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# Unlocking Opportunities: Empowering the Online Platform Workforce in the Western Balkans

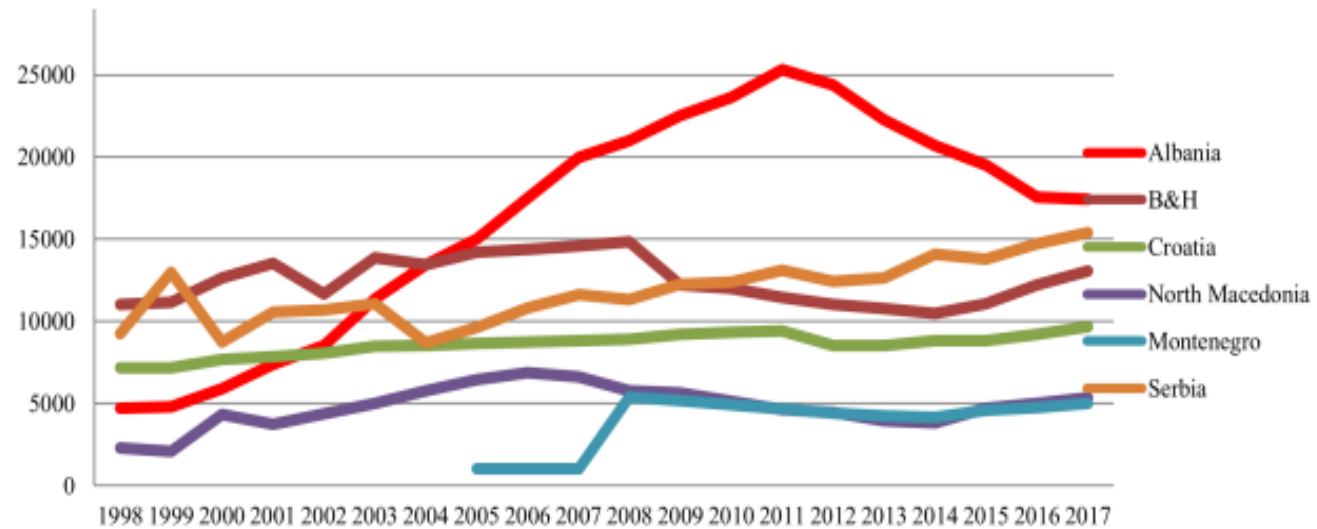
## From brain drain to brain gain Can platform work help?

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# Brain drain

- **WESTERN BALKANS WORKING AGE POPULATION DECLINED BY MORE THAN 400,000 IN PAST 5 YEARS**
- Brain drain is particularly significant in Albania, where the highly educated account for around 40% of the total cumulative outflow
- From mainly a migration of poverty, high unemployment rates, desperation and protest to a more structural one with the migration mainly of the youngsters and highly educated sections of the population

