



Instytut Historii
i Nauk Politycznych



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PRIVATE
COMMERCIAL AND COMPETITION LAW
(IIPCCCL)

S | A | L

School of American Law
for Greece & Cyprus



KEISER
UNIVERSITY

Book of proceedings

FORTY-FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON: “SOCIAL
AND NATURAL SCIENCES – GLOBAL CHALLENGE 2025”
(ICSNS XXXXI-2025)

Paris, 24 June 2025

Organized by

**International Institute for Private- Commercial- and Competition
Law (Austria)**

in Partnership with

**Institute of History and Political Science of the University of Białystok (Poland-EU),
Keiser University (USA), Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences (Germany), School
of American Law (Greece)**

Edited by: Dr. Lena Hoffman

© All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without either the prior written emission of the publisher. Applications for the copyright holder s written permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to the publishers.

**FORTY-FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON: “SOCIAL AND
NATURAL SCIENCES – GLOBAL CHALLENGE 2025”
(ICSNS XXXXI-2025)**

Editor: Lena Hoffman

Paris, 24 June 2025

ISBN: 979-8-950029-23-3

Disclaimer

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that the material in this book is true, correct, complete, and appropriate at the time of writing. Nevertheless the publishers, the editors and the authors do not accept responsibility for any omission or error, or any injury, damage, loss or financial consequences arising from the use of the book. The views expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of University of Bialystok (Poland), International Institute for Private, Commercial and Competition law (Austria), School of American Law (Greece).

(ICSNS XXXXI-2025)

- Prof. Dr. Helmut Flachenecker, Universität Wuerzburg (Germany)*
Prof. Dr. John Rowley Gillingham, University of Missouri (USA)
Prof. Dr. Jürgen Wolfbauer, Montanuniversität Leoben (Austria)
Prof. Dr. H. Ekkehard Wolff, Universität Leipzig (Germany)
Prof. Em. Dr. Karl Otwin Becker, Universität Graz (Austria)
Prof. Em. Nikolaus Grass, Universität Innsbruck (Austria)
Prof. Em. Rolf Ostheim, Universität Salzburg (Austria)
Prof. Dr. Werner Lehfeldt, Universität Goettingen (Germany)
Prof. Dr. Horst Weber, Universität Chemnitz (Germany)
Prof. Em. Josef Barthel, Universität Regensburg (Germany)
Prof. Dr. Gracienne Lauwers, Universiteit Antwerpen (Belgium)
Prof. Dr. Evis Kushi, University of Elbasan (Albania)
Dr. Sasha Dukoski, University St. Kliment Ohridski – Bitola (Macedonia)
Dr. Hans-Achim Roll, Rechtsanwalt (Germany)
Prof. Em. Johannes Bronkhorst, University of Lausanne (Switzerland)
Prof. Dr. Horst-Dieter Westerhoff, Universität Duisburg-Essen (Germany)
Prof. Dr. Francesco Scalera, Università degli studi di Bari Aldo Moro (Italy)
Prof. Dr. Thomas Schildbach, Universität Passau (Germany)
Dr. Angelika Kofler, Europäisches Forum Alpbach (Austria)
Prof. Em. Otto Rosenberg, University of Paderborn (Germany)
Prof. Dr. Joseph Mifsud, University of East Anglia, London, (UK)
Prof. Dr. Nabil Ayad, University of East Anglia, London, (UK)
Dr. Mladen Andrić, Director of the Diplomatic Academy (Croatia)
Prof. Dr. Iraj Hashi, Staffordshire University (UK)
Prof. Em. Winfried Mueller, University of Klagenfurt (Austria)
Prof. Dr. Juliana Latifi, Tirana Business University (Albania)
Prof. Em. Hans Albert, University of Mannheim (Germany)
Dr. Magdalena El Ghamari, University of Białystok (Poland)
Prof. Dr. Bektash Mema, University of Gjirokastra (Albania)
Prof. Dr. Piotr Kwiatkiewicz, University of WAT/WLO (Poland)
Prof. Dr. Slađana Živković, University of Niš (Serbia)
Prof. Dr. Sebastiano Tafaro, Università degli studi di Bari Aldo Moro (Italy)
Prof. Em. Johann Götschl, Universität Graz (Austria)
Prof. Dr. Rajmonda Duka, University of Tirana (Albania)
Prof. Dr. Laura Tafaro, Università degli studi di Bari Aldo Moro (Italy)
Prof. Em. Robert Müller, University of Salzburg (Austria)
Prof. Dr. Malyadri Pacha, Osmania University (India)
Prof. Dr. Mario Calabrese, Sapienza University (Italy)
Prof. Dr. Azem Hajdari, University of Pristina (Kosovo)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Recognition and Enforcement of Judicial Decisions in Albania – Expected Impact of the HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention and the HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention	6
<i>Entela Memishaj</i>	
The Evolution of the Rule of Law in Southeast Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Judicial Institutions from the Ottoman Period to the Modern State.....	23
<i>Erisa Xhixho</i>	
Preparation for an interpreting assignment in the Albanian Institutional Context	30
<i>Ilda Themeli</i>	
Bridging the climate knowledge gap: Rethinking climate education in Albanian High Schools	42
<i>Mihallaq Qirjo</i>	
Beyond the Aggregate: Disaggregating Albania’s Service Sector and Its Economic Impact	50
<i>Admir Mulaaj</i>	
Development of smart environmental solutions for urban sustainability by integrating water purification technologies and circular waste management.....	60
<i>Alfred Lako</i>	
Albanian emigration in legal perspective.....	83
<i>Adela Kusuri</i>	
Bridging the Gap: Financial Inclusion in the Wake of Economic Crises	94
<i>Dorina Olldashi</i>	
XRF Use in Monitoring Soil Composition: A Literature Review	99
<i>Eranda Gjeçi</i>	
Logocracy in Communist Albania: Orwellian Discourse in Enver Hoxha’ Totalitarian State 1944-1985.....	111
<i>Granit Zela</i>	
Constructing identity through language: A discourse analysis of Sami Repishtli’s autobiography	122
<i>Rezearta Murati</i>	

Artificial intelligence in Corporate Governance.....	137
<i>Anisa Kume</i>	
<i>Rezart Dibra</i>	
A qualitative study of factors influencing business perceptions of online food products purchases	142
<i>Eda Luga</i>	
Attitudes of healthcare professionals regarding perinatal depression	151
<i>Alketa Dervishi</i>	
Managing health well-being under the influence of anxiety levels among students of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Shkodra during the Post-COVID-19 Period	158
<i>Arben Hoti</i>	
The legal and social Protection of foreign Workers in Albania and the challenges of integration into the Labor Market	168
<i>Sindi Agalliu (Caushi)</i>	
Electronic signatures in Albania referring to legal framework and contractual services	182
<i>Vitiana Pitaku</i>	
Women’s self-employment in rural areas: Challenges and opportunities in the social, economic and cultural context.....	190
<i>Lediana Xhakollari</i>	

Recognition and Enforcement of Judicial Decisions in Albania – Expected Impact of the HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention and the HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention

Entela Memishaj

Abstract

The enforcement of court decisions is a fundamental institution of law, and an integral part of the right to a fair trial under Article 42 of the Constitution of Albania and Article 6 of the ECHR. The enforcement of court decisions constitutes the final stage in the realization of a right that has been recognized by such a decision. Only upon the conclusion of this phase of the judicial process, is the claimant fully reinstated in the violated or denied right. Considering the importance of this institution and the challenges encountered in practice, this article will present an analysis of the enforcement of court decisions, as well as the recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions, in Albania, in civil and commercial matters. The analysis will continue with the expected impact of the HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention and the HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention on the domestic legal and judicial system. Albania is a country aspiring to join the EU, and in this regard, the recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions, especially in civil and commercial matters, facilitates judicial cooperation between states and also holds particular significance in terms of ensuring legal certainty for foreign investors, which, in turn, contributes to the increase of economic cooperation between countries. In this context, this article will also address issues related to EU Regulation No. 1215/2012, with regard to the recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions and the approach that Albanian courts should adopt under the guidance of these international instruments.

Keywords: enforcement, recognition, court decision, foreign court decision, HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention, HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention, EU Regulation No. 1215/2012.

I. Introduction

In the Albanian civil procedural law, court decisions that have become final, constitute one of the most important forms of executive titles. A court decision is not merely a legal resolution of a dispute, but also a binding instrument that ensures the effective implementation of the right. The party in whose favor the decision has been issued has both the right and the obligation to undertake steps for its enforcement, within the time limits set by law, thereby transforming the decision into a direct means for the realization of the rights recognized or denied.

In a legal context increasingly characterized by international interaction and the globalization of civil and commercial relations, the recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions has acquired fundamental importance. This mechanism serves as a bridge between different legal systems, ensuring legal certainty, effective protection of rights, and the strengthening of international cooperation in the field of civil justice.

In the Albanian system, this institution is regulated through the provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure (CCP), as well as international agreements ratified by

Albania, which, pursuant to Article 393 of the CCP and Article 116 of the Constitution, take precedence over domestic laws. Thus, in cases where there exists a ratified international treaty, governing matters of recognition and enforcement, it prevails over domestic laws.

In the framework of efforts to harmonize international rules on this matter, the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) has adopted two important instruments, the 2005 Convention on Choice of Court Agreements (HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention) and the 2019 Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil or Commercial Matters (HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention). Albania has taken clear steps toward the integration of these conventions into its legal system, respectively through Law No. 42/2024 and Law No. 122/2024.

The HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention focuses on ensuring the effectiveness of exclusive jurisdiction agreements, by establishing the obligation of the chosen courts to hear the case and by guaranteeing the recognition and enforcement of their judgments in other contracting states. On the other hand, the HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention has a broader scope of application, aiming at the recognition and enforcement of all civil or commercial judgments that have become final in a contracting state, without necessarily requiring a prior agreement on the choice of court. Both conventions provide minimum international standards for the circulation of judicial decisions and, at the same time, preserve room for the application of national law and other applicable international treaties.

In the same spirit of harmonization, another important instrument is Regulation (EU) No. 1215/2012, known as “Brussels I bis,” which entered into force on 10 January 2015 and brought about a significant reform of the European system for the recognition and enforcement of judicial decisions in civil and commercial matters. The Regulation abolished the previous *exequatur* procedure and established the automatic recognition of judicial decisions among EU Member States, thereby enhancing efficiency and legal certainty in international relations.

Although this Regulation is not directly applicable in Albania, it has served as a model for the improvement of domestic law provisions, particularly in the Code of Civil Procedure and the Law on Private International Law. For example, the provisions on *lis pendens* and the exclusive jurisdiction of courts have been correspondingly reflected in Albanian legislation, ensuring a closer alignment of our system with European standards.

II. Court decisions as executive titles

The reinstatement of subjective rights proceeds through two main procedural phases, the recognition phase of the right and the enforcement phase.

The recognition phase consists of the judicial process, which begins with the filing of the lawsuit, continues with the examination of the merits of the case, and concludes with the issuance of a court decision recognizing and reinstating the right. This decision becomes enforceable only after it acquires final form, pursuant to Article 451¹

¹ Article 451 Final Decision – The court decision becomes final when: a) it cannot be appealed; b) no appeal has been filed within the time limits prescribed by law or the appeal has been withdrawn; c) the filed

of the CCP. The final form implies that the decision may be enforced in cases where an appeal is not allowed, an appeal has not been filed within the legal time limits, has been withdrawn, has not been admitted, or the court decision has been upheld, amended, or the case has been dismissed at the appellate level. According to judicial practice and references in specific laws, two concepts are distinguished, “final form”, which relates to the enforceability and executive force of the decision, and “final and conclusive form”, which relates to the lack of further appeal to a reviewing court and “the *res judicata*” status attributed to the case.²

After the recognition, the enforcement phase follows, which, according to constitutional judicial practice, is part of the fair trial³. This phase begins once the court decision has acquired final form and constitutes an executive title, thereby enabling the issuance of the executive order. Thereafter, the prevailing party may initiate enforcement proceedings by submitting a request before the bailiff officer.

Mandatory enforcement is carried out solely on the basis of an executive title, in accordance with Article 510⁴ of the CCP. An executive title includes all final civil court decisions containing an obligation, decisions securing the lawsuit, as well as decisions for provisional enforcement, which are mandatory to implement (Article 510 CCP, paragraph (a)). Additionally, executive titles include foreign court and arbitration awards, decisions, granted enforceability pursuant to the relevant provisions of the CCP (Article 510 CCP, paragraph (c)), as well as decisions of arbitration courts in Albania (Article 510 CCP, paragraph (ç)).

Procedures for the mandatory enforcement off court decisions constituting an executive title begin with the issuance by the court of an executive order through an *ex parte* proceeding. This order contains information regarding the creditor and the debtor, the origin of the obligation, as well as the specific obligation arising from the executive title (Article 511 CCP). The initiation of enforcement is the moment the request is submitted to the bailiff officer to begin mandatory execution procedures. It is important to emphasize that the enforcement phase does not begin with the submission of the request for the issuance of the executive order, but rather with the submission of the request to the judicial enforcement service (bailiff officer) for the enforcement of the executive title for which the order has been issued. This request expresses the creditor’s intention to enforce his subjective right arising from the executive title⁵.

appeal has not been admitted; ç) the court decision has been upheld, amended, or the proceedings have been terminated at the second instance.

² Unifying Decision of the Supreme Court No. 00-2025-1483 (1), dated 13 January 2025, paragraphs 43 and 45.

³ Decision of the Constitutional Court No. 6, dated 31 March 2006, pages 4 and 5.

⁴ Article 510 Enforceable Titles – Compulsory enforcement may be carried out only on the basis of an enforceable title. The following are considered enforceable titles: a) final civil court decisions that contain an obligation, decisions issued by the court for securing the claim, as well as for provisional enforcement; b) final criminal court decisions insofar as they relate to property rights; c) decisions of foreign courts and arbitral tribunals that have been granted effect pursuant to the relevant provisions of this Code; ç) decisions of arbitral tribunals in the Republic of Albania;

d) notarial acts containing monetary obligations, as well as acts for the granting of bank loans or loans granted by non-bank financial institutions; dh) bills of exchange, checks, and promissory notes that are equivalent to them; e) other acts which, according to specific laws, are deemed enforceable titles and the enforcement office is charged with their execution.

⁵ Decision of the Supreme Court No. 00-2020-778 (35), dated 2 November 2020, paragraphs 18 and 19.

The recognition phase and the enforcement phase begin through the filing of the respective legal instruments: the lawsuit for the recognition phase and the request for enforcement of the executive title for the enforcement phase. Both instruments must be exercised within the specific prescription periods prescribed by Article 115⁶ of the Civil Code (CC) or within the general prescription periods under Article 114⁷ of the CC. The right to file a lawsuit, if not exercised within the statutory time limit, expires and cannot be exercised before the court or any other competent authority (Article 112⁸ CC).

From a legal perspective, the prescription period for mandatory enforcement is the same as the prescription period for the substantive lawsuit accepted by the court and for which enforcement is sought, a position that derives from judicial practice in Albania and is based on the *ad contrario* interpretation of Article 113⁹ of the CC¹⁰. An alternative view regarding the prescription period, which considers only the application of Article 114 CC as the general prescription period, argues that currently there is no provision in the CC establishing prescription periods for requests for enforcement of final court decisions. Furthermore, there is no definition or indication concerning the prescription period for final decisions of the domestic and international Arbitration Court. Based on the provisions of Article 114 CC, according to this position, it should be concluded that, since “unless otherwise provided by law, all lawsuits between legal persons, between them and natural persons, as well as between natural persons themselves, prescribe within ten years,” the prescription period for requests for mandatory enforcement of other executive titles would be the general prescription period of ten years¹¹. However, this position has not found support in judicial practice to date.

⁶ Article 115 – Are subject to prescription within the following time limits: a) six months for claims for the payment of liquidated damages; b) one year for claims arising from forwarding contracts; c) six months for claims arising from direct transport of goods and passengers by railway, motor vehicles, or aircraft, and one year for the same claims arising from maritime or combined transport; ç) two years for claims for the payment of compensation under insurance and reinsurance contracts, as well as the corresponding amount arising from compulsory insurance; d) three years for claims for the payment of rent for dwellings, shops, premises, and other immovable property; dh) three years for claims for compensation for non-contractual damage and claims for the return of unjust enrichment; e) one year for claims for compensation for non-pecuniary damage for infringement of honor, personality, or reputation. Other claims are subject to prescription within the special time limits provided in this Code or in other laws.

⁷ Article 114 Prescription Time Limits – Where the law does not provide otherwise, all claims between legal persons, between legal persons and natural persons, as well as between natural persons themselves, are subject to prescription within ten years.

⁸ Article 112 Contents – A right of claim that has not been exercised within the time limit prescribed by law is extinguished and can no longer be enforced through the court or any other competent authority.

⁹ Article 113 Claims Not Subject to Prescription – The following are not subject to prescription: a) claims for the restoration or protection of a personal non-pecuniary right, except for the exceptions provided by law; b) declaratory claims; c) claims for the partition among co-owners; ç) claims for the return of amounts deposited in a bank; d) other claims provided for in specific legal provisions. Also not subject to prescription are requests for the compulsory enforcement of decisions related to claims for which prescription does not apply.

¹⁰ Decision of the Supreme Court No. 00-2022-1905 (151), dated 20 April 2022, paragraph 51; Unifying Decision of the Supreme Court No. 00-2023-4411 (106), dated 2 March 2023, paragraph 75; Decision of the Supreme Court No. 00-2024-3525 (246), dated 9 May 2024, paragraph 36.

¹¹ Kore, Dashamir. “Prescription of the Lawsuit”, Dissertation for the defense of the scientific degree “Doctor”, 2022, page 110, published in the official web site of the Faculty of Law, University of Tirana: <https://unitir.edu.al/parashkrimi-i-padise/>;

III. Recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions

Recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions are carried out in accordance with the provisions of the CCP (or special laws, if applicable). In cases where there are conventions ratified by Albania for this purpose, the latter shall take precedence in application, pursuant to Article 393¹² of the CCP.

The review of the request for recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions is submitted to the Court of Appeal¹³. The request must be accompanied by the foreign court decision, translated into Albanian and notarized, certification from the foreign court that the decision has acquired final and binding form, along with the respective legalization of these documents.

The Court of Appeal must verify and, if necessary, carry out all actions prescribed by the CCP, any special law, or any other applicable international agreement (if any), to ensure, primarily, the summons of all debtor parties indicated by the content of the foreign court decision or the foreign arbitral tribunal decision for which recognition is sought from the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal applies the rules of first-instance proceedings. The subject matter of the proceedings before the Court of Appeal is limited solely to the existence or non-existence of any prohibitions or legal impediments provided for under Article 394 of the CCP, or any other special provision applicable for this purpose, including those arising from binding international agreements. At the conclusion of the proceedings, the Court of Appeal decides to either grant or deny the request for recognition of the foreign court or foreign arbitral tribunal decision, which is then enforced in accordance with the provisions of the CCP¹⁴.

Although the position of the Court of Appeal in such proceedings tends not to be obstructive, the existing legal framework is nonetheless considered to have certain limitations. It only provides for the recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions and does not extend to any other executive titles issued outside Albania, such as authentic instruments. Moreover, it does not enable the enforcement of provisional measures taken outside the territory of the Republic of Albania, nor does it allow for the enforcement of dispute resolution agreements, which constitute executive titles under the foreign decision¹⁵. Despite this general assessment of the legal framework, the Court of Appeal, through its practice, has expanded the scope of application of the provisions on the recognition of foreign decisions by including, within the concept of “decision,” also the “payment order of the foreign court,” thereby adopting an approach more aligned with Regulation (EU) No. 1215/2012¹⁶.

¹² Article 393 Conditions for the Enforcement of Decisions Issued by Foreign Courts – Decisions of courts of foreign states are recognized and enforced in the Republic of Albania under the conditions provided in this Code or in special laws. When there is a specific agreement between the Republic of Albania and the foreign state for this purpose, the provisions of that agreement shall apply.

¹³ The Court of Appeal of General Jurisdiction, established by the judicial map reform in Albania, approved by Council of Ministers Decision No. 495, dated 21 July 2022, “On the reorganization of judicial districts and territorial competencies of the courts”.

¹⁴ Decision of the Supreme Court No. 6, dated 1 June 2011, paragraph 31.

¹⁵ Cross-border Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judicial Decisions in South East Europe and Perspectives of

HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention, November 2021, page 20, paragraph 1.2 Assessment of the legal framework, published in: <https://assets.hcch.net/docs/76e4926e-962d-4621-97b5-c3e98d20eb53.pdf>

¹⁶ Kola Tafaj, Flutura. Cinari, Silvana. “Albania’s Benefits from the Ratification of the 2019 Hague Convention on the

IV. Grounds for refusal of recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions

Article 394 of the CCP sets forth the legal grounds for refusing to proceed with the recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions, which are related to the following cases:

- (a) according to the provisions in force in the Republic of Albania, the dispute may not fall within the jurisdiction of the court of the state that rendered the decision;
- (b) the claim and summons to court were not duly and timely notified to the defendant in absentia, thereby depriving him of the opportunity to defend himself;
- (c) between the same parties, for the same subject matter and on the same grounds, a different decision has been rendered by an Albanian court;
- (ç) A lawsuit filed before the decision of the foreign court acquired final and binding form is currently being examined by an Albanian court;
- (d) The decision has acquired final form in violation of its own legislation;
- (dh) The decision conflicts with the fundamental principles of Albanian legislation.

The application of Article 394 of the CCP has revealed problems related to the content of paragraph (ç), which can be used as a tool to obstruct the recognition and enforcement of foreign court decisions in Albania through the filing of lawsuits in Albanian courts before the foreign decision has acquired final and binding form. Legal scholars believe that this provision is an incomplete transposition of the Italian procedural law (which served as a model for the Albanian law), linking the obstacle to recognition with the initiation of proceedings in the domestic court prior to the beginning of proceedings in the foreign court. This legislation itself, although providing a better framework than the Albanian law, has often been used to create parallel proceedings, a phenomenon known as the “Italian torpedo”¹⁷.

The CCP has undergone several fundamental amendments in 2017 and 2021, but the provision in question has remained unchanged. These amendments have included, among the new legal provisions, rules on international *lis pendens* which, in this context, aim to mitigate the negative effects that paragraph (ç) of Article 394 CCP may produce. Specifically, Article 38 of the CCP provides that when the same lawsuit, between the same parties, with the same cause and subject matter, is being examined simultaneously by a court of a foreign state and an Albanian court, the latter may suspend the proceedings if the lawsuit was first filed in the foreign court or if the foreign court’s decision is capable of being recognized and enforced in Albania. Although Article 38 CCP provides the Albanian court with the “possibility” to order a suspension rather than an “obligation” (also taking into account the following paragraph of the article which allows the court to continue or resume proceedings in certain cases), the Albanian court should interpret the concept of international *lis pendens* broadly, insofar as it does not conflict with Albanian procedural law. The purposive interpretation of the norm as a whole should prevail over its literal

Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Civil and Commercial Judgments (“Judgement Convention HCCH2019”), February 2024, published in official web site of the Faculty of Law, University of Tirana, paragraph V. – Decision of the Tirana Court of Appeal, No. 40, Reg. No. 207/9, dated 23 February 2017, published in:

<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgleclefindmkaj/https://fdut.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/PERFITI-MI-I-SHOIPERISE-NGA-RATIFIKIMI-I-KONVENTES-SE-VENDIMEVE-HCCH-2019.pdf>

¹⁷ Harder, Sirko. “The effects of recognized foreign judgments in civil and commercial matters.” *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2013): pages 441–61, published in: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43301568>.

interpretation, aligning as closely as possible with Regulation (EU) No. 1215/2012, Article 33¹⁸.

V. HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention

The Convention on Choice of Court Agreements, dated 30 June 2005, which applies to the recognition and enforcement of a judgment (in civil and commercial matters) rendered by a court of a contracting state whose jurisdiction has been determined based on an exclusive jurisdiction agreement between the parties, entered into force on 1 October 2015. The Parliament of the Republic of Albania ratified the Convention by Law No. 42/2024, dated 2 May 2024¹⁹. The Convention aims to increase access to courts and the effectiveness of judicial proceedings through its three basic rules set out in Articles 5, 6, and 8²⁰:

- The chosen court is obligated to hear the case, ensuring the parties' right to choose the court is upheld;
- Any court that is not chosen must stay the proceedings in favor of the chosen court, thereby preventing parallel proceedings;
- Judgments rendered by the chosen court must be recognized and enforced in the Contracting States, ensuring their global circulation.

Article 5, paragraph 1 of the Convention provides that the court or courts of a contracting State designated in an exclusive choice of court agreement shall have jurisdiction to decide a dispute to which the agreement applies, unless the agreement is null and void under the law of that State. From this provision it follows that the court designated in such an agreement has the obligation to hear the case, guaranteeing the parties' right to choose the forum. According to paragraph 2 of the same article, a court that has jurisdiction under paragraph 1 shall not decline to exercise jurisdiction on the ground that the dispute should be decided in a court of another State. Other courts are not permitted to hear the case. Article 6 provides that any other court must suspend or dismiss proceedings to which an exclusive choice of court agreement applies. This implies the prohibition of doctrines such as *forum non conveniens* or *lis pendens*²¹, which could undermine the effectiveness of a choice of court agreement.

The importance of such an exclusive choice of court agreement also lies in the fact that it guarantees that the final decision given by the chosen court will be recognized and enforced in as many states as possible, thereby improving legal certainty in international civil and commercial relations.

According to the Convention, recognition means the acceptance of the determination of rights and obligations as rendered by the chosen court, and enforcement means taking measures by which the debtor, due to the decision, complies with the order issued by the court of origin²². Matters regarding the recognition and enforcement of

¹⁸ Kola Tafaj, Flutura "International lis pendens in the Albanian jurisdiction, as an innovation in Albanian procedural law.", Magazine "Judicial Life", Nr. 3, 2017, Published by the Albanian School of Magistrates.

¹⁹ According to the publication in the Official Gazette No. 87, dated 23 May 2024.

²⁰ Outline of Convention, published in: <https://assets.hcch.net/docs/89be0bce-36c7-4701-af9a-1f27be046125.pdf>.

²¹ Hartley, Trevor. Dogauchi, dhe Masato. "Hague Convention On Private International Law, Convention of 30 June 2005 On Choice of Court Agreements, Explanatory Report", 2007. page 791, paragraph 3, published in: <https://assets.hcch.net/docs/0de60e2f-e002-408e-98a7-5638e1ebac65.pdf>

²² Ibid, paragraph 7.

decisions rendered by the court chosen by agreement of the parties are governed by Articles 8 through 15 of the Convention.

Article 8²³ of the Convention provides that a decision rendered by a court of a contracting state, designated in an exclusive choice of court agreement, shall be recognized and enforced in other contracting states. Recognition or enforcement may only be refused for reasons specified in this Convention. In this way, the Convention not only establishes the obligation of recognition and enforcement but also sets out the circumstances under which the opposite may occur, as provided in Article 9²⁴.

Due to Articles 8 and 9 of the Convention, Article 394 of the CCP, which sets forth the legal obstacles to the enforcement of decisions rendered by foreign courts, has no scope of application in cases of decisions issued by a foreign court designated to hear a matter under an exclusive choice of court agreement. According to Article 116 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, international agreements take precedence over domestic laws, and such regulation is also expressly provided in Article 393 of the CCP. In this regard, the reference made by Article 393 of the CCP to special agreements, which apply with priority in matters of recognition and enforcement of judicial decisions, directly brings into application the Convention, pursuant to the provisions of its Article 8 and 9.

According to Article 8, paragraphs 3 and 4, the prerequisites for a decision to be recognized and enforced, are based on the provision that a decision is recognized only if it is enforceable in the state of origin and is enforced only if it is executable in the state of origin. Recognition or enforcement may be stayed or refused, if the decision is subject to (re)examination in the state of origin, or if the time limit for seeking

²³ (1) A judgment given by a court of a Contracting State designated in an exclusive choice of court agreement shall be recognized and enforced in other Contracting States in accordance with this Chapter. Recognition or enforcement may be refused only on the grounds specified in this Convention. (2) Without prejudice to such review as is necessary for the application of the provisions of this Chapter, there shall be no review of the merits of the judgment given by the court of origin. The court addressed shall be bound by the findings of fact on which the court of origin based its jurisdiction, unless the judgment was given by default. (3) A judgment shall be recognized only if it has effect in the State of origin, and shall be enforced only if it is enforceable in the State of origin. (4) Recognition or enforcement may be postponed or refused if the judgment is the subject of review in the State of origin or if the time limit for seeking ordinary review has not expired. A refusal does not prevent a subsequent application for recognition or enforcement of the judgment. (5) This Article shall also apply to a judgment given by a court of a Contracting State pursuant to a transfer of the case from the chosen court in that Contracting State as permitted by Article 5, paragraph 3. However, where the chosen court had discretion as to whether to transfer the case to another court, recognition or enforcement of the judgment may be refused against a party who objected to the transfer in a timely manner in the State of origin.

²⁴ Recognition or enforcement may be refused if: (a) the agreement was null and void under the law of the State of the chosen court, unless the chosen court has determined that the agreement is valid; (b) a party lacked the capacity to conclude the agreement under the law of the requested State; (c) the document which instituted the proceedings or an equivalent document, including the essential elements of the claim, (i) was not notified to the defendant in sufficient time and in such a way as to enable him to arrange for his defense, unless the defendant entered an appearance and presented his case without contesting notification in the court of origin, provided that the law of the State of origin permitted notification to be contested; or (ii) was notified to the defendant in the requested State in a manner that is incompatible with fundamental principles of the requested State concerning service of documents, (d) the judgment was obtained by fraud in connection with a matter of procedure; (e) recognition or enforcement would be manifestly incompatible with the public policy of the requested State, including situations where the specific proceedings leading to the judgment were incompatible with fundamental principles of procedural fairness of that State; (f) the judgment is inconsistent with a judgment given in the requested State in a dispute between the same parties; or (g) the judgment is inconsistent with an earlier judgment given in another State between the same parties on the same cause of action, provided that the earlier judgment fulfils the conditions necessary for its recognition in the requested State.

ordinary review has not expired. No matter related to the merits of the judgment may be subject to re-evaluation by the court of the enforcing state, including questions of the jurisdiction of the foreign court. Recognition and enforcement are mandatory under the Convention, even if the chosen court fails to provide reasoning as to the basis of its jurisdiction, and also if its reasoning for jurisdiction is explicitly different from the choice of court agreement²⁵.

A court decision, according to the meaning of the Convention, includes any decision on the merits rendered by a court, regardless of its designation, including a decree or order, and the determination of costs or expenses by the court (including a court officer), provided that such determination is related to a decision on the merits, which may be recognized or enforced under this Convention. A provisional protective measure is not considered a court decision (Article 4, paragraph 1). This provision expands the scope of the court's authority in Albania by classifying, alongside the classic judicial decision, also orders and decrees of the court as subject to recognition and enforcement. Similarly, Article 12²⁶ of the Convention recognizes and equates judicial settlements with the decisions referred to in Article 4, making them also subject to recognition and enforcement in Albania. CPC and Convention do not consider for recognition and enforcement the provisional protective measures.

The Convention unifies the documents that must be submitted to effect recognition and enforcement, according to the provisions of its Article 13, that shall also be a mandatory provision for the Albanian courts.

VI. HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention

The Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil or Commercial Matters, dated 2 April 2019, entered into force on 1 September 2023 and was ratified by Albania through Law No. 122/2024²⁷.

The Preamble of the Convention expresses its purpose of establishing a unified set of fundamental rules for the recognition and enforcement of foreign judicial decisions in civil or commercial matters and its coordination with the HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention. Unlike the latter, which is invoked due to an exclusive choice of court agreement between the parties, the HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention applies to any court decision, of a civil or commercial nature, rendered by the courts of contracting States to the Convention, for which recognition and enforcement is sought in another contracting State.

The general conditions set forth in Article 4²⁸ of the Convention relate to the obligation

²⁵ "The 2005 Hague Convention on Choice of Court Agreements, Commentary and Documents", 2008, ISBN 978-0-521-87866-1, ISBN 978-1-316-60834-0, Cambridge University Press, Autor Ronald A. Brand, Paul M. Herrup, page 101, first paragraph.

²⁶ Judicial settlements (transactions judiciaries) which a court of a Contracting State designated in an exclusive choice of court agreement has approved, or which have been concluded before that court in the course of proceedings, and which are enforceable in the same manner as a judgment in the State of origin, shall be enforced under this Convention in the same manner as a judgment.

²⁷ According to the publication in the Official Gazette No. 1, dated 7 January 2025.

²⁸ Article 4 General provisions – 1. A judgment given by a court of a Contracting State (State of origin) shall be recognized and enforced in another Contracting State (requested State) in accordance with the provisions of this Chapter. Recognition or enforcement may be refused only on the grounds specified in this Convention. 2. There shall be no review of the merits of the judgment in the requested State. There

of the contracting States to carry out recognition, enforcement, and refusal solely for the reasons provided by the Convention. The Convention does not permit a review of the merits of the case, except when such a review serves to the implementation of the provisions of the Convention.

The fundamental condition for a decision to be recognized and enforced is its enforceability in the state of origin. Recognition or enforcement may be stayed or refused if the decision is under review in the state of origin, or if the time limit to file an appeal has not expired, with the interested party having the right to resubmit the request once these circumstances cease to exist.

Beyond the above rules, a judgment will be eligible for circulation under the Convention if any of the criteria listed in Article 5, paragraph 1²⁹ are satisfied. These

may only be such consideration as is necessary for the application of this Convention. 3. A judgment shall be recognized only if it has effect in the State of origin, and shall be enforced only if it is enforceable in the State of origin. 4. Recognition or enforcement may be postponed or refused if the judgment referred to under paragraph 3 is the subject of review in the State of origin or if the time limit for seeking ordinary review has not expired. A refusal does not prevent a subsequent application for recognition or enforcement of the judgment.

²⁹ 1. A judgment is eligible for recognition and enforcement if one of the following requirements is met –

(a) the person against whom recognition or enforcement is sought was habitually resident in the State of origin at the time that person became a party to the proceedings in the court of origin; (b) the natural person against whom recognition or enforcement is sought had their principal place of business in the State of origin at the time that person became a party to the proceedings in the court of origin and the claim on which the judgment is based arose out of the activities of that business; (c) the person against whom recognition or enforcement is sought is the person that brought the claim, other than a counterclaim, on which the judgment is based; (d) the defendant maintained a branch, agency, or other establishment without separate legal personality in the State of origin at the time that person became a party to the proceedings in the court of origin, and the claim on which the judgment is based arose out of the activities of that branch, agency, or establishment; (e) the defendant expressly consented to the jurisdiction of the court of origin in the course of the proceedings in which the judgment was given; (f) the defendant argued on the merits before the court of origin without contesting jurisdiction within the timeframe provided in the law of the State of origin, unless it is evident that an objection to jurisdiction or to the exercise of jurisdiction would not have succeeded under that law;

(g) the judgment ruled on a contractual obligation and it was given by a court of the State in which performance of that obligation took place, or should have taken place, in accordance with – (i) the agreement of the parties, or (ii) the law applicable to the contract, in the absence of an agreed place of performance, unless the activities of the defendant in relation to the transaction clearly did not constitute a purposeful and substantial connection to that State; (h) the judgment ruled on a lease of immovable property (tenancy) and it was given by a court of the State in which the property is situated; (i) the judgment ruled against the defendant on a contractual obligation secured by a right in rem in immovable property located in the State of origin, if the contractual claim was brought together with a claim against the same defendant relating to that right in rem; (j) the judgment ruled on a non-contractual obligation arising from death, physical injury, damage to or loss of tangible property, and the act or omission directly causing such harm occurred in the State of origin, irrespective of where that harm occurred; (k) the judgment concerns the validity, construction, effects, administration or variation of a trust created voluntarily and evidenced in writing, and – (i) at the time the proceedings were instituted, the State of origin was designated in the trust instrument as a State in the courts of which disputes about such matters are to be determined; or (ii) at the time the proceedings were instituted, the State of origin was expressly or impliedly designated in the trust instrument as the State in which the principal place of administration of the trust is situated. This sub-paragraph only applies to judgments regarding internal aspects of a trust between persons who are or were within the trust relationship; (l) the judgment ruled on a counterclaim – (i) to the extent that it was in favor of the counterclaimant, provided that the counterclaim arose out of the same transaction or occurrence as the claim; or (ii) to the extent that it was against the counterclaimant, unless the law of the State of origin required the counterclaim to be filed in order to avoid preclusion; (m) the judgment was given by a court designated in an agreement concluded or documented in writing or by any other means of communication which renders information accessible so as to be usable for subsequent reference, other than an exclusive choice of court agreement. For the purposes of this sub-paragraph, an “exclusive choice of court agreement” means an agreement concluded by two or more parties that designates, for the purpose of deciding disputes which have arisen or may arise in connection with a particular legal relationship, the courts of one State or one or more specific

are minimum requirements for recognition and enforcement, that is, the Convention does not prevent or limit the recognition and enforcement of judgments under national law, bilateral, regional or other international instruments (Articles 15³⁰ and 23³¹), with the exception of Article 6. In this sense, the Convention provides a “floor” rather than a “ceiling” in the recognition and enforcement of foreign decisions³².

In some States, the filters listed in Article 5 are described as indirect jurisdictional bases, distinguishing them from the rules determining the jurisdiction of the court of the State of origin under its own law – the so-called direct jurisdictional bases. The Convention is not concerned with issues of “direct jurisdiction” which remain to be determined by national law. The jurisdictional filters listed in Article 5 are those that a court of a requested State will apply to determine whether a judgment is entitled to recognition or enforcement. In considering whether a foreign judgment meets the threshold conditions of Article 5 or 6³³, the court addressed does not evaluate the court of origin’s application of that State’s own jurisdictional rules. While the Convention does not purport to affect existing national laws on jurisdiction in international cases, judgments from States with direct jurisdictional rules similar to the filters in Articles 5 and 6 will be more likely to circulate under the Convention³⁴.

Article 5 is divided into three paragraphs. The first paragraph lists the connections with the State of origin that are accepted under the Convention for recognition and enforcement of the judgment in the requested State. The second paragraph deals with judgments given against consumers or employees and modifies or excludes the

courts of one State to the exclusion of the jurisdiction of any other courts. 2. If recognition or enforcement is sought against a natural person acting primarily for personal, family or household purposes (a consumer) in matters relating to a consumer contract, or against an employee in matters relating to the employee’s contract of employment – (a) paragraph 1(e) applies only if the consent was addressed to the court, orally or in writing; (b) paragraph 1(f), (g) and (m) do not apply. 3. Paragraph 1 does not apply to a judgment that ruled on a residential lease of immovable property (tenancy) or ruled on the registration of immovable property. Such a judgment is eligible for recognition and enforcement only if it was given by a court of the State where the property is situated.

³⁰ Article 15 Recognition and enforcement under national law – Subject to Article 6, this Convention does not prevent the recognition or enforcement of judgments under national law.

³¹ Article 22 Non-unified legal systems – 1. In relation to a Contracting State in which two or more systems of law apply in different territorial units with regard to any matter dealt with in this Convention – (a) any reference to the law or procedure of a State shall be construed as referring, where appropriate, to the law or procedure in force in the relevant territorial unit; (b) any reference to the court or courts of a State shall be construed as referring, where appropriate, to the court or courts in the relevant territorial unit; (c) any reference to a connection with a State shall be construed as referring, where appropriate, to a connection with the relevant territorial unit; (d) any reference to a connecting factor in relation to a State shall be construed as referring, where appropriate, to that connecting factor in relation to the relevant territorial unit. 2. Notwithstanding paragraph 1, a Contracting State with two or more territorial units in which different systems of law apply shall not be bound to apply this Convention to situations which involve solely such different territorial units. 3. A court in a territorial unit of a Contracting State with two or more territorial units in which different systems of law apply shall not be bound to recognize or enforce a judgment from another Contracting State solely because the judgment has been recognized or enforced in another territorial unit of the same Contracting State under this Convention. 4. This Article shall not apply to Regional Economic Integration Organizations.

³² Outline HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention, published in: <https://assets.hcch.net/docs/36b240ac-8228-481d-a33b-3716baf4c656.pdf>.

³³ Article 6 Exclusive basis for recognition and enforcement – Notwithstanding Article 5, a judgment that ruled on rights in rem in immovable property shall be recognized and enforced if and only if the property is situated in the State of origin.

³⁴ Garcimartín, Francisco. Saumier, Geneviève. “Explanatory Report on the Convention of 2 July 2019 on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil or Commercial Matters (HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention)”, paragraph 135, published in: <https://www.hcch.net/en/publications-and-studies/details4/?pid=6797>.

application of certain connections listed in the first paragraph. The third paragraph establishes the jurisdictional filter applicable to judgment on a residential lease of immovable property (tenancy) or registration of immovable property and excludes the application of all filters listed in the first paragraph³⁵.

Law No. 10428, dated 2 June 2011, "On Private International Law" (**Law No. 10428**) provides in Article 72³⁶, in line with Article 5, paragraph 3, and Article 6 of the Convention, that Albanian courts have exclusive jurisdiction in all cases concerning (under paragraph (a)) disputes relating to ownership rights and other real rights over immovable property, as well as leases and rights arising from the use of immovable property against compensation, when these are located in the Republic of Albania.

Refusal of recognition and enforcement is provided for in Article 7 of the Convention, which contains two categories. The first, in paragraph 1 of Article 7, lists grounds that allow, but do not require, the requested State to refuse recognition or enforcement based either on the way the proceedings took place in the State of origin or on the nature or content of the judgment itself. The second category deals with the particular situation of international *lis pendens* and is covered by paragraph 2 of Article 7³⁷. Article 7 sets out three rules on how to handle court decisions in these cases. Paragraphs 1 (a) and (f) address situations where parallel proceedings have been completed and the resulting decisions are in conflict with each other. Paragraph 2 deals with cases where judicial proceedings are still ongoing in the requested State at the time when recognition or enforcement of a decision given in another State is sought. *Lis pendens* in another State cannot be used as a ground to refuse recognition or enforcement. Moreover, the proceedings ongoing in the requested State must be "between the same parties and for the same cause of action". In such cases, recognition or enforcement may be stayed or refused if two cumulative conditions are met: the court of the requested State is the first to be seized of the matter (seized); and there is a close connection between the dispute and the requested State.

The Convention, pursuant to Article 23, imposes the obligation to interpret and apply it, as far as possible, in harmony with other treaties in force for the contracting States, regardless of whether they were concluded before or after this Convention. The definition of "decision" in the Convention is related to that in the HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention.

VII. Regulation (EU) No 1215/2012

Regulation (EU) No 1215/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 12 December 2012, on Jurisdiction and the Recognition and Enforcement of Judgments

³⁵ Ibid, paragraph 136.

³⁶ Article 72 Exclusive Jurisdiction – Notwithstanding the provisions of this law, the Albanian courts have exclusive jurisdiction in all cases concerning: a) disputes regarding ownership rights and other real rights over immovable property, as well as lease agreements and rights arising from the use of immovable property for remuneration, when such property is located within the Republic of Albania; b) disputes concerning decisions of the bodies of commercial companies, when the company has its habitual residence in the Republic of Albania; c) disputes regarding the establishment or dissolution of legal persons, as well as claims concerning the decisions of their bodies, when the legal person has its seat in the Republic of Albania; ç) disputes concerning the validity of registration in the registers of courts or Albanian state authorities; d) disputes concerning the validity of the registration of intellectual property rights, insofar as such registrations or applications for such registrations have been filed in the Republic of Albania; dh) disputes related to the enforcement within the Republic of Albania of enforceable titles.

³⁷ Ibid, paragraph 244.

in Civil and Commercial Matters, Brussels I bis (Regulation), entered into force on 10 January 2015, repealing the entire previous legal framework, thereby restructuring fundamental concepts in civil procedure.

Article 25 of the Regulation provides that if the parties, regardless of their domicile, have agreed that a court or the courts of a member state are to have jurisdiction, to settle any disputes which have arisen or which may arise in connection with a particular legal relationship, that court or those courts shall have jurisdiction, considered exclusive, unless the parties have agreed otherwise. This definition is particularly flexible in determining the chosen jurisdiction due to the wording “regardless of their domicile”. Choice of court agreements can apply to the parties “regardless of their domicile”, which means that they can be domiciled in EU or non-EU States, as long as the chosen court/s is in a member State of EU³⁸. The ECJ interpreted Article 25 paragraph 1, also to include jurisdiction agreements where parties in the same member State, designate the courts of another member State for disputes, even if the contract lacks other connections to that member State³⁹. This interpretation is broader and more inclusive than the one established in the HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention⁴⁰, under the wording of Article 1, paragraph 2. Specifically, differently from the Convention, that requires the parties to be resident in different states or to have an international link of the case, the Regulation considers the case to be international only because the parties have chosen a foreign member State court to adjudicate their case⁴¹.

Law No. 10428, specifically in Article 73⁴², reflects the provision of Article 25 paragraphs 1, 2, and 5, as well as Article 26 paragraph 1⁴³ of the Regulation⁴⁴.

The Regulation provides for cases where the courts of the member states have exclusive jurisdiction according to Article 24. The same provision is reflected in Article 72 of the Albanian Law No.10428, which stipulates the cases when Albanian courts have exclusive jurisdiction.

³⁸ “Brussels I Bis - A Commentary on Regulation (EU) No 1215/2012”, Author Burkhard Hess - 9781789908176, Chapter “Introduction”, paragraph 0.40, published in: <https://www.elgaronline.com/>.

³⁹ Judgement of ECJ (First Chamber) of 8 February 2024, in Case C566/22, Inkreal s.r.o. v Dúha Reality s.r.o., par 40, published in: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:62022CJ0566>.

⁴⁰ Judgement of ECJ (First Chamber) of 8 February 2024, in Case C566/22, Inkreal s.r.o. v Dúha Reality s.r.o., par 36, 37, 38.

⁴¹ *Matthias Weller*, “Choice of Forum Agreements under the Brussels I Recast and under The Hague Convention: Coherences and Clashes”, *Journal of Private International Law* 3/2016, page 5, published in: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2827711.

⁴² Article 73 Jurisdiction by Agreement – Albanian courts have international jurisdiction even when the parties designate, by agreement, the international jurisdiction of Albanian courts. Such an agreement must: a) be concluded in writing or orally, provided that the latter is confirmed in writing; b) comply with international trade customs which are or are considered known by the parties. The Albanian court where the lawsuit is filed has international jurisdiction if the defendant participates in the proceedings without raising objections regarding the lack of international jurisdiction, even if represented by a lawyer, or if the court has informed the defendant about the possibility of contesting jurisdiction and this notification has been recorded in the minutes of the court hearing.

⁴³ Article 26, paragraph 1 of the Regulation: “Apart from jurisdiction derived from other provisions of this Regulation, a court of a Member State before which a defendant enters an appearance shall have jurisdiction. This rule shall not apply where appearance was entered to contest the jurisdiction, or where another court has exclusive jurisdiction by virtue of Article 24”.

⁴⁴ Christa Jessel-Holst, Prof. Dr. Argita Malltezi, Prof. Dr. Nada Dollani, Prof. Asoc. Dr. Flutura Kola (Tafaj), Dr. Aida Gugu (Bushati), Dr. Eniana Qarri, Dr. Fjoralba Caka, “Commentary Book of Private International Law”, Tirana 2018.

The *lis pendens* rules are provided in Articles 29 – 34 of the Regulation. *Lis pendens*, in its strict sense, is governed by Article 29 of the Regulation, which is a mandatory provision for the second seized court to suspend or stay the proceedings if a court of another Member State has been seized earlier and declares its jurisdiction. Article 31 of the Regulation creates an exception to the general *lis pendens* rule. According to this exception, courts of Member States must stay proceedings when a court with exclusive jurisdiction, under Article 25, is seized. The proceedings should be suspended until the court with exclusive jurisdiction accepts or declines jurisdiction. Where the court designated in the agreement accepts jurisdiction, any other court of any member state shall decline jurisdiction in favor of the chosen court. The HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention provides the same under Article 5, paragraph 2 and Article 6. Article 33 of the Regulation is a new provision even for the Regulation itself, introduced in the context of improving legislation, and specifically the application of *lis pendens*. Article 33 establishes *lis pendens* in a conditional form, based on the fulfillment of certain criteria. The provision of Article 33 of the Regulation concerning international *lis pendens* has been reflected, as explained above, in Article 38 of the CCP in Albania.

The Regulation applies to civil and commercial matters, regardless of the nature of the court or tribunal (Article 1), among EU Member States. According to the Regulation (Article 36), judgments issued by the courts of EU Member States must be automatically recognized (establishing the abolishment of exequatur procedures) in other Member States, without the need for any special recognition procedure. A judgment given in a Member State, which is enforceable in that Member State, shall be enforceable in the other Member States without the need for a declaration of enforceability (Article 39). In such cases, the applicant/creditor is only required to present to the enforcement authorities in the other Member State a copy of the judgment and the certificate provided for in Annex I of the Regulation (Article 42 and 53). The certificate must be served to the other party/debtor before enforcement begins (Article 43).

The refusal of recognition and enforcement of judgments, according to Article 45⁴⁵, is permitted only in limited and specific cases. Even when the circumstances mentioned

⁴⁵ Article 45 Refusal of recognition – 1. On the application of any interested party, the recognition of a judgment shall be refused: (a) if such recognition is manifestly contrary to public policy (*ordre public*) in the Member State addressed;

(b) where the judgment was given in default of appearance, if the defendant was not served with the document which instituted the proceedings or with an equivalent document in sufficient time and in such a way as to enable him to arrange for his defence, unless the defendant failed to commence proceedings to challenge the judgment when it was possible for him to do so; (c) if the judgment is irreconcilable with a judgment given between the same parties in the Member State addressed; (d) if the judgment is irreconcilable with an earlier judgment given in another Member State or in a third State involving the same cause of action and between the same parties, provided that the earlier judgment fulfils the conditions necessary for its recognition in the Member State addressed; or (e) if the judgment conflicts with: (i) Sections 3, 4 or 5 of Chapter II where the policyholder, the insured, a beneficiary of the insurance contract, the injured party, the consumer or the employee was the defendant; or (ii) Section 6 of Chapter II. 2. In its examination of the grounds of jurisdiction referred to in point (e) of paragraph 1, the court to which the application was submitted shall be bound by the findings of fact on which the court of origin based its jurisdiction. 3. Without prejudice to point (e) of paragraph 1, the jurisdiction of the court of origin may not be reviewed. The test of public policy referred to in point (a) of paragraph 1 may not be applied to the rules relating to jurisdiction. 4. The application for refusal of recognition shall be made in accordance with the procedures provided for in Subsection 2 and, where appropriate, Section 4.

in Article 45 of the Regulation are present, the judge does not have the discretion, when assessing the existence or non-existence of such circumstances, to alter the judgment, reopen the case, or make any other modifications to the original decision. From the analysis of Article 9 of the HCCH 2005 Choice of Court, Article 7 of the HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention, Article 45 of the EU Regulation No. 1215/2012, and Article 394 of the CCP, we find that these instruments share three common provisions concerning the grounds for refusal of recognition of a decision, which relate to the lack of proper notification or effective knowledge by the defendant, in such a way that denies them a real opportunity to defend themselves in the judicial proceedings; the existence of a prior judgment, for the same cause and between the same parties (*res judicata*), which conflicts with the judgment for which recognition is sought and the existence of a conflicting judgment with the one sought to be recognized and enforced; as well as the incompatibility of the judgment with the public policy of the state. The CCP, in Article 394, also provides *lis pendens*⁴⁶ and jurisdiction issues as grounds for non-recognition of the decision. As for jurisdiction matters, the Regulation, in point (e) of Article 45, provides grounds for refusal of recognition and enforcement, but only for a specific category of judicial cases for which the Regulation itself sets out such rules. Both Conventions exclude jurisdiction matters from the grounds on which recognition and enforcement may be refused. Conventions provide, unlike the Regulation and the CCP, as a ground for refusal, a decision obtained by fraud in connection with the proceedings (Article 7, paragraph (d) of the HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention and Article 9, paragraph (d) of the HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention).

VIII. Concluding remarks

Final court decisions constitute executive titles and, as such, must be executed within the time limits prescribed by the Civil Code. Their enforcement is essential for ensuring legal certainty and the fulfillment of the right to a fair and effective trial, as required by both domestic and international standards. In Albanian judicial practice, a consistent position has been established whereby the prescription periods for the enforcement of judgments are closely linked to the prescription periods of the substantive rights, upon which those judgments are based. However, Albanian legislation does not contain specific provisions establishing limitation periods for the enforcement of arbitral awards, whether domestic or international, thereby leaving considerable room for discretionary interpretation by the Albanian courts on a case-by-case basis.

At the international level, the requirement to enforce a court decision within prescribed time limits has been recognized and consolidated in key instruments such as the HCCH 2005 Choice of Court Convention and the HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention. Both conventions explicitly provide that a foreign judgment may be recognized and

⁴⁶ Kola, F. and Çinari. "Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters in Albania," in Brussels I bis Regulation and Special Rules: Opportunities to Enhance Judicial Cooperation. Edited by C.E. Tuo, L. Carpaneto, S. Dominelli, March 2021, page 372, published in: https://dispi.unige.it/sites/dispi.unige.it/files/pagine/OPEN%20ACCESS_Brussels%20I%20bis%20and%20Special%20Rules.pdf

enforced in a contracting State only if it is enforceable in the State of origin, thereby directly linking the possibility of international enforcement to the validity and enforceability of the judgment in the rendering State. The same approach is adopted by European Union Regulation No. 1215/2012, which conditions the recognition and enforcement of judgments rendered in a Member State on their enforceability in the State of origin. This international practice reinforces the importance of upholding the principles of legality and legal certainty, through compliance with the statutory time limits, established for the enforcement of judgments and their decisions.

HCCH Conventions contribute to the unification of international judicial practices and the simplification of procedures for the recognition and enforcement of judgments, thereby facilitating the freer and more secure circulation of judgments in the international sphere. Albanian legislation underscores the necessity of giving priority to the application of international conventions by domestic courts. Therefore, it is essential that the Albanian judicial authorities adopt a more open and proactive approach toward these instruments, integrating them as an integral part of the interpretation and application of the law. In this regard, the establishment of specialized training structures for judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and other public officials is deemed necessary, with the aim of strengthening their knowledge and capacities to effectively implement HCCH Conventions. This development is particularly significant for Albania in the context of European integration, despite of the prior consideration the newly ratified HCCH Conventions.

Although EU Regulation No. 1215/2012 is not yet applicable in Albania due to its status as a candidate country, it remains an important guiding model for the normative and practical alignment of Albanian legislation with European standards. This harmonization process serves not only to align domestic practices with those of the European Union, but also to establish the functional and institutional foundations necessary for Albania's effective integration into the EU. Upon integration of Albania in EU, the Regulation will acquire direct effect and take precedence over national norms related to recognition and enforcement of civil and commercial judgments, thereby limiting the scope for domestic legislative intervention solely to matters not regulated by the Regulation.

In summary, the Albanian system for the recognition and enforcement of foreign judgments is at an advanced stage in its efforts to reach international standards, benefiting from the clear influence of international HCCH Conventions and European Union legislation. This approach ensures not only the effective application of the law but also the integrity of the Albanian judicial system within an increasingly interconnected international legal environment.

References

- Convention of 30 June 2005, on Choice of Court Agreements, of Hague Conference on Private International Law;
- Convention of 2 July 2019 on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil or Commercial Matters, of Hague Conference on Private International Law;
- Regulation (EU) No 1215/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2012, on jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial

matters(recast);

- Law No. 10428, date 02.06.2011 “On private international Law”;
- Albanian Civil Code;
- Albanian Civil Procedure Code;
- Decisions of the Constitutional Court of Albania;
- Decisions of the Supreme Court of Albania;
- Kore, Dashamir. “Prescription of the Lawsuit”, Dissertation for the defense of the scientific degree “Doctor”, University of Tirana, Faculty of Law, 2022, published in the official web site of the Faculty of Law, University of Tirana: <https://unitir.edu.al/parashkrimi-i-padise/>;
- Cross-border Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judicial Decisions in South East Europe and Perspectives of HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention, November 2021, page 20, paragraph 1.2 Assessment of the legal framework, published in: <https://assets.hcch.net/docs/76e4926e-962d-4621-97b5-c3e98d20eb53.pdf>
- Kola Tafaj, Flutura. Cinari, Silvana. “Albania’s Benefits from the Ratification of the 2019 Hague Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Civil and Commercial Judgments (“Judgement Convention HCCH2019”), February 2024, published in the official web site of the Faculty of Law, University of Tirana: <https://fdut.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/PERFITIMI-I-SHOQIPERISE-NGA-RATIFIKIMI-I-KONVENTES-SE-VENDIMEVE-HCCH-2019.pdf>;
- Harder, Sirko. “The effects of recognized foreign judgments in civil and commercial matters.” The International and Comparative Law Quarterly 62, no. 2 (2013) published in <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43301568>;
- Kola Tafaj, Flutura “International lis pendens in the Albanian jurisdiction, as an innovation in Albanian procedural law.”, Magazine “Judicial Life”, Nr. 3, 2017, published by the Albanian School of Magistrates;
- Outline of Convention, published in: <https://assets.hcch.net/docs/89be0bce-36c7-4701-af9a-1f27be046125.pdf>;
- Hartley, Trevor. Dogauchi, dhe Masato. “Hague Convention On Private International Law, Convention of 30 June 2005 On Choice of Court Agreements, Explanatory Report”, 2007: <https://assets.hcch.net/docs/0de60e2f-e002-408e-98a7-5638e1ebac65.pdf>;
- Garcimartín, Francisco. Saumier, Geneviève. “Explanatory Report on the Convention of 2 July 2019 on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil or Commercial Matters (HCCH 2019 Judgments Convention)”, published in: <https://www.hcch.net/en/publications-and-studies/details4/?pid=6797>;
- Brussels I Bis - A Commentary on Regulation (EU) No 1215/2012, Author Burkhard Hess - 9781789908176, published in: <https://www.elgaronline.com/>;
- Judgement of ECJ (First Chamber) of 8 February 2024, in Case C 566/22, Inkreal s.r.o. v Dúha Reality s.r.o, published in: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:62022CJ0566>;
- Matthias Weller, “Choice of Forum Agreements under the Brussels I Recast and under The Hague Convention: Coherences and Clashes”, Journal of Private International Law 3/2016, published in: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2827711;
- Christa Jessel-Holst, Prof. Dr. Argita Malltezi, Prof. Dr. Nada Dollani, Prof. Asoc. Dr. Flutura Kola (Tafaj), Dr. Aida Gugu (Bushati), Dr. Eniana Qarri, Dr. Fjoralba Caka, “Commentary Book of Private International Law”, Tirana 2018;
- Kola, F. and Çinari. “Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters in Albania,” in Brussels I bis Regulation and Special Rules: Opportunities to Enhance Judicial Cooperation. Edited by C.E. Tuo, L Carpaneto, S Dominelli, March 2021, published in: https://dispi.unige.it/sites/dispi.unige.it/files/pagine/OPEN%20ACCESS_Brussels%20I%20bis%20and%20Special%20Rules.pdf

The Evolution of the Rule of Law in Southeast Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Judicial Institutions from the Ottoman Period to the Modern State

Dr. Erisa Xhixho

University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the historical evolution of judicial institutions in the countries of South-eastern Europe, with a particular focus on Albania, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, in key historical periods: Ottoman rule, national state formation, totalitarian regimes and post-communist democratic transition. Through a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, the study examines how traditional structures of justice – influenced by religious, canon law and customary norms – have intertwined with efforts to build modern institutions of the rule of law. The analysis focuses on the forms of judicial organization, the degree of judicial independence, the interventions of political power and the effects of international intervention in the processes of institutional reform after the 1990s.

The paper notes that the history of judicial institutions in this region is intertwined with the political and cultural identity of the respective states, directly affecting their credibility and current functioning. Through this analysis, it is intended to contribute to a deeper understanding of the historical legacy in justice and to offer new perspectives on the challenges of developing countries towards building sustainable, independent and effective judicial institutions in line with European standards.

Keywords: Rule of Law, Southeast Europe, Comparative Analysis, Judicial Institutions, Albania.

1. Introduction

The history of institutions represents a key field in understanding the development of the state and the legal order in a society. In particular, the way in which judicial institutions have been built and transformed in different countries offers a valuable window into understanding the relationship between the state, the law and the citizen. In the context of South-eastern Europe – a region characterized by profound political changes, long occupations, ideological clashes and difficult transitions – the history of judicial institutions constitutes a field of study of particular importance.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the evolution of judicial institutions in Albania, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina over a period of time spanning from the Ottoman period to the present day. This study aims to highlight not only the formal and organizational changes of courts and justice structures, but also the impact of the historical, cultural and political context on their actual functioning.

