

“We have found a small Albania here.”

The immigration experiences of Albanian women in Canada

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the settlement and integration experiences of Albanian immigrant women in Canada, situating their personal trajectories within the broader historical contexts of Albanian emigration and Canadian immigration. While Albanian migration to Canada has a history extending over more than a century, larger numbers of Albanians began arriving in the 1990s, following the profound political, economic, and social transformations that reshaped Albania and the wider Albanian-speaking world. Drawing on an oral history approach, the study foregrounds women's voices to explore how they experienced migration, early settlement, and longer-term integration, and how prior lives in Albania, Kosovo, or North Macedonia continue to shape their identities, family roles, and community participation in Canada. The thesis argues that migration does not simply place Albanian women into a new social environment; rather, it produces an ongoing negotiation between inherited norms, personal agency, and the opportunities and constraints of Canadian institutional and social life. Attention is paid to the emotional, legal, and logistical challenges women encountered, as well as to their cultural, economic, educational, and social integration. By linking individual narratives to wider historical processes, including war, political transition, and transnational mobility, the study shows that Albanian women's experiences in Canada are marked by resilience, downward mobility followed by recovery, and a simultaneous process of cultural preservation and adaptation. In doing so, it contributes to broader discussions on immigrant women's integration, gendered migration, and transnational identity formation within the Canadian context.

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DEDICATION

To Albanian women.

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List of Abbreviations

AMP	Albanian Montreal Press
CFB	Canadian Forces Base
CPA	Certified Public Accountant
EAP	English for Academic Purpose
ESL	English as a Second Language
EU	European Union
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
GERMIN	Diaspora engagement initiative for investment and development
ISANS	The Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
KFOR	Kosovo Force (NATO-led international peacekeeping mission)
KLA / UCK	The Kosovo Liberation Army
LINC	Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PGWP	Post-Graduation Work Permit
PR	Permanent Resident
READ	Research Expertise from the Academic Diaspora
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIK	The United Nations Mission in Kosovo
U.S.	United States

Definition of Terminology

In this thesis, I employ terminology that requires clarification. Providing definitions for these terms is essential because some carry significant historical, political, or linguistic nuances that could otherwise lead to misunderstanding. Others are used here as simplified representations of Albanian terms and concepts that, in a more extensive historical or political study, would require fuller and more detailed explanation. Offering these definitions helps avoid confusion, maintains the clarity and flow of the narrative, and ensures that the terminology is used in a way that respects historical facts and scholarly accuracy.

Albanian – This term refers to individuals who ethnically identify as Albanian. Being Albanian is a question not of territorial boundaries, Albanian ethnic identity is closely tied to the Albanian language, and Albanian-speaking communities inhabit several Balkan states. In Albania and Kosovo, Albanians constitute the overwhelming majority - 98% and 93% of the population, respectively. Significant Albanian communities also live as compact and historically rooted populations in North Macedonia (approximately 30%), in Montenegro (around 5%), and a smaller community resides in Serbia, particularly in the three municipalities of the Presheva Valley (Presevo / Preshevë, Bujanovac / Bujanoc, / Medveda / Medvegje). Albanian is official language in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia.

For Albanians from Kosovo, the term *Kosovar* is often used in literature; however, since this refers to citizenship rather than ethnicity, this thesis adopts Albanian, in the way members of the community refer to themselves, or Kosovo Albanian where both ethnicity and state citizenship must be specified. The same principle applies to Albanians from North Macedonia.

Albanian lands – This term is used to designate the territories historically inhabited by Albanian populations. Because these territories have, at different historical moments, been incorporated into various states and imperial formations, the term *Albanian lands* provides clarity and narrative coherence without requiring repeated reference to each specific political entity governing the region at a given time. Historically, these territories have been known as *Illyria* in antiquity and *Arbëria* in the medieval period. However, to avoid confusion among readers who may not be familiar with Albanian historical terminology, the expression *Albanian lands* is used consistently throughout the historical contextualization.

Kosovo – Today the term refers to the independent state of Kosovo. When used in reference to the Ottoman period, however, it denotes the Ottoman *sanjak* of the same name. Although these entities overlap geographically, their borders do not fully coincide. During the Yugoslav period, Kosovo was officially referred to as *Kosovo and Metohija*. In this thesis, the term Kosovo will be used uniformly.

Furthermore, after 1913, when territories with Albanian populations were incorporated into Serbia and Montenegro (including areas extending beyond both the Ottoman Sanjak of Kosovo and the boundaries of present-day Kosovo), Albanian historiography typically uses the expression “Kosovo and the other Albanian-inhabited territories left outside the Albanian state,” whereas Serbian historiography and institutional language of that time employed the term “Kosovo and the newly liberated southern regions.” To avoid both historiographical debates and geographical ambiguity for readers unfamiliar with these distinctions, this thesis adopts Kosovo as an umbrella term, with the acknowledgment that it is neither fully precise politically nor geographically and that it excludes a wider region historically inhabited by Albanians. This clarification is offered out of respect for readers well versed in Albanian history and geography, and for non-Albanian readers

who might otherwise find the terminology confusing. The English form Kosovo is used, just as Albania is used instead of the native Albanian *Shqipëri*.

Historical background – Although Albanian political history is not the primary focus of this study, it is essential for interpreting the narratives of the women interviewed. For this reason, the thesis provides only the historical context necessary for understanding the research findings. It does not engage in historiographical debates that continue to divide scholars, for example, how to define the nature of Serbian violence in Kosovo (genocide or ethnic cleansing); or whether NATO's military intervention in Kosovo was legitimate or not. In this thesis, when divergent historiographical interpretations or multiple terminological variants exist, I will adopt the version that is most widely accepted in contemporary scholarship or most consistently used in institutional and academic practice. This approach aims to avoid unnecessary engagement with unresolved or politically charged historical debates that fall outside the scope of this study.

Use of names and toponyms – Names of people and places appear in English, followed by their native-language form in brackets upon first mention.

Quotations – Interview quotations conducted in Albanian are presented first in the original language and then in English translation to preserve nuance. Albanian quotations that appear within a sentence, rather than as block quotations, are presented in italics and followed by an English translation in brackets. Translations are my own. Quotations from non-English literature (Albanian or Italian) are likewise translated by me.



Map 1. Political Map of the Balkans today

Source: GIS Geography (<https://gisgeography.com/balkan-states-map/#Simple-Map>)



Map 2. Ethnic Albanian Presence in the Balkans today

Source: Schematic representation, based on official census and institutional sources; the State Statistical Office of North Macedonia, *Statistical Atlas, Census 2021*; the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2024 Census database; and the Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT), Census 2023 results.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Alba left Albania in 1999, when she was seventeen and had not yet graduated from high school. She emigrated to Greece with her family, but because they had no legal status, she was unable to continue her education there. With no real prospect of regularizing her status in Greece, she migrated alone to the United States at the age of eighteen. During the ten years she spent there, she worked hard to adapt to a new environment, support herself, learn the language, and navigate one legal process after another in the hope of obtaining legal status. During this period, she started a family and gave birth to two sons, who were U.S. citizens by birth, while she and her husband remained without legal status. Even after ten years of investing time, energy, and money, they were still unable to regularize their situation. It was a long and exhausting journey that ultimately ended with the decision to accept deportation to Albania. For them, however, Albania was not a real option, and returning there was never seriously considered. Alba and her husband decided to emigrate to Canada. They entered Canada irregularly, aware that the risks were considerable. Today, she is a Canadian citizen. She has spent more of her life in North America than in her country of origin; yet she still states: “I am Canadian, but I have my Albanian roots that are always with me. Being Albanian is a part of me. I keep growing it with me.”

The story of Alba, which opens this study, is a story of sacrifice and nostalgia. Her trajectory, marked by repeated displacement, legal insecurity, family sacrifice, and the persistent search for a place where a stable future could be built, reflects the human reality behind migration. For women such as Alba, migration to Canada was not only a movement toward safety and opportunity, but also a difficult process of rebuilding life, identity, and belonging. In this context,

the title of this thesis, “We have found a small Albania here,” drawn from the words of another participant in this study, expresses more than nostalgia for the homeland. It points to a central theme that runs throughout the study: migration is experienced not only as departure and arrival, but also as a process of recreating familiarity, meaning, and belonging within a new social world. At the same time, it reflects the dual character of the immigrant experience explored in this thesis: the search for a better life through migration, and the need to adapt to the host society while preserving meaningful connections to the cultural world left behind.

Although migration constitutes a primordial feature of human history, in the twenty-first century, called the ‘age of migration,’¹ human mobility extends across the entire globe. Every state is touched by migration in one form or another. Some countries see their citizens leaving, others receive newcomers, and many serve as corridors of passage. According to United Nations estimates, today there are about 281 million international migrants in the world, which equates to 3.6% of the global population. These migration flows include large numbers of women, which compose 48% of the migrants (135 million), meaning 3.5% of the world’s female population.² Migration systems arise in response to disparities in demographics, economics, culture, or politics. As noted by political scientist Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, “Where a solution to these “gaps” does not present itself within regions of departure, candidates for migration perceive a possible solution in the option of “exiting” that country or region.”³ Wihtol de Wenden further explains that migration is structured across the world in a series of regionalised systems, determined by complex systems of complementarities and relationships of demographic and economic supply and demand.

¹ Stephen Castles, Hein De Haas, and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Guilford Press, 2014).

² IOM, UN Migration, *The World Migration Report 2024* (IOM, 2024), 4. <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2024>

³ Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, *Migration and International Relations* (IMISCOE 2023), 5.

Major immigration states in the world, often categorized as *classic* immigration countries, include the United States, Canada, several European states, Japan, and Australia. Canada in particular exhibits a high degree of demographic diversity. Nearly two in ten Canadians (18.4%) are foreign-born, and almost one in four individuals (23.0%), according to the 2021 Census, are or have been a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Furthermore, 31.5% of Canadian-born have an immigrant background, having at least one foreign-born parent. The more than 450 mother tongues reported in the census illustrate the heterogeneity of the immigrant population and the wide range of countries of origin represented. According to the 2021 Census, there are 41,620 Albanians residing in Canada (0.1% of the national population), including 21,050 men and 20,570 women.⁴

Albanians have a long history of emigration. Shaped by historical circumstances as well as shifting political and economic conditions, Albanian populations have dispersed across the world in several distinct migratory waves. These waves have been heterogeneous in character, involving migrants with both economic motivations and political reasons for departure. Canada has been a destination for Albanian immigrants for more than a century. However, the number of Albanian arrivals increased significantly beginning in the 1990s, when a larger influx of Albanians chose Canada as their country of settlement.

This study investigates how women experienced arrival and integration, the challenges they faced, and how prior lives in Albania, Kosovo, or North Macedonia continue to shape identities, family roles, and community participation. This thesis argues that Albanian women's

⁴ Government of Canada, "Ethnic or cultural origin for the population in private households," in *2021 Census of Population*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&DGUIDList=2021A000011124&GENDERList=1,2,3&STATISTICList=1,4&HEADERList=0&SearchText=Canada>

settlement and integration in Canada were shaped not only by Canadian immigration structures and the broader social environment, but also by premigration histories, gendered expectations, and family responsibilities carried from their countries of origin. Drawing on oral history interviews, it shows that their trajectories were marked by early uncertainty, frequent deskilling, and gradual rebuilding, while identity and belonging remained layered, negotiated, and closely tied to both Canadian life and Albanian social worlds

Exploring gender within migration contexts is crucial because gender significantly shapes migration experiences. Women and men often migrate for different reasons, encounter distinct challenges, and experience varying degrees of integration in host societies. Women's migration frequently reshapes family dynamics and roles, affecting both their home and host communities. Additionally, migration can economically and socially empower women, yet it can also expose them to increased vulnerabilities, such as exploitation, trafficking, or gender-based violence. Gender-focused studies emphasize the specific contributions and economic participation of female migrants, while also highlighting the unique barriers they face.⁵

Methodology

When we examine any society, one of our first impulses is to listen to the voices of everyday people. Although major institutions, such as government, religious, and educational organizations, often leave behind extensive records about the elite classes, we must turn to other sources to hear ordinary men and women speak about their own experiences. For this reason, this study employs an oral history approach. Oral history is a qualitative research methodology that

⁵ Monica Boyd and Deanne Pikkov, *Gendering Migration, Livelihood and Entitlements: Migrant Women in Canada and the United States* (UNRISD, 2005)

centers on collecting and interpreting personal narratives and lived experiences through recorded interviews. As a method, it privileges the voices of individuals, often marginalized or underrepresented in traditional archives, thereby offering a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the past. My thesis integrates interviews with Albanian women in Canada to collect their experiences, memories, and observations on events and problems that are mostly undocumented. Situating personal narratives within the broader historical trajectories of Albanian emigration and Canadian immigration policy, the study demonstrates how global forces such as war, political transition, and transnational mobility, intersect with local contexts of settlement and belonging. By foregrounding women's voices across time and space, this study contributes to broader discussions on immigrant women's integration and transnational identity formation.

According to Alessandro Portelli, one of the foundational scholars in the field, the value of oral history lies not only in the factual accuracy of what is said but in how people make sense of their experiences; it is “not about events themselves but about their meanings.”⁶ As Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson argue, oral histories help uncover “hidden histories” and contribute to a more democratic and pluralistic historiography.⁷ Linda Shopes also emphasizes that oral history fosters dialogue between researcher and narrator, positioning both as co-creators of knowledge.⁸ This dialogic and reflexive nature is especially valuable when working with communities affected by trauma, exclusion, or systemic barriers, as it empowers individuals to share their own versions of history on their own terms.

⁶ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (SUNY Press, 1991).

⁷ Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (3rd ed.) (Routledge, 2015).

⁸ Linda Shopes, *Making Sense of Oral History, History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web* (American Social History Project, 2002).

Oral history thus provides insight into memory, identity, and subjectivity, making it a particularly powerful tool in studying migration, displacement, and community formation. As argued by Thomson, oral histories “reveal the meanings people attach to migration” and offer critical insights into how individuals negotiate identity, memory, and belonging across borders.⁹ Through the personal accounts of emigrants, researchers can access the layered dimensions of migration, such as family separation, cultural adaptation, discrimination, and the reconstruction of home and community in a new context. These narratives not only humanize the broader processes of migration but also challenge dominant national or institutional discourses by foregrounding lived realities.

In the broader literature, oral history has also been positioned as a method that complements quantitative and policy-based studies of migration. As argued by Steven High, oral histories illuminate the micro-histories that underpin broader social trends, offering a “bottom-up” perspective that deepens our understanding of migration flows and integration processes.¹⁰ The use of oral history in the study of emigration has garnered increasing academic attention and has been employed in numerous scholarly works to document and analyze the lived experiences of emigrants, offering rich, personalized perspectives on migration journeys. One prominent example is the *Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling* at Concordia University, which has spearheaded the project “Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and Other Human Rights Violations.”¹¹ This project highlights how oral testimonies offer critical insight into how forced and voluntary migrants make sense of their experiences of displacement, integration,

⁹ Alistair Thomson, “Moving Stories: Oral History and Migration Studies,” in *Oral History*, 27(1), (1999): 24–37.

¹⁰ Steven, High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (UBC Press, 2009).

¹¹ *Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and Other Human Rights Violations*, (Concordia University, 2012), <http://www.histoiresdeviemontreal.ca/rencontres>

and memory. Similarly, Eithne Luibhéid uses oral history in her work, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, on queer migrants to the United States to reveal how sexual identity and immigration intersect in ways that resist neat categorization by immigration policies.¹² Another compelling example is the work of historian Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, where he emphasizes that oral history not only captures migrants' recollections of arrival and settlement but also reflects on how their sense of identity is reshaped over time and across generations.¹³

Oral history methodologies have also been central to transnational studies of emigration, such as the oral histories of Italian emigrants collected by Donna Gabaccia, which explore the ways in which family, work, and community networks were maintained across borders.¹⁴ Additionally, oral history has proven instrumental in exploring the experiences of South Asian women in diaspora, as seen in the work of Parminder Bhachu, *Twice Migrants*, who used life narratives to understand how Punjabi women navigated migration to Britain. Her study emphasizes the interplay between gender, class, and culture in shaping the migration experience, providing a nuanced understanding that was only possible through first-person accounts.¹⁵ Likewise, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc use oral narratives to explore transnationalism, documenting how immigrants maintain connections to their countries of origin while integrating into new host societies.¹⁶ Their work demonstrates how oral histories reveal the dynamic, multi-sited identities that migrants construct through movement.

¹² Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

¹³ Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (Praeger, 1991).

¹⁴ Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (UCL Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Parminder Bhachu, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain* (Tavistock Publications, 1985).

¹⁶ Nina G. Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina S. Blanc "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration," in *Anthropological Quarterly*, 68(1), (1995): 48–63 DOI: 10.2307/3317464.

In the Canadian context, Julie Drolet and Gayatri Moorthi employ oral history to analyze the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in Alberta. Through in-depth interviews, they uncovered barriers related to employment, language acquisition, and discrimination, as well as the resilience strategies used by newcomers.¹⁷ Similarly, Franca Iacovetta has extensively used oral histories to explore postwar Italian and other Southern European immigrant experiences in Canada, demonstrating how class, gender, and ethnicity shaped integration trajectories and access to rights. Her work also critiques state narratives of benevolent multiculturalism by foregrounding the voices of marginalized communities.¹⁸

Likewise, Albanian scholars have used oral history to examine the challenges faced by Albanian emigrants in their host countries. Issues such as settlement and integration, relationships with host communities, and internal community dynamics have been central to this body of research. Questions of identity preservation, language retention, and the transmission of cultural traditions to second-generation migrants have also received considerable scholarly attention. One example is the study by Armela Xhaho et al., *Empowerment or a Double Burden? Work, Family, and Agency among Albanian Migrant Women in Greece*, which investigates the intersection of gender, migration, and labour through the lived experiences of Albanian migrant women in Greece.¹⁹ Similarly, Zana Vathi's book, *Albanian Emigrants and Their Children in Europe*, analyzes migration patterns, integration processes, and the identity formation of Albanian emigrants and their second-generation descendants across several European states. Her work focuses on how Albanian migrants have adapted to diverse host societies and how their children

¹⁷ Julie Drolet and Gayatri Moorthi, "The Settlement Experiences of Syrian Newcomers in Alberta: Social Connections and Interactions," in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 50(2), (2018):101-120, DOI: 10.1353/ces.2018.0017.

¹⁸ Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Between the Lines, 2006).

¹⁹ Armela Xhaho, Erka Çaro, and Ajay Bailey, "Empowerment or a double burden? Work, family, and agency among Albanian migrant women in Greece," in *Gender, Place & Culture*, 28:10, (2021):1431-1451, DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2020.1817872.

have negotiated dual identities shaped by both their heritage and the cultures in which they grew up.²⁰ Taking a slightly different approach, Kaltrina Kusari's thesis, *Knocking on Doors That Never Open*, examines the experiences of Kosovar Albanian asylum seekers in Canada, focusing on forced migration, settlement trajectories, and integration within the Canadian context.²¹

Conducting oral history interviews, particularly with migrants, refugees, or displaced persons, requires a thoughtful, ethically grounded, and methodologically rigorous approach. At the heart of oral history is informed consent, which must go beyond the mere signing of a release form. Interviewees should be clearly informed, in a language they understand, about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, how their stories will be recorded, stored, and possibly published or archived, and their right to anonymity or to withdraw at any stage without consequences.²² Building trust and rapport is a gradual process; researchers must demonstrate genuine interest, respect, and patience, acknowledging that trust cannot be assumed based on institutional affiliation or research credentials. Interviewers must also adopt open-ended and non-directive questioning techniques, which allow narrators to tell their stories in their own voice, sequence, and emotional tone. As Portelli emphasizes, oral history is not simply about extracting facts, but about understanding meanings, memories, and interpretations. This means paying close attention not only to what is said, but how it is said, including hesitations, silences, emotions, and metaphors, which all carry interpretive value.²³

²⁰ Zana Vathi, *Migrating and Settling in a Mobile World Albanian Migrants and Their Children in Europe* (Springer, 2015), DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-13024-8.

²¹ Kaltrina Kusari, "Knocking on Doors that Never Open": Examining Discourses of Rejected Asylum Seekers from Kosova (Thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, 2017), <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>, DOI:10.11575/PRISM/26706.

²² Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

²³ Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*.

To understand the gendered contours of migration and settlement, I interviewed fifteen Albanian women living in Canada. The sample was designed to reflect age cohorts, migration waves (e.g., post-1990, post-1999, and later arrivals), origin (Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia), geographic spread within Canada (with emphasis on provinces where Albanian communities are present), socioeconomic/educational backgrounds, family status (single, married, divorced, caregiving), and first or second-generation background, in order to surface intersectional variation in challenges and resources.

Participants were recruited primarily through community-based outreach and snowball sampling. Given my community ties, some participants were acquaintances. To mitigate any perception of pressure, all materials and verbal scripts emphasized the voluntary nature of participation and the right to decline or withdraw without consequence. Prior to any interview, participants received an Information Letter and Consent outlining the study purpose, procedures, risks/benefits, confidentiality options, intended use of quotations, and data protections. Consent was documented either by written signature (in person) or verbal consent (for remote interviews), with time provided for questions. Participants were able to choose anonymity (pseudonym). The participants were adult women (18 years or older) who were either Albanian born in Albania, Kosovo, or North Macedonia, or were of Albanian origin and residing in Canada. This study received ethics clearance from the University of Waterloo Human Research Ethics Board in accordance with university research policy.

The methodological design of this study draws on established qualitative approaches within gendered migration research, particularly the work of Donna Gabaccia, Parminder Bhachu, and Caroline Brettell. I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one oral history interviews, in person or via secure video (e.g., Zoom), which focused on migration trajectories, gender roles, identity, work

and care, and community participation. (see Appendix 1) Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes, were audio-recorded with permission and participants could skip any question or stop at any time. This format aligned with the study’s epistemic commitments: open-ended prompts invited narrators to tell their stories in their own terms. The interviews were conducted in the language the participant felt most comfortable using. All first-generation Albanian women chose to be interviewed in Albanian, while the 1.5²⁴ and second-generation participants chose English, as it allowed them to express their stories more naturally. Even when the interviews were conducted in Albanian, participants’ speech frequently incorporated English expressions and slang into the flow of conversation. In other instances, participants began answering in Albanian and then, often without realizing it, as they themselves observed, continued in English. The shift between Albanian and English, or vice versa, occurred naturally and unconsciously. In such cases, quotations are reproduced as spoken, and only the Albanian segments are translated into English.

To make the participants feel comfortable, the interviews were conducted “*in an Albanian way*,” and by this I refer not only to the language used during the conversations but also to the communication style itself. At times, the discussion drifted away from the interview questions and shifted toward talking about Albania or Kosovo. Although this was not an explicit objective of the interview, these digressions helped me gain insight into attitudes and behaviours that could not have been fully captured through direct answers to structured questions. Furthermore, while I asked participants about how and why they had emigrated to Canada, they would, in turn, ask me the same questions. Occasionally, I found myself in the position of the interviewee rather than the interviewer. I allowed this to happen, while carefully ensuring that I did not, in any way, influence

²⁴ 1.5 generation are immigrants who were born abroad but arrived in the host country at a young age, usually during childhood, and were therefore socialized in both the country of origin and the receiving society.

their experiences or perceptions, because, understanding the Albanian cultural mentality, I recognized that this two-directional exchange made them feel more comfortable than a one-sided, interviewer-led format. Only once they felt truly at ease were they able to share their stories openly and without reservation.

The interview transcript was not treated as an objective recording of “facts,” but as a dialogic and interpretive text. Following Portelli, I did not treat “inaccuracies” or inconsistencies as flaws; they were understood as historically meaningful because they revealed how people remember, interpret, and value their pasts. Interpretation in this project attended not only to what was said but also to the contexts (social, historical, psychological) in which narratives were told. Thus, interpretation considered both the content and the context of narratives. The interview material was analyzed through thematic coding, using both deductive and inductive approaches: some themes were identified in advance based on the research questions and the existing literature, such as migration, settlement, work, gender roles, identity, and belonging, while other themes emerged gradually from the interviews themselves through repeated reading and comparison of participants’ narratives. The movement from raw interviews to chapter structure was guided by the recurrence of these themes across the testimonies, as well as by the chronological and interpretive logic of the women’s experiences, which made it possible to organize the findings into broader sections on migration and early settlement, and later integration, identity, and reflection. Quotations were selected based on their relevance to the central themes of the study, their ability to express experiences in the participants’ own voices, and their capacity to illustrate either recurring patterns or meaningful differences among the women interviewed. I then translated Albanian quotations into English, with care taken to preserve not only their literal meaning but

also their emotional tone, cultural nuance, and idiomatic expression. Personal identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Throughout the process, I remained aware of my own positionality, my identity, background, power, and potential biases, while at the same time seeking to honour the dignity of the narrators and to understand that their stories were not simply data points, but testimonies of human experience, struggle, memory, and identity.

Literature Review

Studies on the Historical Trajectories of Albanian Emigration

There is a substantial body of literature on Albanian emigration that examines the phenomenon from a historical perspective, including analyses of the major emigration waves and the social, economic, and political factors driving migration as understood from within the Albanian context.

In “Albanian Migration as a Post-Totalitarian Legacy,” Agata Domachowska provides a political and international context to emigration and investigates how the legacy of Albania’s totalitarian regime has shaped the country’s significant post-1990 emigration patterns. The article presents a detailed account of the successive waves of Albanian emigration beginning in 1990 as a mass response to poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities, and an examination of the present demographic implications.²⁵ Similarly, Janine Dahinden’s provides a comprehensive historical and sociological overview of Albanian-speaking migration from the mid-19th century to the present, with a focus on Albania, Kosovo, and the broader Albanian diaspora. The paper

²⁵ Agata Domachowska, “Albanian Migration as a Post-Totalitarian Legacy” in *Migration Studies – Review of Polish Diaspora*, no. 2 (172), (2019).

emphasizes the transnational character of Albanian migration, shaped by both forced displacement and economic motivations, and its lasting impact on national identity and political activism. The author underlines that Albanian migration, a historical phenomenon, is influenced by regional instability, economic disparities, and ethnic marginalization.²⁶

The study conducted by Mary Ward Loreto Foundation, explores the dynamics of Albanian migration from a multidisciplinary perspective, aiming to understand the root causes, structural factors, and consequences for individuals and society. It traces the historical trajectory of Albanian migration, from the Arbëresh in the 15th century to the post-1990 mass exoduses, highlighting evolving patterns, including irregular migration, and the growing permanence of Albanian diaspora communities.²⁷ Using a similar approach, the study by Ekra Caro and Leo Wissen, "Migration in the Albania of the Post-1990s: Triggered by Post-Communist Transformations and Facilitator of Socio-Demographic Changes," explores the complex relationship between migration and the major political, economic, and social transformations that occurred in Albania following the collapse of communism. The paper focuses on how post-1990 migration was both a consequence of Albania's abrupt transition and a catalyst for deep socio-demographic changes.²⁸

Although, these studies do not offer specific insights into Albanian emigration to Canada, nor do they include a gender-based analysis of migration, which is the central focus of this thesis, they support the research by providing an understanding of the background of Albanian emigration, including the driving factors and the historical and political context.

²⁶ Janine Dahinden, "Albanian-speaking migration, mid-19th century to present" in *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (2013), DOI: [10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm026](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm026).

²⁷ Mary Ward Loreto Foundation, *Beyond Borders: Analytical Research Report on Migration in Albania* (GEER, 2019).

²⁸ Erka Caro and Leo J.G. Wissen, "Migration in the Albania of the post – '90s: triggered by post – communist transformations and facilitator of socio – demographic changes," in *South-East Europe Review for Labor and Social Affairs*, 10(3), (2008): 87 - 105.

Studies on the Impact of Emigration on Albania as a Country of Origin

The second body of literature focuses on the impact of emigration on Albania, with particular attention to remittances and their economic significance at both the macro and micro levels. This scholarship also examines how large-scale outmigration has affected the labour market, contributed to demographic ageing, accelerated the loss of skilled workers, and shaped broader patterns of economic development.

