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The role of youth in agriculture and rural development in the WB

National Report for Albania



Bayerisches Staatsministerium für
Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Forsten



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Purpose



- To understand the situation of the rural youth in the WB in terms of their livelihood, personal development, business opportunities and social participation
- To assess the role and impact of the rural youth in the economic, social and environmental context
- To discover the main drivers of rural youth outmigration in the WB
- To provide policy recommendations for enabling, encouraging, and enhancing rural youth's contribution to the rural development in the WB.



Main research questions

What is youth's quality of life and situation on farms in the Western Balkans regarding economic and social aspects, including time management and life-cycle aspects?

What are youth's aspirations, and how is their general wellbeing?

What are youth's personal development perspectives in the rural areas? What are the opportunities for education and training?

What are the opportunities for an engaged social life of the youth in the rural areas?

How is farm succession done, how much chance does the youth get to participate in the ownership and in the decision-making?

How is youth involved in business decisions, and under which conditions do they become innovators on the farm? Are there specific training needs? What are the opportunities for farm diversification and off-farm work?

How is youth represented in (leadership in) farmers' associations?

Socio-demographic data and trends



- Total population 2,793,592 inhabitants, of which 1,406,532 are women. (50.3%)
- Population in terms of age structure is relatively young, with a median age of 35.4 years.
- The largest age group: 25-54 years old (41.8%)
- The 15-29 age group makes up 24.5 % of the population, while 15-39 account for 36.8%.
- Gender structure, females 50.3%/males 49.7% for 2021.
- In terms of urban versus rural population, the majority of the population (61.4%) lives in urban areas, and 38.6% living in rural areas.
- The share of rural population has been constantly declined over the years due to mainly outmigration.

- Albania has experienced a decline in its population growth rate due to low fertility rate and high level of emigration;
- Emigration- a significant demographic trend in Albania over the last ten years, it represent a major demographic challenges
- 410,575 Albanians are immigrants (INSTAT 2012-2021 data);
- The agriculture and fisheries sectors occupy an important weight in the country's economy and their contribution to the national GDP in 2020 was about 19.3%.
- The unemployment rate is 11.5 % in 2021, down slightly from 11.7% in 2019. The unemployment rate in Albania was relatively high in the years 2012-2015, reaching its peak in 2014 (17.5%). Since 2014, it has been decreasing steadily, except a slight increase in 2020.



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National youth policy



- Youth policy" as a sustainable inclusive activity undertaken by the central and local government, aimed at creating favorable conditions for the personal development of young people and their participation in public, social, economic and cultural life local and national level;
- **The Constitution of Albania** recognizes and protects the rights of young people. It does not make specific references to youth nor does it provide a definition of youth.
- **The Law 75/2019 "On Youth"** - an important step towards protecting and promoting the rights and interests of young people in Albania. The Law specifies that young people are persons from 15 years to 29 years old.
- **National Youth Strategy for the period 2022-2029** focuses on ensuring equality of opportunities and rights, support and engagement for young girls and boys (15- 29 years old), especially those who are the most vulnerable. Three policies: innovation, skills and professionalism and labour market and general wellbeing of young people.



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Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries (SARDF) 2021-2027.

Rural Development Programme 2021-2027 under Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

- Measure 'Investments in physical assets of agricultural holdings' – 90 young farmers
 - Measure 'Farm diversification and business development' - 70 young farmers
 - Measure 'Implementation of local development strategies – Leader approach' for the improvement of social capital and local governance by creating private-public partnerships (Local Action Groups), which establish and implement bottom up Local Development Strategies – LAG board should include at least two young persons below 35 years old - 10 LAGs supported by IPARD III to implement their strategy
- **The Law 15/2019 “On Employment Promotion»**
 - **The National Programme of Internships**
 - **Local Action Plans for Youth** at local self-government level.



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Institutional stakeholders, capacities competencies in regard to rural youth issues



«**Youth policy subject**» as anybody, institution and structure, at central and local level, that within its field of activity exercises responsibilities affecting young people and drafts youth policies, as well as other actors involved in the process of drafting and implementing youth policies.