The paper relies on a comparative and historical methodology, combining archival sources, historical legislation, institutional documents and international scientific literature. It aims to provide answers to several fundamental questions:

- How have traditional Ottoman and local systems influenced the shaping of justice institutions?
- What character did these institutions take on during periods of political transition,

especially during communism and after the '90s?

- Is there a connection between institutional heritage and today's challenges in building the rule of law?

Through this analysis, it is intended not only to enrich the academic literature on the history of institutions in the Western Balkans, but also to encourage reflections on the deep factors that hinder or help build an independent and credible justice system in post-transitional societies.

2. Transition from Empire to Nation-State (19th–early 20th centuries)

The period of transition from Ottoman rule to the establishment of nation-states in Southeastern Europe represents one of the most complex and important phases in the history of judicial institutions in the region. This process was not simply a formal replacement of administrative structures, but involved the clash between traditional legal models and aspirations for the construction of modern rule of law states, inspired by the European model, especially the French and Austro-Hungarian ones.

2.1 The gradual decline of Ottoman influence and the rise of the concept of the nation-state

From the 19th century onwards, the Ottoman Empire began to lose effective control over its Balkan provinces, while at the same time nationalist movements aimed at the creation of independent states erupted. The Ottoman Tanzimat reform (1839–1876), although aimed at modernizing the administration and legal unification of the empire, in many cases served as a further stimulus for local nationalisms demanding greater autonomy.¹

The first states to form after the dissolution of Ottoman rule, such as Serbia and Greece, prioritized the construction of a centralized legal and judicial system that would legitimize the authority of the nation-state and help create a common legal identity.

2.2 Judicial institutions in Albania after Independence (1912–1939)

In the case of Albania, although the declaration of Independence in 1912 formally ended Ottoman rule, the country remained for many years without a functioning and unified justice system. In the early 1920s, under the leadership of the governments of the time, an attempt was made to build a new institutional system based on foreign codifications – especially the Napoleonic Civil Code and the Italian model.²

The creation of the Council of State and the Supreme Court in 1925 was an important step towards the institutionalization of justice, however the lack of political stability and the strong influence of the executive limited the independence of the judicial system.³

¹ Zürcher, Erik J. *Turkey: A Modern History*. IB Tauris, 2004, p. 75–77.

² Dobjani, Ermir. *The Justice System in Albania (1912–1939)*, Toena Publications, 2008, pp. 42–49.

³ Hysi, Arta. “The Independence of the Judicial Power in Albania in the 1930s.” *Albanian Journal of Legal Sciences*, no. 2, 2015, p. 110–115.

2.3 Comparative examples: Serbia and Bosnia

In Serbia, the process of building judicial institutions began immediately after the recognition of independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878. The Criminal Code of 1860 and the Criminal Procedure Code of 1865 were considered among the most advanced in the region, reflecting the influence of Austro-Hungarian and German models.⁴

Bosnia, on the other hand, after its annexation by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908, experienced a different process: modern institutions were established by the imperial administration, without much involvement of local elites. This created a division between “formal institutions” and “traditional social practices,” which would later affect the sustainability of the rule of law after the breakup of Yugoslavia.⁵

2.4 The dilemma of continuity and discontinuity

In all these cases, a tension is observed between institutional continuity and a radical break with the Ottoman model. While the aim was to create modern states inspired by the West, in practice many elements of the old system remained present, both in the lower levels of the judiciary and in the approach to justice itself, which was often closer to customary norms than to written law.

3. Totalitarian regimes and the construction of politicized justice (1945–1990)

After the end of World War II, the countries of Southeastern Europe experienced profound political, economic and institutional transformations, which led to the establishment of totalitarian communist regimes. In this context, the judicial system became an instrument of ideological power and lost any dimension of independence. Despite the internal differences between the countries, a common feature was the replacement of justice as a mechanism for guaranteeing rights with justice as an instrument of political control and punishment.

3.1 Albania: an ideologically based justice

In Albania, the communist regime installed after 1944 built a judicial system that functioned as an integral part of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The 1976 constitution clearly defined that the courts were “organs of popular power” and that they acted in accordance with the political line of the Party of Labor.⁶ Judges were no longer enforcers of the law, but guarantors of the interests of the working class and the party.

District courts, the Supreme Court, and even military judicial bodies operated on the basis of political directives rather than independent interpretation of legal norms.⁷ Punishments for political opponents, rigged trials, and the lack of the right to defense

⁴ Trbovich, Ana S. *A Legal Geography of Yugoslavia's Disintegration*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 31–33.

⁵ Donia, Robert J., and John VA Fine Jr. *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 88–90.

⁶ Constitution of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, 1976, article 74.

⁷ Pepo, Mihal. *Albanian Justice in the Period of Socialism*, Elena Gjika Publications, 2010, p. 68–73.

were integral elements of the justice system. This period brought not only institutional deformation, but also a break from any previous legal experience of the intermediate period.

3.2 Yugoslavia: justice in the function of federal unity

In socialist Yugoslavia, the judicial system retained some formal elements of the Western structure, but in practice it operated as an integral part of state power, linked to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The judiciary was organized on the principle of federalism, with powers divided between the republics, but always under central ideological control.⁸

Unlike Albania, in Yugoslavia there was an attempt to build a more sophisticated normative framework, including the institute of socialist self-government and some involvement of social organizations in the functioning of the judiciary.⁹ However, justice remained politicized and limited to guaranteeing individual rights, especially in matters related to the integrity of the political system and the national unity of the federation.

3.3 Instrumentalization of justice and destruction of public trust

In both cases – in Albania and Yugoslavia – justice was no longer perceived as a mechanism for protecting citizens' rights, but as a means for preserving ideological and state order. This instrumentalization of the judiciary had profound consequences for the credibility of institutions and inherited a culture of fear and distrust that continues to have an impact even after the fall of totalitarian regimes.

The legacy of politicized justice is still visible in some forms of executive capture of judicial institutions, in the lack of real independence of judges, and in the delays in justice reform in the post-communist period.

4. The post-communist transition and the challenges of justice reform (1990–2020)

The collapse of communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s brought about radical transformations in the political and institutional structure of the Western Balkan countries. In this context, the construction of an independent judicial system became one of the greatest challenges of the democratic transition. However, the path towards the creation of a functional, depoliticized and credible justice system has been long, fragmented and often blocked by political interests and inherited clientelist structures.

4.1 The fall of authoritarian regimes and the institutional vacuum

With the overthrow of totalitarian regimes in the early 1990s, the countries of the Western Balkans found themselves faced with an institutional vacuum. Although the new constitutions guaranteed the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary, in practice the legal systems continued to function with the old structures

⁸ Trbovich, Ana S. *A Legal Geography of Yugoslavia's Disintegration*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 89–92.

⁹ Pavićević, Vesna. "Judiciary and Political Control in Yugoslavia." *East European Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1987, p. 439–450.

and the same authoritarian mentality.¹⁰

In Albania, the judicial system of the 1990s was characterized by a lack of professionalism, political interference, corruption, and a lack of transparency in appointments and promotions.¹¹ A large number of judges who had served under the communist regime remained in the system without an effective process of verifying their integrity or competence.

4.2 Justice reform in Albania after 2014

In 2014, Albania undertook one of the most in-depth judicial reform processes in the region, assisted and led by the European Commission and international partners. The judicial reform included a transitional re-evaluation of judges and prosecutors (vetting), the creation of new institutions such as the High Judicial Council (HJC), the High Prosecutorial Council (HPC), the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and the **Special Structure against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK)**¹².

Despite progress in building a new institutional architecture, the reform process has encountered serious obstacles such as: lack of human capacity, file overload, delays in decisions and, in some cases, attempts to politicize the new institutions.¹³

4.3 European integration efforts as a driver of reforms

Throughout the Western Balkans, the prospect of EU membership has become an important pressure mechanism for justice reform. The so-called “Copenhagen criteria” and Chapter 23 of the negotiations (judiciary and fundamental rights) have placed the rule of law at the heart of the integration process.

However, EU periodic reports show that judicial independence, transparency and the fight against corruption remain ongoing challenges. In some cases, reforms have been carried out more to meet procedural formalities than to fundamentally build public trust in institutions.¹⁴

4.4 Culture of impunity and public perception

One of the deepest problems of the transition period has been the culture of impunity, especially for senior officials. Until recent years, almost no high-ranking official had been successfully prosecuted for corruption or abuse of office, reinforcing the belief that justice only works for the weak.

Only with the strengthening of new institutions and investigations into high-ranking public figures (e.g. the arrests of several former ministers or mayors in Albania), has public perception begun to change.¹⁵ However, citizens’ trust in the justice system still remains low, as surveys by independent organizations show.

¹⁰ Sadushi, Sokol. *Constitutional law in transition*, EMAL Publications, 2010, p. 132–135.

¹¹ Kelmendi, Artan. “The Independence of the Judiciary in Albania: Between Ideal and Reality.” *Journal of Legal Sciences*, no. 1, 2013, pp. 47–52.

¹² Euralius & OPDAT. *Report on the progress of the Justice Reform*, Tirana, 2020.

¹³ European Commission. *Progress Report for Albania*, Brussels, 2023, pp. 9–11.

¹⁴ Anastasakis, Othon. “Rule of Law Reform in the Western Balkans.” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2017, p. 509–524.

¹⁵ Balkan Barometer 2023. *Public Opinion Survey*. Regional Cooperation Council, p. 33–36

Conclusions

1. The evolution of the judicial system in the Western Balkans, and especially in Albania, has followed a discontinuous and fragmented path, which reflects the influences of the political, ideological and geopolitical contexts of each historical period.
2. In the period of Independence until the 1930s, the foundations of a modern judicial system were laid, influenced by European models, but which suffered from a lack of political stability and institutional capacity.
3. During the communist regime (1945–1990), the judiciary lost any function of independence, becoming a tool of ideological and repressive power. This institutional deformation has left deep traces in the legal and administrative culture of the country.
4. The transition period after 1990 was accompanied by efforts to rebuild the rule of law, but progress has been slow and often blocked by political interference, the lack of meritocracy, and the presence of corruption.
5. The post-2016 justice reform in Albania represents an unprecedented structural intervention in the history of the country's judicial institutions, with significant results in cleaning up the system and strengthening public trust, although challenges remain numerous.

Recommendations

1. Strengthening the legal education and professionalism of judges should be a long-term priority, giving priority to meritocracy and ethics in their selection and promotion.
2. The institutional memory of the past must be preserved and studied in depth, not only for historical purposes, but to better understand the causes of previous failures and to avoid their repetition.
3. Building a democratic legal culture, which respects the separation of powers and guarantees the independence of the judiciary, must be supported through education, institutional transparency, and civil society involvement.
4. European integration processes should be used not only as external pressure for reform, but also as an opportunity to standardize judicial practices according to the model of the rule of law and the protection of fundamental rights.
5. Historical and comparative studies on justice institutions should be further encouraged in Albania and the region, as part of building an institutional mindset that values independence and integrity.

References

- Anastasakis, O. (2017). Rule of Law Reform in the Western Balkans. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 17(4), 509–524.
- Euralius & OPDAT. (2020). Report on the progress of the Justice Reform. Tirana.
- European Commission. (2023). Progress Report on Albania. Brussels.
- Frashëri, K. (2005). History of the State and Law in Albania. Plejad Publications: Tirana.
- Hysi, V. (2010). Criminal law and the rule of law in Albania: a historical approach. University

of Tirana, Faculty of Law.

Kelmendi, A. (2013). The independence of the judiciary in Albania: between ideal and reality. *Journal of Legal Sciences*, no. 1, 47–52.

Helsinki Committee in Albania. (2022). Evaluation of the vetting process in the justice system. Tirana.

Sadushi, S. (2010). *Constitutional law in transition*. EMAL Publications: Tirana.

Sadushi, S. (2022). *Constitutional Institutions and the Rule of Law in Albania*. Tirana Legal Studies.

Skendaj, E. (2014). *Creating a Functional State: The Case of Albania*. Cornell University Press.

Toçi, G. (2001). *History of Albanian Law*. SHBLU: Tirana.

US Department of State. (2023). *Albania: Human Rights and Rule of Law Report*. Washington DC

Venetian Commission. (2015). *Opinion on the Judicial Reform in Albania (CDL-AD(2015)045)*. Council of Europe.

Zela, A. (2017). Reforming the justice system and its impact on institutional legitimacy. *Journal of Political Science*, no. 2, pp. 68–80.

Balkan Barometer. (2023). *Public Opinion Survey*. Regional Cooperation Council.

Preparation for an interpreting assignment in the Albanian Institutional Context

Ilda Themeli

University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

Interpreting has increasingly been conceptualized as a socially situated activity, with interpreters' working conditions and preparatory practices exerting a significant influence on both process and output quality. Preparation—comprising access to background materials, working documents, and client briefings—not only reflects the interpreter's professional responsibility for accuracy, but also supports cognitive management through strategies such as anticipation and inferencing. This paper examines the experiences of interpreters with Albanian as their A-language in political settings in Albania, with particular attention to institutional practices regarding the provision of preparatory materials. Based on data collected through semi-structured interviews, the study analyzes the extent to which Albanian public institutions respond to interpreters' informational needs and identifies key factors shaping institutional attitudes toward preparation.

Keywords: Interpreting Studies, political interpreting, preparation, quality, Albanian public institutions, socially situated activity.

1. Introduction

Communication, as a human activity aimed at conveying information (Baylon & Mignot, 2003, p. 19), is mediated through interpreting when the interlocutors involved in the communicative act either do not share a common language or opt to communicate in different languages.

Interpreting may be defined as «... *a form of Translation in which a first and final rendition in another language is produced on the basis of a one-time presentation of an utterance in a source language.* » (Pöhhacker, 2022, p. 11).

This definition is grounded in Otto Kade's definition (Kade, 1968, p. 35), which emphasizes two key features:

- The source text is presented only once, rendering repetition or subsequent review impossible.
- The target text must be produced under considerable time pressure, leaving little scope for revision or correction.

Interpreting, as the reformulation of spoken or signed utterances from one language into another, represents an age-old human practice. Within Interpreting Studies—the discipline concerned with the theoretical and empirical investigation of translation and interpreting—interpreting has traditionally been approached from a variety of perspectives, including linguistic, psychological, and psycholinguistic frameworks. Since the 1990s, however, interpreting has increasingly been examined from a sociological perspective, which focuses on the study of social behavior and institutional structures (Inghilleri, 2015, p. 388). Sociological approaches offer valuable insights

into the dynamics between interpreters and the institutional or social structures within which they operate and to which they provide their services (ibid.). From this perspective, sociological approaches to Interpreting Studies «...recent work has emphasized the necessity of studying interpreting within the specific institutions or social contexts in which it is practiced» Angelelli & Baer, 2016, p. 7).

Interpreting as a socially situated activity is shaped by a variety of factors, which may be broadly categorized as *employment-related*¹, *assignment-related* and *task-related* (Gbrić & Pöchhacker, 2015, p. 441).

With particular regard to assignment-related factors, it is important to note that, whether employed or working on a freelance basis, interpreters are engaged to perform specific assignments. Such assignments may take place across a diverse range of settings and formats of interaction, including technical or political conferences involving multiple working languages, press conferences, official state visits, bilateral or multilateral negotiations, legal interviews conducted by law enforcement or prosecutorial authorities, medical consultations, and both in-person and remote encounters.

Among the assignment-related factors, particular attention is paid to aspects concerning the «*collaboration with the commissioning client and such aspects of PREPARATION*² as the provision of documents, access to TERMINOLOGY resources, and the scheduling of a briefing.» (ibid., p. 442).

2. Preparation and Quality

Preparation for a specific interpreting assignment constitutes an integral component of an interpreter's professional work, and inherently requires collaboration with the commissioning party. Theoretically, the concept of preparation is closely intertwined with the concept of quality in interpreting (Kalina, 2015, p. 318), which itself represents a key concept within Interpreting Studies. It is therefore appropriate to briefly consider several theoretical reflections on this notion.

Quality is one of the most extensively researched topics within the discipline, and it is widely regarded as «*an essentially relative and multi- dimensional concept.... quality has to do with such features of the interpreter's product as texture, source–target correspondence and communicative effect, and with behavioral aspects such as special skills and expertise and role performance*». (Pöchhacker, 2022, p. 180).

It is worth noting that, despite being a fundamental notion within Interpreting Studies, due to its complex and multidimensional nature, «*there is not yet a universal consensus on what it is, what criteria should be used to define it, and how these criteria can be objectively evaluated*» (Collado Aís & García Becerra, 2015, p. 368).

The interpreting process involves multiple stakeholders, including the client (commissioning party), users (speakers and listeners), the interpreter, colleagues, as well as a variety of variables such as discourse features, working conditions, delivery speed, and the interpreter's preparation (Moser-Mercer, 1996, p. 45).

Acknowledging the influence of such external factors or input variables has necessitated a conceptual distinction between ideal quality and optimum quality. The former is an abstract notion, referring to a «*hypothetical interpretation would contain all*

² Capitals used in the original.

the criteria or parameters that affect quality, with the exception of the conditioning factors that a real-world interpretation might be subjected to in specific situations» (Collado Aís & García Becerra, 2015, p. 369).

The latter concept is introduced by Barbara Moser-Mercer, who defines it as follows: *«Optimum quality in professional interpreting implies that an interpreter provides a complete and accurate rendition of the original that does not distort the original meaning and tries to capture any and all extralinguistic information that the speaker might have provides subject to constraints imposed by certain external conditions.» (Moser-Mercer, 1996, p. 44).*

Understood in this way, quality is no longer a static but rather a dynamic concept, as highlighted by Pöchhacker when referring to *«quality under circumstances» (Pöchhacker, 1994, p. 242).*

These theoretical considerations are highly relevant to the practical aspects of interpreting, particularly concerning the role of preparation and the contribution of clients to supporting the interpreter's preparatory work. As Kalina emphasizes, in communicative settings where interpreting takes place, *«anyone involved in the communication situation should take this into account and act accordingly.» (Kalina, 2005, p. 773).*

The aforementioned reflections illustrate that preparation is among the factors that affect both the interpreting process and product in terms of quality.

Kalina further notes that *«Interpreting quality is also a function of interpreters' knowledge of situational as well as contextual variables and of speakers and their intentions. Moreover, interpreters should know who the listeners are (experts, TV audience, politicians, etc.) and what their interests are, what their mother tongues are, which hierarchies obtain in the communication situation, etc.» (ibid., p.777) thereby linking preparation to quality, as preparation serves to «build a mental representation of incoming text on the basis of previous knowledge.» (ibid.).*

3. The Role and Content of Preparation for a Specific Interpreting Assignment

Preparation for a specific interpreting assignment reflects not only the interpreter's responsibility for the quality of the interpreting product but also their ethical responsibility towards both the speaker and the audience. This perspective is consistent with theoretical considerations summarized by Kalina, who emphasizes that, in light of interpreters' increasing awareness of their role and responsibility in the discourse, they *«need as much advance information as possible, above all about the purpose of the event, the subject and the participants, in the form of available documents, briefings and background material.» (Kalina, 2015, pp. 318-319).*

The reasons for the importance of such targeted preparation are twofold: on one hand, it supports the interpreter's cognitive processing of understanding during interpreting, and on the other hand, it reflects their professional responsibility. Furthermore, preparation serves to reduce cognitive load during the actual interpreting task by enabling the interpreter in *«finding equivalents and constructing semantic fields and mental maps in the pre-process phase» (ibid., p. 319).* Targeted preparation is considered part *«of a complex process of knowledge management» (ibid.).*

Gile conceptualizes comprehension as the result of the interaction between *«knowledge*

of language, extralinguistic knowledge, and deliberate analysis" (Gile, 2009, p. 84). He notes that «...the Knowledge Base of interpreters and translators of non-literary texts seldom contains all the information necessary for them to perform their work. It follows that ad hoc Knowledge Acquisition, defined here as the acquisition of information for a specific Translation task (as opposed to general ongoing knowledge acquisition... is a regular and important part of Translational Work» (ibid., p. 129).

Whether linguistic, general, or ad hoc, knowledge acquisition directly supports both comprehension and reformulation processes in interpreting.

In discussing ad hoc knowledge acquisition, Gile distinguishes between linguistic and extralinguistic information. Linguistic information includes both lexical knowledge, such as terminology required for understanding the source text and for accurate target language reformulation, as well as stylistic and phraseological knowledge that primarily facilitates target language production (ibid., p. 130).

Extralinguistic ad hoc information, on the other hand, encompasses knowledge about the topic, the speaker(s), and the communication context. This information complements both general knowledge and cues contained in the source discourse, supporting the cognitive processes described above (ibid., p. 131).

In interpreting, unlike written translation, the ad hoc knowledge acquisition must occur before the actual interpreting begins, since interpreting takes place under considerable time pressure, leaving no opportunity to interrupt the process and consult additional resources: the interpreter delivers his rendition a few minutes after the source speech in consecutive interpreting, or even a few seconds later in simultaneous interpreting. The interpreter cannot «stop interpreting and leave the booth in order to find a solution to a problem» (ibid. p. 111).

The phrase "before the actual interpreting begins" itself requires further clarification. Gile differentiates between *advanced preparation*, *last-minute preparation*, and *in-conference preparation* (ibid., pp. 144-146), whereas Kalina identifies several phases: *pre-process*, *peri-process*, *in-process*, and *post-process*" (Kalina, 2005, p. 778). The pre-process phase refers to «information retrieval and preparation as well as coordination or cooperation with other members...» (ibid.), the peri-process phase concerns «the conditions in which the interpreting act takes place (...documents made available in-conference...)» (ibid.) while the in-process phase involves requirements (to be met by interpreters, speakers, listeners, technical staff, etc.) (ibid.). Kalina's first two phases correspond to what Gile describes as preparatory preparation.

4. The Albanian Context

In line with the sociological approaches to interpreting, which view interpreting as a socially embedded activity rather than a purely linguistic one, this paper aims to examine how commissioning clients in the Albanian context respond to interpreters' requests for access to the information and background materials necessary for adequate preparation. The focus of this study is limited to one specific form of interpreting, namely political interpreting. It is employed across various settings whenever «VertreterInnen verschiedenstaatlicher Institutionen zusammentreffen, um

*politische oder diplomatische Beziehungen aufzubauen, zu pflegen oder neu zu definieren; das kann sowohl militärische, politische, kulturelle als auch wirtschaftliche Themen umfassen*³». (Kadrić & Zanicco, 2018, pp. 26-27).

The formats of political interaction vary widely, ranging from bilateral meetings—such as state visits of heads of state, official visits, discussions, and negotiations—to multilateral events, such as international conferences. What characterizes these forms of interaction is that *«keine der beteiligten Personen in eigener Sache in Erscheinung tritt, sondern ausschließlich eine politische Institution oder den Staat selbst vertritt*⁴». (ibid., p. 28).

In such settings, parties often choose to speak the official language of the state they represent, creating a need for interpreters to facilitate communication. In many countries, *«Interpreting for heads of state and government and high-ranking national representatives is usually organised by the ministries of foreign affairs, which recruit freelance interpreters as required and may also maintain a staff of permanent interpreters»* (Thiéry, 2015, p. 108).

However, the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not maintain a similar structure and does not provide this type of service. Likewise, Albania's highest state institutions do not have staff interpreters within their organizational structures. The situation differs for a few of the larger diplomatic missions in Albania, which do employ staff interpreters who are engaged during visits, meetings, or negotiations between foreign and Albanian political representatives.

In the Albanian context, interpreters may be commissioned by both foreign and domestic clients. Foreign clients may require freelance interpreters when their own embassy staff cannot cover the need. On the domestic side, interpreters are engaged by state institutions responsible for organizing visits, meetings, and negotiations, such as the Prime Minister's Office, the Office of the President, the Parliament, various ministries, and other governmental bodies. In these cases, freelance interpreters are generally for specific interpreting assignments either directly or indirectly through translation agencies acting as intermediaries.

5. Examining Interpreters' Experiences with Preparation in the Albanian Context

Following the theoretical discussion on:

- the importance of viewing interpreting within specific social and institutional contexts
- the relationship between task-specific preparation and interpreting quality
- the significance of preparation for interpreters themselves

this section will focus on the actual approach of Albanian institutions, as commissioning clients, toward interpreters' requests for access to information and materials necessary for preparation in political interpreting.

³ Author's translation: Representatives of institutions from different states meet for the purpose of establishing, maintaining, or redefining political or diplomatic relations; such interactions may concern military, political, cultural, or economic matters.

⁴ Author's translation: None of the participants engage as private individuals but rather as representatives of a state or political institution.

5.1 Methodology

In order to examine the approach of Albanian institutions in the context of political interpreting, this study employs semi-structured interviews with conference interpreters who work with Albanian as an active language. From a methodological standpoint, these interviews are primarily exploratory in nature. As Silverman outlines, several types of knowledge may be explored through interviews, including: «(ii) interviewee beliefs about the topic of the interview; ... (iv) interviewee perceptions about actions or behaviors; ... (vi) conscious reasons for responses to knowledge types i–v» (Silverman, 2006, cited in Hale & Napier, 2016, p. 100).

The choice of interviews as a methodological tool is closely linked to the object of this study—namely, the exploration of political interpreters' experiences in Albania and how the broader social context influences their professional practice, particularly regarding preparation-related matters. In this regard, the interview is especially well-suited to understanding the interpreter's experience regarding institutional responses to their requests for information, background materials, and speeches relevant for their targeted preparation, as well as «*what meaning they make out of that experience*» (Seidman, 2013, p. 10).

Given both the nature of the chosen method and the limited number of conference interpreters engaged in political interpreting in Albania, the data collected, along with its analysis and resulting conclusions, are qualitative rather than quantitative.

The small number of such interpreters in Albania is directly related to objective circumstances stemming from several factors. These include: the status of Albanian as a language with a relatively small number of speakers; Albania's political position, which involves limited international engagement; and, consequently, the limited role of Albanian as a working language in political interactions with foreign counterparts. This combination of factors naturally limits the number of interpreters who work with the language pair Albanian (A) – foreign language (B)⁵.

In Albania, there are no official statistics on the number of conference interpreters engaged in political interpreting. The only official register identifying translators and interpreters is maintained by the Ministry of Justice. However, this register is not applicable to the present study for two reasons. Firstly, Law No. 82/2021 “On Official Translation and the Profession of Official Translators”⁶ and, by extension, the register itself, make no distinction between translators and interpreters. Secondly, the law's scope does not encompass political interpreting, which is primarily categorized as conference interpreting (Pöchhacker, 2013, cited in Diriker, 2015, p. 78). Instead, the law regulates other types of interpreting, namely legal interpreting and community interpreting as sub-categories within dialogue interpreting (Merlini, 2020, p. 147).

Furthermore, Albania does not have a professional association of conference interpreters whose membership could serve as a reference population for the sample selected in this study. Likewise, no comparable prior studies exist. Given these circumstances, the identification of interpreters was based on the author's personal knowledge of the community of conference interpreters actively working in political

⁵ For the classification of working language see the provisions of the International Association of Conference Interpreters, AIIC: <https://aiic.org/site/students/abc?nav=sidebar> (21.04.2025)

⁶ The amended law published in the Official Gazette, can be accessed under: <https://qbz.gov.al/preview/1114e8fb-2c56-4e82-a2ee-2093b7367ef5/cons/20240514>, (10.05.2024)

interpreting. This knowledge stems from the author's 24-year professional experience as an interpreter, which includes substantial work in political settings. Two selection criteria were established for participant recruitment: at least five years of experience in political interpreting and Albanian as one of the interpreter's working languages.

5.2 Profile of Interviewed Interpreters

For the purposes of this study, nine interpreters were contacted. Of these, seven agreed to participate in the interviews. All interviewed interpreters have Albanian as their A language, while their B languages are German, English, and Italian. Their professional experience ranges from 21 to 32 years.

Regarding the extent to which political interpreting constitutes part of their professional workload, four of the interpreters reported that political interpreting accounts for between 80% and 100% of their working days. The remaining three interpreters indicated that it comprises between 5% and 20% of their total workload. Two of them are staff interpreters in foreign institutions operating in Albania, while the others work as freelance interpreters.

Four of the interviewees have successfully passed the accreditation test of the Directorate-General for Interpretation (DG Interpretation) and are accredited as interpreters for the institutions of the European Union. Accreditation by EU institutions is widely recognized as a quality seal and filtering mechanism, not only due to the high standards maintained by the institution, but also considering that *«Die Erfolgsquote liegt bei ca. 20 %»*⁷ (Prokesch-Predanovic & Reithofer-Winter, 2016, p. 230).

Two other interviewees are officially recognized by the foreign institutions for which they work; however, these institutions do not operate a formal accreditation system comparable to that of the European Union.

Additionally, two of the interpreters are also recognized by the Council of Europe. Unlike the European Union, the Council of Europe does not conduct a formal accreditation process but recruits interpreters on an ad hoc basis, relying on calls for applications and the submission of curriculum vitae as proof of professional experience⁸.

All interpreters work in both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting modes.

5.3 Questions Regarding Aspects of Preparation

In the course of the conducted interviews, interpreters were specifically asked about issues related to targeted preparation. The purpose of these questions was to shed light on the approach of Albanian institutions, as clients commissioning interpreting services, with regard to the interpreters' requests for information and materials necessary for preparation. In addition, based on the empirical observations of the interpreters, the questions aimed to elicit their experiences concerning possible differences between Albanian and foreign clients.

⁷ Author's translation: Only approximately 20% of candidates who take the exam, are successful.

⁸ The information provided on the official website of The Council of Europe contains general information regarding recruitment, but no specific regulations for interpreters: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/jobs/how-to-apply> (06.05.2025).

More specifically, the interpreters were asked whether in their experience interpreting in political setting:

- interpreter briefings are held prior to the event;
- they are explicitly informed by the client about the goals and the atmosphere of the meeting;
- background materials related to the topics to be discussed are received, in advance;
- the speeches, presentations, or statements to be delivered at the event are received in advance, and, if so, how far in advance these are provided.

In the context of political interpreting in Albania, it is usually the staff of the politicians who engage interpreters, either directly or through translation agencies. Thus, the Albanian client is not the politician(s) themselves who will be interpreted, but rather the corresponding institutions — such as the Prime Minister's Office, the Presidency, the Parliament, or various ministries — which do not have staff interpreters but engage freelance interpreters according to the required language combinations.

Similarly, foreign institutions without a permanent presence in Albania usually engage freelance interpreters who work with Albanian as a working language. In contrast, some diplomatic missions in Albania employ staff interpreters.

5.4 Results and Analysis

In the context of interpreting, briefings serve the interpreter as an opportunity to obtain first-hand information about the nature and objectives of the event, the positions or political stances of the parties and the content axes. The question posed in this regard referred not to direct briefings between the interpreter and the politician(s) to be interpreted, but rather to meetings with staff members, even within the framework of the politician's briefings with their teams.

Among the seven interpreters interviewed, only one reported occasionally having participated in briefings organized by Albanian clients, although this statement was not limited exclusively to political settings. All other interpreters stated that such briefings are not being organized by the commissioning parties. Likewise, all freelance interpreters confirmed that they do not receive explicit information about the goals of the events. In contrast, the two interpreters employed by diplomatic representations stated that, in most cases, they are provided with general information on the topics to be addressed, the stage of the negotiations and the intended goals.

The responses regarding client-provided information — both in terms of briefings and direct information about objectives, positions, atmosphere, and content axes — reveal a clear distinction: compared to freelance interpreters, the position of staff interpreters offers more favorable conditions for obtaining necessary background information, which directly supports the comprehension of utterances conveyed in discourse. Freelance professionals must follow alternative paths to construct the necessary mental context. Often, the meeting agenda serves as the sole starting point, indicating the type of meeting, and occasionally the topic, the speakers, or the participants. As such, they must undertake a more extensive process of analysis regarding the speaker and the broader context of the event, including the developments leading to the meeting, in an attempt to mentally anticipate the potential goals of interaction and the communicative acts that may emerge. Their preparation relies heavily on their

own analysis of the information they are able to locate, lacking the relative certainty provided by direct client briefings, especially concerning the political objectives, positions, or climate between parties — elements which, particularly in the political sphere, are not always accessible to the general public.

Background materials serve the interpreter by complementing their extra-linguistic knowledge concerning the issues to be addressed in the event — whether it is a state or official visit, a negotiation, or a joint press conference. As previously outlined, extra-linguistic knowledge directly supports the analysis during the interpreting task, constituting a key prerequisite for understanding the source discourse and subsequently re-expressing it into the target language. Alongside information about the speaker and audience, as well as the interaction goals, background materials help the interpreter to select and appropriately «resort to strategies⁹ such as anticipation and inferencing» (Kalina, 2015, p. 319).

In this regard, all interpreters confirmed that Albanian clients rarely provide background material on their own initiative. Even when such materials are explicitly requested by the interpreters, it is very rare for Albanian clients to supply them.

Another point of interest concerns the clients' reaction to the interpreter's requests for background material and information. Interpreters often encounter a lack of understanding from clients regarding these requests, stemming from limited knowledge and comprehension of the cognitive processes involved in interpreting. Typically, clients perceive interpreting as a mechanical word-for-word linguistic transfer and fail to recognize why interpreters would need additional background information and materials. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Albania. As Kalina states: «Speakers, and users of interpreting services in general, often fail to understand why interpreters, who, in their view, are only concerned with the linguistic aspects of a speech or dialogue, would need such information, and are reluctant to provide it» (ibid.).

The interviewed interpreters—including those who reported receiving some preliminary background information, as previously described—consistently highlighted a difference between foreign and Albanian clients regarding the provision of such information. The common denominator across all interviews is that Albanian clients are significantly less willing to provide interpreters with background information.

With respect to the final issue regarding the provision of speeches and statements by politicians ahead of time, the interviewees reported that this occurs only rarely. When it does happen, the materials are typically delivered “at the last minute,” “on site,” or “five minutes before”¹⁰ the event. This situation corresponds to what Gile describes as last-minute preparation. According to Kalina, such preparation becomes necessary when «manuscripts are not made available before a meeting, but only just before the speech is delivered, which in practice limits opportunities for teamwork in the booth where the boothmate may be in need of help» (Kalina, 2015, p. 319).

Receiving manuscripts only moments before the speech adds yet another layer to the interpreter's cognitive load during the actual interpreting task. If the interpreter

⁹ Note: Capitalization used in original.

¹⁰ Citations from the interviews, specifically Interpreter A, Interpreter B, and Interpreter E. To protect the identity of the interviewees, they are presented here using codes.

chooses to use the manuscript during interpreting, they must continually monitor the alignment between the spoken and written versions while simultaneously engaging in active listening. This process compounds the interpreter's cognitive burden in both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. It introduces an additional operational stage to the existing cognitive operations, which includes:

- active listening,
- analysis,
- message planning,
- articulation of the planned segment,
- monitoring for informational completeness, semantic accuracy, grammatical correctness, and stylistic appropriateness.

In the consecutive mode, the monitoring and comparison of the manuscript with the spoken delivery is added primarily to the first three operations. In simultaneous interpreting, however, it affects the entire operational chain, all while these processes must occur cyclically for each incoming unit of meaning produced by the speaker, under considerable time pressure imposed by the speaker's delivery pace and the interpreter's aim to minimize the ear-voice-span. Prolonged ear-voice-span, in turn, increases the strain on short-term memory.

When asked whether they more frequently receive speeches from foreign or Albanian clients, the interpreters identified a pattern similar to that observed regarding background materials: foreign clients are more likely to provide such documents. This correlates with a higher level of institutional awareness among foreign entities, staff, and politicians regarding the interpreting process. At higher levels, interpreting services are often organized by specialized institutional units, such as the Directorate-General for Interpretation in EU institutions or the Language Service of the German Federal Foreign Office, which contribute to informing and educating institutions and politicians about the specifics of interpreter-mediated communication.

Among other aspects, interpreters were also asked to elaborate on the reasons why speeches or statements are either not provided to them at all, or are delivered only shortly before the start of the event.

All interpreters identified as a key reason the fact that, generally, Albanian institutions, political staff, and politicians themselves neither understand nor are familiar with the work of the interpreter. This lack of understanding is also reflected in the absence of any regulatory protocol governing the interpreter's role and interpreting services. Furthermore, the hesitation of political staff to share speeches or statements often stems from the perception that these materials constitute confidential information. Indirectly, this indicates that they are not aware of the deontological norms governing the interpreting profession, among which confidentiality is one of the most fundamental.

Another contributing factor relates to the general work culture, whereby speeches and statements are often prepared shortly before the event itself, resulting in their late provision to interpreters—if they are provided at all.

Interpreters D and E observed that personal relationships, developed over time between interpreters and protocol staff when the same interpreter is repeatedly engaged, can somewhat facilitate access to speeches.

In Albania, specialized institutional structures regulating interpreting services—such

as those existing within foreign institutions—are lacking, as is a national interpreters' association akin to AIIC. Such organizations and structures play elsewhere a critical role in raising awareness among institutions and users of interpreting services. Therefore, this makes individual collaboration between interpreters and contracting parties considerably more challenging.

6. Conclusion

Institutional practices and the general approach towards interpreting in Albania do not sufficiently support interpreters in the performance of their duties. Due to a lack of understanding and awareness of the interpreting process, Albanian institutions are rarely willing to provide interpreters with essential information regarding the goals of the event.

Similarly, the organization of interpreters' briefings is not part of institutional practice in Albania.

Political speeches or statements are seldom made available to interpreters. The reasons for this relate both to the aforementioned factors and to the reluctance of staff, who often regard speeches as confidential material. In some cases, such speeches are delivered to the interpreter only shortly before the event begins, and consequently, before the actual interpreting task itself.

This phenomenon is also linked to the broader work culture, where speeches are often drafted shortly before the event.

The interviews highlight that, across all discussed aspects, there is a noticeable difference between the approach of Albanian institutions and that of foreign institutions. The latter tend to be more open and responsive to interpreters' requests for information and materials necessary for the interpreting task.

References

- Angelelli, C.V. & Baer, B.J. (2016). *Researching Translation and Interpreting*. Routledge.
- Baylon, Ch. & Mignot, X. (2004). *Komunikimi*. 3rd Edition. Logos-A.
- Collado Aís, Á. & García Becerra, O. (2015) Quality. In H. Mikkelsen & R. Jourdenais (Eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting*, (pp.368-383). Routledge.
- Diriker, E. (2015). Conference Interpreting. In F. Pöchhacker (Ed.). *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (pp. 78-82). Routledge.
- Gbrić, N. & Pöchhacker, F. (2015). Working Conditions. In F. Pöchhacker (Ed.). *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (pp. 441-443). Routledge.
- Gile, D. (2009). *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*, Revised Edition. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Hale, S. & Napier, J. (2013). *Research Methods in Interpreting: A Practical Resource*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Inghillieri, M. (2015). Sociological approaches. In F. Pöchhacker (Ed.). *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (pp. 388-391). Routledge.
- Kade, O. (1968). *Zufall und Gesetzmäßigkeit in der Übersetzung*. VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie.
- Kadrić, M. & Zanocco, G. (2018). *Dolmetschen in Politik und Diplomatie*. Facultas.
- Kalina, S. (2015). Preparation. In F. Pöchhacker (Ed.). *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (pp. 318-320). Routledge.
- Kalina, S. (2005). Quality Assurance for Interpreting Processes, *Meta*, 50(2). 768-784.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/011017ar>

Merlini, R. (2020). Dialogue Interpreting. I M. Baker & G. Saldanha, (Eds.). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. 3rd Edition. (pp. 147-152). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315678627>

Moser-Mercer, B. (1996). Quality in Interpreting: Some methodological issues. *Interpreters Newsletter*. 7, 43-55. <http://hdl.handle.net/10077/8990>

Pöschhacker, F. (2022). *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. 3rd Edition. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003186472>

Pöschhacker, F. (1994). Quality Assurance in Simultaneous Interpreting. In C. Dollerup & A. Lindegaard (Eds.). *Teaching Translation and Interpreting* 2. (pp. 233-242). John Benjamins Publishing.

Prokesch-Predanovic, M. & Reithofer-Winter, K. (2016). Arbeitsfeld Europäische Institutionen. In M. Kadrić & K. Kaindl (Eds.) *Berufsziel Übersetzen und Dolmetschen: Grundlagen, Ausbildung, Arbeitsfelder*. (pp. 221-232). A. Francke Verlag.

Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researches in education and social sciences*. 4th Edition. Teachers College Press.

Thierý, Ch. (2015). Diplomatic Interpreting. In F. Pöschhacker Ed.). *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (pp. 107-108). Routledge.

Online Resources

Active and passive languages: <https://aiic.org/site/students/abc?nav=sidebar> (21.04.2025)

Ligji i ndryshuar për Përkthimin zyrtar dhe profesionin e përkthyesit zyrtar: <https://qbz.gov.al/preview/1114e8fb-2c56-4e82-a2ee-2093b7367ef5/cons/20240514> (10.05.2024)

Recruitment CoE: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/jobs/how-to-apply> (06.05.2025).

Bridging the climate knowledge gap: Rethinking climate education in Albanian High Schools

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mihallaq Qirjo
University of Tirana, Albania
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4059-0259>

Abstract

This study evaluates climate knowledge among 319 adolescents (aged 17–19) from ten high schools in four Albanian municipalities identified as climate-vulnerable in the National Strategy of Disaster Risk Reduction (2023). Conducted during the 2023–2024 academic year, data were collected via a multiple-choice questionnaire.

Participants were 62% urban and 38% rural, with 40% male and 60% female. While 76% of students reported good or very good knowledge of climate change, their confidence diminished regarding its consequences (53%) and protective measures (48%). Significant gaps were found in understanding global warming mechanisms: although 75% correctly identified carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas, many failed to recognize methane's role.

Addressing these knowledge gaps requires innovative educational strategies. The internet, used by 90% of respondents for climate information, outpaces traditional sources such as school-based education (76%) and television (66%) but presents risks of misinformation. Developing tailored, accurate educational resources rooted in national and local climate data is vital for improving scientific understanding and promoting climate literacy. Strengthening such knowledge will better equip Albanian youth to engage with climate challenges and foster informed, proactive communities in the face of increasing climate risks.

Keywords: climate education, gaps, perceptions, education models, activism.

1. Introduction

The growing trend of climate change necessitates the integration of comprehensive education on the concepts and mechanisms of climate systems, their impacts, and corresponding adaptation and/or mitigation strategies across all levels of education (Maphalala et al., 2025). Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of climate change education at local, national, and international levels. The impacts of climate change have intensified globally, and Albania ranks among the most vulnerable countries (The World Bank Group, 2021). These changes threaten the stability of socio-ecological and economic systems, thus requiring an unprecedented societal transformation grounded in strong knowledge and education starting from an early age (Qirjo et al., 2022). Climate education should be integrated throughout the curriculum and should address the causes and consequences of climate change, including rising land and ocean temperatures, more frequent heatwaves, increased frequency, intensity, and volume of heavy precipitation events, and a heightened risk of drought. Furthermore, such education should explore the interconnections with other significant societal challenges, such as rising consumption, urbanization, rapid digitalization, land and water degradation, biodiversity loss, and food insecurity (IPPC, 2018).

With its Mediterranean climate, Albania is particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change. Over the past 20 years, according to the National Communication Reports to the UNFCCC, the country has experienced significant changes in weather patterns. These include a tendency toward higher temperatures during both winter and summer seasons, increased rainfall intensity leading to frequent flooding and intense storms, and prolonged dry periods lasting several months (Fourth National Communication, 2022). Climate projections indicate that rising temperatures, heatwaves, and extreme heat events are major concerns for Albania, particularly due to their impact on the health of vulnerable populations (National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction, 2023). Key sectors affected by climate shifts include agriculture, water, energy, health, and coastal zones (The World Bank Group, 2021).

The national curriculum includes environmental issues as one of the main strategic objectives of education for students, but it does not explicitly mention climate education as a specific subject. Nevertheless, it emphasizes the need to “fulfil the responsibility of protecting the environment” (National Curriculum Framework, Tirana, 2014). The primary and secondary education system focuses on “making smart decisions for a healthier life by adopting the right and proper attitude toward protecting health, the environment, the workplace, and beyond.” Environmental topics are often implemented through a cross-curricular approach, aiming to integrate sustainable development as a general concept.

The curriculum also emphasizes that “students should develop the ability and willingness to pursue a sustainable lifestyle and take action to maintain sustainable development.” It encourages students to explore the challenges of sustainable development from multiple personal perspectives, including the effects of human activity on the environment, population growth, poverty and hunger alleviation, renewable energy and conservation, and business practices and technologies that align with sustainable development principles.

Several assessments of environmental education in Albania have been conducted to analyze its integration and implementation in various school programs. For ease of analysis, subjects were grouped into (1) natural sciences, (2) social sciences, and (3) other subjects. These studies found that environmental education is delivered through several approaches: (1) as a standalone subject, (2) through a multidisciplinary approach, (3) through theme-based instruction, and (4) as cross-curricular activities (Shumeli et al., 2012).

Climate education remains a relatively new topic in the Albanian public discourse and among education experts. A few contributions—such as those by World Vision Albania (2023)—have aimed to generate insights into children’s and young people’s perceptions of climate change in Albania. Similar efforts were made in 2022 in ten local communities in Kosovo, where climate literacy among children was assessed, leading to recommendations for school- and community-level actions to improve climate knowledge and promote youth activism (Qirjo & Veselaj, 2022).

2. Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative

and qualitative data collection methods. Integrating these approaches enabled a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of children's and young people's perceptions of climate change. The quantitative data allowed for the identification of trends and patterns, while the qualitative data provided rich insights into individual experiences, perceptions, and responses.

Sample Size and Data Collection Tools: To gather data from children, adolescents, and young people, a range of research tools were utilized, including surveys and key informant interviews. The study sites were selected based on municipalities identified as having the highest vulnerability to climate change in Albania: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kamëz, and Durrës (National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2023). Participants included students aged 17 to 19 from both urban and rural communities across ten schools within these four municipalities. A total of 319 participants were involved in the study, with 62% from urban areas and 38% from rural areas; 40% of participants were male and 60% were female.

The questionnaires were disseminated through teachers participating in a Teacher Training Program on Education for Sustainable Development, certified by the Ministry of Education and Sports and delivered by the Resource Environmental Center Albania. This approach facilitated direct engagement with the target population without requiring extensive outreach efforts to access diverse urban and rural communities.

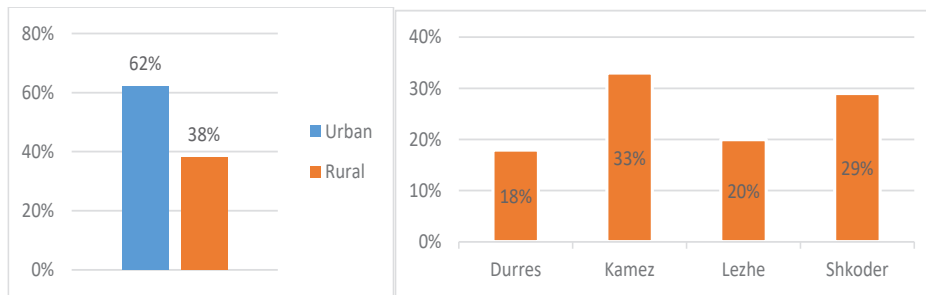
The survey consisted of four sections: (1) demographic information, (2) knowledge about climate change, (3) actions taken toward climate change, and (4) individual and community readiness for climate change. The survey was administered in person on school premises, with teachers present during the process.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical protocols were strictly followed throughout the data collection and interaction process to ensure the protection and well-being of the children and young people involved. Prior to participation, a thorough informed consent process was implemented. Participants were given clear explanations of the research objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their right to voluntary participation and withdrawal. Confidentiality and anonymity were preserved by assigning unique identifiers to each participant, and all personal data was securely stored and accessible only to authorized researchers.

3. Findings and results

3.1 Profile features of participants

The survey included 319 adolescents and young people from four areas of Albania: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kamëz, and Durrës. The majority of participants (92%) were 17 years old, while the remaining respondents were 18 to 19 years old, all in their third year of high school. Most participants lived in urban areas (68%), and the distribution of respondents across the four locations ranged from 18% to 33% of the total responses. In all municipalities, there were more female respondents (60%) than male respondents (40%).

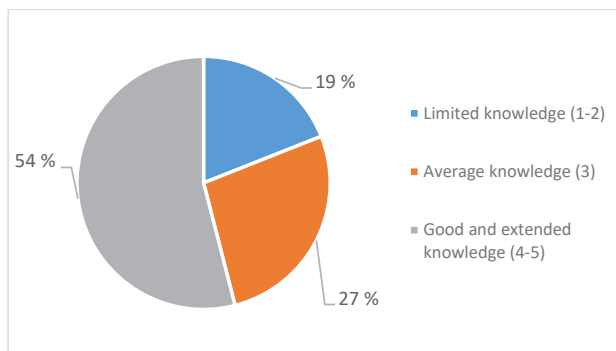


Graf.1: Distribution of responses in four areas of the assessment

3.2 Climate related knowledge

Adolescents and young people, all enrolled in the formal education system, rated their knowledge and concerns about climate change on a scale from 1 (low/poor/limited) to 5 (very good/excellent). The self-assessment of their knowledge—measured through recognition of key terms such as global warming, climate change, the greenhouse effect, and pollution—revealed that 54% rated their knowledge as “good” or “very good.” The average self-rated score for climate change knowledge among participants was 3.27 out of 5.

This level of confidence was consistent when respondents were asked about more specific aspects of climate change, such as the climate system and its functioning, causes and consequences, and sources of emissions. In this section, 60% of participants rated their knowledge as “good” or “very good,” while only 12% assessed their knowledge as “poor” or “limited.”



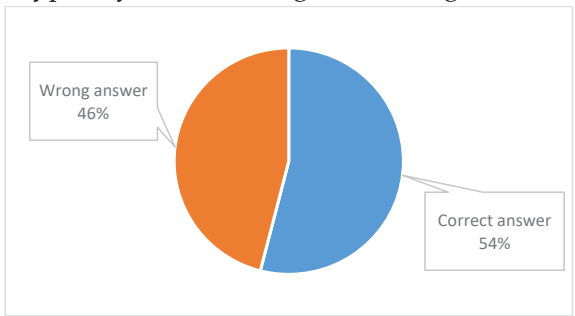
Graf. 2: Self-assessment on the level of knowledge about climate change

A comparable assessment conducted by World Vision Albania (2023) reported an average self-rated climate change knowledge score of 4.85 out of 10 (equivalent to 2.43 out of 5). However, that assessment included a broader range of respondents, including younger children and adults. When focusing on adolescents only, the average self-rated knowledge score increased to 6.21 out of 10 (equivalent to 3.11 out of 5), which is quite comparable to the findings of this study.

The study also explored the sources from which adolescents and young people in Albania acquire their knowledge about climate change. Teachers emerged as the primary source of information. Media was also a significant contributor, especially among the surveyed adolescents and youth. The three most frequently cited sources were internet use (90%), school programs—including curriculum and educational activities (76%)—and television and digital media (66%). Other sources, such as printed materials (e.g., newsletters, books, brochures), discussions with peers, friends, and family members, and participation in community activities, were reported much less frequently, ranging from 10% to 16%.

Although family members are generally expected to be influential in shaping knowledge about climate change, their impact appears to depend on their educational background. Peers played a more limited role, suggesting that climate change is not yet a common topic of public or informal discussion in Albania.

To validate content knowledge, participants were asked to select the three main greenhouse gases from a list that also included distractors (e.g., particulate matter and heavy metals). Only 54% of respondents provided correct answers. Carbon dioxide (28%) and methane (11%) were the most commonly identified correct greenhouse gases. Incorrect responses included gases such as sulfur dioxide (16%) and oxygen (4%), which are not typically classified as greenhouse gases.



Graf. 3: Identification of greenhouses as cause of climate changes

To explore different dimensions of climate change knowledge, participants were presented with a set of closed-ended questions and asked to identify each statement as correct or incorrect. The table below presents the distribution of correct responses, indicating that certain concepts are well understood and that participants are generally able to establish cause-and-effect relationships across various aspects of climate change.

Question	Correct answer*)
Global warming is mostly caused by the human activity	87%
Global warming is linked to greenhouse emissions	85%
Fossil fuel (coal and oil) increases greenhouses in atmosphere	84%
Global warming has increase the frequency of natural disasters	83%

Small countries like Albania are not impacted by climate change	83%
Weather and climate are the same	81%
Climate change does not impact our health	81%
Climate change has impacts on agriculture and the economy	81%
Greening and reforestation contributes directly to climate protection	80%
Deforestation does not impact climate change	78%
Sea level raise is not linked to climate change	72%
Climate change cause global warming	70%
Ice caps and ice in poles increased their volume recently	70%
Use of solar energy reduces the trend of global warming	69%
Volcanoes are the major event impacting climate	65%
Transport does not impact climate	64%
Energy saving contribute to climate action	61%
Very cold days during winter season indicate that climate change is exaggerated	57%
Greenhouse effect helps life in the Earth	52%
Nuclear power station does not have impact on climate change	24%

Tab. 1: List of closed question for assessing cause-effect concept about climate change.
**) The correct answer might confirm or contradict the statement provided in the question*

Based on the collected results, it is evident that participants have a solid understanding of core climate change concepts, particularly the causes and human activities that contribute to it. However, more specific knowledge—such as the detailed impacts of climate change and the roles of individual sectors like energy and transport—shows a higher percentage of inconsistent or incorrect responses.

The results reflect a strong overall grasp of the broader complexities of climate change. Participants tended to answer correctly when describing the origins of the crisis and projecting its general consequences on society. However, these findings differ from those reported in other assessments, such as World Vision (2023), where transport and energy were identified as contributing factors by 84.3% and 51.5% of respondents, respectively. This discrepancy highlights regional variations and suggests that the consolidation of climate-related concepts may fluctuate across different areas.

Readiness to contribute for climate action (chose up to three alternatives)	%
Participate and learn more from environmental experts	45%
Discuss with teacher on topics about climate and environmental protection	40%
Be activist of school Eco-Club and support environmental actions	34%
Support fundraising for climate action in my school	28%

Active participation in the city council for addressing environmental and climate concerns	25%
Become member in environmental and climate community groups	23%
Watch TV productions and movies on climate change	22%
Discuss and raise awareness of my family and others on climate change	18%
Change my living style on consumption to save natural resources and energy	17%

Tab. 2: List of individual actions for climate education and activism

The surveyed students demonstrated a strong understanding of the impact that individual actions can have on mitigating climate change. The three most frequently selected actions were: learning from environmental experts (45%), engaging in discussions with teachers (40%), and becoming an activist (34%). In contrast, the least preferred options were discussing climate change with family members and peers (18%) and changing their lifestyle (17%).

These results reflect a strong desire for more information and knowledge, highlighting students' interest in expanding their understanding of climate change. This interest should be supported by schools, as students show greater trust in discussing environmental and climate issues within the educational setting—particularly with teachers and peers—rather than within their families or communities. Providing science-based facts and reliable data is essential to prevent misinformation and the spread of false climate narratives often found on unchecked social media and other communication channels.

Although lifestyle change was ranked relatively low, students still expressed a willingness to adopt environmentally friendly behaviors. These include walking (52%) and cycling (61%) as alternative modes of transport, recycling and reducing consumption (65%), and planting trees and greening urban areas (62%). Additionally, the responses revealed a positive attitude toward renewable energy sources (such as solar and wind) and energy-efficient solutions, including thermal insulation, LED lighting, efficient appliances, and electric vehicles.

4. Conclusion

The Albanian formal curriculum provides climate education through various subjects and cross-curricular activities. Students aged 17 to 19 have diverse levels of knowledge and concern about climate change, alongside a relatively high level of confidence. The assessment shows that their understanding of general concepts—such as the causes and impacts of climate change—is fairly well developed. However, there are noticeable gaps in their knowledge of specific impacts related to particular economic sectors and activities.

Students express a strong desire for more information through expert engagement and school discussions. They believe that both individual and collective action can lead to positive outcomes for the climate. Across the four municipalities studied, a knowledge gap persists regarding the health and economic impacts of climate

change. Information is mostly limited to the effects on vulnerable groups and elderly individuals.

There is a shared perception among students of the negative consequences of climate change. As a result, they value environmental and climate activism within the school setting, though this enthusiasm is less evident within their families and communities. Furthermore, while lifestyle changes—such as walking, cycling, recycling, and reforestation—are acknowledged as important, adopting these behaviors at the individual level remains a significant challenge.

The education program should promote concrete actions within schools to encourage climate and environmental activism. This can be achieved through initiatives such as Eco-clubs, debates, and other events that spark interest and extend climate education. The development of new digital tools is also essential to support learning in various areas. These tools could facilitate climate data collection through citizen science projects, guided city or nature explorations with environmental experts, and the promotion of environmentally friendly behaviors and lifestyles, including recycling, reducing consumption, planting trees, and engaging in active citizenship.

References

- Ajencia Kombetare e Emergjencave Civile (2023). Strategjia Kombetare per zvogelimin e riskut nga fatkeqesite. <https://akmc.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Strategjia-vendim-2023-02-22-94.pdf> (May 18, 2025)
- Arjan Shumeli, Albert Kopali, Jorgji Stasa (2012). Approaches to teaching environmental education in Albania: the case of subject school programs <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378314786>
- Institute of Communication Studies (2024). Environmental communication excellence guide. Communicating environment. www.iks.edu.mk (Jun. 05, 2025)
- IPCC (2018). Global Warming of 1.5°C. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157940>
- Kamberi, M., Islami, B., Bruci, E., & Salisbury, E. (2022). The Fourth National Communication of Albania on Climate Change. Ministry of Tourism and Environment. www.undp.org/albania/publications/fourth-national-communication-albania
- Maphalala M., Kutame A., Kok P. (2025). Embedding climate change education into the school curriculum: Enablers and constraints. Doi:10.4102/aosis.2025.BK491.08
- Ministry of Education (2014). Korniza kurrikulare e arsimit parauniversitar ne Republiken e Shqiperise. <https://ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Korniza-Kurrikulare.pdf> (May 11, 2025)
- Qirjo M., Veselaj Z. (2022). Analysis of the Youth's Impact on the Environment and Climate Change in 10 Municipalities of Kosovo <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mihallaq-Qirjo-2/publications>
- Resource Environmental Center Albania (2022). Climate Change Strategy in Albania: 2019-2021 Action Plan Monitoring. <https://recshqiperi.org/2022/01/24/monitoring-of-the-climate-change-strategy-in-albania-2020-2030-for-2019-2021/> (May 6, 2025)
- The World Bank Group (2021). Climate Risk Profile: Albania <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org> (Jun. 10, 2025)
- World Vision Albania (2023). Learning to See the Climate Crisis Children and Young People's Perceptions of Climate Change and Environmental Transformation in Albania www.wvi.org

Beyond the Aggregate: Disaggregating Albania's Service Sector and Its Economic Impact

Admir Mulaj

University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

This study analyzes the dynamic link between Albania's services sector and economic growth, emphasizing labor force participation. Using an extended Solow model and a VECM with data from 1996–2023, it finds a strong long-run connection between services and GDP, with services stabilizing the economy. Labor force participation has asymmetric effects, stabilizing GDP in one relationship but destabilizing its link with services in another. Impulse response and variance decomposition confirm the persistent, delayed impact of services on GDP. Comparative international analysis highlights the context-specific nature of service-led growth, supporting targeted investment in high-impact service sub-sectors for sustainable development.

Keywords: Albania, Service Sector, Economic Impact.

