

Research

Labor market reintegration strategies of Albanian return migrants from Greece

Armela Xhaho¹ · Ajay Bailey² · Erka Çaro³

Received: 12 August 2024 / Accepted: 25 November 2024

Published online: 09 December 2024

© The Author(s) 2024 [OPEN](#)

Abstract

For many migrants, returning to their country of origin is an important turning point in their migration trajectory. However, whether reverse migration proves successful depends largely on whether returnees are again able to participate in the social, economic, cultural, and political life of their country of origin. This paper draws on 37 biographical interviews conducted with Albanian returnees in three different geographical areas of Albania: Fier, Tirana, and Voskopoja. It aims to capture the diverse strategies the return migrants employed in navigating the labor market upon their return. We examine how the social and human capital the returnees accumulated while abroad shaped their patterns of reintegration into the labor market. We find that the returnees' social capital in the form of social relationships and their human capital in the form of work experience influenced their entrepreneurial activities in their home country. Moreover, we observe that some of the returnees who were able to capitalize on their migration experiences in their host country introduced a new work culture and new products to their home country and offered better quality work than their local competitors. Our findings further indicate that while the returnees' social networks improved their economic prospects, the levels of trust and social responsibility in these networks enabled them to develop and expand their business activities.

Keywords Return · Labor market reintegration · Entrepreneurship · Social network · Human capital

1 Introduction

For many migrants, returning to their country of origin is an important turning point in their migration trajectory. However, whether reverse migration proves successful depends largely on whether returnees can reintegrate into their community [1] and on the extent to which they can resume participation in the social, economic, cultural, and political life of their country of origin [2]. Effective reintegration is crucial for returnees seeking to contribute to their country of origin by making investments, introducing new ideas, or building trade and business networks [3]. Against this backdrop, this study extends the ongoing theoretical and empirical analysis of return trajectories by capturing the diverse strategies Albanian migrants returning to their home country from Greece have used in navigating the labor market upon the return. Specifically, we examine how the social and human capital the returnees accumulated while abroad shaped their patterns of reintegration into the labor market.

✉ Armela Xhaho, armelaxhaho@yahoo.com | ¹Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands. ²Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning, Faculty of Geosciences, Universiteit Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands. ³Faculty of History and Philology, Department of Geography, University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania.



The patterns of return migration are complex, influenced by a multitude of factors that shape the experiences of migrants as they reintegrate into their home countries. In the case of Albanian returnees, recent research sheds light on the challenges they face upon return, particularly amid economic crises and shifting social contexts [56].

Migratory intentions and return pathways are shaped by the role of family structures in decision-making [57] and gender dynamics [58], with migrant women facing different challenges and reintegration patterns upon return. Other studies emphasize how identity and mobility affect migrant's reintegration patterns [31] and the significance of social networks in determining social mobility after return [28]. These studies emphasize the complex nature of return migration and underscore the necessity of a holistic approach to facilitate the reintegration of returnees into their home communities. Other studies largely focused on the profile of returnees and on their reasons for returning [9–12], identity construction after return migration [11, 13, 14], circular and transnational patterns of migration [3, 15, 16] family influences upon return decisions and transfer of social, human and financial capital [17] and as well as on reintegration and structural challenges upon return [18–20]. Further studies have analyzed the impact of migration and remittances on investment potential in the origin country [4–8].

While this literature has shed further light on the link between return migration and entrepreneurship/investment potential in the country of origin [1, 8, 11, 21, 22], there is limited empirical evidence on the strategies return migrants use to adapt to the labor market of their home country upon their return. The question of how returnees' social capital and human capital affect their labor market reintegration process has been generally overlooked. Indeed, the role that return migrants' social networks play in their entrepreneurial activities back in Albania has also attracted very little attention [23, 24]. This study adds to the existing literature by exploring the mechanisms and strategies returnees use to reintegrate into the labor market of Albania. Through an analysis of 37 biographical interviews, this article sheds light on the importance of the social and human capital migrants bring back to their home country. While return migration can be either voluntary or forced, the focus of this paper is on individuals who voluntarily returned to Albania after living in Greece. This study draws upon social network and human capital theoretical frameworks to explore in more detail the returnees' patterns of reintegration into the labor market of their country of origin. The main research questions we want to explore in this study are as follows: What are the motives and patterns of return migration among Albanians returning to their home country after living in Greece? And how do the social networks and human capital of return migrants facilitate their reintegration into the labor market of their home country upon their return? This study underscores the crucial role of social and human capital in shaping the reintegration patterns of Albanian return migrants from Greece. By analyzing the strategies that returnees use to navigate the labor market, the study highlights the need for more nuanced understanding of their motives and the impact of social networks, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on effective reintegration and the potential for returnees to foster economic development in their home communities.

2 Methodology

The paper draws on 37 biographical interviews conducted with Albanian returnees from Greece. Of these interviews, 12 were carried out between 2015 and 2016, and 25 were carried out between March and May 2021. The empirical material used in this study is derived from fieldwork conducted in three different sites in Albania: Voskopoja located in the southeast; Tirana, located in the central part of the country; and Fier, located in the south. The study employed a purposive selection of participants, by interviewing migrants who satisfied the following criteria: (a) they were over 18 years old when the interview took place; (b) they had spent more than 1 year abroad; and (c) they had some work experience in Greece. Returnees' profiles are presented in Table 1. Identifying return migrants was not easy. Access to respondents largely depended on the "snowball method;" i.e., the contacts were generated through existing networks established through previous interviews with participants, and familial and social bonds within the community. In addition, local NGOs working on the reintegration of return migrants were contracted to identify returnees. The field research was conducted primarily in bars and in the returnees' workplaces and homes. The length of the interviews varied from approximately one to three hours. Participants were previously informed about the nature of the research; they were told explicitly that their participation was voluntary, and they were informed that they were free to end the interview at any time, or not to respond to particular questions. To preserve confidentiality, all the names of the participants are pseudonyms. All the interviews were conducted in the Albanian language and were then partially translated into English. The interviews broadly employed a life history approach, as they explored the participants' life course experiences in Greece, their motivations for returning, and their post-return experiences and reintegration challenges. The interviews