A major contribution within this field comes from the extensive work of Russell King, who, both individually and in collaboration with scholars such as Julie Vullnetari, Eralba Cela, Zana Vathi, Mirela Dalipaj, and Kosta Barjaba, has produced more than one hundred articles and numerous books adopting a multidimensional approach to Albanian migration. These studies investigate the complex relationship between migration and development in post-communist Albania²⁹ and explore how migratory movements have influenced demographic trends, economic conditions, and development prospects.³⁰ Equally significant are the gender-focused studies of these scholars, which provide valuable insights into women's roles, contributions, and challenges within the broader context of Albanian migration.³¹ Together, this body of work illuminates the gendered dimensions of mobility and underscores the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into analyses of Albanian emigration.

²⁹ Russell King, "Albania as a laboratory for the study of migration and development," in *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 7:2, (2005): 133-155.

³⁰ Russell King and Julie Vullnetari "Remittances, Return, Diaspora: Framing the Debate in the Context of Albania and Kosova" in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 4, 2009; Russell King and Julie Vullnetari *Migration and Development in Albania*, Working paper C 5, (Sussex Centre for Migration Research 2003).

³¹ Russell King and Julie Vullnetari, "Gendering Remittances in Albania: A Human and Social Development Perspective," in *Gender & Development*, Volume 19, Issue 1, 2011; Russell King and Julie Vullnetari "A Population on the Move: Migration and Gender Relations in Albania," in *Cambridge Journal of Regions Economy and Society*, 5 /2 (2012): 207-220; Russell King and Julie Vullnetari 'Washing Men's Feet': Gender, Care and Migration in Albania During and After Communism" in *Gender, Place & Culture*, Volume 23, 2016 - Issue 2, 198 – 215.

The 2021 study by the European Training Foundation, *How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania*, examines the impact of migration on Albania's human capital and labor market. It focuses on how emigration and return migration influence skill distribution, employment trends, and economic development.³²

Taken together, these studies offer valuable insights for understanding the enduring connections between Albanian emigrants and their homeland. This broader context informs the design of my own research, helping to shape interview questions for Albanian women in Canada regarding their ties to Albania, their remittance practices, and their potential or actual engagement in economic, social, or cultural investment in the country.

Studies on the Settlement and Integration of Albanian Emigrants in Host Countries

Given that emigration has been a significant phenomenon in Albanian society historically and currently, it has been extensively studied across various academic disciplines. Much literature has focused on emigration to Greece and Italy, the two countries hosting the largest Albanian communities. Similarly, there are multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies concerning Albanian migrants in other European countries and the United States, where considerable Albanian communities also reside. Numerous studies have been conducted by both Albanian researchers and scholars from host countries, exploring migration waves, the causes and consequences of migration, and migration channels and methods. Other studies analyze host-country policies and the challenges faced by emigrants as well as issues of settlement and integration. Furthermore, relationships with host communities and internal community dynamics have also been considered by scholars. Additionally, identity preservation, language retention, and transmission of traditions

³² European Training Foundation *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Albania*, (Report drafted by Ilir Gëdeshi for the European Training Foundation, under the supervision of the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies) (2021).

to second-generation migrants have been the focus of various studies. Other scholars have investigated the roles of Albanian communities as Albania's / Kosovo's "ambassadors" in host countries and their lobbying efforts on Albanian issues, as well as their contributions to the economic development of their home country.

Specializing in social protection and development economics, scholars Carletto, Benjamin, and Marco examine the patterns of social organization and network-based migration among Albanian emigrants to Italy.³³ Their study contributes to a better understanding of transnationalism and highlights the importance of incorporating social dynamics into migration policy and research. Similarly, Fiona Hoti and Jürgen Huber investigate the communication patterns and social interactions of Albanian emigrants living in Germany, focusing on how Albanian migrants maintain ties with their country of origin while adapting to the German social environment.³⁴ Likewise, Nadège Ragaru and Amilda Dymi focus on the historical evolution, socio-cultural development, and integration patterns of the Albanian American community in the United States. The research investigates how this community has maintained its ethnic identity while navigating the process of assimilation into American society.³⁵

The generational differences in the integration process in the host country are the focus of Skender Shala's doctoral thesis "The Kosovo Albanian Diaspora Between Identity Conservation and Social Integration in Lyon." The study explores the historical and contemporary experiences of Kosovo Albanians in Lyon, France, from the 1960s to 2019. The research investigates how this diaspora navigates the dual process of maintaining ethnic identity while integrating into French

³³ Gero Carletto, Benjamin Davis, and Marco Stampini, *Familiar faces, familiar places: the role of family networks and previous experience for Albanian migrants* (ESA Working Paper no. 05-03, 2005).

³⁴ Fiona Hoti and Jürgen Huber, *German Albanian Intercultural communication and interaction in the workplace*, (ICLCC, 2024), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202418502004>.

³⁵ Nadège Ragaru and Amilda Dymi, "The Albanian American Community in the United States," in *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 31 (1-2), (2004): 45-63. hal-01019926.

society.³⁶ In addition, the themes of integration and identity preservation are explored in greater depth in Zana Vathi's book *"Albanian Emigrants and Their Children in Europe."* The study focuses on the migration patterns, integration experiences, and identity construction of Albanian emigrants and their second-generation descendants across multiple European countries. The research revolves around how Albanian emigrants adapt to different host societies, and how their children negotiate dual identities between their heritage and the cultures of their countries of residence.³⁷

The integration of Albanian immigrants and their impact on the host country after settlement, regardless of the specific country, helps in understanding the experiences of the Albanian community in Canada. Although this segment of the literature does not consider the specific features of Canadian society or its immigration and integration policies, it provides a broader picture of the behaviors and challenges faced by Albanian migrants in various countries. It analyzes how their shared or similar experiences are shaped by their country of origin, and how their worldview and Albanian cultural background influence their integration process. The findings of these studies - regarding the integration of Albanians in host countries, their connections with one another within the community, the relationships they build with the local population, and their social, cultural, and political engagement as a mean of preserving and transmitting Albanian culture - will guide my research on the Albanian community in Canada.

Studies on Albanian Emigration to Canada

The next group of literature narrows its focus to Albanian emigration to Canada and is more directly relevant to the theme of my thesis. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, this body of work primarily examines the arrival of Kosovo Albanian refugees in Canada in 1999, their

³⁶ Skender Shala, *Kosovo Albanian diaspora between identity conservation and social integration in Lyon*, (thesis, under the supervision of Gregory Lee, Université Jean Moulin, 2019).

³⁷ Vathi, *Migrating and Settling in a Mobile World Albanian Migrants and Their Children in Europe*.

resettlement, lived experiences, and the challenges they faced. However, emigration to Canada before and after this period remains less explored. Some of the studies that shed light on the Canadian experience of Albanian emigrants include: The Centre for Refugee Studies at York University, along with *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, has published numerous studies on the arrival and resettlement of Kosovo Albanian refugees in Canada in 1999.³⁸ These studies collectively offer an in-depth understanding of the refugees' arrival, settlement processes, sponsorship mechanisms, and the challenges they faced within the framework of Operation Parasol, the Canadian government's 1999 humanitarian evacuation program. Additionally, these studies focus on how these refugees adapted to life in Canada and what factors influenced their integration outcomes; evaluate the effectiveness of Canada's humanitarian response and highlights the ongoing needs of refugees beyond the initial resettlement phase.³⁹

The picture is further enriched by the study *"Sharing the Wealth, Spreading the 'Burden'? The Settlement of Kosovar Refugees in Smaller British Columbia Communities,"* which focuses on the settlement experiences of Kosovar Albanian refugees in British Columbia. The research explores how Kosovar refugees negotiated their sense of belonging, identity, and integration in a multicultural Canadian context and analyzes how these refugees interacted with host institutions, accessed support services, and navigated issues such as employment, language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and intergenerational tensions.⁴⁰ Ontario and British Columbia were the primary host provinces for Kosovo Albanian refugees; therefore, understanding their experiences in both

³⁸ Lawrence Lam, "A Report on the Settlement Experiences of Kosovar Refugees in Ontario;" Yannis A. Stivachtis, "Kosovar Refugees and National Security;" Tomoko Okada, "Kosovar Resettlement Assistance Project in Greater Victoria;" Kathy Sherrell and Jennifer Hyndman, "Global Minds, Local Bodies: Kosovar Transnational Connections Beyond British Columbia."

³⁹ Lawrence Lam, et.al., *A Report on The Settlement Experiences of Kosovar Refugees in Ontario*, (York University, 2001).

⁴⁰ Kathy Sherrell, Jennifer Hyndman and Fisnik Preniqi, *Sharing the Wealth, Spreading the "Burden"? The Settlement of Kosovar Refugees in Smaller British Columbia Cities*, (Vancouver Centre of Excellence, 2004).

locations provides a more comprehensive picture and helps to clearly assess their settlement and early integration in Canada. These studies offer a Canadian perspective on the settlement and integration of Kosovo Albanian refugees, while the thesis *"Knocking on Doors That Never Open"* by Kaltrina Kusari, an Albanian Canadian, presents a slightly different approach. Her thesis explores the experiences of Kosovo Albanian asylum seekers in Canada, focusing on their journey of forced migration, settlement, and integration within Canadian society.

While the above sources focus on the arrival and settlement of Kosovo Albanian refugees, Valbona Sulemani's paper broaden the scope by examining the experiences of all Albanian emigrants from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia from the late 19th to the early 21st century. This thesis analyzes immigration and settlement through historical and anthropological lenses, offering a comparative analysis between Europe and North America. It contrasts the experiences of Albanian migrants in Greece and Italy with those in the United States and Canada.⁴¹

Studies on Canadian Immigration Policy and Immigrant Integration

Immigration has long been a defining feature of Canadian nation-building and identity construction. Therefore, literature on Canadian immigration is extensive, spanning legal, political, philosophical, sociological, and economic perspectives. It explores themes such as human rights, the fiscal costs and benefits of immigration, integration challenges, labour-market transitions, policy effectiveness, and public discourse. In particular, the literature focused on immigration policies, integration challenges, and institutional support for immigrants is relevant to the present study, which aims to bridge macro-level policy analysis with micro-level community experiences.

⁴¹ Valbona Sulemani, *The Albanian diaspora: immigration and settlement experiences*, (Paper 624, Ryerson University, 2019).

Among many others, the studies *Immigration and the Canadian Welfare State* by Grubel and Grady, as well as Vineberg's *Responding to Immigrants' Settlement Needs: The Canadian Experience*, analyze the institutional support available to newcomers. They conclude that the Canadian state has long recognized that providing robust settlement supports is essential for the successful integration of newcomers into society and the labour market.

Furthermore, Bhuyan, Jeyapal, Ku, et.al., Alan G. Green and David A. Green, Claire Ellis and Anna Triandafyllidou in their studies examine the outcomes of immigration policies based on institutional data.⁴² According to these studies, newcomers face challenges such as downward mobility, limited access to employment, and the emotional toll of adaptation. Recent immigrants experience persistent income gaps compared to native-born Canadians, and many do not reach earnings levels sufficient to generate fiscal surpluses. Despite high levels of education, they earn lower incomes and experience higher unemployment rates than Canadian-born workers.

These known socioeconomic discrepancies are explained by these studies, through factors such as the non-recognition of foreign credentials, lack of Canadian work experience, human capital depreciation due to employment in low-skilled jobs, language barriers, and employer uncertainty or bias regarding foreign qualifications.⁴³ Many immigrants struggle to enter the labour market, often working in jobs below their qualifications and earning less than expected. Employers' emphasis on Canadian work experience can leave newcomers feeling undervalued and

⁴² Rupaleem Bhuyan, et al. "Branding 'Canadian Experience' in Immigration Policy: Nation Building in a Neoliberal Era" in *Migration & Integration* 18, (2017): 47–62.; Alan G. Green David A. Green, "Canadian Immigration Policy: The Effectiveness of the Point System and Other Instruments," in *Canadian Economics Association*, vol. 28(4b) (1995): 1006-1041; Claire Ellis and Anna Triandafyllidou in *Precarity, Opportunity, and Adaptation: Recently Arrived Immigrant and Refugee Experiences Navigating the Canadian Labour Market*, in *Immigrant and Asylum Seekers Labour Market Integration upon Arrival: Now Here Land* (Springer, 2021).

⁴³ Rupaleem Bhuyan, et al. "Branding 'Canadian Experience' in Immigration Policy; Herbert Grubel and Patrick Grady, "Immigration and the Canadian Welfare State 2011," in *Studies in Immigration & Refugee Policy*, (Fraser Institute, 2011).

marginalized, forcing many to accept roles far outside their professional background.⁴⁴ The financial and emotional costs of this adjustment can be significant. Knowing this broader context will guide the shaping of the research design and the formulation of interview questions.

Gender-Focused Research on Migration and its Application to Albanian Migration

Analyzing Albanian emigration, settlement, and integration in Canada with a specific focus on gender requires a solid understanding of gender dynamics, the feminization of migration, and the role of gender both within Albanian and Canadian societies, including the influence of Canadian immigration policies. All these variables shape the lived experiences of Albanian women in Canada; therefore, the relevant literature necessarily spans several interconnected domains. A substantial body of scholarship examines Canadian immigration policies through a gender lens, while other studies explore the challenges faced by immigrant women during migration and integration, emphasizing how their country of origin continues to shape their adaptation in the host society. In this sense, gender-focused studies on Albanian emigration in other countries are also useful, as they illuminate how pre-migration socialization, gender norms, and family roles influence women's integration processes in Canada and elsewhere. Taken together, the existing gender-based literature on immigration and integration offers valuable conceptual tools and comparative insights for understanding the experiences of Albanian women in Canada.

Caritas's reports, *The Female Face of Migration*, provides valuable insight into the key challenges women face during migration, settlement, and integration processes. This series of reports explores global trends, drivers, and the consequences of female migration, emphasizing the growing visibility and complexity of women's roles in migration worldwide. They explore how

⁴⁴ Ellis and Triandafyllidou, "Precarity, Opportunity, and Adaptation".

gender shapes migration motivations, experiences, and outcomes, and what socio-economic and policy implications arise from the growing feminization of migration.⁴⁵

Correspondingly, Rupaleem Bhuyan and Catherine Schmidt as well as Barat Wolfe in the studies focus on the settlement experiences and transitions of immigrant women in Canada, with particular attention to how gender, ethnicity, and class intersect to shape their integration into Canadian society⁴⁶ and the challenges they face in entering and sustaining meaningful participation in the Canadian labor market.⁴⁷ These studies show that immigrant women in Canada often face overlapping settlement and employment challenges shaped by precarious legal status, limited access to services, social isolation, poverty, and insecurity in the labour market. At the same time, they highlight that women's employment experiences are influenced not only by structural barriers in Canada, but also by gender norms and responsibilities carried from their countries of origin, which affect how they navigate work, discrimination, and integration.

Immigrant Albanian women in Canada are not the specific focus but are included as part of the broader analysis in the doctoral thesis of anthropologist Ivana Previšić, *Boundary-Making as a Destigmatization Strategy: The Case of Albanian and Bosnian Muslims in Canada*. This study explores the migration experiences, identity negotiations, and integration trajectories of Albanian and Bosnian Muslims living in Canada, with particular attention to how religious and cultural identities are preserved or reshaped in a diasporic context. Although the study is not exclusively focused on the Albanian community or on women and is limited to Muslim individuals (while

⁴⁵ Caritas Internationalis, *The Female Face of Migration* (Background paper, 07/03/2012), <https://www.caritas.org/includes/pdf/backgroundmigration.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Rupaleem Bhuyan and Catherine Schmidt, *Immigrant Women's Settlement Transitions in an Era of Precarious Migration*, (IWYS Primary Research Report, 2019).

⁴⁷ Nombuso Dlamini, Uzo Anucha, and Barat Wolfe, "Negotiated Positions: Immigrant Women's Views and Experiences of Employment in Canada" in *Journal of Women and Social Work*, 27(4) (2012): 420-434, DOI: 10.1177/0886109912464479.

Albania is a multi-religious country), it remains somewhat relevant, though with certain limitations, because a significant portion of the interviewees are women. The interviews explore how these women navigate migration-related challenges, integration processes, and questions of community belonging while managing their dual identities as both Muslims and immigrants.⁴⁸

Furthermore, several gender-focused studies have been conducted on Albanian immigrants in various host countries.⁴⁹ They explore the impact of emigration on the social emancipation of Albanian women within the diaspora, particularly in Western European countries and the intersection of gender, migration, and labor by examining the lived experiences of Albanian migrant women in Greece. Taken together, this scholarship shows that migration can expand women's autonomy by increasing their participation in paid work, decision-making, and public life, while also reshaping family relations and challenging traditional patriarchal roles among Albanian migrants from Kosovo and Albania. At the same time, it makes clear that such empowerment is often partial and costly, since women's greater economic agency frequently comes with a double burden of wage labour and domestic responsibility rather than a full transformation of gender hierarchies.

Contributions and Limitations of the Existing Scholarship for the Present Study

This historiographical review has examined a broad and multidisciplinary body of literature on Albanian emigration, settlement, and integration. Collectively, this scholarship provides a valuable foundation for understanding the historical trajectories and socio-political frameworks that have shaped Albanian migration globally. The diversity of disciplinary perspectives, ranging

⁴⁸ Ivana Previšić, *Boundary-Making as a Destigmatization Strategy: The Case of Albanian and Bosnian Muslims in Canada*, (PhD dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2018).

⁴⁹ Mimoza Dushi, "Influence of migration in women emancipation: case study from Kosovan Albanian diaspora," in *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 58, (2015): 91-103; Xhaho, Çaro, Bailey, *Empowerment or a double burden? Work, family, and agency among Albanian migrant women in Greece*

from history and sociology to anthropology and political science, enriches the contextual understanding of Albanian mobility.

Despite these contributions, several significant gaps remain. The first limitations arise from the geographic focus of existing literature. Much of the scholarship concentrates on Albanian emigrants in European countries, particularly Greece and Italy. While these studies offer important analyses of informal migration, labour exploitation, and cultural preservation, they do not adequately reflect the Canadian context, where immigration today operates through structured, policy-driven pathways, multicultural frameworks, and formal institutional supports. As a result, findings rooted in the European experience cannot be easily generalized to Canada.

Another set of limitations is found in the general literature on Albanian migration, regardless of destination country. Many of these studies describe and analyze emigration in broad, national terms, focusing on historical waves of migration, macro-level causes, and their consequences for Albania as a sending country. Migration is often framed primarily as a national challenge, without full acknowledgment that, in the context of globalization and the global circulation of labour and intellectual capital, migration is a transnational and structural phenomenon rather than an Albanian exception. This perspective produces an incomplete picture of Albanian emigration and the factors that drive this mobility. Furthermore, the consequences of migration in much of this literature are examined chiefly at the macro level (e.g., demographic trends, remittances, brain drain), rather than at the level of individuals, families, or communities.

A related limitation concerns the Canadian-based literature, which is both limited in scope and narrow in focus. The existing studies primarily examine the arrival and settlement of Kosovo Albanian refugees during and after 1999. While valuable, this body of work does not capture the experiences of other Albanian migrants arriving from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia

through economic, skilled-worker, or family reunification pathways, nor does it address the long-term integration of Albanian refugees and/or immigrants. Moreover, the literature that does consider the integration of Albanian immigrants and their impact on host societies rarely engages with the specific features of Canadian society, including its immigration policies, multicultural frameworks, and labour market structures. Canadian immigration policies, characterized by formal, often skills-based entry pathways and robust family reunification programs, shape both the demographic profile and the integration trajectories of Albanian migrants.

Besides, gender rarely constitutes a central analytical lens in these Canadian studies; where women are mentioned, their perspectives appear as secondary to broader community concerns. Consequently, there is a striking absence of research that examines the integration, economic participation, identity negotiation, and family and community roles of Albanian women in Canada. While this gap can be filled by general Canadian studies on the settlement and integration experiences of immigrants, and women in particular, these studies lack the focus, or at least the mention or case study, of Albanian women.

Finally, an important insight emerging from existing scholarship, though based primarily on European cases, is that the integration of Albanian women is shaped more significantly, by the cultural norms and gender roles of the society of origin. As someone familiar with Albania, I recognize that these norms vary considerably depending on regional, urban-rural, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds. For this reason, while the methods and findings of the broader literature are valuable and informative, they cannot predict with certainty the outcomes for Albanian women in Canada, the demographic profile of whom is notably different from most Albanian women emigrants in European countries.

Together, these limitations point to a clear gap in existing scholarship: the absence of an in-depth, gender-focused study of Albanian women in Canada that considers their pre-migration histories, cultural expectations, and the distinctive social, institutional, and policy environment of Canada. The present study seeks to address this gap by documenting and analyzing the lived experiences of Albanian women within the Canadian context.

Structure of the Thesis and Overview of the Findings

The thesis is organized into four chapters. This first chapter introduced the thesis statement and research objectives, outlined the methodological approach, and examined the existing literature, highlighting both its contributions and its limitations for the present study. From here, my thesis moves on to provide a historical background of Albanian history, focusing on the major events and developments that have shaped Albania's contemporary political, economic, and cultural landscape. This is followed by an overview of the major historical waves of Albanian emigration across the world, narrowing the lens in the final section to Albanian migration to Canada. The third and fourth chapters present the findings of the oral history interviews, organized both chronologically and thematically. Chapter Three discusses the women's migration and early settlement experiences, while Chapter Four explores their integration trajectories, the intergenerational dynamics that emerge in the diaspora, and the second-generation's dual identity.

My thesis reveals that Albanian women's settlement and integration in Canada are profoundly shaped by their premigration histories, gendered expectations within Albanian society, and the structural features of Canada's immigration regime. Albanian women's experiences are marked by resilience, downward mobility followed by recovery, and a dual process of cultural preservation and adaptation.

This study was, for me, both a pleasure and a responsibility. It was a pleasure because it allowed me to work with the Albanian community of which I am a member; yet for that very reason, it also carried a particular sense of responsibility. Conducting research within one's own community presents both advantages and challenges. On the one hand, my familiarity with the community's mentality, cultural practices, and historical experiences facilitated meaningful engagement. I speak the language, and I can easily engage in conversations, listen, and understand words and expressions that only we, as insiders, can fully grasp. Moreover, I know what it means to be an Albanian woman and what it means to be an immigrant. We walked along a shared path, albeit in different shoes. On the other hand, it was difficult to listen to these women's narratives without becoming emotional, to hear their pain without feeling empathy, and to learn about their achievements without feeling pride. Nevertheless, like any researcher, I sought to maintain professional distance: to respect their perspectives and experiences, to interpret the interviews with objectivity, and to avoid viewing Albania and Albanians through "eyes of love" shaped by nationalist or romantic sentiments.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historical Context: Albania and the Albanians

*“Ah, 'tis an excellent race, and even under old degradation, even under hodja and Turk, a nice and natural people.”*⁵⁰ – Edith Durham for Albanians

Albanians are an ancient population in the Balkans with a unique history and culture. Albania, a rugged land marked by epic mountain and highland landscapes, vast plains, clear rivers, crystal-blue seas, stretches along the shores of the Ionian and Adriatic Seas. This grandeur and geostrategic location have constituted both a *“blessing”* and a *“curse”* for the Albanian people. Blessed with natural beauty and prosperous territories, Albania has nevertheless been burdened across the centuries with a responsibility disproportionate to its size: finding itself in the midst of clashes between great empires and civilizations:

For centuries it [Albania] formed the political, military, and cultural border between East and West, that is, between the Roman Empire of the western Mediterranean and the Greek Empire of the eastern Mediterranean. In the Middle Ages, Albania was once again a buffer zone, this time between Catholic Italy and the Byzantine Greek Empire. After its definitive conquest by the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century, it formed a bridgehead between Christian Europe and the Islamic Orient, - describes Canadian albanologist Robert Elsie.⁵¹

Placed, unwillingly, amid the epochal conflicts, Albanians fought and fell for their homeland, their self-rule and honour-based society, their identity, and their way of living, clearly differentiated from neighboring population. I will try to describe their way of living using the

⁵⁰ Edith Durham, *High Albania* (Edward Arnold Publisher, 1909), 134.

⁵¹ Robert Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, Second Edition, (The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2010) liii.

words of the Italian scholar Eugenio Barbarich, who, in his voluminous 1905 study *Albania*, asserts:

Albania presents itself as a distinct region of transit and penetration, truly distinctive for its fauna and the social, historical, and political conditions of its people. It is, in essence, a true person. For centuries, mountainous Albania has lived, as it lives, a local life that can be said to be imbued with the juices of the soil. Despite every obstacle, every condition unfavorable to the development of social energies, the Albanian tribes have succeeded one another, since time immemorial, in the same places and with the same characteristics. This means that man has adapted to the soil here, even in the most difficult conditions of subsistence, and has become, over time, its faithful, strong, and intelligent interpreter.⁵²

The Albanians' profound attachment to their land and their way of living has been such that they resisted and fought with great empires (Roman, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian Empires) and the military and political apparatus of neighboring states (Greece, Italy, Montenegro, and Serbia). As the early-20th-century English anthropologist Edith Durham affirms, "Empires came and went and passed over the Albanian as does water off a duck's back. In the fastnesses, which he held, he was never more than nominally conquered and retained his marked individuality and customs."⁵³

The Albanian people have confronted historical upheavals with resilience, at times adapting and reconstituting themselves in response to changing circumstances. This section does not aim to provide a detailed account of historical events, as such an approach would fall outside the scope and objectives of the thesis. Instead, it seeks to outline the key historical developments of the 20th century that have shaped the defining characteristics and contemporary condition of the Albanian population.

⁵² Eugenio Barbarich, *Albania Monografia antropogeografica*, (Enrico Voghera, 1905), xvi.

⁵³ Durham, *High Albania*, 4.

As the Ottoman Empire declined irreversibly at the end of the nineteenth century, Albanians, economically weak, militarily vulnerable, and divided by strong regional loyalties, had to detach themselves from the Empire to avoid collapsing with it. At the same time, “the Serb arose; the Slav again appeared as invader”⁵⁴ claiming the right to re-occupy what they considered historically theirs, - Kosovo. By constructing their own version of history to legitimize their political aims, Serbian scholars relied on the events of 1689 - 1690, during the Austro-Hungarian–Ottoman battle, to argue that Albanians settled in Kosovo only after the so-called “Great Migration” of Serbs led by Patriarch Arsenije III Crnojević.⁵⁵ In the south, the newly independent Greek state pursued political and military objectives aimed at incorporating into its territory the southern Albanian regions inhabited largely by Orthodox Christian populations. Throughout the period of Ottoman decline and withdrawal, the peoples of the Balkans found themselves engaged in intense political and military struggles to define, secure, or expand the territories they regarded as rightfully theirs.

In this context, amid the flames of the Balkan Wars (October 1912 – August 1913), on November 28, 1912, Albanians proclaimed independence, while much of ethnic Albania remained under foreign occupation. The Conference of Ambassadors in London (1912 – 1913), convened to settle the peninsula frontiers following the disintegration of Ottoman authority in the Balkans, recognized Albania’s independence under the collective protectorate of the Great Powers and delineated the borders of the new state. Unfortunately, as Bernd Fischer emphasizes,

⁵⁴ Durham, *High Albania*, 8.

⁵⁵ For further discussion of the academic debate surrounding this historical event, see Noel Malcolm, “The ‘Great Migration’ of the Serbs from Kosovo (1690) History, Myth and Ideology,” in *Rebels, Believers, Survivors: Studies in the History of the Albanians*, 173 – 197 (Oxford University Press, 2020).