Introduction

Building on the Solow model, this study examines the dynamic relationship between Albania's services sector and GDP, with a focus on labor force participation. Modern extensions endogenize growth by incorporating education and R&D, recognizing their roles in enhancing labor efficiency and innovation. This research expands the framework by analyzing education, R&D, and the sectoral impact of services—particularly in Albania—using a Vector Error Correction Model (VECM) to assess short- and long-run dynamics between services and GDP. Comparative international insights provide context for Albania's service-led growth. Empirical evidence from South Asia (Sadiq et al., 2023) reveals a negative correlation between service sector employment and GDP, attributed to labor shifts into low-productivity services. However, this reverses when controlling for macroeconomic variables. Similarly, Kujur's findings show services are influenced by GDP and manufacturing but do not Granger-cause GDP per capita, underscoring the need for industrial support. In Nigeria, Effiong and Okon (2021) find bidirectional causality between services and GDP, though only certain sub-sectors—like professional services—positively impact growth. Lastly, AboElsoud et al. (2020) show that immigration reduces unemployment in the long run in Australia, driven by demand and productivity effects, with wage levels having no significant impact. A structural VECM analysis by Kasnauskienė and Vbrait (2013) shows that while immigration initially depresses employment and wages in the UK, it fosters long-run job creation and service sector growth through increased demand. In Bahrain, Hamdi (n.d.) finds that foreign labor is integral to financial sector development, with expatriates comprising 35% of the workforce and positively influencing per capita income. Albanian seasonal labor abroad qualifies as

a service export, contributing to host economies in real time. Emigration from Eastern and Southeastern Europe, per Atoyan et al. (2016), has reduced growth potential and weakened public services due to skilled labor outflows. Ziesemer (2024) confirms that public R&D drives innovation and GDP growth across OECD countries, validating endogenous growth theory. Albania's 2025 Architecture Festival exemplifies its growing R&D engagement, promoting global collaboration in spatial design. Financial development in Albania, as shown by Dushku (2011) and Gabeshi (2022), has a long-run positive impact on GDP, with credit structure and market competition playing key roles in economic performance. In Greece, tourism has proven central to GDP growth and economic resilience, with the hotel sector contributing significantly to output and employment (Spinthiropoulos et al., 2018; Soklis et al., 2025). This highlights the potential for Albania to further leverage tourism while expanding underdeveloped service sub-sectors like finance. Strategic investment in digital banking and inclusive credit systems could enhance resilience and productivity. In China, Rahman and Barman (2018) show that financial development and trade are cointegrated with growth, acting as both long- and short-run drivers. For Albania, the World Bank (2012–2013) identified fragmented innovation systems and weak university-industry linkages as barriers to competitiveness. Revisiting these recommendations is essential to assess progress and align with EU innovation frameworks. The Western Balkans, including Albania, show low R&D investment, with over 90% of Albania's GERD coming from public and academic institutions (World Bank, 2011). Private sector engagement remains minimal, limiting innovation impact. Nikoloski and Pechijareski (2015) find that international collaboration is the only R&D indicator significantly linked to GDP growth. Albania's 2022 entry into the European Innovation Scoreboard marked progress, but its performance remains below the EU average, with persistent weaknesses in digital skills, R&D investment, and public-private cooperation (Çabiri & Qosja). Alimehmeti highlights institutional barriers in accessing EU research funds, advocating for strategic planning, diversified funding, and stronger project offices. Ziesemer et al. emphasize that public R&D boosts productivity when complemented by private investment. Studies from Romania, Hungary, and Nigeria confirm that education—especially tertiary—can support long-term growth, though outcomes depend on quality, allocation, and institutional context.

The Model

This study examines the dynamic relationship between Albania's services sector and GDP, with a focus on labor force participation. Using annual data from 1996 to 2023, it applies a Vector Error Correction Model (VECM) to capture both short-term dynamics and long-term equilibrium among GDP, services value added, and labor force participation. Capital formation, FDI, and agricultural value added are included as exogenous controls. This framework enables a nuanced analysis of how shifts in services and labor participation influence GDP over time.

The VECM includes three endogenous variables: $\ln(\text{GDP})$, $\ln(\text{Services Value Added})$, Labor Force Participation

The general form of the VECM is expressed as:

$$\Delta \mathbf{Y}_t = \alpha \beta' \mathbf{Y}_{t-1} + \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \Gamma_i \Delta \mathbf{Y}_{t-i} + \Phi \mathbf{X}_t + \mu + \varepsilon_t$$

Where:

- $\mathbf{Y}_t = \begin{bmatrix} \ln(\text{GDP}_t) \\ \ln(\text{Services}_t) \\ \text{LaborForce}_t \end{bmatrix}$ is the vector of endogenous variables.
- $\Delta \mathbf{Y}_t$ is the vector of first differences.
- $\alpha \beta' \mathbf{Y}_{t-1}$ represents the **error correction term**, capturing long-run equilibrium relationships (with two cointegrating vectors in this case).
- Γ_i are matrices of short-run coefficients.
- $\mathbf{X}_t$ includes exogenous variables: gross fixed capital formation, foreign direct investment (FDI), and agricultural value added.
- μ is a constant term.
- ε_t is the vector of error terms.

Cointegration Relationships (Long-Run Equations)

From the document, two cointegrating equations are identified:

1. GDP–Labor Force Participation

$$\ln(\text{GDP}_t) = \beta_1 \cdot \text{LaborForce}_t + \beta_2 \cdot \ln(\text{Services}_t) + \text{const} + \varepsilon_{1t}$$

2. Services–Labor Force Participation

$$\ln(\text{Services}_t) = \gamma_1 \cdot \text{LaborForce}_t + \gamma_2 \cdot \ln(\text{GDP}_t) + \text{const} + \varepsilon_{2t}$$

These equations are normalized and estimated using Johansen's method, with adjustment coefficients indicating how quickly each variable returns to equilibrium after a shock.

The Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test confirms that key macroeconomic variables—such as GDP, services value added, employment, FDI, and others—are non-stationary in levels but become stationary after first differencing, indicating they are I(1) and suitable for VECM analysis. In contrast, CPI, services share in GDP, and tertiary education enrollment are stationary at level. This distinction ensures the econometric model avoids spurious results by appropriately handling variables of differing integration orders.

	lngdp	Inser	CPI	EMPL	FDI	LABOUR_PAR	SERVICE	TERTIARY_ENR	LNAgri	Incap	Inman
Level	0.8611	0.1109	0.002	0.6707	0.5784	0.842	0.0057	0.0158	0.8306	0.8267	0.1872
First	0	0		0.0073	0.003	0.0018			0	0.004	0

Figure 1-- Confirmation of the integration properties of the variables and guiding the appropriate transformations needed for robust model specification.

The Johansen cointegration test (1996–2023) confirms two long-run equilibrium relationships among log-GDP, services value added, and labor force participation.

Both the trace and maximum eigenvalue statistics reject the null of no cointegration at the 5% level. These results justify using a VECM with cointegration rank two to capture both short-run dynamics and long-run adjustments.

Sample: 1996 2023 Included observations: 28 Lags interval (in first differences): 1 to 1 Endogenous variables: LNGDP LNSER LABOUR_PAR Deterministic assumptions: Case 3 (Johansen-Hendry-Juselius): Cointegrating relationship includes a constant. Short-run dynamics include a constant.				
Unrestricted Cointegration Rank Test (Trace)				
Hypothesized No. of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Trace Statistic	0.05 Critical Value	Prob.**
None *	0.681866	46.32922	29.79707	0.0003
At most 1 *	0.464289	16.55190	15.49471	0.0345
At most 2	0.012374	0.323726	3.841465	0.5694

Trace test indicates 2 cointegrating equation(s) at the 0.05 level * denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 0.05 level **Mackinnon-Haug-Michelis (1999) p-values				
Unrestricted Cointegration Rank Test (Max-eigenvalue)				
Hypothesized No. of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Max-Eigen Statistic	0.05 Critical Value	Prob.**
None *	0.681866	29.77732	21.13162	0.0024
At most 1 *	0.464289	16.22818	14.26460	0.0242
At most 2	0.012374	0.323726	3.841465	0.5694

Max-eigenvalue test indicates 2 cointegrating equation(s) at the 0.05 level * denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 0.05 level **Mackinnon-Haug-Michelis (1999) p-values				
---	--	--	--	--

Figure 2- Equilibrium paths and the speed of adjustment

Cointegration analysis confirms two long-run relationships among GDP, services value added, and labor force participation. In the first equation (log-likelihood = 100.13), services show a significant positive association with GDP, while labor force participation has a marginal effect. Adjustment coefficients suggest services actively restore equilibrium, whereas GDP's correction is weak. The second specification (log-likelihood = 112.80) identifies distinct equilibria: GDP-labor and services-labor. Here, GDP shows strong disequilibrium correction, and labor force participation exhibits large, opposing adjustments across both equations.

1 Cointegrating Equation Log-Likelihood: 100.1328			2 Cointegrating Equations Log-Likelihood: 112.8000		
Normalized cointegrating coefficients (standard error in parentheses)			Normalized cointegrating coefficients (standard error in parentheses)		
LNGDP	LNSER	LABOUR_PAR	LNGDP	LNSER	LABOUR_PAR
1.000000	-0.396114	-0.008783	1.000000	0.000000	-0.023844
	(0.05570)	(0.00185)		1.000000	(0.00280)
					-0.038021
					(0.00433)
Adjustment coefficients (standard error in parentheses)			Adjustment coefficients (standard error in parentheses)		
D(LNGDP)	-0.129633		D(LNGDP)	-0.612899	0.522134
	(0.19987)			(0.29238)	(0.23371)
D(LNSER)	0.501862		D(LNSER)	0.124203	0.169111
	(0.27993)			(0.44518)	(0.35586)
D(LABOUR_P AR)	22.75085		D(LABOUR_P AR)	-45.78016	57.74913
	(16.9419)			(17.9578)	(14.3546)

Figure 3 - The complex interplay between economic output, sectoral composition, and labor market dynamics in the Albanian economy

Lag length selection for the VECM, based on data from 1996–2023 and three endogenous variables, identifies one lag as optimal. This is supported by the Schwarz Criterion (SC), Final Prediction Error (FPE), and Likelihood Ratio (LR) test. Choosing a single lag ensures model parsimony, avoids overfitting, and maintains robustness

for accurate estimation of short- and long-run dynamics.

VAR Lag Order Selection Criteria
Endogenous variables: LNSER LNGDP LABOUR_PAR
Exogenous variables: C

Sample: 1996 2023
Included observations: 23

Lag	LogL	LR	FPE	AIC	SC	HQ
0	1.364365	NA	0.000231	0.142229	0.290337	0.179478
1	76.19975	123.6411	7.63e-07	-5.582587	-4.990156*	-5.433592
2	84.76648	11.91893	8.33e-07	-5.544912	-4.508156	-5.284171
3	89.32944	5.158122	1.39e-06	-5.159082	-3.678002	-4.786594
4	109.7262	17.73634*	6.73e-07*	-6.150106*	-4.224703	-5.665873*
5	116.5741	4.168243	1.37e-06	-5.962961	-3.593234	-5.366981

* indicates lag order selected by the criterion
LR: sequential modified LR test statistic (each test at 5% level)
FPE: Final prediction error
AIC: Akaike information criterion
SC: Sch  warz information criterion
HQ: Hannan-Quinn information criterion

Figure 4- Paved the way for the estimation of the VECM and the interpretation of both short- and long-run dynamics among the variables.

Due to limited observations, the VECM includes three I(1) endogenous variables—log-GDP, log-services value added, and labor force participation—while gross fixed capital formation, FDI, and agriculture are treated as exogenous. The model reveals that GDP significantly corrects disequilibrium in its relationship with labor force participation, adjusting 61.3% per period. However, GDP destabilizes the services-labor force link, suggesting asymmetric dynamics. Services play a stabilizing role in long-run equilibrium, while labor force participation has a dual effect: it helps correct GDP-related imbalances (45.7% adjustment) but destabilizes the services-labor relationship, possibly due to diminishing marginal productivity in labor-intensive service sectors.

Vector Error Correction Estimates

Sample (adjusted): 1998 2023
Included observations: 26 after adjustments
Standard errors in () & t-statistics in []
Lags interval (in first differences): 1 to 1
Endogenous variables: LNGDP LNSER LABOUR_PAR
Exogenous variables (short-run only): LNCAP FDI LNAGR1
Deterministic assumptions: Case 3 (Johansen-Hendry-Juselius):
Cointegrating relationship includes a constant. Short-run dynamics include a constant.

Cointegrating Eq:	CointEq1	CointEq2
LNGDP(-1)	1.000000	0.000000
LNSER(-1)	0.000000	1.000000
LABOUR_PAR(-1)	-0.023844 (0.00280) [-8.51065]	-0.038021 (0.00433) [-8.78347]
C	-21.38344	-19.67784

Error Correction:	D(LNGDP)	D(LNSER)	D(LABOUR_P R)
COINTEQ1	-0.612899 (0.26238) [-2.09626]	0.124203 (0.44518) [0.27899]	-45.78016 (17.9578) [-2.54932]
COINTEQ2	0.522134 (0.23371) [2.23408]	0.169111 (0.35589) [0.47522]	57.74913 (14.3546) [4.02303]
D(LNGDP(-1))	0.258697 (0.27595) [0.94052]	1.073783 (0.41881) [2.56391]	53.68251 (16.8939) [3.17763]
D(LNSER(-1))	-0.356242 (0.23346) [-1.52590]	-0.938816 (0.35548) [-2.64190]	-52.01912 (14.3393) [-3.62773]
D(LABOUR_PAR(-1))	0.001431 (0.00276) [0.51845]	0.002072 (0.00420) [0.49299]	0.485003 (0.16954) [2.86072]
C	-1.131973 (2.84561) [-0.39780]	6.549514 (4.33279) [1.51162]	205.2125 (174.776) [1.17414]
LNCAP	0.070141 (0.05452) [1.28957]	-0.100380 (0.08301) [-1.20925]	-0.429207 (3.34848) [-0.12818]
FDI	-0.003583 (0.00358) [-0.99944]	-0.011063 (0.00546) [-2.02690]	-0.464365 (0.22017) [-2.10908]
LNAGR1	-0.014814	-0.199529	-9.034258

R-squared	0.808496	0.423885	0.665400
Adj. R-squared	0.421317	0.192772	0.507841
Sum sq. resid	0.009136	0.021180	34.46392
S.E. equation	0.023182	0.035297	1.423829
F-statistic	3.275195	1.563497	1.225864
Log likelihood	66.50499	55.57371	-40.55602
Akaike AIC	-4.423461	-3.582393	3.812001
Sch��warz SC	-3.987996	-3.147098	4.247496
Mean dependent	0.045074	0.046893	0.120269
S.D. dependent	0.030474	0.038348	2.029781
Determinant resid covariance (dof adj.)		1.22E-07	
Determinant resid covariance		3.42E-08	
Log likelihood		112.8000	
Akaike information criterion		-6.136465	
Sch��warz criterion		-4.541650	
Number of coefficients		33	

Figure 5 - This nuanced behavior underscores the importance of considering sector-specific labor dynamics when designing policies aimed at fostering sustainable economic growth.

Impulse response analysis reveals that a one standard deviation shock in services positively and significantly affects GDP, peaking around the third year and stabilizing thereafter. This delayed yet sustained impact underscores the sector's structural role in Albania's long-term economic growth and confirms a robust, lagged transmission mechanism.

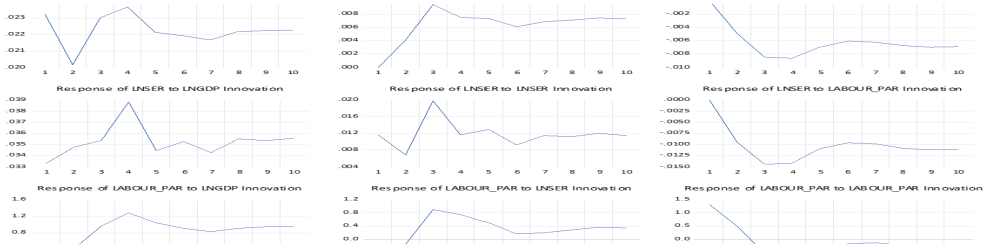


Figure 6- The model captures a robust long-run relationship between these variables.

Variance decomposition reveals that while services and labor have limited short-term effects on GDP, their long-term contributions rise to 7.7% and 7.5%, respectively, underscoring services' delayed structural impact. Conversely, GDP explains up to 80–90% of services sector variance, highlighting its dominant influence, with labor playing a modest but consistent role.

Variance Decomposition of LNSER:				
Period	S.E.	LNGDP	LNSER	LABOUR_PA R
1	0.035297	89.15868	10.84132	0.000000
2	0.050924	89.47342	7.043093	3.483487
3	0.066650	80.38718	12.89668	6.716145
4	0.079274	80.78648	11.23865	7.974866
5	0.088070	80.75458	11.24226	8.003162
6	0.095795	81.78560	10.44126	7.773141
7	0.102858	82.03418	10.29884	7.666975
8	0.109942	82.24338	10.06265	7.693964
9	0.116653	82.23342	10.00530	7.761281
10	0.122978	82.33885	9.866847	7.794306

Variance Decomposition of LABOUR_PAR:				
Period	S.E.	LNGDP	LNSER	LABOUR_PA R
1	1.423829	0.413013	16.40544	83.18155
2	1.569298	7.133359	14.45645	78.41019
3	2.115537	24.48424	25.97588	49.53988
4	2.708426	37.21983	23.33114	39.44903
5	2.984413	42.73762	21.99504	35.26734
6	3.125747	47.19334	20.31000	32.49666
7	3.239611	50.31216	19.28581	30.40203
8	3.381991	53.24601	18.36461	28.38938
9	3.544672	55.56498	17.74065	26.69437
10	3.702723	57.64310	17.08220	25.27469

Variance Decomposition of LNGDP:				
Period	S.E.	LNGDP	LNSER	LABOUR_PA R
1	0.023182	100.0000	0.000000	0.000000
2	0.031384	95.79221	1.726356	2.481437
3	0.040897	87.95829	6.249654	5.792054
4	0.048610	85.91081	6.810224	7.278965
5	0.054353	85.28001	7.239696	7.480289
6	0.059236	85.50456	7.139054	7.356386
7	0.063743	85.38498	7.314623	7.300392
8	0.068188	85.17057	7.467336	7.362093
9	0.072433	84.87511	7.664569	7.460317
10	0.076430	84.70229	7.772845	7.524868

Cholesky One S.D. (d.f. adjusted) Innovations				
Cholesky ordering: LNGDP LNSER LABOUR_PAR				

Figure 7- These findings highlight the mutual interdependence between GDP and the services sector in shaping macroeconomic dynamics, while also pointing to the more moderate role of labor force participation in this interplay.

The VECM stability test shows most AR roots lie within the unit circle, indicating general stability. One root on the boundary suggests marginal instability, common in cointegrated systems, and reflects long-term dependencies rather than a model flaw.

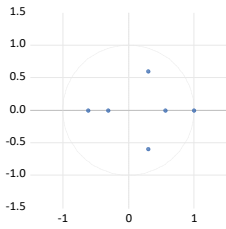


Figure 8 -The model may not meet the most rigid criteria for stability, it remains valid and interpretable within the framework of cointegrated systems, particularly given the theoretical justification for including long-run relationships in the VECM structure.

The VECM residual normality test yields a joint p-value of 0.0019, rejecting multivariate normality due to skewness and kurtosis in the third component. Despite this, the model remains robust and informative, with exogenous variables enhancing its explanatory power and mitigating omitted variable bias—common challenges in applied macroeconomic modeling.

VECM Residual Normality Tests
 Orthogonalization: Cholesky (Lutkepohl)
 Null Hypothesis: Residuals are multivariate normal
 Date: 06/14/25 Time: 12:49
 Sample: 1996 2023
 Included observations: 26

Component	Skeēness	Chi-sq	df	Prob.*
1	-0.020351	0.001795	1	0.9662
2	-0.414320	0.743864	1	0.3884
3	1.804910	14.11670	1	0.0002
Joint		14.86236	3	0.0019

Component	Kurtosis	Chi-sq	df	Prob.
1	4.128486	1.379604	1	0.2402
2	2.166217	0.753126	1	0.3855
3	7.243404	19.50702	1	0.0000
Joint		21.63975	3	0.0001

Component	Jarque-Bera	df	Prob.
1	1.381398	2	0.5012
2	1.496991	2	0.4731
3	33.62372	2	0.0000
Joint	36.50211	6	0.0000

*Approximate p-values do not account for coefficient estimation

Figure 9- What matters more is the model’s ability to provide coherent economic insights and stable long-run relationships, both of which are evident in this case.

The VECM heteroskedasticity test confirms stable residual variance (joint p = 0.2083), supporting model reliability. Individual and cross-product residual tests yield p-values above 0.38, most exceeding 0.60, indicating no variance distortion. This stability enhances the validity of coefficient estimates and inferences regarding GDP, services, and labor force participation.

VECM Residual Heteroskedasticity Tests (Levels and Squares)
 Date: 06/14/25 Time: 12:53
 Sample: 1996 2023
 Included observations: 26

Joint test:					
Chi-sq	df	Prob.			
106.9895	96	0.2083			

Individual components:

Dependent	R-squared	F(16,9)	Prob.	Chi-sq(16)	Prob.
res1*res1	0.519665	0.608558	0.8150	13.51129	0.6351
res2*res2	0.648418	1.037410	0.4979	16.85886	0.3948
res3*res3	0.653005	1.058560	0.4846	16.97813	0.3870
res2*res1	0.578771	0.772878	0.6874	15.04805	0.5211
res3*res1	0.530075	0.634499	0.7953	13.78194	0.6150
res3*res2	0.580680	0.778958	0.6827	15.09768	0.5175

Figure 10- This finding, combined with the model’s structural design and inclusion of

exogenous variables, contributes to the overall robustness and interpretability of the VECM. The correlation analysis confirms a strong positive link between services (LNSER) and GDP (LNGDP) ($r = 0.99$), reinforcing VECM findings. Both variables also correlate positively with capital formation, FDI, agriculture, and manufacturing, highlighting the services sector's integrative economic role. Conversely, CPI shows moderate negative correlations with GDP and services (≈ -0.55 and -0.50), suggesting inflation may hinder service-driven growth.

	LNGDP	LNSER	LABOUR_PAR	LNCAP	FDI	LNAGRI	CPI	EMPL	LNMAN
LNGDP	1.00								
LNSER	0.99	1.00							
LABOUR_PAR	0.08	0.18	1.00						
LNCAP	0.90	0.84	(0.16)	1.00					
FDI	0.79	0.75	(0.26)	0.74	1.00				
LNAGRI	0.97	0.97	0.07	0.81	0.80	1.00			
CPI	(0.55)	(0.50)	0.26	(0.72)	(0.45)	(0.53)	1.00		
EMPL	0.13	0.22	0.93	(0.09)	(0.18)	0.12	0.29	1.00	
LNMAN	0.99	0.99	0.12	0.88	0.75	0.96	(0.56)	0.17	1.00

Figure 11- The correlation matrix supports the structural findings of the econometric model, illustrating the interconnectedness of services with key growth and investment indicators

Granger causality results reveal a significant unidirectional relationship from GDP to services ($p = 0.0104$), indicating that GDP growth predicts service sector expansion. No significant causality is found from services or labor force participation to GDP, nor between labor and services. This supports the view that macroeconomic growth drives sectoral development in the short run.


 VEC Granger Causality/Block Exogeneity Eald Tests
 Date: 06/14/25 Time: 13:00
 Sample: 1996 2023
 Included observations: 26

Dependent variable: D(LNGDP)

Excluded	Chi-sq	df	Prob.
D(LNSER)	2.328358	1	0.1270
D(LABOUR_PAR)	0.268791	1	0.6041
All	2.329385	2	0.3120

Dependent variable: D(LNSER)

Excluded	Chi-sq	df	Prob.
D(LNGDP)	6.573620	1	0.0104
D(LABOUR_PAR)	0.243043	1	0.6220
All	6.573660	2	0.0374

Dependent variable: D(LABOUR_PAR)

Excluded	Chi-sq	df	Prob.
D(LNGDP)	10.09732	1	0.0015
D(LNSER)	13.16043	1	0.0003
All	13.17210	2	0.0014

Figure 12-stimulating aggregate demand and output may be a more effective lever for enhancing service sector performance than targeting the sector in isolation

Conclusion

This study highlights the growing importance of the services sector in Albania's economic development, showing that while services like tourism and finance can significantly boost GDP in the long run, their impact depends on broader economic conditions such as labor participation and investment. The findings suggest that Albania's path to sustainable growth lies in diversifying and strengthening its service industries—including knowledge-intensive services such as education and R&D—while revolutionizing its financial systems and fostering innovation. Notably, the Granger causality analysis reveals that GDP growth helps predict future expansion in the services sector, but not the other way around. So stimulating overall economic activity may be more effective in enhancing service sector performance than targeting services in isolation.

References

- Çabiri, Ketrina Mijo, and Ermira Qosja. Strengthening Albania's Innovation Ecosystem: Strategic Investment and Collaborative Approaches in Scientific Research and University-Industry Partnerships. European University of Tirana and Aleksander Moisiu University of Durrës, 2023.
- Alimehmeti, Genc. Research & Development Landscape in Albania – Perspectives of Higher Education Institutions to Participate in the Horizon Europe Program. EU4Innovation, IPA III 2021–2027, Project No. IPAIII/2022/440-802.
- Sadiq, Rozina, Sahar Sheraz, Mahnaz Muhammad Ali, and Shabnam Nazeer. "Exploring the Contribution of the Service Sector to Economic Growth and Job Creation: Empirical Evidence from South Asia." *Review of Applied Management and Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (2023): 201–215. <https://doi.org/10.47067/ramss.v6i2.314>.
- Dushku, E. (2011). Bank of Albania: Financial development and economic growth: The Albanian Case. https://www.bankofalbania.org/rc/doc/Financial_development_and_economic_growth_The_Albanian_case_5781_2_7108.pdf
- Gabeshi, K. (2022). The determinants of credit activity and the impact of their evolution on economic growth. Case study: Albania. *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, 73, 135–143.
- Nikoloski, Dimitar, and Ljupcho Pechijareski. "Research and Development in Post-Transition: A Case Study of Western Balkans Countries." *SEER: Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* 18, no. 2 (2015): 231–240. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26379814>.
- Ciucu, S., and R. Dragoescu. "Education and Economic Growth in Romania and Hungary." *Procedia Economics and Finance* 00 (2015): 000–000.
- Effiong, Ubong Edem, and Joel Isaac Okon. "The Service Sector-Led Growth Relationship: The Case of Nigeria." *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting* 21, no. 1 (2021): 90–111. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajeba/2021/v21i130358>.
- Ihugba, Okezie A., Sandralyn Obiukwu, and Precious L. Akobundu. "Education and Nigeria Economic Growth Nexus: A VECM Approach." *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology* 6, no. 5 (May 2021).
- AboElsoud, Mostafa E., Anas AlQudah, and Eman Elish. "Does a Change in Immigration Affect the Unemployment Rate in Host Countries? Evidence from Australia." *Journal of Applied Economics* 23, no. 1 (2020): 21–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15140326.2019.1684740>.
- Hamdi, Helmi. "The Short- and Long-Run Effects of International Workers' Remittances on Financial Sector Development and Growth: Evidence from a Regional Financial

Centre." Central Bank of Bahrain.

Kasnauskienė, Gindra, and Loreta Vbraut. (2013) "The Impact of Population Immigration on the Labour Market of the United Kingdom." *Ekonomika* 92, no. 2 (June 2013): 64–78.

Ziesemer, Thomas H. W. "Internal Rates of Return for Public R&D from VECM Estimates for 17 OECD Countries." *Economic Change and Restructuring* 57 (2024): 164. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10644-024-09740-8>

Ziesemer, Thomas H. W., Luc Soete, and Bart Verspagen. "Economic Impact of Public R&D: An International Perspective." *Industrial and Corporate Change* 31, no. 1 (January 2022): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/dtab066>

Spinthiropoulos, K., A. Garefalakis, D. Charamis, G. Gerakis, and A. Konstantinidis. "An Analysis of Key Sectors of Economic Growth in Greece: A VAR Testing Approach." *Journal of Governance & Regulation* 7, no. 4 (2018): 7–12. http://doi.org/10.22495/jgr_v7_i4_p1

Soklis, G., G. Petrakos, and S. Panousi. "The Contribution of the Hotel Industry to the Greek Economy." *Tourism and Hospitality* 6, no. 1 (2025): 11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp6010011>

Rahman, M. M., & Barman, S. D. (2018). A VECM approach to the financial development, international trade and economic growth in China after economic reform. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 9(11).

Atoyan, R., Christiansen, L., Dizioli, A., Ebeke, C., Ilahi, N., Ilyina, A., Mehrez, G., Qu, H., Raei, F., Rhee, A., & Zakharova, D. (2016). Emigration and its economic impact on Eastern Europe (IMF Staff Discussion Note No. SDN/16/07). International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Staff-Discussion-Notes/Issues/2016/12/31/Emigration-and-Its-Economic-Impact-on-Eastern-Europe-43946>

Soete, Luc, Bart Verspagen, and Thomas H. W. Ziesemer. "Economic Impact of Public R&D: An International Perspective." *Industrial and Corporate Change* 31, no. 1 (January 2022): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/dtab066>.

Kujur, S. The Analysis of Service Sector post 1970. Supervised by Prof. Arup Mitra and Prof. Pravakar Sahoo. (Institution not specified in the excerpt.)

Effiong, U. E., & Okon, J. I. (2021). The Service Sector-Led Growth Relationship: The Case of Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting*, 21(1), 90–111. Article No. AJEBA.64886. ISSN: 2456-639X.

World Bank, Paulo Correa, Pluvia Zuniga, Donato De Rosa, Dusan Vujovic, Qursum Qasim, and Hari Subhash. *Strengthening Albania's Innovation Ecosystem: Strategic Investment and Collaborative Approaches in Scientific Research and University-Industry Partnerships*. January 2012 – June 2013.

World Bank. (2011). *Regional R&D strategy for innovation in the Western Balkan countries: Key issues and implications for technical assistance. Private and Financial Sectors Development, Europe and Central Asia*. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/512881468167954396/pdf/691360REVISED00an0Countries01Oct12.pdf>

Architecture Festival Albania. (2025). *International Festival of Architecture and Urban Innovation*. Tirana, Albania.

INSTAT (Institute of Statistics, Albania) – National statistical data on employment, GDP, and sectoral contributions. <https://www.instat.gov.al>

World Bank – Development indicators and macroeconomic data. <https://data.worldbank.org>

Bank of Albania – Monetary and financial statistics, sectoral economic reports. <https://www.bankofalbania.org>

Eurostat – Statistics and data on Europe <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

Development of smart environmental solutions for urban sustainability by integrating water purification technologies and circular waste management

Alfred Lako

Polytechnic University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

The aim of this study was to identify the key directions for applying water treatment technologies and circular waste management to improve the environmental efficiency and sustainability of urban systems. The research methodology was based on a systematic review of scientific literature, which enabled the identification of key approaches to defining urban sustainability under modern conditions. The results showed that the implementation of technologies such as reverse osmosis, biological treatment, pyrolysis, and biogas production contributed to a reduction in carbon emissions by 10–20 % and waste volume by 70–90 %. In Kraków, the processing of 5,000 tonnes of waste into biogas reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 15 %, while in Tirana, the processing of 1,000 tonnes of waste resulted in a 10 % reduction. The use of photovoltaic systems to power reverse osmosis units reduced operating costs by 20–30 %. It was also established that the introduction of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, reduced energy consumption and increased the efficiency of waste processing. Membrane filtration and pyrolysis technologies ensured significant waste reduction and resource savings, supporting the circular economy. Under conditions of limited funding, unbalanced infrastructure, and low public engagement, systemic barriers were identified that hindered the implementation of sustainable technologies for managing urban water and waste flows. The study determined the potential of localised solutions, including biogas plants and renewable energy sources, adapted to the specific contexts of resource-constrained countries such as Albania. The practical significance of the study lay in the applicability of the proposed approaches to enhancing the sustainability of urban systems, provided there was institutional support and infrastructure development.

Keywords: reverse osmosis, biological treatment, pyrolysis, biogas production, biocoal.

Introduction

The topic of sustainable urban development has become increasingly relevant in light of global environmental and social challenges such as climate change, environmental pollution, and the need for the rational use of natural resources. The issue of water resource management and waste processing has acquired particular importance amid rapid urbanisation. The integration of innovative water treatment technologies and digital waste management platforms in cities is key to achieving environmental sustainability and creating efficient and resilient urban systems.

Existing studies demonstrated a wide range of approaches and technological solutions adapted to various socio-economic and climatic conditions. A. G. Capodaglio [1] focused on decarbonising the water sector, emphasising the need to implement energy-efficient and environmentally friendly technologies to ensure the sustainability of water systems in the face of growing populations and increased pressure on natural resources. The author proposed strategies to reduce carbon emissions in water supply

and sanitation, which is particularly relevant to urbanised areas.

D. Istenič et al. [2] studied natural wastewater treatment methods and the reuse in rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe. The work highlighted the importance of applying technologies such as biofiltration for effective water treatment in countries with limited resources. Similarly, M. Simionescu et al. [3] explored the impact of renewable energy and energy poverty on pollution in Central and Eastern Europe, confirming the need to transition to sustainable energy solutions that could significantly improve water resource management.

The study by S. Prabakaran et al. [4] examined the ecological potential of *Azolla* (a water fern with nitrogen-fixing properties used for fertilisation, water purification, and bioenergy) as a natural solution in bioenergy, water treatment, and agriculture, while S. S. Mohanty et al. [5] raised issues of pollution caused by leachates and the barriers to implementing sustainable waste management methods.

S. A. R. Khan et al. [6] assessed wastewater treatment technologies and strategies to enhance environmental sustainability, drawing attention to the applicability in resource-constrained countries. The presented approaches demonstrated the potential to effectively address water supply and sanitation issues through the adoption of innovative technological solutions. The study by T. A. Kurniawan et al. [7] identified the impact of climate change on water quality and sanitary conditions in climate-vulnerable regions, which helped to understand how climate change affects water resources and what adaptive technologies need to be developed to manage water systems and mitigate the consequences of climate change.

Albania, as part of the Western Balkans region, faced multiple sustainable development challenges amid natural resource scarcity and high energy dependence. In this context, studies aimed at assessing the potential of renewable energy sources gained key significance. M. Rajić et al. [8] analysed the impact of European Union (EU) energy policy on decarbonisation in the region, highlighting the importance of implementing green technologies as a tool for sustainable transition. The study showed that the strategic integration of renewable energy sources could help reduce the vulnerability of systems under resource constraints. K. Dhoska et al. [9], in turn, studied Albania's wind potential with a focus on its use in industry, including the metallurgical sector. The results emphasised not only the sectoral potential of renewable energy sources but also the applicability in the broader context of sustainable water and waste stream management. Both studies substantiated the key role of alternative energy in shaping sustainable urban and industrial ecosystems, which directly relates to the objectives of transitioning to a circular model and reducing environmental impact.

Despite the significant potential of digital solutions, implementation challenges persisted due to infrastructural constraints, economic factors, and specific social conditions, which required additional efforts to adapt technologies to local realities. Existing solutions targeting water and waste flow management in cities were also not adapted to local conditions, especially in resource-limited countries such as Albania. The aim of the study was to systematise approaches to the application of water treatment and waste processing technologies to enhance the environmental efficiency and resource conservation of urban systems, defining pathways for the global implementation. In pursuit of this goal, the study analysed the effectiveness of

water treatment and circular waste management technologies based on global case studies, assessing the contribution to reducing environmental impact and conserving resources. Simultaneously, the key barriers to technology implementation were identified and the prospects for the application of digital technologies and localised solutions for scaling the circular economy in cities were defined.

Materials and Methods

The study presented a systematic review conducted in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines and the methodological recommendations of the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions, which ensured the transparency of the source selection process and reproducibility of results. The primary focus was placed on identifying and systematising current scientific approaches, technologies, and solutions applied to ensure urban sustainability through effective water and waste management. The choice of a systematic review as the method was driven by the need to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge on the subject.

Search Strategy. The search strategy was independently implemented by the author using a systematic search across the following databases: Scopus, Web of Science, SpringerLink, MDPI (Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute), Wiley Online Library, Google Scholar, IOPscience, Nature Portfolio, and Emerald Insight. The selection of publications covered the period from the time of the indexing up to 1 May 2025. The focus was on water treatment technologies (reverse osmosis, biological treatment, membrane filtration) and circular waste management practices (pyrolysis, biogas production, composting) in urban environments. Particular attention was given to English-language publications.

Search Terms. The key search terms were formulated in line with the study objectives and included combinations of words such as “water treatment”, “wastewater processing”, “circular economy”, “waste management”, “pyrolysis”, “biogas”, “reverse osmosis”, “biological treatment”, “urban sustainability”, and “smart environmental solutions”.

Terms were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to refine search results. Additionally, reference lists of selected publications and relevant reviews were manually analysed to identify additional sources. Duplicate entries were removed using specialised software EndNote 20.2.1.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria. Primarily peer-reviewed scientific articles available in full text were included, containing empirical data and/or systematised theoretical analysis dedicated to the application of water treatment and circular waste management technologies in urban contexts. Authoritative institutional sources (e.g. reports from international organisations, project documents, and technical platforms) were also admitted if these sources provided relevant information. Excluded were sources without full-text access, non-peer-reviewed publications lacking scientific rationale (editorials, brief posts, abstracts without data).

Data Collection and Quality Assessment. Publications were selected in several stages. First, an initial search was carried out and 520 sources were imported into

EndNote 20.2.1, which helped systematise the literature work. Then, automatic and manual removal of duplicates was carried out, resulting in 410 publications. At the third stage, a preliminary screening of titles and abstracts was performed to exclude irrelevant publications, such as studies unrelated to water treatment or waste management in urban environments, as well as materials lacking empirical data. As a result, 105 records were selected from the initial 410, and after stricter screening based on relevance and thematic focus, 67 publications remained. Full texts were then reviewed to assess compliance with inclusion criteria.

Based on the analysis, a final list of 57 publications was formed, comprising empirical studies, reviews, and thematic case studies aligned with the objective of the review (Figure 1). No requests for data were made to the authors of the original studies. Relevant studies underwent full-text analysis. Data were extracted into a Microsoft Excel table capturing key study characteristics: type (case study, systematic review, empirical study), region (Europe, Asia, Albania), technologies used (reverse osmosis, pyrolysis, biogas), environmental effects (CO₂ emission reduction, waste minimisation), economic indicators (energy efficiency, costs), and social aspects (quality of life, job creation). The quality of the studies was assessed using an adapted version of the CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) tool for case studies and systematic reviews in environmental research. The analysis included evaluation of methodological rigour, transparency of data presentation, case representativeness, and result applicability. Of the 57 studies, 40 were classified as high quality, 10 as medium, and 7 as low quality.

As a result of the search, 573 records were identified, of which 57 studies were included after screening and eligibility assessment (Figure 1). Excluded were studies without empirical data (n = 15) and non-peer-reviewed materials (n = 10). Analysis of the 57 studies showed that most (n = 35) were empirical, conducted in Europe (n = 11), Asia (n = 6), and specifically in Albania (n = 6), a country with regional specificity. Among the technologies, reverse osmosis predominated (n = 28), followed by pyrolysis (n = 19) and biogas (n = 17). Environmental sustainability was achieved through a reduction of CO₂ emissions by 15–20 % (n = 30) and waste reduction by 25% (n = 22). Economic sustainability was expressed in the energy efficiency of technologies in 70% of cases (n=39), while social sustainability was reflected in improved quality of life (n = 18) and job creation (n = 12). Due to the qualitative nature of the synthesis, results were presented in general form without confidence intervals. Quality of studies: 40 – high, 10 – medium, 7 – low (based on the adapted CASP scale). Synthesis was conducted qualitatively without using quantitative effect measures such as risk ratios or mean differences. Heterogeneity analysis and sensitivity analyses were not conducted due to the qualitative nature of the synthesis. Risk of bias from missing results was not assessed, as all included studies contained the necessary data. Certainty of evidence was not assessed, since the synthesis was qualitative (Fig.1).

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases, registers and other sources

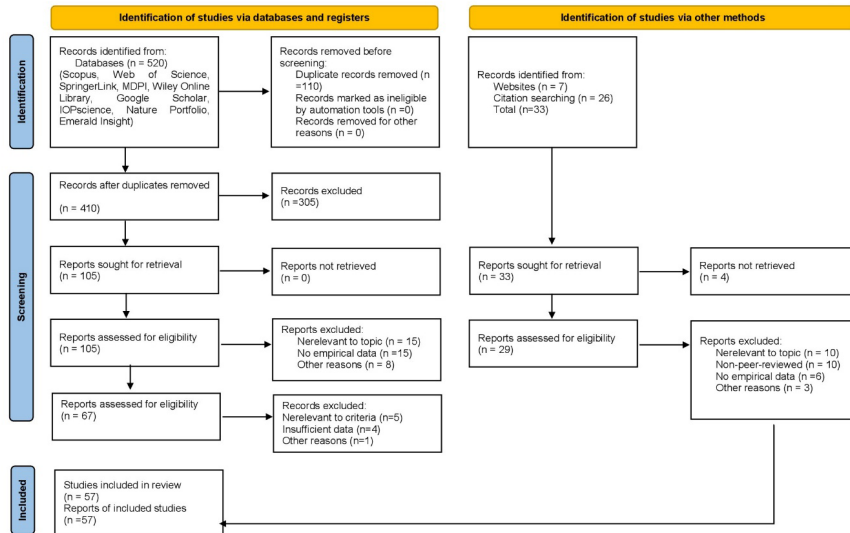


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for a systematic review including searching databases, registries, and other sources

Source: created by the author based on PRISMA Statement [10].

Results and Discussion

In the context of urbanisation growth and limited natural resources, sustainable urban development requires the implementation of technological solutions capable of ensuring environmental safety, economic efficiency, and social equity simultaneously. Urban sustainability is defined by the ability to adapt to climate change, pollution, and resource scarcity, ensuring the quality of life for residents. T. A. Kurniawan et al. [11] emphasised that sustainable cities must be environmentally safe, socially inclusive, and economically prosperous, which demands efficient use of resources, minimisation of environmental impact, and the ability to adapt to changes such as climate change, pollution, and natural resource scarcity. Key components of urban sustainability include environmental (reducing carbon emissions, preserving ecosystems, using renewable energy sources), social (equitable access to resources and services for all residents, improving quality of life), and economic sustainability (job creation, economic growth, development of innovative technologies). Smart environmental solutions represent digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), IoT systems (Internet of Things), and big data analytics for optimising resource consumption and minimising environmental impact, aimed at solving environmental challenges in cities by optimising resource use and reducing environmental impact, according to X. Chen et al. [12]. Smart solutions help optimise the consumption of water, energy, and other vital resources, apply renewable energy

sources such as solar panels and wind turbines, and manage circular processes in the city's economy, including waste recycling and resource reuse [11]. Sustainable cities using smart environmental technologies become more efficient, energy-efficient, and environmentally friendly.

Water treatment is a crucial component for ensuring urban sustainability, especially with growing populations and limited water resources. Existing water treatment technologies provide access to clean drinking water and efficient wastewater recycling, contributing to improved sanitation and ecological sustainability. Reverse osmosis is a process in which water passes through a semi-permeable membrane, allowing the removal of dissolved salts, organic matter, microorganisms, and other pollutants from the water. This technology is widely used for desalination of freshwater and to improve drinking water quality. Reverse osmosis remains one of the most common technologies used for removing salts, microorganisms, and toxins from water [13].

S. A. Moezzi et al. [14] confirmed the efficiency of carbon membranes in reverse osmosis systems for aquaculture wastewater treatment, reducing nitrate, phosphate, and ammonia content. Singapore uses reverse osmosis technology as part of its NEWater programme [15]—a wastewater recycling system that undergoes several purification stages, including reverse osmosis, and then returns to the water supply system. This significantly reduces dependence on external freshwater sources and effectively manages water resources in densely built urban environments [14]. In California, membrane technologies including reverse osmosis are used for seawater desalination, supporting water supply during droughts [13].

Biological water treatment uses microorganisms (bacteria, fungi, algae) to decompose organic pollutants such as carbon compounds, nitrogen, and phosphorus in wastewater. This process mimics natural purification mechanisms, making it more environmentally friendly compared to chemical methods requiring reagents. Efficiency is achieved due to the high ability of microorganisms to remove up to 90–99 % of organic substances and pathogens, especially in aerobic and anaerobic systems, as stated by N. F. Gray [16] and T. A. Kurniawan et al. [11]. The method is an environmentally friendly and effective way to treat wastewater, particularly in densely populated cities.

In Germany, biological wastewater treatment is a key component of a developed network of treatment facilities serving high-density cities. Processes such as activated sludge effectively remove up to 90 % of organic pollutants and nutrients, ensuring compliance with stringent EU standards [17, 11]. In the industrial case of Dow (The Dow Chemical Company) Olefinverbund in Böhlen (Germany), biological technologies including aerobic granular sludge are combined with membrane systems, reducing freshwater consumption by 20 % and supporting cyclic resource use [18]. These approaches can be adapted for urban treatment facilities, enhancing ecological sustainability. Digital monitoring technologies optimise these processes, reducing energy consumption by 15–20 %, contributing to urban ecological sustainability [11]. In the Netherlands, biological wastewater treatment, including biofilters and innovative technologies such as Nereda [19], is widely used in rural and suburban areas where centralised systems are less cost-effective. The Nereda technology, using aerobic granular sludge, removes up to 95% of organic pollutants, nitrogen, and

phosphorus in compact reactors, reducing energy consumption by 30% and facility area by 75 % compared to traditional methods [11]. Biofilters such as trickling filters are effective for small installations, removing 85–95 % of organics with low costs [16]. The Anammox technology further reduces energy consumption by 60 % when removing nitrogen, supporting ecological sustainability [20].

Nanotechnologies open new opportunities for water purification, especially for removing heavy metals, viruses, bacteria, and other pollutants. Nanomaterials such as carbon nanotubes, graphene membranes, and silver nanoparticles are effective in water filtration at low energy costs and without chemical reagents. M. B. K. Suhan et al. [21] demonstrated that TiO₂ nanocomposites possess high photocatalytic activity, making these composites suitable for water purification in cities with high levels of industrial pollution, such as China and India.

Membrane technologies have significantly advanced water purification, especially for saline wastewater. Nanofiltration and membrane distillation effectively remove pollutants and concentrate solutions to extract valuable minerals such as magnesium and lithium, supporting the circular economy. These methods are particularly relevant for coastal regions requiring desalination and saline effluent management [13]. AI integration further optimises water purification. Machine learning algorithms predict water quality (pH, turbidity, COD—Chemical Oxygen Demand) and manage filtration processes, minimising energy use, while IoT sensors provide real-time monitoring [22]. In smart cities, AI and IoT coordinate wastewater treatment and waste recycling, enhancing sustainability and resource efficiency [12]. These technologies demonstrate synergy between water purification and circular approaches, but require investments in digital infrastructure.

In Albania, membrane technologies are used for water purification, ensuring access to clean water under limited resources. Photovoltaic systems power reverse osmosis plants, reducing operational costs by 20–30% compared to traditional energy sources, enhancing energy efficiency, as shown by A. Qamili & S. Kapia [23]. Such approaches support sustainable water resource management, potentially strengthening the circular economy through the integration of renewable energy sources, although further infrastructure investment is needed for scaling up.

Circular waste management aims to transform waste into resources, minimising landfilling and supporting the closed-loop economy. Key technologies include recycling (sorting, processing, and reuse of waste such as plastic, metals, paper), pyrolysis (technology converting waste, e.g., plastic or organic, into energy or carbon materials at high temperatures), composting (natural decomposition of organic waste into fertiliser), and biogas production (conversion of organic waste into biogas for energy use). Circular waste management helps reduce pollution, conserve resources, and create new energy solutions for cities, improving the ecological sustainability [24, 25].

Recycling remains the foundation of the circular economy. The co-pyrolysis of municipal solid waste and plastics allows the conversion of organic waste into biogas, bio-oil, and carbon materials, supporting the circular economy. As S. A. Razzak [26] noted, pyrolysis produces biogas used for energy and heating, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and CO₂ emissions by 20–40 % compared to traditional incineration.

The resulting carbon materials are used in water treatment and construction, while the process reduces landfill waste volume by 70–90 %.

The combined transesterification and pyrolysis technology allows efficient processing of fatty food waste such as used cooking oil into valuable products, supporting circular economy principles. In the first stage, transesterification extracts fatty acids to produce biodiesel (fatty acid methyl esters) for use as fuel. The residues containing organic matter undergo pyrolysis at 400–600 °C in an oxygen-free environment, resulting in bio-oil, biogas, and biochar. Bio-oil and biogas can serve as renewable energy sources for electricity or heating, while biochar is used as an adsorbent or additive in construction materials [25]. This process reduces waste by 80–90% and greenhouse gas emissions by 30–50 % compared to traditional incineration, helping reduce dependence on fossil fuels. In the context of sustainable waste management, such technologies have potential for urban energy needs where waste recycling is integrated into energy supply.

Composting and biogas production are effective methods for processing organic waste, supporting the circular economy and sustainable resource management. Composting converts food and garden waste into compost used as fertiliser, reducing waste volume by 50–70 % and preventing methane emissions from landfills. Anaerobic digestion of food waste produces biogas (100–200 m³ per tonne of waste), which is used for electricity, heat, or transport fuel, reducing CO₂ emissions by 30–50 % compared to incineration, as confirmed by S. A. Ansari et al. [27]. Biogas plants convert organic waste into energy, supporting energy needs and reducing dependence on fossil fuels. Additionally, bio-processing of waste enables the production of Cellulose Nanocrystals (CNC), extracted from fruit peels and agricultural residues through hydrolysis and fermentation. CNCs are used in eco-friendly materials such as biodegradable packaging and composites, with yields of up to 20–40 % of cellulose and a 15–30 % reduction in carbon footprint compared to plastic [25].

Circular waste management in Albania aims to convert waste into resources, minimise landfilling, and support a closed-loop economy. Key technologies include recycling construction waste such as concrete, bricks, and metals for reuse in construction, reducing landfill volumes [28, 29]. In addition, sorting and recycling of plastic, paper, and metals at enterprises increase economic efficiency and reduce waste, although infrastructure remains limited, according to B. Kosta & V. Ramadani [30]. Biogas production from organic waste such as agricultural and forestry residues is used for energy needs, supporting sustainable development, but the scale of application remains limited [31]. These practices promote the circular economy but require investment in sorting centres and technologies to expand recycling and energy production.

The integration of water purification and circular waste management technologies contributes to optimising resource use and reducing environmental impact, thereby supporting sustainable development of urban systems. The use of digital tools enables real-time monitoring and automated process optimisation. AI platforms predict water quality parameters such as pH, turbidity, and Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), followed by adaptation of treatment modes to reduce energy consumption [22]. At the same time, IoT sensors are used to increase the efficiency of waste collection and

sorting, helping reduce CO₂ emissions by 10–20% through route optimisation [11]. Practical examples such as the Singapore project demonstrate the use of AI algorithms to coordinate wastewater treatment processes (including up to 40% reuse for drinking purposes) and anaerobic processing of organic fractions into biogas, generating 10–15 MW of energy, which is integrated into the water-energy nexus [12]. The use of renewable energy enhances energy efficiency, for example, photovoltaic systems supply power to reverse osmosis units, reducing operating costs by 20–30% [23], while pyrolysis of food waste yields up to 0.7 tonnes of liquid biofuel per tonne of feedstock [26].

Thus, pyrolysis and anaerobic digestion technologies are becoming key components in energy-oriented organic waste recycling, reinforcing circular economy principles in urban environments [24]. Despite the need for significant investment in digital infrastructure, such integrative solutions provide a synergistic effect by combining water and waste systems within a unified sustainable management model. Table 1 summarises these effects and regional implementation examples, highlighting the potential of technology integration for achieving environmental, social, and economic sustainability in urban ecosystems.

Table 1. Benefits of integrating water treatment and circular waste management technologies

Key impact	Description of the effect	Regional examples
Reducing carbon emissions	Pyrolysis (0.5–0.7 t biofuel/t) and biogas (10–15 MW/plant) reduce CO ₂ and CH ₄ emissions by 10–20% by converting waste into energy, preventing landfill emissions. Digitalization of sorting with AI optimizes processes, reducing emissions by 10–15%	A project in Krakow, Poland, converts 5,000 t/year of organic waste into biogas, reducing emissions by 15%. A biorefinery in Louisiana, USA, produces 1,000 t/year of biogas, replacing diesel fuel. A pilot project in Jakarta, Indonesia, converts 2,000 t/year of plastic into pyrolysis oil, reducing emissions by 12%. Pilot project in Tirana, Albania converts 1,000 t/year of organic waste into biogas, reducing CO₂ emissions by 10%
Saving resources	Recycling plastics (70–80% reuse), metals (95% energy savings), paper and organics (fertilisers, biogas) reduces the need for primary resources, minimizing oil and gas production and deforestation	A pilot project in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, recovers 500 t/year of phosphorus from dairy biomass for fertiliser. A programme in Harare, Zimbabwe, composts 3,000 t/year of organic waste, replacing imported fertilisers. A plant in Shanghai, China, converts 10,000 t/year of food waste into biogas, saving fossil fuels. A facility in Bangalore, India, converts 5,000 t/year of construction waste into building materials, reducing resource extraction by 15%.

Improv- ing the quality of life	Recycling reduces landfills (60-80%), prevents toxic emissions (dioxins), improves health and creates jobs (10-15/1000 t), maintaining sanitary standards and the aesthetics of cities	A project in Louisiana, USA, processes 4,000 tons of waste per year, creating 50 jobs and eliminating landfills. Recycling in Jakarta, Indonesia, has reduced illegal dumping by 30% while improving sanitation. Phosphorus extraction in Amsterdam, Netherlands, reduces soil pollution, improving health. A project in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is converting 3,000 tons of plastic per year into pellets, creating 40 jobs and reducing land-fill by 25%.
--	---	---

Source: created by the author based on S.A. Ansari et al. [27], P.H. Carvalho et al. [32], X. Chen et al. [12], P. S. Goh et al. [13], N.F. Gray [16], T. A. Kurniawan et al. [11], L. Malka et al. [33], S. A. Razzak [26].

The research results showed that the integration of waste recycling and wastewater treatment technologies had a multidisciplinary impact in the context of sustainable urban development. The implementation of these solutions contributed to emission reductions, more efficient use of resources, and had a positive effect on employment levels and sanitary conditions. The comparison of empirical case studies with existing scientific publications confirmed a high level of alignment in both development directions and the achieved socio-environmental effects.

In the study by B. G. K. Steiger et al. [34], the technological feasibility of using agro-industrial waste as a raw material for the production of composite sorbents used in wastewater treatment processes was substantiated. The authors demonstrated the high sorption efficiency of such materials in removing organic and inorganic pollutants, and emphasised the potential in implementing a circular economy. The findings corresponded with the results of the present study (practice in the Netherlands), where organic side fractions were used for secondary phosphorus extraction. In both cases, a resource-oriented approach was implemented, in which waste acted as an alternative to primary raw materials, in line with the key principles of sustainable development under urbanisation.

The use of biological approaches in managing organic waste was also confirmed by a number of examples. In particular, the composting and biogas production from food residues implemented in Harare and Shanghai demonstrated the environmental and economic efficiency of decentralised solutions. In the study by P. Verma et al. [35], this approach indicated the prospects of biological detoxification of wastewater using microalgae, complementing the technologies for processing organic fractions in the current study. In both cases, cheap biological conversion was used to extract value from streams previously regarded solely as waste. Thus, biotechnology opened up additional avenues for a circular approach to managing urban flows.

The study by N. Tyagi et al. [36], dedicated to the application of 2D-MXenes (2D-transition metal carbides/nitrides with high activity, used in water purification technologies) in wastewater treatment, revealed the potential of highly efficient nanomaterials for urban water purification infrastructure. In comparison with the current study (case of Singapore), where an intelligent water flow management system was applied, the synergistic effect of combining digital solutions and advanced

materials became evident. Both approaches demonstrated an aspiration for high-tech modernisation of urban water infrastructure.

The transition from disposal to energy use was confirmed by cases from the USA and Indonesia, where pyrolysis and anaerobic digestion technologies were applied. These solutions aimed to reduce methane and carbon dioxide emissions, as well as to partially meet energy needs through waste. Similar conclusions were contained in the work of K. S. Salem et al. [37], which emphasised the necessity of integrating energy generation processes and organic waste recycling. This confirmed the relevance and effectiveness of waste recycling models focused on energy efficiency in urbanised areas.

V. I. Ameh et al. [38] demonstrated technologies for producing nanostructured filters from plastic waste for water purification. In the present study (Jakarta), a similar approach was implemented, where plastic was recycled into fuel. In both cases, synthetic waste was involved in a closed technological cycle, reducing environmental pressure and minimising landfill volumes. This underlined the potential of integrating waste into a closed technological cycle, contributing to the reduction of primary resource consumption.

In the study by J. Wang & H. Dong [39], the technologies for processing multi-component solid waste (ash, construction debris, slags, and fly ash) for use as alternative aggregates in the construction industry were considered. The authors focused on reducing dependence on primary mineral raw materials and demonstrated examples of successful implementation of these solutions in infrastructure projects. This approach coincided with the results of the current study (case of EU cities), where waste-derived materials were used in construction as substitutes for traditional non-metallic resources.

Issues related to pollution caused by landfill leachate and the risks of its entering aquatic ecosystems further highlighted the importance of pre-processing waste at the generation stage. A. M. Yattoo et al. [40] presented a comprehensive review of landfill leachate characteristics, including its composition, toxicological effects, and risks to aquatic ecosystems. The authors demonstrated the need to shift from reactive measures to eliminate pollution consequences to proactive strategies focused on reducing the volume of waste sent to landfills. A similar approach was implemented in this study (Indonesia), where pyrolytic recycling of plastic waste reduced landfill pressure and prevented the formation of secondary pollutants. In both cases, emphasis was placed on early intervention in the waste stream to minimise long-term environmental damage.

However, despite significant advantages, the implementation of water purification and circular waste management technologies faced a number of challenges. These difficulties could be technological, economic, political, and social. Table 2 presents the classification of barriers to sustainable urban technologies.

Table 2. Barriers to the integration of water treatment and circular waste management technologies

Limitation	Characteristic	Regional cases
High installation and operating costs	The high cost of reverse osmosis, pyrolysis, and biogas plants requires significant investment in infrastructure and maintenance, limiting adoption in less developed regions.	The biogas plant in New Orleans (USA) (\$8 million, 5000 tons/year) is not scalable in neighbouring regions. Plastic pyrolysis in Jakarta (Indonesia) (2000 tons/year) requires \$2 million, which is inaccessible for small cities
The need for government subsidies and support	Government subsidies and incentives are essential for the economic viability of technologies, especially in resource-poor countries	Composting in Harare, Zimbabwe (3,000 t/year) is not expanding without grants, despite the potential to reduce fertiliser imports by 10%. Plastic recycling in São Paulo, Brazil (5,000 t/year) is limited without subsidies.
Political and economic challenges in resource-poor countries	Lack of political will, low levels of subsidies and limited finances hinder the implementation of technologies	In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, corruption and the budget (<2% for the environment) are holding back wastewater treatment. In Mumbai, India, the recycling budget (<\$1 million/year) limits biogas projects
Lack of long-term data on environmental impacts	Nanotechnology (TiO ₂ , carbon nanotubes) and membrane technologies create waste (microplastics, used membranes) whose long-term risks are not well understood	An experiment in Delhi, India, using TiO ₂ to purify water found accumulation of microplastics in soil (0.1–0.5 mg/kg), but the long-term environmental impacts remain unknown. In Shanghai, China, membrane disposal (1000 t/year) generates non-degradable waste that potentially pollutes aquatic ecosystems, with no data on chronic impacts. Plastic pyrolysis in Jakarta, Indonesia generates toxic residues (0.05 t/t) whose environmental risks have not been investigated due to a lack of long-term observations
Limited research on AI adoption in developing countries	AI optimizes water treatment and waste management, but developing countries have limited infrastructure and personnel	AI plastic sorting in Jakarta (500 t/year) is limited by lack of 4G networks and specialists. In Harare, Zimbabwe, AI composting fails due to weak digital infrastructure

Lack of study of social aspects	Low public awareness and involvement reduce recycling efficiency	In Vientiane, Laos, campaigns reach 20% of residents, reducing sorting by 40%. In Bangalore, India, 30% of residents do not sort waste, limiting plastic recycling
Limited interdisciplinary research	Lack of research integrating water treatment, waste management and the water-energy-food nexus	In São Paulo, Brazil, the lack of nexus models is holding back the integration of processing and energy. In Beijing, China, nexus research is limited to academic projects without practical applications. In Delhi, India, lack of data on biogas and recycling slows sustainability policy

Source: created by the author based on P. S. Goh et al. [13], S. A. Razzak [26], G. Park et al. [25], X. Chen et al. [12], B. Shrestha et al. [41], T. A. Kurniawan et al. [11], J. Fito & S. W. H. Van Hulle [42], I. Nyambiya et al. [43], E. Vann Yaroson et al. [44], S. A. Ansari et al. [27], M. B. K. Suhan et al. [21], M. D. Islam et al. [45], M. C. Garg et al. [22], V. Noudeng et al. [46], D. Mitra et al. [47], P. N. Carvalho et al. [32]

In the context of Albania, the implementation of water purification and circular waste management technologies faced significant challenges, limiting the contribution to sustainable urban development. High installation and operational costs for systems (reverse osmosis and pyrolysis) hindered the scaling due to limited infrastructure and financial resources. In Tirana, a pyrolysis project for construction waste processing required investments of €0.7–1.2 million, significantly exceeding local environmental budgets [22, 29]. Political and economic barriers, including a lack of political will and low levels of state subsidies, slowed the introduction of environmental solutions, especially in the field of construction waste recycling and circular practices. In Shkodër, tourism development was prioritised over technologies for construction waste recycling necessary for a circular economy [29]. In Durrës, the absence of subsidies (less than 5% of the ecology budget) hindered the launch of biogas plants for food waste processing [27].