Table 1 Returnees' profiles

Int. No	Fictive name	Sex	Age	Education level	Year of emigration	Year of return	Occupation in the receiving country	Occupation in Albania
1	Besim	M	41	High School	1999	2011	Private business in construction	Owns a bakery/bar
2	Aulona	F	40	High School	1999	2011	Domestic worker	Owns a bakery/bar
3	Andon	M	55	High School	1991	2002	Construction worker and farmer	Private business in
4	Redon	M	47	High School	1991	2020	Waiter & construction worker	Owns a restaurant and guesthouse
5	Esma	F	44	High School	1991	2020	Cook	Cook, in her own restaurant/guesthouse
6	Afrim	M	53	University degree	1991	2010	Waiter	Owns a restaurant
7	Arba	F	24	High School	2005	2015	Tourism sector	Culinary
8	Bardhyl	M	58	8th grade	1992	2020	Construction worker	Owns a restaurant and guesthouse
9	Blerime	F	57	8th grade	1992	2018	Personal assistant for the elderly	Owns a restaurant and guesthouse
10	Ceni	M	53	High School	1991	2001/2010	Different jobs; worked mainly in plastering	Owns a guesthouse
11	Dardan	M	30	MA degree	2008	2017	Assistant waiter	Administration of his family business
12	Desar	M	44	High School	1991	2008	Worked in a transportation company	Owns a restaurant and guesthouse
13	Dashi	M	38	High School	1994	2018	Cook assistant/Chef	Owns a restaurant
14	Merita	F	41	University degree	1997	2012	Service industry	Administration of a coffee bar
15	Nertila	F	50	University degree	1999	2009	Different (unspecified) jobs; medical sector	Medical worker
16	Skender	M	53	University degree	1998	2011	Hospitality sector; owner of a pastry shop	Engineer
17	Sokol	M	46	High school	2001	2013/2015	Driver	Driver
18	Rezi	F	48	High school	1997	2011	Domestic worker/Bakery	Private business (bakery)
19	Erjet	M	42	8th grade	1996	2021	Tourism sector	Private business (bar & minimarket)
20	Liza	F	65	High school	1995	2017	Domestic worker	Private business (construction materials)
21	Kristaq	M	60	High school	1997	2005	Plumber/Construction	Retired
22	Kico	M	31	8th grade	2005	2009	Construction/Pottery	Private business (pottery)
23	Bukurie	F	37	University degree	2007	2015	Seller	Private business (teacher)
24	Jera	F	35	High school	1992	2010	Domestic worker/Hairdresser	Private business (fashion/ hairdresser/ minimarket)
25	Gisel	F	40	High school	1997	2010	Domestic worker/seller	Babysitter
26	Dafina	F	42	High school	1997	2011	Domestic worker Restaurant (chef)	Private business (restaurant and bakery) in Tirana & Saranda
27	Bela	F	38	University degree	1994	2010	Seller/hairdresser	Hairdresser
28	Irida	F	49	High school	1999	2001	Domestic worker/Tailor	Tailor
29	Kudret	M	44	High school	1999	2002	Construction/Factory specialist	Private business
30	Bona	F	60	High school	1991	2008	Domestic worker	Private business
31	Lili	F	37	High school	1997	2014	Hairdresser	Private business
32	Anda	F	33	High school	1997	2000	Domestic worker/Tailor	Domestic worker/failed to open a business
33	Kimet	M	59	Primary Education	1991	2007	Construction	Guard

Table 1 (continued)

Int. No	Fictive name	Sex	Age	Education level	Year of emigration	Year of return	Occupation in the receiving country	Occupation in Albania
34	Denisa	F	42	High school	1997	2001	Domestic worker	Private business
35	Rigers	M	40	High school	1997	2014	Wood specialist/Driver	Private business in agriculture
36	Niku	M	38	High school	1996	2006	Pizza delivery	Driver
37	Drita	F	47	High school	1996	2010	Bakery	Private business (bakery)

Data from researcher

were coded based on the inductive approach and were analyzed thematically with the MAXQDA software program. The main themes and codes are presented in Table 2.

3 Return migration from Greece

Greece has been one of the leading destination countries for Albanian migrants. At the beginning of the 1990s, most Albanian migration outflows to Greece followed a spontaneous and irregular path [9, 24]. In the early 2000s, these migratory trends were characterized by a low-intensity pattern and since then they were matured into more permanent family settlements [9]. Various social, economic, and political factors triggered a wave of return migration from Greece that has been underway since 2001 [26].

Studies indicate that, Albanian migrants return to their country due to various factors, including forced repatriation by host country authorities, challenges in integrating into the local labor market, family or psychological issues, and the completion of their initial goals related to starting a business or saving money [51]. Moreover, the legal status of migrant workers in the destination country is crucial, as it significantly influences their ability to access resources, opportunities, and rights that shape their migratory decisions. Albanians in Greece could be regularized only in the late 1990s and early 2000s, following the regularization schemas for illegal migrants by the Greek authorities [52]. Literature suggests that individuals with precarious or undocumented status often face barriers that compel them to consider onward migration or return to their country of origin if their current plans fail, as they may lack the security and support necessary for successful reintegration [53–55]. Research indicates that labor market in Greece is among the most precarious in the European Union, closely linked to the prevalence of seasonal employment. This instability has been a major push factor for outward migration, especially following the 2008 global economic crisis [26].

According to INSTAT [34], a total of 95,064 Albanian citizens returned to Albania after living abroad in the 2011–2019 period, with the vast majority returning from Greece. Albanians returning from Greece have been found to be especially likely to invest their financial capital in a small, family-owned business in their home country [27]. The decision to invest upon their return was sudden in some cases and was based on a well-organized and planned strategy in others. Studies have shown that most Albanians living in Greece maintained strong ties with their home country. There is also evidence that these returnees are inclined to seek work in the sectors in which they were employed in their host country, and that they tend to start businesses like those they have been exposed to while abroad [8, 22, 33]. Return migration is not necessarily the endpoint of the migration cycle; rather, it is one of several paths in the wider mobility process, as migrants may engage in multiple emigration and return migration episodes, and remigration [3]. It has been shown that the lack of reintegration policies in Albania is a push factor that leads many returnees to emigrate to another country [34]. Regardless of whether returnees are planning to remain indefinitely in Albania, most have maintained strong ties with their home country by, for example, sending remittances, making regular visits, establishing transnational businesses, or building houses [34, 35]. Such practices have led to the establishment of transnational communities [25] made up of individuals who move back and forth between the two countries [14]. These transnational spaces enabled migrants to send financial and social remittances in the form of ideas, values, behaviors, and identities [29].