“independence saw the creation of a state but not a nation,”⁵⁶ the nation was fragmented by imposed state borders. According to the Conference’s decisions, which “ignore[d] the wishes of local populations in redrawing or sanctioning new boundaries,”⁵⁷ the frontiers of the Albanian state left outside it was roughly half of the territories inhabited by Albanians, forcibly dividing the population among Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia, “an error that haunted the Balkans right to the end of the 20th century,” states Elsie.⁵⁸ Likewise, Robert C. Austin, Canadian historian and specialist in Balkan studies, emphasizes: “Albania’s borders, rather than following ethnic lines, were the product of geopolitical concerns, ensured that Albanians eager for border revision would play an important role in the political struggle. [...] In the war’s aftermath, it was simply assumed that Kosovo was an integral part of Serbia.”⁵⁹ With minor subsequent adjustments, the borders fixed by the London Conference remain Albania’s present-day frontiers.

After the London Conference the history of the Albanians of Kosovo and those of Albania unfolded along separate trajectories. Their political conditions and social developments diverged, and, except for brief intervals, contacts between Albanians on the two sides of the border remained scarce or outright prohibited.

Albania After the 1913 London Conference

In the first half of the twentieth century, Albania struggled to consolidate its state amid deep political fragility, economic underdevelopment, and intense geopolitical pressure. The end of World War I left the neutral country occupied and its independence questioned at the Paris Peace

⁵⁶ Bernd Fischer, “The Balkans Wars and the Creation of Albanian Independence,” in *War in the Balkans: Conflict and Diplomacy before World War I*, Edited by James Pettifer and Tom Buchanan (Bloomsbury Academic 2020): 102 – 114, 112.

⁵⁷ Sabrina P. Ramet, “Realpolitik or Foreign Policy Surrealism,” in *War in the Balkans: Conflict and Diplomacy before World War I*, Edited by James Pettifer and Tom Buchanan (Bloomsbury Academic 2020): 19 – 45, 23.

⁵⁸ Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, lix.

⁵⁹ Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, *Founding a Balkan State*, 14.

Conference. The 1920s brought attempts at state-building overshadowed by a weak agrarian economy, minimal infrastructure, low literacy, and external interference. Ahmet Zogu's rule (1925–1938) centralized power and introduced limited modernization, though corruption, strong patriarchal social structure, and growing Italian influence hindered progress. During World War II, successive Italian and German occupations dismantled Albanian institutions, briefly expanded Albania's borders to include Kosovo, creating the so-called "Greater Albania," by the 1941 proclamation of King Victor Emmanuel III. The war deepened internal divisions as communist and nationalist forces competed for control, setting the stage for the postwar communist takeover.

The Albanian communist regime was established by exploiting the country's profound economic and social backwardness in the aftermath of the Second World War and, within only a few years, constructed a totalitarian dictatorship grounded in Marxist–Leninist ideology, class warfare, the cult of personality, and an extensive bureaucratic repressive apparatus. It was characterized by successive political purges, total control of information, the prohibition of religious practice, the suppression of intellectual life, and complete international isolation, accompanied by structural poverty, extreme shortages, and systemic economic failure. This policy kept "the entire population in a state of confusion and insecurity."⁶⁰ Unlike many other communist states, Albania distinguished itself by an exceptional degree of isolationism, the absolute abolition of religion (becoming the world's first officially atheist state) the severing of ties with all socialist allies, and the extreme embrace of the autarkic doctrine of "*relying on our own forces*," which precipitated the country's deep economic and social collapse. British anthropologist Clarisse de Waal describes Albanian communism as the most brutal in Europe:

Enver Hoxha's dictatorship was the most Stalinist and the most brutal socialist regime in Europe. Centralization was absolute, both politically and economically.

⁶⁰ Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, Ixvii.

Isolation from the outside world and the population's ignorance of internal affairs were achieved through a combination of draconian restrictions on the movement of people and the suffocating atmosphere created by the government to suppress the circulation of information.⁶¹

The fall of communism in Albania emerged at the intersection of the regime's deep structural crisis and the transformative democratic wave sweeping across Eastern Europe. The Albanian Labor Party attempted to preserve its monopoly of power through limited and carefully controlled reforms in 1990, but these measures neither addressed the country's profound economic collapse nor contained the rapidly intensifying popular discontent. Events such as the early 1990 protests, the embassy crisis, and especially the student movement of December 1990 exposed the erosion of the regime's authority and demonstrated that Albania could no longer remain insulated from the broader "wind of change" affecting the communist world. Ultimately, the recognition of political pluralism in December 1990 marked a peaceful transfer of power and the collapse of what scholars have called "Europe's last bastion of Stalinism,"⁶² completing Albania's delayed but inevitable break with its totalitarian system.

"Albania's transition from communism to democracy was all but smooth or seamless. The system change shook the country and was all embracing leaving no Albanian unaffected. The demise of communism began later and turned out to be more disorderly than in other central and eastern European countries," states historian Robert Pichler.⁶³ Albania's transition began amid the collapse of a totalitarian system that had left the country economically devastated, institutionally fragile, and socially disoriented. Albania's transition was defined not by a smooth transformation

⁶¹ Clarissa de Waal, *Shqipëria pas rënies së komunizmit*, translated in Albanian by Jorgji Qirjako (AIIS, 2009) / the Albanian edition of the book: *Albania Today: A Portrait of Post-Communist Turbulence* (I.B. Tauris, 2005).

⁶² Carl Grimberg, *Historia Botërore dhe qytetërimi*, Vol. 12, translated in Albanian by Mirela Papa (Uegen. 2005), 255.

⁶³ Studies on Southeast Europe, *Legacy and Change, Albanian transformation from multidisciplinary perspectives*, Robert Pichler (Ed.) (LIT Verlag, 2014).

but by a difficult balancing act between aspiration and instability, between the desire to break with the past and the persistent weight of its legacy. The first steps toward pluralism and democracy were accompanied by ambitious legal, political, and economic reforms aimed at dismantling the mechanisms of the communist state and building new institutions suited to a parliamentary democracy and market economy. Yet these achievements were shadowed by profound challenges, such as weak state capacity, political polarization, uncoordinated reforms, and widespread corruption, concerns mentioned in every Progress Report of the European Commission.⁶⁴

In 1997 Albania was shaken by a deep crisis caused by the collapse of widespread pyramid schemes. Weak institutions, rapid and uncoordinated reforms, gaps in financial regulation, and a permissive attitude toward informal lending allowed these schemes to grow until they imploded at the end of 1996. Their failure triggered mass protests, violent clashes, and the breakdown of public order, quickly spreading all over the country. State institutions proved unable to respond effectively, and the situation escalated into social anarchy, armed revolts, and the looting of weapons depots. International actors intervened through Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) mediation, and the United Nations authorized Operation *Alba* to help restore order and prepare early elections. The crisis left severe consequences: economic collapse, destruction of infrastructure, loss of life, a sharp decline in public trust, and a profound political shift marked by the fall of the ruling party.

Since the fall of communism, the country's aspiration for European Union integration has been framed as a symbolic return to Europe, representing not only geopolitical reorientation but also a civilizational and historical reinsertion into the European space from which communist

⁶⁴ European Commission, Staff Working Paper, *Albania 2014 Progress Report* (Brussels: 8. 10. 2014), COM (2014) 700 final.

isolation had removed it. Today, despite progress, Albania continues to grapple with persistent challenges, including the consolidation of the rule of law, strengthening democratic institutions, reducing corruption, and improving judicial efficiency.

Kosovo After the 1913 London Conference

Following the 1913 decisions of the London Conference of Ambassadors and the subsequent forcible incorporation of Kosovo into the state structures of Serbia (later Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes), Kosovo was administered as an occupied territory and Albanians endured Serbian state-sponsored violence that aimed at the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. Among the sources that corroborate this phenomenon, the 1913 report of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace states that the violence was intended to change “*the ethnic character of regions exclusively inhabited by Albanians.*”⁶⁵ In addition, Albanians faced the juridical denial of their national identity: they were subjected to violent policies of displacement and colonization of their lands, while the laws of the new state failed to implement the provisions of the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1919) concerning the protection of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities.⁶⁶ Albanians were prohibited from using their language, accessing Albanian-language education, employing national symbols, or participating in public administration, being treated “as second-class citizens,” stresses Sabrina P. Ramet.⁶⁷ The armed resistance of 1913–1928, which demanded respect for national rights and an end to ethnic cleansing, was suppressed through state terror.

At the end of the Second World War, drawing on the Atlantic Charter of the United Nations, which affirmed the right of self-determination for small nations, the Albanians of Kosovo expressed their political will to unite with Albania. Despite this, through the Yugoslav military

⁶⁵ Cited by Tom Buchanan, “The Balkan Wars after 100 years,” in *War in the Balkans. Conflict and Diplomacy before World War I*, edited by James Pettifer and Tom Buchanan (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 12.

⁶⁶ Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 14.

⁶⁷ Ramet, “Realpolitik or Foreign Policy Surrealism,” 32.

reoccupation (1944–1945), followed by the establishment of a military administration and subsequently by the legal annexation formalized in the law of 3 September 1945,⁶⁸ Serbian authorities reasserted control over Kosovo.

Within the new federal state of Yugoslavia, the territories inhabited by Albanian populations were divided among three republics: the Republic of Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. According to the Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia of 1946, Kosovo was designated as the Autonomous Region of Kosovo-Metohija, endowed with very limited competencies and placed under the direct authority of People's Republic of Serbia. Albanians were officially classified as a national minority, even though they outnumbered the Montenegrins and Bosniaks,⁶⁹ groups which enjoyed republican status within the Yugoslav Federation. Kosovo's economy remained in a severely underdeveloped and unequal condition: the post-war reintroduction of Slavic colonists, combined with requisitions, collectivization policies, and the systematic exclusion of Albanians from employment, produced structural poverty and deliberate economic marginalization.⁷⁰ Ethnic inequality was stark: a small Serb-Montenegrin minority controlled most administrative positions and public-sector employment, while forced emigration to Turkey and violent disarmament campaigns aimed to reduce the demographic weight of the Albanian population.

The period between 1968–1974 marked several significant improvements: the legalization of the Albanian flag, the expansion of Albanian-language education, the establishment of the University of Pristina, and subsequently the adoption of the 1974 Constitution, which granted

⁶⁸ See Paul Shoup, "Yugoslavia's National Minorities under Communism," in *Slavic review*, Vol.22 (1), (1963): 64-81, for more detailed analysis of this period.

⁶⁹ Tim Judah, *The Serbs History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Third Edition (Yale University Press, 2009), Appendix 2: Yugoslav Census of 1961, 365.

⁷⁰ Judah, *Kosovo, What Everyone Needs to Know*, 44 – 46.

Kosovo broader autonomy, federal representation, the official use of the Albanian language, and independent institutions. Yet the status of a republic remained denied, generating persistent dissatisfaction among Albanians.

With the rise to power of Slobodan Milošević (1985), discriminatory policies intensified: on 23 March 1989, Kosovo's autonomy was forcibly abolished, its institutions were placed under Serbian control, and a broad campaign of repression, structural violence, was initiated. According to Josip Glaurdić, it is noteworthy that “real resistance to these proposals was basically nonexistent at the federal level. [...] [Moreover] Milošević's dismantling of the Yugoslav constitutional equilibrium and the brutal subjugation of Kosovo failed to spark any concerted reaction in the international community.”⁷¹ Following this, all major policy areas such as the administration of security services, territorial defense, economic planning, international relations, and language policy, came under Serbian control.

During the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Albanians of Kosovo articulated a political platform that ranged from the restoration of the 1974 autonomy to the pursuit of self-determination and independence. They established parallel institutions and adopted a strategy of peaceful resistance. Belgrade responded by imposing violent administrative control and systematically excluding Albanians from public life. Meanwhile, the international community, guided by the logic of the *Badinter Commission*,⁷² did not treat the autonomous provinces as entities equal to the republics, thereby limiting the Kosovo question primarily to the framework of human rights.

⁷¹ Josip Glaurdić, *The hour of Europe - Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia* (Yale University Press, 2011), 31, 39.

⁷² The *Badinter Commission* (officially the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia) was a five-member body of European constitutional court presidents, led by Frenchman Robert Badinter, created by the European Economic Community (EEC) in August 1991 to provide legal guidance during the Yugoslavian breakup.

Confronted with the absence of international recognition and with intensifying repression, Albanians proceeded through referenda, active diplomacy, and the consolidation of a “parallel state.” Ibrahim Rugova, the elected president, insisted that any resolution should be achieved through peaceful means and the internationalization of their political claims.⁷³ When it became evident that Rugova’s peaceful political strategy was failing to produce concrete results, a radical wing began gaining support in Kosovo. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA / UCK), a popular guerrilla force seeking to achieve Kosovo’s independence through armed resistance, became public in March 1998.⁷⁴ As a counter-offensive, “Milosevic responded by letting convicted criminals out of prison on condition that they arm themselves, go to Kosova, steal whatever they liked from local Albanians, and do what they wished to the houses owned by Albanians.”⁷⁵ Serbian repression escalated into large-scale operations of violence and ethnic cleansing that culminated during 1998–1999. In September 1998 the number of refugees was estimated at 300,000 of whom about 50,000 were living out in the open, mostly in forests.⁷⁶ These developments generated concern about an impending humanitarian catastrophe and strengthened the fear that the worsening situation in Kosovo posed a threat to the fragile regional peace and security.

Diplomatic efforts by the EU and the United States to resolve the Kosovo question also failed. Belgrade rejected the essential conditions set forth at the Rambouillet Conference (February 6 – March 19, 1999). In the face of massacres such as that of Racak⁷⁷ (*Reçak*) and the mass, coercive displacement of the population, NATO and the United Nations decided, without a United

⁷³ Tim Judah, *Kosovo War and Revenge* (Yale University Press, 2000).

⁷⁴ The KLA (UCK) claimed to have carried out its first actions prior to its public emergence, dating back to 1996.

⁷⁵ Ramet, “Realpolitik or Foreign Policy Surrealism,” 33.

⁷⁶ Heinz Loquai, “Kosovo - A Missed Opportunity for a Peaceful Solution to the Conflict?” in *IFSH (ed.), OSCE Yearbook 1999*, (Baden-Baden 2000), 79-90.

⁷⁷ On 15 January 1999 Serbian forces executed and mutilated 45 civilians, women, children, and the elderly in Racak, a small village in central Kosovo.

Nations Security Council authorization, to launch an air strike against Serbia in order to halt the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe and to compel the withdrawal of Serbian military forces from Kosovo. President Bill Clinton, in his message to the American people, explained that the military intervention in Serbia was necessary to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, to prevent a wider conflict in Europe, to defend the values and strategic interests of the United States, and to preserve peace and stability on the continent:

We act to protect thousands of innocent people in Kosovo from a mounting military offensive. We act to prevent a wider war [...] All the ingredients for a major war are there: ancient grievances; struggling democracies; and in the center of it all, a dictator in Serbia who has done nothing since the cold war ended but start new wars and pour gasoline on the flames of ethnic and religious division. [...] if President Milosevic will not make peace, we will limit his ability to make war. [...] If we and our allies were to allow this war to continue with no response, President Milosevic would read our hesitation as a license to kill. [...] That is why we have acted now: because we care about saving innocent lives.⁷⁸

Serbia regarded this decision as an act of aggression, a violation of the sovereignty of an independent state, and a violation of international law.⁷⁹ In response, it intensified its violence against the Albanian population and escalated their expulsion. During the period of NATO air campaign, Serbian police, Yugoslav Army, and paramilitaries forces expelled 862,979 ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, and several hundred thousand more were internally displaced, in addition to those displaced prior to March 1999,⁸⁰ reported Human Rights Watch. The 78-day air campaign (24 March – 9 June 1999) concluded with the Kumanovo Technical-Military Agreement, which

⁷⁸ Bill Clinton, *Address to the Nation on Airstrikes Against Serbian Targets in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)* (speech, March 24, 1999), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLzPVYTf2oc>

⁷⁹ Read more about the debates surrounding the legitimacy of the NATO intervention in: Francesco Francioni, “Of War, Humanity and Justice: International Law After Kosovo,” in *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, J.A. Frowein and R. Wolfrum (eds.), (2000): 107-126.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Under Orders, War Crimes in Kosovo* (Report, October 26, 2001), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2001/10/26/under-orders/war-crimes-kosovo>

compelled the withdrawal of Serbian military, police, and paramilitary forces from Kosovo and authorized the deployment of the international peacekeeping force, KFOR (Kosovo Force).

After the conclusion of the NATO intervention, *Toronto Star* reporter, Sandro Contenta, reported from Djakovica (Gjakova): “Whole villages razed, mass graves dotting the landscape, body parts strewn along ravines, land mines taking their toll on returning refugees. [...] It's painfully clear - reconstruction will take a long time, and reconciliation may never come.”⁸¹

Following the conclusion of the air-strike campaign, Resolution 1244 (10 June 1999) of United Nations Security Council, placed Kosovo under interim international governance, while leaving the question of its final status unresolved. The international administration of Kosovo, based on Resolution 1244, was implemented through the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which assumed broad administrative competences for building provisional institutions and establishing the framework of self-governance.⁸² This governance model was unprecedented, as it marked the first instance in which international institutions exercised de facto legislative, executive, and judicial authority over a territory.⁸³

The resolution of Kosovo's status likewise resulted in another historical precedent; Kosovo's independence was declared unilaterally on 17 February 2008, based on the Ahtisaari Plan, which never received approval from the UN Security Council. Today, although Kosovo functions as an independent state, Resolution 1244 formally remains in force, while the country continues to host a multilayered international presence (KFOR, UNMIK, and EULEX) reflecting again the sui generis and contested nature of its state-formation settlement.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Sandro Contenta, “Lessons of war,” *The Toronto star*, July 11, 1999, B5.

⁸² United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 1244 (1999)* (Distr. General S/RES/1244 (1999), 10 June 1999).

⁸³ Bardhok Bashota, *Doktrina e Administrimit Territorial Ndërkombëtar: Rasti i Kosovës nën UNMIK-un 1999-2008* (PhD dissertation, University of Tirana, 2014).

⁸⁴ Bashota, *Doktrina e Administrimit Territorial Ndërkombëtar: Rasti i Kosovës nën UNMIK-un 1999-2008*.

In parallel with these developments, Albanians in Macedonia sought to position themselves within the new political configurations taking shape in the newly established Macedonian state. Albanians likewise found themselves in an unfavorable legal position after the country's peaceful secession from the former Yugoslav Federation on January 25, 1991. The Constitution, which codified the character of the new state as an ethnic Macedonian nation-state, defined Albanians as a national minority rather than a constituent people. Albanians, who constituted the second-largest ethnic group after Macedonians, demanded to be recognized as equal citizens of a state they wished to regard as theirs as well. Albanians claimed, through political and diplomatic channels, constitutional equality, official use of the Albanian language, equitable representation, and territorial-political autonomy.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, these demands were systematically ignored by the Macedonian political elite, a situation that produced enduring tensions and episodes of open ethnic conflict, such as the 2001-armed conflict.

With the mediation of the European Union and the United States, the Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed on August 13, 2001, between Albanian political representatives and the Macedonian government. The agreement produced a compromise that improved several aspects of the Albanian community's status, including the expanded use of the Albanian language, decentralization, equitable representation in public administration and law enforcement, as well as special decision-making mechanisms in Parliament and local governance.⁸⁶ Although the agreement paved the way for a more inclusive model, it was unable to fully overcome structural inequalities and the ongoing challenges faced by Albanians in Macedonia.

⁸⁵ Zeqirja Rexhepi, *Zhvillimet Politiko- shoqërore te shqiptarët në Maqedoni 1990-2001* (Tringa Design, 2005).

⁸⁶ Framework Agreement Concluded at Ohrid, Macedonia (Signed at Skopje, Macedonia on 13 August 2001), <https://cdn.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/2/8/100622.pdf>.

The problems and challenges have been similarly reflected in the experience of Albanians in Montenegro following its separation from the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006.

Shaped by these historical dynamics and by persistent political and economic pressures, Albanians have engaged in widespread and continuous emigration across different periods of their history.

Albanian Emigration in Historical Perspective

The Old diaspora

Before the twentieth century, Albanian emigration had already become a deeply rooted historical and social phenomenon, taking several distinct forms. One of its earliest major waves began in the fifteenth century, when many Albanians fled Ottoman expansion and settled in Dalmatia, Greece, and especially southern Italy, where the *Arbëresh* communities preserved their language, identity, and historical memory over centuries.⁸⁷ During Ottoman rule, Albanian mobility also developed through seasonal and long-term labour migration, known as *kurbet*, as men left mountainous regions in search of work across the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and beyond, while women remained at home carrying the burden of household survival and family continuity. Over time, migration came to shape not only the economic life of Albanian society, but also its emotional and cultural world, leaving a deep imprint in memory, folklore, and social practice. By the nineteenth century, emigration had acquired an additional intellectual and political dimension, as Albanian communities abroad established associations, published newspapers, supported education in the Albanian language, and contributed materially and ideologically to the

⁸⁷ Antonio Bellusci and Ornela Radovicka, *Rrugëtim në Ngulimet Arbëreshe*, (QSPA, 2020).

Albanian National Movement. In this way, pre-twentieth-century Albanian emigration was not only a strategy of survival, but also a formative force in the preservation of identity, the circulation of ideas, and the emergence of modern Albanian national consciousness.

The Balkan Wars (1912–1913) triggered large-scale emigration among the Albanian population, particularly among Albanians living in what is today Kosovo and North Macedonia, territories invaded and occupied by Serbia and Montenegro. To escape the violence, reprisals, and atrocities committed by Serbian and Montenegrin military forces and irregular bands, the inhabitants of these regions were forced to abandon their homes. Numerous official sources and scholarly studies provide detailed accounts of these events. A contemporary description from the ground is given by a Serbian citizen in a report to the British Vice-Consul in Skopje:

The atrocities began as soon as we crossed the old Serbian border. [...] There were fires everywhere. Whole Albanian villages had been transformed into columns of flames [...] Homes were burning. [...] the komitadjis [...] broke into Turkish and Albanian homes and did the same thing, time and again: stole and slaughtered. Skopje has 60,000 inhabitants, [...] some of them had fled, but most of them were still there. And they were now victims to the nightly bloodbaths.⁸⁸

Likewise, Tim Judah states that “some 20,000 may have lost their lives and tens of thousands fled. Several appalling massacres took place...”⁸⁹

The forced displacement / emigration of Albanians living in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, as well as in Greece, continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century because of violence and policies that formed part of broader ethnic-cleansing campaigns targeting the Albanian population. Large numbers of Albanians fled primarily to neighboring countries, driven by the hope and expectation that they would be able to return to their homes. Furthermore,

⁸⁸ Robert Elsie and Bejtullah Destani, *Kosovo a Documentary History*, (I.B. Tauris, 2018) (Behind the curtains of the Balkan Wars - Despatch from British Vice-Consul W.D. Peckham in Skopje to the British Ambassador Sir Ralph Paget in Belgrade Skopje, Dec. 14, 1914, 103 – 107).

⁸⁹ Judah, *Kosovo, What Everyone Needs to Know*, 39.

three population-exchange agreements were concluded between Turkey and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (in 1913, 1938, and 1953). These agreements stipulated the resettlement to Turkey of Yugoslav citizens who were identified as Muslim by religion, culture, and nationality, and who spoke Turkish. Because of these agreements, it is estimated that more than 400,000 Muslim Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia were forcibly displaced to Turkey.⁹⁰ Although they were registered as Turks upon arrival, some continue to preserve the Albanian language and traditions to this day. Similarly, following the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), concluded at the end of the Greco-Turkish War as the legal basis for the compulsory exchange of populations, it is documented that, from 1924 to 1926,⁹¹ approximately 60,000 Muslim Albanians⁹² from Chameria (Çamëria) (a historically Albanian-inhabited region assigned to Greece under the decisions of the London Conference) were compelled to depart for Turkey, being classified as ethnic Turks under the exchange provisions.

Meanwhile, in Albania during the 1920s and 1930s, both directions of mobility were evident: economic and political emigration, as well as returning migration. For example, at the end of the First World War, approximately 15,000 Albanian emigrants returned from the United States,⁹³ a portion of whom became actively involved in the political, educational, and cultural life of the country. Return was either a personal choice or “a mission” entrusted by diaspora organizations to selected individuals, with the aim of contributing to the construction and democratization of the Albanian state. Illustrative are the cases of representatives of the Pan-Albanian Federation *Vatra* in the United States, such as Fan S. Noli, Sotir Peci, and Koste

⁹⁰ Jusuf Osmani, *Kolonizimi serb i Kosoves*, Second edition, (ERA, 2010), 137.

⁹¹ The data cover only that two-year period; however, population exchange continued until the late 1930s.

⁹² Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, *Historia e popullit shqiptar*, Vol. III (Toena, 2007) 505.

⁹³ Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike, Instituti i Historisë, *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX*, Vol. I, (Botimet Albanologjike, 2017), 547.

Cekrezi.⁹⁴ During and after the Paris Peace Conference, the Albanian diaspora played an important political role by defending national interests abroad, supporting the Albanian state, and contributing directly to the consolidation of its institutions through the return and public service of diaspora members in the early 1920s.

During 1920s, emigration, although not particularly extensive, continued along the same lines and toward the same destination countries. It remained predominantly male-driven and was largely motivated by economic factors. In many cases, men migrated alone, either because their departure was regarded as temporary and therefore did not necessitate bringing their families, or because “emigration was considered a danger, requiring strength and patience.”⁹⁵ Being perceived as a hardship, men tended to shield women from its difficulties and uncertainties.

In the formative years of the communist regime in Albania (1944–1947), many Albanians fled the country for political reasons. Individuals who held openly anti-communist positions were systematically targeted by the secret police and the State Security apparatus. To avoid imprisonment, internal exile, or even death, they escaped either individually or together with their families. This wave of emigration, anti-communist in both ideology and purpose, sometimes collaborated with foreign intelligence services to weaken and ultimately overthrow the communist regime in Albania.

According to James S. O'Donnell, “The Party [the Albanian Party of Labour] continually strived for and did manage to have an impact on almost all of their citizens' affairs. Extreme measures were instituted to keep both Albanian citizens in and foreigners out of Albania.”⁹⁶ During

⁹⁴ Nexhipi and Mici, Kontributi i Federatës “Vatra” në Mjedisin Politik dhe Kulturor të Viteve 20’ në Shqipëri”.

⁹⁵ Mema, Denis. Aliaj, Sulltana. Matoshi, Alfred (2019) *Beyond Borders: Analytical Research Report on Migration in Albania*, GEER, Tirana, 2017, 11, ISBN 978-9928-07-624-3.

⁹⁶ James S. O'Donnell, *A Coming of Age: Albania under Enver Hoxha* (Columbia University Press, 1999), 136.

the communist period, Albanian emigration was severely restricted under a policy of self-isolation; attempts to leave the country were classified as “treason against the homeland,” a capital offense. Article 47 of the Albanian Criminal Code stipulated that “escape outside the state, as well as refusal to return to the Fatherland by a person who has been sent to serve or has been permitted temporarily to go outside the state, is a crime of treason” punishable by a minimum sentence of ten years’ imprisonment or even death. In accordance with the Code, people attempting to escape could be shot without warning by the Border Guard. In tandem with the criminalization of emigration, the regime cultivated a denigrating culture toward would-be emigrants: those who attempted to leave were publicly branded “enemies,” “vagabonds,” “hooligans,” “declassed elements,” “immoral and characterless,” and “parasites.” Punishment extended beyond the individual. The families of those who escaped, or attempted to escape, were subjected to internment, loss of rights, and stigmatization as “enemies of the people.” Correspondence between emigrants or escapees and their relatives in Albania was monitored and censored by the State Security (*Sigurimi i Shtetit*).