- **The State Ministry for Youth and Children operational as of 2021.**
- **Line ministries including other central government institutions**
- **The National Youth Agency**
- **The National Youth Council**
- **Youth Centers**
- **The National Youth Representative Organization**
- **The Local Youth Council**
- **Youth organizations**
- **Organizations for young people**
- **Local self-government units**



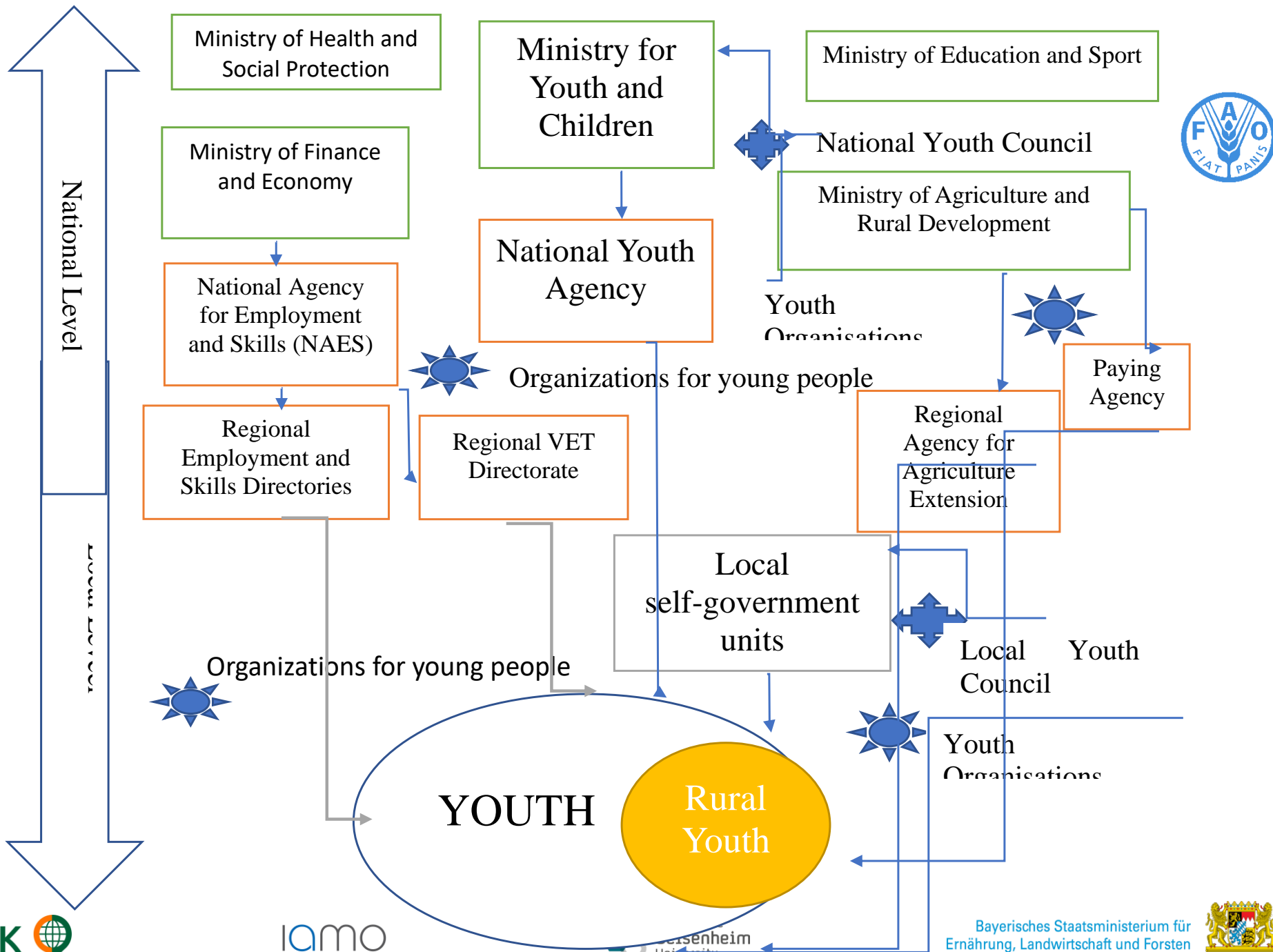


Figure 1. institutional setting for supporting rural youth Institutional and legal framework

Conclusions on national youth policy



- Youth policy is cross-sectorial and involves numerous actors for its formulation and implementation toward improved youth status.
- The youth policies are formulated and implemented at both national and local level.
- No specific legal references to rural youth.
- Limitations: The lack of provisions for online spaces; it does not outline the qualifications for a "youth worker». the provision of adequate resources and funding for the implementation of envisaged program effectively.
- There are limited awareness among institutional representatives at both national and local level that could limit Law's effective implementation.
- Considering the cross-sectorial and multistakeholder features of youth policy, its formulation and implementation may be hampered by lack of coordination among government agencies, and with other structures