Table 2 Main themes and codes

Themes	Codes
Experience in the host country	Work experience, trainings, and capacities; family life
Preparing for return	Reasons for returning; Orientation/investment plan; keeping in contact with the origin country and preparing for return
Return to Albania	Challenges in labor market reintegration; challenges in accessing public information and resources; non-enabling business environment/ climate and regulations
Social network	Social network: information and assistance from social networks on the labor market; facilitating access to institutions and business; advice about where to invest; resources from social networks; assistance with employment; trust and solidarity; transnational networks
Human capital transfer	Human capital transfer of knowledge and skills; work culture; transferring the “Greek style”; adapting to the Albanian environment; challenges faced

Data from researcher

4 Theoretical framework: the role of social and human capital in the reintegration process

Depending on whether returnees did or did not have positive social and economic experiences while abroad, their process of reintegration into their home country may be difficult. The reintegration process includes a wide range of economic, social-psychological, and cultural aspects that complement each other [30]. While all these factors play a crucial role in the successful reintegration of returnees into their country of origin, the economic factors are of particular importance. Whether return migrants have reintegrated into the labor market of their home country is seen as a key indicator of their overall level of reintegration. Recent studies have suggested that there is a tendency for return migrants to engage in entrepreneurial activities [1, 8, 22, 34]. However, these studies also showed that whether returnees become entrepreneurs depends on their human capital, social networks, and access to credit [32] and on the reintegration infrastructure in their home country. In economic terms, successful migrants tend to be those who have either accumulated enough financial capital to start their own business upon return or who have obtained skills and knowledge that allow them to easily find a job and apply their skills [30]. Returnees seeking to make business investments need social capital and human capital accumulated through work experience [33]. Human capital consists of “resources possessed by the individual, who can use and dispose of them with great freedom and without much concern for compensation.” [14]. Human capital is accumulated through actions taken by individuals, mainly through education, training, and experience [36]. In general, the literature on this topic has found that compared to non-migrants, returnees have better employment prospects and superior know-how and skills. On the other hand, “social capital is rooted in social networks and social relations and is conceived as resources embedded in a social structure that is accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions” [36]. This form of capital is generated by creating and maintaining direct and indirect social ties [36]. Moreover, social capital is linked to an individual’s network of social relations [37], which are held together by norms of trust and reciprocity that provide mutual benefits [37, 38].

Social networks play a key role in migrants’ willingness to return to their origin country. Whether migrants feel ready to return depends on the extent to which they can mobilize the resources they would need to return, such as the appropriate contacts, relationships, skills, and acquaintances [2]. Such resources emerge from patterns of interpersonal relationships and cross-border linkages. The maintenance of such networks is of paramount importance, as returnees may need these networks to implement their initiatives and projects following their return [2, 39]. In addition, migrants’ willingness to return may depend on whether they have the relevant information about the origin country. Having cross-border and domestic social capital (family and friends) can greatly enhance the reintegration process [27, 35].

There is a vast body of literature supporting the claim that social networks facilitate returnees’ access to information about job and economic opportunities [37, 40–42]. Personal social networks, and family ties facilitate entrepreneurs’ access to the financial and other resources they need to develop new ventures [43]. In addition, immigrants seem to benefit considerably from their social contacts, who can provide them with useful publicly available and restricted information on the labor market in general, as well on the regulations and practices relevant to setting up a new business, which may be specific to the host country [41, 42]. Scholars have suggested that entrepreneurs’ network ties have three different types of utility (advice, resources, and emotional support) that are central to supporting the growth of new ventures [43, 44]. Advice networks can help entrepreneurs identify opportunities for new products or services; facilitate their access to specialized knowledge on industry trends, changes and gaps in supply chains and distribution channels, technology developments, new markets for existing products, consumer trends, and changes in laws and regulations [45] and advise them on sales and marketing strategies and financial decisions [44]. Interpersonal trust has positive effects when making investment decisions [46] and loyalty between individuals increases the chances of business success [47]. Receiving emotional support from network members can help entrepreneurs manage their psychological stress when faced with challenges, and can increase their motivation, commitment, and confidence [47]. In addition, entrepreneurs rely on other individuals to gain access to key resources, such as the financial capital, labor, supplies, and new technologies they need to grow their business [48]. These kinds of networks facilitate entrepreneurs’ access to customers and supplies. The friends and family members of entrepreneurs often serve as their first customers and can later spread information about the business among their networks through a kind of “snowball effect” [47]. Considering these arguments, it appears that the social networks of return migrants could ease their reintegration into the social and economic life of their origin country [37].

Moreover, the concept of social networks is a key element of the life course paradigm, which is based on the idea of linked lives, and on the embeddedness of life course events in social relationships [49]. The principle of linked lives

means that “individuals’ lives are not evolving in a vacuum but are interdependent: embedded in networks of social relations” [50]. This principle is a suitable and potentially fruitful conceptual starting point for analyzing immigrants’ paths to reintegration through the lens of the social network paradigm.

5 Returning pathways: the role of social and human capital in labor market reintegration

5.1 Preparing for the return

Most of the migrants in our sample who returned to Albania were driven by economic reasons; either their work in the destination country was affected by the 2008 economic crisis, or they perceived that they had better economic prospects in Albania. The economic crisis negatively affected many Albanian migrants, as most were working in the service industry or in construction, which was among the sectors that were hit the hardest by the crisis. Many of the interviewees reported that had been working in more than one job or had been working three shifts to make ends meet. Others said that their income from employment in their host country had been low because they were in precarious jobs. The precarious nature of employment in Greece served as a significant push factor for migration from the country, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis [26]. These challenges prompted many of the migrants in our sample to consider starting a business in Albania. They perceived that the economic situation in Albania provided potentially profitable investment opportunities. Moreover, several participants indicated that their fatigue from job-hopping and having extended working hours made the prospect of self-employment very appealing. In addition, family reasons and nostalgia prompted many of the Albanian migrants to return. Many of the interviewees said they returned to care for their elderly parents, particularly after their parents developed health problems. Another group of participants reported that they decided to return after having accumulated enough savings in the host country, which they planned to invest in, mostly in the tourism and services sectors.

Although most interviewees indicated that they returned in response to the economic crisis, they noted that even before the onset of the crisis, they had maintained their relationships with family and friends across the border and made frequent visits to Albania. Few of them have made attempt to invest in their homeland even before the onset of the crisis. Our empirical evidence suggests that the migrants in our sample had multiple migration episodes before resettling in Albania. Although most of the participants lived in Greece for many years, most had visited Albania several times, especially during summer or winter vacations. For example, Esma, a 44 year-old kitchen assistant, said, “We visited [Albania] five times within a year. We’ve kept in touch with our friends here. I often came over to help my brother during winter.” Most of the migrants stayed in Greece long enough to save considerable financial capital and were eager to return and set up a new business. Several participants reported using the savings they accumulated abroad to establish a business. In many cases, there was a positive link between the employment experience the returnees acquired in Greece and their post-return employment experiences. Our empirical evidence showed that the Albanian returnees were inclined to work and invest in work profiles like those they became familiar with while abroad. Some of the return migrants had been working in food outlets and tourism in Greece and set up a similar business in Albania following their return. Merita, a 41 year-old woman, said, “Having had a positive experience in Greece with this kind of sector, I thought I could put my skills to practice and start a coffee bar business” (Merita, 41).