As a result of these draconian measures, Albania recorded the lowest rate of escapes in the Eastern Bloc, less than 0.5% of the population, in contrast with over 20% in the German Democratic Republic, 14% in Czechoslovakia, 6% in Poland, and 5.3% in Bulgaria.⁹⁷ Referring to communist countries, C. W. de Wenden notes that these policies were enforced “because their population was their main resource, and sometimes because they feared that their nationals abroad might endanger internal political stability.”⁹⁸

In contrast, during the same period, emigration among Albanians living in the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, was substantial and continuous, driven primarily by political

⁹⁷ Kujto Albania, “*Kufij të përgjakur*” (Documentary, March 14, 2019), <https://kujto.al/kufij-te-pergjakur/>.

⁹⁸ De Wenden, *Migration and International Relations*, 2.

repression, forced expulsions, and broader structural pressures within Yugoslavia. Large numbers resettled in industrial cities across Western Europe, particularly in Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Scandinavian countries. Many individuals who left in the postwar decades, often transiting through Turkey following their compulsory resettlement, were officially categorized and treated abroad as “Yugoslavs” or “Turks,” which obscured their Albanian identity in host-country records and public discourse. This administrative misclassification, tied to the immediate country of departure, affected social visibility and constrained opportunities for political organization in Western Europe. Described by the scholar Isa Blumi as “*second-tier migration*,”⁹⁹ these dynamics frequently pushed migrants to subsume their identity claims under adopted labels for reasons of security, mobility, and social acceptance. Furthermore, Blumi compares the position of Albanian emigrants originating from Albania with that of those from Yugoslavia, highlighting how the conditions they faced in their respective host countries produced markedly different trajectories of visibility, integration, and political mobilization:

The Catholic Albanian population, violently ejected by the Albanian Communist Party in the period from 1944 to 1960, were by far the most successful community in the West. The community was fiercely nationalist [...] they were fiercely anti-communist and the fact that their host governments identified them as refugees from a Stalinist state helped in the Cold War context. Albanians from Yugoslavia, on the other hand, had no such luck since Western states actively courted Tito and his independent socialist state.¹⁰⁰

By the early 1980s, the situation deteriorated further following the 1981 student protests in Pristina (Prishtinë), when mass arrests, harsh reprisals, and sustained political pressure prompted thousands more Kosovo Albanian to flee Yugoslavia and join the growing Albanian diaspora in Europe. A more politicized, educated cohort of exiles then began to reassert a distinct Albanian presence,

⁹⁹ Isa Blumi, “Defining social spaces by way of deletion: the untold story of Albanian migration in the postwar period,” in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 29:6, (2003): 949-965, DOI: 10.1080/1369183032000171311.

¹⁰⁰ Blumi, “Defining social spaces by way of deletion,” 961.

catalyzing new forms of diaspora activism and making the Kosovar question increasingly visible internationally.

These historical emigration waves, extending globally, are known as the “Old Diaspora” (pre-1990). After the fall of communist regimes in the 1990s, mass emigration resumed on an unprecedented scale in both Albania and Kosovo, forming what is commonly referred to as the “New Diaspora.” “The post-communist mass exodus of Albanians is not an isolated migration episode. Rather, the long communist period of 1944–1990 was an artificial interlude in the long-term historical migration of the Albanian people,”¹⁰¹ argues the scholar, Russell King.

The New Albanian Diaspora

As the communist regime was breathing its last, in the late evening of July 2nd, 1990, thousands of Albanian citizens forced their way into foreign embassies in Tirana, seeking political asylum. According to Fred Abrahams, approximately 5,000 Albanians had filled the embassies; 3,199 individuals in the French embassy, 870 in the Italian embassy, about 500 in the French embassy,¹⁰² most of them (3,407 - 70%) were workers, only 155 were civil servants, and not a single well-known intellectual.¹⁰³

The exodus of people was driven by economic motives, by poverty and misery, towards a dream of a better and more secure life. The political issue came after the economic one and in any case, most of the people who entered the embassies did not possess the cultural and intellectual level to be defined as political dissidents, - expresses Brunilda Durici in her doctoral thesis.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Russell King, “Albania as a laboratory for the study of migration and development,” in *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 7:2, (2005): 133-155 / 137.

¹⁰² Fred C. Abrahams, *Shqipëria e Re - Nga diktatura në demokraci në Europë*, translated in Albanian Ildir Hoxha (Fjala Publishing, 2015), 67.

¹⁰³ Elez Biberaj, *Shqipëria në tranzicion*, (AIIS, 2011), 86.

¹⁰⁴ Brunilda Durici, *Shqiperia pergjate viteve 1985 - 9997* (disertacion, Universiteti i Tiranes: 2018) 93.

Based on the article *Border Killings in 1990* by the Albanian scholar Afrim Krasniqi, during 1990 a total of over 1,200 individuals attempted to escape toward Greece, 910 toward Yugoslavia, and 52 toward Italy. Fifty-eight of them were killed at the border, by Border Post Units while attempting to flee.¹⁰⁵ According to this study, the principal drivers of escape were political violence and the absence of civil liberties; the continuation of internments, imprisonments, and political discrimination; political surveillance and persecution by the State Security (Sigurimi); poverty and severe economic conditions; a lack of hope for change; the inability to secure basic goods; isolation from the outside world; and the desire to reunite with family abroad, to pursue education abroad, or to seek a better life. Drawing on archival data, the author demonstrates that “the overwhelming majority of these escapees were very young (primarily 18–20 years old), lacking hostile intent, and motivated chiefly by a wish for better living conditions, often characterized, ironically in the period’s parlance, as an eagerness to experience the “bourgeois paradise.”¹⁰⁶

In the following years, throughout the entire period of Albania’s political transition, emigration became a pervasive phenomenon. While the state was exceedingly weak, public order and citizen security were severely compromised, and social indiscipline was rampant, thanks to the new possibilities for mobility in March 1991, 20,000 Albanians fled by boat to Brindisi in southern Italy, and in August of that year another 12,500 landed in Bari, much to the distress of the Italian government.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, in a more discreet but even more massive exodus, impoverished Albanians fled across the land border into Greece in search of jobs and a better life. Albania had become an international problem. According to Russell King’s research, during 1991–

¹⁰⁵ Afrim Krasniqi, “Vrasjet ne kufi ne vitin 1990: Midis ligjit, ideologjise dhe dhunes shtererore,” in *Studime hisotrike*, No. 2, (2025): 201 – 231, 216.

¹⁰⁶ Krasniqi, “Vrasjet ne kufi ne vitin 1990: Midis ligjit, ideologjise dhe dhunes shtererore,” 215.

¹⁰⁷ Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, Introduction, Ixix.

1992, an estimated 200,000 Albanians left the country,¹⁰⁸ although he does not cite the source of this figure. Furthermore, the author analyses the characteristics and driving factors of Albanian emigration throughout the 1990s. As King observes, Albanian emigration after 1990 was distinguished by its exceptional scale and intensity, its largely irregular character, and its function not only as a strategy of economic survival, but also as a means of personal liberation and, in some cases, political resistance to an authoritarian culture.

Albanian emigrants entered various Western European countries and North America through “the main gate and the back door”¹⁰⁹ (to use Aristide Zolberg’s words, that means, both legally and illegally). Throughout this entire period, illegal emigration, whether through the Greek mountains or across the Ionian and Adriatic Seas toward Italy, continued uninterrupted. Irregular migration was accompanied by the spread of criminal activities such as document forgery and human trafficking. While, at first, refugees were welcomed, “since they strengthened the image of Europe [...] of democracy and freedom, providing a safe haven to those who had been persecuted and threatened in countries in the Communist Bloc,”¹¹⁰ in the following years this movement became a constant source of concern for Italy and Greece, where many Albanians remained as “irregular” or “undocumented” immigrants. This situation led to the social stigmatization and exclusion of Albanians within Greek and Italian societies.

Referring again to R. King, by the mid-1990s most estimates indicated that around 400,000 Albanians were living and working abroad.¹¹¹ While earlier waves of emigration had been predominantly male-dominated, the migratory movements of the late twentieth century were

¹⁰⁸ King, “Albania as a laboratory for the study of migration and development,” 140 – 141.

¹⁰⁹ Aristide Zolberg, “International policies in a changing world system,” in *Human migrations: Patterns and policies* (Indiana University Press, 1978), 5–27.

¹¹⁰ De Wenden, *Migration and International Relations*, 24.

¹¹¹ King, “Albania as a laboratory for the study of migration and development,” 138.

increasingly characterized by family migration, driven by a combination of economic, political, and educational motives. Significantly, this most recent period marked the first major emigration of Albanian women, who migrated in substantial numbers alongside their families. With the shift toward family-based migration, Albanians showed a stronger tendency to settle more permanently in the host countries. This form of migration reflects a strategy focused on building a stable future for the household, as children enter the local school system and gradually give rise to a second-generation of Albanians abroad.

Economically, this wave of emigration has significantly reduced high unemployment rates in Albania stemming from economic transformations after communism's fall. Furthermore, remittances have played a critical role in supporting families, enhancing living standards, financing education, encouraging family enterprises, and contributing to national economic stability and social mobility.

The political and social chaos unleashed by the 1997 pyramid-scheme crisis in Albania sharply intensified emigration, chiefly toward Italy and Greece, and after toward other countries as well. The number of Albanians leaving, especially for Italy, rose daily: estimates reached 13,000 by mid-March,¹¹² barely two weeks after the state of emergency was declared. Once again, Albanians sought to enter Italy “*through the back door*,” this time to escape their ‘democratic’ country that could no longer guarantee their safety. Not all succeeded. In an effort, as contemporaries put it, “to keep Albanians in Albania,”¹¹³ Italian forces patrolled Albanian territorial waters. On March 28, 1997, in the Otranto Channel, the Albanian vessel “*I katërti i Radës*,” carrying clandestine passengers attempting to reach Italy, collided with the Italian frigate

¹¹² *Përpyekja*, IV, no 11-12 (September – December 1997), 197.

¹¹³ Ted Perlmutter, “The Politics of Proximity: The Italian Response to the Albanian Crisis,” in *International Migration Review*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), 208.

“*Sibilla*” and sank, resulting in 94 deaths, most of them women and children. Incidents of this kind, on a smaller scale, occurred both before and after 1997, bearing witness to the often-tragic sacrifices made by Albanians along the painful path of migration. Due to fear and insecurity in the country, tens of thousands of Albanians left Albania during 1997, even though no precise official data on the number of those who departed were recorded.

During 1989–1999, emigration from Kosovo was also substantial; however, the driving factors and circumstances differed markedly from those in Albania. Ethnic tensions accompanying the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, together with systemic discrimination, ethnic persecution, and the escalating Serbian military repression, once again compelled Kosovo Albanians to flee their homeland. The exodus culminated in 1999, when Serbian military and paramilitary forces forcibly expelled more than 1,000,000 Albanians from their homes. Long columns of people moved toward the borders: “barefoot, unwashed, unfed, terrified, grief-stricken [...] the column had neither beginning nor end. Along the road remained the elderly, children, the dead, the wounded, as the Serbian forces fired continuously from afar,”¹¹⁴ recalls a Kosovo Albanian refugee. Apart from the neighboring countries, through the NATO humanitarian evacuation mission, 91,057¹¹⁵ of Kosovo Albanian refugees were sheltered in Türkiye, Germany, the United States, Canada, and several other host countries. Most refugees returned to Kosovo after the end of the conflict, while a portion chose to remain permanently in the receiving states.

The Albanian diaspora played a pivotal role in sustaining Kosovo’s parallel institutional system and in supporting the struggle for independence, particularly throughout the 1990s. Through sustained organizational capacity and considerable financial sacrifice, the diaspora

¹¹⁴ Shemsi Krasniqi, “Kujtesa dhe Rrëfimet për Eksodin e Vitit 1999,” in *Studime Shoqërore*, No. 4, (2017): 143 – 172, 157.

¹¹⁵ OSCE, *Kosovo / Kosova as Seen, as Told* (OSCE, 1999).

became a crucial pillar of the economic and institutional survival of Kosovo Albanian society under Serbian rule. Diaspora contributions were formalized primarily through the Three Percent Fund, which financed the government-in-exile and enabled the continued operation of essential parallel institutions, including education and healthcare, as well as through the “Homeland Calls” Fund, which provided direct material support to the Kosovo Liberation Army.¹¹⁶ Throughout the decade, diaspora mobilization remained broad-based and consistent, reflecting an exceptional level of collective commitment to Kosovo’s liberation and subsequent processes of state formation.

Although the situation in Albania stabilized and Kosovo’s independence was achieved, emigration nevertheless continued during the 2000s due to “the political, sociocultural and identificational /existential dimensions of dissatisfaction with life in Albania and pessimism over future prospects,”¹¹⁷ assert King and Vullnetari. Additionally, according to Titili et al., some of the main drivers of migration in region include: “economic factors; demographic pressures, particularly population ageing combined with youth out-migration; institutional trust and governance issues, including low confidence in state institutions and perceptions of limited meritocratic opportunities, and migration networks shaping both intentions and actual migration.”¹¹⁸

Albanian migration in the 2000s differed markedly from that of the 1990s. The first decade was characterized by spontaneous, unplanned, and largely irregular movements. In the absence of proper reception and integration policies in Italy and Greece (which were the main destination countries), emigrants could only obtain low-paid, marginal jobs in sectors such as agriculture and

¹¹⁶ Dalip Greca, “Edhe perfaqesuesit e vendlindja therret keqperdoren mjetet,” *Gazeta Dielli*, September 24, 2014, <https://gazetadielli.com/edhe-perfaqesuesit-e-vendlindja-therret-keqperdoren-mjetet/>

¹¹⁷ Russell King and Julie Vullnetari, “A population on the move: migration and gender relations in Albania,” in *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 5, (2012): 207–220, 1–14 doi:10.1093/cjres/rss004, 210.

¹¹⁸ Denisa Titili, et. al. “Migration intentions in transition economies: A study of potential migration from Albania and its future impacts on the sending society,” in *Review of Socio-Economic Perspectives*, Vol.10 No.2 (2025), 58 – 69.

construction. The early-2000s regularization programs in both countries marked a turning point, allowing migrants to legalize their status. “This shift improved their psychological well-being and expanded access to somewhat better, though still lower-tier, employment opportunities.”¹¹⁹ Additionally, the demographic profile of those emigrating has also changed compared to the 1990s. Increasingly, academics, physicians, professionals, young people, and other well-educated individuals, who face limited employment prospects, dissatisfaction with salaries, poor working conditions, or insufficient opportunities for professional and personal development, choose to emigrate in search of better opportunities. According to the Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) survey carried out in 2005-2006, more than 50 percent of the lecturers and research workers in Albania emigrated from the country.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the gender composition of emigrants has become increasingly balanced. While women accounted for around 20 percent of total Albanian migrants in the early and mid-1990s,¹²¹ their share has reached 48.6 percent.¹²² The main migration channel for Albanian women continues to be family reunification, followed by migration for study purposes. Labour-migration through legal pathways remains relatively rare and generally involves professional or highly qualified women.

A considerable share of those who emigrate nowadays follow legal channels, whether for employment, education, or family reunification. However, irregular migration continues to exist. For individuals undertaking these dangerous journeys without passports or visas, the only viable pathway to obtaining legal status is often through asylum claims. As a result, some “politicise their identities, even when they are not, in reality, subject to persecution in their country of origin.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ King and Vullnetari, “A population on the move: migration and gender relations in Albania,” 212.

¹²⁰ IOM, UN Migration, *Migration in Albania: A Country Profile 2008*, (IOM, 2008), 39.

¹²¹ IOM, *Migration in Albania: A Country Profile 2008*, 17.

¹²² IOM, UN Migration, *Migration Data Platform for Evidence-Based Regional Development* (M-POWERD), Albania, <https://seeecadata.iom.int/msite/seeecadata/country/albania>.

¹²³ De Wenden, *Migration and International Relations*, 7.

They may, for example, invoke the threat of blood feuds, a phenomenon that, although still present in some isolated mountainous areas, is not a real risk in Albania, or claim discrimination on cultural grounds, such as belonging to the Roma/Egyptian communities, or assert persecution based on sexual orientation, by presenting themselves as members of the LGBTQ+ community.¹²⁴ Furthermore, some seasonal workers remain illegally in the host country after the expiry of their contracts, waiting for new seasonal opportunities, while others enter on visitor visas and then attempt to obtain permanent status, often spending years in immigration procedures or legal battles.

This extensive emigration has led to substantial population decline, the depopulation of rural areas, population ageing, losses in human capital, exacerbated labour shortages, and a significant brain drain. Official data from Institute of Statistics Albania (INSTAT) indicate that 2,256,346 Albanians live outside the territory of the Republic of Albania (with a female-to-male ratio of 48.6:51.4),¹²⁵ representing approximately 48 percent of all Albanian citizens. By comparison, according to the 2023 Population Census, the resident population of Albania stands at 2,461,785.¹²⁶

Kosovo has not published an official report on emigration since 2014, when the last comprehensive analysis, based on data from the 2011 Population Census, was released. According to that report, “the number of people who had emigrated from Kosovo was 380,826; in proportion to Kosovo’s resident population, 21.4 percent of the population was living outside Kosovo.”¹²⁷ Fragmented data in subsequent years indicate that emigration in Kosovo has continued at troubling

¹²⁴ See Federal Court Decisions, Case 1 - *Taho v. Canada* (Citizenship and Immigration) IMM-2424-19, November 13, 2019; Case 2 - *Bocerri v. Canada* (Citizenship and Immigration) IMM-4754-07, 2008-09-10; Case 3 - *Hasa v. Canada* (Citizenship and Immigration) IMM-3700-17, IMM-3700-17.

¹²⁵ Instituti i Statistikave, *Diaspora e Shqiperise ne shifra*. (INSTAT, 2025) 11.

¹²⁶ Instituti i Statistikave, *Censi i Popullsisë dhe Banesave në Shqipëri 2023*, (INSTAT, 2024), 7.

¹²⁷ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, *Kosovan Migration* (KAS, 2014), 18.

levels. Notably, the irregular departure of more than 100,000 individuals between late 2014 and early 2015 became a matter of serious concern for Kosovo's authorities and even more so for European Union member states,¹²⁸ which experienced the impact of this sudden migration flow. According to the 2024 Census, which included a systematic registration of the diaspora. 37,451 people out of a population of 1,614,003 emigrated during 2024 alone,¹²⁹ underscoring the persistent and significant scale of outward migration.

Although data on Albanian emigration from North Macedonia is unavailable due to the absence of ethnicity-based records, overall emigration from the country remains high. According to official figures, 693,896 emigrants originate from North Macedonia, out of a total population of 2,083,380, meaning that 33.3% of the country's population lives abroad. Of these emigrants, 51.6% are male and 48.4% are female.¹³⁰ These numbers strongly suggest that a significant share of emigrants from North Macedonia are ethnic Albanians.

The studies show that the Albanian diaspora has generally shown a strong capacity to adapt to host societies while maintaining meaningful connections to its cultural roots. In many contexts, Albanians rely initially on family and community networks, which provide practical and emotional support and help ease early integration. Over time, they tend to integrate through employment, education, entrepreneurship, and participation in local institutions, often displaying resilience in navigating language barriers, labor market challenges, and unfamiliar social norms. Interactions with native populations range from cooperative workplace relations to broader social engagement,

¹²⁸ Hivzi Islami, "Push-Pull Faktorët në Migrimet e Jashtme - Qasjet Teorike Rasti i Kosovës," in *Studime Shoqërore*, 4 (2017): 43.

¹²⁹ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, *Estimation Population of Kosovo in 2024* (KAS, 2025), 10.

¹³⁰ IOM, UN Immigration, *Migration Data Platform for Evidence-Based Regional Development* (M-POWERD), North Macedonia, <https://seeecadata.iom.int/msite/seeecadata/country/north-macedonia>.

contributing to a gradual building of trust, intercultural exchange, and mutual adaptation.¹³¹ At the same time, Albanian communities usually maintain close ties with one another cultivating a shared sense of identity through cultural associations, religious institutions, social events, and digital communication.

These patterns are the same among emigrants from Albania, Kosovo, and ethnic Albanian of North Macedonia. They perceive and treat one another as part of a single community, regardless of their country of origin; they speak Albanian with each other, celebrate national holidays together, and share the same cultural traditions and customs. “The Kosovo Albanian diaspora, for now, feel and act simply as Albanians in terms of their ethnicity and nationality,”¹³² for this reason, both institutional and academic terminology commonly refers to a single Albanian diaspora when discussing immigrants from Albania, Kosovo, or ethnic Albanians from North Macedonia.

The emotional attachment to the homeland remains strong among Albanian emigrants, expressed through continued involvement in the form of remittances, regular visits, and sustained interest in developments in Albania / Kosovo. Albanian society is highly mobile not only in terms of outward migration but also through return visits and constant transnational contact; people maintain close ties by travelling back and forth, calling relatives, sending or bringing goods, and providing financial support, thus effectively minimizing geographical distance. Albanian migration constitutes one of the largest migratory flows in Europe relative to the size of the population. Survey data from 2005 indicate that 89 percent of Albanian migrants in European countries return to Albania at least once or twice a year, while nearly 20 percent return more than

¹³¹ Carletto, Davis, and Stampini, *Familiar faces, familiar places: the role of family networks and previous experience for Albanian migrants*; Vathi, *Migrating and Settling in a Mobile World Albanian Migrants and Their Children in Europe*; Hoti and Huber, *German Albanian Intercultural communication and interaction in the workplace*.

¹³² Lumniye Kadriu, “Kosovo Albanian diaspora in the frame of diaspora definitions and transnationalism,” in *Studia Ethnologica Pragensia* 2 (2019): 56 – 72 / 66.

five times per year.¹³³ Similarly, the work of cultural anthropologist Lumnie Kadriu highlights the strength of these transnational bonds, showing how Albanian emigrants consistently choose the homeland as their preferred holiday destination and attributing to this annual return “home” affective, economic patriotic, normative, relational, and material purposes:

1. For diasporians summertime holidays are mainly time to visit home;
2. The choice of certain beaches [for holidays] because of ideological motives - they were chosen because they are considered Albanian thus for patriotic motives to contribute economically to the motherland, and to reify inter generational cultural experiences and identities from there;
3. The reinforcement of traditional, local, regional and national values while on holiday;
4. The creation of new relationships and social networks while on holidays, including new marriages with people from the homeland or originating from there;
5. The possession or investment in the building of second homes in the homeland while on holiday.¹³⁴

Being aware that almost half of Albanians live outside the homeland, both the governments of Albania and Kosovo have developed comprehensive diaspora cooperation strategies aimed at strengthening ties with Albanian communities abroad and mobilizing their potential. These strategies pursue a dual objective. On one hand, they seek to reverse or mitigate brain drain by promoting *brain gain* and *brain circulation*, on the other hand, these policies prioritize supporting Albanians abroad.

Key Albanian state initiatives include the *National Diaspora Strategy* (2018–2024 and updated 2021–2025) which sets the overall policy to engage the diaspora for development; it

¹³³ Kazer, *Patriarchy after patriarchy*, 239.

¹³⁴ Lumnie Kadriu, “Kosovo Albanian diaspora in the frame of diaspora definitions and transnationalism,” in *Studia Ethnologica Pragensia*, 2 (2019): 56 – 72, 69.

frames cooperation instruments across ministries and commits the state to a durable partnership with Albanians abroad. The *National Agency for Diaspora* is the government's technical arm that coordinates implementation and supports programs that connect expertise and investment from abroad back to Albania.¹³⁵ Programs such as READ (Research Expertise from the Academic Diaspora) facilitate connections between Albanian scholars abroad and universities in Albania, while platforms like GERMIN promote diaspora networking, civic participation, and homeland engagement. A signature platform has been the Diaspora Summit, held three times so far (2016, 2019, and 2023) These summits gather senior leaders from Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro, alongside hundreds of diaspora participants from Europe and overseas and has been focused on remittances/finance, institutions economy, health, culture, education, and innovation.

Similarly, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora in Kosovo has, since 2022, promoted and implemented the Program for Citizen Diplomacy, an initiative designed to connect young professionals from the diaspora with Kosovo. The program aims to ensure that “young people born and raised abroad gain direct exposure to life in Kosovo and become acquainted with the professional opportunities the country can offer,”¹³⁶ while at the same time inspiring them to contribute actively to Kosovo's political, economic, social, and cultural development.

On the other hand, these policies aim to support Albanians abroad, helping them preserve their cultural identity, language, and heritage through Albanian-language schools, cultural centers, and educational networks, including the Council of Albanian Teachers in Diaspora.¹³⁷ The

¹³⁵ Ministri i shtetit për Diasporën, *Strategjia Kombëtare për Diasporën dhe Plani i Veprimit*, 2021–2025, <https://akd.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Projekt-Strategjia-Kombetare-e-Diaspores-2021-2025.pdf>.

¹³⁶ MPJD shpalos programe të rëndësishme për mërgatën, Karvani i Diasporës 2022 dhe Programi për Diplomaci Qytetare, 26.07.2022, <https://mfa-ks.net/lajmet/mpjd-shpalos-programe-te-rendesishme-per-mergaten-karvani-i-diaspores-2022-dhe-programi-per-diplomaci-qytetare/>

¹³⁷ For more information, visit: <https://kkad.al/keshilli-koordinues-i-arsimtareve-ne-diaspore-kkad-e/>.

Publishing Center for the Diaspora¹³⁸ develops and distributes Albanian-language textbooks and cultural materials, supports the Council of Teachers in Diaspora, and regularly ships free textbook packages to dozens of countries.

The strategies' purpose is to enhance consular services, expand cultural diplomacy, and improve mechanisms for political participation, including the diaspora voting. Kosovo has long enabled out-of-country voting (by mail and, increasingly, via missions abroad), while Albania amended its Electoral Code in July 2024 to operationalize external voting and implemented diaspora voting for the first time in the May 11, 2025, parliamentary elections (postal ballots with prior e-registration).

Although, these initiatives are considered by many as “more decorative than purposeful [...] where folklorism colors the outward form while the substance remains amorphous,”¹³⁹ they demonstrate a growing recognition that the diaspora is not only a demographic extension of the nation but also a vital partner in economic development, public diplomacy, national identity preservation, and international visibility of Albania and Kosovo.

The following section shifts from the broader overview to a concentrated examination of Albanian emigration to Canada.

Albanian Migration to Canada: Patterns and Pathways

Albania and Canada established diplomatic relations on October 22, 1987, and since then, the two countries maintained a cordial relationship characterized by cooperation in various areas of mutual interest. Until 1992, the Embassy of Canada in Belgrade also covered Albania.

¹³⁸ For more information, visit: <https://qbd.gov.al/>.

¹³⁹ Petrit Kuçana, “Diaspora si spektatore,” *The Albanian*, April 21, 2021, <https://gazetashqiptare.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/25.pdf>; “Samiti i Diasporës/ Hasani: Show mediatik i Ramës”, *MCN tv*, April 2, 2026, <https://www.mcntv.al/lajme/kryesore/70413902-54dc-4795-ab36-e2d8eec513fd>

Subsequently, from 1992 to 1999, this jurisdiction was transferred to the Embassy of Canada in Budapest, Hungary. Since 1999 and onward, Canada has been represented in Albania through its ambassador based in Rome, Italy, while an honorary consulate in Tirana assists with Canadian interests in the country. Albania initially managed its bilateral relations with Canada through its mission to the United Nations in New York, until April 2001, when the Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Ottawa was opened for the first time. Overall, “the relations between the two countries are very positive and are characterized by a longstanding and consolidated friendship,”¹⁴⁰ as stated on the official website of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania.

Although geographically far from each other, Canada has been a strong supporter of Albania's efforts to establish democracy and strengthen its economy and has also provided development assistance focusing on aspects of governance, economic growth and social development. Through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, Canada supports projects in Albania to promote Canadian priorities relating to the rule of law, good governance, diversity, disabilities and women’s economic empowerment.¹⁴¹ Canada has been supportive of Albania's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Albania and Canada have signed several agreements and memoranda of understanding covering a range of areas, including trade, investment, education, and security. They have worked together, as members of the United Nations and NATO, to promote international peace, security, human rights, and sustainable development. Albania alongside Canada and other countries has actively participated in UN peacekeeping missions and operations in countries such as Afghanistan, Kosovo and the Aegean Sea Lebanon, Mali, and the Central African Republic.