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- The successful implementation of the National Youth Strategy will require awareness among young people and other stakeholders on the strategy and action plan, including activities that are expected to be implemented in the coming years.
- The 2021 survey revealed that 74.5% of municipalities (of those that responded to the survey) have a special unit dedicated to youth, while 25.5% reported having no dedicated unit, but they have integrated this responsibility in other directorates such as education, sport and art.
- 69.7% of the municipalities do not have a local plan on youth, while 30.3% of them have LAPY (2021)



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Awareness and opinions on strategic documents and program



- **Regarding the effectiveness of the relevant institutions that implement rural youth issues** the interviewees' highlighted that they are quite comprehensive, covering a range of areas such as education, health, employment, and entrepreneurship.
- **These institutions usually work together as a cross-sectoral group for youth-related matters, and the National Agency for Youth is responsible for all young people, regardless of whether they are from urban or rural areas.**
- Institutional representatives are aware of the National Youth Strategy but unsure about its status and if there is an action plan/they cannot provide any opinion on its effectiveness as it will be implemented in the coming years.
- The program (YGS) will be effective, but its implementation still needs to be evaluated.
- They emphasize the need for improved coordination among all implemented institutions of the action plan to strengthen its effectiveness

(Interviews 2022)



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The appointed unit/department/sector/appointed person



NGO representative: the organization has an appointed person responsible for dealing with rural youth issues and rural women.

At the university level, the Student Career Center is responsible for counseling young people regarding employment and training opportunities.

At the municipal level, there is a Youth Advisor responsible for organizing and monitoring activities and projects dedicated to youth, including rural youth.

the MARD representative has no information on the appointed unit/department/sector/appointed person in the Ministry

National Youth Agency representative: The concept of youth is perceived as inclusive without differentiation between urban and rural youth so there is no specific sector or appointed person responsible for dealing with rural youth issues.

(Interviews 2022)



Trends and main findings



Data indicates a declining percentage of youth (age 15-29) in the total population, while the proportion of youth (age 15-39) remains relatively stable over the years.

- The share of youth (age 15-29) in the total population has been gradually decreasing from 26% in 2012 to 23% in 2020 and 2021.
- The share of youth (age 15-39) remains relatively stable at 37% from 2012 to 2017, with a slight decrease to 36% from 2018 to 2021.

The focus group discussions highlighted the different perspectives of young people in rural areas, based on their age and gender, regarding critical issues that affect their lives.

- The female participants aged 25-40 identified **local infrastructure and public services as a priority issue**;
- The female participants aged 15-24 rated **education as the most concerning issue**;
- The male participants aged 15-24 highlighted issues such as **unemployment and lack of quality services in health and education**;
- The male participants of aged 25-40, identified **local infrastructure and social life** as important issues.



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Education



Study highlights lower academic performance among rural youth compared to their urban counterparts; Educational disparities: 44% attending secondary school, 11% pursuing post-secondary studies, and 37% lacking any formal education. The limited educational opportunities primarily affect rural youth, particularly those in the 18-21 age group, (Cela&Kamberi,2019)

Lower academic performance among rural youth compared to their urban counterparts. The lack of adequate infrastructure, including poor roads, limited electricity, and transportation difficulties, emerged as a common concern across all four groups.

Insufficient teaching quality and a limited focus on vocational education were prevalent across all groups. The female youth in the 15-25 age group feel that vocational education is undervalued in rural areas;

Access to education varied across different age groups and villages. Some areas offered limited educational levels, with only primary and lower secondary education available.

Higher secondary education was often only accessible in urban areas;

Quality of education was perceived as average. There are difficulties and gaps in rural youth education, which impacted their integration to higher education. (Male participants age group of 15-24)

Education is a key factor that contribute to the out-migration of families and young people from rural areas, seeking better educational opportunities. Most of the young people who leave because of education do not return.



Employment and economic opportunities



Rural areas offer limited job prospects compared to urban centers due to factors such as political influences, a lack of private sector investment, and the dominance of traditional sectors like agriculture.

- Female participants (15-25 age group) expressed less interest and involvement in agriculture due to cultural attitudes and a lack of desire, while male participants (25-40 age group) highlighted difficulties in inheriting farms and agricultural businesses.
- Younger participants emphasized the importance of specialized education and infrastructure to support employment opportunities in sectors like agrotourism. They stressed the need for improved access to training and advisory services to develop their skills.
- Both age and gender groups: financial constraints as a barrier to starting businesses or investing in agriculture. Limited access to land, bureaucratic procedures, and lack of financial support hindered young people's ability to engage in entrepreneurship.
- Participants also stressed the importance of supportive government policies, including tax reductions, increased subsidies, easier access to credit, to encourage entrepreneurship and job creation in rural areas.