5.2 The role of social networks in facilitating labor market reintegration

Through maintaining regular communication, visiting their home country, using the internet, and watching Albanian TV stations, the returnees were well informed about the political, economic, and social events that were taking place back home. The narratives of the returnees indicated that their systematic communication and cooperation with friends and family members proved useful, as it enabled them to get valuable and restricted information about potential investment pathways in Albania.

5.2.1 Social networks provide information about labor market conditions and regulations

Our findings showed that many of the returnees counted on their kin and friends for information about the business climate and labor market opportunities in Albania. The returnees reported that they faced many difficulties in re-entering the Albanian labor market, as they lacked the skills that were required, and were thus unprepared to take advantage

of the potential investment pathways. It appears that very few return migrants in Albania get any kind of official labor market information from the migration counters that have been set up to serve as resource centers for return migrants. None of the returnees in our study reported accessing these migration counters or being aware that they existed. The interviews clearly showed that the returnees had very little information about policies or domestic legislation relevant for starting a business or gaining access to public services, and that family members and friends were their main sources of information.

Thus, the participants reported relying on insights and tips from their networks, which they saw as good sources of information on the labor market and business conditions.

When we returned here, we started inquiring about other hotels in the area. We asked around and we realized that many of our friends had started their hotels and restaurants. I would often ask them: "What's it like to have your hotel and how is the business climate over there [Albania]. I was influenced by them. We got some ideas from them and lots of useful information. Thought I should try it out once, with the support of my family. (Dardan, 30)

I did refer to my family and friends for support. I got back in touch with some of my closest friends who helped me understand how things work in Albania; but in terms of developing a business idea, that was my original idea. They helped me adjust more easily to life here and get to know things, rules and business procedures, which I had no idea at all. I followed their advice, as I trust them a lot. (Merita 41)

Social networks served in other cases as mediators for facilitating access to institutions and other business owners:

We came to Albania thinking we would purchase a piece of land to build a winery, with a garden in the front so we could use it during the summer months. Because if we were to use it during winter, we would have to invest more in the property to install heating. We got in touch with our people here [friends and cousins] because they knew where we could get properties, but a lot of issues came up. Some properties were missing registration papers, some were being held up in court cases, and some were inadequate. We ended up renting the property of two elderly people in the area who had opened a restaurant. As we were chatting with our friends, we found out that their children had moved to Tirana and had gotten good jobs. We asked whether they were looking to rent the place and they said they would consider it if they found the right people. This is how we came across this property, and luckily, we reached an agreement with the owners thanks to the orientation and information we received from our friends. (Dashi, 38)

5.2.2 Social networks provide ideas about where to invest

Many returnees were uncertain about the types of businesses and the geographic areas in which they were seeking to invest. The returnees reported experiencing many difficulties in accessing labor market-specific information, orientation, and guidance from public institutions, and particularly information about the sectors in which they could invest their savings. While the fast-growing tourism industry offered attractive business opportunities for most of the returnees to Albania, others said they were assisted by their friends and acquaintances in identifying suitable sectors and geographic areas for investment. Therefore, they had to rely on the advice they received from their friends and cousins.

I had my budget, but I had no idea where to invest. Our family friends came over to visit us and suggested this idea. They asked whether we ever intended to return to Albania. I told them we had nothing to do there; what jobs could we possibly do in Albania, with those low wages? I didn't have a profession, but on the other hand, my husband was complaining that work in construction was already diminishing. Our friends told us that in Voskopoja there was a need for bakeries. There used to be a bakery, but the owner had passed away, his widow had closed down the business and now the only way for them to get bread was to receive it from a guy who delivered it from Korca. We liked the idea of starting our own business. (Merita 41)

It is interesting to note that for many of the interviewees, family and friends proved to be good sources of information on where they should or should not invest their financial capital. For example, Dashi, a 38 year-old chef, described how his investment decisions were directly influenced by the advice of his cousins. He had been working as a chef in a gourmet restaurant in Greece for more than 20 years, and he wanted to use that experience to invest in a restaurant in Tirana. However, he changed his mind after his cousins informed him that investing in Tirana was not a smart choice.

There are fewer opportunities to invest in Tirana. Gourmet restaurants cost more than two million euros, or otherwise, you'd better go for a Korca Grill. I used to come to Tirana very often on Easter holidays, but I found the rent too expensive. I thought I could invest in Tirana since I had many friends and cousins that could assist me with both information and

resources, and as clients. One of my cousins who lives in Tirana helped me get around and visit many restaurants. [...] He convinced me that it would be unwise to invest in a restaurant in Tirana because I wouldn't survive the market. Let alone with home cooking! (Dashi, 38)

My siblings came over to visit us in Greece and they suggested that there was a need for this kind of work (bakery) in Voskopoje. We considered this their advice because we trusted them a lot and my husband were tired of working in construction. (Aulona, 40)

Although the participants noted that the central government had announced several support schemes to incentivize the establishment of start-ups by offering soft loans and to help returnees reintegrate into the labor market, none of them indicated that they had profited from such schemes. Instead, they reported facing numerous challenges in accessing basic services, such as electricity and water, as well as administrative barriers and bureaucracy. All the returnees gave numerous examples of situations in which they were helped to gain access to services and resources by their social networks, and some reported that their social networks provided them with financial resources as well.

I relied on my family for everything that I needed - starting with the initial capital I needed to start the business. I came to Voskopoja to buy a piece of land and one of my cousins who used to own a hotel advised me to start a winery in Voskopoja. He told me, "Get yourself a piece of land, grow a garden and work seasonally only during summertime. Six months of good income in Voskopoja would last you for an entire year." (Dashi 38)

These narratives show that relations among family members and friends were characterized by high levels of trust, which facilitated cooperation, mutuality, and comfort in sharing information. It appears that these advice networks were essential to returnees seeking to become entrepreneurs, as they provided them with easy access to reliable information. Personal networks were beneficial for the return migrants, as the networks offered them specific knowledge and advice about how the labor market functioned. As the narratives above clearly illustrate, the returnees had easier access to information thanks to their social networks. Thus, according to the interviewees, local social networks served as channels for gaining access to resources and helping them to expand their business activities.