¹⁴⁰ The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, *Newsroom, Bilateral relations between Albania and Canada*, 22 August 2024, <https://punetejashtme.gov.al/en/newsroom/marredheniet-shqiperi-kanada/>.

¹⁴¹ Government of Canada, *Canada Albania relations*, Date modified: 2024-06-19, <https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/albania-albanie/relations.aspx?lang=eng>.

The most significant cooperation in this aspect is NATO's intervention in Kosovo, where Canada played an important role. Canada's role in the Kosovo War is a decisive moment in the transformation of Canadian foreign policy from a traditional peacekeeping posture toward a more assertive model of humanitarian intervention. Michael Manulak treats Canada's decision to join Operation Allied Force as a "clear and controversial point" of policy change: Ottawa had moved beyond diplomatic pressure and sanctions to support coercive force against a sovereign state whose conduct in Kosovo was increasingly associated with repression, displacement, and ethnic cleansing.¹⁴² The dominant public justification for Canadian participation was humanitarian rather than narrowly strategic. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien framed Canada's decision in terms of "our values as Canadians, our national interest in a stable and secure Europe and our obligations as a founding member of NATO."¹⁴³ Kim Richard Nossal and Stéphane Roussel describe Canada as the "happy follower" in the Kosovo conflict: not simply dragged into war by alliance politics, but willing to participate because Ottawa regarded the intervention as normatively justified. They argue that Canadian officials believed in the "essential rightness of the use of force" in these circumstances, while Lloyd Axworthy made the government's reasoning unmistakable when he declared that "Humanitarian considerations [...] are the principal motive for our action."¹⁴⁴

Public opinion and the media strongly supported this decision of the Canadian government. "Canadians went to war in Kosovo, for a third time in Europe in this century, to save countless lives, to affirm universal human rights, to combat monstrous crimes. It is an old, honourable

¹⁴² Michael W. Manulak, *Canada and the Kosovo Crisis: An Agenda for Intervention* (Queen's University Centre for International Relations, 2011), 1.

¹⁴³ Cit. by Kim Richard Nossal and Stéphane Roussel, "Canada and the Kosovo War: The Happy Follower," in *Alliance Politics, Kosovo, and NATO's War: Allied Force or Forced Allies*, ed. Pierre Martin and Mark R. Brawley (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 181–199. 184.

¹⁴⁴ Cit. by Nossal and Roussel, "Canada and the Kosovo War: The Happy Follower," 195.

story,”¹⁴⁵ wrote the *Toronto Star*. Likewise, a public opinion poll found that seven in ten Canadians supported the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s air strikes¹⁴⁶ aimed at impeding Belgrade’s military campaign against unarmed Kosovar civilians.

Canada’s direct military contribution took the form of Operation Echo, the Canadian component of the NATO air campaign. The stated Canadian objectives, as articulated by Defence Minister Art Eggleton, linked the military campaign to wider political ends: ending violence in Kosovo, securing the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces, enabling the safe return of refugees, stationing an international military presence, and establishing a political framework for Kosovo’s governance.¹⁴⁷ Canada’s contribution, however, was not confined to airstrike campaign, Operation Parasol represented its humanitarian counterpart.

Canada offered temporary sanctuary to over 5,000 Kosovars under the emergency evacuation scheme, while another approximately 2,000 - 2,300 arrived through family reunification; in total, 7,251 Kosovars came to Canada, and about 4,800 remained. The government established a fast-track process for two groups of Kosovar refugees in Albania and Macedonia: those who had relatives in Canada, and a smaller group who had “special needs” and were referred by the UNHCR. In May 1999, the government issued an appeal for sponsors and within a few weeks, about 1,000 groups had responded to the government’s call for sponsors.¹⁴⁸ The government provided 24 months of income support for refugees and the option of being matched with a sponsor.

¹⁴⁵ “War in Kosovo was morally right” *The Toronto star*, June 11, 1999, A26.

¹⁴⁶ Editorial, “Parliament must vote before sending troops,” *The Toronto star*, April 13, 1999, A18.

¹⁴⁷ Bob Bergen, *Scattering Chaff: Canadian Air Power and Censorship during the Kosovo War* (University of Calgary Press, 2019).

¹⁴⁸ Rachel McNallya, “Equally Public and Private Refugee Resettlement: The Historical Development of Canada’s Joint Assistance Sponsorship Program,” in *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees*, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2023): 1–18 <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40941>.

Since April 1978, the Canadian Immigration Act formally recognized humanitarian considerations as a basis for admission in the country, marking a shift toward welcoming a significant number of refugees annually, rather than limiting such admissions to exceptional global crises. The Act outlined specific policy goals, including “fulfilling Canada’s international legal obligations with respect to refugees and upholding its humanitarian tradition with respect to the displaced and the persecuted.”¹⁴⁹ Since then, Canada had welcomed the refugees from southeast Asia in ’78 - 81; other refugees arrived from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala during 1982 to 1993. After the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989, Canada admitted 8,000 Chinese students and migrants as refugees. During the protracted civil war in their country, 20,000 Somalis were admitted in 1990 to 1997, meantime, approximately 20,000 Bosnians settled in Canada in the 1990s. The number of people making claims for refugee protection at Canadian borders and ‘inland’ rose dramatically, reaching nearly 40,000 in the early 1990s.¹⁵⁰ In 1986 Canada was awarded the Fridtjof Nansen Medal by the UNHCR - the first time a nation was the recipient – in “recognition of [its] major and sustained contribution to the cause of refugees.”¹⁵¹

The 2024 *CIHS Bulletin* on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Operation Parasol stresses that “the success of this operation rested on the close collaboration” of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Red Cross, businesses, community organizations, individuals across Canada, the International Organization for Migration, and UNHCR.¹⁵² Jan Raska’s overview further emphasizes the lead role of Canadian immigration authorities, the transport of evacuees from the region, initial accommodation at Canadian Forces

¹⁴⁹ Vineberg, R. *Continuity in Canadian Immigration Policy 1947 to Present: Taking a Fresh Look at Mackenzie King’s 1947 Immigration Policy Statement*, 213.

¹⁵⁰ The Canadian Historical Association, *Refugees in Canada. A Brief History*, Editor: Marlene Epp, Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada Series, No.35, 2017.

¹⁵¹ The Canadian Historical Association, *Refugees in Canada. A Brief History*, 21.

¹⁵² Gerry Maffre, “Operation Parasol—25th Anniversary 1999–2024,” in *CIHS Bulletin* 108 (May 2024).

bases, logistical support, private sponsorship arrangements for those who stayed, and repatriation arrangements for those who returned.¹⁵³ The reception of Kosovar refugees was structured as a rapid humanitarian mobilization that combined state capacity, military logistics, civil-society participation, and local volunteerism. At the reception bases, refugees were not merely admitted; they were medically screened, housed, documented, clothed, and socially supported through an improvised but extensive infrastructure of care.

This welcome extended beyond bureaucratic processing into forms of everyday inclusion: children received donated bicycles, refugees encountered local schools and public visitors, a mosque was organized on base, food-service arrangements were secured, and diasporic and immigrant communities, most memorably the Vietnamese Association of Toronto - held fundraising initiatives “as a show of appreciation” for the support once extended to them.¹⁵⁴ Drawing from the *Toronto Star*’s reporting, Canadian citizens demonstrated remarkable compassion and solidarity; communities across the country quickly donating food, clothing, hygiene supplies, and funds, and filling local aid centers with essential goods. Charitable and faith-based organizations, along with countless volunteers, worked tirelessly to collect, sort, and deliver assistance,¹⁵⁵ reflecting a nationwide desire to help families fleeing violence.

From the perspective of the refugees themselves, what stood out most was the unexpected level of generosity demonstrated by Canadian institutions and the Canadian public. As the *Toronto Star* reported, one refugee arriving at CFB Trenton stated, “After more than five weeks, (it’s) the first time we are treated like human beings.”¹⁵⁶ Another article from the same newspaper cited

¹⁵³ Jan Raska, “A Pier 21 Overview of the Evacuation,” in *CIHS Bulletin* 108 (May 2024).

¹⁵⁴ Crowther, “I Was the Mayor of Kosovo Town.” In *Operation Parasol—25th Anniversary 1999–2024*, *CIHS Bulletin* 108 (May 2024).

¹⁵⁵ “Kosovo: the refugee” rubric, *The Toronto star*, April 9, 1999, A15.

¹⁵⁶ Valeria Lawton, “First time we are treated like human beings”, *The Toronto star*, May 6, 1999, A7.

refugees expressing their appreciation, noting, “We’re grateful and thankful for your kindness and all you’ve done for us.”¹⁵⁷

Canada also remained actively engaged in Kosovo following the signing of the Kumanovo Agreement. Canada contributed both to the security architecture and to the wider post-conflict reconstruction environment. Nossal and Roussel note that the Coyote reconnaissance vehicles attached to KFOR “produced a favorable impression among the other allies.”¹⁵⁸ Canada’s contribution continued in the rehabilitation of Kosovo through community and humanitarian aid, support for democratic governance, human rights, mine action, war crimes investigation, and police training.

Following Kosovo’s declaration of independence on February 17, 2008, Canada was among the first states to recognize the Republic of Kosovo. Since then, bilateral relations between the two countries have steadily deepened. Canada’s contribution to the Republic of Kosovo has been multidimensional, political, economic, social, and beyond, while both the official and friendly relations between the two countries continue to advance, according to the Ministry for Diaspora and Foreign Affairs of Kosovo.¹⁵⁹ According to official data of the Government of Canada, Canada has provided more than CAD135 million in development assistance to Kosovo. Canada continues to offer small-scale grants through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, supporting local partners in projects aimed at strengthening the rule of law, promoting human rights, enhancing civic participation, and combating corruption.¹⁶⁰ Diplomatically, Canada covers Kosovo through its Embassy in Zagreb, where the Ambassador is accredited to Kosovo on a non-resident basis.

¹⁵⁷ Stan Josey, “Kosovars headed for Kingston camp,” *The Toronto star*, July 2, 1999, A10.

¹⁵⁸ Nossal and Roussel, “Canada and the Kosovo War: The Happy Follower”.

¹⁵⁹ Ambasada e Republikës së Kosovës, Otavë, Kanada, <https://ambasadat.net/Kanade/>

¹⁶⁰ Government of Canada, *Canada-Kosovo relations*, Date modified: 2022-09-28, [https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/kosovo/relations.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/kosovo/rerelations.aspx?lang=eng)

Consular matters are handled through the Visa Section of the Canadian mission in Vienna. On the Kosovar side, the Embassy of the Republic of Kosovo in Canada has operated as a diplomatic mission since September 2015, while consular representation is provided by the Consulate General in Toronto, established in early 2018. In addition to the embassy and consulate, the Republic of Kosovo also has two accredited honorary consuls in Canada, one serving the Greater Toronto Area and another representing Newfoundland and Labrador.

Even though the establishment of diplomatic relations dates to the late twentieth century, Canada has been a destination for Albanian immigrants for over 100 years. Historically and today, Canada is one of the major destinations for international immigrants. “Canada is viewed as ‘exceptional’ among immigrant-receiving nations, due to large numbers of ‘skilled immigrants’, its geographic isolation (which helps deter unauthorized immigration) and relatively high public support for immigration,”¹⁶¹ states Bloemraad.

Robert Austin in *The Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples* underscores the difficulty of tracing Albanian migration to Canada during the 20th century due to the pre-1981 census practice of subsuming Albanians under residual categories such as “Other” or the broader regional label “Balkans.” Even so, R. Austin following discernible patterns notes that the earliest Albanian arrivals in North America were largely Orthodox from the Korca region, initially concentrated around Boston at the close of the nineteenth century; oral testimony indicates a contemporaneous but very small movement into Canada, probably fewer than twenty-five individuals. Motivations included economic hardship, religious pressure, and avoidance of conscription in the Ottoman

¹⁶¹ Cit. by Bhuyan, R., Jeyapal, D., Ku, J. *et al. Branding ‘Canadian Experience’ in Immigration Policy: Nation Building in a Neoliberal Era*, 49.

military.¹⁶² Other sources mention Albanians as well in the early 20th century in Canada. Tony Ruprecht, in *Toronto's Many Faces*, asserts that “the first wave of Albanians to arrive in Canada was between 1904 and 1906. They settled in the Greater Toronto Area, working in factories and restaurants. Early cultural activities centered around *konaks* (boarding houses), religious organizations, and nationalist clubs. The second wave of immigrants came to Canada after the First World War. Among the new settlers was Sejdati Qerim, a prominent businessman who helped found the first mosque in Toronto.”¹⁶³ Likewise, while talking about early Muslim roots in Toronto, Heritage Toronto notes that “the initial waves of Muslim immigrants during the first half of the 1900s were from Albania and regions of Eastern Europe.”¹⁶⁴

R. Austin further argues that until the Second World War, migration to Canada remained limited, dominated by single men and sojourning breadwinners. In the post-war era, the establishment of communist regimes in Yugoslavia and Albania precipitated the flight of anti-communist groups, although the severe restrictions on legal emigration from Albania during the communist period sharply constrained exits. A notable Albanian immigrant of this wave is Hysen Prishtina, chairman of the National Assembly of the Legality Movement, who arrived in Canada in 1968 and became one of the early prominent Albanian political emigrants in the country.¹⁶⁵

In addition, the community also highlights the *Kulla* and *Bleta* families, whose presence and contributions are noted as significant within the Albanian-Canadian community. Karafil Bleta

¹⁶² Robert Austin, “Albanians,” in *The Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*, Paul Robert Magocsi editor, (University of Toronto Press, 1999), 180.

¹⁶³ Tony Ruprecht, *Toronto's many faces*, (Dundurn Press, 2011), 22.

¹⁶⁴ Heritage Toronto, *Fatih Mosque, Early Muslim Roots in Toronto*, <https://www.heritagetoronto.org/explore/big-stories-in-little-india-map-tour/fatih-mosque/#:~:text=A%20Congregation%20Divided,Foundation%20of%20Toronto%2C%20beginning%20operations.>

¹⁶⁵ Austin, “Albanians,” 181.

founded several companies in Toronto, including *Floriri Village Investments Inc.*, *Niazi Holdings Inc.*, and the *Korce Group*, focused on apartment building, real estate investments, and property management in Toronto.¹⁶⁶ While *the Pathway of Fame* Peterborough, writes about *Kulla* family members:

Jim, Mike and Eddie Kulla fled Communist Albania at the height of the Cold War. They faced grave physical danger, both to themselves and family members left behind, to seek freedom in a new land. The brothers settled in Peterborough, determined to explore the fullness of their potential. They worked hard to establish themselves as good corporate citizens and enthusiastic and caring members of the community. Many longtime Peterborough residents and visitors have fond memories of the Miss Diana Restaurant in Market Plaza, the Miss Diana Motor Hotel on Lansdowne and, more recently, Lakeside Dining in Lakefield.¹⁶⁷

By the late twentieth century, both Canada and the United States registered an increase in Albanians seeking refugee status, including those originating from Yugoslavia. After the collapse of communist rule in Albania, many asylum-claims no longer met the threshold of political persecution, leading to deportations. Census figures track this gradual demographic emergence: in 1986, 1,435 individuals reported Albanian ancestry (875 single-origin); by 1991, totals nearly doubled to 2,565, with 1,550 single-origin, and 420 reporting Albania as country of origin. The population was disproportionately concentrated in Ontario, with smaller communities in Quebec, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Alberta; metropolitan data identified clustered communities in Toronto, Mississauga, Calgary, Edmonton, Hamilton, Kitchener, and London, with the largest concentration in the Toronto metropolitan area, especially Mississauga.¹⁶⁸

Albanian emigrants after 1990 largely followed the same patterns and tended to settle in the same regions and cities. Albanian immigrants tend to choose their place of residence based on

¹⁶⁶ Albanian Canadian Business Network, Facebook.

¹⁶⁷ Gordon Gibb, *The Kulla Brothers*, May 21, 2020, <https://ptbopathwayoffame.ca/inductee/the-kulla-brothers/>

¹⁶⁸ Austin, "Albanians," 181.

a combination of social ties, economic opportunities, and family circumstances. They are particularly drawn to areas with pre-existing Albanian communities, as these offer emotional support, cultural familiarity, and practical assistance with integration. Economic prospects similarly guide settlement, with immigrants favouring provinces with stronger labour markets and long-term stability. Geographic accessibility to Albania plays a secondary role, as some migrants prefer regions with more convenient travel connections. Family composition influences mobility as well: single immigrants are generally more willing to move to less familiar regions, whereas parents, especially those with young children, tend to remain close to established Albanian networks where social support and community resources are accessible.¹⁶⁹

In the subsequent years, the number of Albanians choosing Canada as a destination for emigration increased steadily. Referring to Canadian immigration consulting firms, Tony Ruprecht states that following the political and economic crises in Albania and the wider Balkan region, approximately 1,000 Albanians per year migrated to Canada after 1997,¹⁷⁰ forming part of the broader post-communist migration wave. Moreover, in 1999, an additional 7,000 Kosovo Albanians were brought to Canada through the Operation Parasol, as explained earlier in this section.

According to Statistics Canada, there are 41,620 Albanians residing in Canada, including 21,050 men and 20,570 women.¹⁷¹ 70.8 percent of them live in Ontario, followed by Quebec (11.1%) and Alberta (7.76%). Provinces with fewer ethnic Albanians are: Northwest Territories

¹⁶⁹ Leogena Zhaka and Endrit Xhina, “A Geospatial Agent-Based Model of the Spatial Dispersal of Albanian Immigrant Population in Canada”.

¹⁷⁰ Ruprecht, *Toronto’s may faces*, 22.

¹⁷¹ Government of Canada, “Ethnic or cultural origin for the population in private households,” in *2021 Census of Population*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&DGUIDList=2021A000011124&GENDERList=1,2,3&STATISTICList=1,4&HEADERList=0&SearchText=Canada>

(0.012 %) and no ethnic Albanians are reported in Nunavut.¹⁷² The actual number of Canadians of Albanian origin is estimated to be higher, argues Austin, largely because many second- and third-generation individuals may not report their ethnic background in census surveys. This undercount is further exacerbated by the confusion in Canadian census instruments between country of origin and ethnic identity, which often leads respondents, particularly those Albanian whose families migrated from Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy, or Turkey, to identify by country of birth rather than Albanian ethnicity.¹⁷³

While the absolute number is not large, Canada is the fifth most preferred emigration destination for Albanians¹⁷⁴ and its share of the global Albanian emigrant population has doubled since the mid-1990s. Additionally, the Albanian community in Canada is among the most highly educated in the diaspora, with 70.4 percent holding university degrees,¹⁷⁵ making Canada a key case in discussions of Albanian *brain drain* and *brain waste*. Public and institutional recognition of the Albanian community in Canada further affirms that, although numerically small, it is a well-established and civically engaged diaspora. In Ontario, Bill 36 (2016) proclaimed the month of November as *Albanian Heritage Month*. The Act states that,

by proclaiming the month of November as Albanian Heritage Month, the Province of Ontario recognizes the meaningful contributions immigrants have made in building Ontario's communities and the social, economic, political and cultural achievements of Albanian-Canadians throughout the province. Albanian Heritage Month is an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate future generations about Ontario's rich history.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Amarildo Ceka, "Shqiptarët në Kanada, statistika dhe disa mendime nga aktivisti Amarildo Ceka," *AM Press*, February 7, 2023, <https://ampress.ca/shqiptaret-ne-kanada-statistika-dhe-disa-mendime-nga-aktivisti-amarildo-ceka/>

¹⁷³ Austin, "Albanians."

¹⁷⁴ Instituti i Statistikave, *Diaspora ne Shifra*, (INSTAT, 2020), 15.

¹⁷⁵ European Training Foundation, *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Albania*, (Report, 2021), 19.

¹⁷⁶ Legislative Assembly of Ontario, *Bill 36, 2016 An Act to proclaim the month of November as Albanian Heritage Month*, (Chapter 29 Statutes of Ontario, 2016).

This provincial precedent has since been echoed at other governmental levels. In 2025, a federal private member's bill (Bill C-209) was introduced in Parliament to establish Albanian Heritage Month across Canada, signaling growing national acknowledgment of the community's presence and contributions. Similarly, British Columbia proclaimed November 2025 as *Albanian Heritage Month*, extending official recognition to the western provinces as well. (see Appendix 2)

The above overview clearly demonstrates that Albanian emigration to Canada differs markedly from emigration to European countries in several important ways. While migration to Europe has traditionally been shaped by geographical proximity, economic necessity, and informal or irregular channels, migration to Canada has typically taken place through formal pathways such as refugee resettlement programs, including the large-scale resettlement of Kosovars in 1999, family reunification policies, and skilled worker programs. In contrast to the irregular migration experienced by many Albanians in Europe during the 1990s, where precarious employment, limited legal protections, and restricted mobility were common, Canada's immigration system has primarily admitted Albanians through mechanisms that valorize education, skills, and professional qualifications as shown by the studies¹⁷⁷ and the interviews for this study.

In comparing the Canadian experience to that of Albanian emigrants in Greece and Italy, the contrast becomes even more pronounced. Albanians in Southern European states have frequently confronted xenophobia, restrictive labour markets, and long delays in integration, which have shaped public perception and influenced everyday interactions.¹⁷⁸ In Canada, however, Albanians have cultivated strong educational aspirations, high levels of civic participation, and

¹⁷⁷ European Training Foundation, *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Albania*; Valbona Sulemani, *The Albanian diaspora: immigration and settlement experiences*, (Ryerson University, Theses and dissertations 1.1.2009, Paper 624).

¹⁷⁸ Barjaba, "Towards new scenarios of Albanian labor migration"; King, "Albania as a laboratory for the study of migration and development".

notable professional mobility, especially in urban centres. This more favourable environment is echoed in studies of Albanian integration, which show that Albanian immigrants in Canada tend to adapt quickly to the fast-paced lifestyle, express appreciation for the opportunities available to them, and highlight the fairness, supportiveness, and openness of Canadian society. Furthermore, Albanians in Canada, regardless of whether they arrived in earlier or more recent cohorts and irrespective of their country of origin, generally report positive immigration and settlement experiences, identifying Canada as a place where people of all backgrounds are welcomed and where dedicated effort allows individuals to achieve their aspirations.¹⁷⁹ Albanian immigrants are able to maintain transnational identities through engagement in community organizations, cultural events, and diaspora media, a dynamic supported by the Canadian context.

The Canadian state's institutional structure has been especially consequential in shaping Albanian immigrant experiences. Canada has cultivated the image of a welcoming nation for immigrants and is regularly lauded for its multicultural policies, which promote equality and tolerance for cultural diversity. Promoted since the 1960s, the consensual nexus between immigration, citizenship, and multiculturalism has played an important role in making Canada's immigration process more inclusive. The multicultural frame of government discourse helped to create a Canadian national identity that was clearly reflected in Canada's immigration agenda. Liberal discourse is based on an open and "borderless" post-national identity, where multiculturalism is integral to the nation.¹⁸⁰ Multiculturalism has become a cornerstone of Canada's national discourse and immigration policy, shaping both how the country defines itself and how it manages diversity. Officially adopted as state policy in 1971 and later enshrined in the

¹⁷⁹ Valbona Sulemani, *The Albanian diaspora: immigration and settlement experiences*.

¹⁸⁰ Magdalena Fiřtová, "Framing Canadian Immigration Discourse Under the Conservative Government (2006–2015): Breaking Path Dependence?" in *Migration & Integration* 22, (2021), 266, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-019-00734-4>

Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988, multiculturalism promotes the recognition and accommodation of cultural diversity as a central feature of Canadian identity. In this framework, immigrants are not required to assimilate into a dominant culture but are instead encouraged to maintain their heritage while participating fully in public life. Canada positions itself as a society not defined by a singular ethnicity or religion but by shared values of tolerance, equality, and democratic participation.

Canada's approach to immigrant settlement has involved a comprehensive institutional response, built on a collaborative model that engages both federal and provincial governments, alongside non-governmental and community-based organizations funded by the federal government. The Canadian state has long recognized that providing robust settlement supports - such as language training, employment counselling, housing assistance, information and orientation services, mental health and trauma support, legal aid and human rights advocacy, as well as youth and family programs - is essential for the successful integration of newcomers into society and the labour market. The institutionalization of settlement services beginning in the 1970s, most notably with the introduction of the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) and the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program in the early 1990s.

However, studies show that in recent decades immigrants, despite high levels of education, have earned lower incomes and have higher rates of unemployment than Canadian-born workers.¹⁸¹ There are many plausible reasons by which to explain these known socioeconomic

¹⁸¹ Ana Ferrer, et. al., *New Directions in Immigration Policy: Canada's Evolving Approach to the Selection of Economic Immigrants* (IZA DP No. 8682, 2014); Jeffrey G. Reitz and Rupa Banerjee, *Racial inequality, social cohesion, and policy issues in Canada* (IRPP, 2007); & Rupaleem Bhuyan. et al. "Branding 'Canadian Experience' in Immigration Policy: Nation Building in a Neoliberal Era," in *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 18(1) (2017): 47-62. Doi: 10.1007/s12134-015-0467-4.

discrepancies, such as the non-recognition of foreign credentials, lack of Canadian work experience, human capital depreciation due to employment in low-skilled jobs, language barriers, and employer uncertainty or bias regarding foreign qualifications.¹⁸² Immigrants experience difficulties during transition in the labour market holding jobs that do not reflect their level of training and education, and earning lower incomes. Many immigrants experience a profound emotional and professional dislocation because the lack of Canadian work experience is often interpreted by employers as a sign of inadequate adaptability or unfamiliarity with workplace norms, leaving newcomers to feel undervalued despite their qualifications and prior achievements, leading to feelings of frustration, loss of identity, and even marginalization. This perception forces many to take what they describe as a “step backwards,” accepting positions far below their skill level or outside their original profession. The financial and emotional costs of this adjustment can be significant.¹⁸³ This context should be taken into consideration when analyzing the Albanian community and when interpreting the experiences of the interviewed women.

Albanian Community in Canada: Between Integration and Identity Preservation

"There may not be as many Albanians in my riding as some other cultural groups [...] but they are just as important in everybody's eyes. Albanians are a part of our history and a part of the spirit of Canada and of my community. "¹⁸⁴

Wayne Gates, 2016

¹⁸² Bhuyan, *et al.* “Branding ‘Canadian Experience’ in Immigration Policy: Nation Building in a Neoliberal Era”; Herbert Grubel and Patrick Grady, *Immigration and the Canadian Welfare State 2011* (Fraser Institute, 2011).

¹⁸³ Claire Ellis and Anna Triandafyllidou, “Precarity, Opportunity, and Adaptation: Recently Arrived Immigrant and Refugee Experiences Navigating the Canadian Labour Market,” in *Immigrant and Asylum Seekers Labour Market Integration upon Arrival: Now Here Land* (IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, 2021).

¹⁸⁴ Wayne Gates, *Legislative Assembly of Ontario*, 24 March 2016, 8266, https://www.ola.org/sites/default/files/node-files/hansard/document/pdf/2016/2016-03/house-document-hansard-transcript-1-EN-24-MAR-2016_L153.pdf.

The Albanian community in Canada will be examined primarily through its own voices. To achieve this, Albanian-language media, newspapers, community associations webpages, public Facebook profiles and groups, as well as blogs and podcasts, will be analyzed to understand how the community lives, organizes its public life, collaborates internally, integrates into Canadian society, and preserves its ethnic identity and ties to the homeland. These materials were selected purposively based on their visibility, relevance, recurrence, and connection to major centres of Albanian settlement in Canada. They are treated not as direct reflections of everyday reality, but as forms of discourse, evidence of public activity, and indicators of community self-representation in the public sphere. Accordingly, they are used to illuminate institutional presence, community narratives, and visible forms of organization. Since such sources often privilege active organizations, successful initiatives, and publicly articulated identities, they are not assumed to be fully representative of the Albanian community in Canada as a whole. A reading of these public sources shows a community that is socially active, geographically dispersed, institutionally creative, and emotionally attached both to Canada and to Albanian national space, including Albania and Kosovo.