Civic engagement and social life



There is a disparity between rural and urban youth regarding work hours, social activities, and international travel. Rural youth work longer hours, engage in less socializing with friends, and have lower rates of international travel compared to urban youth. (Cela&Kamberi 2019)

There is a lack of social engagement in internships, volunteer activities etc. 19.7% of youth have been part of internships. With regards to social engagement, only 16% of young people were involved in volunteer activities during last years in Albania (Youth Balkan Hub nd).

FGD reveal a consensus among participants regarding the limited social life in rural areas.

- They highlight the lack of facilities such as cinemas, sports fields, and clubs in rural areas. This contributes to a sense of limited social life and reduced opportunities for social activities.
- The religious institutions play a significant role in providing socialization opportunities for young people as they organize social activities such as summer camps and events.
- Younger participants (15-24) express that technology and the internet are sources of social interaction in the absence of physical facilities.
- Young males in rural areas have more options, such as gathering in cafes, while community prejudice restricts girls from visiting coffee shops, and the available activities organized by religious authorities are only for men.
- **The limited social life is not considered the primary reason for the out-migration of young people from rural areas. Instead, it is viewed as a contributing factor to their non-return to these areas after they leave.**
- Some participants express an attachment to the rural areas, highlighting the tranquility and untapped potential as factors that make rural areas attractive despite the limited social life.



Political participation



- A significant majority of youths in Albania exhibit a lack of interest in political processes. 62 percent of young people express no interest in politics, which represents an increase from the 40 percent reported in 2015. Furthermore, the percentage of highly interested youths has decreased to 3 percent, compared to 7 percent in 2015. This disinterest in politics is consistent among both urban and rural youth. (Cela&Kamberi, 2019)
- Male and female participants in 15-24 age group express a belief that political engagement is primarily driven by personal gain or affiliation with a specific party. The presence of a patriarchal mindset is highlighted as a significant barrier for girls' political participation and decision-making.
- Young male participants in 25-40 age group tend to have a higher level of political engagement, driven by political pressure and the desire to secure job positions.
- Female participants in both age groups perceive limited opportunities for civic and political engagement, leading to a lack of motivation and solidarity among young people. Gender divisions and the lack of transportation options are mentioned as specific challenges faced by girls in rural areas.
- **All groups confirm the limited impact they believe they can have on changing the situation.**
- There is a general lack of proactivity and a sense of demotivation among young people when it comes to civic and political engagement.



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Rural infrastructure



- A shared consensus on the inadequacy of local public social and economic infrastructure in rural areas.
- Similar problems related to roads, electricity, water supply, transportation, and healthcare facilities.
- Male participants (25-40 age group) emphasized the importance of good infrastructure in attracting people to rural areas. They highlighted issues such as damaged roads, lack of public lighting, infrequent public transportation, and deteriorated healthcare facilities.
- Female participants (25-40 age group) echoed similar concerns about infrastructure in rural areas.
- They mentioned problems with unpaved roads, unreliable drinking water supply, inadequate public transportation, waste management issues, and difficulties with electricity.
- The challenges generated from the inadequacy of infrastructure were seen as significant factors influencing the decision to leave rural areas.



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Youth involvement in farming