5.2.3 Social networks help in finding employment

Although most of the participants said that they opened their own businesses after they returned from Greece, some reported that their friends and relatives helped them get a job following their return. Therefore, it appears that social capital played a role in the returnees' access to employment in their home country.

I got this job through a friend of mine, who used to work here previously. Before this, I used to work in a different tavern. I've been working here for 4 years now, and I like it - the working conditions are better. (Arba 24)

Overall, the narratives presented in this section highlight that the returnees gained access to valuable resources for starting new ventures through network ties, including tangible resources, knowledge, and advice. Thus, our empirical findings suggest that the return migrants' family ties and social and kinship networks helped them start and grow their business ventures.

5.2.4 Using transnational networks to promote and enhance business prospects

Many of the participants reported that their social networks helped them advertise their business and attract new clients. Friends living in both countries served as clients and as promoters of the returnees' business activities through their social networks, i.e., through the "snowball effect" [47]. Besides accumulating savings and learning new skills, some of the return migrants used their time abroad to build relationships with potential suppliers and find sources of information that would allow them to start, and gradually expand, small manufacturing businesses of their own. Kristaq, a 60 year-old plumber who opened a micro-enterprise selling construction materials in Fier, bought some of his materials and machines in Greece, where he also got some ideas about how to expand his business. Many of the migrants visited Albania very often while living in Greece, usually to see their family in friends, to renovate their house, or to have a vacation. They reported that during these trips, they noticed that the country was developing at a fast pace. This prompted many of the migrants to seek to replicate in Albania the types of businesses they were involved in while in Greece. Other migrants followed in their footsteps. These back-and-forth movements of the returnees created multiple relationships between their home country and their destination country, which they later mobilized to establish and expand transnational business

structures. Some of the return migrants who had been working in the tourism sector in Greece took the opportunity to invite their friends in Greece to come to Albania as tourists. For example, one participant said that he had invited his Greek friends to stay in his hotel as guests or clients:

Many friends from Thessaloniki came here as clients. Many of them are returning clients and they have spread the word about my business. They brought me new clients, and they advertised my business on their social networks; 99%-100% of the work here is thanks to my friends. My friends from Greece used to call me as they heard that I opened a business here, so they wanted to come over here. My friends here as well were my clients, and they played a key role in advertising my business to other clients all over Albania. All this work is established and expanded through friends. That's how things work over here. This business would not have survived without the assistance of my network, both friends and family. (Ceni, 53)

As the narratives above show, the assistance provided by the returnees' social networks went beyond giving advice. In many cases, friends and family members became customers themselves or recommended the business to other people.

These narratives illustrate how the returnees used both cross-border and domestic social capital (family and friends) to help them reintegrate into the labor market. These networks included various kinds of interpersonal ties that linked people in both the origin country and the destination country through bonds of friendship, kinship and shared community [51]. It thus appears that reciprocity, trust, and social responsibility played important roles in various contexts.

5.3 The role of human capital

According to the participants, their migration experiences provided them with opportunities to enhance their skills, learn new languages, and learn innovative techniques that they were then able to transfer to their entrepreneurial activities in Albania.

5.3.1 Human capital gained abroad: knowledge and skills

The returnees reported that their work experience in Greece was quite beneficial for them, as it enabled them to learn new languages and new ways of behaving:

Waiters in Greece spoke at least two foreign languages. I learned English there, I already knew French and Italian since I was here, and I had learned Russian when I was at school. Meanwhile, Albanian waiters are generally less prepared. I am happy that I learned all these things in Greece, which could never be taught in Albania. (Arba, 24)
I learned a lot about customer service in Greece because I've worked both in a hotel and in a restaurant. I'm very keen on making guests feel welcome, so every time we have guests over, I take over the hotel's reception desk. I learned to speak Greek and other foreign languages such as Italian and English, which come in handy even in Albania. I also learned the technique of setting the table for fine dining. I learned to be patient with clients. (Dardan 30)

In addition, some of the returnees said that they had been able to apply innovative techniques and new skills and techniques they learned abroad in Albania. For example, one participant recounted that his father learned a new technology in Greece and brought it to Albania:

My dad learned about the technology for extracting honey, which he is practicing here, with a few changes because the technology used there was of a higher quality. Whereas here, everything is done manually. (Dardan 30)

These narratives indicate that the returnees brought to Albania the Greek style and Greek innovations, not only in their approaches to business, but also in their behavior, attitudes, and modes of communication. For example, some of the returnees reported that in Greece, they acquired technical skills and learned about business innovations and ethical standards that better comply with the European work culture:

Upon my return, I insisted a lot on applying my knowledge of customer service and the management of the coffee bar. What I've brought back with me is a European style of communication. We've been here for 13 years now and I'm still maintaining it. While interacting with clients, I maintain the mantra I've learned in Greece: that the customer is always right. Whatever the client says because, at the end of the day, it's thanks to the client that we're working. (Desar, 44)
The style of communication, culture, and attributes I've acquired in Greece have been very useful in terms of handling others with the proper respect. I did learn much on the professional level. There is no culture of ethical working in Albania.

I've had a lot of issues with cleanliness. Apart from this, instead of doing their job, people tend to meddle in other people's affairs, comment on how much I'm learning and so on. (Skender 53)

As well as bringing skills and knowledge about the Greek style to their business ventures in Albania, the returnees brought with them a better understanding of how to construct and furnish their business premises, as the comment below illustrates:

Having worked in construction in Greece has helped me a lot to build my business back in Albania. I managed to build everything by myself, drawing on the methods and approaches I've learned when in Greece. Having worked in construction in Greece helped me a lot because I did the entire project myself. (Redon 47)

5.3.2 Business pathways in Albania: investing in familiar sectors and adapting the labor market

Many of the returning migrants said that they sought to replicate in Albania the enterprises they had been working in while in Greece. For example, some of the migrants who worked in patisseries in Greece set up their own businesses after returning to Albania. Many of the participants reported becoming involved in service sector businesses, like trade and hotels/restaurants, or in manufacturing.