The public evidence leaves little doubt that the Greater Toronto Area is the principal hub of Albanian life in Canada. (see Appendix 2) Toronto and Mississauga appear repeatedly as the core spaces of associations, media production, business networking, religious life, and community celebration. Toronto hosts the Albanian Canadian Community Association, the Albanian Muslim Society of Toronto, Saint Mother Teresa Albanian Mission, Orthodox initiatives, *Pasqyra Shqiptare* television,¹⁸⁵ Albanian News newspaper, the Albanian Oda Podcast, AlbTv Canada,

¹⁸⁵ *Pasqyra Shqiptare TV* operates for 23 years within the OMNI Television network, which broadcasts multilingual and multicultural programming across Canada.

business networks, youth associations, book festivals, and large heritage celebrations. Ottawa, Kitchener, Waterloo, Hamilton, London and Windsor appear as significant and active centres of Albanian settlement in Ontario. Montréal and Laval form a second major pole. The Albanian Cultural Association of Montreal, the Albanian Association of Montreal, Albanian Montreal Press (AMPress), Albanian Association Kosova, the “*Nënë Tereza*” (“Mother Tereza”) Albanian school in Montréal, and the “*Dardania*” school in Laval all point to a substantial and organized Albanian presence in Québec. Montréal’s public activities place strong emphasis on cultural preservation, patriotic celebration, and the visibility of Albanian professionals and entrepreneurs.

Beyond these two principal centres, the Albanian community maintains several meaningful nodes in Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, and Vancouver. In Calgary and Edmonton, community life is manifested primarily through various association-based activities and through the local community-run Albanian heritage language school. The Albanian community in Calgary takes pride in the “*Foleja e Shqiponjave*” (“Eagles’ Nest”) Albanian School and its ten-year contribution to the promotion and preservation of the Albanian language, traditions, and cultural heritage.¹⁸⁶ In Halifax, the presence of an Albanian school and a locally maintained Albanian community association contributes to organized cultural life. In British Columbia, the Albanian Canadian Society for Social and Economic Progress, together with a range of professional networking events in Vancouver and Victoria, similarly reflects a structured and active community presence.

Albanian migrants in Canada are active across several overlapping economic fields. First, there is the world of small and medium-sized entrepreneurship, especially in practical service sectors. Evidence from participation in the *Albanian Canadian Business Expo 2025* held in

¹⁸⁶*Foleja e Shqiponjave - 10 vite përkushtim ndaj përcimit të Gjuhës e Kultures Shqipe, May 11, 2025*, [tps://www.albcanyyc.ca/post/foleja-e-shqiponjave-10-vite-përkushtim-ndaj-përcimit-të-gjuhës-e-kultures-shqipe](https://www.albcanyyc.ca/post/foleja-e-shqiponjave-10-vite-përkushtim-ndaj-përcimit-të-gjuhës-e-kultures-shqipe)

Toronto¹⁸⁷ indicates that Albanian-owned enterprises are concentrated predominantly in construction-related services. Community groups openly circulate and support Albanian-owned auto services, restaurants, home-care providers, beauty services, cleaning and maintenance companies, and other local businesses. Second, there is a visible layer of professional and semi-professional upward mobility. The community media outlets regularly profile Albanian real-estate professionals, lawyers, mortgage brokers, dentists, entrepreneurs, and various professionals working in finance, property management, law, and consulting.¹⁸⁸ Third, there is an increasingly explicit effort to build collective economic institutions, rather than relying solely on dispersed individual businesses. Organizations such as the Albanian Canadian Business Network, the Canadian Albanian Chamber of Commerce, and the Albanian Diaspora Business Chamber in Canada signal a shift from informal co-ethnic support networks toward more formalized economic structures.¹⁸⁹ Geographically, these business networks seem especially concentrated in the GTA, Montréal, and Vancouver facing professional circles, although local service businesses are spread wherever Albanian households have formed stable communities.

Another important dimension of community development is the gradual establishment of numerous Albanian organizations over the years. The Albanian Canadian Community Association, established in 1990, presents itself as a representative body for thousands of Albanian Canadians in the GTA and explicitly states that it aims to preserve culture, make the community's voice heard, and help Albanians integrate into Canadian life, irrespective of political affiliation or religious

¹⁸⁷ Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Canada, *Newsroom, The Albanian-Canadian Business Network Fair Held in Ontario*. 17 June 2025, <https://ambasadat.gov.al/canada/en/newsroom/ambasadorja-malo-merr-pjese-ne-panairin-e-rrjetit-te-bizneseve-shqiptaro-kanadeze-ne-ontario/>

¹⁸⁸ *Flas shqip.ca*. The Albanian-Canadian portal, <https://flasshqip.ca/bota-shqiptare>; *AMPRESS*, Albanian Montreal Press, <https://ampress.ca/>

¹⁸⁹ Albanian Canadian Business Network, Facebook page, June 21, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/albaniancanadianbusinessnetwork/>

belief.¹⁹⁰ “The Albanian Canadian Community Association is developing a greater awareness and pride amongst its members and within the entire Canadian community as to who Albanian Canadians are, where they came from and their aspirations,”¹⁹¹ - emphasized MPP Laura Albanese during the second reading of Bill 145, An Act to proclaim the month of November as Albanian Heritage Month.

Comparable language appears in other regions. The Albanian Canadian Association of Calgary describes the community as “vibrant,” “connected,” “successful,” and still “true to its heritage,” while also emphasizing harmonious integration into Canadian society.¹⁹² The Albanian Community in Ottawa defines its purpose through equality, access to opportunity, and full participation.¹⁹³ The Albanian Cultural Association of Montreal stresses preservation and development of Albanian culture, and fulfills its mission “through the cultivation of national values, culture, traditions, and the Albanian language, as well as through the provision of a wide range of services for different age groups within the Albanian community in Quebec.”¹⁹⁴ The Albanian Canadian Society for Social and Economic Progress in British Columbia, whose motto is “Empowering Our Community, Celebrating Our Heritage,”¹⁹⁵ frames its mission around several core pillars, including community empowerment and integration, cultural preservation and promotion, economic and professional development, advocacy and policy engagement, as well as education and youth involvement.

¹⁹⁰ Albanian-Canadian Community Association, *Basic Statute for Regulating the Activities of the Albanian-Canadian Community Association*, <https://albcan.ca/statuti-baze/#>

¹⁹¹ Legislative Assembly of Ontario, First Session, 41st Parliament, *Official Report of Debates* (Hansard), 24 March 2016, 8262.

¹⁹² Albanian Canadian Association of Calgary, <https://www.albcanyyc.ca/visit>

¹⁹³ Albanian Community in Ottawa, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/albcanorg>

¹⁹⁴ Albanian Cultural Association of Montreal, *Statuti i Shoqatës Kulturore Shqiptare ne Montreal*, <https://albculture.ca/index.php/antaresimi/>

¹⁹⁵ Albanian Canadian Society for Social and Economic Progress, <https://acsep.org/>

Albanian organizations in Canada tend to combine cultural nationalism, mutual aid, and multicultural citizenship. This associational life is sustained through a recurring calendar of events: Flag Day and Albania Independence Day celebrations, Kosovo independence commemorations, Canada Day messages, women's events, Albanian book festivals, concerts, summer picnics, youth gatherings, professional networking evenings, children's performances, patriotic parades, and religious holidays. These rituals function as ritualized sites of memory and belonging as well as informal institutions of cultural transmission. Community celebrations are not merely entertainment, but through songs, folk performance, Albanian-language speeches, children's recitations, and commemorative dinners, the community turns culture into a teachable practice; such events socialize the second-generation into an Albanian symbolic universe.

The Albanian community in Canada maintains a small but meaningful diasporic media sphere. Among its key platforms, *Pasqyra Shqiptare Tv*, broadcast on OMNI 1, describes itself as a mirror of community life in Canada and has done so for 23 years.¹⁹⁶ Its coverage ranges from women's events and mosque picnics to business initiatives and public recognition ceremonies. The newly created television station *AlbTV* Canada seeks to pursue a similar mission and to diversify and pluralize this media sector. *Albanian news* online and small-circulation print newspaper, and digital outlets, such as *Flasshqip.ca*, *Albanian Montreal Press*, and *Whoman*, further broaden this media ecosystem. Their content spans Albania, Kosovo, and wider diaspora culture, while also covering Canada-related topics including the economy, business, interviews, children, parenting, and public affairs.¹⁹⁷ This is a strong indicator that the Albanian-language press in Canada does not function only as homeland media abroad. It also mediates Canadian reality for Albanian

¹⁹⁶ Pasqyra shqiptare, <https://www.youtube.com/@PasqyraTv>

¹⁹⁷ Flasshqip.ca, <https://flasshqip.ca/>; Albania Montreal Press, <https://ampress.ca/>; Whoman magazine, <https://whoman.ca/>

readers: politics, economy, public safety, community profiles, migration concerns, and business visibility, serving as a vehicle of both integration and ethnic cohesion. The Albanian Oda Podcast introduces yet another format: long-form conversation, cultural reflection, and identity dialogue.¹⁹⁸ Presented as a space for honest discussions and cultural storytelling, it suggests a shift from traditional association-based discourse toward personality-driven, digitally networked forms of public conversation.

These media outlets do more than report news: they curate a community archive of success and portray the Albanian diaspora as a cohort advancing into fields of international expertise and leadership. Such professional publicity generates symbolic capital for the community, provides role models for younger generations, and strengthens the legitimacy of Albanian organizations in their engagement with Canadian institutions.

Robert Austin analyzes the evolution of the Albanian community across generations, emphasizing that,

first-generation Albanian immigrants to Canada have maintained a deep interest in their traditions and homeland politics and have struggled to ensure that their children follow in their footsteps. One aspect of their heritage, patriarchy, has been challenged by second and third-generation Albanian women, who have rejected the notion that a woman's place is in the home and have broadened their activities considerably through education and community work of various kinds.¹⁹⁹

That said, women-led associations, initiatives, and activities are essential and constitute a distinct sphere of community agency, mobilization, and identity reproduction. A notable case is the Kitchener Albanian Women's Forum (Forumi i Grave Kitchener), whose members regularly organize fundraising campaigns for families in need in Albania and Kosovo. Through the joint

¹⁹⁸ Albanian Oda Podcast, <https://www.youtube.com/@AlbanianOdaPodcast>

¹⁹⁹ Austin, "Albanians," 182.

engagement of the women of the forum, under the coordination of Nexhmije Recaj (who prefers not to be named publicly, as she views the initiative as a collaborative process without a single leader), the Forum has so far raised funds and built seven new homes for families in need in Kosovo and Albania.²⁰⁰ Similarly, such women-led fundraising resonates with patterns visible in other Albanian-Canadian, but with a distinctive emphasis on care duties and needs assessment at the micro level.

Furthermore, Albanian women in Canada have emerged as dynamic actors in cultural preservation, community leadership, artistic expression, and public advocacy. Through platforms such as *Whoman Canada Magazine*, or clubs and associations such as The Artiste Foundation, the Albanian Women's Book Club (in Toronto), Albanian women cultivate intellectual exchange and strengthen diasporic cultural life. Their activism extends into community-building and bringing together Albanian women and girls across Canadian provinces to promote artistic development, promote and celebrate women achievements,²⁰¹ amplify women's voices,²⁰² and address experiences of violence and displacement, particularly those linked to the 1999 Kosovo war.

The public Facebook pages and groups devoted to Albanian women in Canada stress support, information-sharing, mutual assistance, and networking among girls and women. Their posts often move away from ceremonial nationalism toward the practical life of settlement: finding trusted services, locating businesses, sharing events, and building gendered spaces of mutual

²⁰⁰ Forumi i Grave Kitchener, Facebook post, February 20, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18GmNXpbL6/>

²⁰¹ Blerina Ruka, "Kozeta Miliku: The Albanian Researcher Revolutionizing Early-Life Health," *Whoman*, July 6, 2025, <https://whoman.ca/kozeta-miliku-the-albanian-researcher-revolutionizing-early-life-health/>

²⁰² Hannah Martz, "Vasfije Krasniqi in "Vogue" magazine among 250 survivors of sexual violence worldwide," *Whoman*, July 8, 2025, <https://whoman.ca/vasfije-krasniqi-in-vogue-magazine-among-250-survivors-of-sexual-violence-worldwide/>

recognition.²⁰³ In these virtual spaces, everyday communication tend to revolve around small but persistent worries: finding a room or a first job, understanding local paperwork, keeping children linguistically anchored, or simply coping with loneliness. Such posts typically trigger quick, empathetic replies that offer step-by-step guidance, private follow-ups, and invitations to meet for coffee or to connect newcomers with local networks. In the emigrant context, these small actions often function as forms of micro-integration. Posts such as “*a ka ndonjë shqiptar në Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge?*” (“Is there any Albanian in ...?”) and the welcoming responses that follow, often accompanied by invitations to community spaces, help reduce isolation and build initial social ties. This is sociologically significant because communities are not reproduced solely through major institutions; they are also sustained through informal relations.

Youth activation is one of the strongest indicators that the Albanian community in Canada is transitioning from a first-generation migrant formation into a multi-generational diaspora. At the university level, Albanian Students’ Associations, such as those at York University, the University of Toronto, and the University of Waterloo (some currently active and others intermittently active), aim to celebrate and promote Albanian heritage, participate in community events, and represent Albanian youth. Through music, food, workshops, and networking activities, these associations work to build bridges both within the Albanian community and between Albanian students and the broader university environment.²⁰⁴ A further dimension of youth activation within the Albanian community in Canada is the emergence of institutionalized youth leadership, where educational achievement, professional networking, and cultural continuity are being deliberately linked. A particularly important example is the RH Scholarship, a Toronto-based non-profit organization,

²⁰³ Albanian women in Canada, Facebook group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3617434685241423/>; Shqiptaret ne Toronto, Facebook group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/753755483172449/>

²⁰⁴ Albanian Association at York, *Heritage, Community and Events*, March 27, 2026, <https://albaniansatyorku.ca/>

founded in 2013. Its mission is to provide financial support to students of Albanian origin (though not limited exclusively to them) and to connect academic excellence, leadership, community contribution, and youth empowerment.²⁰⁵ Alongside this educational model, Albanian Youth and NextGen Professionals,²⁰⁶ represent a more expansive form of youth organization, combining networking, mentorship, cultural belonging, and social participation.

Taken together, these initiatives show that Albanian youth mobilization in Canada is no longer confined to folkloric participation or ceremonial patriotism; it increasingly operates through the language of professionalization, peer mentoring, social entrepreneurship, and community-building across cities. The public visibility of these youth-led institutions signals an ongoing generational transition in communal leadership.

Passing into the second-generation, no issue is more central to identity preservation than the teaching of Albanian to children born or raised in Canada. As Marigona Morina's study *Albanian Heritage Language Learning in Canada: Understanding Language Maintenance and Identity Development among Second-Generation Immigrants* demonstrates, Albanian parents typically follow a policy of exposing their children to Albanian at home, encouraging active use of the language, and reinforcing it through extended family ties, particularly grandparents, as well as through frequent visits to the homeland. These practices are intended to support stronger linguistic competence and a deeper sense of cultural affiliation. However, second-generation Albanian children in Canada often find themselves navigating between two sets of expectations:

²⁰⁵ RH Scholarship, *Supporting Albanian-Canadians*, https://www.rhscholarship.org/?fbclid=IwY2xjawQmmWpleHRuA2FlbQlXMAbIcmIkETF4akxCclhsdW43TWk4YWV5c3J0YwZhcHBfaWQOMjIyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHgjEkKGYkYcKXgXXYXgk4v4d0FGuwTPiFBvHbBBhE2mcVORMFDJIL7LocPYh_aem_MNkM-3BBBoDSosHsj6xReSg

²⁰⁶ Blerina Ruka, "NextGen Professionals Conference 2025: Bridging Innovation and Opportunity in Toronto," *Whoman*, March 30, 2025, <https://whoman.ca/nextgen-professionals-conference-2025-bridging-innovation-and-opportunity-in-toronto/>

on one hand, their parents' aspirations for heritage preservation, and on the other, their own everyday realities shaped by hybrid cultural practices and the predominantly English- or French-speaking social environments in which they grow up. Furthermore, although parents express strong commitment to maintaining the heritage language and culture, they simultaneously worry about their children's academic progress and overall integration. As a result, they frequently tolerate, or even prioritize, the use of English or French due to educational considerations or perceived integration pressures. These patterns ultimately lead many second-generation Albanian children to speak limited Albanian or to understand it passively while rarely using it actively.²⁰⁷

For many second-generation children, Albanian has become primarily the language of their grandparents, not of everyday interaction even with their parents, since the latter also speak English. As one second-generation interviewee in the *Marigona* study put it, "I speak Albanian only to my grandparents..."²⁰⁸ This is not an isolated case. One of the women I interviewed for this study explained that her children speak English both with the parents and with each other, shifting to Albanian only in the presence of grandparents. She recalled a moment when her oldest child addressed the younger one in Albanian, and the younger responded surprised: "Why are you speaking Albanian? Grandpa is not here." Another widely observed pattern involves dual-language family conversations in which each participant speaks their preferred language, parents speaking Albanian and children responding in English, often sustaining such interactions for long periods. As one parent in Marigona study confirmed: "We speak to them in Albanian, and they answer us in English."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Marigona Morina, *Albanian Heritage Language Learning in Canada: Understanding Language Maintenance and Identity Development among Second-Generation Immigrants*, (dissertation, University of Calgary, 2025).

²⁰⁸ Morina, *Albanian Heritage Language Learning in Canada*, 103.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 100

It is evident, without structured schooling, family transmission alone is unlikely to sustain language over generations. Albanian community has been trying to keep Albanian language schools and traditions alive. They are one of the main places where parents, teachers, and community organizations converge. Their importance lies not only in teaching grammar or vocabulary, but in transmitting songs, national history, holidays, and a sense of shared belonging. The official diaspora education portal of the Albanian Diaspora Publishing Centre lists Albanian language heritage schools in Canada in Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Hamilton, Montréal, Vancouver, Laval, Ottawa, and Kitchener.²¹⁰ However these community-based schools require teachers, classrooms, textbooks, scheduling, volunteer time, parental motivation, and sometimes coordination with public spaces. Adriana Fishta Bejko, Chair of the School Board at the Albanian Language School in Calgary, raises several concerns regarding Albanian schools in the diaspora:

Albanian-language schools in the diaspora lack a unified scientific, didactic, and linguistic structure, largely because their activities have until now been based, undeniably, on patriotic but nevertheless amateur foundations, often characterized by significant elements of “folklorization” in teaching practices, curricula, textbooks, and related materials. The overall situation of Albanian-language instruction in the diaspora is highly uneven; in many cases, the teaching of Albanian is not a priority for parents. In several other cities, despite the efforts of local associations, schools have been forced to close due to low participation.²¹¹

The Albanian school in Calgary, “*Foleja e Shqipeve*,” is attended by approximately 30 students each academic year. However, as Adriana explains, this process is not straightforward. In my interview with her, she recounts that she personally contacts Albanian families and encourages

²¹⁰ Qendra e Botimeve për Diasporën, *Shkollat shqipe në diasporë*, <https://qbd.gov.al/kanada/>

²¹¹ Adriana Fishta Bejko, “Gjuha dhe identiteti kombëtar shqiptar në Kanada,” *AMPRESS*, January 4, 2021, <https://ampress.ca/gjuha-dhe-identiteti-kombetar-shqiptar-ne-kanada/>

them to register their children in the Albanian language school. “For me, *NO* is not an answer,”²¹² Adriana states.

The Albanian School in Halifax functions as an important community gathering space, fostering cohesion among Albanian families in the region. However, it faces the same challenges. In the interview with Mira Shehu, founder and a long-time director of the Albanian language school in Halifax, she explained to me that the school operated on a voluntary basis, supported entirely through funds raised by the community. Three class levels were established, and approximately 30 children were enrolled each year. The school held its activities at weekends in the facilities of a local church, as the rental costs were more affordable. She recalls an instance when one student remarked, “This is not a normal school.” “There were plans to create a dedicated center that would serve as the school’s permanent home, as well as a space for the association and for community recreational activities; however, such an initiative required substantial funding,” - Mira explains.²¹³ At the time of the interview, the school was no longer active, because there were no available teachers.

Another revealing illustration of the fragility of Albanian-language maintenance in Canada appears in public community appeals asking parents to enroll their children in Albanian language heritage schools. In one public Albanian community group in Halifax, members issued a direct appeal to parents:

“Thirrje për të gjithë prindërit shqiptarë!” Gjuha shqipe është identiteti ynë, trashëgimia jonë, dhe lidhja më e fortë me rrënjët tona. Fëmijët tanë që lindin dhe rriten larg atdheut kanë nevojë të mësojnë gjuhën, kulturën dhe historinë tonë për të ruajtur lidhjen me Shqipërinë dhe Kosovën. Regjistroni fëmijët tuaj në Shkollën

²¹² Interview with Adriana Fishta Bejko, July 11, 2025

²¹³ Interview with Mira Shehu, November 11, 2025

*Shqipe dhe ndihmoni ata të flasin, shkruajnë dhe të ndihen krenarë për gjuhën dhe kulturën e tyre.*²¹⁴

[“A call to all Albanian parents!” The Albanian language is our identity, our heritage, and our strongest connection to our roots. Our children, who are born and raised far from the homeland, need to learn our language, culture, and history to preserve their connection to Albania and Kosovo. Enroll your children in the Albanian School and help them speak, write, and feel proud of their language and culture.]

Other public community posts from Waterloo and Montreal express similar appeals. The ongoing struggle to secure viable enrolment in dispersed immigrant settings is also evident in the classes of Albanian as an International Language that have been hosted within, or alongside, Canadian school structures. Although such classes have operated in certain schools for periods, the available evidence, drawn from community webpages, or the interviews for this research, suggests a fragmented and inconsistent history. It can be said with certainty that in 2015, there were seven different elementary schools in Ontario within public school system that offered language classes where the children learned the Albanian language and study history and traditions.²¹⁵ It was not possible to determine with certainty whether any of these classes remain active today.

The everyday sociology of migration tends to follow a recognizable trajectory: as a community matures, its needs evolve beyond arrival, settlement, and employment toward concerns related to care, health, aging, and intergenerational coordination. Within the Albanian-Canadian context, publicly visible elder-centered institutions appear less developed than youth organizations; however, a particularly illustrative example of elder-focused community care is “Meshan Cini for Graceful Aging” in Toronto, a non-profit initiative founded to support Albanian

²¹⁴ Albanian-Canadian Association "Illyria" in Halifax, Canada, *Thirrje për të gjithë prindërit shqiptarë*, Facebook post, February 1, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/286188268805/posts/10161101402668806/>

²¹⁵ Legislative Assembly of Ontario, *Official Report of Debates*, 8262.

seniors through companionship, care, and intergenerational solidarity.²¹⁶ The foundation provides a culturally familiar environment in which participants can speak Albanian and remain socially connected, functioning as an important bridge against the risks of isolation in later life. “Meshan Cini for Graceful Aging” addresses not only the practical needs associated with aging, but also the compounded loneliness that arises from the dual experience of advanced age and migration. By fostering linguistic comfort, social dignity, and sustained intergenerational ties within the Albanian-Canadian community, the initiative demonstrates how emergent forms social care are beginning to respond to the demographic transformations of a maturing immigrant population.

Members of the Albanian community in Canada have actively embraced initiatives launched by the Albanian government to strengthen cooperation with the Albanian diaspora, contributing to projects such as READ and GERMIN. Adriana Fishta Bejko was elected by the Parliament of Albania in 2019 as Secretary of the Coordinating Council of the Diaspora and Ardian Radovicka a member of it. The current representative of Albanians in Canada on the Council is Angela Papparizo.²¹⁷

Fifteen members of the Albanian community in Canada have been awarded the title “Ambassador of the Albanian Nation,” an honor bestowed upon individuals who have distinguished themselves through outstanding contributions to Albania or the Albanian diaspora in fields such as humanitarian action, education, science, technology, culture, sports, or business. Among the recipients from Canada are Adriana Fishta Bejko, Mira Shehu, and Ruki Kondaj. Other representatives of the Albanian community in Canada who have received the title Ambassador of

²¹⁶ Meshan Cini for Graceful Aging, <https://www.meshanciniforgracefulaging.com/>.

²¹⁷ Her name appears on the Council’s official website. This situation is somewhat contradictory, as during the period of this research she returned to Albania to assume a public role and was promoted by the Albanian Prime Minister as a concrete outcome of the government’s “brain gain” campaign.

the Albanian Nation include Agustin Simoni, Genc Tirana, Julian Dyrmishi, Kastriot Dervishi, Konstandin Jani Ristani, Kristaq Turtulli, Lulzim Rrafshi, Nehat Kaloshi, Ramazan Këllezi, Shani Pnishi, Vangjush Ziko, and Zeqirja Rexhepi.²¹⁸

Ultimately, as demonstrated by their activity, Albanians in Canada generally imagine integration not as assimilation, but as dual belonging. Organizations repeatedly stress both heritage and civic participation. They remain strongly tied to Albania and Kosovo through culture, diplomacy, commemoration, and media attention. The relationship to Albania and Kosovo is mediated through language (nearly all activities, diaspora media outlets and Facebook community pages operate in Albanian), remembrance, state symbols, cultural performances, and professional exchange. Business pages speak of strengthening economic and trade relations. Media outlets profile Albanian success in Canada. Associations promote both patriotic belonging and Canadian civic participation. This is a rhetoric of multicultural incorporation. The result is a classic diasporic balance: the homeland remains emotionally central, but the community's everyday future is being built in Canada.

However, what becomes clear from a close analysis of the Albanian-Canadian public sphere is that, while the community displays energy, patriotism, talent, and achievement, there remains a persistent gap between high levels of activity and institutional consolidation. The Albanian community in Canada appears vibrant, visible, and emotionally cohesive, yet it remains only partially organized as a coordinated national structure. It is rich in events, associations, media initiatives, schools, religious spaces, and professional networks, but these often operate in parallel rather than as components of a stable, integrated system. Publicly, one can observe fragmentation

²¹⁸ Agjencia Kombetare e Diaspores, *Diaspora. Ambasador i kombit* (AKD, 2021) 22, <https://online.pubhtml5.com/fiit/ifmb/#p=2>

across cities and sectors, a strong reliance on volunteers, donors, and a small circle of highly committed individuals, as well as uneven levels of organizational maturity.

The result is a diaspora endowed with considerable symbolic capital but supported by a comparatively weaker common infrastructure for planning, service provision, intergenerational coordination, and long-term sustainability. In this sense, the Albanian community in Canada has already succeeded in becoming socially present and culturally expressive, yet it still faces the deeper historical task of becoming more structurally connected, institutionally stable, and strategically coordinated across regions, generations, and fields of activity.

CHAPTER III

MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES

Demographic Profile of the Participants

The demographic profile of the participants in this research reflects a diverse and multilayered Albanian-speaking diaspora in Canada. The women differ significantly in their migration histories, stages of arrival, legal pathways, and geographical dispersion. These variations provide a rich foundation for understanding their settlement and integration experiences.

Participants originate from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, with the majority coming from Albania. Some migrated directly from their home countries, while others followed multi-stage migration routes through the United States, Greece, or Italy before arriving in Canada. Those who experienced serial migration, all four of whom are from Albania, illustrate a common phenomenon among Albanians who initially migrated to neighbouring countries due to physical and geographical proximity and greater mobility opportunities. Often confronted with xenophobia and marginalization in these neighbouring societies, as well as with the absence of clear regulations and procedures for obtaining regular residence documents, many ultimately moved again to countries that offered greater economic and legal security.²¹⁹ These participants add significant value to the study by enabling a comparative understanding of migration experiences in Canada and elsewhere in Europe and North America.