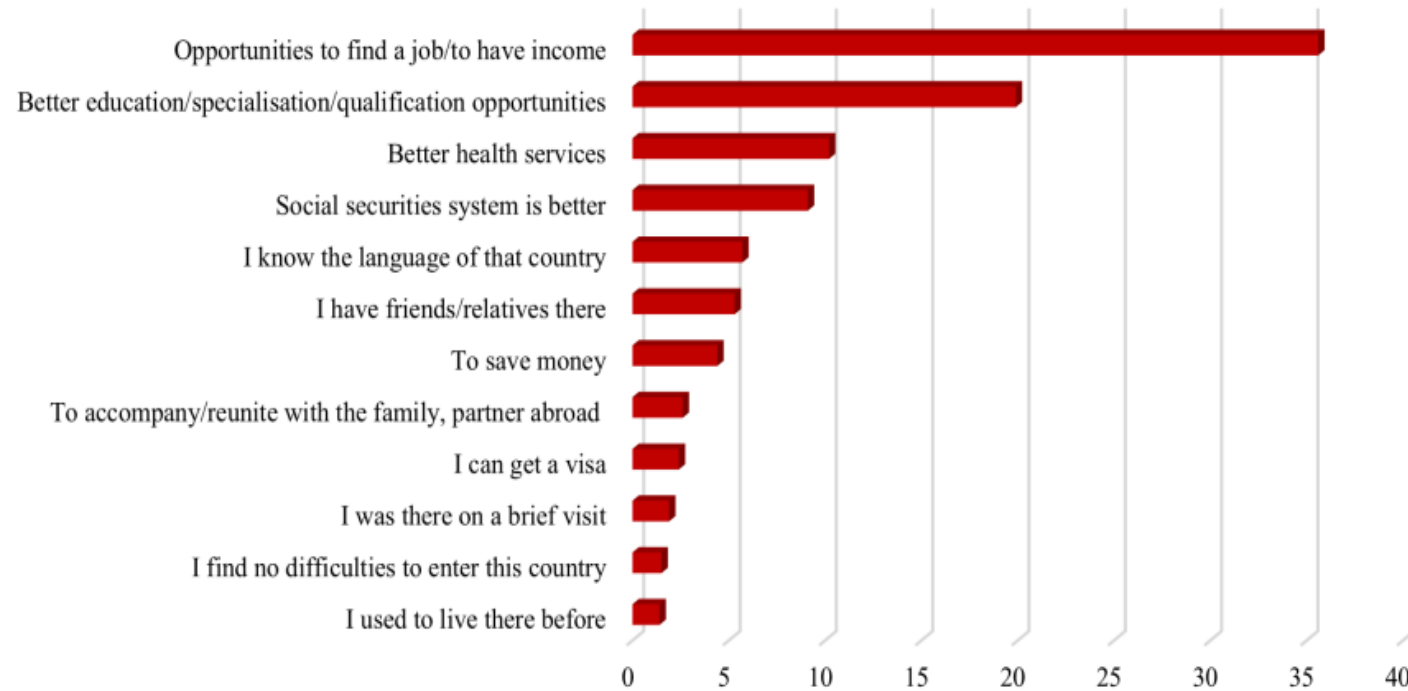
**Figure 1. Tertiary students from Western Balkan countries studying abroad**



**Source:** UNESCO (2017) *Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students*.

<http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>

# Reasons for choosing a destination country



**Source:** Survey with Albanian students in Albania, 2019

# *There are jobs, but there are not professionals...*

- Over 80% of medium and large businesses and 54% of small businesses reported having ICT vacancies in the last 12 months (2022)
- skills mismatch between what the education system equips youth with, and what the labour market requires (digital knowledge, data entry knowledge)
- Different approaches to the labour market (life – work balance; creativity)
- Vacancies mainly in Tirana
- Low wages

# Migration from Albania

## *wicked problem*

- King (2021) a wicked problem is a problem that is extremely difficult or impossible to solve
  - incomplete information,
  - contradictory forces,
  - changing circumstances,
  - multiple layers of complexity
  - interdependencies with other problems.

- Albania is still locked in the phase of on-going large-scale migration (Gëdeshi & King, 2021; King & Gëdeshi, 2019)
  - young, educated and qualified people
    - 40% of the emigration from Albania could be classified as brain drain (Leitner, 2021);
  - still high potential rates of migration
    - 30% (Public Opinion Balkan Barometer).
  - high unemployment rates,
    - 10,9% (INSTAT 2023)
  - endemic corruption,
  - the unfavourable business climate,
  - informal markets,
  - Low standard of education and health services
  - widening socio-economic and spatial differences,

# The virtualization of work

- Changes of the traditional “social model” of industrialized countries based on **place, time and action**
  - Global integration of work
- point of entry for new immigrants
  - Precarious and atypical work conditions
  - Non – standard jobs in the platform economy
- Silver bullet solution for out migration (?)
- Job offers from online platforms require employees with not very high data entry skills (basic digital knowledge) to software development projects (specialized knowledge)



# Methodology

- 20 in – depth interviews
- 8 women/12 men
- IT (12), Teaching (4), Architecture (1), Literature (1), Translator (2)
- *Transcribed, coded, translated, quoted*

# Migration and cloudwork – web-based

- Many cloudworkers embrace the flexible and informal conditions of cloudwork while shuttling back and forth with regular employment
- Cloudwork allows them to live middle class lifestyles,
- Full time or part time job
- Trust more the platform itself than the state
- Do not want the policy to intervene in their work
- **Do not consider migration**