Everything I now know it's because of my experience in Greece in the tourism sector. My approach to work, customer service, organization, and cooking skills - all this I learned in Greece. (Afrim 53)

Making bread comes with difficulties. Initially, we hired a baker from Tirana, because we had no clue how to do it. He trained us and my husband learned how to make bread. When in Greece, my husband used to go over to an Albanian baker's shop to gain some bread baking skills and the profession gradually grew on him. (Aulona, 40)

Several of the participants indicated that by capitalizing on their migration experiences in their host country, they were able to provide a new working culture, new products, or better-quality work in Albania than those offered by their local competitors. For some of the returnees, working in the same sector in Albania as they did in Greece facilitated the process of transferring their skills. However, others admitted that their initial plan for introducing the "Greek style" to their business activities in Albania was not always successful. Moreover, some of the returnees acknowledged that it was a bit risky to rely only on the advice of their social networks in identifying investment pathways, without studying and collecting formal information about labor market trends. These investments were not always successful. Many of the migrants said that they adapted their initial business plan to accommodate the needs and/or mentality of Albanians. To survive in their new setting, they had to modify the work culture in their business to fit the local market context and client demands.

I've had to switch things around a bit at the restaurant because there's a different mentality here. Albanians are used to the same old dishes and it's very hard to change this. I find it difficult to introduce new dishes on the menu. I would like to introduce some Greek dishes to the menu, to turn it into a Greek cuisine kind of place. But since our clientele was not used to that kind of food, we had to adapt it. We have traditional cuisine as in all Voskopoja, and we've only introduced some Greek dishes and sweets, just as we used to do when back in Greece. The dishes are very different from ours. I've had to change things a bit. (Dardan 30)

Our experience in Greece has helped us a lot in the kitchen. However, my wife must incorporate some traditional cuisine into the menu because our customers demand mostly roasted meats. In the summer, I might start introducing dishes that we learned on the island, such as lasagna. (Esma, 44)

The majority of the return migrants in the restaurant business stressed that they had to slightly change their menus to include more traditional cuisine, in line with client demands. Although the skills they brought with them enabled the returnees to modernize and westernize the management and development of their business, they still had to incorporate older traditions to ensure that their business in Albania survived. Thus, the migrants who returned brought with them new ideas and practices they acquired in their host country. These narratives indicate that returnees can play an important role in the socioeconomic development of Albania, as they bring back skills, knowledge, and know-how that are crucial for business management and development. It appears that continuing to work or investing in the sector they worked in while in Greece made it easier for the interviewees to transfer their skills.

The business climate is very important for private investors. However, our findings suggest that the returnees perceived the business climate in Albania as unfavorable for the successful development of their business ventures. Most of the participants stated that the bureaucracy in Albania, along with the widespread informality and corruption, were

the main obstacles to their reintegration into the labor market. They faced difficulties in accessing the necessary documentation. Moreover, a lack of infrastructure, scarce public investment, and non-transparent business procedures in relation to investments and soft loans, were perceived as key barriers to the returnees' successful reintegration into the labor market. In some cases, when their business plan or investment failed or was not successful, the returnees had to look for other business ideas or consider migrating to other EU countries. These narratives show that regardless of the social and human capital the return migrants had acquired while abroad, structural factors in Albania impeded the development of their business ventures.

6 Discussion and conclusions

This study explored the role of social networks and human capital in the labor market reintegration of Albanian citizens who returned to their home country from Greece. The paper drew on 37 biographical interviews conducted with Albanian returnees in three geographical areas in Albania: Fier, Tirana, and Voskopoja. The study found that the migrants had different reasons for returning to their origin country, including economic reasons (unemployment/end of the contract, more/better jobs, desire to invest savings) and family/life cycle concerns (parental ties, marriage, retirement, children's education). In addition to family reasons, feelings of nostalgia, and a desire to invest in Albania, the onset of the Greek economic crisis caused many migrants to return to Albania. The return migrants we interviewed reported that they invested the expertise, skills, and money they acquired in Greece in their home country, with a majority of them indicating that they had a plan to start a private business before they returned to Albania.

This study contributes to the academic scholarship in a variety of ways. In this article, we paid particular attention to the role of social and human capital, as we identified these forms of capital as the main factors that influenced the returnees' patterns of reintegration into their origin country. In terms of human capital, the study found that the return migrants were more likely to consider investments in small micro-enterprises, which gave them opportunities to transfer the know-how, the new skills, and the knowledge they accumulated abroad. As regards the social capital, the narratives above show that the returnees' patterns of reintegration depended on the extent to which they were able to mobilize the resources that were most crucial for their successful reintegration into the labor market. These resources were either tangible (i.e., financial capital) or intangible (i.e., contacts, relationships, skills, and acquaintances) [2].

Consistent with findings from other studies, our results suggest that regardless of the overall business environment and infrastructure in the home country, the returnees made use of various kinds of network ties, including those who offered them advice, resources, and emotional support [43, 44]. The findings revealed that although the returnees were well equipped with new ideas and knowledge about how to set up and manage a business, their social networks provided them with new information on the labor market climate, business procedures, and investment trends in Albania. We also observed that the returnees' social networks played an important role in their reintegration. The narratives showed that the returnees' friends and family members facilitated their access to resources, such as initial capital for establishing their business. In many cases, the returnees' network ties served as mediators who facilitated their access to institutions and other business owners. Thus, these kinds of networks provided the returnees with information about the labor market, new products or services, changes and gaps in supply chains and distribution channels, the latest trends in consumer behavior, and new developments in laws and market regulations.

Our findings indicated that the Albanian return migrants were supported by transnational social networks and partnerships with business contacts in their host country, which were maintained while they were abroad, and were later reinforced. In some cases, members of the returnees' transnational networks became their first customers, or these network ties assisted them by promoting or advertising the business among their own networks. In addition, the proximity of Albania to Greece made it easy for the migrants to make occasional visits to their host country, and to establish patterns of transnational personal and business networks. Finally, the interpersonal trust and emotional support they received from their family members alleviated the returnees' anxiety and stress following their return and increased their chances of successfully starting and growing a business. In addition, the narratives showed that trust and a sense of social responsibility among friends and relatives were key to the development, management, and expansion of the returnees' business ventures. The returnees' social networks linked their communities in their home country and their host country, and these links remained important after they returned to their home country.

This article adds to the existing scholarship by emphasizing that returnees' prospects for labor market reintegration depended on the interplay of their human and social capital. By looking at this big picture, we realized that family and kinship networks play a large role in shaping the lives of migrants. We observed that the migrants' decisions were

inextricably linked to and influenced by significant others. This finding also points to the ideas of linked lives over time and of transnational space.

However, returnees' investments in Albania were not always successful. Some of these business ideas did not work out, either because the investments were not in line with local labor market demands, or because of the structural constraints in Albania. This group of returnees reported that they regretted investing in Albania and were considering migrating to other EU countries. However, given the circular and fluid patterns of Albanian migration, the return of these migrants should not be viewed as the endpoint of their migration trajectories, but as permanent pathways.