Public environmental awareness also remained low, reducing the effectiveness of sorting and recycling programmes – in Durrës, 90% of construction waste was landfilled due to the lack of educational campaigns [27]. Regional gaps in the Western Balkans, including Albania, were manifested in a lack of localised data and wastewater treatment solutions, as well as limited analysis of the economic sustainability of circular practices for small enterprises, according to the study by J. Fito & S. W. H. Van Hulle [42]. AI integration was restricted by weak digital infrastructure and a shortage of qualified personnel (in Tirana, a project for AI-based waste management was not implemented due to a lack of experts – fewer than 10 experts for the entire region) [29]. These challenges highlighted the need for significant investments, state support, and educational initiatives to promote the circular economy and sustainable development in Albania.

The literature analysis revealed systemic contradictions in the application of circular waste management and water purification technologies, which limited the contribution to sustainable urban development and required further research to develop balanced solutions. The balance between environmental efficiency and economic feasibility remained a key issue in selecting waste processing technologies for resource-constrained areas. As noted by G. Park et al. [25], M. Smol et al. [48], waste processing technologies (pyrolysis and biogas systems) offered significant environmental benefits, including a reduction in carbon footprint and the production of alternative fuels. However, the implementation was limited by high capital costs and complex infrastructure, particularly in regions with limited financial resources such as Albania and low-income countries [27, 42], requiring research into the development of affordable technologies adapted to various economic conditions.

When selecting recycling and resource recovery technologies, it was necessary to balance potential energy efficiency with possible environmental consequences. In some cases, efforts to minimise energy consumption could be accompanied by deterioration in environmental indicators, requiring a comprehensive approach to sustainability assessment. Nanotechnologies and membrane systems demonstrated high efficiency in water purification and waste processing with low energy consumption, making these technologies attractive for sustainable development. However, the accumulation of by-products such as nanomaterials and non-recyclable waste posed potential environmental threats, the long-term consequences of which remained unknown. This contradiction between technological efficiency and uncertain ecological risks underscored the need for long-term research to ensure ecosystem safety [20, 48].

The direct integration of global approaches into local contexts often proved challenging. This was due to differences in resource bases, institutional maturity, and technological readiness. Universal technologies, such as AI-based waste management systems, were successfully applied in developed regions, improving resource efficiency [11, 49]. However, the implementation in less developed contexts, including Albania, Indonesia, and Zimbabwe, faced infrastructural constraints and a lack of qualified personnel, as noted by B. Kosta & V. Ramadani [30], I. Nyambiya et al. [43]. This gap between global models and local realities indicated the need for context-oriented approaches that take regional specifics into account.

Technological implementation of solutions required not only technical compatibility but also interdisciplinary coordination encompassing legal, behavioural, and institutional aspects. The absence of interdisciplinary connections could lead to fragmented approaches, reducing the effectiveness of programmes. Successful examples of bioprocessing and waste recycling in the USA and China [11, 40] demonstrated the need to integrate the circular economy with the water–energy–food nexus. However, scientific gaps and the lack of localised models limited scaling in other regions such as Brazil, India, and Albania [26, 31]. This contradiction called for the development of analytical frameworks that connect technologies with regional systems.

Consequently, the identified contradictions confirmed the complexity of transitioning to sustainable development in the global context, highlighting the need for

interdisciplinary efforts to create affordable, safe, and locally adapted solutions to promote the circular economy. Based on these gaps and contradictions, directions were proposed for further research aimed at overcoming existing limitations and improving the implementation of circular economy practices in various regions (Table 3).

Table 3. Systematic analysis of the limitations and prospects of sustainable urban solutions

Barriers	Potential solutions	Practical measures
Affordability / Eco-efficiency	Development of modular and low-cost waste processing technologies (pyrolysis, biogas) for regions with different income levels	– Supporting government subsidies and international grants to reduce capital costs. – Developing small-scale installations adapted to local budgets. – Conducting cost-effectiveness studies of technologies for low-income countries.
Energy efficiency / environmental risks	Ensuring environmental safety of nanotechnologies and membrane systems through long-term studies of the impact	– Creating protocols for monitoring the accumulation of by-products (nanomaterials, toxic residues) – Developing biodegradable or recyclable materials to replace current ones – Conducting field studies of chronic impacts on ecosystems
Global Solutions / local adaptation	Adaptation of universal technologies (e.g. AI waste management) to local infrastructure and personnel conditions	– Investing in digital infrastructure and training of specialists in developing regions. – Developing hybrid models that combine global technologies with local resources. – Conducting pilot projects to test adaptation in specific regions.
Technological integration / interdisciplinary gaps	Integrating circular economy technologies with the water-energy-food nexus through interdisciplinary research	– Developing regionally adapted nexus analytical models. – Creating international research networks for data sharing. – Supporting localized research for small businesses and communities.

Source: created by the author based on P. S. Goh et al. [13], S. A. Razzak [26], G. Park et al. [25], X. Chen et al. [12], B. Shrestha et al. [41], T. A. Kurniawan et al. [11], J. Fito & S. W. H. Van Hulle [42], I. Nyambiya et al. [43], S. A. Ansari et al. [27], M. B. K. Suhan et al. [21], V. Noudeng et al. [46], D. Mitra et al. [47], P. N. Carvalho et al. [32], M. Smol et al. [48], M. Behjat et al. [49], A. Soo et al. [50], S. Dhiman et al. [51]

For the successful integration of circular waste management and water purification

technologies in Albania, targeted measures were required, taking into account local economic, infrastructural, and social constraints. The development of digital infrastructure, including adapted AI platforms and IoT systems, could improve the efficiency of water and waste resource management. Pilot projects in Tirana demonstrated the potential of such systems for wastewater monitoring and optimisation of biogas installations, but the scaling-up required investment in telecommunications and specialist training [30, 33]. The introduction of regulatory frameworks certifying recycled construction materials and encouraging the use through tax incentives could reduce landfill waste and support closed cycles in the construction sector [28, 29].

The integration of renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, with water purification and waste recycling systems would enhance energy efficiency but required government subsidies and international grants to cover costs [23, 33]. Combining solar energy with agroforestry could provide sustainable management of organic waste in rural areas. Educational campaigns to raise public environmental awareness were essential to increase participation in recycling programmes, particularly in contexts of low environmental culture [28]. Research into the environmental risks of technologies such as nanotechnologies had to precede the implementation, given the limited resources for monitoring [42].

The development of localised solutions adapted to Albania's climatic and economic conditions, including biogas installations, also required interdisciplinary research and pilot projects. Regional cooperation with other Western Balkan countries and international partners could provide knowledge exchange and funding to build sustainable urban systems [33, 42]. These measures underlined the necessity of a comprehensive approach that combined government support, international cooperation, and scientific research to promote the circular economy in Albania.

The study results demonstrated that the prospects for applying circular waste management and water purification technologies under resource-constrained conditions were realistic, provided the technologies were adapted and accompanied by institutional support mechanisms. Technologies for renewable water purification and desalination integrated with alternative energy sources had the greatest potential. In the study by E. J. Okampo et al. [52], the focus was on the sustainability of decentralised solar-powered desalination units using hybrid solutions (e.g., membrane technologies with thermodynamic optimisation). The results of the current study confirmed the viability of these approaches in rural and remote regions where centralised infrastructure was unavailable, which allowed renewable purification to be considered the basis of future decentralised water supply systems.

Another promising direction was the use of carbon-based materials in water purification. T. Fatima & A. Mushtaq, A. [53] studied carbon-based nanostructures (including graphene, carbon nanotubes, fullerenes, and quantum dots), which had high sorption capacity and could be effectively applied in water treatment systems. The authors emphasised the unique physicochemical properties of these materials, providing multifunctionality and environmental sustainability. The current results complemented the authors' conclusions, showing that such carbon materials could be locally derived as by-products of recycling and then used in purification,

strengthening the idea of technological circularity.

G. M. Sonu et al. [54] thoroughly examined the potential for converting agro-waste into energy carriers and high-value carbon nanoparticles. The authors demonstrated how plant residues could be converted into energy and valuable materials, opening up prospects for integrating such solutions into bioenergy clusters. This study, which concerned biogas and biochar yield in small-scale units, also confirmed the viability of such an approach at a local level, forming the basis for further integration of agriculture into closed energy and material cycles, an important step towards sustainable development.

S. Aguado et al. [55] also analysed existing methodologies for assessing the circular economy in the context of municipal composting and urban agriculture, with particular attention to regional aspects. The research highlighted the importance of integrating organic waste into soil regeneration and closing agri-food cycles in urban settings. This direction fully aligned with the results of the current study, showing that these approaches were applicable even in medium-density urban development. Particularly important was the growing interest in vertical farming and greenhouse models, which could be integrated into urban structures. Thus, circularity manifested not only in waste recycling but also in the agri-food cycle as a key component of a sustainable urban environment.

This study demonstrated the potential of digital technologies and AI platforms for local management of water and waste flows, emphasising the importance of adapting these technologies and platforms to local infrastructure and integrating these innovations with social, economic, and environmental conditions to increase the resilience of urban systems. The work by X. Yu et al. [56] used multicriteria analysis to assess innovative wastewater treatment technologies using the Technique for Order of Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution (TOPSIS) model, enabling optimal decision-making based on technical, economic, environmental, and social parameters. The authors stressed the importance of comprehensive evaluation when selecting technologies to improve water treatment processes and reduce energy consumption.

The current study also focused on the use of digital technologies; however, emphasis was placed on the phased adaptation and localisation, adding a new element to the authors' work, which mainly focused on optimising existing technologies. The successful implementation of innovative technologies in water systems required not only technological advancements but also consideration of local specifics and infrastructure constraints, making the research findings more adaptive and tailored to specific urban conditions.

A. Bardhi et al. [57] considered the impact of solar power plants on the electricity grid in Albania, highlighting the need to modernise energy infrastructure for the effective integration of renewable energy sources. The authors drew attention to the importance of introducing innovative technologies to optimise energy supply management, which was a necessary condition for the successful use of solar energy. The results of the study also pointed to the significance of innovative technologies for the effective management of natural resources under limited infrastructure conditions. Both studies confirmed the need for technological modernisation to enhance the resilience

and efficiency of systems. For the successful integration of innovative solutions in resource-constrained settings, phased implementation adapted to local socio-economic and infrastructural conditions was required.

Thus, the prospects for integrating water purification and circular waste management technologies, including reverse osmosis, pyrolysis, biogas, and AI optimisation, lay in the creation of sustainable urban systems through energy-efficient and resource-saving solutions. The development of localised modular technologies, the strengthening of digital infrastructure, and interdisciplinary research would enable the scaling-up of the circular economy, minimising environmental impact and supporting global sustainability.

Conclusion

During the systematic review conducted, which included 56 selected sources, modern water purification technologies and circular waste management in the context of sustainable urban development were analysed. It was established that the comprehensive integration of such solutions contributed to reducing environmental impact, optimising the use of natural resources, and increasing the energy efficiency of urban systems. The results of the study demonstrated that the implementation of pyrolysis and anaerobic digestion technologies enabled a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions into the environment by 10–20 %.

The use of membrane technologies, including reverse osmosis, and biological methods of wastewater treatment made it possible to remove up to 90–99 % of organic pollutants and pathogens, and also enabled the reuse of up to 40 % of purified water in urban water supply systems. The digitalisation of processes using AI and IoT systems ensured a reduction in energy consumption by 15–30 % and additionally reduced CO₂ emissions by 10–20 % through optimisation of logistics and real-time monitoring. The recycling of organic, plastic, and construction waste reached 80–90 %, significantly reducing the need for primary resources and the volume of landfill disposal. These technologies had high potential for the formation of a circular economy and a sustainable urban environment, simultaneously reducing ecological burden, creating new sources of energy, materials, and jobs.

The effectiveness of the solutions considered largely depended on the regional context, including the level of infrastructure development, institutional maturity, and availability of financial resources, which required the adaptation and localisation of technologies for different socio-economic conditions. Among the limitations were identified high capital costs, a shortage of qualified personnel, and weak digital infrastructure, especially in resource-constrained countries (Albania, Zimbabwe, India). A lack of long-term data on the environmental impact of nanomaterials and membrane technologies was also recorded.

It was recommended to develop adapted modular solutions, support digital infrastructure, launch pilot projects, and attract state and international funding, as well as implement educational programmes to increase public engagement. The results obtained confirmed the importance of circular solutions for sustainable urban ecosystems and the need for the adaptation to local conditions. In the future, results

could be improved through the development of new indicators, the implementation of innovations, and the strengthening of educational initiatives to raise public awareness.

References

- [1] Capodaglio, A. G. (2025). Energy use and decarbonisation of the water sector: A comprehensive review of issues, approaches, and technological options. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21622515.2024.2440163>
- [2] Istenič, D., Bodík, I., Merisaar, M., Gajewska, M., Šereš, M., & Griessler Bulc, T. (2023). Challenges and perspectives of nature-based wastewater treatment and reuse in rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe. *Sustainability*, 15(10), Article 8145. <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/10/8145>
- [3] Simionescu, M., Radulescu, M., & Belascu, L. (2024). The impact of renewable energy consumption and energy poverty on pollution in Central and Eastern European countries. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0960148124014654?via%3Dihub>
- [4] Mohanty, S. S., Vyas, S., Koul, Y., Prajapati, P., Varjani, S., Chang, J.-S., Bilal, M., Moustakas, K., Show, P. L., & Vithanage, M. (2023). Tricks and tracks in waste management with a special focus on municipal landfill leachate: Leads and obstacles. *Science of the Total Environment*, 860, 160377. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969722074794?via%3Dihub>
- [5] Prabakaran, S., Mohanraj, T., Arumugam, A., & Sudalai, S. (2022). A state-of-the-art review on the environmental benefits and prospects of Azolla in biofuel, bioremediation and biofertilizer applications. *Industrial Crops and Products*, 183, Article 114942. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0926669022004253?via%3Dihub>
- [6] Khan, S. A. R., Ponce, P., Yu, Z., Golpîra, H., & Mathew, M. (2022). Environmental technology and wastewater treatment: Strategies to achieve environmental sustainability. *Chemosphere*, 286, Article 131532. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S004565352102004X?via%3Dihub>
- [7] Kurniawan, T. A., Bandala, E. R., Othman, M. H. D., Goh, H. H., Anouzla, A., Chew, K. W., Aziz, F., Al-Hazmi, H. E., & Khoir, A. N. (2024). Implications of climate change on water quality and sanitation in climate hotspot locations: A case study in Indonesia. *Water Supply*, 24(2). <https://iwaponline.com/ws/article/24/2/517/100030/Implications-of-climate-change-on-water-quality>
- [8] Rajić, M., Quaranta, E., Kuriqi, A., & Kasiulis, E. (2024). Renewable energy in the Western Balkans and EU policy: Pathway to regional net-zero. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 1442(1), 012002. <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1755-1315/1442/1/012002>
- [9] Dhoska, K., Bebi, E., Markja, I., Milo, P., Sita, E., & Qosja, S. (2024). Modelling the wind potential energy for metallurgical sector in Albania. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-51841-x>
- [10] PRISMA Statement. (2025). <https://www.prisma-statement.org/>
- [11] Kurniawan, T. A., Othman, M. H. D., Liang, X., Goh, H. H., Gikas, P., Kusworo, T. D., Anouzla, A., & Chew, K. W. (2023). Decarbonization in waste recycling industry using digitalization to promote net-zero emissions and its implications on sustainability. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 338, 117765. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301479723005534?via%3Dihub>
- [12] Chen, X., Zhang, Z., Abed, A. M., Lin, L., Zhang, H., Escorcía-Gutierrez, J., Shohan, A. A., Ali, E., Xu, H., Assilzadeh, H., & Zhen, L. (2024). Designing energy-efficient buildings

- in urban centers through machine learning and enhanced clean water managements. *Environmental Research*, 260, Article 119526. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0013935124014312?via%3Dihub>
- [13] Goh, P. S., Wong, K. C., & Ismail, A. F. (2022). Membrane technology: A versatile tool for saline wastewater treatment and resource recovery. *Desalination*, 521, Article 115377. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0011916421004483?via%3Dihub>
- [14] Moezzi, S. A., Rastgar, S., Faghani, M., Ghiasvand, Z., & Javanshir Khoei, A. (2025). Optimization of carbon membrane performance in reverse osmosis systems for reducing salinity, nitrates, phosphates, and ammonia in aquaculture wastewater. *Chemosphere*, 376, Article 144304. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0045653525002462?via%3Dihub>
- [15] PUB, Singapore's National Water Agency. (n.d.). NEWater. <https://www.pub.gov.sg/Public/WaterLoop/OurWaterStory/NEWater>
- [16] Gray, N. F. (2021). Natural wastewater treatment systems and sustainability. World Scientific Publishing. <https://www.worldscientific.com/worldscibooks/10.1142/q0320#t=aboutBook>
- [17] European Commission. (n.d.). Urban wastewater. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/water/urban-wastewater_en
- [18] KWR Water Research Institute. (n.d.). AquaSPICE: Advancing sustainability of process industries through digital and circular water use innovations. <https://www.kwrwater.nl/en/projecten/aquaspice-advancing-sustainability-of-process-industries-through-digital-and-circular-water-use-innovations/>
- [19] Royal HaskoningDHV. (n.d.). Nereda® aerobic granular sludge technology. <https://nereda.royalhaskoningdhv.com>
- [20] Paques. (n.d.). Biological wastewater & biogas treatment systems. <https://www.paquesglobal.com/>
- [21] Suhan, M. B. K., Al-Mamun, M. R., Farzana, N., Aishee, S. M., Islam, M. S., Marwani, H. M., Hasan, M. M., Asiri, A. M., Rahman, M. M., Islam, A., & Awual, M. R. (2023). Sustainable pollutant removal and wastewater remediation using TiO₂-based nanocomposites: A critical review. *Nano-Structures & Nano-Objects*, 36, 101050. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352507X23001130?pes=vor&utm_source=scopus&getft_integrator=scopus
- [22] Garg, M. C., Kumari, S., & Agarwal, S. (2024). The integration of artificial intelligence in advanced wastewater treatment systems. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-67237-8_1
- [23] Qamili, A., & Kapia, S. (2024). Evaluation and integration of photovoltaic (PV) systems in Albanian energy landscape. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2772940024000043?pes=vor&utm_source=scopus&getft_integrator=scopus
- [24] Chia, M. R., Phang, S.-W., Mohd Razali, N. S., & Ahmad, I. (2024). Approach towards sustainable circular economy: Waste biorefinery for the production of cellulose nanocrystals. *Cellulose*. Advance online publication. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10570-024-05825-9>
- [25] Park, G., Lee, T., Kim, J.-H., Song, H., Chen, W.-H., & Kwon, E. E. (2025). Comprehensive valorization of oil-rich food waste through coupling transesterification with pyrolysis. *Journal of Analytical and Applied Pyrolysis*, 189, Article 107082. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165237025001354?via%3Dihub>
- [26] Razzak, S. A. (2024). Municipal solid and plastic waste co-pyrolysis towards sustainable renewable fuel and carbon materials: A comprehensive review. *Chemistry – An Asian Journal*, 19(17), Article e202400307. <https://aces.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/asia.202400307>
- [27] Ansari, S. A., Kumar, T., Sawarkar, R., Gobade, M., Khan, D., & Singh, L. (2024). Valorization of food waste: A comprehensive review of individual technologies for producing

- bio-based products. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 364, Article 121439. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301479724014257?via%3Dihub>
- [28] Buhajloti, A. (2024). Exploring the opportunities and challenges of transitioning to a circular economy in the construction industry. <https://www.pesd.ro/articole/nr.18/nr.1/pesd2024181013.pdf>
- [29] Dorri, F., & Shahini, B. (2024). Balancing economic and construction growth with environmental sustainability in Albania's real estate sector. <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/16/22/9780>
- [30] Kosta, B., & Ramadani, V. (2025). The impact of circular economy practices on firm performance: Evidence from the Western Balkans. *Journal of Enterprising Communities*. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/jec-12-2024-0271/full/html>
- [31] Bojović, M., Mrkonjić, Z., & Vukelić, I. (2024). Agroforestry systems and forest resources as a potential for sustainable energy development in the western Balkan region. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13705-024-00502-y?utm_source=getftr&utm_medium=getftr&utm_campaign=getftr_pilot&getft_integrator=scopus
- [32] Carvalho, P. N., Finger, D. C., Masi, F., Cipolletta, G., Oral, H. V., Tóth, A., Regelsberger, M., & Exposito, A. (2022). Nature-based solutions addressing the water-energy-food nexus: Review of theoretical concepts and urban case studies. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 338, Article 130652. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S095965262200292X?pes=vor&utm_source=scopus&getft_integrator=scopus
- [33] Malka, L., Dervishi, I., Owolabi, A. B., Abdullahi, Y., Suh, D., Aliaj, B., Zeqo, M., & Dervishi, R. (2024). Deep retrofitting toward net zero energy building in the Mediterranean region: A case study of Albania. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844024112054?pes=vor&utm_source=scopus&getft_integrator=scopus
- [34] Steiger, B. G. K., Wilson, L. D., Evitts, R., Zhou, Z., & Xie, F. (2022). Valorization of agro-waste biomass as composite adsorbents for sustainable wastewater treatment. *Industrial Crops and Products*, 191(A), 115913. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365408667_Vvalorization_of_agro-waste_biomass_as_composite_adsorbents_for_sustainable_wastewater_treatment
- [35] Verma, P., Sirotiya, V., Rathore, R., Kumar, A., Rai, A., Soni, U., Khalid, M., Yadav, K. K., & Vinayak, V. (2024). A comprehensive review on microalgal chromium detoxification in tannery wastewater: Paving the way for biobased products. *Process Safety and Environmental Protection*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0957582024009832?via%3Dihub>
- [36] Tyagi, N., Sharma, G., Kumar, D., Pratap Neelratan, P., Sharma, D., Khanuja, M., Singh, M. K., Singh, V., Kaushik, A., & Sharma, S. K. (2023). 2D-MXenes to tackle wastewater: From purification to SERS-based sensing. *Coordination Chemistry Reviews*, 496, Article 215394. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0010854523003831?via%3Dihub>
- [37] Salem, K. S., Clayson, K., Salas, M., Haque, N., Rao, R., Agate, S., Singh, A., Levis, J. W., Mittal, A., Yarbrough, J. M., Venditti, R., Jameel, H., Lucia, L., & Pal, L. (2023). A critical review of existing and emerging technologies and systems to optimize solid waste management for feedstocks and energy conversion. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590238523004101?pes=vor&utm_source=scopus&getft_integrator=scopus
- [38] Ameh, V. I., Onu, M. A., Modekwe, H. U., Ayeleru, O. O., Nomngongo, P. N., & Ramatsa, I. M. (2024). Fabrication and characterization of nanostructures from waste polymers for water and wastewater treatment. In *Smart nanomaterials for environmental applications*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B978044321794400034X?via%3Dihub>
- [39] Wang, J., & Dong, H. (2024). Preparation and application of multi-source solid wastes as clean aggregates: A comprehensive review. *Construction and Building Materials*, 418, Article 135414. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0950061824005555?via%3Dihub>
- [40] Yatoo, A. M., Hamid, B., Sheikh, T. A., Ali, S., Bhat, S. A., Ramola, S., Ali, M. N., Baba,

- Z. A., & Kumar, S. (2024). Global perspective of municipal solid waste and landfill leachate: Generation, composition, eco-toxicity, and sustainable management strategies. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11356-024-32669-4>
- [41] Shrestha, B., Foret, B., Sharp, W., Gang, D., Hernandez, R., Revellame, E., Fortela, D. L. B., Holmes, W. E., & Zappi, M. E. (2024). An overview of the potential for municipal wastewater treatment plants to be integrated into urban biorefineries for the production of sustainable bio-based fuels and other chemicals. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40726-024-00318-6>
- [42] Fito, J., & Van Hulle, S. W. H. (2021). Wastewater reclamation and reuse potentials in agriculture: Towards environmental sustainability. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 23(3). <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10668-020-00732-y>
- [43] Nyambiya, I., Chapungu, L., Sawunyama, L., Musvoto, E. V., Nhamo, L., & Zvimba, J. N. (2025). Circular economy drivers, opportunities, and barriers for wastewater services within low- and medium-income countries. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S147470652500021X?utm_source=
- [44] Vann Yaroson, E., Chowdhury, S., Mangla, S. K., Dey, P., Chan, F. T. S., & Roux, M. (2024). A systematic literature review exploring and linking circular economy and sustainable development goals in the past three decades (1991–2022). *International Journal of Production Research*, 62(4). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/00207543.2023.2270586?src=geftft&utm_source=scopus&getft_integrator=scopus
- [45] Islam, M. D., Uddin, F. J., Rashid, T. U., & Shahruzzaman, M. (2023). Cellulose acetate-based membrane for wastewater treatment—A state-of-the-art review. *Materials Advances*, 4. <https://pubs.rsc.org/en/content/articlelanding/2023/ma/d3ma00255a>
- [46] Noudeng, V., Pheakdey, D. V., Minh, T. T. N., & Xuan, T. D. (2024). Municipal solid waste management in Laos: Comparative analysis of environmental impact, practices, and technologies with ASEAN regions and Japan. *Environments*, 11(8), Article 170. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3298/11/8/170>
- [47] Mitra, D., Choudhury, T., Madan, A., Chattaraj, S., & Pellegrini, M. (2025). AI technologies for enhancing recycling processes. *AI Technologies for Enhancing Recycling Processes*. <https://www.igi-global.com/gateway/book/347511>
- [48] Smol, M., Szoldrowska, D., & Duda, J. (2025). Identification of barriers and driving forces for circular economy (CE) implementation in water and wastewater companies. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/bse.4097>
- [49] Behjat, M., Svanström, M., Peters, G., & Perez-Soba, M. (2024). Sustainability indicator identification and selection for an innovative conceptual system: Phosphorus recovery from dairy wastewater. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 207, Article 107646. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921344924002404?pes=vor&utm_source=scopus&getft_integrator=scopus
- [50] Soo, A., Wang, L., Wang, C., & Shon, H. K. (2023). Machine learning for nutrient recovery in the smart city circular economy – A review. *Process Safety and Environmental Protection*, 173. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0957582023001672?via%3Dihub>
- [51] Dhiman, S., Thakur, B., Kaur, S., Ahuja, M., Gantayat, S., Sarkar, S., Singh, R., & Tripathi, M. (2025). Closing the loop: Technological innovations in food waste valorisation for global sustainability. *Discover Sustainability*, 6(1), Article 258. https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s43621-025-01073-4.pdf?utm_source=scopus&getft_integrator=scopus
- [52] Okampo, E. J., Nwulu, N., & Bokoro, P. N. (2023). Optimisation of renewable energy powered desalination systems: A sustainable techno-economic and environmental consideration. *IOP Publishing*. <https://iopscience.iop.org/book/mono/978-0-7503-6154-5.pdf>
- [53] Fatima, T., & Mushtaq, A. (2023). Efficacy and challenges of carbon-based nanomaterials in water treatment: A review. *International Journal of Chemical and Biochemical Sciences*,

- 23(1). <https://www.iscientific.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/27-IJCBS-23-23-29.pdf>
- [54] Sonu, Rani, G. M., Pathania, D., Abhimanyu, U. R., Rustagi, S., Huh, Y. S., Gupta, V. K., Kaushik, A., & Chaudhary, V. (2023). Agro-waste to sustainable energy: A green strategy of converting agricultural waste to nano-enabled energy applications. *Science of the Total Environment*, 875. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969723012834?via%3Dihub>
- [55] Aguado, S., Cotler, H., Astier, M., & Padilla-Rivera, A. (2025). Evaluation methodologies for circular economy in municipal composting and urban agriculture: A literature review with focus on Latin America. *Circular Economy and Sustainability*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43615-025-00582-8>
- [56] Yu, X., Suntrayuth, S., Carayannis, E. G., Sindakis, S., & Showkat, S. (2023). Advancing industrial wastewater treatment through comprehensive evaluation and innovative technology: A G1-entropy improved TOPSIS model approach. *Journal of Technology Transfer*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10961-023-10032-y>
- [57] Bardhi, A., Eski, A., Leka, B., & Dhoska, K. (2025). The impact of solar power plants on the electricity grid: A case study of Albania. <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-4117/6/2/35>

Albanian emigration in legal perspective

Adela Kusuri

University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

This paper focuses primarily on the legal framework, driving factors, and the state's role in the management of legal and illegal emigration of Albanian citizens. Emigration continues to be a major social and economic trend in Albania, which is mostly driven by high unemployment, poverty, lack of opportunities, and low trust in public institutions.

The study outlines the legal basis for the free movement to any country, which is granted by the Albanian Constitution and backed by other national and international legal instruments. The paper also deals with how this right is understood within Albanian legal order and how it's actually applied.

More attention is given to the irregular migration-related problems: lack of legal protection, exposure to exploitation of labor, and discrimination in destination states. Current trends are analyzed with the support of data and statistics from national and international sources.

The Albanian state is critically assessed in terms of its obligations and policy reactions. The paper evaluates the effectiveness of the current laws and bilateral agreements and reintegration programs, raising doubt as to whether Albania has really been working towards migration governance from a strategic and rights-based perspective.

The conclusion, therefore, emphasizes that a more coherent, balanced, and forward-thinking migration governance concept is needed, grounded in national priorities and in international legal standards.

Keywords: emigration, legal framework, free movement, irregular migration, public policy.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore Albanian emigration from a legal viewpoint, by addressing how the right to emigrate is acknowledged, regulated, and facilitated in Albanian legal system and within the framework of international obligations. The study aims to discover whether the Albanian State views emigration as a phenomenon to be controlled or supported, and to which extent its legal and policy framework reflects in a coherent and strategic perspective in governance. A special focus is put on irregular emigration and its vulnerabilities, especially in terms of legal protection, labor exploitation, and discrimination. Through a critical review of laws, bilateral agreements, and reintegration programs, the study intends to analyze Albania's institutional and legal responses, thereby drawing attention to the already established need for a more balanced and rights-based migration governance model.

Methodology

The study applied a predominantly qualitative, interpretive approach in law. It included a systematic review and analysis of national legal instruments, such as the Constitution of Albania, Labor Code, and Law No. 9668/2006 "On Emigration of

Albanian Citizens for Employment Purposes”, among others, as well as international documents relevant to the subject, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Complementing the legal analysis is a review of strategic policy documents such as the National Strategy for Diaspora. Furthermore, to relate the legal framework with current realities, the study pulls in various statistics and reports from national institutions such as INSTAT. This multidisciplinary approach allows a better understanding of how law, policy, and socio-economic considerations interact to shape the emigration landscape in Albania.

I. Emigration in Context: The Case of Albania

Migration is the movement of people away from their usual place of residence to a new place of residence, either across an international border or within a State (International Organization for Migration, 2021). This is a phenomenon that has been associated with human populations for millions of years.

There are different forms of migrations, but the two broad categories and most common in practice are emigration and immigration. Emigration, or external migration, is the movement of individuals or groups from a country of residence to another country. On the other hand, immigration is when the individuals or groups enter a particular country.

From a legal viewpoint, the right to migrate is an individual freedom, forming part of constitutional law, international law, labor law, and so on. Population movement hence arises from socio-political, demographic, economic, or environmental reasons. However, migration for economic reasons, particularly for labour purposes, is the principal cause, as also attested to by statistics from the International Labor Organization of the UN. Migration arises from high unemployment, poor labor standards, poor education, and, in general, poor economic conditions.

Albania is not merely a country with a long history of emigration; it has also been characterised with historically high levels of emigration, mainly on economic grounds. As of 2020, INSTAT (2020b) estimated the Albanian emigration stock living abroad at 1.68 million people, equivalent to 59% of the current resident population (United Nations Network on Migration, 2022).

The first migratory movements were documented at least during the 15th-16th centuries, but the largest modern wave of mass emigration took place in 1990 when thousands of Albanians left predominantly for neighboring Italy and Greece, which was in majority irregular and unlawful. The flow of emigration declined for perhaps four or five years until 1997, when the collapse of pyramid schemes and political chaos instigated another mass exodus.

Albanians were hopeful of democracy and its institutions, but ills of the real world forced many to flee the country during the thirty years of the democratic transition. Today, Albania is a country with one of the largest numbers of emigrants in proportion to its population, alongside countries such as Syria and Afghanistan. According to a labor force survey undertaken by the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), the main reason for leaving Albania, even in recent years, is “employment opportunities,” mentioned by 83.7% of respondents. Other factors include family reunification at about 9% and

education at roughly 3.5% (INSTAT, 2019).

Irregular emigration is a big concern for the Albanian community. A large number of Albanians have left the country irregularly, mainly towards European Union countries, and the United Kingdom. This trend has not only been present during the initial massive wave of emigration of the early 90s, but has also continued throughout the past decade.

II. The Legal Basis of the Right to Emigrate: National and International Legal Framework

Regulated migration for purposes of employment is achieved through national laws as well as a series of international agreements, particularly with EU member states. This legal framework is very important as it ensures that migration is not only carried out in an orderly and safe manner, but that migrants rights are also safeguarded.

II.1 Constitutional Protection of the Right to Migrate in Albania.

Freedom of movement both within and outside the country is constitutionally guaranteed in Albania. Article 38 of the Albanian Constitution holds that: *“Everyone has the right to choose their place of residence and move freely within any part of the territory of the state”*. Further to this, paragraph 2 of that article says: *“No one may be prevented from freely leaving the country”* (Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë, art. 38, pgh. 2 as amended). The article does not explicitly state migration for employment purposes; however, the generalized acknowledgment of the right to leave forms the legal basis upon which Albanian citizens may look for work abroad.

Nevertheless, Article 17 of the Constitution states that rights may be subject to restrictions if and when these restrictions are imposed by law for purposes of protecting public interest or protect the right of others. This opens the possibility for legal limitations on migration in exceptional circumstances, such as situations posing a risk to the country. In any event, such restrictions must be proportionate to the situation giving rise to the necessity for them, and must never go further than those prescribed by the European Convention on Human Rights.

II.2. Provisions in the Labor Code

According to Article 1 of Law No. 7961, dated July 12, 1995, *“The Labor Code of the Republic of Albania,”* as amended, this Code is based on the Constitution of the Republic of Albania and as a result, it aligns with it.

National Labor Codes generally regulate employment relations within the national territory. Because these laws usually have no extraterritorial validity, they do not provide any rights, procedures, or protections to individuals who acquire employment abroad. Same applies for Albania, where its Labour Code tries to determine the rights and obligations of both employers and employees, issues such as working hours, leave entitlements, protection at the workplace, safety, protection against discrimination, special protections for children, etc, all within the country.

Therefore, Albanian emigrant workers come under the jurisdiction of the host country's labour laws abroad, so the Labour Code of Albania offers them little in terms of direct safeguards during foreign employment. Indeed, national-level migration regulations are lacking, but this gap has been addressed by international instruments. In this direction, Albania has negotiated bilateral labour agreements with destination countries to regulate the transborder movement of Albanian workers and to establish minimum employment standards and protections for its nationals working abroad.

II.3. Law No. 9668, dated December 18, 2006, as amended, "On Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Employment Purposes"

High unemployment and poverty rates toward the late 1990s until the early 2000s led to large-scale emigration. In order to respond to this development, Law No. 9668/2006 "On Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Employment Purposes" was adopted. The government had in fact enacted a law on labor migration in 2003, but by 2006 it wanted a more comprehensive policy, in harmony with European standards. Law No. 9668/2006 (as amended) is the principal law governing labor emigration from Albania. Whereas it recognizes the individual right of Albanians to work overseas, it also acknowledges the state's interest in regulating emigration, protecting its citizens, and aligning migration with national development.

According to Article 2 of this law, "emigration for employment purposes" is considered to be the voluntary departure of an Albanian citizen from the territory of the Republic of Albania in order to be employed, self-employed, professionally trained through work in another country, or to reunite with a family member who has emigrated.

Pursuant to Law No. 9668/2006 (as amended), every Albanian has the right to emigrate, with limitations placed on that right only in cases where national security, public health and morality, the rights and freedoms of others are endangered, or when there is a final court decision (Law No. 9668/2006, as amended, art. 5). Article 5 of this law stipulates that emigrants are entitled to equal treatment and non-discrimination. Emigrants retain their political rights: The law explicitly provides for their participation in Albanian elections, while they remain represented and in contact with Albania's institutions.

Hence, Albanian emigrants should be assisted in accessing complete information on their rights and services provided by the state. Emigrants, do also receive free of charge pre-departure counseling, covering a comprehensive range of aspects including vocational training, job placement, social protection, housing, education, social security, and orientation courses in language and job skill training.

According to Articles 10 and 11, emigrants must obtain work contracts and visas and "adhere" to the employment purposes for which they have been declared. This way, it is understood that irregular migration and criminal activity are punishable under Albanian law. The law also favors the protection of vulnerable persons, such as children below working age who are not allowed to emigrate for work, with their retrieval if found working abroad. Certain ministries, such as the ministry responsible

for labour and social affairs, finance, education, etc., also have a say in handling all these matters.

In brief, emigrants have many rights which include that to emigrate, to equal treatment and information, to vote, to consular help, etc; however, they are also required to respect the purpose stated for their migration and abide by the laws of the host country.

Moreover, Law No. 9668/2006 (as amended) stipulates that state agencies shall promote bilateral/multilateral labor migration arrangements with destination countries, and regulate private recruitment agencies.

II.4. International Legal Framework

Albania is a party to several international instruments recognizing the right of emigration. One of the most important instruments of normative value is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Paragraph 2 of Article 13 of the UDHR states: *“Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country”* (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, art. 13, para. 2).

This provision is also found in Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was ratified by Albania in 1991. The Paragraph 2 and 4 of the ICCPR states: *“Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own”* and *“No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country”*. While the Paragraph 3 of this article states that restriction of this right, however, shall be allowed only if it is necessary to protect national security, public order, public health or the rights and freedoms of others, and that are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966).

Albania has also ratified a number of ILO Conventions concerning migrant workers, including the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), and the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143). Both Conventions require member states to take measures to protect the migrant workers. Convention No. 97 obliges member states to ensure equal treatment for lawfully admitted migrant workers in areas such as wages, working conditions, trade union membership, accommodation, and social security, so that they are not treated less favorably than nationals (International Labour Conference, 1949). The Convention also calls for providing free employment services or information to migrants, regulating recruitment to prevent abuses, and facilitating migrants’ departure and reception in cooperation with other countries. In the context of Albania’s policies, ratifying C-97 helped align national law with these international standards. Notably, Albania established a comprehensive legal framework to protect its citizens working abroad, including the Law No. 9668, dated December 18, 2006, as amended, *“On Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Employment Purposes”*.

Convention No. 143 addresses two critical aspects of migration: (1) combating migrations in abusive conditions (irregular or clandestine labor migration and trafficking), and (2) promoting equality of opportunity and treatment for migrant workers who are lawfully present (Global Migration Policy Associates & Taran, 2023).

Ratification of C-143 by Albania implies a commitment to strengthen policies against human trafficking and irregular migration networks. The need for this is paramount given the backdrop of large-scale emigration from Albania and labor exploitation instances. Albanian migrant workers are indeed victims of trafficking and forced labor, especially when employed irregularly to Western Europe. The Convention pushes Albania to cooperate internationally in curbing illegal recruitment and to protect any migrant worker on its territory from abusive conditions. Although Albania did not accept Part II of C-143, the spirit of that part, ensuring long-term migrants enjoy equality in employment and social rights, is reflected in Albania's broader policy commitments (for example, foreigners legally working in Albania are generally granted equal access to healthcare, education, and labor rights as Albanian citizens) (Migrants & Refugees, n.d.).

Besides that, Albania has entered into bilateral agreements with key host countries like Greece, Italy, and most recently, the United Kingdom. These agreements intend to set up structured mechanisms for the recruitment, employment, and protection of Albanian workers abroad.

For instance, a bilateral labor agreement between Greece and Albania, concluded in 1997, is still in operation. It covers seasonal work for agricultural workers. After the harvest, based on this treaty, Albanian workers are issued temporary residence and temporary worker permits to work in the agricultural sector in Greece. For instance, the metaklisi procedure that invites workers ensures stable access for Albanian farmers to Greek farms. A testament to this ever-active agreement are the economic ties that go back far: Many Greek farmers rely on Albanian seasonal work.

Another important document is the Social Security Treaty, signed on 6 Feb 2024 between Italy and Albania, enabling the recognition of work contributions made by emigrants for pension purposes. This treaty which entered into force on June 2025 allows workers to receive pensions from both Albania and Italy, proportionate to the years worked in each country. From this long-awaited agreement will benefit approximately 500,000 Albanian citizens and around 4,000 Italians who have worked in both countries. This agreement also covers disability pensions, survivor/family pensions, unemployment benefits and healthcare and maternity-related allowances (Euronews Albania, 2025).

For several consecutive years, young Albanians have traveled irregularly to the United Kingdom, seeking asylum rights. This situation has been portrayed as alarming mainly by the British media and the British political circles. Therefore, measures were taken to tackle the problem from both countries, which was concluded with the return agreement, signed between Albania and the United Kingdom in 2022. This agreement, which was part of a broader Albania-UK anti-smuggling partnership, intended to ensure that applicants from Albania considered ineligible for asylum would be expelled back to Albania.

Albania's relationship with the European Union (EU) is also a key component of its labor migration framework. The country, still not an EU member, has accomplished two major steps in terms of execution of its labor/employment/mobility projects with the European Union. Targeting labor market reforms, skills training, and legal migration channels has been the center of attention of the Mobility Partnership Framework and

the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) projects. The second major step has been the liberalization of the Schengen visa, since 2010, allowing visits for up to 90 days in any 180-day period, but not the rights of Albanians to legally work in these countries, unless they have a national visa or residence permit.

A major challenge, remains the contrast between the existence of all this legal framework and the presence of irregular migration. Although bilateral agreements and cooperative measures with the EU have been put in place to curb the situation, their effect is minimized due to excessive bureaucracy, restricting criteria, and the lack of an extensive public awareness campaign. Many Albanians continue seeking employment abroad through informal or unauthorized channels, particularly in sectors with high demand for low-skilled labor. This rather creates risks of labor exploitation, human trafficking, denial to rights, and absence of legal support.

III. The “Conflict” Between Freedom of Movement and Brain Drain

Most in the field attribute Albania being a country with high emigration trends to a low standard of living, unemployment, and low wages. Despite labour shortages in recent years and a high demand for workers, primarily in the private sector, inadequate pay has failed to motivate the workforce to return to work.

The discouragement of the workforce has led many Albanians to resolve the issues of unemployment and low wages through labor migration abroad. Migrants are predominantly working-age. In recent EU data, about 59% of Albanians who left were under 35 years old (CNA, 2025). This has pushed the country into a severe crisis, with enormous impacts in all three dimensions: demographic, social, and economic. The Albanian exodus that followed the immediate years of the post-communist transition mostly involved the lower educated and unemployed individuals. But for a while now it has involved the most active and economically productive segment of Albania’s population, as many of the well-educated are also leaving.

The brain drain damages not only the institutional strength of the state but also its long-term prospects toward sustainable development. Albania invests significantly in educating its citizens through public universities and subsidized healthcare, yet host countries, especially EU members, appear to benefit from this investment.

Within this context, a question emerges as to whether Albania should take steps to restrain brain drain in the country? If yes, what kind of steps are admissible under a rule-of-law state and an open economy?

In similar situations, many other countries have attempted policies that limit the emigration of professionals in some important sectors through contracts requiring a mandatory period of domestic service after graduation or policies to recover education costs if professionals leave immediately. Albania followed similar steps in September 2024, when the Albanian Parliament passed amendments to Law No. 60/2023, “On the special treatment of students enrolled in the integrated second-cycle program “General Medicine” in public higher education institutions”. Above all, this step was taken given that the healthcare sector had been heavily affected from emigration: roughly 3,500 Albanian doctors and nurses had moved to Germany in the last decade (Hoxhaj, 2023). The amendments prescribed, among other things, that students sign

a contract committing them to work in Albania for some years following graduation, which depends on study-year category or, in the absence of doing so, reimburse the full cost of their studies (Law no. 60/2023, as amended). However, fundamental rights were alleged to have been violated by such measures, by medical students, who, after protesting and bringing the matter before the Constitutional Court, managed to reduce the period of required employment in Albania.

Legislation and policy must act sensitively and in coordination to maintain this delicate balance. Solutions lie not in restricting the right to emigrate but to create competitive conditions with foreign labor markets, improving quality of life, raising salaries, professionalizing public administration, and creating mechanisms that assist in the return and reintegration of skilled Diaspora. International cooperation is also key, through bilateral agreements on regular and safe migration, EU labor mobility policies, and mutual recognition of professional qualifications can contribute to better management of this phenomenon.

IV. The Role of the Albanian State in Migration Governance

One of the biggest challenges for policymaking in Albania relates to the management of labor migration as the country still ranks among its largest labor-exporters in the region. This basic question arises; does the Albanian state consider the migration process as something to be regulated and controlled, or does it see it as something to be supported and facilitated, along the lines of the right to free movement and employment?

According to the Albanian legislative framework, Albanian citizens have the right to leave the territory of Albania and to return. As previously analyzed in this study, this right is provided for in the Constitution as well as in other legal and sub-legal acts. However, the Albanian state has not remained behind but has taken several steps toward cooperation with emigrants, including efforts to facilitate their return to Albania through various incentives, and moreover, to achieve their reintegration into the homeland (Law no. 9668/2006, as amended, art. 22).

The Albanian government has also developed an official policy framework dedicated to the diaspora. One of the most important initiatives was the adoption of Law No. 16/2018 “On the Diaspora”. This law determines the areas of cooperation between the homeland and the diaspora, including the teaching and use of the Albanian language; preserving cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identity; promotion of economic cooperation; collaboration in science and sports, etc.

Along the way, Albania has also adopted several other important documents, such as the National Strategies. The “National Migration Strategy 2005–2010” became the very first document ever put together to try to align the interests of the Albanians both within and outside the country into the profile of a state policy (Majko et al., 2021, p. 13).

The next document to influence changes in state policy and practice toward developing the link between the Albanian Diaspora and the Republic of Albania is the “National Strategy for the Albanian Diaspora 2021-2025”. There are three main objectives for this strategy: (1) Aligning amendments of laws with the policymaking

process; (2) Coordination of state administration for the new level of diaspora policy; (3) Involvement of state structures in charge of improving the cooperation with Albanian communities abroad (Majko et al., 2021, p. 29). One of the achievements in this context was the introduction of voting for the diaspora in the 2025 parliamentary elections. Diaspora activists had fought hard for this right to be recognized as a constitutional right and thus ruled in favor of it by the Constitutional Court; it was agreed upon by the two major political parties of the country.

However, emigration has often been treated as a positive process to be encouraged in Albania on account of its ability to reduce pressure within the domestic labor market and generate huge inflows of remittances. Remittances have consistently represented a substantial percentage of GDP in Albania. As for 2024, according to data from the Bank of Albania, remittances reached a record-breaking €1.045 billion, marking the highest figure ever recorded (Albanian Times, 2025). Remittances, by serving as the most important source of income for many households have also been an important stabilizing mechanism for the Albanian economy. However, the remittances must be used effectively to stimulate economic development and not allow the country to rely solely on financial transfers without a real economic foundation.

Moreover, the Albanian government has proactively sought to reposition the diaspora as a potential development resource. Through all the development-oriented policymaking, the state has promoted the idea that skilled Albanian emigrants can contribute to the development of their homeland. These policies, which focus on encouraging “brain circulation” as opposed to the more negative connotations of “brain drain,” strive to harness their professional expertise, entrepreneurial initiatives, and broad networks for mutual benefit. Through all this, the government aspires to convert each instance of emigration from being a drain of human capital into a wellspring of innovation and competitiveness for the national economy.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

After this entire analysis, it may be stated that emigration appears, on the one hand, as a necessity and, on the other, as a challenge for the Albanian case. Emigration, which in economic terms has had a positive impact on improving the lives of emigrants and their families, through remittances, has also started ringing the bells of demographic stability, workforce erosion, and institutional resilience within the country, because of mass emigration of young and skilled people.

From a legal perspective, the legislative backdrop in Albania is tilted towards facilitation rather than restriction. Law No. 9668/2006 “On Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Employment Purposes” is the main law regulating emigration, the legal channels of labor, and protection of emigrants’ rights abroad. This approach of facilitation in conjunction with bilateral labor agreements, consular assistance, and reintegration measures seeks to cement the State’s attempt to foster links with the Albanian diaspora and promote cultural, economic, and civic involvement.

However, despite the existence of these legal frameworks, a noticeable gap exists between the legal commitment and the application of it in reality. A lot of the services and protections envisaged in the law, such as pre-departure orientation, registration

of migrants, and reintegration programs, can at best be regarded as partially realized and underfunded. Simultaneously, irregular migration continues to put strain on domestic and external settings, misuse of visa-free travel, and organized smuggling operations coupled with very high rates of asylum claims in EU countries at times turning against the credibility of Albania and further placing pressure on its international partnerships. Consequently, the country is lately lured more and more into the spheres of migration management and readmission agreements with EU Member States and the United Kingdom, in fact, representing a regulatory turn under external influence.

To respond more effectively to the challenges posed by emigration, several key measures are needed. In the first place, Albania must commit to full implementation and follow-up reform of its legal framework. Law No. 9668/2006 (as amended), while progressive in spirit, needs to be reformed in a manner that reflects modern migration trends, including circular migration, digital mobility, and enhanced labor protections abroad. Reintegration support for returnees must go beyond token assistance and paper showing support and must include support services that have access to employment, training, credit, and recognition of skills.

Moreover, the engagement of the diaspora needs to become more practical and economically integrated, aiming at mechanisms for investment, innovation, and political participation. Hence, there should be an expansion of bilateral labor mobility partnerships, especially with stronger EU economies, to channel emigration through legal pathways that mutually benefit both donors and host countries. At the institutional level, improved coordination must take place among the ministries involved with labor; foreign affairs; and, interior and education concerning migration governance. Eventually, the deepening of public trust in the nation-state institutions may be the highest holding-grip of this long-term strategy. Most Albanians still emigrate not only for economic reasons but they do so due to a lack of trust in public services, rule of law, and governance. More weight has to be given to solving these internal issues to curb emigration as a choice, rather than a necessity.

In conclusion, a relatively comprehensive legal and institutional mechanism has been developed in Albania for addressing emigration. However, the state must now look at implementing those policies, reforming and modernizing them. The state will start turning emigration from a national challenge to a managed-beneficial process only through a balanced approach that combines protection, opportunity and trust.

References

- Albanian Times. (2025, March 31). Record high remittances from Albanian emigrants in 2024. Retrieved from <https://albaniantimes.al/record-high-remittances-from-albanian-emigrants-in-2024/>
- CNA. (2025, April 1). Mass exodus, in 2022–2023 alone, nearly 100 thousand Albanians emigrated to EU countries, according to Eurostat. Retrieved from <https://www.cna.al/english/sociale/ikja-masive-vetem-ne-2022-2023-gati-100-mije-shqiptare-emigruan-ne-vende-i426467>
- Constitution of the Republic of Albania [Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë]. (1998). Amended. Retrieved from <https://qbz.gov.al/preview/635d44bd-96ee-4bc5-8d93-d928cf6f2abd>
- Euronews Albania. (2025, June 2). Pension agreement with Italy comes into effect: €7.6 million allocated for first year. <https://euronews.al/en/pension-agreement-with-italy-comes-into->

effect-e7-6-million-allocated-for-first-year/

Global Migration Policy Associates, & Taran, P. A. (2023, November 26). Ratifications of migration governance and migrants' rights conventions [PDF]. Global Migration Policy Associates. <https://www.globalmigrationpolicy.org/articles/intStandards/Ratifications%203%20migration%20governance-migrants%20rights%20Conventions%20at%2026Nov23.pdf#:~:text=The%20subsequent%20ILO%20Migrant%20Workers,of%20long%20term%20migrant%20workers>

Hoxhaj, A. (2023, June 28). Opinion: Albania's brain drain: why so many young people are leaving and how to get them to stay. UCL News. Retrieved from <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2023/jun/opinion-albanias-brain-drain-why-so-many-young-people-are-leaving-and-how-get-them-stay>

INSTAT. (2019). Arsyet e largimit nga Shqipëria. Retrieved from <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/7848/diaspora-ne-shifra-2020.pdf>

International Labour Conference. (1949, January 1). Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97). WIEGO. <https://www.wiego.org/advocacy-worker-education-resources/migration-employment-convention-revised-1949-no-97/>

International Organization for Migration. (2021). Fundamentals of migration. <https://www.iom.int/fundamentals-migration>

Law No. 60/2023, dated July 21, 2023, On the special treatment of students enrolled in the integrated second-cycle program "General Medicine" in public higher education institutions [Ligji nr. 60/2023]. (2023). Amended. Retrieved from <https://qbz.gov.al/preview/2dc64ce8-163d-44ec-bc66-ee271fe2b543/cons/20241118>

Law No. 9668, dated December 18, 2006, On emigration of Albanian citizens for employment purposes [Ligji nr. 9668]. Amended. Retrieved from <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/ligj/2006/12/18/9668/f17925d0-49e2-478a-bfb2-3d4d2bac6ab5;q=9034>

Majko, P., et al. (2021). Albanian diaspora national strategy 2021–2025. National Diaspora Agency. <https://akd.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/STRATEGJIA-KOMBETARE-E-DIASPORES-2021-2025-ENG.pdf>

Migrants & Refugees. (n.d.). Country profile: Albania – Migration profile. Retrieved from <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/albania/>

United Nations. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

United Nations. (1966). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Treaty Series, vol. 999, p. 171. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-right>

United Nations Network on Migration. (2022) New National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Albania to be fully rooted in the GCM. UN Network on Migration. <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/pledge/new-national-strategy-migration-republic-albania-be-fully-rooted-gcm>

Bridging the Gap: Financial Inclusion in the Wake of Economic Crises

PhD (C.) Dorina Olldashi

European University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

Economic crises disproportionately impact the financially excluded, deepening poverty and impeding recovery for vulnerable populations. This paper examines how economic downturns — such as the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic — disrupt access to financial services and expose systemic inequalities. It analyzes the role of financial inclusion as a tool for resilience, exploring both the challenges and opportunities presented by crises. Drawing on case studies and global data, the paper highlights the dual role of technology and policy in expanding access, while acknowledging persistent barriers such as gender inequality, digital divides, and regulatory constraints. Ultimately, the paper argues that financial inclusion must be treated as a core element of economic stability and crisis response strategy, not an afterthought.

Keywords: Financial inclusion, economic crisis, digital finance, financial resilience, fintech, COVID-19 pandemic, global financial crisis, financial access, financial exclusion, policy intervention, digital divide, economic recovery, mobile banking, underserved populations.

Introduction

Economic crises reveal and often widen the fault lines in global financial systems. Whether triggered by banking collapses, global pandemics, inflation surges, or geopolitical instability, these events tend to impact the most vulnerable segments of society the hardest. One of the most pressing challenges during and after economic turmoil is the question of access: who can get help, who can recover, and who is left behind? At the center of this issue lies financial inclusion. Defined as the availability and equality of opportunities to access financial services, financial inclusion is a critical pillar of economic resilience. Yet, in times of crisis, inclusion often takes a backseat to rapid stabilization, leaving billions without the tools to weather or recover from financial shocks. This paper explores the relationship between economic crises and financial inclusion, showing how downturns disrupt access, but also create opportunities for reform and innovation.

Literature Review

The intersection of economic crises and financial inclusion has gained growing attention in development economics and financial regulation research. Scholars like Demirgüç-Kunt et al. (2022) have emphasized the importance of financial inclusion as a resilience tool during crises, noting that access to digital payments and formal financial services can significantly mitigate the impact of income shocks. The Global Findex Database is frequently cited in the literature for documenting the steady but uneven progress in account ownership, especially among low-income groups.

Research by Sahay et al. (2015) from the International Monetary Fund presents a macroeconomic perspective, arguing that financial inclusion contributes to economic stability and inclusive growth, particularly when complemented by strong regulatory frameworks and financial literacy. However, the literature also warns of potential downsides. Allen et al. (2016) caution that rapid digitalization without consumer protection may exacerbate inequality and increase exposure to fraud and over-indebtedness.

Empirical studies such as Jack and Suri's (2014) work on Kenya's M-Pesa system show that mobile money platforms have profound impacts on poverty reduction, especially during times of crisis. Their findings underscore the potential of technology to transform access when supported by enabling environments. Meanwhile, GSMA reports and UNCDF policy papers highlight implementation gaps and regional disparities, stressing the need for infrastructure investment and inclusive design.

The literature converges on a few key themes: financial inclusion enhances crisis resilience, technology is a powerful enabler but not a silver bullet, and inclusive access requires targeted policy interventions. However, gaps remain in understanding long-term impacts of crisis-driven inclusion efforts, and the specific needs of marginalized subgroups, such as women, refugees, and rural populations, are underexplored. This paper builds on these foundations to analyze how financial inclusion fared in two of the most significant global crises of the 21st century.

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research approach, combining secondary data analysis with thematic case studies to explore the relationship between economic crises and financial inclusion. The primary sources of data include reports from international organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and GSMA, as well as peer-reviewed academic literature and policy briefs. By analyzing macroeconomic trends, financial inclusion indicators, and the evolution of digital financial services across different crises, the study identifies patterns and draws comparative insights.

Two major crises—the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic—serve as anchor case studies, selected for their global impact and the wealth of available data. These case studies provide contextual depth and help illustrate both challenges and innovations in financial inclusion during crisis periods. The paper also integrates insights from various geographical contexts to highlight regional disparities and policy responses.

Understanding Financial Inclusion

Financial inclusion goes beyond just having a bank account. It encompasses access to a wide range of financial services — including savings, credit, insurance, pensions, and digital payments — that are affordable, reliable, and tailored to people's needs. According to the World Bank's 2021 Global Findex report, about 1.4 billion adults remain unbanked, the majority of whom are women, the poor, and those in rural

areas. In many parts of the world, formal financial services remain too expensive, inaccessible, or culturally misaligned with local practices. Moreover, trust in the financial system, digital literacy, and consumer protection are equally vital aspects of inclusion.

Financial inclusion is not merely a development goal; it is a macroeconomic necessity. Inclusive financial systems support individual empowerment, economic growth, and social stability. They help families manage cash flow, absorb shocks, invest in education or businesses, and build for the future. When crises hit, these safety nets become even more crucial.

Economic Crises and the Financially Excluded

In times of economic crisis, financially excluded populations face a compounded disadvantage. They are more likely to lose jobs, lack access to emergency credit, and be cut off from government support systems that require a bank account or mobile wallet. Meanwhile, the financial sector itself often contracts during crises. Banks become more risk-averse, credit dries up, and informal economies shrink.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a textbook case of how exclusion plays out. Lockdowns made physical access to banks difficult or impossible. Government relief packages were frequently distributed digitally, leaving out those without mobile money accounts or digital IDs. Many migrant workers, informal laborers, and rural families were effectively cut off from aid.

Crises also disrupt remittances, which serve as a lifeline for millions. According to the World Bank, global remittances to low- and middle-income countries dropped sharply in 2020 before rebounding in 2021. For households relying on these funds for daily survival, even a brief disruption can be devastating.

Case Studies: Lessons from Past Crises

The Global Financial Crisis (2008)

The 2008 financial meltdown exposed deep flaws in global banking systems, particularly in the U.S. and Europe. Subprime lending practices, inadequate regulation, and over-leveraged institutions led to widespread bank failures. In the U.S., low-income and minority communities were disproportionately affected, losing homes and jobs at higher rates. Trust in financial institutions eroded, and many withdrew entirely from the formal sector.

However, the aftermath of the crisis also saw a push for greater financial inclusion. In developing countries, the crisis prompted exploration of alternative models, such as mobile banking and microfinance. Regulators began to emphasize consumer protection, financial literacy, and inclusive financial policies. Innovations like Kenya's M-Pesa gained momentum, offering mobile-based financial services to the previously unbanked.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic accelerated both the risks and the solutions for financial inclusion. In response to widespread lockdowns and economic shutdowns, many governments

implemented direct cash transfers via digital channels. India expanded its Aadhaar-linked payment systems, and Brazil used its existing digital infrastructure to deliver emergency aid to millions.

But gaps remained. In Sub-Saharan Africa, mobile money services expanded, but the gender gap in access widened in several countries. Older populations and those without smartphones or mobile data plans were often left behind. The pandemic highlighted that digital financial inclusion must be accompanied by investments in digital literacy, affordable technology, and inclusive infrastructure.

Technology as a Double-Edged Sword

Digital technology holds immense promise for bridging the financial divide. Fintech innovations like e-wallets, peer-to-peer lending, and blockchain-based remittances are reshaping access. Alternative credit scoring models that use mobile data or social signals can assess creditworthiness without traditional credit histories.

Yet technology can also entrench exclusion if poorly implemented. Algorithms may reflect existing biases. Digital-only models risk alienating users without smartphones or internet access. Cybersecurity threats, privacy concerns, and a lack of digital literacy can deter usage.

For technology to enable inclusion, it must be paired with enabling policies, inclusive design, and public awareness. Governments can play a catalytic role by fostering interoperable digital ecosystems, supporting low-cost mobile devices, and encouraging responsible innovation.