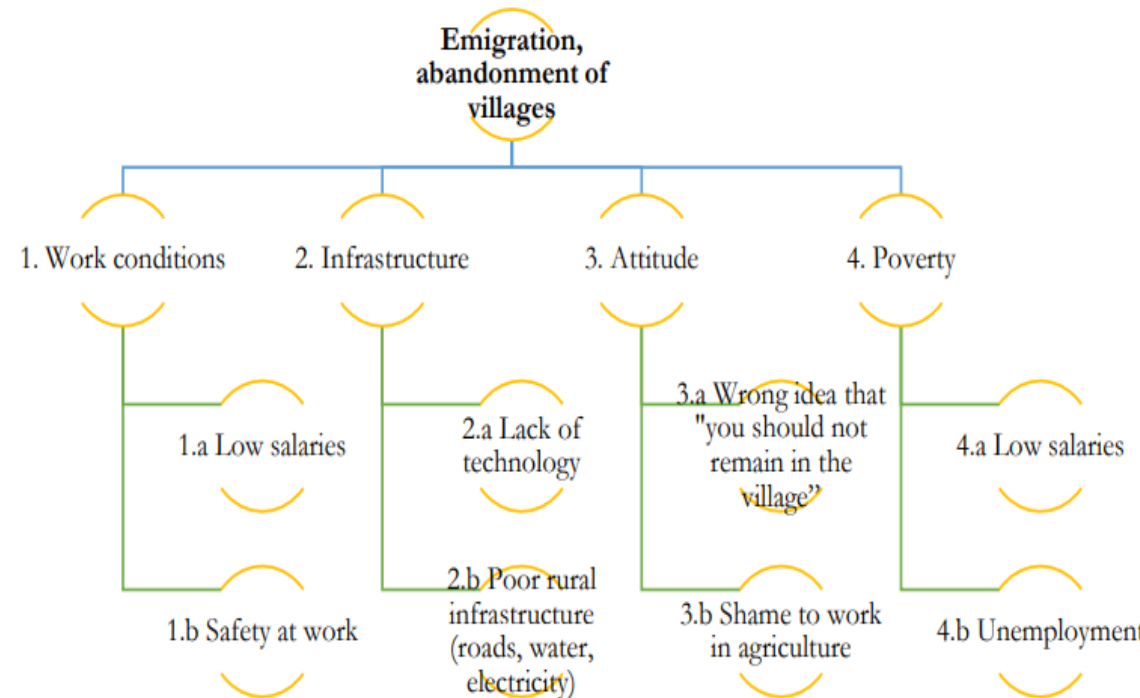
- Limited inclusion of girls in agriculture in rural areas due to cultural attitudes and traditional gender roles discourage girls from engaging in agricultural activities.
- Participants noted that girls rarely inherit farms or take on leadership roles in farming operations.
- There is a perception that farming is more suited for boys, and girls are expected to marry and move to their husband's household.
- Both male age groups highlighted that income-generating activities like livestock farming, agriculture, and beekeeping are not substantial and often struggle to provide adequate livelihoods.
- The potential of agrotourism models and branding specific products. These models can offer alternative opportunities for youth engagement in rural areas.
- Female participants also highlighted prejudice faced by female agronomists and the male-dominated nature of the agricultural sector.
- **Labor-intensive nature of agriculture and low income sector contribute to young individuals leaving rural areas and choosing emigration as a result.**



Migration



- “Youth brain drain” ranks Albania at number one in Europe for young people's desire to leave and study abroad.
- 35% of students with a Bachelor's degree and about 30% of students generally aim to study abroad, while the level of economic status of Albanian students is again at alarming proportions compared to other countries.
- Young people that willingly want to leave the country account for up to 79% (CRCA 2020).
- There is an increase of emigration. In 2021 the number of emigrants was 42,048 persons.



(Rural Albanian Youth Project, RTM 2020)



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Recommendations



- Improving education in rural areas is seen as a priority to prevent further migration and support the future of young people in these areas. Addressing the educational challenges requires improving infrastructure by investing in schools, laboratories, sports facilities, and transportation system.
- Ensure qualified teachers are available and promote vocational education as a valuable education opportunity for students. Incorporate subjects such as citizenship and environmental into the curriculum.
- Efforts to encourage the return of educated individuals to rural areas should be done through employment opportunities, support for family businesses, and fostering a strong connection and sense of affiliation with the community.
- To incentivize young people to stay in rural areas, opportunities such as grants, subsidies, microcredit, support for activities, training on digital skills, employment opportunities, and policies/subsidies related to infrastructure, basic services, vocational education, start-ups, and tax reduction are suggested.



Recommendations



- **Improving cooperation and collaboration** among government institutions and other stakeholders toward effective implementation of the Law on Youth;
- While **gender mainstreaming and inclusiveness** in state support measures are noted. It is essential to assess whether these measures are **adequately addressing the specific challenges faced by young women** in rural areas, such as cultural barriers to participation in agriculture and limited opportunities for civic and political engagement.
- The inadequate local infrastructure, including roads, electricity, water supply, transportation, and healthcare facilities, significantly affects the quality of life and opportunities for rural youth. Policies should **prioritize infrastructure development in rural areas to create an enabling environment for education...**
- Policies should focus on **promoting entrepreneurship and innovation** among rural youth. This can be achieved by providing financial support, training, and mentorship programs tailored to the specific needs and aspirations of rural young entrepreneurs.