Nevertheless, even though we recognize the importance of social capital, we are also aware that the labor market legislation, policies, and institutional frameworks of the country of origin could either impede or improve return migrants' opportunities for developing a business after their return. Further studies are needed to shed more light on these structural factors. Gender differences in the process of labor market reintegration, and, more particularly, in the process of setting up and managing a business after return migration, are topics that deserve special attention in future research. These studies may, for example, examine the ways men and women mobilize their resources during the post-return phase, and how important these resources are not only during the business establishment stage, but also over the long run. Future quantitative research could also explore the effects of different characteristics of networks—such as network size, network density, network diversity, the preponderance of strong or weak ties, and network redundancy—on the performance of businesses started by returnees, and how these characteristics are intertwined with the human capital the return migrants gained while abroad.

The finding of this study have broader implications for understanding migration patterns within Southern Europe, particularly regarding the Southern European model of migration and return migration dynamic. By emphasizing social and human capital, the research demonstrates how return migrants can leverage their experiences and networks to foster economic development in their home countries, highlighting the importance of family and community ties in migration decisions. This work contributes to a deeper understanding of return migration across Southern Europe, suggesting that these patterns of mobility should be seen as part of ongoing, fluid migration trajectories rather than as final endpoints. Additionally, it raises important questions regarding the interaction between local labor market conditions and the structural barriers that returnees encounter, underscoring the need for future research to explore gender differences and the diverse characteristics of social networks that shape the reintegration experiences of return migrants in the region.

7 Guidelines followed

The study was performed in accordance with the protection of personal data in Albania is regulated by Law No. 9887, dated 10 March 2008, "On the Protection of Personal Data," as amended. This law provides the legal framework for the collection, processing, and protection of personal data, including research ethics for the handling of personal data, ensuring participant confidentiality and privacy. The law is aligned with European Union standards to safeguard individuals' privacy rights.

Acknowledgements We would like to express our gratitude to Prof. Dr Clara Mulder for her helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. Special thanks go to our research participants for sharing their life stories during interviews. Finally, we would like to thank the Open Society Foundation for supporting this research through the Civil Society Scholar Awards.

Author contributions The study was conceptualized and authored by primary researcher Dr. Armela Xhaho, who also led the data collection and analysis processes. The primary researcher received ongoing supervision and feedback from the co-authors Prof. Dr Ajay Bailey and Prof Assoc. Erka Caro. Co-authors contributed significantly to the reviewing process and partial authorship of the manuscript, with primary input in the methodological framework and the drafting of conclusions.

Data availability The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author. The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy under the European General Data Protection Regulation and ethical restrictions. However, anonymized data and code used for analysis are included in this article. For any additional inquiries or access requests, please contact the corresponding author.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate The research was approved by the ethical committee, composed of members of mentoring Institution of the project University of Jyväskylä in Finland. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The researcher guaranteed all the respondents, that the information they gave for the interview will be used only for the purpose of academic research. The interviews were

tape recorded after oral consent from the respondents. All personal information of the participants was coded separately, and pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Participants were offered the opportunity to see the transcripts of the interview.

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License, which permits any non-commercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this licence to share adapted material derived from this article or parts of it. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

References

1. Piracha M, Vadean F. Return migration and occupational choice: evidence from Albania. *World Dev.* 2010;38(8):1141–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.12.015>.
2. Cassarino JP. Theorising return migration: the conceptual approach to return migrants revisited. *Int J Multicult Soc UNESCO.* 2004;6(2):253–79.
3. Gemi E, Triandafyllidou A. Rethinking migration and return in Southeastern Europe. Albanian mobilities to and from Italy and Greece (Ser. Routledge research on the global politics of migration). London: Routledge; 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429344343>.
4. Mezger Kveder C, Beauchemin C. The role of international migration experience for investment at home: direct, indirect, and equalising effects in Senegal. *Popul Sp Place.* 2015;21(6):535–52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1849>.
5. Black R, King R. Editorial introduction: migration, return and development in west Africa. *Popul Sp Place.* 2004;10(2):75–83. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.318>.
6. Abbas S. Workers' remittances and domestic investment in south Asia: a comparative econometric inquiry. *Int Migr.* 2019;57(5):89–104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12612>.
7. Conway D, Cohen JH. Consequences of migration and remittances for Mexican transnational communities*. *Econ Geogr.* 2008;74(1):26–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-8287.1998.tb00103.x>.
8. Kilic T, Carletto G, Davis B, Zezza A. Investing back home: return migration and business. Hoboken: Wiley; 2009.
9. King R, Vullnetari J. A population on the move: migration and gender relations in Albania. *Camb J Reg Econ Soc.* 2012;5(2):207–20. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rss004>.
10. Kraus R. Different forms, reasons and motivations for return migration of persons who voluntarily decide to return to their countries of origin. *Int Migr (Geneva Switzerland).* 1986;24(1):49–59.
11. Maron N, Connell J. Back to nukunuku: employment, identity and return migration in Tonga. *Asia Pac Viewp.* 2008;49(2):168–84.
12. Bastia T. Should I stay or should I go? return migration in times of crises. Should I stay or should I go? *J Int Dev.* 2011;23(4):583–95. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1794>.
13. Gu Q, Schweisfurth M. Transnational connections, competences and identities: experiences of Chinese international students after their return "home." *Br Edu Res J.* 2015;41(6):947–70.
14. Lin N. Social networks and status attainment. *Ann Rev Sociol.* 1999;25:467–87.
15. Mazzucato V, Dito B. Transnational families: cross-country comparative perspectives. *Popul Sp Place.* 2018;24(7):e2165.
16. Carling J, Erdal MB. Return migration and transnationalism: how are the two connected? *Int Migr.* 2014;52(6):2–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12180>.
17. Tiemoko R. Migration, return and socio-economic change in west Africa: the role of family. *Popul Sp Place.* 2004;10(2):155–74. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.320>.
18. Barcevičius E. How successful are highly qualified return migrants in the Lithuanian labour market? *Int Migr Geneva Then Oxford.* 2016;54(3):35–47.
19. Mercier M, David A, Ramón M, De Arce R. Reintegration upon return: insights from Ecuadorian returnees from Spain. *Int Migr.* 2016;54(6):56–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12288>.
20. Nisrane BL, Morissens A, Need A, Torenvlied R. Economic reintegration of Ethiopian women returned from the Middle East. *Int Migr.* 2017;55(6):122–36.
21. Jones RC. The local economic imprint of return migrants in Bolivia: return migrants in Bolivia. *Popul Sp Place.* 2011;17(5):435–53. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.626>.
22. Nicholson B. From migrant to micro-entrepreneur: do-it-yourself development in Albania. *South East Eur Rev.* 2001;4(3):39–42.
23. Danaj S. Return migration and reintegration challenges. Tirana: Hope for the Future Association; 2006.
24. Gemi E. Transnational practices of Albanian families during the Greek crisis: unemployment, de-regularization and return. *Int Rev Sociol.* 2014;24(3):406–21.
25. Michail D. Social development and transnational households: resilience and motivation for Albanian migrants in Greece in the era of economic crisis. *Southeast Eur Black Sea Stud.* 2013;13(2):265–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2013.789673>.
26. Kapitsinis N, Gialis S. The spatial division of precarious labour across the EU regions: a composite index analysis of the 2008/09 global economic crisis effects and Covid-19 initial implications. *Eur Urb Reg Stud.* 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09697764231191631>.