²¹⁹ Petros Karatsareas and Rexhina Ndoci, “Tracing trajectories of vulnerability in the biographical narratives of Albanian onward migrants from Greece in the UK,” in *Language, Culture and Society*, 14 November 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1075/lcs.23022.kar>

The participants arrived in Canada at markedly different stages of life. Some entered the country as infants or young children, particularly those who arrived during the Kosovo war, while others migrated as young adults or mid-career professionals. A smaller number moved later in life after having already established professional and family lives. Most participants arrived in Canada with their families, reinforcing the understanding that Albanian migration to Canada is largely family-based. This mirrors the broader post-1990 migration trends from Albania, where emigration increasingly took the form of family migration and where women represented almost half of the migratory population.

Thus, the demographic profile includes first-generation emigrants, 1.5-generation migrants (born outside Canada but raised, educated, and socialized here), as well as second-generation individuals. The 1.5 and second-generation participants do not offer insight into the migration process itself; however, they contribute valuable perspectives on integration, identity, and belonging among Albanian emigrants. Their narratives make it possible to analyze intergenerational continuity, the preservation of identity and language, and the broader influence of both cultures in their upbringing.

The duration of residence ranges from recent settlers with fewer than five years in Canada to long-term residents with more than two decades of permanent settlement. Including women who arrived over a span of more than twenty years provides a wide range of experiences. Given the major and rapid changes in Canadian immigration practices during this period, as well as the political and economic transformations in Albania, the experiences of these women offer a rich and nuanced picture.

The participants entered Canada through diverse legal channels, including refugee admission, family sponsorship, skilled-worker programs, and international student streams. The

two participants who arrived through family sponsorship were sponsored by their husbands, who had migrated earlier as bachelors and later married Albanian women - another common phenomenon in Albania, where young men living abroad often choose spouses from the homeland due to shared mentalities, customs, and traditions.²²⁰ It is also noteworthy that among the remaining participants who arrived through other streams, half were the principal applicants in the immigration procedures, with their husbands and families joining them. Seven of the interview participants had already established their families at the time they emigrated to Canada, and they had between one and four children. Three of them had adolescent or young-adult children, while the others had younger children, mostly of school age. The remaining five women, who arrived in Canada as adults, formed their families after settling here.

Many long-term residents have naturalized as Canadian citizens, while others hold permanent residency or post-graduation work permits and remain in temporary status. These different entry categories shaped early settlement experiences and varying access to integration resources, highlighting the heterogeneity of the cohort. The women reside across several provinces, with notable concentrations in Ontario (Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo, Windsor, and Mississauga), reflecting the broader pattern of the Albanian community, 70% of which lives in Ontario, followed by women residing in Calgary (Alberta) and Halifax (Nova Scotia).

Among the women who migrated as adults and/or with prior work experience, all hold university degrees across a wide range of disciplines, including social sciences, education, agriculture, economics, business, history, and law. Their professional roles prior to migration included research positions, teaching at various educational levels, public-sector administrative

²²⁰ Russell King and Nicola Mai, *Out of Albania. From Crisis Migration to Social Inclusion in Italy* (Berghahn Books, 2008).

work, expertise within governmental institutions, and economic analysis. This demographic profile reinforces the observation that Albanian immigrants to Canada tend to have a high level of education.²²¹ It is also broadly representative of contemporary Albanian society, where in recent decades women have been employed primarily in public administration, healthcare, social services, agriculture, and production, and often work in family businesses or operate their own enterprises, such as dental clinics, notary offices, legal consultancy, hairdressing, tailoring, handicrafts, textiles, publishing, and retail. In university education, most students are women, who predominantly pursue fields such as teaching, health and welfare, and the social sciences. Women invest more than men in their academic and professional development, and the number of women pursuing master's and doctoral studies is higher than that of men.²²² This trend also characterizes Kosovo and North Macedonia.

After arriving in Canada, five of the women (considering only the first-generation participants) did not pursue further formal education, completing only short professional training programs. In contrast, seven women continued their education after migration. Among them, two completed college-level programs that were lower than the level of education they had attained in their home countries, while four others pursued graduate studies, master's or PhD programs, thereby advancing and expanding their academic qualifications in Canada. While another completed her education as an adult after migration and achieved professional advancement solely through her studies and training in Canada

At the time of the interviews, four women had advanced and strengthened their careers in Canada within the same professional fields in which they were trained in their home countries.

²²¹ European Training Foundation, *How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Albania*.

²²² Erjon Nexhipi and Adelina Nexhipi, "Gender policies in Albania from a European perspective," in *IACHSS*, 2022. <https://www.dpublication.com/proceeding/7th-iachss/#Table-of-Contents>

Another four participants had built entirely new careers in Canada, different from those they had pursued before migration. Two participants were employed in the same field as in their homeland, but in positions that represented a downward shift in status or level. One participant had no work experience in Canada. (see Appendix 1)

Taken together, these characteristics indicate a group that is educationally diverse, professionally experienced, and shaped by multiple migration regimes. Their distribution reflects both established Albanian-speaking communities and settlement patterns associated with education, employment opportunities, and family networks. Their demographic profile provides an essential foundation for analyzing their labour market integration, credential-recognition challenges, and the broader socio-economic dynamics examined in subsequent chapters.

Although the sample is qualitative and not intended to be representative, two limitations emerge when reflecting on the composition of the participant group: the absence of participants from British Columbia and Quebec, and the lack of representation from the Old Diaspora (pre-1990 Albanian migration). However, during the period of conducting interviews, I met a woman who had migrated from Kosovo to Canada as a young adult in the 1980s. Although not a formal interview participant, she shared aspects of her family's experience in conversation. She explained that as long as her parents were alive, the family maintained Albanian customs and traditions. After her marriage to a second-generation Albanian man, the couple lived with his parents, who also followed Albanian traditions with great devotion. Today, however, she was unsure how many of these traditions remained in her everyday life. She understood Albanian but no longer spoke it actively; as she explained, after her mother passed away at a relatively young

age, “I no longer had anyone to speak Albanian with.”²²³ Yet during my visit, she served traditional Albanian dishes, and Albanian music played on the radio. She and her husband had visited Albania several times and had traveled once to Kosovo. She ultimately chose not to participate in a recorded interview, explaining that it was difficult to recall her early years in Canada in detail, more than forty years had passed, and that many responsibilities at the time had been carried by her parents. “I couldn’t understand much back then,” she noted, suggesting that her perspective on that period remained incomplete. This encounter prompted me to reflect on the potential value and analytical relevance of including a woman who had migrated before 1990 in the study.

To better understand these women’s stories, and the ways in which their experiences were shaped by the gender norms of the society from which they come, I will briefly outline the gender norms that have historically characterized Albanian society. Albanian society has historically been shaped by a deeply rooted patriarchal mindset, where gender roles were strictly defined and women’s mobility, autonomy, and participation in public life were heavily constrained. Traditional Albanian society was organized around two core principles: the primacy of the family as a social institution and strongly patriarchal norms. These norms were expressed through patrilineal descent, where family identity passes through the male line, and patrilocal residence, meaning a woman joined her husband’s father’s household after marriage. In more moderated forms, and to different extents across the north and south, and between rural and urban contexts, these features continue to characterize Albanian society.

²²³ The interviews were conducted between December 2025 and February 2026. Instead of citing each quotation individually, the participant’s pseudonym is placed at the beginning of each quotation. Interview extracts are presented first in Albanian and then in English translation; all translations are my own. Where participants shifted between Albanian and English, quotations are reproduced as spoken, and only the Albanian segments are translated. Minor edits for readability do not alter meaning.

Although the communist period introduced formal equality and brought women into education and the workforce, traditional gender norms within the family remained largely unchanged. Yet, despite these advances, women continued to shoulder a heavy dual burden: they held full responsibility for domestic and childcare duties at home, while also being expected to work just as much as men in the public sphere.²²⁴ After the 1990s, the collapse of state structures, economic insecurity, and the resurgence of conservative values further reinforced women's vulnerability, pushing many back into the private sphere and exposing them to limited economic opportunities. The collapse of the communist regime led to the disintegration of support systems like kindergartens and day-care centers that had been established to facilitate women's roles in the workforce, therefore, many women found themselves in a dilemma between raising children or pursuing a career because of time inconveniences, lack of social services and obstacles caused by traditional gender stereotypes and society's masculine mindset.

In response to these long-standing challenges, Albania has developed an extensive legal and policy framework aligned with European and international standards, recognizing gender equality as a fundamental democratic principle. Over the past three decades, successive governments have adopted comprehensive legislation on gender equality, anti-discrimination, domestic violence, reproductive rights, and equal political representation, accompanied by national strategies aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment, social inclusion, and participation in decision-making. Gender quotas in parliament, government structures, and local councils have significantly improved women's visibility in public institutions.

Despite notable progress, the implementation of gender policies in Albania remains inconsistent. Structural barriers, such as limited access to social services, weak coordination

²²⁴ Russell King and Julie Vullnetari, "A population on the move: Migration and gender relations in Albania."

among institutions, and the persistence of entrenched patriarchal norms, continue to impede the realization of substantive gender equality. These challenges manifest in various ways: women continue to bear the primary responsibility for child-rearing and domestic work; they face limited time available for entrepreneurial activities, insufficient access to information, reduced professional experience, weaker social networks, and constrained financial resources.²²⁵ Combined, these factors diminish women's ability to acquire managerial and business practices.

Drawing these elements together, these women came from small countries (Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia) marked by turbulent historical development, the legacies of conflict, economic hardship, and political instability, societies experiencing an identity crisis and states still striving to rebuild and define their place in the world. They left these challenging contexts to build a new life far from home, in a country profoundly different from their own.

The differences between Albania / Kosovo and Canada are deeply rooted in their historical development, political systems, and social structures, shaping profoundly distinct societal contexts. Canada is a stable federal democracy grounded in multiculturalism, bilingualism, and institutional pluralism. By contrast, Albania's and Kosovo's modern statehood is characterized by a more culturally and linguistically homogeneous society with a unitary state structure. Additionally, there exists significant contrasts in population size, geographic scale, and economic capacity. Canada's highly diversified economy, extensive welfare state, and strong social services differ markedly from the more modest economic base and limited social protections available in Albania and Kosovo. Social norms also diverge, with Albania and Kosovo characterized by strong kinship networks, more traditional gender roles, and family-centered social expectations, whereas

²²⁵ Mimoza Hafizi, "Female Entrepreneurship in Republic of Albania," in *International Symposium on Learning Management and Technology Development in the Information and Internet Age*, (University of Bologna, 2002).

Canadian society tends to prioritize individual autonomy, gender equality, and more flexible family structures.

Together, these historical, demographic, and structural differences create a distinct contrast between the two contexts and help explain the magnitude of adaptation, identity negotiation, and social adjustment that Albanian migrants experience when settling in Canada. What follows are the thoughts and experiences of the interviewed participants. These accounts should not be understood as objective or absolute truths; rather, they reflect how the participants themselves have lived, interpreted, and witnessed these experiences in their own lives.

Migration and Early Adaptation

Scholars of migration have long emphasized that the initial phase of settlement represents one of the most disorienting and demanding stages of the migratory trajectory. Classic assimilation models, later revised by segmented integration theory, and more recent post-migration frameworks all highlight that arrival is not a moment of resolution but the beginning of a complex process of adaptation marked by structural barriers, emotional rupture, and profound reorganization of daily life.²²⁶ For feminist migration theorists in particular, the early settlement period is understood as a site where global inequalities, gendered expectations, and family responsibilities intersect, shaping migrants' opportunities and vulnerabilities in distinctive ways.²²⁷ It is within this theoretical landscape that the experiences of the women in this study define the earliest stage of life in Canada, setting the foundation for the challenges that emerge beyond initial arrival.

²²⁶ Robert E. Park, "Human migration and the marginal man," in *American Journal of Sociology*, 33 (6), (1928): 881–893; Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation*. (University of California Press, 2001); Courtney Brell, Christian Dustmann and Ian Preston, "The labor market integration of refugee migrants in high-income countries," in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 34(1), (2020): 94–121.

²²⁷ Maria Vincenza Desiderio ed., *Canada-EU Migration Platform on the Integration of Migrant Women. Outcomes Report*. European Commission (European Website on Integration, 2020).

Across all narratives, the decision to emigrate is consistently remembered not as a wholly voluntary choice but as one fundamentally shaped by broader political, economic, and social conditions in the country of origin. As Ariana stated in her interview, “*Migram i pavullnetshëm por i imponuar nga kushtet,*” [An involuntary migration, something forced by circumstances.] recalling that the collapse of Albania’s social order in 1997 found her in the United States on a Fulbright scholarship. As she explained, “*unë si prind i dy teenagers isha e trembur të kthehesha në Shqipëri. Duhet të bëja diçka, të jetoja në paq ... Aplikova për të emigruar në Kanada.*” [As a mother of two teenagers, I was frightened by the idea of returning to Albania. I needed to do something, to find a way to live in peace ... So, I applied to immigrate to Canada.]

The experience of refugees from the Kosovo War introduces yet another layer, in which migration is stripped of any element of decision-making altogether. For Nexhi, departure was an emergency, an escape from immediate violence rather than a planned life project. She recalled, “*nuk kemi qënë shumë mirë, kemi lënë kokën prapa, luftën prapa, nuk ishim mirë, nuk e dinim në do ktheheshim më.*” [We hadn’t been doing well. We had left everything behind; our home, the war. We didn’t know if we would ever go back.]

For others, such as Lira, who left Albania in 2000, migration was not prompted by war or political collapse, yet the departure was nevertheless emotionally fraught and deeply ambivalent. As she recounted:

Me thënë të drejtën unë nuk doja të vija në Kanada, kam qarë gjithë rrugës deri në Rinas. Të ikja nga Shqipëria nuk doja ... kisha prindërit të moshuar, fëmijët kishin marrë një lloj drejtimi, do duhet të fillonim nga e para, unë kisha punë shumë të mirë... Fëmijët donim që të iknim në Kanada, dhe për të ardhmen e tyre ikëm.

[To be honest, I didn’t want to come to Canada. I cried the entire way to the airport in Rinas. I didn’t want to leave Albania... I had elderly parents, the children already had their own path, and we would have had to start everything from the beginning.

I had a very good job... But the children wanted us to move to Canada, and for their future, we left.]

A similar reluctance emerges in Dita's narrative, for whom migration to Canada represented the third major displacement in her life:

Kur bashkëshorti aplikoi ne jetonim në Itali, ishim emigrant me leje qendrimi, unë nuk e dija dhe isha në shock kur e mora vesh. Nga aplikimi deri te marrja e vizës, procesi zgjati dy vjet. Gjatë asaj kohe përpiqesha t'i mbushja mendjen vetes - do kalojë mirë çdo gjë, do jetë çdo gjë në rregull, ne duhet të jemi bashkë.

[When my husband applied, we were living in Italy at the time. We were immigrants with a residence permit, and I had no idea he had applied. I was in shock when I found out. From the application to receiving the visa, the process took two years. During that time, I kept trying to convince myself: everything will be fine, it will all work out, we need to stay together.]

These accounts illuminate a recurrent theme: migration as sacrifice, particularly for mothers. The decision to migrate is rarely framed as a personal aspiration; rather, it emerges as an obligation, an act undertaken to secure safety, education, and long-term opportunity for their children. For women who had already established careers and stable lives in Albania, the primary motivation was not self-realization but the conviction that their children deserved a future that Albania could no longer provide. This sentiment is echoed by Ariana (a mother of two teenage boys), Dori, (a mother of an eight-year-old at the time of arrival), and Ana (a mother of three, two of whom were youth). Their narratives converge around the same concern:

Ariana: Aplikimi për bursën Fulbright ishte për ngritjen time profesionale padyshim, por ishte dhe për të mbrojtur fëmijet e mi, literally, për të mbrojtur fëmijët e mi.

[Applying for the Fulbright scholarship was, of course, for my professional growth, but it was also to protect my children, literally, to protect my children]

Dori: Ne nuk ikëm nga Shqipëria për arsye ekonomike, në Shqipëri kishim krijuar baza të forta ekonomike, kishim karrierë të suksesshme si unë dhe im shoq. Unë kam qënë gjithmonë kundër emigrimit, por pasi linda vajzën kuptova që nuk doja të jetoja me aty - nuk doja ta rrisja me të tjera norma në shtëpi dhe pastaj ta nxirrja jashtë në një xhungël.

[We didn't leave Albania for economic reasons. We had built a solid financial foundation there, and both my husband and I had successful careers. I had always been against emigrating, but after my daughter was born, I realized I didn't want to live there anymore - I didn't want to raise her with one set of values at home and then send her out into what felt like a jungle]

Ana: Unë nuk kam qënë asnjëherë pro emigrimit në fakt, por kur vjen puna te kalamajtë duhet të besh ca zgjedhje që jo gjithmonë të pëlqejnë ... fëmijëve duhet t'u afronim mundësira, për mua Shqipëria ishte e pamjaftueshme, për më tepër Shqipëria nuk po afronte më modelin e duhur për rininë shqiptare.

[I've never really been in favor of emigrating, but when it comes to your kids, you must make choices you don't always like... We needed to offer them opportunities, and for me, Albania had become insufficient. More than that, Albania was no longer providing the right model for its youth.]

In contrast, younger women who migrated earlier in life often described their departure as aligned with aspirations for professional growth, better labor conditions, and the desire to embark on adulthood in a context perceived as offering more structured opportunities. Youth, in these accounts, offered flexibility and optimism, even as choices were still shaped by Albania's structural limitations. Alba, who left in 1999 at age 17, recalled: "*We didn't have an easy life in Albania. Ne mezi prisnim të iknim nga Shqipëria.*" [We couldn't wait to leave Albania.] Likewise, Eva, who emigrated in 2019 at age 23, explained that coming to Canada was "*ëndrra e saj e bërë realitet*" [her dream became true.]

Despite differences in age, background, or migration pathways, the challenges accompanying settlement were remarkably consistent. Women described the emotional and social pressures of cultural adjustment, fears tied to language barriers, the anxieties of navigating immigration bureaucracy, and the profound concern that their children might struggle to adapt to a new school system and society. As Ana summarized, "*Të gjithë ishim me frikën e përshtatjes dhe të ambjentimit në një vend që ka një kulturë shumë ndryshe nga e jona.*" [We were all anxious about how we would adapt and settle into a country with a culture so different from ours.]

None of the women had previously visited Canada, meaning their decisions were shaped by imaginaries constructed through acquaintances, relatives abroad, and narratives circulating about Canada's immigration system and multicultural ethos. These imagined geographies foregrounded legal pathways, Canada's reputation for tolerance, and its promise of safety and long-term stability.

Ana: Nuk kishim qënë më parë në Kanada, gjithmonë kemi menduar është shumë larg është shumë ftohtë ... një shok i bashkeshortit tim na e mbushi mendjen ...

[We had never been to Canada before. We always imagined it was too far away, too cold... but a friend of my husband convinced us...]

Mari: Zgjedha Kanadanë për studimet e mia për shkak se doja të njihesha me pedagogjinë kanadeze,

[I chose Canada for my studies because I wanted to become familiar with Canadian pedagogy.]

Lira: Zgjodhëm Kanadanë se im shoq ishte inxhinier miniere dhe me sistemin e pikëve merrte pikë shumë, mund të vinim lehtësisht.

[We chose Canada because my husband was a mining engineer, and under the points-based system he scored very high - it meant we could immigrate more easily.]

Ariana: [Kanadaja] është një nga vendet më të mira për gratë, për impenjimin e grave në fushën akademike ... e jo vetëm.

[Canada is one of the best countries for women, especially when it comes to women's involvement in academia... and not only there.]

These expectations often collided with more complex settlement realities. As Dori reflected, "*Po ta dija sa të mëdha ishin sakrificat që duhet të bënim, me shumë gjasa nuk do ta kisha provuar [emigrimin].*" [If I had known how big the sacrifices would be, I probably wouldn't have tried emigrating.]

The first day of arrival is remembered with contrasting emotions, enthusiasm for some, disorientation or fear for others:

Ana: Ne erdhëm në shkurt. Ishte shumë ftohtë. Kur zbitem nga avioni edhe qimet e hundës na ngrinë. Fëmijët bënin shaka “kthehuni prapa, kthehuni prapa sa jeni në kohë.”

[We arrived in February. It was freezing. When we got off the plane, even the hairs in our noses froze. The kids were joking, ‘Turn back, turn back while you still can!’]

By contrast Lira recalled her arrival in 2000 as “*a miracle*”

Ne erdhëm në qershor 2000, në Calgary. Ajo dita e parë ishte një mrekulli. Ishte kaq bukur! Shqipëria në 2000-n, kishte probleme shumë, akoma ato shkatërrimet e pas ‘97-s. Më pëlqeu që ditën e parë.

[We arrived in June 2000, in Calgary. That first day was wonderful. It was so beautiful! Albania in 2000 still had many problems, the aftermath of ‘97 was still visible. I loved it from the very first day.]

Across experiences, participants consistently emphasize the warmth and courtesy of Canadian citizens and officials, an impression magnified by comparison with institutional encounters back home. Lira continues her account of the day of arrival:

Në Toronto, në aeroport më bëri përshtypje, aty na thanë “Welcome to Canada.” - ne nuk kishim përvoja të mira me zyrat [në Shqipëri].

[In Toronto, at the airport, something really struck me, they said, ‘Welcome to Canada.’ We had never had good experiences with government offices back in Albania.]

Alba, who arrived in Canada through an irregular crossing at the U.S.- Canada land border, outside designated ports of entry, described being deeply shaken by the risk she and her husband had undertaken. Yet she vividly recalled the kindness demonstrated by the officials throughout the process of submitting their refugee claim:

Unë isha e frikësuar, më dridheshin duart. Oficerët ishin shumë të sjellshëm. They said, “It’s ok, it’s ok.” Madje ata bënin shaka me ne [duke thënë] “We’re not the bad guys.”

[I was scared; my hands were shaking. The officers were very kind. They said, ‘It’s okay, it’s okay.’ They were even joking with us, saying, ‘We’re not the bad guys.’]

Similarly, Nexhi, arriving via Operation Parasol, remembered:

Pritja ka qënë fantastike. – ne vendosëm të qendronim, Kanadaja nuk ka kthyer asnjë. Kemi pasur mbështetje shumë nga qeveria federale, dhe nga shoqatat, nuk kemi pasur shqetësime.

[The reception was fantastic. We decided to stay. Canada hasn't sent anyone back. We received a lot of support from the federal government and from community organizations. We really had no difficulties.]

Mari's arrival during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores how extraordinary acts of kindness shaped early impressions:

Ne erdhëm në Kanada në periudhën e pandemisë të shkaktuar nga Covid 19. Për shkak të kufizimeve të vendosura, në duhet të qendronim në karantinë për dy javë. Nga aeroporti kemi shkuar direkt në hotel. Një shoqja ime e universitetit që e dinte që ne do të vinim, me shkroi dhe me ofroi të bente pazar për ne, duke e ditur që jemi në karantinë. Unë e falenderova dhe duke menduar që për dy javë nuk do mund të dilnim dot vetë, i dërgova një listë të gjatë me artikuj dhe i thashë që do ta paguaja cash faturën e blerjeve, sepse nuk kisha mundur ende të hap një llogari bankare. Ajo e bëri pazarin, erdhi na e solli në hotel, e për më tepër nuk pranoi që të merrte paratë. Për mua kjo ishte e jashtezakonshme, ajo harxhoi kohën e saj, paratë e saj – nuk e bëri një shqiptar këtë, e bëri një kanadez. Kanadezët janë vërtet welcoming.

[We arrived in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the restrictions in place, we had to stay in quarantine for two weeks. We went straight from the airport to the hotel. A university friend of mine, who knew we were coming, wrote to me and offered to do our grocery shopping, knowing we wouldn't be able to leave the hotel. I thanked her, and since I knew we'd be stuck inside for two weeks, I sent her a long list of items and told her I would pay her in cash, because I hadn't been able to open a bank account yet. She did all the shopping, brought everything to the hotel, and on top of that, she refused to take any money. For me, this was extraordinary. She spent her time, her own money. And it wasn't an Albanian who did this; it was a Canadian. Canadians truly are welcoming.]

Their eventual place of settlement was shaped primarily by practical necessities rather than personal choice. Those who arrived through family reunification typically remained in the cities where their husbands had already established themselves. Women who migrated through the skilled worker program often selected locations based on the employment contracts secured by the principal applicant, while international students settled according to the geographic location of

their university or college. Refugees, meanwhile, first spent time in reception centers before being relocated to communities where they had existing family ties or acquaintances.

Some participants later relocated within Canada, a process they often described as another emigration. Ariana moved from Vancouver to Calgary; Eva from Prince Edward Island to Toronto; and Lira from Calgary to Halifax, a move she experienced as a second displacement, noting that *“Halifax ishte shumë ndryshe nga Calgary ... një dinamikë tjetër këtu.”* [Halifax was very different from Calgary... it had a completely different dynamic.] Regardless of pathway or secondary movement, all women ultimately settled in urban centers, where services, employment opportunities, and community networks were more accessible.

Most participants had no close relatives in Canada at the time of their arrival, except for those who migrated through family reunification programs. Some mentioned having distant acquaintances or friends; others arrived entirely alone, navigating the initial phase of settlement without any form of personal network. Their recollections highlight how profoundly this absence shaped their early months, intensifying the sense of rupture, disorientation, and vulnerability. As Dori noted, *“Ne nuk njihnim asnjë njeri.”* [We didn’t know anyone.] Similarly, Ela, who arrived in 1999, recalled: *“kishte shumë pak shqiptarë atëherë këtu, unë njihja vetëm tre, që ishin njerëz të njohur, por jo të afërt.”* [There were very few Albanians here at that time. I only knew three, and they were acquaintances, not close friends.] The same experience was for Ariana, *“Fillimisht kur erdhëm në BC kisha vetëm familjen, ishim vetëm, nuk kishte shumë shqiptarë.”* [When we first arrived in BC, it was just us as a family, we were on our own. There weren’t many Albanians around.]

In the first weeks and months after arrival, newcomers were confronted with an intense cluster of simultaneous responsibilities. They had to secure their first rental home without any

Canadian credit history, furnish an empty apartment, purchase necessities, obtain a driver's license, enroll their children in school, and learn how to navigate unfamiliar institutional structures. Many women recalled arriving with only two suitcases, a material expression of the drastic compression of their former lives. Everything they owned, and everything that anchored their daily routines, had been left behind. Beginning life "from zero," as several participants described it, carried different weights depending on their prior migration experiences. For those who had already rebuilt their lives once, or even twice, the emotional and practical burden was even heavier. As Ana explained, "*Në Shqipëri i kisha të gjitha, këtu duhet të filloja jo nga zero, por nga minus.*" [In Albania, I had everything. Here, I had to start not from zero, but from below zero.] Alba similarly reflected on the early months: "*Ishte e vështirë... gjërat ishin të shtrenjta ... All our saving we spent in three months... we had to start from zero.*" [It was difficult... everything was expensive. We spent all our savings in three months... we had to start from zero.] For war refugees, the challenges were even more profound. Eni described her family's arrival with stark simplicity: "*When my parents arrived here, they had nothing. No money – nothing.*"

Beyond these material and logistical difficulties, Dita also highlighted the structural differences and the profound lack of accessible information she encountered:

Një gjë që ishte e vështirë ishte se këtu duhet të studioje për çdo gjë vetë, për taksat, për insurance, për bankat ... askush nuk të jepte informacion ... në Itali kujtoj që beheshin emisione televizive që i edukonin / informonin qytetarët për këto çështje ... më mungonte informacioni për këto gjëra dhe shumë gjëra nuk i kuptoja, funksiononin ndryshe ...