Policy Levers for Inclusion During Crises

Crises demand coordinated policy responses. Key interventions that promote inclusion include:

1. **Simplified KYC Processes:** Tiered Know Your Customer requirements allow low-risk customers to open basic accounts with minimal documentation.
2. **Digital ID Integration:** Linking financial accounts with national ID systems can facilitate fast and secure transfers.
3. **Agent Banking:** Using local retailers and mobile agents can expand reach in rural and underserved areas.
4. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborations between governments, telecoms, and fintech firms can accelerate infrastructure rollouts.
5. **Financial Education Campaigns:** Crises are teachable moments. Campaigns can increase awareness of safe, affordable financial tools.

Structural Barriers That Persist

Despite progress, many systemic barriers remain:

- **Gender Disparities:** Women often lack formal IDs, phone ownership, or autonomy to manage finances.
- **Geographic Gaps:** Remote and conflict-affected areas often lack infrastructure.
- **Regulatory Overreach:** Strict AML/CFT rules can exclude low-income users unintentionally.

- **Cultural Factors:** In some societies, mistrust of banks or reliance on informal savings groups persists.
- Unless these structural issues are addressed, financial inclusion will remain partial and fragile.

Conclusion: Inclusion as Resilience

Economic crises are inevitable, but financial exclusion need not be. Building inclusive financial systems is not only a matter of social justice; it is essential to economic resilience and recovery. The ability of individuals to access, trust, and use financial services determines whether they can survive a downturn or fall into deep poverty. Policymakers, financial institutions, and technology providers must treat financial inclusion as a core component of crisis preparedness. This means investing in infrastructure, simplifying regulations, ensuring inclusive design, and building public trust. Crises will come again. The question is: will we have built systems that include everyone, or will the same groups be left out once more?

References

- Demirgüç-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., Singer, D., Ansar, S., & Hess, J. (2022). *The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19*. World Bank.
- Sahay, R., Cihak, M., N'Diaye, P., Barajas, A., Mitra, S., Kyobe, A., ... & Reza Yousefi, S. (2015). *Financial inclusion: Can it meet multiple macroeconomic goals?* IMF Staff Discussion Note.
- Jack, W., & Suri, T. (2014). Risk sharing and transactions costs: Evidence from Kenya's mobile money revolution. *American Economic Review*, 104(1), 183-223.
- World Bank. (2023). *Financial Inclusion Overview*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/financialinclusion>
- United Nations Capital Development Fund. (2021). *Leaving No One Behind in the Digital Era*. UNCDF.
- GSMA. (2022). *State of the Industry Report on Mobile Money 2022*. GSMA Intelligence.

XRF Use in Monitoring Soil Composition: A Literature Review

Eranda Gjeçi

University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectroscopy has emerged as a pivotal tool in soil science, offering rapid, non-destructive, and multi-elemental analysis capabilities. This review synthesizes recent advancements in XRF applications for soil composition monitoring, emphasizing portable XRF (pXRF) technologies. Key factors influencing measurement accuracy, such as soil moisture, particle size, and organic matter content, are examined. The integration of XRF with predictive modeling and complementary analytical methods is also discussed. Overall, XRF demonstrates significant potential for in situ soil assessment and long-term monitoring, particularly when standardized protocols and matrix-specific calibrations are employed.

Keywords: XRF, soil monitoring, soil moisture, soil matrix, organic matter.

1. Introduction

Understanding soil composition is crucial across a wide range of fields, including agriculture, environmental monitoring, and geosciences. In fact, a global report from June 2021 on soil pollution highlighted a growing concern: increasing levels of soil contamination and widespread waste are putting the future of global food production and the health of both humans and ecosystems at serious risk. The message was clear, urgent global action is needed. As Xing et al. (2022) point out, soil contamination affects not only the food we consume but also the water we drink and the air we breathe.

In response to these challenges, non-destructive analytical techniques have become increasingly attractive due to their ability to carry out simultaneous multi-elemental analyses. These methods have found extensive use in both industrial and research settings to examine a wide variety of materials, including those of industrial, geological, archaeological, biological, and environmental origin. Among these techniques are neutron activation analysis (NAA), X-ray fluorescence (XRF), and particle-induced X-ray emission (PIXE), all of which are recognized for their precision, sensitivity, and reliability (Ene et al., 2010).

While traditional laboratory methods are known for their accuracy, they often involve time-consuming procedures and significant sample preparation. In contrast, XRF spectroscopy stands out as a faster, non-destructive alternative that can analyze multiple elements at once, usually requiring minimal preparation. The advent of portable XRF (pXRF) devices has further broadened the scope of this technology, enabling in-field soil assessments with remarkable ease and efficiency (Tavares et al., 2023).

Today, XRF spectrometry is considered one of the most suitable techniques for delivering accurate quantitative data on a broad spectrum of elements in a single, rapid scan. It's versatile enough to handle all kinds of sample types, whether solid, liquid,

slurry, or powder, and it can detect and quantify primary, secondary, and trace elements in one go.

The advantages of XRF extend well beyond direct soil analysis. The technology is also widely applicable in related areas such as farm monitoring, fertilizer application, and geological surveys. For construction sites or broader land surveys, where the threshold values are generally higher than those used in agricultural contexts, XRF proves to be even more appropriate (Xing et al., 2022). Its practical value in environmental analysis lies in a unique combination of factors: it offers high accuracy, is relatively low-cost, requires no site-specific standards, and is user-friendly thanks to modern software interfaces. Moreover, the sample preparation involved is minimal, making it even more accessible.

Another key benefit is speed: XRF can provide elemental composition data in just seconds. It covers a wide elemental range, from sodium (^{23}Na) to uranium (^{238}U) and is effective across a broad range of concentrations. Notably, the method does not require wet chemistry; no acids or chemical reagents are involved, which further simplifies the analytical process. This makes it a valuable tool in evaluating pollution levels in soil and rock samples, especially considering that hazardous elements can be mobilized by acid rain, eventually making their way into rivers, oceans, and food chains. These pollutants can be absorbed by plants and animals, ultimately posing risks to human health (Faweya et al., 2016; Ene et al., 2010).

XRF has become the most widely accepted technique among nuclear analytical methods, largely due to its reliability and versatility. It is frequently described as the best available method for both identifying and quantifying the mineral content in environmental samples.

2. Principles of XRF

XRF operates on the principle of detecting secondary (fluorescent) X-rays emitted by a material when it is excited by a primary X-ray source. The energy and intensity of these fluorescent X-rays are characteristic of the elements present in the sample, allowing for qualitative and quantitative analysis. In soil analysis, XRF can detect a wide range of elements, including major nutrients and trace metals, facilitating comprehensive soil composition profiling (López-Núñez, 2022).

The mechanism for the X-ray fluorescence of an atom takes place in the following stages. When X-ray beams illuminate the sample, it is said to be excited. The excited sample in turn emits X-rays along a spectrum of wavelength characteristic of the composition of the sample. The atoms in the sample absorb X-ray energy by ejecting electrons from the lower (L-K transition - i.e. K_{α}) energy levels. The atom becomes unstable and an outer shell (M-K transition - i.e. K_{β}) electron replaces the missing inner electron. This leads to a release of energy, due to a lower binding energy of the inner electron compared to an outer one. This emission of characteristic X-rays indicates the type of atoms present in the sample. Intensities of the X-rays from the unknown sample provide the basis for quantitative analysis of the elements (Faweya et al, 2016; Rumsby, 2013).

Theoretically, an XRF is capable of analyzing a variety of different elements. How-

ever, the elements that a particular type of XRF instrument can measure (and is calibrated for) can vary between manufacturers. Many instruments are only calibrated for analysis between 20 to 25 elements and some instruments are not designed to detect light elements (magnesium Mg to sulphur S or bromine Br). Typically, the detection limit for XRF varies between 5 to 100 ppm. However, the detection limit for an element is dependent on the element being analysed, x-ray source and detector used by the instrument (Rumsby, 2013).

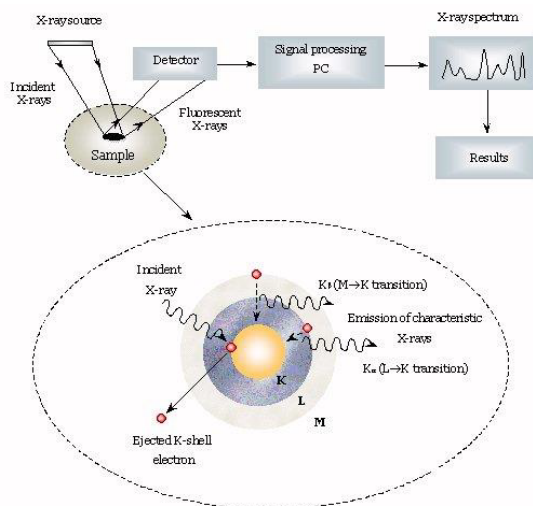


Figure 1: The principle of XRF and the typical XRF detection arrangement

(Source: Rumsby, 2013)

3. Applications of XRF in soil composition monitoring

Field-portable X-ray fluorescence (pXRF) analysis has become a valuable tool for conducting a large number of elemental measurements in soils within a short timeframe. When used directly in the field, by placing the XRF device in direct contact with the ground, this in-situ technique requires minimal sample preparation. However, it is generally considered a screening-level method. In this capacity, pXRF is highly effective for identifying potential contamination hotspots, providing preliminary insights into the extent and type of soil contamination, aiding in remediation decision-making, and facilitating the screening of hazardous waste.

To move beyond basic screening and achieve semi-quantitative results, more rigorous sample preparation is required. Procedures such as sieving, drying, and homogenizing soil samples help eliminate many common sampling errors, particularly those caused by grain size variability, moisture content, and other matrix effects. These steps significantly improve the accuracy and reliability of XRF data.

However, because the technique is susceptible to analytical interferences and inherent errors, its results should be interpreted as qualitative or semi-quantitative—especially when used for contaminated site investigations (Rumsby, 2013).

The accuracy and reliability of pXRF measurements are influenced by several environmental and methodological factors. Recent studies have explored these limitations in depth, particularly in relation to soil moisture, sample preparation, matrix effects, and the prediction of plant-available nutrients.

3.1 Nutrient Analysis

Soil fertility refers to the soil's capacity to supply plants with essential nutrients in both adequate amounts and balanced proportions to support optimal growth and yield. Fertile soils typically contain sufficient levels of primary macronutrients, such as nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K), as well as important secondary and micronutrients like calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), sulfur (S), iron (Fe), and zinc (Zn) (Lal, 2015). Yet, fertility is not determined by nutrient content alone. Physical properties, including soil texture, structure, porosity, and water retention along with biological factors like microbial activity and organic matter content, play equally crucial roles (Bünemann et al., 2018). These elements interact in complex ways, ultimately shaping the soil environment that either supports or limits plant productivity. A high level of fertility contributes to healthy root development, efficient nutrient uptake, and greater resilience to environmental stress, which are key factors in achieving sustainable crop yields. Conversely, soils with poor fertility, whether due to nutrient imbalances, degradation, or depletion, often result in diminished productivity and heightened vulnerability to erosion, pests, and disease. Human activities such as over-cultivation, excessive use of chemical fertilizers, and deforestation frequently lead to a decline in fertility. On the other hand, sustainable practices, like using organic amendments, rotating crops, and applying conservation tillage can restore and even enhance fertility over time (FAO, 2020). For these reasons, soil fertility management is central to food security, especially in regions grappling with land degradation and the effects of climate change.

To meet the growing demand for efficient soil monitoring, modern assessments increasingly employ rapid sensor technologies. Among these, X-ray fluorescence (XRF) stands out as a cost-effective, non-destructive method for evaluating nutrient levels and soil quality (Towett et al., 2016). Its role in precision agriculture is particularly valuable, allowing farmers to detect nutrient deficiencies and tailor fertilization strategies with greater accuracy. As sustainable land use and agricultural intensification gain importance, the ability to evaluate soil fertility quickly and accurately becomes a critical aspect of both productivity and environmental stewardship (Silva et al., 2021). XRF has been widely applied to quantify essential soil nutrients like calcium (Ca), potassium (K), and iron (Fe). In a study by Tavares et al. (2023), different predictive modeling approaches including random forest and partial least squares regression were evaluated to enhance the precision of Ca and K measurements using XRF data. The study found that integrating auxiliary variables such as soil texture and visible-near infrared (vis-NIR) spectra significantly improved prediction accuracy, achieving R^2 values of 0.84 or higher. This underscores the strong potential of multi-sensor data fusion in soil analysis.

In a broader regional study, Towett et al. (2016) used portable XRF and mid-infrared (MIR) spectroscopy to assess soil fertility indicators across sub-Saharan Africa. Their

results confirmed that pXRF could accurately predict levels of extractable phosphorus (P), iron (Fe), and manganese (Mn), reinforcing the tool's value in large-scale soil monitoring programs.

Sharma et al. (2021) also demonstrated the effectiveness of pXRF in agricultural fields across India, where the technology was used to monitor deficiencies in zinc (Zn) and copper (Cu). These micronutrient deficits often limit crop productivity in intensively farmed areas, and the study showed that pXRF is capable of identifying such challenges efficiently.

Further applications of XRF support sustainable land management in resource-limited settings. For instance, Rattanachayoto et al. (2022) explored the use of low-cost, handheld XRF devices to estimate chemical properties of tropical soils. Their research confirmed that even in field conditions without access to laboratory infrastructure, XRF could deliver sufficiently accurate data for decision-making.

XRF also excels in high-resolution spatial mapping of soil nutrients. Wijewardane et al. (2016) applied XRF sensors in precision agriculture to map calcium (Ca), potassium (K), and magnesium (Mg) across extensive farm areas. Their work demonstrated how XRF-enabled mapping improved variable-rate fertilization practices, which in turn reduced both costs and environmental impacts.

The strength of XRF lies in its ability to deliver rapid and reliable nutrient data. When combined with complementary technologies such as remote sensing, vis-NIR spectroscopy, and geostatistical modeling, it forms the backbone of modern soil diagnostics (Silva et al., 2021). The growing availability of open-source machine learning tools is further enhancing the potential for widespread, low-cost deployment of XRF in fertility assessment.

Integrating pXRF with other data sources is proving valuable for more comprehensive analysis. Dasgupta et al. (2024) successfully combined pXRF measurements with USB-microscope imagery and auxiliary soil parameters to predict fertility indicators such as available boron (B) and organic carbon (OC). This multi-sensor approach improved prediction accuracy, highlighting the promise of integrated tools in advancing soil science.

In a different context, Antonangelo and Zhang (2024) explored the predictive potential of pXRF for estimating plant-available nutrients, particularly phosphorus and potassium, in soils amended with biochar. Their study revealed that pXRF could successfully predict phosphorus availability using standard regression models, showing strong correlation with conventional extraction methods such as Mehlich-3 and Olsen. However, potassium predictions were less reliable when plants were present, due to nutrient uptake affecting residual concentrations. Other elements such as calcium, sulfur, magnesium, and zinc showed weak or no consistent correlations with plant-available forms, suggesting that pXRF's utility in this domain may be element-specific and context-dependent.

In their study, Rinaldi et al. (2020) evaluated a portable X-ray fluorescence (pXRF) method to estimate soil fertility attributes: clay content, cation exchange capacity (CEC), exchangeable potassium (ex-K), and exchangeable calcium (ex-Ca) with a focus on minimizing matrix effects. They proposed a straightforward correction method combining Compton normalization (CN) with multivariate regression mod-

els (Multiple Linear Regression and Partial Least Squares Regression). Soil samples from Brazilian Lixisol and Ferralsol fields were analyzed using a Bruker Tracer III-SD pXRF. Raw and Compton-normalized emission line intensities were extracted, and models were trained and validated using a 70:30 dataset split. Results showed that CN significantly improved predictions, particularly for ex-K and ex-Ca, boosting R^2 values above 0.94. Linear models suffice when spectral peaks are well resolved. The authors concluded that combining CN with regression modeling offers a transparent, fast, and effective alternative to proprietary calibration methods (Rinaldi et al., 2020). Complementing this, a study by Römpf et al. (2013) explored the use of Total X-ray Fluorescence spectroscopy (TXRF) as a greener and equally reliable method for quantifying total element concentrations in soil. TXRF requires minimal sample preparation: dried and homogenized soils are suspended with an internal standard (e.g., Ga or Y), deposited on quartz carriers, and dried before analysis. This technique demonstrated high precision, with detection limits reaching the ppm to ppb range, and strong agreement with certified reference materials and ICP-OES results (typically $R^2 > 0.95$). Despite some inaccuracy in measuring light elements, TXRF provided simultaneous quantification of macro and trace nutrients, including Fe, Ca, Mg, Zn, Pb, and Cu, highlighting its high-throughput, cost-effective, and environmentally friendly nature. The authors emphasized TXRF's strong potential for routine agricultural and environmental monitoring, while noting the need for further calibration refinements, especially for lighter elements (Römpf et al., 2013).

A third study by Weindorf et al. (2014) examined how organic matter (OM) and moisture influence pXRF measurements, particularly in organic-rich soils and amendments. While pXRF devices performed well for medium-to-heavy elements like Fe, Mn, Ca, and Zn, their accuracy decreased for light and trace elements (e.g., Cd, Hg, Cr). OM and moisture both affected X-ray attenuation and sample density, contributing to poor elemental estimations. The authors recommended using chemometric corrections, including multivariate calibration and standardized protocols (e.g., drying, particle size control, scan time), to minimize these effects. They also proposed integrating pXRF with near- and mid-infrared spectroscopy, which are more responsive to organic signals, to further enhance measurement reliability. Ultimately, pXRF was seen as a powerful tool for field-ready analysis, provided its limitations in organic and moist matrices are addressed (Weindorf et al., 2014).

3.2 Heavy Metal Detection

X-ray fluorescence (XRF) has become a widely used technique for detecting heavy metals in soils, particularly at contaminated sites where rapid, non-invasive assessments are essential. Its utility is supported by official guidance; for example, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2007) established protocols for the use of portable XRF (pXRF) devices to screen soils for toxic elements such as lead (Pb), arsenic (As), and cadmium (Cd), enabling quick, on-site evaluations without the need for laboratory infrastructure.

XRF has been extensively employed in environmental pollution studies, such as those conducted near industrial facilities. One notable example is the use of XRF to evaluate soil contamination around the Iron and Steel Integrated Works (ISIW) in Galați,

Romania. Researchers assessed the presence of several heavy metals, including arsenic (As), chromium (Cr), copper (Cu), nickel (Ni), lead (Pb), vanadium (V), and zinc (Zn) and confirmed the method's effectiveness for environmental monitoring in heavily industrialized regions (Ene et al., 2010).

An early and influential study by Kalnicky and Singhvi (2001) highlighted the performance of pXRF instruments for analyzing heavy metals in contaminated soils. Their research demonstrated that pXRF could effectively quantify elements such as Pb, Zn, Cu, Cd, and As, particularly in areas affected by industrial activity or improper waste management.

Beyond industrial sites, XRF is also applied in agricultural and geochemical risk assessments. For instance, Weindorf et al. (2013) used pXRF to measure heavy metal concentrations, specifically Pb, Cr, and Ni in mining-impacted soils. Their results emphasized that XRF can serve as a practical and accessible tool to assess risks to both crop safety and soil health, especially in regions with limited access to traditional analytical laboratories.

In urban environments, XRF has been used to monitor pollution levels across cities in developing regions. Towett et al. (2013) applied XRF to assess the total concentrations of heavy metals like Pb, Zn, and Cu in soils from several sub-Saharan African cities. Their findings demonstrated the potential of XRF for large-scale soil contamination mapping, particularly in areas with constrained infrastructure and environmental monitoring capacity.

Taken together, these studies underscore the versatility and reliability of XRF spectroscopy in detecting heavy metals in soils, whether for environmental risk assessments, sustainable land management, or urban pollution monitoring. Its non-destructive nature, rapid analysis time, and field portability continue to make it an indispensable tool for modern soil diagnostics.

4. Factors Influencing XRF Accuracy in Soil Analysis

4.1 Matrix Effect in XRF Soil Analysis

In X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectroscopy, one of the most influential and well-documented challenges is the matrix effect, a phenomenon where the chemical composition and physical characteristics of a sample interfere with accurate elemental analysis. This is particularly significant in soil analysis, where the matrix is inherently complex and heterogeneous, comprising diverse mixtures of minerals, organic matter, moisture, and particles of varying sizes (Towett et al., 2016). These variables impact both the excitation of atoms by the primary X-ray source and the subsequent emission and detection of fluorescent X-rays, leading to potential systematic errors in measurement.

Matrix effects can be broadly categorized into two main types: absorption effects and enhancement effects. Absorption occurs when the fluorescent X-rays emitted by an element are partially absorbed by other components in the sample before they can reach the detector. This results in an underestimation of that element's actual concentration, especially for lighter elements such as magnesium (Mg), aluminum (Al), and phosphorus (P), which emit lower-energy X-rays (Sharma et al., 2021). Conversely, enhancement effects arise when the presence of certain heavy elements, like iron (Fe)

or titanium (Ti), stimulates the secondary excitation of other elements, artificially inflating their detected concentrations.

A common field-related example involves soil moisture. When analyzing wet soils, the XRF signal often appears weaker than in dry samples because water absorbs low-energy X-rays. Consequently, elements such as potassium (K) or phosphorus (P) may seem less abundant simply due to moisture interference, not because of their actual concentration (Silva et al., 2021). Soil texture can also play a role: finer soils like clay differ significantly in density and particle packing compared to sandy soils, which alters scattering and absorption paths and affects the XRF readings (de Winter & Vass, 2017).

To address matrix effects, researchers and practitioners use a range of correction strategies. One of the most common is Compton normalization, which adjusts for matrix variations by comparing the ratio of Compton scatter (inelastic) to Rayleigh scatter (elastic). This approach allows for consistent correction without the need for recalibration across different soil types (de Winter & Vass, 2017). Additionally, machine learning models, such as partial least squares regression (PLSR), random forest, and support vector machines (SVM) are increasingly employed to correct for matrix effects by incorporating additional data such as soil texture, pH, and vis-NIR spectra (Tavares et al., 2023).

Another effective method involves developing matrix-matched calibration models. These are built using soil standards that closely resemble the target samples in terms of mineralogy and texture. For broader applications, such as national soil surveys, researchers have created localized calibration libraries that include a wide variety of soil types to improve prediction robustness (Towett et al., 2016).

Despite the challenges posed by matrix effects, XRF remains a powerful technique in soil science. With appropriate calibration and correction measures, XRF can yield high-quality data suitable for applications ranging from fertility assessment to pollution monitoring and precision agriculture. The integration of hybrid sensor systems, such as combining XRF with vis-NIR spectroscopy and data-driven correction techniques continues to push the boundaries of in-field soil diagnostics.

Importantly, matrix effects also include concentration-dependent shielding at extremely high levels of a specific element. In such cases, atoms of the same element can absorb or block the fluorescent X-rays emitted by neighboring atoms of the same type. This can cause the XRF device to underestimate the element's actual concentration. While such effects may not be significant for general screening purposes, they become critical in human health risk assessments, where underestimation could lead to overlooked hazards (Rumsby, 2013).

The complexity of matrix effects (variations in soil composition and texture) presents another major challenge. A study published in the *Journal of Chemical Education* (2024) focused on how matrix effects specifically influence iron measurements in soil samples. The authors highlighted that even when total iron content is constant, differences in density, mineralogy, or texture can significantly alter XRF signal response. They advocated for the use of matrix-matched standards or more rigorous calibration methods to address these inconsistencies, especially in heterogeneous or organic-rich soils.

4.2 Soil Moisture Content, Particle Size, and Soil Texture

Soil moisture is one of the most influential factors affecting the accuracy of XRF measurements. Moisture attenuates the fluorescent X-rays emitted from the sample, which leads to an underestimation of the actual elemental concentrations. This is especially problematic when measuring light elements whose low-energy X-rays are more easily absorbed by water molecules. To address this issue, researchers recommend drying soil samples before analysis or applying moisture correction factors to compensate for this attenuation effect (Ravansari & Lemke, 2018).

One of the most critical factors influencing pXRF performance is soil moisture. Sahraoui and Hachicha (2017) conducted an in-depth investigation into how different moisture levels, ranging from air-dry to fully saturated, affect the accuracy of trace element measurements such as lead, cadmium, and iron. Their findings showed a clear decline in signal intensity with increasing water content, highlighting the need for moisture correction models to achieve reliable results. Similarly, Padilla, Hormes, and Selim (2019) demonstrated that while Compton normalization can partially mitigate moisture effects, higher moisture contents still significantly underestimate trace element concentrations. Their work also underscored the importance of sample thickness, showing that thicker samples are needed to stabilize readings, particularly for elements with lower-energy fluorescence emissions.

Another important parameter is particle size distribution, which directly influences the sample's homogeneity and the surface area exposed to the X-ray beam. Larger, coarse particles can cause greater scattering and sample heterogeneity, which in turn reduces measurement precision and reliability. Standard procedures such as sieving and homogenizing the soil to a uniform, fine particle size, typically less than 2 mm, have been shown to improve both the reproducibility and accuracy of XRF readings (Rumsby, 2013).

Soil texture and organic matter content also play critical roles in XRF performance. Soils with high organic matter levels tend to absorb more X-rays, particularly those emitted at lower energies, making it more challenging to quantify lighter elements accurately. Additionally, the combination of moisture content, organic matter, and soil texture alters the bulk density of the sample and affects how X-rays are scattered and absorbed. These combined effects highlight the importance of following standardized sample preparation protocols or, in the case of in-situ measurements, applying robust correction methods to ensure reliable data (Silva et al., 2021).

Beyond moisture and thickness, the way in which soil samples are prepared plays a substantial role in the accuracy of pXRF analysis. Li et al. (2022) systematically examined the effects of particle size, water content, and excitation time on pXRF measurements. Their results emphasized that finely ground soils and longer scan durations enhance spectral clarity and reduce variability caused by sample heterogeneity. Interestingly, they observed that minor moisture (up to a certain threshold) had limited impact, particularly in coarser samples, suggesting that the interaction between particle size and moisture deserves careful consideration in field protocols.

5. Complementary Techniques and Future Directions

To enhance the accuracy and versatility of XRF in soil analysis, researchers are increasingly turning to complementary spectroscopic techniques. The integration of

XRF with visible–near infrared (vis–NIR) and mid-infrared (MIR) spectroscopy allows for a more comprehensive understanding of soil chemical and physical properties. These multisensor approaches benefit from each method’s unique sensitivity to specific soil constituents, offering a more holistic and reliable analysis (Tavares et al., 2023; Towett et al., 2016).

At the same time, the incorporation of machine learning algorithms has opened new frontiers in soil diagnostics. Methods such as random forest, support vector machines (SVM), and partial least squares regression (PLSR) are being used to build robust predictive models from XRF datasets. These models help compensate for matrix effects and environmental variability, substantially improving the accuracy of nutrient and heavy metal quantification (Dasgupta et al., 2024).

Technological advancements in portable XRF devices are also expanding the possibilities for soil monitoring. Newer models are more compact, user-friendly, and capable of delivering results in real time, making them ideal for large-scale assessments in both agricultural and environmental contexts. Current research and development efforts are focused on creating standardized operating protocols, establishing region-specific calibration libraries, and designing open-source data analysis pipelines. These initiatives aim to make XRF technology more accessible and widely applicable in areas such as precision agriculture, contamination monitoring, and natural resource management (Silva et al., 2021; Tavares et al., 2023).

6. Conclusion

X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectroscopy, especially in its portable form, has truly transformed how we monitor soil composition. It’s fast, affordable, and capable of detecting many elements all at once, which makes it incredibly useful both out in the field and back in the lab. What used to take days or weeks can now be done in minutes, giving researchers, farmers, and environmental managers timely insights.

Of course, like any method, XRF comes with some challenges. Things like the soil’s moisture, particle size, and the complex mix of materials can sometimes throw off the measurements. But the good news is that scientists have developed clever ways to work around these issues, using correction techniques, advanced calibration, and even machine learning to clean up the data. Plus, when XRF is combined with other tools like visible and near-infrared spectroscopy, it provides an even fuller picture of soil health.

Because of its speed and versatility, XRF is helping in lots of important areas. It supports farmers in managing soil fertility more precisely, helps identify harmful heavy metals that could threaten crops or people, and plays a key role in environmental cleanup efforts. Having near-instant results means decisions can be made quickly, saving time and money — which is crucial as we face big challenges like pollution, soil degradation, and feeding a growing population.

Looking ahead, portable XRF technology keeps getting better. When paired with smart data analysis and standardized methods, it has the potential to be used on a huge scale, from small farms to whole regions, making soil monitoring more accessible everywhere. This means everyone involved, from scientists to policymakers to farmers, can make better, more informed choices that protect our land and boost productivity.

In short, XRF is shaping up to be an essential tool in caring for our soils sustainably, helping us protect the environment, improve food production, and safeguard human health for years to come.

References

- Antonangelo, J., & Zhang, H. (2024). *Assessment of portable X-ray fluorescence (pXRF) for plant-available nutrient prediction in biochar-amended soils*. *Scientific Reports*, 14, Article 13498. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-71381-8>
- Bray, S. S., Mazzei, L., Silva, S. H. G., & Nanni, M. R. (2021). Combination of Compton normalization and multivariate regression for correcting matrix effects in soil analysis by XRF. [Unavailable].
- Bünemann, E. K., Bongiorno, G., Bai, Z., Creamer, R. E., De Deyn, G., de Goede, R., ..& Brussaard, L. (2018). Soil quality – A critical review. *Soil Biology and Biochemistry*, 120, 105–125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soilbio.2018.01.030>
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0038071718300294>
- Dasgupta, A., Kumar, K., & Tripathi, A. (2024). Integration of pXRF data with USB-microscope imagery and soil variables for fertility prediction. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2404.12415?#:~:text=This%20study%20investigated%20the%20use,climatic%20zones%20under%20field%20conditions>.
- deWinter, D. A. M., & Vass, M. (2017). Mitigation of matrix effects in portable XRF analysis of soil using Compton normalization. *Geoderma*, 307, 261–270. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoderma.2017.08.012>
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016706117302370>
- Ene, A., Bosneaga, A., & Georgescu, L. (2010). Determination of heavy metals in soils using XRF and AAS. *Romanian Journal of Physics*, 55(7-8), 815–820. https://www.nipne.ro/rjp/2010_55_7-8/0557018.pdf
- Faweya, E. B., Adewuyi, G. O., & Olowu, R. A. (2016). Application of XRF in trace metal pollution studies. *International Journal of Applied Science and Technology*, 6(2), 1–9. [Journal website: <https://www.ijast.org/>]
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). (2020). Soil Fertility - Sustainable Management. <https://www.fao.org/soils-portal/soil-management/soil-fertility/en/>
- Journal of Chemical Education. (2024). *Exploring matrix effects on the determination of iron in soil using X-ray fluorescence*. *Journal of Chemical Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.3c01032>
- Kalnicky, D. J., & Singhvi, R. (2001). Field portable XRF analysis of environmental samples. *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, 83(1-2), 93–122. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-3894\(00\)00330-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-3894(00)00330-7)
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0304389400003307>
- Lal, R. (2015). Restoring soil quality to mitigate soil degradation. *Sustainability*, 7(5), 5875–5895. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su7055875>
- <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/7/5/5875>
- Li, Y., Zhang, H., Wang, L., Liu, C., & Zhou, X. (2022). Assessment of the effect of soil sample preparation, water content and excitation time on proximal X-ray fluorescence sensing. *Sensors*, 22(12), 4572. <https://doi.org/10.3390/s22124572>
- Corescence Analysis of Organic Amendments: A Review. *Appl. Sci.*, 12, 6944. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app12146944>
- Padilla, J. T., Hormes, J., & Selim, H. M. (2019). Use of portable XRF: Effect of thickness and antecedent moisture of soils on measured concentration of trace elements. *Geoderma*, 337, 853–862. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoderma.2018.10.034>
- Rattanachayoto, P., Nuntasu, N., & Inoue, Y. (2022). Using handheld XRF for tropical soil chemical properties. *Geoderma Regional*, 30, e00501. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geodrs.2022.e00501>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352009422000447>

Ravansari, R., & Lemke, L. D. (2018). Portable XRF analysis and moisture effects on soils. *Applied Geochemistry*, 92, 85–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeochem.2018.04.015>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0883292718301041>

Rinaldi, M., Borin, M., Gallucci, F., & Rampazzo, N. (2020). Assessing soil key fertility attributes using a portable X-ray fluorescence: A simple method to overcome matrix effect. *Agronomy*, 10(6), 787. <https://doi.org/10.3390/agronomy10060787>

Römpp, A., Krüger, B., Spanka, M., & Jakubowski, N. (2013). Quantification of total element concentrations in soils using total X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (TXRF). *Science of the Total Environment*, 463–464, 1043–1048. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2013.06.058>

Rumsby, P. (2013). XRF soil testing guidance for contaminated land assessment. UK Environment Agency.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/290890/scho0813bsdx-e-e.pdf

Sahraoui, H., & Hachicha, M. (2017). Effect of soil moisture on trace elements concentrations using portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometer. *Journal of Fundamental and Applied Sciences*, 9(2), 1049–1061. <http://www.jfas.info/index.php/JFAS/article/view/3145>

Sharma, P., Saini, G. P., & Meena, R. K. (2021). Portable XRF: A quick tool for micronutrient analysis in Indian soils. *Current Science*, 121(3), 373–378.

<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/121/03/0373.pdf>

Silva, S. H. G., Nanni, M. R., & Demattê, J. A. M. (2021). A review of portable XRF applications in soil fertility. *Geoderma*, 402, 115179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoderma.2021.115179>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016706121004062>

Tavares, T. R., Nanni, M. R., Silva, S. H. G., & Demattê, J. A. M. (2023). Enhancing soil fertility estimation using pXRF and vis-NIR sensors. *Soil & Tillage Research*, 230, 105670. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.still.2023.105670>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167198723000319>

Towett, E. K., Shepherd, K. D., & Sila, A. M. (2013). Portable XRF for soil elemental quantification in sub-Saharan Africa. *Geoderma*, 206, 287–295. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoderma.2013.05.018>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016706113001394>

Towett, E. K., Shepherd, K. D., & Sila, A. M. (2016). Soil fertility monitoring using portable XRF and MIR spectroscopy. *Scientific Reports*, 6, 28270. <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep28270>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/srep28270>

United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (2007). Method 6200: Field Portable X-ray Fluorescence Spectrometry. <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-12/documents/6200.pdf>

Weindorf, D. C., Bakr, N., Zhu, Y., McWhirt, A., Michaelson, G., & Ping, C. L. (2014). Portable X-ray fluorescence analysis of mineral and organic soils and the influence of organic matter. *Geoderma*, 232–234, 426–430. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoderma.2014.06.014>

Weindorf, D. C., Paulette, L., & Man, T. (2013). Rapid assessment of heavy metals in mining-impacted Romanian soils using portable XRF. *Geoderma*, 206, 112–120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoderma.2013.04.009>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016706113001081>

Wijewardane, N. K., Ge, Y., Wills, S. A., & Loecke, T. D. (2016). Prediction of soil properties using data fusion of Vis-NIR and XRF. *Geoderma*, 286, 252–260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoderma.2016.11.021>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016706116303057>

Xing H., Xialong Y., Jiahui H., Xiadong D., Menting W., Jianteng S., Guining L., Xueqin T. (2022). Characteristics and Health Risks of Phthalate Ester Contamination in Soil and Plants in Coastal Areas of South China. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 19(15), 9516. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19159516>

Logocracy in Communist Albania: Orwellian Discourse in Enver Hoxha' Totalitarian State 1944-1985

Granit Zela

University of New York Tirana, Albania

Abstract

This paper builds on the concept that the political discourse of Orwellisms, from the totalitarian world of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, finds its embodiment in Enver Hoxha's dictatorship during the period 1944 -1985. The qualitative analysis relies on the empirical data obtained from the analysis of the language used in Hoxha's volumes and other scripts that were inscribed forcefully by the totalitarian language in the public conscious and strictly controlled public discourse. It is argued that that Hoxha's regime was a Logocracy, as Arlen Blyum (2003) termed the Soviet state, - while in the specific case of Hoxha's Cult State - a political system ruled by the word, imposing forcefully state political jargon acquisition, censorship, self-censorship, rectification, punishment, hence, total control of public speech and the ideological decorum.

Keywords: Communist Albania, Logocracy, Public Discourse, Ideological Decorum.

Introduction

Orwell's approach to political implications of language provides scholars with instruments of analysis that can be applied also in Balkan communist dictatorships where such heritage continues to have a tremendous impact in the present. This idea elaborated in many of his notable essays was developed even further in *Nineteen Eighty-four*, where Newspeak is used as a sinister way to suppress individual freedom through language. These totalitarian states were permeated with "Orwellisms", words or phrases from Orwell's writing that have passed into the language and can even be found in dictionaries. "Orwellian" has become an adjective used to warn of anything that reminds one of repression.

From *Animal Farm*, the slogan "all animals are equal but some are more equal than others" is regularly used as an ironic comment on unfair systems that pose as democratic ones, and from the totalitarian world of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, a range of words has been drawn to describe abuses of government and power. Politicians and the media are often accused of "Newspeak" and "doublethink." Those who censor themselves or others are called "Thought Police." The phrase "Big Brother" is also popular with people who wish to protest government interference in private life, such as the use of cameras to survey public areas like parks (Agathocleous, 2000, p 86).

Communist Albania was the country where such Orwellisms flourished since "off all formerly Communist states, Albania and Romania had the most oppressive regimes. No other countries in Eastern Europe experienced such an uninterrupted exercise of Stalinist repression, so closely fore-shadowing the tyrannical and stifling society imagined by George Orwell in his novel 1984 (Tarifa 2020, p. 37).

Enver Hoxha, who headed his country's communist movement for nearly half a century, had the most profound long-term impact, moving Albania from openness to the rest of the socialist world, which brought about rapid economic and social change, evolving into an isolated cage based on a failed doctrine of self-reliance and simple fear. Hoxha created and controlled one of the most repressive and totalitarian of the Eastern European communist regimes, which has been described as a collage of fantasies, or the sort of place that would make surrealists weep for joy. But if it was a surrealist fantasy, it was a brutal one that Hoxha achieved through his absolute control of the party and the state. He ruthlessly decimated the ranks of his colleagues – no communist regime experienced such repeated purges and decimations. An inevitable by-product of this system was widespread insecurity, verging on paranoia, that mirrored Hoxha's own. The result was the notion of a state continually under siege. Albanians were forced to endure a nightmare of political oppression – a world of secret police, informers, midnight arrests, executions, prisons, labour camps and internal exile (Fischer and Schmitt, 2022, 174).

After Hoxha's death, the well-known broadcast journalist, reporter and correspondent Morley Safer, dedicated his radio programme "60 minutes" to Enver Hoxha's Communist Albania and compared Albania to the fictitious Ruritania and the belated dictator to Orwell's Big Brother. Safer took a look at Albania by admitting that he "had to do it with bits and pieces of film that are available on the country, because you not only can't get to Albania from here, almost no one can get to Albania from nowhere. Party leader Hoxha sealed the country tight years ago". (p.1)

He highlighted the fact that the five-year Anglo-American unsuccessful attempts to destabilise this communist country with operations of trained Albanian fighters from diaspora failed only served to further Hoxha's control over Albania. That control took the form of the most repressive government in the world, a kind of Marxist Ruritania, mentioning Anthony Hope's as an image of literature as an analogy to a real place.

In the same line of finding analogy with fictitious countries and literary nightmarish creations, Safer states that Enver Hoxha exceeded the imagination of George Orwell: Hoxha outlawed all religions. The churches and mosques were closed. Sacrilege became the national policy. The churches became museums of atheism, or put to uses that would remind people that worship of anything but the state was criminal. The penalty for performing baptism can be death. The penalty for operating a business can be death. There is no private property, no private cars. Hoxha was a bigger brother than even George Orwell could contemplate. He was a living saint whose likeness was everywhere, to whom praise, enforced praise, was almost continuous. The pantheon is shared only by the dead saint Stalin [...] Hoxha was 76 when he died, having completed the 40th volume of his autobiography. (p. 5).

"What the Albanian people were left with" argues Fevziu (2016), "was best described as a nightmarish caricature of Stalin's Soviet Union, a carbon copy of Stalinist oppression crammed within the borders of a small country of 3 million people. To add insult to injury, the hungry and humiliated Albanians were forced to endure slogans like: 'We'd rather feed on grass than betray the principles of Marxism-Leninism!' In fact, there were no principles to talk about any more. Empty slogans of this sort were simply an expression of the age-old instinct of political survival, a means of holding

on to power". (p.356).

"Let everyone understand clearly, the walls of our fortress are of unshakeable granite rock," he wrote in one of the many volumes of memoirs, some containing reminiscences of Stalin, that he penned over the years. More than 40 volumes of speeches and reminiscences by Mr. Hoxha were published (Saxon 1985, p. 10).

Despite this emphasis on history and tradition, the central focal point for education and culture was ideology with an emphasis on the liberation struggle of the Albanians against the Axis invaders during the Second World War. Textbooks, traditional histories, literature for children, general literature, drama and film – all were limited to variations on the same theme. Even Albanian coins depicted the successful armed struggle against fascism. So, while there was a significant increase in cultural activity, it was ideologically directed, leaving no room for spontaneity or creativity. Rigid conformism turned Albania into a dull and barren cultural desert (Fischer and Schmitt, 2022, p.303)

As a result of the strict implementation of the Marxist–Leninist ideology, political discourse always occupied a central place in the literature of socialist Albania. Among others, memoirs were a prominent genre of political discourse with a powerful persuasive role. They were basically written by Hoxha and a few other political figures. Though memoirs are considered to be personal, in a totalitarian system like the Albanian society, their goal goes far beyond the mere narration of real-life stories. They persuade readers through the subtle use of intimation and solidarity strategies. Although memoirs are retrospective, the selection of rich language has persuasive effects, since it aims at convincing people about the righteousness of the decisions made. The extensive use of figures of speech, such as simile, metaphors, name-callings, and others had a great impact on the recipients (Rista Dema, 2008, p.20).

Hoxha's Heritage of 40 Volumes as the Logocracy's Foundations

While some Balkan dictators seemed to soften with age, Hoxha became more extreme. Some of this was driven from outside Albania. It is perhaps ironic that as Albania became increasingly isolated, Hoxha's internal policies were increasingly influenced by interaction with foreign states. The move toward China further radicalized Hoxha and ushered in a Chinese-style campaign designed to revolutionize all aspects of life in Albania between 1965 through much of 1969. The so-called ideological and cultural revolution was intended – unlike the Chinese equivalent – to enhance central control and cater to nationalist sentiments by establishing continuity between Hoxha's regime and the heroes of Albanian history, who were now celebrated as precursors to Hoxha, the great teacher. The party organized a cult of personality around the person of Hoxha. He was ever present, his picture appeared on major buildings, his name graced the sides of mountains. Official photos showed his avuncular visage, always smiling, often surrounded by children and flowers. All school textbooks included the obligatory Hoxha quote on the subject at hand (Fischer and Schmitt, 2022, p.309). In this Orwellian state, Vehbiu, (2019), explores in "The broken language, the language that breaks: Notes on the freedom and shackles of public speech in totalitarian Albania" the debasement of the public discourse, during Hoxha's dictatorship, the language

coercion, the speech prison, the subversive speech, the rapport of the ordinary citizen with the public discourse: Totalitarian regimes like that of Enver Hoxha in Albania have been called logocracy: political systems ruled by the word, but also the form of social organization where the individual is represented by the words he speaks and where citizenship depends on the acquisition of the necessary political jargon. [...] For logocracy to function, self-censorship is needed, or a kind of control over speech and expression in general, that every responsible individual exercise over himself, without the need for an external controlling authority to intervene to correct, explain, or punish. (p.60).

In this line of argument, such logocracy was based on Hoxha's flood of memoirs and books, which provided the script that everyone had to acquire and forcefully reproduce. A view of how books and memoirs of Enver Hoxha had invaded the private and public life of the Albanian citizens is provided by a review of his last publication "Laying the foundations of the New Albania" published at the "8 Nëntori" Publishing House, Tirana, 1984, by the Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies at the Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania. In this review of the main literary magazine of that time "Nëntori" (November), January 1985 one reads:

Comrade Enver Hoxha's new book "Laying the foundations of the new Albania" was received with great interest and aroused deep emotions throughout the country. In Tirana, at around 8 o'clock on the day of its publication, not a single copy was to be found in the bookshop shelves, although the bookshops had been supplied with the entire quantity belonging to the capital from the total print run of 50,000 copies. Also, within a few hours of its publication, the book was sold out throughout the country and there is a persistent and growing demand for it everywhere. [...] The immediate absorption of the book best highlights the high values of our people with a developed political and cultural sense. [...] And, if the immediate absorption of the book is an indicator of the strength of our people's thirst, desire and passion for books in general, for history in particular, and even more so for that history that people are accustomed to reading written by such a masterful pen as that of Comrade Enver Hoxha, the extremely warm reception given to the work, [...] demonstrate the great and comprehensive values and lessons of this monumental work (Nëntori 1985, p.5-6).

In the review, it is highlighted that in every village were sent 4/5 copies but that was not enough, everybody demanded to have the monumental book of about 580 pages, in every house, the workers of the Party, members of the mass's organizations, historians, artisans, craftsmen, writers, artists as the ones who support the Party in their education of the masses, sons and daughters of the working people (Nëntori 1985, p.7-8).

After Hoxha's death, Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies at the Central Committee of the Albanian People's Party published "The Index to the Works of Comrade Enver Hoxha Volumes 1-40" (1985) by printing it in 0,000 copies. The Index the Works aimed to assist in the study of the rich heritage of Marxist-Leninist theoretical thought and the practical contribution of Comrade Enver Hoxha to the issue of revolution and socialism. It constituted the scientific information apparatus for these 40 volumes and was "a clear reflection of the very broad and multifaceted problematic that

the glorious and unforgettable leader of our Party and people has addressed and analyzed throughout his entire activity.

"The theoretical work and revolutionary practice that Comrade Enver Hoxha left us," is quoted to have said his successor Ramiz Alia, "is a great legacy. There is no field of political, ideological and social activity in which his philosophical thought, organizational strength and leadership activity have not been expressed (Index of the works of comrade Enver Hoxha, 1985).

Woodcock (2016) provides a rare and often brutal portrait of the Communist rule of Enver Hoxha (1944-1985) and its logocracy of public spaces where the slogans were inscribed.

"Schools and public buildings (which meant all buildings) were painted with slogans such as *"We will fight," "Enver – Party,"* and, in the absence of a specific anniversary or event, *"Thank you Enver."* Enver Hoxha's portrait was in every school, hospital, shop and in many peoples' homes – or at least in their front hall where neighbours could see it. Public spaces were marked by queues, streets without cars where workers crammed into crowded buses, and the slogans of the regime written on the walls. By the time children entered the first grade they were familiar with the monistic structure of Albanian society. They were used to seeing photographs of Enver Hoxha in health clinics, libraries, bread shops and kindergartens, as well as on billboards, placards and the front pages of newspapers and magazines. Slogans declaring love and gratitude to Enver and the Party were written in curvaceous or commanding blood red script on freshly whitewashed walls throughout public space. Even if children couldn't read or write themselves, the slogans were most likely familiar to them through Party publications for children and storybooks. *Pioneers! Read more books about Politics, Art and Science!* Other slogans were adapted from those written across apartment blocks, such as *Organisation! Discipline! Emulation!* The school curriculum was divided into the three categories of volunteer work, study, and ideology, and the language itself was dominated by words such as collective (rather than community), defence and vigilance. *Enver and the Party* was such a common slogan on walls, newspapers, television and radio... Slogans from the 1980s through to today, from *"Long Live Enver Hoxha," "PPSH"* (the acronym of the Albanian Labor Party, and *"Praise the international proletariat"* (Woodcock, 2016, p 30-167).

De Vaaal (2005) sheds light on the use of propaganda in the Albanian language primers; "the third primer was full of paragraphs about 'us children increasing the number of hydro-power stations, railways and factories in our fatherland'. In the second primer you had to fill in the missing clitic in phrases like 'heroine of the people', 'portrait of Comrade Enver', 'cap of the partisan'. The textbooks were just an echo of the ubiquitous use of propaganda outside, where slogans such as *'Glory to the Party', 'Long live Enver'* were eye-catching, painted large on the sides of buildings, across the hillsides and factory gates (De Waal 2005, p.22).

Propaganda consisted not only in emphasising the achievements of the period, but also in denying any past achievement and the prosperity of Liberal Democracies, so called "imperialist". While the population suffered the failure of the centralised economy, the lack of political pluralism, lack of freedom of speech, and the strong indoctrination of the new generation with Marxist- Leninist's ideology, propaganda of the period

reflected the prosperity and happiness that characterised Albanian society (Lala, 2017 p. 1).

Saxon points out his writing and passages like that of 1982, when after asserting that *"imperialists and their lackeys say that we have isolated ourselves from the "civilized world,"* Hoxha added this ringing sentence: *"Both the bitter history of our country in the past and the reality of the "world" that they advertise have convinced us that it is by no means a "civilized world," but a world in which the bigger and stronger oppress and flay the smaller and the weaker, in which money and corruption make the law, and injustice, perfidy and backstabbing triumph."* (Saxon 1985, p.10).

According to Orwell, one of the priorities of totalitarian language is the continuous alteration of the past. When the communists seized power after their Soviet-supported coup d'état of September 9, 1944, they completely rewrote Albania's modern history to fit their ideological dogmas and current political needs. As the ironic motto of Oceania's "Ministry of Truth" in Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four proclaims, "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 1992, p. 37).

The term "class war", was one of the Communists' main slogans. Moralistic slogans were inscribed large on the walls: *'By stealing, evil-doers are attacking our regime and the economic basis of socialism'*. Or *'The party's work educates people and draws them away from the nets of intriguers, of the lazy and the malcontents.'* Some were reasonable enough, such as *'Indifference is worse than criticism'*, though perhaps misplaced in a prison context. (De Waal 2005, p.124). One of Enver Hoxha's favourite 1960s slogans was: *"Let us take to the hills and mountains, and make them as beautiful as the plains"* (De Waal, 2005, p. 174).

Undoubtedly in a dictatorial state, the written press is the main mechanism of propaganda. Subject to constant censorship, press and literature of the period were weapons in the hands of the state. Information was given in accordance with the ideological principles dictated by the Party-State. Newspapers like *"Zëri i Popullit* (Voice of the People)", *"Bashkimi* (Union)", *"Zëri i Rinisë* (Voice of the Youth)" or even *"Gazetat e Murit* (Wall Posters)" etc., conveyed the Marxist-Leninist ideology and the speech of the Party. Initially newspapers circulated for the most part in cities, but very quickly measures were taken for them to be distributed to even the most remote villages, with the objective of informing the public with the speech imposed by the Party itself. During that period, the press had a great indoctrinating role and was used as the main instrument for state propaganda. As instruments at the hands of the state, the written press and all forms of literature were used to convey to the masses the message the Party wanted. Use of propaganda as a medium of communication to manipulate the masses takes on great vestiges considering the international isolation of Albania, especially after the break in relations with China (Lala, 2017. p.4).

The isolation of the country was such that the European dissident debates could not include the Albanian cultural elite in any form. In the years before the regime collapsed, the intellectual debates were not even framed in the language of civil society used by central European intellectuals. [...] Right up until its final days, the regime's apparatus of repression was very successful in preventing the emergence of open criticism. Even those few people who could, under the strict control of the secret services, travel abroad did not dare to openly challenge even the discourse

of the system. Therefore, debates were shaped by the mummified language of the Communist apparatus (Rama, Sh. 2020, p.78). At the time of his death Hoxha had written some 7,000 pages during his whole lifetime.

“The Language of the Great Lenin”, Hoxha’s “Newspeak”

What the regime did, [...] was to tell citizens what they could and should say in public, and to provide them with the means of formulating this correctly; by giving them a lexicon, a grammar, and a rhetoric of public discourse, dominated by the clichés and ethos characteristic of the regime’s own ideology. The school played a leading role in the success of this project of teaching the masses totalitarian jargon and instructing them what to say in public; so that many adults instinctively were able to express themselves when asked to do so (Vehbiu 2019, pp. 61-62).

In this line of argument, Orwellian Newspeak, in 1984, or “totalitarian language,” is embodied in the official “language” of the communist state and is characterized by meaning erosion which implies that changes in linguistic expression take place somewhere in the back of our minds. Hence, it is created a language within a language by deforming the meaning of the word. Orwellian falsification of reality makes clear the connection between politics and the debasement of language.

According to John Wesley Young, “the Orwellian Model of Totalitarian Language ... includes six major components: intent of the rulers to control thought and behaviour through language, exaltation of the state over the individual, violence and vilification, euphemism, special political terminology, and the failure of words to reflect reality” (Young, 1991, 215).

Learning “the language of the great Lenin”—an early phrase that, incidentally, proved effective even after the assault on Stalin in the Soviet Union—meant learning the language of the most powerful socialist country on earth. [...] The country’s first Russian language classes enrolled party operatives, government personnel, and a handful of intellectuals. The language schools offered classes that met twice a week for a period of two to three years, leading to a certificate. A Russian language department opened in Tirana’s pedagogical institute in January 1949. Russian language instructors came for periods ranging from two to three years. In 1952, more than forty such instructors were in the country, contracted by the Ministry of Education. The following year, the government established a special program designed to pre-prepare Russian teachers. Russian language study had already been part of the high school curriculum since 1950.

In 1955, were published how-to guides specifying how much time should be spent on vocabulary, how much on grammar, and which examples of Soviet literature were appropriate for translation at various levels of competency. Along with the shaming, the journal also showcased success stories. It featured young workers who could now translate directly from Soviet magazines or promising high school students who wrote letters to their Soviet pen pals (Mëhilli 2017, p.105).

Just as Communist power in Albania preceded the arrival of Soviet machines, so the arrival of Marxism-Leninism preceded the printing of the complete works of Marx and Lenin. It didn’t help that the classics had written so much—it was not easy

printing it all. On top of that, there were Stalin's works too. In 1956, party officials sought to publish a two-volume set of writings from Marx and Lenin, translated from Russian. The complete works of Lenin, Marx, and Engels waited to be published, year after year. In the meantime, propaganda officials published key texts, excerpts, and small volumes, which were cheaper to print and easier to distribute. The publication of Lenin's complete works was finalized in 1962.

Slogans in the Public Space as Logocracy's Ideological Decorum

The Soviet state came to be dominated not so much by an ideocracy as by a logocracy – the power of words. [...] what mattered was to write and say the necessary words, to maintain some form of ideological decorum" (Bluym 2003, 10).

In the face of an ideological censorship which pretended to the status of a 'logocracy', as Arlen Blyum has termed it, "the country brimmed with his photos, paintings, and statues that dominated public spaces, especially on official holidays. The burial ceremony of Enver Hoxha was a testimonial of the populations' deep indoctrination with the cult of personality, which carried on even after his death in the framework of the "continuation course" and expressed itself by designating the name "Enver Hoxha" to a series of institutions and building a museum in his honour" (Lala, 2017. p. 3).

In the 1970s, when the US was fighting in Vietnam, the communist government of Albania created some of the funniest propaganda slogans. One said: "Mbahu Vietnam" – *Hold on Vietnam*. Another said "Vietnam, nuk je vetëm" – *Vietnam, you are not alone*. It is not known if any Vietnamese was ever encouraged by this solidarity shown by its communist brothers far away from the theatre of war. Dictatorships often use fear from unknown internal or external enemies to facilitate their rule. Government officials and party leaders urged the population to write such slogans everywhere, from Tirana to the humblest village (Erebara, 2025, para 3).

The exhausting memoirs in all some fifty volumes of Enver Hoxha, the partisan leader and Stalinist dictator of Albania, ... were, of course, produced not as an accurate record of Hoxha during World War II but rather to serve a political purpose. This is perhaps best reflected by the fact that the memoirs have often been rewritten to conform to political changes in postwar Albania. As Jon Halliday points out in his book *Enver Hoxha, the Artful Albanian*, a one-volume condensation of some of the Hoxha memoirs, it stretches the imagination to believe that after an interval of some twenty years Enver Hoxha could reconstruct five years of conversations word for word (Fischer, J. 999, p.278).

Albania was a good ally for China too not only because of Hoxha's quote: "*China has nothing to fear - Albania is China's ally now.*" Albania was useful for its propaganda value to the Chinese because of the hostile propaganda against revisionism produced in Tirana. Albanian propaganda was reprinted in Chinese newspapers and on radio. Albania was portrayed in the Chinese press as an influential European Communist country allied with China in the struggle against revisionism and the Soviet Union. A popular Chinese slogan regarding Albania was. "*We (Albania and Cina) are far away but we are neighbours.*" (O' Donnell, 1999, p. 67)

From birth the regime has nurtured the idea of a foreign threat in his mind, preparing him for a life 'with pick in one hand and rifle in the other.' For 35 years, the public media have bombarded the population with messages, emphasizing the need for 'vigilance and caution' calling on the people to prepare to defend their country. The written press, radio, television, and street propaganda maintain a constant parade of changing enemies' intent on devouring Albania. The Albanian blockade is highly visible everywhere inside the country. Entering Shkodra, for example, the traveller is greeted by the slogan: *"Let us fulfil our obligations and break the blockade!"* and in Tirana: *"We will smash the blockade and the imperialist and revisionist encirclement!"* But, who, since World War II has ever threatened to blockade, much less actually laid siege to Albania? Enver Hoxha one day proclaimed his country under blockade, and that was that. The invention of enemies and the fight against them may be said to be the basis of Enver Hoxha's rule. For 40 years now Enver Hoxha has changed and abused imagined enemies abroad and liquidated or 'thrown in the rubbish bin' whoever he feels may be against him at home (O' Donnell, 1999, p. 202).

There is no doubt that the Party pervaded nearly all aspects of Albanian life. In fact, the situation was such that there was no attempt to camouflage this activity. Enver Hoxha openly espoused his views on the subject on December 14, 1963 in his closing speech at the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Albanian Party of Labor. Enver said:

The leadership of the Party knew everything about people's lives, knew what each of them thought. The Party also knew that they were not all pure gold, there were people with wrong ideas, there were heroes, convinced and disciplined people, reliable people, but there were also intriguers, windbags, cowards, etc.... (O' Donnell, 1999, p. 40)

"How did things come about that I, that we are still here," asks the New York based scholar Vehbiu, "and able to testify to what happened to Albanian society under totalitarianism - when the state, through power, attempted to recruit into its political and ideological service, the public discourse of every citizen? How crippled have we been, who was more or less a victim of this recruitment, from the experience of living in a logocracy?" (Vehbiu 2019, p.103).

"I hope that Orwell's novel, "he continues- "which is present in the reader's imagination, will not serve as a surrogate or a nightmarish caricature of totalitarian reality, but rather as a stage light, or instrument that will help us all see better into the past. Orwell himself would have wanted it that way.

In "1984" there is a thematic nexus between what is happening to people and what is happening to language; there is a connection between homicide and logocide. Just as people are turned into nonpersons who do not exist once the correspondent "texts" acknowledging their existence are destroyed, so words, facts, and history disappear once they are "rectified." (Blakemore, 1984, pp. 349). In case of Hoxha's dictatorship these texts were everywhere as the instruments of Logocracy.

Slogans deriving from the works of the dictator Hoxha and then spread in all textbooks, and public spaces dominated the discourse by making it mechanical and a script that had to be reproduced especially in the form of slogans such as: Proletarians of all countries, unite! Land for those who till it; Long Live the Communist Party

of Albania, the standard bearer of the fight for freedom!; The most dangerous foe is a foe forgotten; The Party is the tip of the sword of the working class; Chromium breaks through the blockade; Long Live Proletarian Internationalism!; Vigilance, vigilance and yet more vigilance; Let us raise the standards of the proletarian morals; We shall take to the hills and to the mountains and make them as fertile as the plains; Let us think, let us work, let us live like revolutionaries; The stronger the dictatorship of the proletariat, the stronger our socialist democracy; Vietnam will be victorious; Long Live the dictatorship of the proletariat; Long Live the Party; Glory to the Party!; Down with the blockade!; Learn from the working class etc.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this paper was demonstrated that the political discourse of Orwellian totalitarianism, as envisioned in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, found a real-world manifestation in Enver Hoxha's dictatorship between 1944 and 1985. Through a qualitative analysis of Hoxha's memoirs, party congresses, slogans, and other official texts, it becomes clear that language served not only as a means of communication but as a central tool of control.

The regime functioned as a Logocracy—mirroring Arlen Blyum's concept of the Soviet state, where power was exercised through enforced linguistic conformity, ideological censorship, and the relentless shaping of public discourse. This term, deriving from the Greek words *logos* (word) and *kratos* (power or rule) and referring to a form of governance where power is exercised primarily through language, is not just a government that uses propaganda or rhetorical control; it is a regime in which the very structure of language is weaponized to shape ideology, enforce conformity, and suppress dissent.