27. Labrianidis L, Lyberaki A. Back and forth and in between: returning Albanian migrants from Greece and Italy. *J Int Migr Integr*. 2004;5(1):77–106.
28. Vollmer R. 'For a better life'? the role of networks in social (Im) mobility after return to Albania. *Cent East Eur Migr Rev*. 2023;12(2):99–115.
29. Levitt P. Social remittances: migration driven local-level forms of cultural diffusion. *Int Migr Rev*. 1998;32(4):926–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019791839803200404>.
30. Chobanyan, H. Return migration and reintegration issues: Armenia, CARIM-east research report 2013/03. research report CARIMEast RR 2013/03. European University Institute Robert Schuman centre for advanced studies. 2013. https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/27863/CARIM-East_RR-2013-03.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
31. Dimitriadis I. Migrant construction workers in times of crisis. Worker agency, (Im) mobility practices, and masculine identities among Albanians in Southern Europe. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; 2022.
32. Ndreka A. Return migration and re-integration of returnees' challenges in the origin country. *Res Soc Chang*. 2021;11(3):4–24. <https://doi.org/10.2478/rsc-2019-0012>.
33. Black R, Castaldo A. Return migration and entrepreneurship in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire: the role of capital transfers. *Tijdschr Econ Soc Geogr*. 2009;100(1):44–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2009.00504.x>.
34. Filipi Gj, Galanxi E, Nesturi M, Grazhdani T. Return migration and reintegration in Albania. Tirana: INSTAT IOM; 2014.
35. Labrianidis L, Kazazi B. Albanian return-migrants from Greece and Italy: Their impact upon spatial disparities within Albania. *Eur Urb Reg Stud*. 2006;13:59–74.
36. Mintchev V, Boshnakov V. The profile and experience of return migrants: empirical evidence from Bulgaria. *Seer J Labour Soc Aff East Eur*. 2006;9(2):35–59.
37. Piracha M, Tani M, Vaira-Lucero M. Social capital and immigrants' labour market performance. *Pap Reg Sci*. 2016;95:126. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pirs.12117>.
38. Coleman J. Social capital in the creation of human capital. *Am J Sociol*. 1988;94:595–120.
39. Wang DJ. When do return migrants become entrepreneurs? the role of global social networks and institutional distance. *Strateg Entrep J*. 2020;14(2):125–48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.1352>.
40. IoannidesLoury YML. Job information networks, neighbourhood effects, and inequality. *J Econ Lit*. 2004;42(4):1056–93.
41. Aguilera MB, Massey DS. "Social capital and the wages of Mexican migrants: new hypotheses and tests. *Soc Forc*. 2003;82(2):671–701.
42. Birley S. The role of networks in the entrepreneurial process. *J Bus Ventur*. 1985;1:107–17.
43. Renzulli L, Aldrich HE. Who can you turn to? Tie activation within core business discussion networks. *Soc Forc*. 2005;84:323–41.
44. Arregle J-L, Batjargal B, Hitt MA, Webb JW, Miller T, Tsui AS. Family ties in entrepreneurs' social networks and new venture growth. *Entrep Theor Pract*. 2015;39(2):313–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12044>.
45. Batjargal B. Social capital and entrepreneurial performance in Russia: a longitudinal study. *Organ Stud*. 2003;24:535–56.
46. Batjargal B. Network triads: Transitivity, referral, and venture capital decisions in China and Russia. *J Int Bus Stud*. 2007;38:998–1012.
47. Bruderl J, Preisendorfer P. Network support and the success of newly founded businesses. *Small Bus Econ*. 1998;10:213–25.
48. Batjargal B, Liu M. Entrepreneur's access to private equity in China: the role of social capital. *Organ Sci*. 2004;15:159–72.
49. Elder GH, Johnson MK Jr, Crosnoe R. The emergence and development of life course theory. In: Mortimer JT, Shanahan MJ, editors. *Handbook of the life course*. Boston: Springer; 2003.
50. Wingens M. A life-course perspective on migration and integration. Cham: Springer; 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1545-5>.
51. UNDP. Strengthen national and local systems to support the effective socio-economic integration of returnees in the Western Balkans IPA/2020/420–517. New York: UNDP; 2020.
52. Gemi E. Transnational practices of Albanian families during the Greek crisis: unemployment, de-regularization and return. *Int Rev Sociol*. 2014;24(3):406–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.954332>.
53. Della Puppa F, Montagna N, Kofman E. Onward migration and intra-European mobilities: a critical and theoretical overview. *Int Migr*. 2021;59(6):16–28.
54. Della Puppa F, King R. The new 'twice migrants': motivations, experiences, and disillusionments of Italian-Bangladeshis relocating to London. *J Ethn Migr Stud*. 2019;45(11):1936–52.
55. Dimitriadis I. Onward migration aspirations and transnational practices of migrant construction workers amidst economic crisis: exploring new opportunities and facing barriers. *Int Migr*. 2021;59(6):128–41.
56. Carella M, García-Pereiro T, Pace R, Paterno A. Albanian return migration in times of economic hardship: the role of migratory intentions. In: *Population studies in the Western Balkans*. Cham: Springer International Publishing; 2024. p. 231–65.
57. Koplaku B, Drishti E. The (big) role of family constellations in return migration and transnationalism. *Int J Migr Health Soc Care*. 2023;19(3/4):435–50. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMHC-07-2022-0078>.
58. Tafilica M. Coming home: challenges of reintegration for returned migrant women in northern Albania (doctoral dissertation, Clemson University). Clemson: Clemson University; 2023.