# Not only ICT ...

- A. K, (M, 29, chemistry teacher ) *My primary source of incomes is the work online because it gives you more, much higher incomes.*
- K.M (F, 29, math teacher) *As for my career, after finishing my master studies for math in Norway, I returned in Albania to teach, I have always thought that teaching would be my only priority, but now, that I have been working for 6 years as a teacher, I think that I like diversity in my jobs, not monotony. I think that through Upwork I can find different possibilities.*

# Not only ICT ...

- Five countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) were ranked among the top ten in the world for the number of translators in relation to their population
  - *B.K (F, 45, English teacher) I have translated 40 000 words for 10 days, working 4 hours per day, and I was paid 300 Euro, which is quite good for me...It was not difficult, but just voluminous, and no, it can't be done through google translate...*



Minimum wage

293 Euro/month

Average wage

599 Euro/month

Location based gig-work

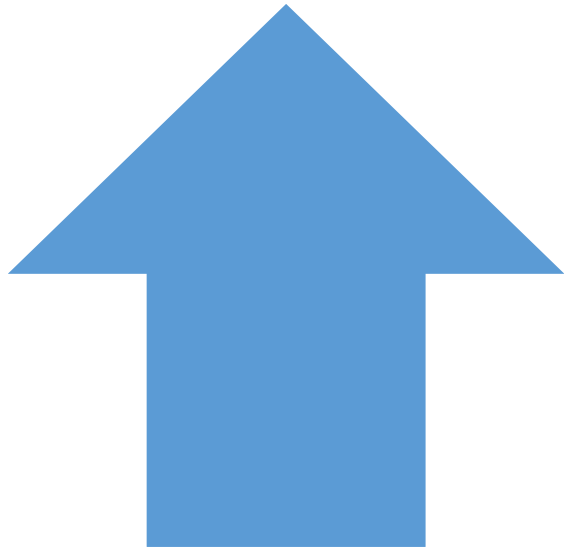
450 Euro – 1000 Euro/month

Web based gig-work

36646\$ /year – 51600\$/year

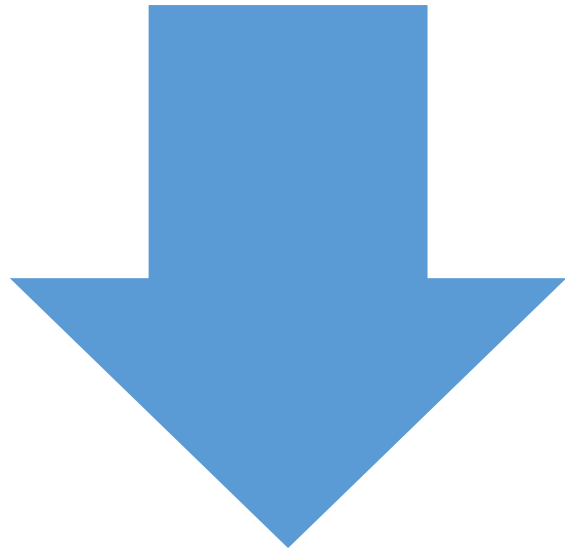
Fig. 2 Paga mesatare mujore bruto sipas aktiviteve ekonomike (lekë)





***cloudwork***

Being things like they are in Albania, I wouldn't want the state to interfere with what I do...



***Food delivery***

Yes, stress, unseen stress by the traffic, I have kidney pain. Sometimes I almost get mad, want to grab the phone and throw it on the ground, I'd rather live with a piece of bread.

# Conclusions

- Brain drain is the biggest challenge of this new decade that should dictate/shape the current and future policy agenda of our economies.
- the skills mismatch between what the education system equips youth with, and what the labour market requires.
- Cloudwork for return migration and transnationalism – right policies
- Platform work can help by allowing highly skilled professionals to work for global companies while at the same time contributing to the country's economy and development,
- The future of work will shape migration trajectories and the migrants–labour market relationship.
- Gig platforms are emerging as new players in the political economy in Albania by creating the possibility to bring the salaries of the destination country to the potential migrant and not vice-versa as the traditional theories of migration suggest.
- Towards non-linearity of the migration process with a variety of migration paths and sequences
- Silence of policy for the gig/platform economy
- For a rapid economic and social development and as a consequence less migration it is needed the right policy mix and synergy among elements Olesen (2003).



# Thank you!

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