In a Logocracy, official discourse is elevated to an almost sacred status. The regime crafts a rigid political lexicon—marked by slogans, formulaic expressions, and euphemisms—that citizens are compelled to adopt. Deviation from this linguistic orthodoxy is not merely discouraged but often criminalized, making speech an instrument of surveillance and self-policing. Public life becomes saturated with state-approved vocabulary, while alternative forms of expression are censored, erased, or rebranded as subversive.

In the context of Enver Hoxha's Albania, Logocracy took the form of a tightly controlled language regime, where public discourse was flooded with slogans, ideological jargon, ritualistic praise, and imposed historical narratives. Language became a mechanism of domination, used to cultivate loyalty, rewrite reality, and maintain the regime's absolute authority. In this context, Learning Lenin's language, which was a kind of Albania's "Newspeak", involved more than just understanding Russian—it was seen as a means of wielding power, it was a way to instil discipline and assert control. Hoxha's Cult State thus exemplifies a political system in which language itself became a mechanism of domination, institutionalizing the totalitarian imperative within the fabric of everyday speech and thought.

References

- Blakemore, S, Language and Ideology in Orwell's 1984 Source: Social Theory and Practice, Vol. 10, No. 3, A Special Issue: Orwell's 1984 (Fall 1984), pp. 349-356 Florida State University Department of Philosophy Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23556571>
- Blyum, A. Self-Administered Poison. The System and Functions of Soviet Censorship, University of Oxford, Legenda Special Lecture Series 5, 2003, p. 10.
- Erebara, Gj. That propaganda slogan that still holds, <https://albanianeconomy.com/2014/06/23/propaganda-slogan-still-holds/>
- Fischer, J. B & Schmitt J, O, A Concise History of Albania, Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- Fischer, J. B & Schmitt. J. O. (20022), A Concise History of Albania-Cambridge University Press.
- Fischer, J. B. (1999), Albania at War, 1939 -1945, Purdue University Press.
- Fevziu, B. (2016). Enver Hoxha, The Iron Fist of Albania, I.B. Tauris, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd London, New York p.356.
- Goldsworthy, V. Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination, Yale University Press, 1998.
- Gyasi O. S & Beverky A. S. Hartford (Eds). Political Discourse Analysis, Nova Science Publishers, Inc. New York, 2008.
- Index to the works of comrade Enver Hoxha, volumes 1-40, Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies, "8 Nëntori" Publishing House, Tirana, 1985.
- Mëhilli, E. From Stalin to Mao, Albania and the Socialist World, Cornell University, 2017.
- Lala, B. (2017), Propaganda during the Communist Dictatorship, Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture.
- Halliday, J (ed), The Artful Albanian: The Memoirs of Enver Hoxha. London: Chatto & Windus, 1986
- O' Donnell, J. (1999), A Coming of Age: Albania Under Enver Hoxha. Columbia University Press, New York, USA.
- Orwell, G. Nineteen Eighty-Four. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992, 37.
- Orwell G. (1968), "Politics and the English Language" in *The Collected Works, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. 4. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://orwelllibrary.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/orwell-george-collected-essays-journalism-letters-vol-4-1945-1950-secker-warburg-19681.pdf
- Vickers, M., and Pettifer, J. (1997). Albania—From anarchy to a Balkan identity. NY: New York University Press.
- Waal, De C. Albania Today, A Portrait of Post Communist Turbulence, I.B. Tauris, New York, 2005.p.22
- Rama A. Sh. (ed), (2020), The End of Communist Rule in Albania Political Change and The Role of The Student Movement, Rama, Routledge, Taylor and Francis.
- Saxon, W. Enver Hoxha, Mastermind of Albania's Isolation, April 12, 1985. The New York Times Archives, April 12, 1985, Section A, Page 10.
- Safer, M. CIA Report. Radio TV Reports, INC. For: Public Affairs Staff. Programmes 60 minutes, Station WDM TV CBS Network Date April 14, 1985. 7:00P.M. City Washington, D.C. Subject: Enver Hoxha.
- Tanya Agathocleous, George Orwell, Battling Big Brother, Oxford University Press, 2000. P 86
- Tarifa, F. Coming to an End. The Fall of Communist Rule in Albania, p.37, Included in Rama, Shinasi. (Editor). Conceptualising comparative politics. The End of Communist Rule in Albania. The Political Change and the Student Movement. Taylor & Francis 2020.
- Vehbiu, A. The broken language, the language that breaks: Notes on the freedom and shackles of public speech in totalitarian Albania. Çabej Publishing House, 2019.
- Woodcock, Sh. Life is War, Surviving Dictatorship in Communist Albania, HammerOn Press, 2016.
- Wesley Young W. J. Totalitarian Language: Orwell's Newspeak and Its Nazi and Communist Antecedents. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1991.

Constructing identity through language: A discourse analysis of Sami Repishti's autobiography

Rezearta Murati

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Albania

Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of language, identity, and memory in Sami Repishti's autobiographical work *In the Shadow of Rozafa* (2004), a powerful testimony of individual suffering and collective historical experience under the Albanian communist regime. Far beyond a mere personal account, the autobiography provides a rich linguistic landscape through which the author negotiates trauma, exile, and resistance. Through discourse analysis, this study aims to illuminate how linguistic structures are employed to construct personal and national identity, to articulate emotional experience, and to shape memory. The analysis proceeds on three linguistic levels. At the lexical level, attention is given to recurrent key terms - such as day, life, city, time, home, fear, condition - which serve as semantic anchors for themes of persecution, loss, and rootedness. These high-frequency words are not only descriptive but ideologically and emotionally charged, acting as carriers of symbolic weight. At the grammatical level, the shifting use of verb tenses and personal pronouns highlights the author's narrative stance and involvement with the reader, creating a dynamic interplay between past events and present reflection. The syntactic level focuses on sentence construction, exploring how variation in sentence length and structure influences the rhetorical intensity and emotional depth of the narrative. His discourse not only gives voice to personal trauma but also seeks to preserve cultural identity, ethical resistance, and historical truth. The text thus becomes a site of both linguistic and moral significance, illustrating the transformative power of language in articulating suffering and shaping post-memory. By offering a detailed linguistic reading of *In the Shadow of Rozafa*, this paper contributes to the understanding of how autobiographical discourse can serve as a vehicle for constructing historical consciousness and sustaining cultural continuity in contexts of political violence and displacement.

Keywords: Sami Repishti, autobiography, discourse analysis, identity, trauma narrative, linguistic structures, exile, memory.

1. Introduction

Autobiography as a literary genre represents a crucial intersection between language, identity, and memory. Through personal narrative, the individual becomes both subject and narrator, using linguistic structures not merely to recount events but to re-construct the self across time and space. This function becomes especially meaningful in narratives of trauma and exile, where life writing assumes ethical, political, and cultural dimensions. Sami Repishti's memoir, *In the Shadow of Rozafa* (2004), exemplifies such a discourse. More than a personal story, it is a linguistic and ideological act of resistance, identity construction, and memory preservation. Written after decades of political persecution and exile, the text provides a record of survival that articulates both personal pain and collective history under the Albanian communist regime. This study investigates how language in Repishti's autobiographical narrative constructs identity, articulates trauma, and serves as a site of moral and cultural wit-

nessing. Using a discourse-analytical approach, the paper explores how linguistic choices - lexical, grammatical, and syntactic - contribute to the construction of self and memory. Addressed implicitly to both Albanian and international audiences, the memoir establishes a dynamic interplay between the personal and the political, the past and its present narration. Language here functions not only as a communicative medium but also as the very locus of meaning-making, resistance, and belonging (Fairclough, 1992).

Repishti's life spans a turbulent historical period marked by fascist occupation, communist dictatorship, incarceration, and eventual exile. Born in Shkodra in 1925, he was educated in Florence, participated in anti-fascist activities, and was imprisoned for opposing the regime. Following fifteen years of incarceration, he escaped to Yugoslavia and emigrated to the United States in 1962. These events form the narrative's experiential core, yet it is through language that they acquire coherence, affective resonance, and ethical weight. Thus, the memoir transcends personal recollection to become a discourse of identity grounded in rupture, resilience, and diasporic awareness.

Discourse analysis provides the theoretical and methodological grounding for this exploration. As Fairclough (1992) asserts, discourse is both language use and social practice - it reflects and produces social realities. From this perspective, identity is not a static inner essence but a dynamic and relational construct, shaped by semiotic strategies and intersubjective positioning. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) similarly describe identity as a discursive accomplishment, produced through narrative, institutional, and conversational contexts.

Repishti's memoir operates on three linguistic levels: lexical, grammatical, and syntactic.

At the lexical level, the recurrence of emotionally and ideologically loaded terms - such as *day*, *home*, *fear*, *life*, and *darkness*—function as “semantic anchors”. These words not only describe experience but also structure emotional and cultural meaning. Such lexical choices embed individual experience within wider discourses of trauma and displacement.

Grammatically, Repishti's manipulation of verb tense and pronouns reveals shifting narrative positions. The alternation between past and present tense creates a layered temporality, suggesting the ongoing emotional presence of past events in the narrator's consciousness. The first-person singular (*I*) asserts narrative authority and self-presence in the face of a regime that sought to erase individual voices. Occasional shifts to *we* create collective identification with victims, exiles, and survivors, turning individual memory into collective post memory (Smith & Watson, 2024). As Fairclough (1992) notes, such grammatical choices reflect how power and identity are enacted through language.

At the syntactic level, sentence structures reinforce emotional and rhetorical dynamics. Long, complex sentences often accompany reflective passages, mimicking the recursive nature of traumatic memory. Short, abrupt sentences punctuate moments of crisis or ethical clarity. This variation allows Repishti to express interiority and invite ethical engagement. Ochs and Capps (2001) emphasize that narrative syntax is central to how speakers construct agency and coherence.

Importantly, Repishti's narrative is deeply ethical. It is not merely an account of suffering, but a mode of witnessing. The text consistently orients itself toward others - fellow prisoners, exiles, and future generations. This relational quality aligns with Smith and Watson's (2010) description of life writing as an "ethical performance" in contexts of historical violence. Through writing, Repishti preserves memory and resists ideological erasure. His language becomes a space of moral inscription.

The memoir functions as a counter-discourse to authoritarian narratives. Its detailed, emotionally layered, and symbolically rich language restores complexity to voices marginalized by power. In doing so, it embodies what Jonathan Rutherford (2003) describes as resistance through cultural difference - foregrounding plural and contingent identities in opposition to hegemonic simplifications. Rather than affirming a stable or essential self, Repishti's narrative reveals identity as fractured, evolving, and grounded in sociohistorical struggle.

This study thus positions *In the Shadow of Rozafa* within a broader field of discourse analysis and life-writing theory. Drawing on Fairclough's (1992) view of discourse as social practice, Benwell and Stokoe's (2006) interactional identity theory, Ochs and Capps' (2001) model of narrative coherence, and Smith and Watson's (2024) ethics of autobiography, it reveals how linguistic form and historical content converge. Through language, Repishti not only narrates a life but restores memory, constructs identity, and resists forgetting.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodological Tools

This study outlines the theoretical and methodological foundations of the present study, which investigates how identity, trauma, and memory are discursively constructed in Sami Repishti's autobiography *In the Shadow of Rozafa* (2004). Adopting a critical discourse analytical approach, it is informed by sociolinguistics, narrative theory, cultural memory studies, and identity theory. By analysing the lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and symbolic features of Repishti's text, the research aims to reveal how language functions not only as self-representation but also as ethical witnessing and cultural transmission.

2.1 Defining Key Concepts

Identity is treated here not as an inherent psychological trait but as a discursive phenomenon. Following Benwell and Stokoe (2006), identity is seen as "an interactional and discursive phenomenon, continually negotiated and reformulated in situated social practices". In autobiographical texts, identity is not fixed but constructed through language, evolving across time and in relation to others. It is shaped by social structures, power relations, and institutional histories.

Repishti constructs multiple identities throughout his narrative: as a political prisoner, a moral witness, a cultural representative, and a diasporic intellectual. Each identity position is linguistically enacted through pronouns, evaluative language, and symbolic references. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006) argue, identity emerges "in the moment-to-moment unfolding of talk and text", and its analysis requires attention to the fine structure of discourse.

Discourse is understood here through Fairclough's (1992) critical lens as a form of so-

cial practice. It not only reflects social realities but also constructs and contests them. Language use, in this view, is ideologically loaded - capable of legitimizing authority, resisting repression, and shaping collective memory. Fairclough distinguishes between discursive events and formations, reminding us that individual texts participate in broader systems of meaning. Repishti's memoir, for example, engages with discourses of resistance, exile, and post-totalitarian memory.

Post-memory, a term originally developed by Marianne Hirsch, is used here following Smith and Watson (2010), who describe it as the transgenerational transmission of trauma through narrative. Though Repishti himself lived the events he describes, his act of narration is oriented toward future generations. His autobiography is more than recollection - it is a cultural intervention that transmits suppressed histories. As Smith and Watson (2010) argue, autobiographical texts of trauma are performative; they not only represent memory but preserve and transform it.

2.2 Methodological Tools and Levels of Analysis

The study employs qualitative discourse analysis guided by critical and interactional approaches. It operates at three linguistic levels—lexical, grammatical, and syntactic—while also considering metaphor and symbolic discourse.

Lexical analysis identifies high-frequency and ideologically loaded terms—such as *life*, *fear*, *home*, and *city* - which serve as “semantic anchors” for key themes. These terms are not neutral descriptors; they encode emotional and political meaning.

Grammatical analysis focuses on verb tense, pronouns, modality, and voice. Repishti frequently shifts between past and present tense to blur boundaries between memory and reflection. These shifts reinforce trauma's persistent presence in the narrator's consciousness.

Pronoun usage also constructs identity. The use of *I* establishes personal testimony; *we* invokes collective experience. These shifts allow Repishti to move between personal memory and collective post-memory. As Fairclough (1992) notes, grammar encodes relationships of power and involvement.

Syntactic analysis examines sentence length and structure to interpret psychological and rhetorical functions. According to Ochs and Capps (2001), syntax reflects the speaker's emotional stance and narrative agency. Syntax thus becomes a means of emotional expression and ethical engagement.

2.3 Justification for the Approach

The use of discourse analysis is justified for several reasons. First, it allows a holistic investigation of how language creates meaning in sociohistorical contexts. As Fairclough (1992) states, it is particularly suited to uncovering the “opaque relationships between discourse and power”, making it ideal for analyzing texts born from repression and exile.

Second, discourse analysis frames identity as constructed through language rather than existing prior to it. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) maintain that identity is “produced within discourse,” especially in autobiographical texts where the self must be retroactively narrated through rupture and trauma.

Third, it enables integration of emotional and ethical dimensions into the analysis. Ochs and Capps (2001) highlight that narrative discourse reflects affective investment and moral positioning. By attending to how emotions are encoded in grammar, lexis,

and syntax, the study explores how trauma is not merely represented but lived and communicated.

Finally, the method aligns with the study's focus on post-memory as a discursive act. Smith and Watson (2010) argue that witnessing is a "discursive practice" that ensures memory persists beyond the individual. Repishti's memoir exemplifies this, transforming private suffering into public testimony through the structure of language.

3. Lexical analysis: High-frequency terms and Symbolic weight

Language in autobiographical discourse does more than recount events; it reveals the emotional, ideological, and symbolic scaffolding of lived experience. In Sami Repishti's *In the Shadow of Rozafa*, lexical choices are not merely stylistic or incidental - they are instrumental in constructing a narrative of trauma, exile, and identity. This section investigates the key lexical items that recur throughout the memoir, examining their semantic fields, affective intensities, and symbolic functions. The analysis identifies recurring terms such as *day*, *home*, *fear*, *city*, *life*, *condition*, and *darkness*, which serve as "semantic anchors" for the themes of loss, belonging, persecution, and resilience. These words do not operate in isolation but form a network of emotionally and ideologically charged language that shapes the reader's understanding of both personal and collective memory.

3.1. "Day": Temporality, Trauma, and Waiting

The word *day* appears frequently in Repishti's narrative, often in emotionally and temporally significant contexts. Far from a neutral temporal marker, *day* acquires symbolic meaning, denoting critical thresholds in the author's life - arrest, sentencing, exile, and fleeting moments of hope. In the prison sections of the memoir, Repishti counts days obsessively, reflecting the disorienting effects of incarceration and the reduction of human experience to the bare passage of time. The recurrence of *day* as a lexical unit evokes a sense of suspended temporality and psychological entrapment. According to Ochs and Capps (2001), temporal references in narrative discourse are not merely chronological tools; they shape the emotional and epistemic stance of the narrator. In this context, *day* often marks both suffering and resistance. The "*last day*" before sentencing, the "*first day*" of freedom, or the "*eternal days*" in solitary confinement are all imbued with a heavy emotional charge. These lexical repetitions dramatize the relationship between time and trauma, transforming an ordinary word into a repository of existential intensity.

3.2. "Home": Loss, Displacement, and Cultural memory

Perhaps the most ideologically significant term in the text is *home*. On a surface level, it refers to the author's birthplace of Shkodra, his family house, or Albania more broadly. But at a deeper level, *home* functions symbolically as the locus of identity, rootedness, and cultural continuity. The loss of *home* is not just geographical but ontological—it signifies the loss of community, memory, and meaning. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006) argue, identity in discourse is often constructed through binary oppositions such as *home/away*, *belonging/exclusion*, and *center/margin*. In Repishti's text, *home* stands in opposition to *prison*, *exile*, and *alienation*, becoming a key node in the semantic map of post-memory.

Repishti's descriptions of home are often idealized and emotionally saturated. He invokes the sensory details of his childhood - smells, landscapes, family rituals - not merely as nostalgia but as a form of cultural preservation. This is consistent with Smith and Watson's (2010) view of autobiography as a site of "mnemonic labor" where memory is actively shaped through affectively charged language. In this sense, *home* is less a physical place and more a symbolic structure that anchors the self in a fragmented world.

Moreover, the idea of returning "*home*" is a recurring but ultimately unattainable motif in the memoir. The exile's journey is marked by a perpetual distance from home - both literal and metaphorical. This semantic tension between presence and absence, nearness and impossibility, gives *home* its powerful emotional and ideological resonance.

3.3. "*Fear*": Emotional atmosphere and Political terror

The term *fear* appears repeatedly across the narrative, not only as a descriptor of internal states but as a pervasive social atmosphere. In Repishti's Albania, fear is institutionalized - embedded in surveillance, interrogation, and ideological coercion. The frequent use of *fear* reflects both the author's personal psychological landscape and the broader culture of repression under the communist regime.

Lexically, *fear* is used in conjunction with terms like *night*, *cell*, *guards*, and *silence*, forming what could be described as a trauma lexicon. This aligns with Fairclough's (1992) view that lexical sets in discourse often reflect dominant ideologies or the internalization of power structures. In Repishti's memoir, *fear* is not just an emotion but a symptom of a political system designed to annihilate individuality.

Yet, paradoxically, *fear* also functions as a marker of ethical awareness. The narrator often contrasts his fear with acts of moral courage, such as resisting interrogation or defending fellow prisoners. In these contexts, *fear* becomes the backdrop against which ethical agency is asserted. The word thus carries dual symbolic weight: as a tool of oppression and as a context for resistance.

3.4. *City*: Space of ambivalence and political surveillance

The lexical item *city* recurs as both a geographic reference and a charged ideological space. In *In the Shadow of Rozafa*, the *city* - often Shkodra or Tirana - is never a neutral setting. For Repishti, cities signify sites of betrayal, political surveillance, and public humiliation, especially under the totalitarian regime. For example, his descriptions of Tirana evoke a sense of alienation and danger, representing the capital as a stage for ideological performance and state control. This aligns with Benwell and Stokoe's (2006) claim that identity construction is often embedded within spatial markers that are symbolically saturated.

The dual nature of *city* is also evident in exile contexts. Cities like New York or Florence are depicted ambivalently - as places of both reinvention and emotional distance. Repishti's lexicon reflects what Fairclough (1992) terms "ambivalent discourses," where space is encoded with contradictory associations of threat and opportunity.

Moreover, cities are narrated as relational nodes. The juxtaposition between the intimate landscape of Shkodra and the cold institutional spaces of Tirana constructs a symbolic geography of belonging versus estrangement. As Jonathan Rutherford (2003) puts it, "spaces are not passive containers of meaning but active terrains where

identity is shaped and contested”.

3.5. *Life: Oscillations between vitality and constraint*

The term *life* in Repishti’s memoir operates on a semantic spectrum - from vitality to oppression. On the one hand, life affirms survival, endurance, and the drive to create meaning beyond suffering. On the other, phrases like *life sentence*, *life under communism*, or *life in exile* carry the burden of structural violence and moral rupture. These dual registers reveal what Ochs and Capps (2001) describe as “lexical polysemy,” wherein a single term encapsulates conflicting emotional realities.

Repishti’s use of *life* often corresponds with ethical reflection. He distinguishes between “*a life worth living*” and “*a life lived in fear*” implying that existence is measured not just biologically but morally. This moral texture echoes the idea in Smith and Watson (2010) that life writing is as much about “moral witnessing” as it is about self-expression. Notably, *life* is linked to continuity and rupture. *Family life*, *academic life*, and *political life* are all invoked as interrupted narratives, with trauma acting as a force of fragmentation. Yet, the persistent use of the term across contexts reinforces its symbolic centrality as a narrative axis around which other meanings revolve.

3.6. “Condition”: Existential state and Collective positioning

Another notable term is *condition*, often used in phrases like *human condition*, *condition of prisoners*, or *condition in exile*. Here, the word functions both descriptively and philosophically. It signals not only a physical or social state but also an existential diagnosis of the human experience under authoritarianism. This usage aligns with Fairclough’s (1992) notion that certain lexical items carry embedded ideological meanings that reflect specific worldviews.

Condition is a meta-narrative term in Repishti’s discourse—it gestures toward systemic injustice, moral decay, and psychological trauma. But it also allows the author to universalize his experience, framing his suffering not as an isolated incident but as a reflection of the broader human struggle for dignity and meaning. In this sense, *condition* becomes a bridge between individual story and collective memory.

3.7. *Darkness: The lexicon of Repression and Ontological void*

The metaphor of *darkness* in the memoir is among its most ideologically potent. It signifies more than the physical absence of light; it evokes the erasure of truth, the absence of hope, and the epistemological collapse of meaning under dictatorship. Repishti frequently employs this term when describing prison cells, interrogations, or the broader condition of living under a regime that suppressed dissent and distorted reality.

Fairclough (1992) notes that such metaphorical fields serve to “constitute social reality” through symbolic condensation. In this sense, *darkness* becomes a cipher for both external control and internal despair.

Repishti also links *darkness* to moments of ethical awakening - where silence and fear are broken by acts of resistance or prayer. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006) argue, metaphors in identity discourse often “structure perception and action,” turning lived oppression into narratable experience.

3.8. *Silence: Censorship, Survival, and Narrative breakthrough*

Silence in Repishti’s narrative is paradoxically both enforced and chosen. Under dictatorship, silence is the condition of survival—strategic and coerced. Yet, it also repre-

sents the suppression of memory and the denial of justice. The recurrence of this term in conjunction with themes of trauma, confession, and testimony positions *silence* as both a symptom and a wound.

Smith and Watson (2010) highlight that one of the key functions of autobiography is to “break silences” and recover what has been historically repressed. Repishti’s memoir is itself framed as an act of breaking silence - of restoring speech to the voiceless and reinserting forgotten suffering into public memory.

Additionally, *silence* is not always negative. In some passages, Repishti describes moments of contemplative silence, prayer, or inner fortitude, suggesting that silence can also be a site of ethical self-possession. This duality resonates with Ochs and Capps’ (2001) claim that autobiographical discourse often reflects “epistemic ambivalence” through lexical contrasts.

The lexical choices in *In the Shadow of Rozafa* are far from arbitrary; they constitute a discursive architecture through which identity, trauma, and memory are rendered meaningful. Words such as *day*, *home*, *fear*, *city*, *life*, *condition*, *darkness*, and *silence* recur with high frequency not merely because they describe events but because they symbolize the ethical, political, and emotional stakes of the narrator’s experience. These terms act as carriers of symbolic and ideological weight, revealing how language serves to narrate, preserve, and resist in contexts of historical violence and exile. This lexical analysis underscores the memoir’s function not only as testimony but as cultural memory, positioning Repishti’s voice within a broader discourse of moral witnessing and national identity.

4. Grammatical structures: Verb tense, Pronouns, Modality, and Voice

Autobiographical discourse is a site of temporal reflection, emotional self-representation, and ideological positioning - all of which are mediated through grammar. In Sami Repishti’s *In the Shadow of Rozafa* (2004), grammatical structures do not merely shape the narrative form; they become central to the articulation of trauma, the negotiation of identity, and the ethical stance of the autobiographer. This section examines four core grammatical components - verb tense, pronoun usage, modality, and voice - to illuminate how language functions in constructing narrative selfhood and historical accountability.

4.1. Verb tense: Temporal positioning and Emotional resonance

One of the most salient grammatical features in Repishti’s memoir is the shifting use of verb tenses, especially between the past simple, past perfect, and present tense. These shifts are not arbitrary; they represent what Ochs and Capps (2001) refer to as “temporal stance,” whereby the narrator chooses the distance or immediacy of narrated events. In most autobiographical texts, past tense is expected, but Repishti’s selective use of the present tense in moments of intense reflection or judgment serves to dramatize events, collapse temporal distance, and involve the reader in the urgency of moral reckoning.

For example, when recounting moments of imprisonment or interrogation, Repishti often uses the historical present, a rhetorical device that conveys immediacy and relived trauma: “*They come into the cell. I do not speak. I hear my own breath.*” This

grammatical move transforms the past into a vivid and psychologically active scene, suggesting that traumatic memory remains unresolved and present in the author's consciousness. According to Smith and Watson (2010), such tense usage is characteristic of trauma narratives, where the past "insists on its presence" and resists narrative containment.

Conversely, past perfect is used when Repishti seeks to establish the chronological ordering of memories: "*I had been arrested before my father returned from Italy.*" This layering of past events reflects a more distanced and structured approach, often used when the narrator takes an analytical stance on his past. The alternation between these tenses thus encodes the narrator's varying degrees of emotional proximity, epistemic certainty, and narrative control.

In line with Fairclough (1992), who describes grammatical tense as a tool for "shaping reality through temporal projection", Repishti's tense usage reveals a grammar of trauma - a structure where past and present blur, and where grammar reflects psychological aftershocks.

4.2. Pronouns: *Self, Other, and the Collective*

Pronoun use in *In the Shadow of Rozafa* reveals how the narrator constructs identity, interpersonal relationships, and moral positioning. The first-person singular (*I*) dominates the narrative, as expected in autobiographical writing, but it is used with varying effects - from assertion and confession to vulnerability and resistance. Repishti uses *I* to claim authorship over memory and to position himself as a legitimate witness of historical injustice. This aligns with Benwell and Stokoe's (2006) observation that "the personal pronoun is central to the performance of self in discourse".

At times, the first-person plural (*we*) is employed, particularly when the author references political prisoners or the Albanian people. This collective *we* serves to transform individual suffering into collective memory and shared trauma, thus positioning Repishti as a representative voice. According to Fairclough (1992), such usage represents a "synthetic personalization" where the speaker draws the audience into a shared discursive space.

Interestingly, Repishti also occasionally uses the second-person pronoun (*you*) when addressing the reader or an abstract interlocutor (e.g., the regime, the next generation). This rhetorical address has dual effects: it invites ethical identification and simultaneously performs moral accusation. The movement between *I*, *we*, and *you* illustrates the complex triangulation of narrator, reader, and subject - a feature that Smith and Watson (2010) identify as fundamental to testimonial autobiography.

Moreover, the absence or elision of third-person pronouns in critical moments (e.g., referring to interrogators or state officials as "they") reflects both epistemic distancing and moral condemnation. This vague *they* operates ideologically - it anonymizes power and implies a systemic, faceless regime. Such pronoun strategies reflect the broader narrative politics of inclusion and exclusion, subjectivity and otherness.

4.3. Modality: *Moral stance and Affective intensity*

Modality, the expression of possibility, necessity, obligation, and certainty, plays a central role in shaping the narrator's evaluative and ethical stance. In Repishti's text, modal verbs such as *must*, *should*, *could*, and *cannot* appear frequently, often in passages of moral reflection, emotional urgency, or political critique.

For instance, the use of *must* in “*We must remember the truth*” conveys deontic modality - expressing obligation. This aligns with Smith and Watson’s (2010) description of post-traumatic narratives as forms of “ethical imperative”. Here, grammar becomes a moral command, asserting not just memory but responsibility. In contrast, *could not* often accompanies scenes of torture or moral dilemmas - “*I could not betray them*” - which reflects both external constraint and internal resolve.

Fairclough (1992) notes that modality is a key element in the “textual enactment of ideology,” where language encodes beliefs about agency, duty, and truth. In this vein, Repishti’s frequent use of negative epistemic modality – “*I could never understand why they hated us*” - signals both narrative humility and a deep moral dissonance.

Additionally, emphatic modality is used to express certainty or denial, particularly in judgments of injustice. Phrases like “*It must be said*” or “*They will never silence us*” function rhetorically to reinforce the narrator’s authority and moral commitment. Such modal expressions perform what Benwell and Stokoe (2006) call “identity reinforcement through epistemic stance”, whereby belief and identity are mutually asserted. Modality also encodes emotional tone. The oscillation between *could*, *must*, and *should* reflects the shifting psychological terrain of the narrative - between despair and hope, guilt and determination. These modals thus carry affective weight, signaling not just what is said but how it is felt and why it matters.

4.4. Voice: Agency, Accountability, and Resistance

The grammatical voice - active versus passive - is a powerful tool for managing agency and accountability in discourse. In *In the Shadow of Rozafa*, Repishti alternates between active voice, which affirms personal agency, and passive voice, which reflects conditions of victimization, repression, or depersonalized violence.

When narrating actions taken in resistance - escaping prison, refusing collaboration, defending fellow prisoners - Repishti predominantly uses active constructions: *I resisted*, *I spoke*, *I escaped*. These verbs enact agency and moral clarity, affirming the subject’s capacity to act even under coercion. This corresponds with what Ochs and Capps (2001) describe as “agentive narration,” where grammar supports the narrator’s claim to ethical subjectivity.

By contrast, passive constructions are frequently used in recounting violence or systemic abuse: *I was arrested*, *We were stripped*, *It was forbidden to speak*. These grammatical choices reflect what Fairclough (1992) calls “ideological erasure of agency,” where the doer is obscured and the victim is foregrounded. In Repishti’s memoir, this strategy paradoxically reveals the extent of state control - while also reinforcing the narrator’s role as witness rather than aggressor.

Notably, the passive voice does not always signal weakness. In many cases, it heightens the moral contrast between the narrator’s suffering and the perpetrators’ anonymity. The absence of explicit agents (e.g., “*It was decided that I would be moved*”) reflects both institutional dehumanization and narrative restraint. This restraint is itself an ethical position, emphasizing dignity over revenge.

The interplay of active and passive voice thus becomes a grammatical mirror of the memoir’s broader moral dynamics. Repishti’s active verbs construct a self that resists and endures; his passive constructions expose a system that erases, humiliates, and controls. This narrative balance is consistent with Benwell and Stokoe’s (2006) theory

that voice reflects “discursive positioning within power asymmetries”.

Through a close analysis this section has shown how grammar in Sami Repishti’s *In the Shadow of Rozafa* functions not merely as a technical feature but as a core instrument of meaning-making, resistance, and ethical communication. Each grammatical choice reflects not only narrative coherence but also ideological positioning and emotional truth. These grammatical features are central to the text’s ability to “structure personal identity, articulate suffering, and build ethical dialogue with the reader”. By attending to grammar, the reader is invited not only to hear a story but to witness a subjectivity forged in resistance, marked by loss, and committed to remembrance.

5. Syntactic patterns: Sentence structures and their psychological and rhetorical functions

Syntax - the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences - is not merely a structural feature of language; it is an essential component of how narratives evoke emotion, construct subjectivity, and organize thought. In *In the Shadow of Rozafa* (2004), Sami Repishti’s sentence structures reflect both psychological depth and rhetorical strategy. They serve to shape the emotional tempo of the narrative, reflect internal states of trauma and resilience, and guide the reader’s interpretive path through moments of ethical reflection, political critique, and autobiographical confession.

This section examines Repishti’s syntactic patterns with attention to sentence length, complexity, variation, and repetition, demonstrating how each of these contributes to the memoir’s psychological intensity and rhetorical power. Drawing on insights from narrative discourse theory and critical discourse analysis, we interpret syntax not only as grammar but as expressive form - what Ochs and Capps (2001) call the “architecture of emotional meaning” in storytelling.

5.1. Sentence length and Psychological rhythm

One of the most noticeable syntactic features of Repishti’s memoir is the strategic variation in sentence length. Long, winding sentences - often punctuated with multiple subordinate clauses - are frequently used in moments of reflection or memory retrieval. These extended constructions mimic the flow of thought and mirror the narrator’s attempt to process complex or traumatic experiences. For instance, when recounting the days leading up to his arrest, Repishti uses cumulative clauses to reproduce the anxiety and anticipatory dread of that period.

According to Ochs and Capps (2001), sentence length in autobiographical discourse can indicate the speaker’s emotional proximity to the event. A long sentence may signify cognitive overload, recursive thinking, or an effort to delay the emotional impact of the narrated experience. In Repishti’s text, these sentences often crescendo into moral judgments or revelations, creating a rhythm of suspense followed by ethical clarity.

By contrast, short, clipped sentences are used in moments of emotional intensity or shock: “*They came. They took me. I did not resist.*” The brevity of these constructions reflects the psychological contraction typical of traumatic recollection. As Fairclough (1992) notes, “syntactic compression is often a stylistic choice to convey emotional

force". These terse sentences halt narrative flow, commanding the reader's attention and mirroring the fragmentary nature of traumatic memory.

5.2. Sentence complexity and Narrative depth

Closely related to sentence length is syntactic complexity - the layering of main and subordinate clauses, parenthetical insertions, and embedded reflections. In Repishti's writing, complex sentences often occur when the narrator is grappling with moral ambiguity, revisiting a formative moment, or offering commentary on broader political realities.

For example, in a passage describing his release from prison, Repishti writes: "*Although I was no longer behind bars, the fear, the silence, and the memory of those endless nights accompanied me like a second skin, a shadow that would not lift, no matter how much sunlight the world offered.*" This sentence uses multiple clauses and appositions to evoke emotional layering, showing how freedom is psychologically haunted by the residues of captivity.

Such syntactic constructions also reflect what Benwell and Stokoe (2006) describe as the "multi-voicedness of identity discourse," where multiple perspectives - past and present, self and society - are encoded within a single syntactic unit. The narrator's voice is not linear but dialogic, constantly negotiating between experience and interpretation. Complex syntax here becomes a tool for rendering the instability of post-traumatic subjectivity and the struggle to craft narrative coherence.

5.3. Repetition and Syntactic parallelism

Repetition is another central syntactic feature in Repishti's memoir. He frequently repeats sentence structures, openings, or concluding clauses to reinforce key themes and emotions. A series of sentences may begin with "*I remember...*" or "*They said...*," establishing a rhythmic pattern that mirrors the recurrence of traumatic memory or ideological imposition.

Parallelism - where sentences or clauses share the same syntactic structure - is often used for rhetorical emphasis. Consider the following construction: "*They took my name. They took my freedom. They tried to take my dignity.*" This repetition not only intensifies emotional resonance but also builds a cumulative ethical argument. As Smith and Watson (2010) note, "syntactic repetition is often a strategy for moral insistence in autobiographical testimony". In such passages, language becomes not only expressive but accusatory - a structured indictment of injustice.

Moreover, repetition mirrors the psychological looping of trauma. The mind revisits the same moments, the same fears, the same betrayals. Syntax here is not simply a vehicle of content, but a form of psychological enactment.

5.4. Syntactic disruption and Fragmentation

While much of Repishti's narrative maintains a formal and elevated style, there are moments of syntactic disruption - incomplete sentences, abrupt shifts in construction, or sudden ellipses - that signal emotional rupture. These breaks in grammatical regularity often occur during the recounting of torture, loss, or existential despair. For example: "*And then... nothing. Silence. Darkness. Breath - just breath.*"

Such disruptions break the narrative flow, reflecting the breakdown of cognitive and emotional processing. According to Fairclough (1992), syntactic fragmentation can "instantiate a rupture in ideological coherence," revealing the limits of language in

representing extreme experience. These moments invite the reader into the unspeakable - into the margins of what narrative can contain.

These disruptions are especially important when viewed through the lens of trauma theory. Trauma, as Smith and Watson (2010) argue, often resists linear representation and demands alternative syntactic forms - elliptical, repetitive, or fragmented - to approximate its effects. In this sense, Repishti's syntactic ruptures are not stylistic anomalies but faithful renderings of emotional and historical fracture.

5.5. Syntax and Reader engagement

Beyond internal psychology, syntax in Repishti's memoir also serves a rhetorical function - positioning the reader ethically and emotionally. Long, complex sentences draw the reader into reflection; short, declarative ones demand moral attention; parallel structures invite alignment; and syntactic ruptures demand interpretation.

This aligns with Fairclough's (1992) theory of "syntactic positioning," where sentence form directs how the reader relates to the content. Repishti's syntax does not simply report events; it invites participation in their moral and affective weight. The reader is not a passive observer but a co-narrator - one who must bear witness to the narrated suffering and its implications.

Sami Repishti's *In the Shadow of Rozafa* demonstrates that syntax in autobiographical discourse is never neutral. Through variation in sentence length, complexity, repetition, and disruption, Repishti constructs a narrative style that mirrors the psychological contours of trauma and the rhetorical demands of testimony. His syntactic choices enable the articulation of suffering, the performance of ethical selfhood, and the evocation of cultural memory. Sentence structure in this memoir is integral to how "emotional depth and rhetorical intensity" are achieved in autobiographical narration. Syntax, therefore, is not merely grammar - it is witness, resistance, and voice.

6. Conclusion

This study has explored Sami Repishti's *In the Shadow of Rozafa* through the lens of critical discourse analysis to understand how language mediates the autobiographical narration of trauma, political exile, and identity reconstruction. More than a personal life story, Repishti's memoir serves as a discursive space in which individual suffering is transformed into cultural testimony, collective memory, and ethical reflection. The analysis has focused on three interrelated linguistic levels - lexical choices, grammatical constructions, and syntactic patterns - to reveal how the narrative operates as both an act of remembrance and resistance.

At the *lexical level*, the memoir is marked by the recurrence of emotionally and ideologically charged terms such as *day*, *home*, *fear*, *city*, *life*, *condition*, *darkness*, and *silence*. These words do not function simply as descriptors but carry symbolic and emotional significance that reinforces the thematic concerns of the text. The term *day*, for instance, marks temporal thresholds—arrest, imprisonment, or moments of fleeting hope—highlighting the psychological structure of waiting and existential uncertainty. *Home* evokes not only a physical place but a deeper sense of loss, identity, and cultural belonging, frequently contrasted with exile and alienation. *Fear*, in turn, recurs throughout the narrative as both a personal emotion and a systemic atmosphere

imposed by totalitarian repression. Other terms such as *city* and *life* convey tensions between danger and continuity, while *condition*, *darkness*, and *silence* point to physical and moral states shaped by trauma and censorship.

Grammatically, the text uses shifts in verb tenses, pronoun variation, modality, and voice to position the narrator in relation to events and moral judgments. The frequent alternation between past and present tenses illustrates the unresolved nature of traumatic memory, where past experiences remain psychologically present. First-person pronouns (*I*, *me*, *my*) create an authoritative personal voice, while the occasional use of *we* expands the narrative to include a collective identity of persecution and survival. This strategic pronoun shift bridges personal testimony with collective memory. Modality—expressed through verbs such as *must*, *should*, and *could*—adds layers of ethical commitment, indicating necessity, possibility, and moral deliberation. The use of passive voice in recounting certain events, such as imprisonment or interrogation, underscores the erasure of agency and dramatizes the institutional control to which the narrator was subjected.

Syntactically, Repishti's sentence structures reflect both psychological states and rhetorical intention. Long, complex sentences dominate reflective passages, often mirroring the layered emotional and cognitive processes involved in recounting traumatic memory. These sentences unfold gradually, echoing the narrator's internal effort to process loss, injustice, and displacement. In contrast, short, fragmented sentences appear in moments of heightened emotion—shock, fear, or ethical certainty—serving as stylistic interruptions that convey the urgency or intensity of lived experience. Syntactic repetition and parallelism further strengthen the emotional and rhetorical tone of the text, reinforcing key themes and facilitating reader engagement with the affective dimension of the narrative.

Beyond structural analysis, the study has shown that Repishti's autobiography participates in the broader tradition of testimony and post memory. Though he is a direct survivor of the historical events he describes, the memoir is clearly addressed to future generations, particularly those removed from the immediate experience of dictatorship and exile. In this sense, the text performs a dual function: as personal healing and as political remembering. Through metaphor, symbolism, and discursive framing, Repishti constructs a version of history that resists forgetting and challenges official silences.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that autobiographical discourse - especially in contexts of trauma and displacement - serves as a powerful medium for negotiating memory, constructing identity, and enacting resistance. Repishti's linguistic strategies reveal how the self is narrated through rupture, how pain is encoded in form, and how ethical agency is asserted through voice. *In the Shadow of Rozafa* stands not only as a document of survival, but as a form of cultural and moral inscription.

References

- Bamberg, M. (2005). Narrative discourse and identities. *Narrative Inquiry*, 15(1), 1–5.
Bamberg, M., De Fina, A., & Schiffrin, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Selves and identities in narrative and discourse*. Studies in Narrative, John Benjamins Publishing Company.
Benwell, B., & Stokoe, E. (2006). *Discourse and identity*. Edinburgh University Press.

- Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse: A critical introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2019). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- De Fina, A. (2003). *Identity in narrative: A study of immigrant discourse*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing narrative: Discourse and sociolinguistic perspectives*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Polity Press.
- Gee, J. P. (2010). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small stories, interaction and identities*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hyvärinen, M., Hyden, L. C., Saarenheimo, M., & Tamboukou, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Beyond narrative coherence*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Leech, G., & Short, M. (2007). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). Pearson/Longman.
- Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative: Creating lives in everyday storytelling*. Harvard University Press.
- Repishti, S. (2004). *Në hijen e Rozafës* [In the shadow of Rozafa]. Onufri.
- Rutherford, J. (2003). A place called home: Identity and the cultural politics of difference. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (2nd rev. ed., pp. 9–27). Lawrence & Wishart.
- Smith, S., & Watson, J. (2010). *Reading autobiography: A guide for interpreting life narratives* (2nd ed.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, S., & Watson, J. (2024). *Reading autobiography now: An updated guide for interpreting life narratives* (3rd ed.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Toolan, M. J. (2001). *Narrative: A critical linguistic introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Artificial intelligence in Corporate Governance

Dr. Anisa Kume

University of Tirana, Albania

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rezart Dibra

Tirana Business University College TBU, Albania

Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly emerged as a transformative force in the realm of management. This paper explores how AI reshapes business practices across decision-making, operations, customer engagement, and strategic planning. By integrating AI technologies such as machine learning, natural language processing, and robotic process automation, organizations can significantly improve efficiency, accuracy, and innovation. The study concludes that while AI presents challenges related to ethics, bias, and workforce displacement, its benefits for competitive advantage and long-term sustainability are (IBMTeamData&andAI, 2024) Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most transformative technologies in recent years, reshaping various aspects of human life, including the business and management sectors. In management, AI is not just a buzzword; it is a powerful tool that drives efficiency, enhances decision-making, and improves customer experiences. Artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed corporate governance, offering unparalleled opportunities for efficiency and decision-making and raising a host of complex legal questions. This article explores the use of AI in corporate governance, addressing the changing role of AI, ethical and legal issues, questions of liability and accountability, considerations of intellectual property, and data privacy issues (Dastani & Yazdanpanah, 2023).

This article explores the role of AI in management especially in corporate governance, its benefits, challenges, and future implications.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence in management, AI in processes, (AI) on human resource management.

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transitioned from a technological novelty to a vital driver of organizational efficiency and strategic competitiveness. Businesses across all sectors are adopting AI to refine managerial functions, redefine operational procedures, and respond more dynamically to market changes. This paper analyzes how AI is transforming managerial approaches and the broader implications for modern business practices. Artificial intelligence (AI) is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. It includes learning, reasoning, and self-correction. Examples of AI applications include expert systems, natural language processing (NLP), speech recognition, machine vision, and generative tools like ChatGPT and Perplexity.

(Adam Uzialko, 2024) Perhaps more importantly, it's becoming an increasingly crucial business tool with ramifications across multiple industries (Chui, 2028) Many years ago, in trying to improve manufacturing and production, these improvements were related to the physical world (DiCarlo, 2025). AI in Strategic Decision-Making. One of the primary areas where AI is making an impact is in strategic decision-making. AI technologies, such as machine learning, natural language processing, and predictive analytics, can analyze vast amounts of data, uncover hidden patterns, and provide insights that might be missed by human managers.

A distinct set of difficulties is also presented by the use of AI systems in public organizations, notably concerning the established bureaucratic processes and human oversight. This situation highlights how vital it is to understand and adjust to the dynamic interaction of human-machine bureaucracies, where human and AI system roles and responsibilities always change (Siebecker, 2020).

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into corporate governance has reshaped the landscape of decision-making within organizations. Constant optimization of commercial processes is still a challenge for firms. In the era of digital transformation, rapidly changing customer expectations for faster delivery and better quality of goods and services, and , economic entities need to improve their internal processes and performance. (Daniel Paschek, 2017) In her paper, Maria Kamariotou says that: AI technology offers great potential to solve difficulties, challenges remain implicated in practical implementation and lack of expertise in the use of Artificial Intelligence at a strategic level to create and increase the value of the economic entity. Machine learning algorithms process vast amounts of data to uncover patterns, forecast trends, and support real-time decision-making. Managers now rely on predictive analytics for customer behavior, risk assessment, and inventory control. Corporate governance refers to the system of rules, practices, and processes by which a company is directed and controlled. As Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to reshape managerial functions, its implications for corporate governance are increasingly significant. The integration of AI into governance frameworks enhances transparency, accountability, and risk management but also introduces new ethical and oversight challenges. By integrating machine learning algorithms into boardroom analytics, companies can better assess strategic investments, compliance risks, and market trends. For example, AI-powered systems can flag unusual patterns in financial reports or communication data, aiding internal audits and regulatory reporting.

A critical component of good governance is ensuring that AI is used ethically. Boards must set clear policies on data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and the prevention of AI bias. Establishing an AI ethics committee or including AI governance in ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) reports is becoming standard practice. AI technologies offer the promise of increased efficiency, improved decision-making processes, and the potential for greater transparency.

The beneficial effects of AI on corporate governance have been demonstrated in

research, demonstrating how it improves governance processes, notably in the context of boards of directors, and works as a driving force behind the organizational changes required to fully realize the potential of AI (Verhezen, 2020). With promising advancements in cognitive engagement, process automation, and cognitive insights are currently the main areas of attention for AI applications in governance (Locke & Bird, 2020).

2.1 Robotic Process Automation (RPA)

RPA streamlines repetitive administrative tasks such as payroll processing, invoicing, and data entry, freeing managers to focus on strategic priorities. RPA adoption is particularly high in finance, HR, and supply chain operations.

3. AI and Strategic Management

AI supports data-driven strategy formulation by providing insights into market trends, competitor analysis, and scenario simulations. AI tools enable more agile planning, reduce uncertainty, and help anticipate market disruptions.

4. Human-AI Collaboration

AI is not replacing managers but augmenting their capabilities. Managers equipped with AI tools demonstrate improved decision accuracy and faster response times. However, effective collaboration requires digital literacy and continuous training.

5. Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Despite its advantages, AI adoption raises concerns:

- Bias and Fairness: AI systems can inherit data biases, leading to unfair decisions.
- Transparency: The 'black box' nature of some algorithms complicates accountability.
- Job Displacement: Automation threatens certain roles, necessitating upskilling programs.
- Privacy: Data-driven AI must comply with regulations to safeguard user privacy.

6. Case Examples

- Amazon: Uses AI for inventory prediction, dynamic pricing, and personalized recommendations.
- Unilever: Applies AI in recruitment via gamified assessments and NLP-based interviews.
- IBM Watson: Assists in financial forecasting and healthcare diagnostics, supporting managerial insights.

7. Future Outlook

As AI capabilities continue to evolve, future management will involve greater synergy between human intelligence and AI. Key trends include explainable AI (XAI), ethical

AI frameworks, and AI-driven innovation ecosystems. Organizations that integrate AI ethically and strategically will be better positioned for sustainable success.

8. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research methodology, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data will be collected through an online survey targeting a diverse group of professionals within the Albanian business sector, including entrepreneurs, market analysts, operational managers, and traders. Secondary data will be drawn from relevant industry publications, business databases, and existing academic literature to supplement and contextualize the findings. Qualitative research method. In doing this, texts from various sources, such as regulations, monographic books, manuscripts, and electronic databases, have been used. The information collected from these sources has been arranged and presented herein using the document analysis method.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to significantly enhance quality of life by optimizing services across nearly every industry. Despite its promise, AI presents certain challenges particularly for companies that need to be addressed as businesses increasingly adopt this technology. The integration of AI across different sectors opens up numerous opportunities for both customers and organizations alike. This study is based on data collected via questionnaires distributed in January 2025 to 150 respondents. Participants were selected from various Albanian cities, including Tirana, Vlora, Durrës, Saranda, and Kavaja. To maintain the anonymity of the participants and their businesses, specific financial or personal information is not disclosed. The study provides a concrete analysis of opinions, interviews, and the results gathered from the questionnaires.

Graph 1: The Status of Enterprises. Graph 1 presents data on the legal and operational status of various enterprises in the study. It illustrates the distribution of business types among respondents, such as registered companies, informal businesses, or startups.

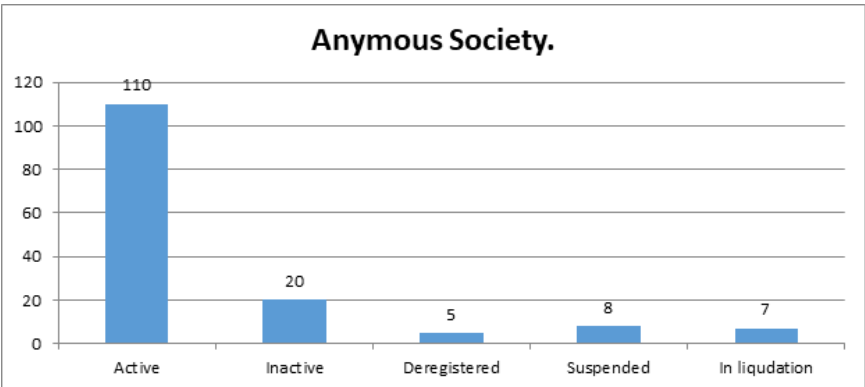


Figure 1: The Status of Enterprises.
Source: Data processed by the authors with Microsoft Excel Program (2025).

This graph will illustrate the size of businesses based on the number of employees. The most common ones seem to be local enterprises in the field of trade, with businesses employing between 10 to 40 employees (with a few businesses employing more than 40). We will also highlight the fact that family businesses are more closed off in their operations (as you mentioned that they perform multiple roles like reception, kitchen, and waiter services).

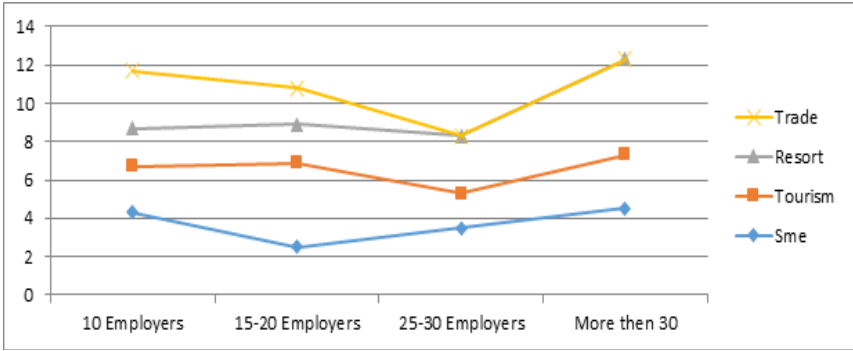


Figure 2: Enterprise Types by Sector and Size.
Source: Data processed by the authors with Microsoft Excel Program (2025).

9. Benefits and challenges of AI in corporate governance

AI has the capacity for improved corporate governance decision-making procedures. It can analyze massive amounts of information more rapidly than humans are capable of, allowing organizations to make more accurate judgments based on data (Wang et al., 2018). AI can free up human resources for higher-level planning and value-added work by automating routine tasks like data entry and analysis. The fundamental goals of governing a company can be met by the cost savings and enhanced productivity resulting from this higher efficiency.

10. Results

This research has explored critical aspects of the evolving role of AI, ethical and regulatory considerations, liability and accountability, intellectual property, and data privacy. However, it is imperative to highlight two critical themes that emerged from our discussions: Firstly, attributing legal personality to AI entities is at the heart of liability concerns and intellectual property issues. As AI systems take on more autonomous roles in decision-making,

Conclusion

In conclusion, integrating AI in corporate governance has emerged as a transformative force, reshaping how businesses operate and strategize. AI’s ability to automate routine tasks, generate insights from data, and augment decision-making processes

has increased operational efficiency and fostered innovation and competitiveness. Artificial Intelligence is not merely a tool but a paradigm shift in managerial thinking. From operational efficiency to strategic foresight, AI empowers businesses to adapt, compete, and grow in a volatile digital economy. Successful adoption requires not only technological readiness but also a culture of innovation, ethics, and continuous learning.

References

- Davenport, T. H., & Ronanki, R. (2018). Artificial Intelligence for the Real World. *Harvard Business Review*, 96(1), 108–116.
- Bughin, J., Seong, J., Manyika, J., Chui, M., & Joshi, R. (2019). The AI Frontier: Modeling the Impact of AI on the World Economy. McKinsey Global Institute.
- Brynjolfsson, E., & McAfee, A. (2017). The Business of Artificial Intelligence. *Harvard Business Review*.
- Russell, S., & Norvig, P. (2020). *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Haenlein, M., Kaplan, A. (2021). A Brief History of Artificial Intelligence: On the Past, Present, and Future of Artificial Intelligence. *California Management Review*, 63(4), 5–14.
- Wagner, G. (2019). Robot, Inc.: Personhood for autonomous systems? *Fordham Law Review*, 88(2), 591–612. <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol88/iss2/8/>
- Wang, Y., Kung, L., & Byrd, T. A. (2018). Big data analytics: Understanding its capabilities and potential benefits for healthcare organizations. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 126, 3–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2015.12.019>
- <https://www.techtarget.com/searchenterpriseai/definition/AI-Artificial-Intelligence>

A qualitative study of factors influencing business perceptions of online food products purchases

Eda Luga

Agricultural University of Tirana

Abstract

Increased access to the internet and the growing ability of consumers to take advantage of new forms of product purchases has aroused the interest of researchers. Purchasing food products, however, still poses a challenge with interest for study. While in many countries of the world online purchases, including food products, have increased, in some countries in the Balkans this trend has been limited to the provision of delivery. However, businesses have made efforts to introduce this new marketing channel model into consumer behavior. For this purpose, the study focuses on gathering the perception of businesses that offer food products through potential online channels. We conducted 50 qualitative semi-structured interviews with workers, managers and entrepreneurs of different food businesses in Albania. The purpose of the interview was to assess their current activity in relation to existing distribution channels as well as the development of online channels, the challenges and potential they carry. The interviews were conducted with representatives of food businesses such as: supermarkets, convenience stores, fast food, or stores that have either developed online platforms or operate through social media. The analysis of the data obtained from the interviews was subjected to manual coding based on thematic analysis in order to develop themes. Thematic analysis is a method for developing themes, which are patterns in the data collected. Large businesses seem to be more inclined to invest in developing online channels, as do some fresh produce businesses that target a higher-income consumer. The perception that consumers still have limited options for food delivery nearby their homes and during extended hours has hampered food businesses' efforts to offer online products, especially fresh products.

Keywords: Online purchases, Food products, Qualitative research, Business behavior.

Introduction

The emergence of new forms of consumer communication is placing pressure on food retail units to respond by investing in human resources and infrastructure. They must also assess the impact that new forms have on financial indicators, but also on those of building reciprocal relationships so often proclaimed as creators of competitive advantage. It is now widely accepted that consumer purchasing behavior can be described as a cross-section of decision-making processes influenced by internal and external factors (Goswami & Chouhan, 2021).

Online food shopping is seen as one of the biggest disruptions to food business models, especially supermarkets. The engagement of food businesses in the use of technology is not always easy and often some of them, such as restaurants, tend to stay away from technology. Conducting research aimed at developing a better understanding of business perspectives for offering products to customers is very important (Hwang et al., 2020). Offering food products through the use of technology is not the main goal of the business as this objective is competed by other objectives. According to Ho et al., 2014 businesses that operate online encounter difficulties in relationships with

customers as their insight is missing in business decisions.

The commitment of food retailers has led to increased investment in the use of sophisticated algorithms to rank products or make product recommendations that appear when a customer searches for an item (Moran et al., 2022). Despite the research conducted, it is noteworthy that few studies have investigated the ways in which online food delivery businesses influence customers' purchasing decisions (Karpyn et al., 2020).

Studies are still needed regarding the business perception of online food shopping because they will help manufacturers and retailers to react accordingly to the environment (Burgoiné et al., 2017). While consumer behavior and the identification of factors that encourage or inhibit them to develop online food shopping patterns have been explored, more detailed studies need to focus on the business approach. Often due to the nature of food shopping where a relationship is built between the consumer and the product (the organoleptic properties of food products), retailers need to determine the inherent need to focus their attention on emotional elements, as well as to create unique experiences (Liu & Lin, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to investigate in depth the factors that influence the decision-making of food businesses, including all food businesses. For this purpose, it will rely on GT which helps to better and dynamically identify the factors that can influence business development. Fifty semi-structured interviews were conducted in Albania. Interviews were conducted with managers or entrepreneurs of food businesses such as: Supermarkets, Convenience food stores, Fast foods. The processing of information from the interviews was carried out through manual coding in Nvivo 15. Online shopping experiences in the food sector have largely been limited to supermarket sales units, particularly for non-perishable categories such as bottled water and packaged goods. Recently, there have been some attempts to expand this model by offering fresh product packages through specialized vendors. However, several factors continue to discourage widespread consumer adoption of online food platforms. These include the close proximity of physical stores, the extended service hours of markets and supermarkets, and the general convenience of in-person shopping.

Background of the Study

Online food channel from the business perspective

Studying food retailing models is important to understand the consumer and achieve business objectives. Retailing can be done in fixed locations such as stores or markets, door-to-door or by delivery. Businesses generally view online food sales as a significant opportunity for growth and reaching a wider customer base. The ease and convenience of placing orders via mobile applications has brought about a significant change in the food delivery and takeaway business (Onyeného & Hedberg, 2013).

The online grocery shopping model is a form of purchasing food products, fresh produce, and other items through communication with websites or mobile applications (Driediger & Bhatiasévi, 2019). The spread of technology has facilitated this process, and since the 1990s, studies on online grocery shopping have also begun (Park et al., 1996). Online shopping is defined as the process of searching for and purchasing products or services over the internet (Varma & Agarwal, 2014).

The ease and convenience of placing orders via mobile applications has brought about a significant change in the food delivery and takeaway business (Onyeneho & Hedberg, 2013). Dang et al., (2018) in his study highlights the evidence proven by other authors who claim that consumer behavior regarding online food purchases differs from that of other products. The main concerns of consumers are those of food safety, perceived risk, information quality, trust in actors (Dang et al., 2018; Li & Bautista, 2019; Sanchez-Sabate & Sabaté, 2019; Zielińska et al., 2020). What is important according to Kim Dang et al. (2018) is that while preferences for online food purchases differ from the purchase of other goods, the rules for using e-commerce are the same. Most studies on online grocery sales have looked at it from the social, psychological perspective of the consumer. It seems that there are fewer authors engaged in assessing the opinion of online grocery providers.

Selling food online is a challenging issue for which a strategy must be developed to avoid the effects of decision-making (Warouw et al., 2022). Currently, market opportunities for businesses that want to develop strategies to develop online channels for food products have increased and this is related to the choice of marketing strategy (Abdullah, M. 2014). The business perspective of providing such a product delivery channel seems to find acceptance from every business sector to provide better customer service (Driediger & Bhatiasavi, 2019). In fact, this is seen as an effort that is being embraced not only by large companies but also by small and medium-sized enterprises. According to consumers, providing a service that ensures product delivery to the customer's door is one of the best service policies to attract customers (Dey et al., 2023). In the context of a developing country like Albania, online food shopping is not yet part of a widespread shopping pattern (Luga & Mehmeti, 2024). The use of these channels for the sale of food products poses a greater concern (than in other sectors) regarding the quality of the products. This is particularly important for fresh goods which can be damaged during delivery (Lin et al., 2013) and the fact that consumers have demands for physical examination of the product before purchase.

Theoretical background

To help develop the interviews in this study, insights from the Grounded Theory (GT) of Glaser and Strauss (1969) were used. This theory is now most widely used in qualitative studies (Chammas & Yehya 2020; Rosenlund et al., 2020). GT implies that researchers identify patterns or relationships between factors without being constrained by prior theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Initially, research begins with data collection. Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, clarifying research themes to further clarify theory. New data are continually compared with existing data to develop deeper understanding and refine categories. As themes emerge, new data are collected to refine the theory. Participants are selected based on the needs of the developing theory, not on predetermined criteria. The development of a relationship between the concepts obtained from the data can be integrated into a model (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Since the purpose of the study is to better investigate the perception of businesses on the use of online food channels and this situation is new for the consumer, it can be used successfully. According to (McCullough et al., 2020) GT can be used successfully when seeking to better understand a phenomenon that is under study.

Methodological application of GT

To utilize GT, it was created the interview template, conceived with a few limited

questions mainly related to business data and then with the presentation of the research purpose about the online channels of offering their products. The process was conducted through the following key stages: It was formulated a broad research focus. The open-ended approach of the interview allowed the research question to evolve based on the data. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, enabling insights from early data to inform subsequent sampling decisions. During this initial stage of analysis, the data were examined line by line to identify and label discrete ideas or actions. Codes were manually assigned to represent meaningful segments, often using participants' own words (in vivo coding, Nvivo 15). The open codes were then grouped into broader categories and subcategories. Based on the evolving analysis, participants and data sources were purposefully selected to refine categories, test emerging relationships, and explore variation. This iterative sampling process continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Throughout the process a memo writing was created to capture insights about codes, categories, and their interplays. A central category was identified that integrated all other categories and provide the foundation for the insights of the theoretical conceptualization.

Results and Discussion

For the purposes of this study, 50 food businesses were interviewed (Figure 1. Type of food business interviewed for each region) distributed 34 in the Tirana region, 8 in the Shkodra region, 8 in the Korça region. The interviews were conducted with representatives of food businesses such as supermarkets, convenience stores, fast-food. The interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour.



Figure 1. Type of food business interviewed for each region

Regarding the type of activity, all businesses operate in the field of food product delivery or ready-to-eat meals.

Their activity is mainly carried out through direct channels of food product delivery to the consumer. Regarding issues related to product sales formats, we note that supermarket managers interviewed claim that they have applied online product sales formats at the same time as physical sales in stores. It seems that the COVID_19 Pandemic has been a very strong reason to start exploring such a channel, different from Fast-Food that have offered it before. It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic has created conditions to promote such a service for most supermarkets that offer this service. Significantly, situational factors such as COVID-19 seem to be important causes

of promoting online shopping and their decline after the situation went towards normality. For example, managers of large supermarkets claim that:

"...online purchases of grocery baskets increased particularly during the pandemic period and appear to have declined after the lifting of movement restrictions".

The second factor motivating the exploration of online food delivery channels is the aspiration to provide a comprehensive assortment of products. Food businesses seek to fulfill consumer needs by aligning with fundamental values such as innovation, adaptability, and a proactive approach to industry transformation. Of these, only 5 of them currently continue to have such a service active.

Despite their large size and extensive network of branches across Albania, these supermarkets have centralized their online delivery services in only a few designated units. While some chains show interest in investing in and enhancing these services, others remain in the early stages of development. The challenges faced have varied in nature but are primarily related to supply chain logistics. Initially, third-party transportation services were used, but many supermarkets have since transitioned to using their own delivery vehicles. One recurring issue has been the inconsistency between consumer orders and the products actually delivered, particularly regarding the type or specific characteristics of the items. This has led to a lack of trust among consumers, many of whom express concerns about the non-delivery or substitution of requested products. As noted by supermarket managers:

"...product images on web pages cannot reflect every variation available in physical stores, which increases confusion among customers. Often, this is resolved through direct phone communication."

In such cases, some supermarkets have addressed the issue by offering substitute products when the exact requested items were unavailable, aiming to meet customer needs as closely as possible. Consumers have primarily preferred to purchase pre-packaged items through online supermarket platforms, including bottled water, packaged food products, and personal or household care items. In contrast, demand for fresh products—particularly various types of meat—has remained relatively low. According to supermarket managers, one of the key challenges in delivering fresh products such as meat lies in the need for refrigerated transport vehicles to ensure proper preservation during distribution. To address this, some supermarkets are working to align delivery logistics with the location of the nearest store to the customer's address, aiming to improve service efficiency. Others have opted to centralize the service by operating online orders through a dedicated unit, thereby improving the organization of work and logistical flow. While a few supermarket managers' report having developed formal business plans tailored to new online distribution channels, the majority have integrated this service into their long-term strategies without short-term implementation plans. Despite the currently limited contribution of online sales to overall revenue, many supermarkets consider the online model a necessary and strategic offering to maintain market competitiveness. Managers also report that online consumers exhibit distinct profiles, primarily based on social class and income. High-income, well-educated individuals, foreign nationals, and institutional consumers (such as businesses, associations, and NGOs) are identified as the most frequent users of online food shopping services. One manager remarked:

"...consumers who place online orders are typically looking for premium products and prioritize time-saving and home delivery over the cost of the service."

Consumers place their orders through dedicated web pages maintained by the supermarkets, where they can also benefit from promotional campaigns such as discounted product bundles and limited-time offers.

Notably, significant regional disparities exist in the adoption and continuation of online sales among large supermarkets. In regions such as Shkodra and Korça, online sales were largely discontinued following the end of COVID-19 restrictions. During the pandemic, up to 83% of supermarkets in these areas temporarily adopted online sales, mainly to serve elderly consumers. In many cases, children of emigrants placed orders on behalf of their parents. However, once normal conditions resumed, consumer behavior reverted to traditional in-store purchases.

Convenience stores in the region largely maintain traditional retail models, relying on physical customer visits for sales. Their online presence is minimal, limited to maintaining Facebook or Instagram pages primarily for communication rather than active sales or promotion. Aside from in-store shopping, the only alternative sales channel available to these stores has been telephone orders with home delivery services restricted to short distances.

Investment in digital infrastructure such as websites or dedicated mobile applications is currently viewed as premature by these businesses. This hesitation stems from operational challenges including difficulty in recruiting staff and managing day-to-day activities. Moreover, these stores emphasize consumer preferences for fresh products—especially fruits and vegetables—which customers prefer to select personally, thus reducing the perceived need for an online shopping option. A representative statement illustrates this perspective:

“...maybe large supermarkets will offer this, we have difficulty coping with such a form, besides the fact that food products, especially fruits and vegetables, consumers want to buy fresh, almost daily and choose them themselves.”

In contrast, businesses offering ready-made food and prepared meals have a longer history of engaging with remote sales channels. Their primary customers include workplaces, home consumers, and individuals with specific dietary needs. Orders have predominantly been processed via telephone and supplemented by Instagram promotional activities. Delivery logistics typically involve motor vehicles, and payments are usually made in cash upon delivery.

Table 1. Food business perspectives of online food purchases

Food Business Perspectives	Factors that encourage businesses to develop online channels	Factors that limit businesses from developing online channels
Supermarkets	Product Category	Investment in technology
	Consumer Profile	Investment in human resources
	Lifestyle	Consumer perceptions
Convenience Stores	Product Category	Distance
		Consumer perceptions
Fast-Food	Product Category	Investment in technology
		Investment in human resources

A small subset of convenience stores has developed more advanced online sales sys-

tems over the past three years. These units have built dedicated applications internally without outsourcing development. Their business strategy emphasizes establishing direct relationships with local service businesses, such as bars, positioning their platform as a B2B sales channel. To promote adoption, these businesses actively approached potential customers, educating them on the benefits and use of the digital ordering system. The motivation behind this digital transformation includes increasing operational efficiency, expanding product ranges, and reducing costs. Despite these advances, these businesses face significant challenges. The primary obstacle remains customers' limited digital literacy, requiring continuous improvements and user support for the applications. The most frequently sold products through these platforms are teas, soft drinks, and alcoholic beverages, aligning with the profile of their main clients - local bars and service businesses.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the varied approaches to online food delivery across different categories of food businesses in Albania. Supermarkets have introduced online delivery services primarily as a complementary channel, characterized by limited staffing and modest investments, reflecting their aim to enhance the overall retail experience rather than drive significant sales volume through this medium. Convenience stores, strategically located within residential areas, have largely continued to rely on traditional in-person sales, leveraging their accessibility as a key competitive advantage. A noteworthy development is the emergence of business-to-business online purchasing, wherein concentrated demand and larger order volumes contribute to improved operational efficiency—an aspect previously unconsidered at the outset of this research. Furthermore, distinctive distribution practices designed to serve elderly households and facilitate payments from emigrant family members underscore the unique socio-economic context of Albania, marked by high rates of emigration and strong family ties.

References

- Abdullah, M. (2014). *Manajemen dan Evaluasi Kinerja Karyawan*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Aswaja Pressindo.
- Burgoine, T., Mackenbach, J. D., Lakerveld, J., Forouhi, N. G., Griffin, S. J., Brage, S., (2017). Interplay of socioeconomic status and supermarket distance is associated with excess obesity risk: a UK cross-sectional study. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 14, 1290.
- Chammas, G., & Yehya, N. A. (2020). Lebanese meal management practices and cultural constructions of food waste. *Appetite*, 155, 104803.
- Dang, K., A., Xuan Tran, B., Tat Nguyen, C., Thi, Le, H., Thi, et al. (2018). Consumer preference and attitude regarding online food products in Hanoi, Vietnam. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 15, 981.
- Dey, B., K., Sarkar, M., Chaudhuri, K., Sarkar, B., (2023). Do you think that the home delivery is good for retailing? *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 72, 103237
- Driediger, F., Bhatiasavi, V., (2019). Online grocery shopping in Thailand: consumer acceptance and usage behavior. *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.* 48, 224–237.
- Driediger, F., Bhatiasavi, V., (2019). Online grocery shopping in Thailand: Consumer acceptance and usage behavior. *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.*, 48, 224–237.
- Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* Chicago, Adelin, London.

- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1965). *Awareness of dying*, Aldine Transaction, New Brunswick.
- Glaser, B., Strauss, A. (1999). *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Goswami, Sh., Chouhan, V., (2021). Impact of change in consumer behaviour and need prioritization on retail industry in Rajasthan during COVID-19 pandemic, *Materials Today: Proceedings* 46 (2021) 10262–10267.
- Karpyn, A.; McCallops, K.; Wolgast, H.; Glanz, K. (2020). Improving Consumption and Purchases of Healthier Foods in Retail Environments: A Systematic Review. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 17, 75.
- Li, L., Bautista, J. R. (2019). Examining personal and media factors associated with attitude towards genetically modified foods among university students in Kunming, China. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 16, 4613.
- Lin, Y., K., Yeh, C., T., Huang, C., F. (2013). Reliability evaluation of a stochastic-flow distribution network with delivery spoilage. *Comput. Ind. Eng.*, 66, 352–359
- Liu C., F., Lin C., H., (2020) Online Food Shopping: A Conceptual Analysis for Research Propositions. *Front. Psychol.* 11:583768.
- Luga, E., Mehmeti, G., (2024). Factors that affect the intention of consumers to buy food products online, *Economia agro-alimentare*: XXVI, 2.
- McCullough, K., Whitehead, L., Bayes, S., Williams, A. and Cope, V. (2020), The delivery of Primary Health Care in remote communities: A Grounded Theory study of the perspective of nurses, *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 102, 1 – 9.
- Moran, A.J.; Headrick, G.; Perez, C.; Greetsinger, A.; Taillie, L.S.; Zatz, L.; Bleich, S.N.; Rimm, E.B.; Khandpur, N. (2022). Food marketing practices of major online grocery retailers in the United States, 2019–2020. *J. Acad. Nutr. Diet.* 2022, 122, 2295–2310.
- Onyeneho, S. N., Hedberg, C. W. (2013). An assessment of food safety needs of restaurants in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 10, 3296–3309.
- Park, K., Perosio, D., German, G.A., McLaughlin, E.W., (1996). *What's in Store for Home Shopping?* Charles, H., Ed.; Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University: New York, NY, USA.
- Rosenlund, J., Nyblom, A., Ekholm, H. M., & Sörme, L. (2020), The emergence of food waste as an issue in Swedish retail, *British Food Journal*, 122 (11), 3283-3296.
- Sanchez-Sabate, R., and Sabaté, J. (2019). Consumer attitudes towards environmental concerns of meat consumption: a systematic review. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 16, 1220.
- Varma, I. G., Agarwal, M. R. (2014). Online Buying Behaviour of Homemakers in Western Suburbs of Mumbai and Social Media Influence. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 16(8), 42–65.
- Warouw, D., Himpong, M., Pasoreh, Y., Matheosz, J., N., (2022). The Role of Online Food Selling Students through Social Media in Supporting the Entrepreneurial Creativity Program, *Journal of Asian Multicultural Research for Economy and Management Study*, 3 (3), 025-036
- Zielińska, D., Bilska, B., Marciniak-Lukasiak, K., Łepecka, A., Trzaśkowska, M., Neffe-Skocińska, K., (2020). Consumer understanding of the date of minimum durability of food in association with quality evaluation of food products after expiration. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 17:1632.

Attitudes of healthcare professionals regarding perinatal depression

Alketa Dervishi

Faculty of Technical Medical Sciences, Medical University of Tirana

Abstract

Perinatal depression refers to a depressive disorder that can appear during pregnancy or 4 weeks to 12 months after birth and can be associated with challenges for the mother, child and family members. Studies related to this topic mainly focus on risk factors, prevention and treatment of this psychological disorder. The aim of this study is to investigate the correlation between the specialty, professional clinical experience of health care professionals and the management of perinatal depression. This is a cross-sectional study, which includes a convenient sampling, applied in primary care and maternity. Data was collected through Google Forms, using the Maternal Mood Assessment (MAMA) survey, a 37-item self-administered questionnaire covering various aspects of perinatal depression, such as definition, prevalence, risk factors, diagnosis, management and support. Consent was obtained from the participants of this study and data confidentiality was ensured. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the institutional ethics committee. A total of 54 care professionals working in health institutions in Albania participated in this study, of which 43.4% were nurses, 41.5% midwives, 11.3% doctors and 4.2% psychologists. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 60 years and the mean was 41.2 years (SD 10.03). Regarding the experience, it turned out that the majority (37.7%) had 5 years of work and 26.4% had 10 years of employment in health care. About 51.9% of the respondents reported that no outpatient service for perinatal depression is offered, and the rest 41.8% state that this type of service is offered. From the questionnaire data, it is concluded that there are no specific ways to prevent and manage perinatal depression, specifically reported by 52.8% of respondents. From the statistical analysis of the data, a significant relationship was observed for age and seniority at work, with a p value of less than 0. The study concludes that the prevention and treatment of perinatal depression should be a priority of primary care structures. It is important to invest in the continuing education and professional development of healthcare professionals.

Keywords: health care professionals, perinatal depression, primary care.

Introduction

Perinatal depression is a psychological disorder that affects women during pregnancy or a few weeks after giving birth [1]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 1 in 10 women show symptoms of perinatal depression in countries with high standards, while in developing countries, 1 in 5 women suffer from perinatal depression [2]. The data shows that in the USA, the prevalence of depression during pregnancy is 8.5%-11% and 6.5%-12.9% during the first year after birth [3]. Studies are based on the prevention of this psychological disorder, risk factors, effective management methods, but global data are still not sufficient [4]. Studies conclude that perinatal depression can occur as a result of previous abortions, financial difficulties, unhealthy relationships between partners, lack of support, and traumas, lack of information about the birth process, etc [5,6,7]. Perinatal depression is accompanied by long-term negative effects such as: persistent depressive disorder, ineffective

mother-child communication, compromised self-care ability, it can also affect a woman's physical and mental health [8].

Untreated perinatal depression can be associated with premature birth, low birth weight and impaired cognitive development of the baby [9]. Health care workers should be trained to provide psychological services according to specific programs in clinical settings, including prenatal ones and to choose the most effective management methods [10]. Policies of health institutions that focus on identifying women with a history of depression in the perinatal period are necessary for immediate intervention, enabling the reduction of the potentially negative consequences of perinatal depression for the physical and psychological well-being of the mother and the child [11].

This issue requires further studies to determine the factors that can improve and promote the mental health of the mother, also aiming to explore the knowledge that health care professionals have regarding perinatal depression. Referring to the negative effects of perinatal depression on the life of babies and the family, diagnosis and treatment of this disorder in time, during the first weeks after birth, are essential [12]. However, the challenge of providing effective mental health services to mothers with depression continues.

Methodology

This is a cross-sectional study, which includes a convenient sampling, applied in primary care and maternity. The data was collected through Google Forms, using the Maternal Mood Assessment (MAMA) survey, a 37-item self-administered questionnaire covering various aspects of perinatal depression, such as definition, prevalence, risk factors, diagnosis, management and support.

Consent was obtained from the participants of this study and data confidentiality was ensured. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the institutional ethics committee.

Instruments

The questionnaire used was developed specifically for this study and included direct questions about specialty and professional experience related to perinatal depression. For the correct completion of the questionnaire, the first author and the other authors, as well as health care professionals were engaged, who provided comments to ensure the clarity and validity of the instrument.

Demographic data related to gender, age, specialty and professional experience were reported. Perinatal depression was defined as a major depressive episode occurring during pregnancy or within the first year after birth. The questionnaire was applied in the Albanian language and then the material was processed in the English language.

Data analysis

Data analysis was made possible through SPSS version 26.0. The first author completed the coding and data analysis process. Participants self-reported their professional

role and this was categorized according to whether they had general medical training such as doctor, nurse, or whether they were specialists in childbirth care such as obstetricians and midwives. Data are presented as percentages. The chi-squared test was used to assess significant differences. When chi-square was not appropriate for the analysis of observed data, we used Fisher's exact test. $P < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Results

The study involved 54 participants who completed the online questionnaire through Google Forms. Participants who indicated that their profession was outside the scope of the project, or who were not considered as health professionals, were not included in the study. All participants in the study were women, 54 (100%). The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 60 years and the mean was 41.2 years (SD 10.03).

Participants were asked to specify their professional role, resulting in: 23 (43.2 %) nursing staff, 22 (41.3 %) midwives, 6 (11.3 %) doctors and 3 (4.2 %) psychologists.

The participants were also asked to complete the years of experience they had according to their profession.

It turned out that the majority 21 (37.7 %) had 5 years of experience, 14 (26.4 %) had 10 years of experience, 7 (13.2 %)

had 11 to 15 years of experience, 2 (3.8 %) had 16 to 20 years of experience, and 10 (18.9%) had over 20 years of experience in health care. Referring to the specialties, the data showed that 17 (30.8%) were employed in the university hospital center, 9 (17.3%) in the primary service, 16 (28.8%) in the maternity-delivery room-obstetrics, and 16 (28.8%) in the obstetrics-counseling-practice clinic. private 3 (5.8 %) and 9 (17.3 %) exercised their professional activity in other specialties. From the statistical analysis of the data, a significant relationship was observed for age and seniority at work, with a p value of less than 0.05 (Table 1).

Table 1. General data related to age and work among the participants

General Data	Variables	Percent - age(%)	P value
Age	21- 30 years	34 %	<.042
	31- 40 years	39.6 %	
	41 - 50 years	17 %	
	51 – 60 years	9.4 %	
Qualification and profes- sion	Nurse	43.4 %	>.076
	Midwife	41.5 %	
	Physician	12.3 %	
	Psychologist	3.8 %	

Place of work	University Hospital Center	30.8 %	>.051
	Primary Care	17.3 %	
	Martenitet-Dhoma elindjes-Reparti i Obstetrikes	28.8 %	
	Martenitet-Delivery Room-Obstetrics Ward	5.8 %	
Seniority at work	0-5 years	37.7%	<.001
	6-10 years	26,4 %	
	11-15 years	13.2 %	
	16-20 Years	3.8 %	
	>20 years	18.9 %	

The application of specific referral procedures related to perinatal depression according to the specialty of the participants in the study was also an issue of the questionnaire. Specifically, from the data it was concluded that in 32.1% of cases they had referral procedures related to perinatal depression, in 52.8% of cases these types of procedures were not applied and 15.1% had no information (Table 2).

Table 2. Data about referral procedure for perinatal depression

In your work environment, is there a specific referral procedure for perinatal depression?	
Yes	32.1 %
No	52.8 %
I am not sure	15.1 %

The focus of this study was the possibility of outpatient services for this perinatal psychological disorder. From the data, it was found that in 41.8% of cases outpatient service was offered and in 51.9% of cases there was no outpatient service for perinatal depression (Table 3).

Table 3.

Does the clinic in your area offer an outpatient service for perinatal depression?	Percentage (%)
Yes	41.8 %
No	51.9 %

The interviewees were asked about the effectiveness of the application of instructions regarding the management of perinatal depression and it turned out that 96.3% stated that it would be useful to have instructions in the management of this disorder (Table 4).

Table 4.

Would it be helpful to have guidelines for managing perinatal depression?	Percentage (%)
Yes	96.3 %
No	3.7 %

Discussion

In our country, pregnancy in general is a very positive emotional state, as has been established in clinical practice. This study aimed to explore the correlation between the specialty and experiences of health professionals in Albania, regarding perinatal depression. Professionals expressed interest in further training to support the development of their knowledge and practice with mothers in relation to psychological disorders and their mental health in general. In other studies, it is concluded that perinatal health care professionals have had minimal training for the mental health of the mother, considering it beyond their professional scope, which results in an obstacle to providing effective care [13].

Facilitative procedures for women in their community who seek help for perinatal mental health are discussed in this study. Data from various studies concluded that there were barriers both at the individual level and in the health care system. Barriers at the individual level included lack of financial resources and low socio-economic status, which has been consistently reported as a risk factor for perinatal depression in studies conducted in developing countries [14]. The conclusions of this paper offer new possibilities for identifying maternal mental health issues at the level of the health system by specialty. The participants determined the effectiveness of the application of instructions regarding the management of perinatal depression.

Regardless of the barriers, health care professionals should have a protocol and describe a process available to identify a woman suspected of having perinatal depression for further evaluation and treatment. In various studies, the importance of applying group counseling for women with depressive symptoms to talk about their feelings and also to encourage family members to participate in supporting women at risk for perinatal depression has been stated. All these findings show the effectiveness of providing mental health interventions by health care workers [15]. Supporting family members in mental health counseling sessions can make it easier for women to seek mental health help [16]. This research provides sufficient information to guide the development and implementation of health professional training on this topic.

Conclusion

Further studies should be conducted to determine effective interventions and

clinical approaches to be implemented by health professionals with particular focus on continuing education. More support and training opportunities for staff about psychosocial issues should be provided to effectively prevent and manage cases of perinatal depression, especially among young professionals. The data of the studies reinforce the importance of the specialty and experience of the health care team in the support of women with this psychological disorder. Future research should explore the possibility of using evidence-based methods for the effective application of maternal mental health care [17], with the ultimate goal of promoting maternal and infant well-being.

Statement of competing interest

We wish to confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there was no significant financial support for this material that could have influenced its outcome.

Gratitude

We would like to thank all the health professionals who helped fill out the forms, those who processed the statistical data and the authors who conducted this study.

References

- Dagher R.K., Bruckheim H.E., Colpe L.J., Edwards E., White D.B. Perinatal depression: Challenges and opportunities. *J. Women's Health*. 2021;**30**:154–159. doi: 10.1089/jwh.2020.8862. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]
- WHO. *Pregnancy, Childbirth, Postpartum and Newborn Care: A Guide for Essential Practice*. WHO; Geneva, Switzerland: 2015. [PubMed] [Google Scholar]
- Gaynes et al., 2005 B.N. Gaynes, N. Gavin, S. Meltzer Brody, K.N. Lohr, T. Swinson, G. Gartlehner, S. Brody, W.C. Miller. Perinatal depression: Prevalence, screening accuracy, and screening outcomes.
- Legazpi P.C.C., Rodríguez-Muñoz M.F., Olivares-Crespo M.E., Izquierdo-Méndez N. Review of suicidal ideation during pregnancy: Risk factors, prevalence, assessment instruments and consequences. *Psicol. Reflexão E Crítica*. 2022;**35**:1–10. doi: 10.1186/s41155-022-00220-4. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]
- Barthel D., Kriston L., Barkmann C., Appiah-Poku J., Bonle M.T., Doris K.Y.E., Esther B.K.C., Armel K.E.J., Mohammed Y., Osei Y., et al. Longitudinal course of ante-and postpartum generalized anxiety symptoms and associated factors in West-African women from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. *J. Affect. Disord*. 2016;**197**:125–133. doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2016.03.014. [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]
- Belay S., Astatkie A., Emmelin M., Hinderaker S.G. Intimate partner violence and maternal depression during pregnancy: A community-based cross-sectional study in Ethiopia. *PLoS ONE*. 2019;**14**:e0220003. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0220003. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]
- Chorwe-Sungani G. Performance of the 3-item screener, the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale, the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist-15 and the Self-Reporting Questionnaire and Pregnancy Risk Questionnaire, in screening of depression in antenatal clinics in the Blantyre district. *Malawi Med. J*. 2018;**30**:184. doi: 10.4314/mmj.v30i3.10. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]

Ng'Oma M., Meltzer-Brody S., Chirwa E., Stewart R.C. "Passing through difficult times": Perceptions of perinatal depression and treatment needs in Malawi—A qualitative study to inform the development of a culturally sensitive intervention. *PLoS ONE*. 2019;**14**:e0217102. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0217102. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]

Gelaye et al., 2016 B. Gelaye, M.B. Rondon, R. Araya, M.A. Williams Epidemiology of maternal depression, risk factors, and child outcomes in low-income and middle-income countries

Chowdhary et al., 2014 N. Chowdhary, S. Sikander, N. Atif, N. Singh, I. Ahmad, D.C. Fuhr, A. Rahman, V. Patel The content and delivery of psychological interventions for perinatal depression by non-specialist health workers in low and middle income countries: A systematic review

Fisher J., De Mello M.C., Patel V., Rahman A., Tran T., Holton S., Holmes W. Prevalence and determinants of common perinatal mental disorders in women in low- and lower-middle-income countries: A systematic review. *Bull World Health Organ*. 2012;**90**:139–149H. doi: 10.2471/BLT.11.091850. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]

WHO . Pregnancy, Childbirth, Postpartum and Newborn Care: A Guide for Essential Practice. WHO; Geneva, Switzerland: 2015. [PubMed] [Google Scholar]

Byatt, N., Biebel, K., Lundquist, R. S., Moore Simas, T. A., Debordes-Jackson, G., Allison, J., & Ziedonis, D. (2012). Patient, provider, and system-level barriers and facilitators to addressing perinatal depression. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 30(5), 436–449. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02646838.2012.743000>

Gelaye et al., 2016 B. Gelaye, M.B. Rondon, R. Araya, M.A. Williams Epidemiology of maternal depression, risk factors, and child outcomes in low-income and middle-income countries

N. Chowdhary, S. Sikander, N. Atif, N. Singh, I. Ahmad, D.C. Fuhr, A. Rahman, V. Patel The content and delivery of psychological interventions for perinatal depression by non-specialist health workers in low and middle income countries: A systematic review Best Pract

Nakku et al., 2016 J.E.M. Nakku, E.S. Okello, D. Kizza, S. Honikman, J. Ssebunnya, S. Ndyabangi, C. Hanlon, F. Kigozi Perinatal mental health care in a rural African district, Uganda: A qualitative study of barriers, facilitators and needs

Gilmore and McAuliffe, 2013. B. Gilmore, E. McAuliffe Effectiveness of community health workers delivering preventive interventions for maternal and child health in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review

Managing health well-being under the influence of anxiety levels among students of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Shkodra during the Post-COVID-19 Period

Dr. Arben Hoti

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Albania

Abstract

Like the rest of human society, Albanian society also experienced significant challenges during the post-COVID-19 period, affecting individuals' health and well-being. This period was managed through efforts to adhere to health protocols and safety measures in a personalized manner, a process that highlighted a variety of impacts, including psychological ones such as stress and anxiety. Based on a census sample of 336 students from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Shkodra, this article presents findings related to compliance with preventive measures and the influence of anxiety, particularly in connection with vaccination and personal experience with COVID-19. These findings are part of a broader study conducted during 2021–2022, contributing to the global body of research on the psychological and social consequences of the post-pandemic period. The article aims to explore the effects on health well-being associated with managing the post-COVID situation, the manifestations of anxiety levels, and their psychological implications. Satisfactory levels of vaccination and normal levels of personal COVID-19 experience, which were not statistically significantly influenced by anxiety levels, suggest effective management of the post-COVID-19 period without causing significant threats to students' psychological well-being.

Keywords: COVID-19, students, vaccination, anxiety.

Introduction

This article presents a part of the study conducted at the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi," within the Faculties of Education Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Economics, with Bachelor-level students. This study was carried out during the period from October 2021 to March 2022, at a time when Albanian society had overcome the difficult periods of Covid-19 infection and mass vaccinations of the population. The period experienced with Covid-19 in human society, including in Albania, has had various impacts on individuals' health and psychological well-being. The management of health well-being has been the subject of various studies, including this research paper.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the post-Covid management of students under the influence of anxiety (its levels). Another objective of the paper is to collect empirical data on Covid-19 infection, and the vaccination status of the students involved in our sample. A third objective is to verify the relationship between the levels of anxiety with vaccination status and experience with COVID-19. This paper addresses these objectives by defining clear goals and well-defined research questions. The research questions of the paper are as follows:

1. What is the level of anxiety in our sample?

2. Is there a connection between the status of vaccination and levels of anxiety?
3. Is there a connection between the personal experience with COVID-19 and levels of anxiety?

In conclusion, the introduction emphasizes that the paper follows a clear structure and that all work has been conducted in accordance with the necessary ethical guidelines.

Literature Review

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the virus known as SARS-CoV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2). This virus is part of the coronavirus family and can cause a wide range of symptoms, from mild ones (like the flu) to severe diseases, such as pneumonia, and can lead to death, especially in individuals at higher risk, such as the elderly and those with other pre-existing health conditions (WHO, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's lives worldwide. It has disrupted work, education, healthcare, the economy, and relationships.

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes such as increased blood pressure (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020, p. 66). Individuals with anxiety disorders often experience recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may also avoid certain situations due to distress. Additionally, they may have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness, or rapid heartbeats.

Anxiety should not be confused with fear, although the two terms are often used interchangeably. Anxiety is considered a future-oriented response with prolonged action, generally focused on a diffuse threat, while fear is a more immediate and short-lived response to a clearly identifiable and specific threat (Hoti & Hoti, 2022). Anxiety is an ongoing, generalized emotional state, whereas fear is directed towards specific present circumstances.

Studies on the Impact of anxiety on COVID-19

During COVID-19, impacts on people's anxiety were observed, as reflected in many studies. A systematic qualitative review was conducted by Saeed et al. (2022) to investigate the prevalence and association of anxiety in different population samples related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this systematic review indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the mental health of many populations in society. Anxiety is prevalent within the general population, healthcare workers, university students, and other vulnerable groups. The prevalence of anxiety among students was 34.7% (Saeed et al., 2022, p. 12).

A study conducted in China on the consequences of COVID-19 on the population found that depression had a prevalence of 15%, anxiety 28.8%, and high-level stress 8.1% (Wang et al., 2020). Asmundson and Taylor (2020) studied the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, identifying a significant increase in health-related anxiety among individuals. The researchers emphasized the factors contributing to the rise in anxiety during the pandemic, including insecurity and social changes, fear for health, and lack of control. This was further reinforced by

Lima et al. (2021), who emphasized that anxiety is the most common response in the population to extreme situations such as a pandemic.

Halperin et al. (2021) reported that the prevalence of anxiety among university students was 30.6%. Islam et al. (2020) reported that anxiety among university students had worsened compared to pre-pandemic levels and with the duration of lockdowns. In contrast, Kim et al. (2021) did not report significant changes in anxiety during lockdowns. A study conducted in Kosovo with 657 students from 6 universities analyzed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of students. The results showed that 79.2% of the study participants experienced anxiety, specifically 16.9% reported severe anxiety levels, 24.2% moderate, and 38.1% mild anxiety (Jetishi Çollaku, 2024, p. 47).

Methodology

Nature of the Study. This study is empirical, analytical-descriptive, exploratory, and correlational, aiming to interpret and analyze empirical data in accordance with the research questions. Various statistical methods, such as frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulations, and correlations, were employed to achieve the research objectives.

Sample. The sample consists of Bachelor-level students from the fields of Finance, Business administration and Tourism at the Faculty of Economics in University of Shkodër “Luigj Gurakuqi”. Students were selected using a census approach, including over 85% of the registered students, with a small number excluded due to incomplete or invalid questionnaires. A total of 336 students who met the participation criteria volunteered to take part in the study.

Instrument Used. The instrument used is divided into three sections. The first section contains 4 questions gathering information about the impact of Covid-19, the severity of the impact, treatment methods, and vaccination status. The second section includes the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), adapted to Albanian and pilot-tested.

Administration and Data Collection. The questionnaires were administered during seminars, when student participation was highest. Prior to completing the questionnaires, students were informed about the purpose of the survey and were assured of anonymity. They were given 15-20 minutes to complete the survey.

Results and Discussion

The sample consists of 336 students from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Shkodra. They are enrolled in Bachelor's level studies in the following programs: Finance (N = 162), Business Administration (N = 99), and Tourism (N = 75). In terms of gender distribution, the sample includes 241 female and 95 male students.

Table 1. Personal Experience with Covid-19					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Uninfected	164	48.8	48.8	48.8
	Infected ones	144	42.9	42.9	91.7
	Infected twice	28	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	336	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 presents the distribution of participants based on their personal experience with Covid-19. The data show that 48.8% of respondents had never been infected with Covid-19, while 42.9% had been infected once, and only 8.3% had been infected twice. This distribution indicates that nearly half of the sample had no direct experience with the virus, whereas a considerable percentage had been infected at least once. The lowest percentage belongs to those who were infected twice, suggesting that this group represents a rarer experience within the studied sample.

Table 2. Distribution of Infection Severity among Participants Who Have Had Covid-19					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Asymptomatic	98	29.2	40.2	40.2
	Mild symptoms for a short duration	97	28.9	39.8	79.9
	Noticeable symptoms for a considerable time	36	10.7	14.8	94.7
	Severe and prolonged symptoms	13	3.9	5.3	100.0
	Total	244	72.6	100.0	
Missing	System	92	27.4		
Total		336	100.0		

Table 2 displays the distribution of participants according to the severity of their Covid-19 experience, but only among those who had been infected. Out of 336 respondents, 244 provided valid answers to this question, while 92 cases represent missing data. Among those infected, 29.2% experienced the virus mildly or with no noticeable symptoms, and 28.9% reported mild symptoms requiring home isolation. A more symptomatic experience, without requiring hospitalization, was reported by

10.7% of respondents, while only 3.9% needed hospital treatment. These data indicate that the majority of those infected experienced Covid-19 in mild or moderate forms, whereas the percentage of those who experienced severe forms was relatively low in this sample.

Table 3. Covid-19 Vaccination Status					
		Fre- quency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumu- lative Percent
Valid	Unvaccinated	92	27.4	27.4	27.4
	Vaccinated once	28	8.3	8.3	35.7
	Vaccinated twice	194	57.7	57.7	93.5
	Vaccinated 3 times	22	6.5	6.5	100.0
	Total	336	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows the distribution of participants according to the number of Covid-19 vaccinations received. Out of 336 respondents, 27.4% reported being unvaccinated, while 8.3% had received only one dose. The vast majority of the sample—specifically 57.7%—were vaccinated twice, and 6.5% had received three doses. These findings suggest that the overall level of protection through vaccination is high in the sample, although a considerable portion remains unvaccinated, which may be related to personal, informational, or experiential factors—particularly among those who had not contracted Covid-19.

Table 4. Distribution of Anxiety Levels among Participants					
		Frequen- cy	Percent	Valid Per- cent	Cumulative Percent
Val- id	Low	185	55.1	55.1	55.1
	Middle	99	29.5	29.5	84.5
	High	52	15.5	15.5	100.0
	Total	336	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 presents the distribution of anxiety levels among the study sample. Of the 336 respondents, 55.1% reported a low level of anxiety, 29.5% indicated a moderate level, and 15.5% experienced a high level of anxiety. This suggests that more than half of participants experienced low anxiety, while a considerable portion reported moderate anxiety, and a smaller percentage experienced high levels of anxiety.

Table 5. Relationship between Anxiety Levels and Personal Experience with Covid-19 (Crosstabulation)

Infected		Personal Experience with CO-VID-19				Total
		Infected twice				
Anxiety levels	Low	Count	102	69	14	185
		% within Anxiety levels	55.1%	37.3%	7.6%	100.0%
	Midle	Count	42	48	9	99
		% within Anxiety levels	42.4%	48.5%	9.1%	100.0%
	High	Count	20	27	5	52
		% within Anxiety leveles	38.5%	51.9%	9.6%	100.0%
	Total	Count	164	144	28	336
		% within Anxiety levels	48.8%	42.9%	8.3%	100.0%

Table 5 illustrates the relationship between anxiety levels and personal experience with Covid-19, categorized by infection status: not infected, infected once, and infected twice. The data show that the majority of individuals with low anxiety ($n = 185$) were not infected (55.1%), while 37.3% had been infected once, and only 7.6% twice. Among those with moderate anxiety ($n = 99$), the highest percentage had been infected once (48.5%), followed by those not infected (42.4%), and a smaller portion infected twice (9.1%). The group with high anxiety ($n = 52$) contained the highest percentage of individuals infected once (51.9%), while 38.5% were not infected, and 9.6% had been infected twice. These findings suggest a possible relationship between personal exposure to the virus and anxiety level, where individuals who had been infected once or twice appear more frequently in the moderate and high anxiety categories compared to those who had no infection experience.

Table 6. Chi-Square Tests for Relationship between Anxiety Levels and Covid-19 Experience

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.849 ^a	4	.144
Likelihood Ratio	6.881	4	.142

Linear-by-Linear Association	4.874	1	.027
N of Valid Cases	336		
a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.33.			

Table 6 shows that the Pearson Chi-Square test yielded a value of 6.849 with 4 degrees of freedom (df), and a p-value (Asymptotic Significance) of 0.144. This indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between anxiety levels and personal experience with Covid-19 in this sample, as $p > 0.05$.

Table 7. Crosstabulation of Anxiety Levels and Covid-19 Vaccination Status							
		Unvaccinated					Total
		Vacc. once	Vacc twice	Vacc, 3 times			
Anxiety levels	Low	Count	49	14	109	13	185
		% within Anxiety levels	26.5%	7.6%	58.9%	7.0%	100.0%
	Middle	Count	34	9	53	3	99
		% within Anxiety levels	34.3%	9.1%	53.5%	3.0%	100.0%
	High	Count	9	5	32	6	52
		% within Anxiety levels	17.3%	9.6%	61.5%	11.5%	100.0%
	Total	Count	92	28	194	22	336
		% within Anxiety levels	27.4%	8.3%	57.7%	6.5%	100.0%

Table 7 presents the distribution of anxiety levels in relation to the number of Covid-19 vaccinations. Among the 336 participants, 55.1% reported low anxiety, 29.5% moderate anxiety, and 15.5% high anxiety. In the low anxiety group ($n = 185$), the majority were vaccinated twice (58.9%), while 26.5% were unvaccinated. In the moderate anxiety group ($n = 99$), 53.5% were vaccinated twice and 34.3% were unvaccinated. Among participants with high anxiety ($n = 52$), 61.5% had received two doses, 17.3% were unvaccinated, and smaller proportions had received one or three doses. These results show that, across all anxiety levels, receiving two vaccine doses is the most common pattern. However, a considerable portion of individuals

with low and moderate anxiety were unvaccinated. The high anxiety group showed a relatively higher percentage of individuals vaccinated with three doses compared to other groups. This suggests a possible relationship between vaccination status and anxiety level, potentially reflecting differences in risk perception and health behavior during the pandemic.

Table 8. Chi-Square Tests for Anxiety Levels and Vaccination Status			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.426 ^a	6	.209
Likelihood Ratio	8.689	6	.192
Linear-by-Linear Association	.270	1	.603
N of Valid Cases	336		
a. 2 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.40.			

Table 8 shows that the Pearson Chi-Square test produced a value of 8.426 with 6 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.209. This means that there is no statistically significant relationship between anxiety levels and vaccination status in this test, as $p > 0.05$. The Likelihood Ratio test supports this conclusion, with a p-value of 0.192. Additionally, the Linear-by-Linear Association test does not reveal any linear relationship between the variables, as the p-value is 0.603, which is well above the 0.05 threshold. It is worth noting that 16.7% of cells have expected counts less than 5 (with a minimum expected count of 3.40), which may affect the reliability of the test results and requires caution in interpretation. Overall, the findings indicate no significant statistical association between the variables analyzed in this sample.

Conclusion

This research study reached several important conclusions related to the three research questions posed. After presenting the results and the corresponding discussions, the following conclusions were drawn:

Nearly half of the sample reported no direct experience with the virus, whereas a considerable percentage had been infected at least once. The lowest percentage was among those infected twice, indicating that this group represents a rarer experience within the studied sample.

COVID-19 affected the majority of students in mild forms or with no symptoms at all. The vaccination process was completed regularly in most cases, with at least two doses administered to 57.7% of participants. Among unvaccinated students, approximately one-quarter appear to have been influenced by the fact that they had not previously been infected with COVID-19.

There is no statistically significant relationship between anxiety levels and personal experience with COVID-19 in this sample ($p > .05$). also, there is no statistically

significant association between vaccination status and anxiety levels within this sample.

All these findings suggest effective management of the post-COVID-19 period without causing significant threats to the psychological well-being of students.

Acknowledgments. We are very grateful to all participants for sharing their experiences. The authors express their gratitude for the financial support provided by the University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2020). *APA dictionary of psychology* (2nd ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000-0000>
- Asmundson, G. J. G., & Taylor, S. (2020). Coronaphobia: Fear and the 2019-nCoV outbreak. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 70, 102196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2020.102196>
- Cao, W., Fang, Z., Hou, G., Han, M., Xu, X., Dong, J., & Zheng, J. (2020). The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students in China. *Psychiatry Research*, 287, 112934. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112934>
- Chong, M. Y., Wang, W. C., Hsieh, W. C., Lee, C. Y., Chiu, N. M., Yeh, W. C., Huang, O. L., Wen, J. K., & Chen, C. L. (2004). Psychological impact of severe acute respiratory syndrome on health workers in a tertiary hospital. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 185, 127-133. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.185.2.127>
- Diana, M. P. L. J., Cercado, F. G., Chiu, P. Z., De Justo, P. A., De Silva, A. R., & Oducado, R. M. F. (2023). Filipino nursing students' health promoting behaviors during the pandemic. *Nurse Media Journal of Nursing*, 13(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.14710/nmjn.v13i1.49896>
- Eisenberg, D., Hunt, J., & Speer, N. (2013). Mental health in American colleges and universities: Variation across student subgroups and across campuses. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 201(1), 60-67. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0b013e31827ab077>
- Fu, W., Yan, S., Zong, Q., Anderson-Luxford, D., Song, X., Lv, Z., & Lv, C. (2021). Mental health of college students during the COVID-19 epidemic in China. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 280(Pt A), 7-10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.11.032>
- Halperin, I., Malleron, T., Har-Nir, I., Androulakis-Korakakis, P., Wolf, M., Fisher, J., & Steele, J. (2022). Accuracy in predicting repetitions to task failure in resistance exercise: A scoping review and exploratory meta-analysis. *Sports Medicine*, 52(2), 377-390. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-021-01559-x>
- Hoti, V., & Hoti, A. (2021). *Introduction to psychology* (2nd ed.). Publishers “Enja”.
- Islam, M. S., Sujan, M. S. H., Tasnim, R., Sikder, M. T., Potenza, M. N., & van Os, J. (2020). Psychological responses during the COVID-19 outbreak among university students in Bangladesh. *PLOS ONE*, 15(12), e0245083. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245083>
- Jetishi Çollaku, P. (2024). Assessment of anxiety after COVID-19 among Kosovo students. In *The 2nd International Congress of Healthcare Professionals: Abstracts* (p. 47). Prishtina, Kosovo.
- Jiang, W., Liu, X., Zhang, J., & Feng, Z. (2020). Mental health status of Chinese residents during the COVID-19 epidemic. *BMC Psychiatry*, 20, 580. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02971-1>
- Kim, H., Rackoff, G. N., Fitzsimmons-Craft, E. E., Shin, K. E., Zainal, N. H., Schwob, J. T., Eisenberg, D., Wilfley, D. E., Taylor, C. B., & Newman, M. G. (2022). College mental health before and during the COVID-19 pandemic: Results from a nationwide survey. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 46(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-021-10241-5>
- Lima, C. K. T., Carvalho, P. M. de M., Lima, I. de A. A. S., Nunes, J. V. A. de O., Saraiva, J. S., de Souza, R. I., & Neto, M. L. R. (2020). The emotional impact of Coronavirus 2019-nCoV (new Coronavirus disease). *Psychiatry Research*, 287, 112915. [166](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

psychres.2020.112915

Public Health. (2025). Trends in COVID-19 infections and effects on young people. *Public Health Center*.

Public Relations. (2025). The impact of vaccination on mental health. *Mental Health Institute*.

Saeed, H., Eslami, A., Nassif, N. T., Simpson, A. M., & Lal, S. (2022). Anxiety linked to COVID-19: A systematic review comparing anxiety rates in different populations. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2189. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042189>

Wang, Y., Di, Y., Ye, J., & Wei, W. (2020). Study on the psychological states and its related factors during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in some regions of China. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 26, 10223, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2020.1746817>

Wheaton, M. G., Abramowitz, J. S., Berman, N. C., & Fabricant, L. E. (2012). Psychological predictors of anxiety in response to the H1N1 (swine flu) pandemic. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 26(1), 72–77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2011.08.010>

World Health Organization. (2021, August 15). *WHO coronavirus (COVID-19) dashboard*. World Health Organization. <https://covid19.who.int/>

Wu, P., Fang, Y., Guan, Z., Fan, B., Kong, J., Yao, Z., Liu, X., Fuller, C. J., Susser, E., Lu, J., & Hoven, C. W. (2009). The psychological impact of the SARS epidemic on hospital employees in China: Exposure, risk perception, and altruistic acceptance of risk. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(5), 302–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/070674370905400504>

Yip, P. S., Cheung, Y. T., Chau, P. H., & Law, Y. W. (2010). The impact of epidemic outbreak: The case of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and suicide among older adults in Hong Kong. *Crisis*, 31(2), 86–92. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000015>

The legal and social Protection of foreign Workers in Albania and the challenges of integration into the Labor Market

PhD (C.) Sindi Agalliu (Caushi)

University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

Amidst the increasing trend of labor migration to Albania, the legal protection and social inclusion of foreign workers constitute a complex and pressing challenge for the country's legal and institutional systems. This study critically examines the adequacy of Albania's normative framework and enforcement mechanisms in ensuring not only fundamental labor rights but also access to social protection and welfare services for migrant workers. Through a combined legal and comparative analysis, grounded in national legislation, international human rights obligations, and European Union standards, the article identifies structural gaps, administrative barriers, and discriminatory practices that hinder the effective realization of rights for this vulnerable group. Special emphasis is placed on the lack of institutional coordination, limited access to healthcare, social assistance, and unemployment benefits, as well as the precarious legal status that exacerbates social exclusion. The findings highlight the need for an integrated legal and policy reform that guarantees both labor rights and equal access to social protection schemes, fostering a more inclusive and rights-based approach to labor migration governance in Albania.

Keywords: Foreign workers, legal, protection, social protection, labor market.

Introduction

In recent years, Albania has experienced significant changes in its labor market structure, driven by the large-scale emigration of domestic workers and the growing demand for labor in sectors with chronic workforce shortages such as construction, agriculture, services, and manufacturing. As a result, the country has increasingly attracted foreign workers, primarily from South and Central Asian countries (INSTAT, 2024; ILO, 2023). This development represents a novelty for the Albanian labor market, which until recently was characterized by a net emigration of labor. However, the arrival of foreign workers has revealed serious gaps in the legal and institutional systems for the protection of their rights. Reports from the International Labour Organization and analyses from national institutions highlight that foreign workers often face indecent working conditions, a lack of information about their rights, and difficulties in accessing complaint mechanisms and justice (ILO, 2023; Ombudsperson of Albania, 2023).

Albanian legislation recognizes the right to employ foreign nationals through Law no. 79/2021 "On Foreigners," which outlines procedures for residence and work permits. Additionally, the Labour Code guarantees the principle of equality and prohibits discrimination in the workplace (Labour Code of the Republic of Albania, Article 9). Nevertheless, the practical implementation of these provisions faces numerous

challenges due to weak administrative oversight, ineffective labor inspections, and limited institutional capacities (Lleshi, 2022; ILO, 2023). In this context, this article aims to analyze the current legal and institutional framework governing the employment and protection of foreign workers' rights in Albania, to identify existing gaps, and to provide concrete recommendations for improving protection and integration mechanisms, in accordance with international standards for decent and non-discriminatory work (ILO, 2016; EU Progress Report Albania, 2024).

1. Legal Reform and Implementation Challenges in the Protection of Foreign Workers in Albania: Aligning the Legal Framework with European Standards.

Legal and Institutional Framework for the Employment of Foreign Workers in Albania
The employment of foreign workers in Albania is governed by a complex legal framework that combines national labor legislation, immigration law, and ratified international treaties. This framework is intended to safeguard the rights of foreign workers and to ensure equal treatment with domestic workers, reflecting Albania's broader commitment to upholding international labor standards and fundamental human rights (Rexha, 2017; Lleshi, 2019).

In recent years, Albania has made significant progress in its legal framework for the protection of foreign workers, mainly through the adoption of Law No. 79/2021 "On Foreigners." This law aligns with and harmonizes national legislation with European Union standards, particularly incorporating provisions from Directive 2014/66/EU on the admission of highly qualified employment and Directive 2009/52/EC on sanctions against employers of illegally staying third-country nationals (Government of Albania, 2021; European Commission, 2023). The law guarantees foreign nationals the right to legal residence and access to the labor market, as well as inclusion in core social services such as health insurance and pensions, reflecting Albania's commitments under the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions Nos. 97 and 143 concerning migrant workers' rights (ILO, 2024).

Albania's alignment with the EU *Acquis Communautaire* is further reinforced through the European Commission's annual progress reports, which evaluate compliance with international standards on labor migration (European Commission, 2022). Despite this legal framework, implementation remains a key challenge. In sectors such as construction and agriculture, industries with high demand for manual labor, foreign workers are frequently employed under irregular conditions, often lacking formal contracts or labor protections. Reports by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019) highlight persistent issues of informality and exploitation in these sectors, emphasizing the vulnerability of migrant workers to unsafe working conditions and abuse (Mihail & Ivanov, 2017).

Article 4 of the Labour Code establishes the principle of non-discrimination and equality of treatment, mandating that foreign workers are entitled to the same employment conditions and social protections as Albanian citizens. This is in line with EU Directive 2011/98/EU, which Albania seeks to harmonize with as part of its EU accession process (European Union, 2011). Additionally, Article 48 of the Labour Code and Article 7 of Law No. 79/2021 detail the procedural requirements for obtaining

work and residence permits. These provisions are essential for ensuring transparent and lawful employment of foreign nationals, serving as safeguards against informal labor practices (Rexha, 2017). An important step in this process was the adoption of Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) No. 554, dated August 4, 2021, which standardized the procedures for applying for residence permits. This decision clearly defined the categories of permits, validity periods, and required documentation, enabling a more efficient implementation of the “single permit” system. This system, in compliance with EU Directive 2011/98/EU, aims to simplify the administrative process for foreign workers by combining the application for both residence and work permits into a single procedure. This reform has contributed to reducing bureaucracy and improving transparency in the authorization process for employing foreign nationals.

In 2023, the majority of residence permits for foreigners in Albania were issued for temporary periods, with 36.2% granted for up to 12 months and 13% for stays of 24 months. This indicates that a large portion of migrants reside in the country for limited durations, primarily for work, study, or other temporary reasons. A smaller share, 11.9%, received permits valid for 36 months, while 14.3% of foreigners held permanent residence permits. This reflects that a segment of migrants has established deeper ties and longer-term integration within Albania, contributing steadily to its social and economic fabric. This distribution calls for flexible migration policies and tailored social services that address the diverse needs based on length of stay. Those with temporary permits require guidance and access to basic services, whereas migrants with permanent status need full inclusion in the country’s social and economic systems.

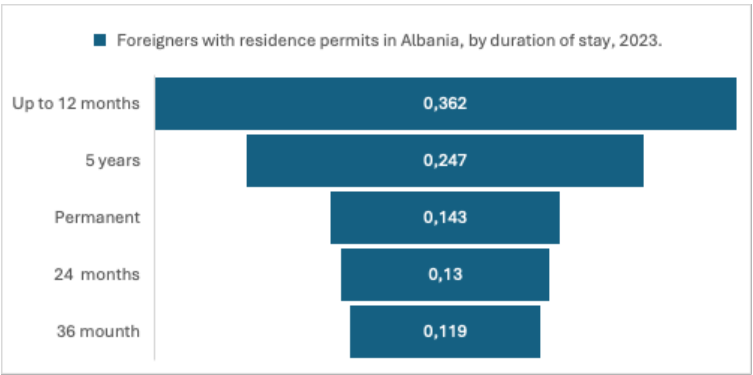


Figure 1: Foreigners with residence permits in Albania, by duration of stay, 2023.
Source: Border and Migration Department, General Directorate of State Police, processed by INSTAT, 2023, visually created by the author.

A key feature of this legislation is the introduction of the “single permit” system, which aims to simplify and streamline the administrative process for obtaining residence and work permits by combining them into a single application. This system is in line with Directive 2011/98/EU and intends to reduce bureaucracy and processing times (Government of Albania, 2021). However, beyond legislative advances, implementa-

tion remains a serious challenge. According to reports from the European Training Foundation (ETF, 2024), over 60% of foreign workers face administrative obstacles caused by unclear and non-harmonized procedures, inconsistent application of the law across regional authorities, and a lack of multilingual information. These issues conflict with the principles set out in Article 6 of Law No. 79/2021 and Article 2 of the Albanian Labor Code, which guarantee transparency and prohibit discrimination based on nationality. Institutionally, key actors such as the National Employment and Skills Agency (AKPA) and the State Labor Inspectorate face difficulties related to limited human and technical capacities as well as fragmentation of responsibilities between institutions. This complicates coordination and the effective implementation of policies aimed at sustainable labor market integration of foreign workers (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2023).

Subsequently, DCM No. 836, dated December 3, 2021, detailed the conditions and procedures for issuing residence permits for employment purposes. This act regulates the responsibilities of employers and foreign workers in the application and implementation process of permits, ensuring alignment with European standards and enhancing legal certainty for the parties involved. This has helped increase the system's credibility and improved the legal protection of foreign workers.

A significant aspect of improving the legal framework relates to flexibility in attracting qualified workers. In this regard, DCM No. 100, dated February 10, 2022, established criteria for exempting certain categories of foreigners from the obligation to obtain a work permit, including researchers, artists, and short-term trainees. This decision aims to promote the mobility of highly skilled workers and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience, thus improving Albania's competitiveness at regional and international levels. In terms of social protection, DCM No. 303, dated May 7, 2022, marked an important advancement by recognizing the contributory periods of foreign workers in Albania for social security purposes. This act guarantees foreign workers' right to access pensions and health services on equal terms with Albanian citizens, based on the principle of reciprocity and bilateral agreements Albania has signed with other countries. This regulation complies with Albania's international commitments, including conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and strengthens migrants' social security, thereby reducing risks of social marginalization.

To ensure better institutional coordination in supporting the integration of foreign workers, DCM No. 540, dated September 21, 2023, was also adopted. It establishes clear cooperation mechanisms between the National Employment and Skills Agency (AKPA), the Ministry of Interior, and the National Service for Asylum Seekers. This DCM specifies the responsibilities of institutions concerning the provision of professional training and employment mediation for migrants and asylum seekers, promoting a comprehensive and sustainable approach to labor market integration. However, despite these DCMs being important steps towards consolidating the legal and administrative framework, their practical implementation faces several challenges. Difficulties primarily relate to the limited human and technical capacities of responsible institutions, fragmentation of competences, and lack of clear and multilingual information for foreign workers. These issues hinder the effective realization of the

decisions' objectives and limit migrants' access to the services and rights prescribed by law.

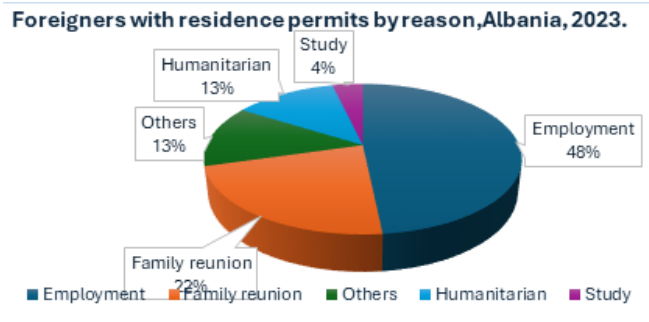


Figure 2: Foreigners with residence permits by reason, Albania, 2023.

Source: Border and Migration Department, General Directorate of State Police, processed by INSTAT, 2023, visually created by the author.

Beyond formal labor market challenges, foreign workers and asylum seekers face additional social and cultural barriers that hinder their full integration. These include language difficulties, cultural differences, and limited access to basic public services. The UNHCR report (2023) highlights that asylum seekers in Albania face restrictions on labor market access and a lack of sustainable integration programs. A positive initiative is the ILO pilot project “Enabling Employment Opportunities for Asylum Seekers in Albania” (2024–2025), which offers skills profiling and mediation through public-private partnerships. However, the small scale and limited funding restrict its long-term and sustainable impact. Meanwhile, official statistics for 2023 indicate that the largest share of residence permits issued to foreigners was for employment purposes (48%), followed by family reunion (22%), humanitarian reasons (13%), other reasons (13%), and study (4%).

1.2 Foreign Workers in Albania: Challenges of Labor Market Integration, Weak Institutional Oversight, and Informality.

Studies by the World Bank (2021) and OECD (2020) reveal gaps in labor integration policies, especially in terms of access to training, fair employment opportunities, and social services. Ultimately, as Sullivan and Smith (2023) argue, Albania must intensify efforts to implement harmonized, rights-based migration policies that reflect international norms and actively combat exploitation. This requires a well-resourced labor inspection system, streamlined procedures for issuing work permits, and stronger collaboration with civil society and international organizations. However, a significant institutional gap lies in the capacity of the Labour Inspectorate, which is tasked with monitoring compliance with labor standards. The Inspectorate is frequently under-resourced and lacks the personnel necessary to perform effective oversight, undermining enforcement of the legal protections afforded to foreign workers (ILO, 2021).

At the international level, landmark decisions such as *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy* (ECtHR, 2012) underscore the obligation of states not to return migrants without assessing the risks they may face in their home countries. This principle has influenced Albania's asylum and migration policies, particularly in the context of labor migration. In response, Albania has undertaken positive steps, including bilateral labor agreements with other countries and the ratification of key international conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990). These actions have contributed to a slow but steady improvement in the working conditions of foreign workers (Gusmeroli & Matija, 2015). However, systemic challenges persist. The National Strategy on Migration and Development 2022–2026 outlines goals for better integrating foreign workers into the Albanian labor market, particularly by improving administrative processes and access to employment services. Yet, disparities remain in the treatment of workers from non-EU countries and neighboring Balkan states, who often face greater administrative and social obstacles (Kola & Ylli, 2022).

A particularly worrying issue is the high incidence of informal employment among foreign workers. Based on ILO data (2024), approximately 44% of foreign workers are engaged in unregistered work, especially in sectors such as construction, agriculture, and domestic services. This is reflected in the pie chart (Figure 3) which shows that 44% of foreign workers are informally employed, while only 56% are formally employed.

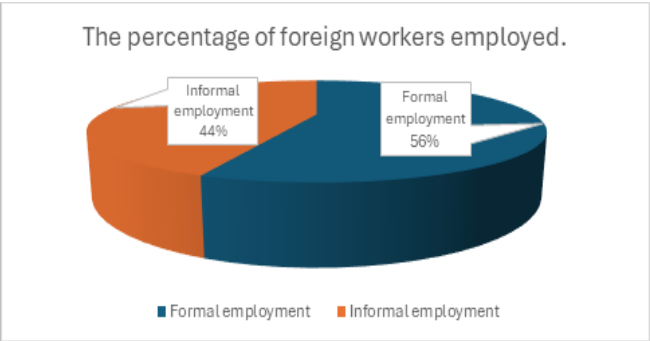


Figure 3 : The percentage of foreign workers employed, ILO, 2024.

Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), Global Estimates on Migrant Workers, 2024; processed and visualized by the author.

This practice directly violates provisions of the Albanian Labor Code (Articles 7–9), which require written contracts and social security contributions. The absence of formal contracts and registration exposes workers to exploitation, lack of legal protection, and hazardous working conditions. Furthermore, insufficient labor inspections and ineffective enforcement mechanisms exacerbate the problem, undermining public finances and the social insurance system in Albania. Socially, informality prevents foreign workers from accessing health and social insurance benefits as stipulated by Law No. 7703/1993 on Social Insurance, placing them in a vulnerable position and

increasing risks of poverty and social exclusion (National Social Insurance Institute, 2024).

Another vulnerable group comprises returnee migrants, who face social and legal obstacles due to the non-recognition of skills and experience acquired informally abroad. The qualitative study by Kasapi and Sulejmani (2023) reveals that 78% of returnees from Greece face bureaucratic difficulties and lack formal recognition of their competencies, limiting their reintegration and employment prospects in Albania. This situation contradicts international standards, specifically the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and reflects slow progress in implementing Albania's National Qualifications Framework (OECD, 2024). As a result, this gap negatively affects the full utilization of human capital brought back by returnees and hinders economic and social development.

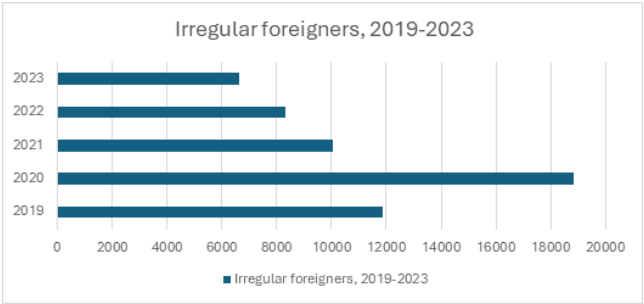


Figure 4: Irregular foreigners, 2019-2023

Source: Border and Migration Department, General Directorate of State Police, processed by INSTAT, 2023, visually created by the author.

Strategically, the National Strategy on Diaspora and Migration 2021–2025 aims to improve labor market integration, enhance social protection, and combat discrimination against migrants (Government of Albania, 2023). Nevertheless, mid-term evaluations indicate uneven implementation, particularly regarding tailored employment services for foreign workers. This is partly due to the lack of effective monitoring systems and the absence of clear, measurable indicators to assess performance. Additionally, Albania's ratification of ILO Convention No. 143 obliges the country to ensure social security rights for migrant workers; however, practical enforcement remains limited and institutional coordination is insufficient, further increasing social vulnerability (ILO, 2024). Data from the Ministry of Interior (2024) also shows a decline in the number of irregular foreigners from a peak in 2020 to lower figures in 2023, reflecting gradual improvements in enforcement, though challenges persist.

2. Reforming the EU Legal Framework on the Protection of Migrant Workers: Objectives, Content, and Implementation Challenges

In response to structural challenges such as labor shortages, increased intra-EU mobility, and growing migration flows from third countries, the European Union has

undertaken a series of legal reforms aimed at strengthening the protection of migrant workers and their integration into welfare systems. These reforms have emerged as a necessity to harmonize legal standards across Member States, ensure equal treatment, and prevent discrimination and informal employment practices (European Commission, 2024a). The primary objective is to establish a unified and fair approach to labor migration, consistent with the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* and international standards, particularly those of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

One of the most significant innovations is Directive (EU) 2024/2831 on Platform Work, which, for the first time, introduces a legal presumption of employment for individuals working through digital platforms. According to Article 4 of the Directive, if at least two out of seven criteria are met—such as control over remuneration, supervision of work performance, or restrictions on working hours—the individual is presumed to be in an employment relationship. This provision aims to address the phenomenon of “false self-employment,” which has created a legal vacuum for a growing number of platform workers, often migrants, who remain excluded from social protection, health insurance, and paid leave. The Directive also includes mandatory algorithmic transparency requirements (Article 6) and requires human oversight in automated decision-making processes (Article 8), thus aligning labor law with digital-era realities (Council of the European Union, 2024).

However, implementation remains challenging due to administrative fragmentation, limited enforcement capacity, and resistance from platform companies that argue the measures increase costs and reduce business flexibility (Taylor Wessing, 2024). Parallel to this, significant changes have been introduced through the recast of the Single Permit Directive – Directive (EU) 2024/1233. This Directive consolidates residence and work permits into a single administrative procedure (Article 4), shortens the decision-making period to 90 days (Article 7), and allows third-country nationals to apply from within the host country, removing the previous requirement to apply from abroad. Additionally, it grants equal treatment rights in access to social security, education and vocational training, and working conditions (Article 12). Importantly, the Directive allows job mobility, including the right to change employers without reapplying for a new permit (Article 13). Despite these advancements, reports indicate that fragmented national practices, lengthy administrative procedures, and partial harmonization with national labor laws continue to undermine its effectiveness (Springer, 2025).

The adoption of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, in force since June 2024, marks a broader institutional shift towards the Europeanization of migration management. The Pact comprises ten legislative instruments, among them the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation, which reinforces inter-institutional coordination and the principle of solidarity among Member States in handling asylum and labor migration (European Commission, 2024b). It contains provisions aimed at improving migrant workers’ access to housing, legal aid, healthcare, and other essential services. However, the Pact has faced strong political opposition, particularly regarding the redistribution of responsibilities among Member States with disproportionate migration pressures. Moreover, concerns remain about the potential exclusion of

certain migrant categories, notably those with temporary contracts or irregular legal status, from national social protection systems—a particularly pressing issue for Albanian migrants seeking employment across the EU

2.1 National Implementation of the New European Union Directives on the Protection of Migrant Workers: A Comparative Analysis of Spain and Germany.

In the context of recent European Union legal reforms aimed at strengthening the protection of migrant workers, Member States have undertaken various initiatives to harmonize their national legislation with the requirements set out by the new 2024 EU Directives. Notably, Spain and Germany offer significant examples of how these directives, the Platform Work Directive (2024/2831) and the Revised Single Permit Directive (2024/1233)—have been operationalized at the national level.

Spain has been among the pioneering countries addressing the issue of bogus self-employment within the digital platform economy. The enactment of the “*Rider Law*” in 2021 established a legal framework recognizing platform workers, such as food delivery couriers, as employees rather than self-employed contractors whenever the platform exercises effective control over working time, place, and methods (Council of the European Union, 2024; Taylor Wessing, 2024). This approach directly aligns with Article 4 of Directive 2024/2831, which introduces a legal presumption of an employment relationship where indicators of control and dependence are present (European Commission, 2024). Furthermore, Spain has incorporated provisions on algorithmic transparency and human oversight of automated decisions, consistent with Articles 6 to 8 of the same directive (Council of the European Union, 2024).

However, practical implementation has faced obstacles, including divergent regional court rulings, limited labor inspectorate capacities, and resistance from platform companies citing increased costs and reduced operational flexibility (Taylor Wessing, 2024). Conversely, Germany has concentrated its efforts on implementing the Revised Single Permit Directive by reforming its Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*) and Employment Regulation (*Beschäftigungsverordnung*) as of April 2024 (Lexology, 2024). These legal amendments enable a consolidated procedure for applying simultaneously for residence and work permits, reflecting the requirements of Article 4 of the directive (European Commission, 2024). Additionally, a transitional three-month period following contract termination has been introduced, during which permit holders may seek new employment without losing their residence status, pursuant to Article 11 of the directive (Lexology, 2024). These reforms aim to facilitate labor market integration and enhance internal mobility for third-country nationals. Nevertheless, reports from several federal states (*Länder*) indicate administrative challenges, including delays in application processing and insufficient resources to handle rising application volumes, jeopardizing compliance with the directive’s 90-day decision deadline under Article 7 (Springer, 2025).

In summary, the cases of Spain and Germany illustrate different yet complementary approaches to implementing the EU standards on migrant worker protection. Spain emphasizes safeguarding workers’ rights in the digital economy through control and transparency mechanisms, while Germany focuses on streamlining bureaucratic pro-

cedures and promoting legal flexibility for migrants. Nonetheless, both contexts face persistent challenges related to administrative capacity, uniform enforcement of legal provisions, and balancing market interests with workers' rights protection.

3. Legal Gaps and Structural Challenges in the Social Protection of Foreign Workers in Albania.

The legal framework for social protection of foreign nationals in Albania is primarily founded on Law No. 7703, dated May 11, 1993, "On Social Security in the Republic of Albania," as amended by Law No. 64/2023, which establishes that all employees, including foreign nationals legally employed on Albanian territory, have the right and obligation to participate in the social insurance system (Article 7; Republic of Albania, 1993/2023). Complementarily, Law No. 10383, dated February 4, 2011, "On Mandatory Health Insurance," amended by Law No. 65/2023, mandates compulsory health insurance coverage for all employed persons (Article 5; Republic of Albania, 2011/2023).

However, practical application of these provisions remains limited for foreign nationals with temporary or irregular employment contracts. The lack of comprehensive enforcement mechanisms undermines the effective coverage of these groups, in contradiction with Article 6 of the Labor Code (Law No. 7961/1995), which guarantees equal treatment for all workers irrespective of nationality. Law No. 79/2021, "On Foreigners," regulates foreign nationals' entry and stay, including the right to access social protection only when holding valid residence permits and employment contracts (Articles 71 and 74). Yet, the law lacks detailed provisions for social protection access for undocumented or temporarily resident foreigners, creating a legislative gap impacting vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers (IOM Albania, 2023).

One significant systemic challenge is the absence of bilateral social security agreements with most countries of origin of migrants residing in Albania, particularly those from Asia and Africa. Law No. 7703/1993 (Article 45) allows for bilateral agreements to coordinate social insurance coverage periods, but currently, Albania maintains such agreements only with Turkey (2003), Belgium (2010), and Germany (2015), thereby excluding many migrant workers from pension portability and social benefits recognition (ISSH, 2023; Rexha, 2019).

Institutionally, the State Labor Inspectorate, governed by Law No. 9634, dated November 20, 2006, "On Labor Inspection and Social Services," lacks explicit mandates or specialized units to oversee the enforcement of labor rights and social insurance contributions specifically for foreign workers (Articles 3 and 8). This institutional gap facilitates employer non-compliance and reduces protection against unregistered labor, breaching the principle of equal treatment as outlined in Article 6 of the Labor Code.

Moreover, Law No. 57/2019, "On Social Assistance and Services," amended by Law No. 79/2023, outlines access criteria for social assistance benefits such as economic aid, unemployment benefits, and child allowances (Articles 9–12; Republic of Albania, 2019/2023). However, these benefits are typically inaccessible to foreigners without regular legal status or formal registration, causing a risk of exclusion and dis-

crimination (UNHCR, 2024).

Reports from international organizations, including UNHCR (2024) and IOM Albania (2023), stress the urgency for a coordinated national strategy integrating migration policies with social protection reforms. Such a strategy should reinforce inter-institutional cooperation, expand legal coverage, and enhance enforcement mechanisms to guarantee the social rights of all foreign nationals on Albanian territory. In summary, improving the social protection system for foreign nationals in Albania requires:

- Legislative amendments harmonizing domestic laws with international human rights and labor standards, especially regarding undocumented and temporary migrants;
- Strengthening institutional capacities and establishing dedicated inspection protocols to ensure employer compliance;
- Negotiating and expanding bilateral social security agreements to allow pension portability and benefit coordination;
- Increasing outreach and support programs that facilitate access to social protection for migrant communities.

Such measures would ensure compliance with Article 22 of the Albanian Constitution guaranteeing social protection for all residents and align Albania's practice with international commitments under ILO conventions and EU standards (Rexha, 2019; IOM Albania, 2023).

4. Conclusion

As Albania faces increasing labor migration flows from third countries, the legal and social protection of foreign workers has become an urgent and multidimensional challenge, legal, institutional, and socioeconomic. While the country has made steps toward aligning its legal framework with European standards, most notably through Law No. 79/2021 "On Foreigners" and the amended Labor Code (Law No. 7961/1995), the current system remains fragmented and insufficient to effectively safeguard the rights of foreign workers, particularly those in informal or precarious employment. In this context, one of the most urgent priorities is the drafting of a dedicated law on the rights of migrant workers. This law should go beyond general provisions and provide concrete guarantees on equal pay, mandatory inclusion in social insurance schemes, access to legal aid, and basic public services. Such a legal instrument would reflect Albania's obligations under the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (United Nations, 1990) and the Revised European Social Charter (Council of Europe, 2023), both of which emphasize non-discrimination and access to social protection regardless of legal status.

Another pressing issue is the lack of bilateral social security agreements with the countries of origin of most foreign workers in Albania, such as Bangladesh, Egypt, and India. The absence of such agreements prevents the recognition of contribution periods and the transfer of pension rights, thereby undermining the social security entitlements of migrants. Albania should prioritize the negotiation of bilateral agreements on the basis of ILO Convention No. 157 on the Maintenance of Social Security Rights, which allows for the totalization and portability of acquired rights across bor-

ders (ILO, 2012). This model is widely applied across EU countries as part of a fair labor mobility regime (OECD, 2021).

To ensure effective registration and prevent undeclared work, a National Register of Foreign Workers should be established and fully integrated with the tax and social insurance systems. This digital platform would allow for real-time monitoring of employment history and ensure automatic inclusion in mandatory insurance schemes. Such a system is essential for enforcing employer obligations and reducing vulnerability among migrant workers (FRA, 2019).

Additionally, automatic enrollment in mandatory social and health insurance schemes should be guaranteed for all foreign workers, including those with temporary or humanitarian residence permits. For those in particularly vulnerable situations, the state should provide temporary subsidies or contributions to support their inclusion in the system. These measures align with ILO Recommendation No. 202 on Social Protection Floors, which calls for universal access to essential social services and income security (ILO, 2012), and with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN, 1966).

To enhance enforcement capacity, the State Labor Inspectorate must be strengthened through increased staffing, specialized training on migrant worker rights, and improved coordination with the immigration authorities. Inspections should particularly target high-risk sectors such as construction, agriculture, and domestic work. Moreover, a multilingual anonymous reporting mechanism should be introduced to empower migrant workers to safely report abuse or exploitation (FRA, 2019). An additional recommendation involves the establishment of a “*minimum social rights package*” for all migrants in Albania, regardless of status. This package should include access to primary health care, emergency income assistance, temporary shelter, and psychosocial support. A dedicated public fund, co-financed by the government and international partners such as the IOM and UNHCR, could support the delivery of these essential services.

Finally, Albania must integrate the protection of foreign workers into its national employment and social protection strategies, including the upcoming National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2025–2030. This would ensure a coherent and rights-based approach that connects migration, labor market policy, and social cohesion, thereby reinforcing Albania’s commitment to constitutional equality, international labor standards, and sustainable development.

References

- Commission of the European Union. (2024). *Albania 2024 progress report*. Brussels: European Commission. <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu>
- Council of Europe. (2012). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Council of Europe. (2023). *European Social Charter (Revised)*. Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int>
- Council of the European Union. (2024). *Directive (EU) 2024/2831 of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving working conditions in platform work*. Official Journal of the European Union.

European Commission. (2022). *Albania 2022 progress report*. Retrieved from <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu>

European Commission. (2024a). *Strengthening legal migration: Reforming the Single Permit and Long-Term Residents Directives*. <https://ec.europa.eu>

European Commission. (2024b). *New Pact on Migration and Asylum: A fresh start on migration in Europe*. <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu>

European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). (2012). *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy*, Application no. 27765/09.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). (2019). *Protecting migrant workers from exploitation in the EU: boosting workplace inspections*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU.

European Union. (2011). *Directive 2011/98/EU on a single permit for third-country nationals*. Official Journal of the European Union, L343/1.

Government of Albania. (2023). *Mid-term evaluation report of the National Strategy on Diaspora and Migration 2021–2025*. Tirana: Ministry of Interior.

Gusmeroli, F., & Matija, S. (2015). *Labour migration in Albania: Policies, statistics and trends*. Tirana: IOM Albania.

Gusmeroli, S., & Matija, M. (2015). *Labour migration and working conditions of foreign workers in Albania*. Tirana: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

INSTAT. (2024). *Emigration and the labor market in Albania – Statistical data 2023–2024*. Tirana: Institute of Statistics. <https://www.instat.gov.al>

Institute of Social Security of Albania (ISSH). (2023). *Annual Report on Social Protection and International Agreements*. Tirana: ISSH.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2012). *Maintenance of Social Security Rights Convention, No. 157*. Geneva: ILO.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2012). *Social Protection Floors Recommendation, No. 202*. Geneva: ILO.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2016). *Migration for employment convention (revised), 1949 (No. 97) and Migrant workers (supplementary provisions) convention, 1975 (No. 143)*. Geneva: ILO.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2021). *Labour inspection and protection of migrant workers in Albania: Challenges and perspectives*. Geneva: ILO.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2021). *Strengthening labour inspection systems in Albania*. Geneva: ILO.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2024). *Informality and migrant workers in Albania: Analytical brief*. Geneva: ILO.

International Labour Organization. (2016). *General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment*. Geneva: ILO.

International Labour Organization. (2023). *Foreign workers in Albania: Legal and institutional challenges*. ILO Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe. <https://www.ilo.org>

International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2019). *Labour market and migration trends in Albania*. Tirana: IOM.

International Organization for Migration Albania (IOM Albania). (2023). *Report on the Challenges of Social and Economic Integration of Migrants in Albania*. Tirana: IOM.

Kasapi, E., & Sulejmani, G. (2023). *Return migration and informal skills: Barriers to reintegration in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Social Studies.

Kola, I., & Ylli, E. (2022). *Administrative challenges for third-country nationals in Albania's labor market*. Tirana: Albanian Centre for Migration Studies.

Kola, I., & Ylli, K. (2022). *Integration of foreign workers in the Albanian labor market: Policy review and challenges*. *Journal of Migration Studies*, 11(2), 45–66.

Labour Code of the Republic of Albania. (2021). *Law No. 7961, dated 12.07.1995, as amended*. Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania.

Law No. 7703/1993. *On Social Insurance in the Republic of Albania*, as amended.

Law No. 79/2021, *On Foreigners in the Republic of Albania*, Official Gazette No. 112, dated 16.07.2021.

Lexology. (2024). *Germany implements new Single Permit Directive reforms*. <https://www.lexology.com>

Lleshi, A. (2019). *Legal aspects of foreign workers' employment in Albania*. Tirana Law Review, 6(1), 33–49.

Lleshi, E. (2022). *The legal protection of migrant workers in Albania: Challenges and perspectives*. Albanian Journal of Social Justice, 4(1), 45–59.

Mihail, D. M., & Ivanov, S. (2017). Employment conditions of migrant workers in Southeast Europe: A comparative analysis. *Journal of Southeast European Labor Studies*, 5(3), 21–37.

National Social Insurance Institute. (2024). *Annual report on foreign workers' access to social insurance*. Tirana: ISSH.

OECD. (2020). *Labour market integration of migrants in the Western Balkans*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD. (2021). *International Migration Outlook 2021*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD. (2024). *Skills recognition and qualifications framework in Albania: Country progress report*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

People's Advocate (Avokati i Popullit). (2023). *Annual report on human rights in Albania*. <https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al>

Republic of Albania. (1993/2022). Law No. 7703, dated 11.05.1993, "On Social Security in the Republic of Albania" (amended by Law No. 119/2022). Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania.

Republic of Albania. (1995/2022). Labour Code, Law No. 7961, dated 12.07.1995 (amended by Law No. 150/2022). Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania.

Republic of Albania. (2005/2023). Law No. 9355, dated 11.03.2005, "On Social Assistance and Services" (amended by Law No. 121/2023). Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania.

Republic of Albania. (2006/2019). Law No. 9634, dated 20.11.2006, "On Labor Inspection and Social Services" (amended by Law No. 48/2019). Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania.

Republic of Albania. (2011/2021). Law No. 10383, dated 04.02.2011, "On Mandatory Health Insurance" (Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania).

Republic of Albania. (2013/2021). Law No. 108/2013, "On Foreigners" (amended by Law No. 73/2021). Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania.

Rexha, A. (2017). *The Albanian legal framework on foreign employment and its harmonization with EU standards*. Albanian Journal of European Law, 4(2), 12–25.

Rexha, D. (2019). Bilateral Social Security Agreements and Their Impact in Albania. *Journal of Labour and Social Protection*, 12(1), 45–62.

Springer. (2025). *Challenges in implementing EU labor migration directives in federal Member States*. *Journal of European Labor Law*, 18(1), 24–39.

Sullivan, J., & Smith, R. (2023). *Migration governance and labor rights: The Albanian case in regional context*. *Journal of Migration Policy Studies*, 11(1), 45–68.

Sullivan, T., & Smith, J. (2023). *Human rights and migration policy: Labor protection in transitional states*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Taylor Wessing. (2024). *Platform work under EU law: Legal implications and company responses*. <https://www.taylorwessing.com>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2021). *Migrant protection and vulnerability in Albania: Situational analysis*. Geneva: UNHCR.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2024). *Annual Report on the Social Protection of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Albania*. Tirana: UNHCR.

United Nations. (1966). *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org>

United Nations. (1990). *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org>

World Bank. (2021). *Albania: Labor market dynamics and challenges*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank. (2021). *Pathways to better jobs for vulnerable groups in Albania*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Electronic signatures in Albania referring to legal framework and contractual services

PhD (C.) Vitiana Pitaku
University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

As Albania moves forward in building a digital economy and legal system, electronic signatures and contracts are becoming increasingly important. This paper explores the country's current legal framework, focusing on Law No. 9880/2008 and Law No. 107/2021, and examines how well they support the use of electronic contracts.

Although both public and private sectors in Albania are gradually embracing digital tools, there are still serious questions around the legal certainty and enforceability of documents signed electronically. This study looks at how Albania's laws compare with the European Union's eIDAS Regulation, highlighting both the progress made and the challenges that still need to be addressed. Key areas of focus include how electronic signatures are classified, the role of certified trust service providers, and the safeguards needed to ensure that digital agreements hold up legally. The paper also considers the real-world application of these laws especially through platforms like e-Albania and examines ongoing issues such as low digital awareness, limited public understanding, and institutional gaps. Finally, the paper offers recommendations for improving Albania's legal and technical infrastructure to better support electronic contracts. These include steps to align more closely with EU standards, build public trust in digital tools, and ensure that cross-border electronic transactions are secure, reliable, and widely accepted.

Keywords: Electronic signature, electronic contract, Albanian legal provisions, legal validity, Contract enforcement.

1. Introduction

The regulation of contractual relations in Albania is governed by two important laws, to guarantee and protect the rights of the parties when they negotiate together. These relations are not directly provided for by the Civil Code, but the provisions of the latter are implemented in harmony with two other laws.

Law No. 9880 of 2008, which first introduced the legal concept of electronic signatures, and Law No. 107/2021, which updated the framework in light of new technological needs and aligned more closely with EU standards, even though Albania is still a candidate to be a member. Together, these laws define the legal status of electronic signatures and the responsibilities of trust service providers, aiming to enable secure and verifiable digital transactions. The electronic signature is regulated by a special law, which contains 60 articles, which provide in detail not only issues related to the main notions but also the process related to authorities for electronic certification, registration and supervision. The law also addresses issues related to the invalidity of the signature and issues related to the authenticity of the content of the document. Despite these laws, the legal framework is not complete and it needs to be completed.

Despite the fact that the laws formally seem to be correct and complete, in practice they are not used much and this gap has led to its widespread non-use. Given that the information on using the electronic signature is limited and the infrastructure is not fully developed, the electronic signature does not receive the necessary attention in practice. For this reason, the use of electronic contracts is limited to their significant value. This paper will analyze the existing legislation on electronic signatures, carefully analyzing it in the focus of its implementation in the conclusion of electronic contracts. Of course, an analysis will be made between the domestic legislation, determining what are the problems in implementation, what are the EU standards and what tasks Albania must fulfill, in order to strengthen the responsible authorities and to guarantee the rights of the individual in the implementation of electronic contracts.

Since 2008 and onwards, with further amendments such as Law No. 122/2016 and Normative Act No. 18/2022, the legislator has wanted to support the digitalization initiative not only in the private sector but also in the public one. The entire legal framework has aimed not only at the recognition but also at the effective use of electronic signatures and they serve as legal instruments in an administrative and legal sense. This is also understood from Article 4 of Law No. 9880/2008 where the legal validity of the electronic signature is related to all legal actions and acts that are drafted by natural and legal persons, public or private and has the same evidentiary power as the written form.

Regardless of the internal legal framework, the new initiatives undertaken by the legislator are such as to bring the country closer to EU standards, and in particular those related to the eIDAS regulation. These initiatives serve not only as a legal necessity but also as a necessary step to guarantee security in public services across borders. However, the practice of legal signatures has many challenges which include lack of information for users, limited use for business users, limited judicial practice. From this it is understood that despite the fact that there is no lack of legal provision, implementation depends on the strengthening of institutions and public trust. This paper aims to examine the existing legal framework for electronic signatures in Albania, with a particular focus on its application to electronic contracts. It identifies the gaps between legislation and implementation, highlights institutional and legal uncertainties, and provides recommendations aimed at increasing both legal certainty and public trust in digital tools.

1.1 The importance of electronic signatures according to Albanian legislation

The development of technology and in particular digitalization is taking on particular importance not only for public administration but also for commercial companies, every private business where the electronic signature plays a role that guarantees security, efficiency and fast transactions.

They serve not only to confirm the identity of the signer but also to ensure the integrity of the signed document—functions that are fundamental in any legal or contractual relationship. Albania has made legislative progress in this regard, establishing a legal basis for electronic signatures through specific laws that aim to reflect international

best practices and, more importantly, to align with European Union standards. Yet, despite this normative progress, the practical use of electronic signatures in Albania remains limited. Several factors contribute to this situation. First, public awareness and digital literacy remain low, with many individuals unfamiliar with how electronic signatures work or when they are legally valid. Second, private sector adoption has been cautious, and public institutions often lack the necessary capacity to implement the relevant provisions effectively. Third, judicial practice in this field is still undeveloped, leaving many legal questions unresolved in the absence of guiding case law.

These challenges raise essential legal and policy questions: Are the current laws sufficient to ensure legal certainty and protection for users of electronic signatures? What institutional measures are needed to strengthen their use in practice? And what steps should be taken to close the gap between the legal framework and its implementation? Addressing these issues is not merely a technical matter—it is a prerequisite for building a trustworthy digital legal system and for fostering the broader acceptance of electronic contracts in Albania.

1.2 What is an electronic signature?

In legal and practical terms, an electronic signature is a method used to express consent or approval on a digital document. While the form it takes can vary—from a typed name or a scanned signature to a digital certificate secured by encryption—its legal value depends on the reliability of the method used and its capacity to verify the identity of the signer. Across jurisdictions, electronic signatures are increasingly treated as equivalent to handwritten ones, provided that certain legal and technical conditions are met. At the international level, the United Nations has offered guidance through UNCITRAL's Model Law on Electronic Signatures (2001), which promotes the legal validity of electronic signatures while endorsing technological neutrality and functional equivalence.

The European Union, through the eIDAS Regulation, distinguishes between three types of electronic signatures—simple, advanced, and qualified—with the latter carrying the highest level of legal assurance, provided it is issued by a recognized trust service provider. This tiered approach helps ensure both flexibility and legal certainty across different contexts. Albania, through Law No. 9880/2008 and the more recent Law No. 107/2021, has incorporated these international standards into its domestic legal system. These laws not only recognize various forms of electronic signatures but also aim to regulate their use in public and private transactions. However, practical implementation remains inconsistent.

Of particular importance in the law are the definitions given in Article 3 of Law No. 9880/2008 on electronic signature which is defined as data in electronic form, accompanied by other electronic data, to verify the identity of the signatory and the authenticity of the signed document. In the division of electronic signature, the notion of advanced electronic signature is also addressed, which is divided into four categories, qualified electronic signatures.

A core difficulty lies in the lack of widespread understanding of what electronic signatures entail, both in the public and institutional spheres. Furthermore,

the technical infrastructure necessary for qualified electronic signatures is still underdeveloped. In essence, electronic signatures represent more than a digital convenience. They are a legal mechanism through which consent and accountability can be established in a digital context. To function effectively, however, they must be embedded within a broader system that ensures security, transparency, and legal recognition. Referring to Albanian law, still some measures should be taken.

1.3 Legal framework for electronic signatures

Albania's legal framework for electronic signatures and electronic contracts is primarily governed by two key pieces of legislation: Law No. 9880/2008 "On Electronic Signature" and Law No. 111/2018 "On Trust Services for Electronic Transactions." Together, these laws establish the legal basis for electronic authentication, document validity, and digital trust mechanisms within the Albanian legal system.

The 2008 law was the first comprehensive legal act to formally recognize electronic signatures in Albania. It introduced a typology of electronic signatures simple, advanced, and qualified and explicitly provided that a qualified electronic signature, issued by a certified trust service provider, holds the same legal force as a handwritten signature. This law also outlined the responsibilities of certification authorities, which are entities authorized to issue digital certificates and guarantee the security and authenticity of the signatures they validate.

The adoption of Law No. 111/2018 marked an attempt to bring Albanian legislation closer to the EU's eIDAS Regulation. While the 2008 law focused primarily on electronic signatures, the 2018 law broadened the regulatory scope by introducing additional trust services, such as electronic seals, timestamps, registered electronic delivery services, and website authentication. This expansion was intended to promote a more robust legal environment that enables secure digital communication and cross-border interoperability.

However, the coexistence of these two laws has created notable ambiguity. Albania has not repealed or subordinated the earlier law, and there is no clearly defined legal hierarchy between the two. As a result, legal practitioners, institutions, and users are often uncertain about which law applies in a given context, especially when the two laws overlap with each other. This ambiguity is particularly problematic in cases, where the enforceability of an electronic signature may depend on which legal standard is applied.

Adding to the complexity is the absence of a dedicated legal regime at the Civil Code for electronic contracts. Albania relies on the general rules of civil law to regulate contractual validity, without specific provisions tailored to the digital context. While this approach allows flexibility, it also leads to legal uncertainty. For example, it remains unclear whether clicking "I agree" on a website constitutes valid consent under Albanian contract law or whether such actions can stand as evidence in court. Moreover, the accreditation and oversight of certification authorities, crucial actors in the infrastructure of electronic trust, is still lacking. Although the laws refer to "qualified certificates" and "qualified providers," the state has not established a fully functional supervisory body capable of ensuring that such providers meet strict legal and technical standards. Without a credible accreditation mechanism, users may be

exposed to insecure or legally invalid digital signatures. In this context, article 10 of the law has established the authority that is responsible with some amendments with the normative act nr.18/2022, who is the general director.

Cross-border recognition of electronic signatures is another area of concern. Law No. 107/2021 aspires to reflect eIDAS principles, but Albania's non-EU status severely limits its capacity to participate in the EU-wide trust framework. In the absence of bilateral agreements or mutual recognition mechanisms, electronic signatures issued in Albania may not be automatically recognized in EU countries and vice versa thus undermining legal certainty in international transactions.

In addition, the legal framework does not adequately address consumer protection in digital contracting. Neither law includes provisions that safeguard users in online transactions, such as the right to clear and accessible information, the right to withdraw from a digital agreement, or access to dispute resolution. These gaps are particularly concerning given the growing reliance on digital platforms for day-to-day consumer interactions.

Lastly, while both laws advocate technological neutrality, they fail to provide concrete technical or security standards for electronic signatures and trust services. This regulatory silence creates inconsistencies in practice and leaves users vulnerable to cyber risks, identity fraud, and other forms of digital abuse. It also places judges, lawyers, and businesses in a difficult position when assessing the legal validity and integrity of an electronic signature in court.

In these terms while Albania has made commendable efforts to legislate electronic signatures, the current framework suffers from fragmentation, weak institutional enforcement, and gaps in consumer and cross-border protections. The lack of legal harmonization, insufficient oversight of trust service providers, and absence of enforceable technical standards undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the system. Unless these issues are addressed through legislative clarification, institutional reform, and international alignment, the full potential of digital legal tools in Albania will remain unrealized.

The evolution of digital technologies has prompted jurisdictions worldwide to establish clear and reliable standards for electronic signatures and digital contracting. These frameworks are essential not only for ensuring the legal validity and security of digital transactions but also for fostering cross-border recognition and trust in a globally interconnected economy.

At the international level, one of the earliest and most influential initiatives was undertaken by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL). In 1996, UNCITRAL adopted the Model Law on Electronic Commerce, which set foundational principles for the legal recognition of electronic communications and transactions. It established the idea that a contract should not be denied legal effect solely because it is in electronic form and promoted functional equivalence—meaning electronic records and signatures can serve the same legal function as traditional paper-based documents.

In 2001, UNCITRAL followed with the Model Law on Electronic Signatures, which focused more directly on the criteria that make an electronic signature reliable and legally trustworthy. It emphasized technological neutrality, allowing states to choose

their preferred technologies while promoting minimum standards for authenticity, integrity, and signatory identification. While these model laws are non-binding, they serve as important reference points for national legal reforms.

The European Union, through Regulation (EU) No. 910/2014 on electronic identification and trust services (eIDAS), has gone a step further by establishing a legally binding and uniform framework across EU member states. The eIDAS Regulation recognizes three distinct types of electronic signatures:

Simple Electronic Signatures (SES), basic forms, such as scanned images or typed names, with limited verification and lower evidentiary value.

Advanced Electronic Signatures (AES), linked uniquely to the signatory, capable of detecting tampering, and created under the signatory's sole control.

Qualified Electronic Signatures (QES), the most secure and legally robust, supported by a qualified certificate issued by a supervised trust service provider, and legally equivalent to a handwritten signature across the EU.

The core objective of eIDAS is to enhance trust, legal clarity, in digital services across the Union. By standardizing trust services and introducing mutual recognition mechanisms, eIDAS supports the creation of a Digital Single Market, where individuals, businesses, and governments can interact electronically across borders with legal certainty.

The complexity of implementation, particularly for small businesses and non-EU countries, poses real barriers. In practice, the adoption of qualified electronic signatures often requires technical resources, infrastructure, and user training that are not always available or accessible. In addition, while eIDAS is binding within the EU, its applicability to non-member states, such as Albania, relies heavily on alignment efforts and bilateral cooperation.

From a legal perspective, the definitions provided in international and EU standards offer clarity and precision that many domestic system is still lack. These standards provide a functional template that can help legislators and regulators develop domestic norms while ensuring compatibility with broader digital ecosystems.

In conclusion, international and European definitions of electronic signatures offer a mature and comprehensive model for legal and technical recognition of digital acts. However, their successful implementation requires more than legal transposition—it demands institutional capacity, technical readiness, public awareness, and a strategic commitment to trust-building in the digital space.

2. Conclusions and Recommendations

Albania has taken commendable steps toward establishing a legal foundation for electronic signatures and digital contracts, particularly through Law No. 9880/2008 and Law No. 111/2018. These legal instruments reflect a clear intent to align with European standards, most notably the eIDAS Regulation, and to provide the basic tools needed to enable secure and reliable digital transactions. They define core concepts, recognize different types of electronic signatures, and introduce trust service providers into the legal lexicon—essential components of any digital legal framework.

However, despite this formal progress, the practical implementation remains fragmented and, in several respects, inadequate. The lack of harmonization between the two main laws, the absence of a dedicated legal framework for electronic contracts, and the weakness of supervisory mechanisms create an uncertain and at times incoherent regulatory environment. Users—whether individuals, businesses, or institutions—face legal ambiguity regarding the validity, enforceability, and cross-border recognition of electronic signatures and contracts.

Moreover, certification authorities, which play a central role in verifying digital identity and ensuring the reliability of electronic signatures, operate in an environment that lacks proper accreditation and regulatory oversight. Without a functioning and transparent system to certify and monitor these providers, the credibility of “qualified” electronic signatures is undermined. This institutional vacuum significantly weakens user confidence in digital legal tools.

Further compounding the issue is Albania’s status outside the European Union. Although Law No. 107/2021 attempts to reflect the principles of eIDAS, the lack of mutual recognition agreements or integration into the EU trust framework severely limits the practical effect of this alignment. As a result, electronic documents and signatures generated in Albania may not be accepted or trusted in EU jurisdictions—and vice versa—hampering both commercial cooperation and legal certainty in cross-border transactions.

Another critical weakness lies in consumer protection. Neither of the two primary laws provides clear guarantees for individuals entering into electronic contracts. Fundamental rights—such as the right to transparent information, the right to withdraw from a digital contract, or access to an effective dispute resolution mechanism—are either vaguely defined or entirely absent. This regulatory gap exposes users to potential abuse, undermines trust, and may ultimately discourage the use of digital contracting platforms altogether.

Finally, while the legal framework emphasizes technological neutrality, the absence of binding technical and security standards leaves the system vulnerable to inconsistent implementation, cybersecurity risks, and evidentiary challenges in court. Judges, lawyers, and businesses are often left without clear criteria to assess the legal sufficiency or authenticity of a digital signature.

To address these challenges and build a credible and functional digital legal system, Albania should consider the following strategic measures. Legislative consolidation, clearly differentiate the scopes of Law No. 9880/2008 and Law No. 107/2021 to eliminate overlaps, avoid legal conflicts, and provide clarity on the applicable legal regime for specific types of transactions. Establishment of a supervisory authority to create or a national regulatory body tasked with accrediting and monitoring trust service providers, ensuring compliance with both legal and technical standards. Development of a legal regime for electronic contracts to introduce explicit provisions on electronic contract formation, consent, evidentiary rules, and dispute resolution to supplement the general rules of the Civil Code.

Pursuit of bilateral agreements engage in international cooperation to negotiate mutual recognition arrangements for electronic signatures with EU and regional partners, increasing legal certainty in cross-border transactions.

Public awareness and institutional training launch education campaigns and targeted training programs to improve digital literacy among citizens, legal professionals, and public officials, fostering a culture of trust and competence in electronic communications.

Legal reform alone is not sufficient for electronic signatures and contracts to gain real traction, Albania must bridge the gap between legislation and implementation. By reinforcing legal clarity, institutional capacity, technical safeguards, and public trust, the country can position itself to fully participate in the digital economy and meet the evolving demands of modern legal and commercial practice.

References

-Albanian Legislation

Law No. 9880, dated 25 February 2008, On Electronic Signature, Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania.

Law No. 111/2018, On Trust Services in Electronic Transactions, Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania.

Civil Code of the Republic of Albania (as amended).

-European Union Legal Framework

Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014, on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market (eIDAS Regulation).

-Italian Legal Literature

A. Palmieri, *The Electronic Signature: Validity and Evidentiary Value* (Giuffrè Editore, 2020).

M. Perassi, *The Electronic Contract: Formation, Validity and Evidence* (CEDAM, 2018).

F. Delfini, *The Digital Document and the Electronic Signature* (Giappichelli, 2019).

G. Finocchiaro, *Manual of IT and Internet Law* (Zanichelli, 2021).

R. D'Orazio, 'Digital Signature and Advanced Electronic Signature: Normative Evolution and Critical Issues', in *Rivista di Diritto Civile* (2020), pp. 245–268.

- European Union Reports and Resources

European Commission, *eIDAS Regulation: Overview and Key Facts*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-strategy> (accessed May 2025).

European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), *Trust Services and eID: Security Recommendations* (2023).

Women's self-employment in rural areas: Challenges and opportunities in the social, economic and cultural context

Lediana Xhakollari

Universiteti i Shkodrës "Luigj Gurakuqi", Albania

Abstract

This study addresses the phenomenon of women's self-employment in rural areas of Lezhë district, exploring the challenges, opportunities and factors that influence this form of employment. In a reality where unemployment remains high and women face exclusion from the formal labor market, self-employment appears not only as an economic alternative, but often also as an indispensable need for survival and independence. The purpose of this study is to analyze the real experiences of self-employed women in the context of the economic, social and cultural conditions that characterize rural areas. The motives for starting an economic activity, access to financial and institutional resources, as well as the impact that self-employment has on personal empowerment and a sense of autonomy are examined. The methodology used is mixed methods, combining quantitative data collected through a structured questionnaire with 50 women, and qualitative data through 10 semi-structured interviews. The instruments are based on international indices and questionnaires such as WEAI, ILO and UN Women, adapted to the Albanian context. The results show that the majority of self-employed women have low education, live in peripheral areas and are engaged in agriculture, livestock and handicrafts. They face numerous challenges, such as lack of land ownership, insufficient institutional support, restrictive cultural norms and lack of support networks. However, self-employment is perceived positively as a way to gain control over income, increase self-confidence and contribute to family well-being. This study suggests the need for comprehensive policies that address the concrete needs of women in rural areas, including training, access to credit, infrastructure improvement, and promotion of positive models of female entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Self-employment, rural women, socio-economic challenges, economic empowerment, institutional support.

1. Introduction

Self-employment among rural women has emerged as a critical pillar of economic activity in Albania, particularly in the district of Lezhë, where formal employment opportunities are limited, and socio-economic inequalities are deeply rooted. In this context, self-employment serves a dual function. On one hand, it acts as a reactive measure, a survival strategy adopted by women who are excluded from the formal labor market due to systemic barriers such as low education levels, geographic isolation, and prevailing gender discrimination. On the other hand, it represents a proactive and strategic choice—a means through which women seek to gain financial independence, assert agency over their lives, and contribute meaningfully to their households and communities.

This duality underscores the complexity of self-employment as both a necessity and an opportunity. While it provides much-needed flexibility—allowing women to

combine income-generating activities with domestic responsibilities—it also exposes them to a host of challenges. These include limited access to credit and property, minimal institutional support, and entrenched cultural norms that continue to define women’s roles within rigid boundaries. As a result, rural women’s entrepreneurial potential is often underutilized or informal, lacking the sustainability and support needed for long-term development.

The main objective of this research is to delve into the lived experiences of self-employed women in rural Albania, with a focus on understanding their motivations for initiating economic activities, the resources available to them, and the social and gender dynamics that influence their entrepreneurial trajectories. By adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study seeks not only to document the economic realities of these women but also to capture the nuanced interplay between structural constraints and individual agency. The findings aim to reveal how self-employment can act as a transformative force—not only for the individual woman in terms of empowerment and self-worth but also for the broader rural community by challenging traditional roles and stimulating local development.

Ultimately, this study argues that while self-employment offers meaningful pathways for empowerment, its impact is limited unless accompanied by comprehensive and gender-sensitive policy interventions. These must address institutional gaps, enhance access to resources, and promote a cultural shift toward the recognition and support of women as key economic actors in rural Albania.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Motivations and Drivers of Self-Employment

Self-employment among rural women is often a response to limited alternatives in the formal labor market, rather than a result of entrepreneurial aspiration. In Albania, particularly in underdeveloped regions like Lezhë, traditional employment opportunities are scarce due to economic stagnation, low industrial investment, and infrastructure gaps. As a result, many women resort to self-employment in agriculture, livestock, or handicrafts primarily to meet basic household needs (Ferrin, 2023; Ndrevataj, 2020).

Several scholars suggest that women’s motivations to pursue self-employment are multifaceted. While for many it is a necessity born out of unemployment and financial hardship, for others it is also a pathway to gain flexibility, autonomy, and a sense of purpose. Controy (2022), for instance, emphasizes that some women deliberately choose self-employment as a means to achieve work-life balance and to fulfill both personal and familial obligations. Similarly, Liça, Sula, and Korsita (2023) argue that increasing self-efficacy and supportive family structures can turn self-employment into an empowering and aspirational venture, particularly in contexts where social capital plays a significant role.

Furthermore, recent evidence indicates a shift from purely necessity-driven to opportunity-driven self-employment among women who are beginning to recognize the potential for personal growth, social contribution, and financial independence through entrepreneurship (Liça et al., 2023).

2.2 Access to Resources

Limited access to financial, technical, and social resources remains one of the most persistent barriers to female self-employment in rural Albania. Many women lack ownership of productive assets such as land, which directly affects their creditworthiness and eligibility for formal loans. Traditional inheritance laws and patriarchal family structures often exclude women from property rights, reinforcing cycles of dependency and poverty (Ndrevataj, 2022).

Training opportunities are also sparse, and women in remote rural areas are rarely reached by formal capacity-building programs. In most cases, knowledge is passed informally within families or acquired through peer learning. As highlighted by UN Women (2024), the absence of accessible and gender-sensitive training undermines women's entrepreneurial success and sustainability. In addition, informal support from spouses or family members, while helpful, is inconsistent and often insufficient for scaling up economic activities.

Lack of access to networking platforms also limits rural women's ability to share experiences, build partnerships, or learn from role models, which are critical elements in developing entrepreneurial resilience (GADC, 2022; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022).

2.3 Institutional Support and Policies

Although various national and international actors have developed programs to support women's economic participation, institutional support in rural areas remains fragmented and largely ineffective. The Ministry of Finance and Economy (2023) has introduced reforms to strengthen employment services and vocational training systems. However, the coordination between central institutions, local government units, and implementing agencies is often weak, limiting the outreach and sustainability of these programs.

Agencies such as the National Agency for Employment and Skills (AKPA) and the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (AKAFPK) are tasked with supporting employment and professional development. Yet, their presence and effectiveness in rural areas are limited due to lack of infrastructure, funding, and personnel (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2023).

Events like the "Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO" organized by UN Women (2024) demonstrate the potential of institutional initiatives to empower women through access to training and markets. However, such efforts are typically one-time activities and do not substitute for continuous and systematic support.

Effective policy-making in this domain requires a more gender-sensitive approach that accounts for the socio-cultural barriers women face, the geographic disparities in access to services, and the need for sustainable funding and follow-up mechanisms. Moreover, programs should not only focus on financial inclusion but also integrate components of mentorship, community engagement, and long-term capacity development.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative

and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's self-employment in rural areas of Lezhë. The rationale for this approach was to combine the breadth and generalizability of quantitative data with the depth and contextual richness of qualitative insights. Mixed methods were particularly suitable for examining complex social phenomena such as gender roles, empowerment, and institutional access, which cannot be fully captured through numbers alone.

Quantitative Component

The quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 50 self-employed women living in rural and semi-rural areas of Lezhë. The questionnaire was designed to capture demographic characteristics, the nature and duration of economic activities, income control, access to support services, and perceptions of autonomy and empowerment. It contained both closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items for subjective perceptions (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Qualitative Component

To complement the quantitative findings and delve deeper into the subjective experiences, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with women selected through purposeful sampling. The interviews focused on the motivations for self-employment, social and cultural challenges, personal aspirations, family dynamics, and the perceived impact of economic activity on personal identity and community standing. Interviews were conducted in Albanian, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed for emerging themes.

Instruments

The research instruments were adapted from internationally recognized and validated frameworks, adjusted to the local context to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance:

- Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) – Developed by IFPRI and USAID, this tool was used to assess women's decision-making power in agricultural production, control over income, access to and control of productive resources, leadership in community groups, and allocation of time. Selected indicators were adapted into concise survey items (e.g., "I have the final say on how income from my activity is spent").
- UN Women & FAO Frameworks – These tools offered dimensions related to empowerment, institutional inclusion, and gender-sensitive economic indicators. They also provided the foundation for questions assessing perceived self-worth, respect in the household, and aspirations for business growth.
- All instruments were translated and piloted with a small group of 8 women to ensure clarity, contextual fit, and comprehension before full deployment.

Sampling Strategy

The study used two distinct sampling methods tailored to each component:

- Quantitative sampling: A random sampling method was applied to identify 50 women from various rural and semi-rural villages in the district of Lezhë. Inclusion criteria were: (a) women aged 18 and older; (b) currently self-employed

in any form of income-generating activity (formal or informal); (c) residing in rural areas.

- Qualitative sampling: A purposeful sampling strategy selected 10 participants with diverse socio-demographic profiles (age, marital status, education level, type of activity, and residence area). The goal was to ensure diversity and to capture different perspectives on empowerment and challenges.

This combination allowed both representativeness (in the quantitative strand) and depth (in the qualitative strand).

4. Results

The findings of this study, derived from both quantitative surveys with 50 self-employed women and qualitative interviews with 10 selected participants, offer a multifaceted understanding of women's self-employment in rural areas of Lezhë. The results are presented across five thematic areas: demographic characteristics, the nature of self-employment, decision-making and autonomy, access to institutional support, and the role of gender-related barriers in shaping women's experiences.

4.1 Demographic Profile

The majority of participants were middle-aged women, with ages ranging from 31 to 64 years. The average age was approximately 49 years, reflecting a demographic more likely to have long-standing household responsibilities and limited formal employment options. A closer breakdown of the age distribution revealed that 58% of respondents were between 45 and 58 years, 24% were under 43 years, and only 6% were older than 60, suggesting that self-employment is most prevalent among women in their productive years.

Educational attainment was generally low. More than two-thirds of the women (68%) had completed only the basic 8-year school system, 24% had attained a secondary education, and just 4% held a higher education degree. An additional 4% reported having received no formal education at all. This low level of educational preparation indicates the limited access to formal employment opportunities and vocational training.

In terms of marital status, half of the women (50%) were married, 28% were single, and the remaining were either widowed (18%) or divorced (4%). The majority were mothers, with 70% having up to two children, 20% with three, and 10% with four children. Family structure played a key role in shaping their daily routines and their engagement with self-employment.

The women predominantly resided in accessible rural areas. Nearly half (46%) lived in zones close to urban centers, while 36% lived in flat, agriculturally active villages. Only a small minority were located in mountainous (8%) or remote areas (10%), which may reflect both the concentration of economic opportunities and the distribution of public services.

Collectively, these demographic findings indicate that self-employment in rural Lezhë is most commonly undertaken by women who are married, in their late 40s or early 50s, have low educational attainment, and reside in semi-rural environments that offer a degree of accessibility to local markets or transportation routes.

4.2 Nature of Self-Employment

The types of self-employment practiced by the women fell into three main categories. The most common area of work was agriculture and livestock, with 62% of respondents engaged in farming, animal husbandry, or related activities. Another 20% were involved in food production and processing, typically producing homemade goods such as dairy products, jams, or baked items. A further 18% worked in traditional crafts, such as embroidery, weaving, or the creation of handmade accessories—skills often passed down through generations.

Most of these economic activities were informal. A striking 86% of the women operated outside legal and fiscal systems, meaning their businesses were unregistered and untaxed. Only 14% had taken steps to legally formalize their activity. Regarding initial sources of capital, 52% of participants started their businesses using personal savings, 38% relied on support from family members, and only a small fraction (10%) had obtained loans or microcredit.

Qualitative interviews revealed that women's choices of activity were strongly influenced by traditional knowledge, ease of access to resources, and the ability to integrate business efforts with household responsibilities. Many explained that their ventures were shaped more by necessity and inherited skills than by formal business planning.

4.3 Decision-Making and Autonomy

Decision-making autonomy varied significantly among participants. While 44% of women stated that they had full decision-making power over their economic activities, 36% described decision-making as a shared responsibility, typically with their husbands. The remaining 20% noted that decisions were largely made by other family members, indicating continued male dominance in household-level economic authority.

When asked about control over the income generated, 42% said they had the autonomy to decide how their earnings were spent. However, a larger group (48%) indicated that such decisions were made jointly with their spouse, and 10% reported having little or no control over financial decisions. These findings suggest that even when women are the primary labor contributors in their economic activities, they may not enjoy full control over the resulting benefits.

Insights from the interviews offered further nuance. Many women acknowledged that although they performed the bulk of the work, key decisions—especially those involving larger investments or income distribution—still required the approval or involvement of male family members. One participant noted, *“Even though it’s my work, I can’t make big decisions without asking my husband.”* Such examples highlight the gap between perceived and actual autonomy, and the enduring influence of patriarchal norms on women's roles, even in self-directed economic activities.

4.4 Institutional Support and Networking

Support from formal institutions was nearly absent in the lives of most participants. A significant 82% of the women reported that they had never participated in training

programs related to business or agricultural development. Similarly, 76% stated that they had never received technical assistance, either from government services or NGOs. Only 10% were members of women's groups, cooperatives, or local associations, suggesting a lack of engagement with formal or semi-formal networks that could offer mutual support and capacity building.

Several key barriers to institutional support emerged. Geographical isolation was cited by nearly one-third (32%) of participants as a limiting factor. More than half (54%) were simply unaware of available services. Others mentioned logistical and administrative challenges, such as complex bureaucratic procedures (36%) and the lack of time or transportation due to domestic responsibilities (44%).

Interviews further revealed a general sense of disconnection from state institutions and development programs. Many participants expressed frustration over the absence of outreach efforts. One woman remarked, *"No one has ever come to talk to us or offer help. We only hear about these things on TV."* These narratives underscore the urgent need for targeted, localized, and inclusive programs that actively engage women where they live and work.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with both national and international research on women's entrepreneurship in rural contexts. They reaffirm that while self-employment can act as a significant mechanism for survival and economic participation, it is also constrained by deep-rooted structural and cultural barriers. These include limited access to land ownership, insufficient financial infrastructure, and a lack of institutionalized training and support programs tailored to rural women. One of the most striking consistencies with global findings is the persistent challenge of access to productive resources. As shown in previous studies (IFPRI, 2023; OECD, 2021), land ownership and financial inclusion are critical enablers of women's economic success. In Albania, customary norms and legal ambiguities continue to restrict women's ability to inherit and control land. This affects not only their creditworthiness but also their long-term investment potential. The current study confirms that the majority of self-employed women in Lezhë operate informally, without legal recognition or access to formal financing, thus perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability and informality.

Furthermore, the lack of technical training and institutional engagement emerged as a critical limitation. The low rate of participation in training programs among the respondents echoes broader regional patterns observed across the Western Balkans, where rural women are often excluded from vocational education and lifelong learning due to logistical constraints, low awareness, and gendered expectations (EIGE, 2020; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022). This gap in knowledge and skills not only limits women's entrepreneurial capacity but also isolates them from innovation and technological advances that could enhance productivity.

However, amid these barriers, the study also highlights strong evidence of individual resilience and adaptive agency. Most women demonstrated creativity, commitment, and the ability to balance economic activity with domestic and caregiving

responsibilities. This aligns with what Amine and Staub (2009) term the “informal entrepreneurship resilience” of women in developing contexts—a phenomenon where, even in the absence of external support, women manage to create economic spaces for themselves and contribute significantly to household welfare.

The duality of self-employment as both a necessity and an opportunity also resonates with the literature. While many women in this study entered self-employment due to a lack of alternatives, a significant portion described it as a means of achieving greater autonomy and a sense of self-worth. This mirrors international findings suggesting that self-employment can be both *instrumental* (for economic survival) and *transformative* (for personal empowerment) (UN Women, 2023; Liça et al., 2023). A central paradox emerges from the data: women’s entrepreneurial potential exists and is actively expressed, even in resource-poor and culturally restrictive environments. However, in the absence of systemic support—such as institutional recognition, infrastructure, and access to networks—these efforts remain fragmented, highly informal, and vulnerable to economic shocks. Without clear pathways for scale, sustainability, and formal inclusion, women remain trapped in a subsistence-level economy that limits long-term growth and security.

Despite this, the study demonstrates the empowering potential of self-employment, even in modest forms. Women reported increased self-confidence, respect within the household, and a sense of identity tied to their work. These subjective gains, although difficult to quantify, are critical.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The results of this study clearly demonstrate that self-employed women in rural Lezhë face a multidimensional set of challenges. These challenges are deeply embedded in structural, economic, and cultural contexts that limit women’s access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power. Most of the women involved in this research operate in informal settings, without the benefit of legal recognition, financial services, or targeted institutional support. Their educational backgrounds are generally low, further restricting their access to information, training, and public programs designed to foster entrepreneurship.

Despite these substantial barriers, the women surveyed and interviewed in this study exhibit a remarkable degree of motivation, creativity, and resilience. Many have developed and sustained income-generating activities based on traditional skills, local knowledge, and social capital, often balancing multiple roles as economic contributors, caregivers, and community members. These efforts reflect not only a survival strategy but a meaningful attempt at self-determination and social inclusion. Self-employment, even in its most basic form, plays a transformative role in the lives of rural women. Participants reported higher levels of self-confidence, greater involvement in household decisions, and an increased sense of purpose and respect within their families and communities. These psychological and social shifts, although sometimes subtle, are critical indicators of empowerment and serve as an entry point for broader social change. However, without systemic support and intentional policy

action, these personal gains risk remaining isolated and unsustainable. The study highlights a central contradiction: while women's entrepreneurial energy is evident, it remains largely untapped due to the lack of a supportive ecosystem. For self-employment to evolve from an informal coping mechanism into a sustainable and empowering livelihood strategy, coordinated and inclusive interventions are urgently needed.

6.2 Policy Recommendations

To address the complex interplay of barriers faced by self-employed rural women, this study proposes a set of integrated and context-sensitive policy recommendations:

1. Capacity building

It is essential to develop and deliver tailored training programs that go beyond basic skills and address the full entrepreneurial lifecycle. These programs should cover financial literacy, business planning, digital skills, product development, and market strategies. Training must be delivered in accessible formats (including mobile and community-based learning) and adjusted to the literacy levels and time constraints of rural women.

2. Access to credit and financial services

Governmental and non-governmental actors should expand microcredit schemes specifically targeted at rural women, with favorable conditions such as low interest rates, flexible repayment terms, and minimal collateral requirements. These should be accompanied by mentorship programs to increase women's confidence in managing loans and making financial decisions. Partnerships with local banks and cooperatives could facilitate outreach and trust-building.

3. Infrastructure development

Improving rural infrastructure is a prerequisite for enabling women's economic participation. Investments in transportation (roads, public transit), digital infrastructure (internet connectivity), and marketplaces can reduce the isolation that hinders women's access to customers, information, and institutions. A rural digital inclusion strategy should also be considered, enabling women to market their products online or access e-learning tools.

4. Cultural Transformation and Social Norms

Addressing cultural barriers requires a long-term strategy that includes public awareness campaigns, school-based education on gender equality, and community dialogue initiatives. The visibility of successful female entrepreneurs from rural areas should be actively promoted through media, educational institutions, and local governance platforms. Role models can challenge stereotypes and encourage other women—and their communities—to view entrepreneurship as a viable and respectable path for women.

5. Institutional coordination and local governance

There is a need for more coherent coordination between national policy frameworks and local implementation. Municipalities should be empowered and resourced to deliver localized support to rural women, including information offices, technical assistance desks, and liaison units with NGOs or donor-funded programs. Local

government staff should receive training on gender-sensitive service delivery and the socioeconomic dynamics of rural women's entrepreneurship.

6. Monitoring and inclusion in policy design

Policymakers must ensure that rural women are not only beneficiaries but also **participants** in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of programs that affect them. Creating advisory boards or consultative forums composed of rural women entrepreneurs can help make interventions more responsive and equitable. Disaggregated data collection is also crucial for tracking progress and identifying gaps. In conclusion, supporting women's self-employment in rural Albania is not merely a matter of economic development—it is a social and human rights imperative. Empowering rural women economically contributes not only to household welfare but also to community resilience, intergenerational progress, and national development. The time has come for strategic, inclusive, and sustained investments that recognize rural women as agents of change, not recipients of charity.

Acknowledgements

The author is very grateful to all participants for sharing their experiences. The author expresses her gratitude for the financial support provided by the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi".

References

- Amine, L. S., & Staub, K. M. (2009). Women entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa: An institutional theory analysis from a social marketing point of view. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 21(2), 183–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985620802182144>
- Controy, T. (2022). Women's entrepreneurship and work-life balance: A U.S. perspective. *Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jge.vxxi.xxx> (sho DOI nëse e ke)
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2020). *Gender equality and rural women's economic participation in the Western Balkans*. <https://eige.europa.eu> (sho URL të plotë nëse është përdorur online)
- Ferrin, R. (2023). Female self-employment in post-transition Europe. *European Journal of Employment Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ejes.vxx.xxx> (sho DOI nëse e ke)
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2022). *Barriers to women's employment in rural Albania*. Tirana: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Albania.
- GADC. (2022). *Gender equality and labor rights in Albania: A national survey report*. Gender Alliance for Development Center.
- IFPRI. (2023). *Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index*. International Food Policy Research Institute. <https://weai.ifpri.info>
- Liça, A., Sula, M., & Korsita, V. (2023). Motivations and psychological capital of Albanian women entrepreneurs. *Albanian Journal of Business Research*.
- Ministry of Finance and Economy. (2023). *National Employment Strategy and Rural Economic Empowerment Programs*. Government of Albania.
- Ndrevataj, E. (2020). *Self-employment as a strategy for economic survival among rural Albanian women*. Tirana: Rural Studies Forum.
- Ndrevataj, E. (2022). *Gender and land ownership in rural Albania*. Gender Policy Series.
- OECD. (2021). *Enhancing women's access to productive resources in rural areas*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- UN Women. (2023). *Women's economic empowerment: Global progress and gaps*. UN Women.
- UN Women. (2024). *Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO: Empowering rural women in Albania*. UN Women Albania.