[One thing that was difficult was that here you must figure everything out on your own, taxes, insurance, banking... no one gives you any information ... I remember in Italy they even had TV programs that educated and informed people about these things... I really lacked that kind of information here, and I didn't understand many things, everything worked differently.]

These testimonies underscore the magnitude of the initial settlement period, revealing how material scarcity, institutional unfamiliarity, and emotional dislocation converged to make the first stage of resettlement one of the most demanding phases of the migration trajectory. Despite these difficulties, the women were generally aware that the early phase of settlement would not be easy. As Alda noted, “*e dija që do ishte e vështirë ... por nuk trembesha,*” [I knew it would be difficult... but I wasn’t afraid.] expressing a pragmatic acceptance of the challenges ahead. Similarly, Mari emphasizes that she anticipated cultural shock and expected to encounter obstacles along the way; they were prepared, but “*normalisht disa gjëra nuk mund t’i parashikonim.*” [Naturally, there were things we couldn’t have predicted.]

At the same time, the conditions these women came from significantly shaped how they interpreted their initial experiences in Canada. Nexhi, who arrived from Kosovo after enduring the consequences of systemic Serbian discrimination, reflected on the early days of settlement by stating, “*Ne kemi kaluar shumë vështirësi në vendin tonë, shumë vështirësi, këtu ka qënë shumë më e lehtë.*” [We went through a lot of hardship in our country, a lot. Here, everything has been much easier.]

Dita, who recounted to have undergone a difficult integration process in Italy, remembers her early months in Canada as unexpectedly positive. The contrast with her previous migration experience shaped her sense of relief and ease, allowing her to recall this period as “*a beautiful time*”:

Bashkëshorti erdhi më parë, që të gjente shtëpi dhe ta sistemonte, unë dhe fëmijët qendruam në Itali dhe për dy muaj, që fëmijët të mbaronin vitin shkollor. Kur erdhëm këtu, nuk patëm traumen e të gjeturit shtëpi, strehim, sepse bashkëshorti e kishte sistemuar shtëpinë Duke qënë periudhë e pushimeve të shkollës ato dy muajt e parë kaluan sikur të ishim me pushime, fëmijët shkonin në pishinë, në librari, që ishin falas. Si pjesë e aplikimit duhet të depozitonim një shumë prej

17.000 CAD në bankë për të përballuar periudhën e fillimit. Kjo na hoqi dhe shqetësimin financiar.

[My husband came first, to find a place to live and get everything set up. The children and I stayed in Italy for two more months so they could finish the school year. When we arrived here, we didn't go through the stress of searching for housing or trying to get settled, my husband had already arranged everything. Since it was summer break, those first two months felt almost like a vacation: the children went to the pool, to the library - all for free. As part of the application process, we had to deposit 17,000 CAD in the bank to cover the initial period. That removed the financial worry as well.]

In contrast, Ana, who arrived in 2023 from Albania, where she and her husband had stable employment and a secure life, described the early period as particularly challenging:

Këto sfidat e para që t'i nuk njeh dhe nuk të njeh njeri, e nuk ke një historik në Kanada janë sfida të mëdhaja për emigrantët e rinj, gjë që duhet të ndryshojë – duhet ta pranosh këtë emigrantin e ri që sapo vjen e nuk ka asnjë historik, asnjë gjë. ... Vështirë për të gjetur punë, vështirë për të blerë makinë sepse askush nuk të besonte nëse ke fuqi pague ose jo.

[These initial challenges - when you don't know anyone and no one knows you, when you have no history in Canada - these are major difficulties for new immigrants, and it's something that needs to change. You must accept the reality that a newcomer arrives with no credit history, no background, nothing. It was hard to find a job, hard to buy a car, because no one trusted whether you had the financial reliability to make payments.]

However, even amid such difficulties, moments of joy and discovery also punctuated these early experiences. Lira, recalling her first phase in 1999, described the excitement and novelty of those initial days:

Që të nesërmen e mbërritjes filluam të kërkojmë për shtëpi me qera... gjetëm një apartament, brenda javës e gjetëm, nuk ishte i keq. Dhe menjëherë pastaj filluam me mobilimet, blerjet. Sepse të vish vetëm me valixhe... na treguan që ka auction dhe ne shkuam, une mrekullohesha, nuk kisha parë ndonjëherë, kisha lexuar vetëm në libra “uau kështu u beka vërtet?!”

[The day after we arrived, we started looking for a rental... we found an apartment within a week. It wasn't bad. And right away we began furnishing it, buying everything we needed, because when you come with only suitcases... They told us

there were auctions, so we went. I was amazed; I had never seen anything like that. I had only read about it in books. I thought, ‘Wow, this is how it actually works?!’]

Securing the first job was consistently described as one of the most challenging aspects of early settlement, particularly due to the expectation of possessing “Canadian experience” and the difficulty of getting foreign qualifications recognized. The lack of opportunities and the financial pressures of this early transition forced many women to accept any opportunity available to them, regardless of their professional backgrounds. Almost every participant went through a period of deskilling: teachers became lunch assistants, economists worked as interpreters, researchers entered data-entry roles, and trained professionals took cashier positions. Although emotionally painful, these choices were framed as necessary. As many explained, contributing to the household income took precedence over professional identity during the first stage of resettlement:

Punë nuk të jepte askush se ti je i sapoardhur ... të gjithë thoshin ka punë. ka punë, por punë nuk të jepte njeri, pavarësisht se çfarë dije ti. Ti doje të punoje po s’gjeje dot punë ... Fillimisht aplikova dhe për pastruese, sepse isha aq e përlurur sa thosha “këtu nuk ka vend për krenari, do bëjë një punë vetëm që të kem të ardhura për familjen,”

[No one would give you a job because you had just arrived... everyone kept saying there’s work, there’s work, but in reality, nobody hired you, no matter what you knew. You wanted to work, but you simply couldn’t find a job. At the beginning I even applied for cleaning jobs, because I was humble enough to say to myself, ‘There’s no room for pride here. I’ll do any job, as long as I can bring in an income for my family], explained Ana, who had twenty years of teaching experience in Albania.

Similarly, Dori, who had worked as a finance manager in Albania, recalled:

Qendrova tre muaj pa punë, duke aplikuar dhe duke bërë intervista. ... kërkimi i punës u bë punë në vetvete. Puna e parë ishte cashiere... Puna e parë mund të mos ishte ajo që doja, por nuk ka asgjë të keqe të fillosh një punë, cashiere, që të siguron të ardhura për të mbuluar shpenzimet, të mëson kulturën e punës, të mëson komunikimin... Unë e doja këtë vend pune vetëm për të fituar një qetësi financiare, unë nuk rreshta së aplikuari.

[I stayed unemployed for three months, applying and going to interviews. ... Job searching became a job. My first job was as a cashier... It wasn't the job I wanted, but there's nothing wrong with starting anywhere - being a cashier gave me an income to cover expenses, it taught me the work culture, it taught me how to communicate here...I took that job only to gain some financial stability, and I never stopped applying for other positions.]

Alda, who migrated in 2000, encountered similar experiences:

Ishte e vështirë të krijoja linjat e vazhdimësisë, me përvojën që unë kisha në Shqipëri, sepse ishte një stad tjetër zhvillimi në Shqipëri dhe një stad tjetër zhvillimi në Toronto. Këtu kisha tjetër status – nuk mund të sistemohesha në të njëjtin nivel menjëherë, nuk ishte e lehtë – e prisja këtë e kisha dëgjuar nga njerëzit e tjerë – një lloj stresi të krijon.

[It was difficult to create a sense of continuity with the experience I had in Albania, because Albania was at one stage of development and Toronto was at a completely different one. Here I had a different status - I couldn't settle into the same level right away; it wasn't easy. I expected that, and I had heard it from others, but it still creates a certain kind of stress.]

Likewise, Ela, whose professional background in Albania was at the Centre for Geographic Studies, recalled:

Nuk ishte e lehtë, kërkohetj experience kanadeze. Unë fillova punë në data entry ... Im shoq filloi punë në një fabrikë ... Njerezit na thoshin që po të mos kesh njohje këtu nuk fillon dot punë, një shqiptar që njihnim punonte në këtë fabrikë dhe ai referoi tim shoq.

[It wasn't easy, everyone wanted Canadian experience. I started working in data entry... My husband began working in a factory... People kept telling us that without connections you couldn't get a job here. An Albanian we knew worked in that factory, and he was the one who referred my husband.]

Even when the women did not experience these employment barriers directly but saw their husbands confronting them, they nevertheless felt the consequences. Lira herself found work two months after arrival as an assistant teacher, at least within the same professional field as her experience in Albania, but she recounted that:

Im shoq nuk mundi të gjejë dot punë këtu, kërkohej experiencë kanadeze. Po si mund të kishe eksperience kanadeze kur nuk të jepnin shansin për të punuar këtu? Iu afrua një punë në Libi nga një kompani angleze. Në nëntor - pas 6 muajsh pasi erdhëm - unë mbeta vetëm me fëmijët.

[My husband couldn't find a job here, everyone asked for Canadian experience. But how could he have Canadian experience if no one gave him the chance to work in the first place? He was then offered a job in Libya by a British company. In November, just six months after we arrived, I was left alone with the children.]

As Mari noted earlier, not everything could be anticipated. None of them could have foreseen the pandemic, which disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, including newly arrived immigrants. Both Mari and Eva, beyond the difficulties typical of the initial settlement phase, also had to navigate the additional constraints and challenges created by COVID-19 restrictions. As Eva explained:

Menjëhere sapo unë erdha filloi pandemia, ishte e vështirë në atë kohë të gjeje punë. Shumë njerëz humbën punët për shkak të kufizimeve të vendosura nga pandemia. Kjo më krijoi vështirësi financiare. Unë erdha për të studiuar, por njëkohësisht mund të punoja part time e të kisha një lloj sigurie financiare për veten, por me fillimin e pandemisë kjo u bë e pamundur.

[Right after I arrived, the pandemic started, and it was a hard time finding a job. Many people lost their jobs because of the restrictions that were put in place. This created financial difficulties for me. I had come here to study, but at the same time I could work part-time and have some financial security for myself, but once the pandemic began, that became impossible.]

These experiences of having to rebuild their lives from the ground up, of spending months without employment or working in low-paid positions, were further compounded by financial constraints. Initial savings were depleted quickly, leaving families vulnerable during the earliest and most precarious stages of resettlement.

Dori: Në aspektin financiar, në fillim pasiguria arriti kulmin, ishim tre muaj pa punë. Ne sigurisht që kishim ardhur me kursime, po ato rridhnin ato tre muaj. ... Mungesa e punës vështirësonte gjetjen e një banese me qera e mungesa e banesës vështirësonte rregjistrimin e vajzës në shkollë.

[Financially, in the beginning the uncertainty was at its peak, we spent three months without work. Of course, we had come with savings, but during those three months they were draining fast. ... Not having a job made it difficult to find a place to rent, and not having housing made it difficult to register our daughter at school.]

Ela: Kishim me vete pak kursime që i kishim sjellë nga Shqipëria... Shkonim në këmbë në shkollë (2 stacione metroje) se donim të kursenim lekët e abonese. Ecnim në këmbë në të ftohtën e dimrit. O zot sa ftohtë që ishte! ... Vinim [me bashkeshortin] në Mc Donalds dhe ndanim një racion fries dhe një Coca cola. Nuk kishim, bënim çdo gjë me llogaritje të përpiktë.

[We had brought only a small amount of savings from Albania... We used to walk to school - two subway stations - because we wanted to save the money for the transit pass. We walked in the freezing winter cold. My God, it was so cold! ... My husband and I would go to McDonald's and share one order of fries and one Coca-Cola. We didn't have money - we calculated every single expense with absolute precision] Ela recalls when describing her early experiences in Canada.

For Ana, these memories are even more deeply painful:

Shock i parë ishte që lekët që erdhën nga Shqipëria që muajin e parë filluan të pakësohen. Me sado rezerva [financiare] të vish është e vështirë ekonomikisht të mos e ndjesh sfidën ... Gjatë kësaj periudhe të vështirë financiare, si unë dhe bashkeshorti humbëm nga një prind, e nuk mundëm të shkonim në Shqipëri për t'ju dhënë lamtumirën - nuk e përballonim dot financiarisht.

[The first shock was realizing that the money we had brought from Albania started disappearing already in the first month. No matter how much you come with, financially it's hard not to feel the struggle... During this difficult financial period, both my husband and I lost a parent, and we couldn't go back to Albania to say goodbye - we simply couldn't afford it.]

The financial instability of the first months generated a constant sense of worry. This combination of economic hardship and emotional loss made the transition period profoundly difficult, shaping the early immigrant experience with deep and lasting impact. As Ana continued, “*Na ka mbetur peng.*” [It has remained a deep regret for us.]

The family becomes the primary space where the tensions of settlement are negotiated, where belonging is rebuilt, and where loss is processed. The family served as an important source

of support for all participants; however, for women who were mothers at the time of migration, the challenges were significantly greater. While children's adaptation is often framed as more flexible or rapid, the emotional and practical work required from their mothers is substantial. For the women interviewed, supporting children through school transitions, language acquisition, or identity struggles was an extension of the sacrifices made during migration itself. In addition to navigating their own adaptation, they also had to shoulder the emotional burden of their children's adjustment, ensuring that their sons and daughters experienced this transition with as little emotional strain as possible. After explaining how the lack of a fixed address delayed her daughter's school registration, Dori added that:

Dori: Pati dhe ajo [vajza] ulje - ngritjet e saj gjatë periudhës së parë... e mundonte largësia nga shtëpia, nga gjyshërit.

[She, too, [the daughter] went through her ups and downs during those first months... she struggled with being far from home, far from her grandparents.]

Ana: Sfidën më të madhe e kemi pasur me vajzat. Unë dhe bashkeshorti ishim të vetëdijshëm - jemi në emigracion - sfidat janë normale. Vajzat e përjetuan atë shock-un kulturor, pa patur miq, pa patur njerëz ... [kur u larguam nga Shqipëria] Vajza e madhe ishte studente në vitin e dytë për juridik, këtu nuk ju njoh dhe ju desh të fillonte nga e para universitetin. Vajza tjetër ishte në klasë të 12-të, ju desh të bënte dhe njëherë klasën e 12-të, sepse ne erdhem pothuajse në fund të vitit shkollor.

[Our biggest challenge was with our daughters. My husband and I were aware of the situation - we were immigrants, and challenges were to be expected. But the girls went through the cultural shock much more intensely: no friends, no familiar faces... When we left Albania, our older daughter was in her second year of law school; here her studies weren't recognized, and she had to start university all over again. Our younger daughter was in 12th grade, and she had to repeat 12th grade because we arrived almost at the end of the school year]

Meanwhile, Dita explained that during the early period she had to accompany her sons to school to translate for them, as they did not speak English. Even when language was not a barrier, other concerns emerged. Ariana described the initial difficulties faced by her sons:

Fëmijët bënin në shkollë letërsi kanadeze... po ata ishin bosh në këtë drejtim. Kur ne erdhëm unë nuk e njihja letërsinë kanadeze, unë njihja e kisha lexuar letërsi amerikane po jo kanadeze – m'u desh të lexoja, të edukoja veten me kërkesat e kurrikulës kanadeze për Language Arts, që të ndihmoja fëmijët në shkollë.

[The kids were studying Canadian literature in school... but they had no background in it. When we arrived, I didn't know Canadian literature either - I was familiar with or had read American literature, but not Canadian. So I had to read, to educate myself about the requirements of the Canadian Language Arts curriculum, so I could help the children with their schoolwork.]

It was not easy even for those who migrated alone. Eva recalled the dilemmas and early challenges that she had to confront entirely on her own:

Fillimi ishte sa i bukur aq edhe i frikshëm. Isha shumë entuziaste, por nga ana tjetër isha vetëm. Qëllimi ishte të vinim [në Kanada] të dy me të fejuarin, por atij ju refuzua viza dy herë dhe kjo na shkaktonte ankth. A do mund të bashkoheshim e të ishim të dy këtu e të vazhdonim ëndrrat, apo do të qendronim të ndarë, apo unë duhet të kthehesha në Shqipëri? Kthimi në Shqipëri ishte zgjedhja e fundit që unë mendoja.

[The beginning was as beautiful as it was frightening. I was very excited, but at the same time I was alone. The plan was for both of us - me and my fiancé - to come to Canada together, but his visa was denied twice, and that caused us a lot of anxiety. Would we be able to reunite and build our dreams here, or would we have to stay apart? Would I have to go back to Albania? Going back to Albania was the last option I wanted to consider.]

These practical struggles in the first months generated deep emotional hardship. Yet, despite their severity, this period also stands as a testament to women's resilience. It demonstrates their capacity to endure uncertainty, navigate unfamiliar institutional systems, and rebuild their lives from the ground up, even while carrying significant emotional wounds.

Dori: Ato muajt e parë nuk e di se sa herë i kam paketuar e ç'paketuar valixhet... Ç'na u desh? Pse erdhem? ... Nuk gjenim shtëpi, nuk kishim njeri... Ishte e veshtirë.... Ankth, pasiguri, mërzë.

[During those first months, I don't even know how many times I packed and unpacked my suitcases... Why did we do this? Why did we come? ... We couldn't

find a place to live; we had no one here... It was hard... anxiety, uncertainty, sadness.”]

Ana: Dhe të gjitha këto sfida na e kanë tronditur njëçik themelin me thënë të drejtën. ... [Por] I kemi pranuar këto sfida, sepse fundja i kemi zgjedhur vetë. ... [e jo vetem kaq] Unë nuk e kam ngritur asnjëherë zërin ndaj këtyre pakënaqësive, nuk donim t’ju jepnim zë shqetësimeve, për të mos rënduar dhe rebeluar fëmijët.

[All these challenges shook our foundation a little, to be honest. But we accepted them - after all, they were the result of our own choices. And more than that, I never raised my voice about these frustrations; we didn’t want to give weight to our worries, so we wouldn’t burden or provoke rebellion in the children.]

Loneliness marked the first months with intensity. Regardless of whether they arrived as war refugees or voluntary migrants, the women consistently described a profound sense of missing their families, their familiar social environments, and the spontaneity of everyday life in Albania or Kosovo:

Nexhi: What really më mundonte ishte se isha lonely, sad, I missed my country and I didn’t know if I would ever go back. I left my family there and I didn’t know where they were. I left the house...

[What really weighed on me was that I was lonely...]

Zade: Ishte një botë krejt tjetër nga ajo që erdha une. Më mungonin njerëzit, këtu duhet të ecja kilometra që të hasje në një njeri. Dhe une jam social butterfly.

[It was a completely different world from the one I came from. I missed people - you had to walk kilometers here before even running into someone. And I’m a social butterfly.]

Mari: Kur erdhëm, sfida kryesore ishte mungesa e njerëzve, aspekti social - ti e di si jemi ne në Shqipëri dhe Kosovë - dalim shpesh, takojmë shumë njerëz, kurse këtu nuk kishim njeri. U bëmë shumë të vetmuar.

[When we arrived, the main challenge was the lack of people - the social aspect. You know how we are in Albania and Kosovo - we go out often, we meet people all the time, we’re surrounded by others. But here, we didn’t have anyone. We became very lonely.]

Eva: Entuziazmi i fillimit kaloi sidomos me fillimin e pandemisë... kufizimet u bënë të mëdha e mundësitë të pakta... Kontakti me njerëzit këtu ishte i pamundur ... Isha krejt vetem. Mbështetja e vetme emocionale dhe financiare ishte familja ime në Shqipëri... Isha tërë kohës para ekranit të celularit duke folur me ta.

[The initial excitement faded, especially once the pandemic began... the restrictions became severe and the opportunities very limited. It became impossible to connect with people... I was completely alone. My only emotional and financial support was my family in Albania... I spent all my time in front of my phone screen, on video calls with my family back home.]

Ariana: Ajo që më ka penguar kur erdha ishte mungesa e miqve. Kanadezët e kanë të vështirë të kenë shokë ose shoqe në kuptimin siç i kemi ne në Shqipëri ... Njeriu ka nevojë për shokë e miq - jo vetëm për aspektin akademik - por për të shfryrë një hall, për të ndarë një gëzim. Këtë nuk e gjeta këtu.

[What held me back when I first arrived was the lack of friends. Canadians find it difficult to form friendships in the way we understand them in Albania... A person needs friends - not just for academic support, but to vent a problem, to share a joy. And I didn't find that here.]

In this difficult period, the women's first sources of support were the occasional presence of relatives or extended family members, as well as the Albanian community that they gradually discovered or actively built around themselves. Several participants also emphasized the importance of Albanian associations and Albanian schools, which functioned as key social spaces where Albanians could meet, exchange information, and support one another:

Ela: Në aspektin social njoha disa familje shqiptare që erdhën pas nesh, dhe ato me fëmijë të vegjël dhe shpesh dilnim bashkë. Ky ishte socializimi i parë. Ishte gjë shumë e mirë se fëmijët socializoheshin me njëri-tjetrin, flisnim shqip dhe qanim hallet me njëra-tjetrën. –

[Socially, I got to know a few Albanian families who arrived after us, and they also had young children, so we often went out together. That was our first real social circle. It was wonderful - the children socialized with each other, we spoke Albanian, and we shared our worries with one another.]

Ana: Njoha disa shqiptarë nëpërmjet shoqatës shqiptare të Calgarit. ... Më ka ndihmuar shumë emocionalisht dhe psikologjikisht sepse dëgjoja shqip. Kaq më duhej mua ... Kur vjen në një vend të ri, kur akoma nuk e di se ku je, çfarë do bësh, nuk di nga të orientoresh - të degjosh shqip është mrekulli ... [shqiptarët që kemi njohur këtu] na e kanë bërë jetesën më të lehtë, qoftë duke ardhur për vizita, duke dalë bashkë duke biseduar Ne kemi gjetur një Shqipëri të vogël këtu.

[I met some Albanians through the Albanian Association of Calgary. It helped me tremendously, both emotionally and psychologically, simply because

I could hear Albanian. That was all I needed...When you arrive in a new country, when you still don't know where you are, what you're going to do, how to find your way - hearing your own language is a miracle. The Albanians we met here have made life so much easier - whether by visiting us, going out together, or just talking. We've found a small Albania here.]

"Fat i madh që e kishim komunitetin shqiptar," [We were incredibly lucky to have the Albanian community,] stated Dori. She expressed deep gratitude for the help and support she received from Albanians in Halifax:

Një familje shqiptare [ajo përmend emrat dhe shpjegon se nuk i njihte më parë, i kishte njohur aty] na mirëpritën në shtëpinë e vet dhe qendruam aty pa paguar asgjë derisa gjetëm shtëpi me qera. ... Disa kosovare na kanë dalë krahë, dolën garant për ne kur morëm shtëpinë e parë me qera. ... I falenderoja dhe ju thoja: "Ju jam në borxh." Ata më thoshin: "Nuk na e ke borxh ne, ja ke borxh shqiptarit tjetër që do të vijë pas teje. Duhet ta ndihmosh siç të kemi ndihmuar ne ty, e siç na kanë ndihmuar ne kur kemi ardhur, që të kalojë ndihma në një dorë tjetër."

An Albanian family - whom I hadn't known before; welcomed us into their home, and we stayed with them without paying anything until we found a place to rent ... Some Kosovars stood by us as well. They co-signed for us when we rented our first apartment ...I used to thank them and say, 'I owe you.' And they would tell me, 'You don't owe us. You owe it to the next Albanian who comes after you. You must help them the way we helped you, and the way others helped us when we arrived - so that the help keeps passing from one hand to another.']

With the philosophy "pay it forward," members of the community helped one another, offering support during the most difficult moments of early settlement and becoming, in effect, the first safety net for newcomers.

Taken together, these accounts show that the first stage of migration was a period marked by instability, adjustment, and profound emotional weight. The women navigated unfamiliar systems, managed limited resources, and carried the added responsibility of guiding their families through uncertainty. Yet within these demanding circumstances, they also cultivated new forms of support, drawing on emerging community ties, small acts of solidarity, and their own determination

to rebuild daily life. As the initial phase of arrival gradually stabilizes, the women's narratives reveal a new set of challenges that emerge beyond the first months, challenges tied not only to economic integration, but also to the long-term process of rebuilding one's place in a new society.

Rebuilding One's Place in a New Society

Migration studies have long emphasized that the process of relocation does not conclude with physical arrival; rather, arrival inaugurates a complex and extended phase of adaptation shaped by linguistic, cultural, social, economic, and emotional negotiations. Classic theories of migration and integration highlight the fact that settlement unfolds in layered stages, each characterized by distinct forms of strain, adjustment, and transformation.²²⁸ The testimonies of the women whose narratives structure this study reveal that once the immediate shocks of arrival began to stabilize, a different set of challenges emerged, marked not only by structural barriers but also by the reconfiguration of identity, family roles, and long-standing emotional histories.

In recounting their first encounters with Canadian institutions, participants emphasized the importance and the limitations of the support structures available to newcomers. They described how language programs, settlement services, and community-based resources offered guidance not only in linguistic acquisition, but also in cultural adaptation, everyday practical matters, and access to essential services. These initial supports were remembered as instrumental in reducing uncertainty and facilitating a gradual sense of stability.

Dita: U angazhuam me LINC. Ata na ndihmuan për t'u integruar; organizonin udhëtime që të njihnim vendin dhe kulturën. ... Gjetem mbështetje në Job bank, që ndihmonte newcomers për resume, intervista pune, aplikime për punë. ... Ishte dhe një qendër tjetër, - se kujtoj dot emrin, një organizatë jo qeveritare, që ndihmonte në procedurat

²²⁸ Alejandro Portes, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*.

me dokumentat, oftonte free legal services, ofronte kamp për fëmijët, kishte food bank. Ishin te gjitha falas.

[We got involved with LINC. They helped us with integration; they organized trips so we could get to know the country and the culture. We also found support through Job Bank, which helped newcomers with resumes, job interviews, and job applications. There was another center as well - I can't remember the name exactly, a non-governmental organization that helped with documentation procedures, offered free legal services, provided camps for children, and even had a food bank. Everything was free.

Dori: The Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) më ndihmoi goxha në këto coaching, mentoring, për të gjetur punë, për të bërë resume... Oferta e parë për punë që mora, më erdhi pikërisht nga një kompani që m'u referua nga ISANS.

[The Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) helped me a lot with coaching and mentoring - finding a job, preparing my resume... The first job offer I received actually came from a company that had been referred to me by ISANS.]

Alda: Kërkova ndihmë në institucionet kanadeze për newcomers e ata më ndihmuan të gjeja punët e para vullnetare, dhe me informacionet e nevojshme për fillimin. Po dhe ato kishin limitet e veta ... informacionet me të shumta i kam marrë nga njohjet naturale që kam bërë më pas. ... institucionet ishin një lloj orientimi po jo ndonjë mbështetje e madhe.

[I sought help from the Canadian newcomer institutions, and they assisted me in finding my first volunteer positions and provided the basic information I needed at the beginning. But they also had their limits... most of the meaningful information I received came later, through the natural connections I built myself. ... The institutions offered some guidance, but not substantial support.]

Alba, who, unlike the others, faced her greatest challenge with legal status issues, described this process as *"a long journey."* She recounts the support she received from the state, the forms of assistance that eased her situation, but also the sense of uncertainty that this support simultaneously provoked:

We had to get a lawyer, ... the good thing we never experienced in US - as soon as we came here, we got legal aid, so they paid for the lawyer ... *Morëm mbështetje financiare nga shteti për disa muaj ... maj deri në shtator ... Por, we didn't want it ... isha e shqetësuar se kjo mund të ndikonte në aplikimet për dokumentat.* I filled in a form - I believe it was every month - to explain that I don't need any more wealth care cause I got a job, although I didn't earn enough. And the social worker (or whatever she was called, I don't remember) was so nice and she said that I would want to get it for one more month, cause you have the kids... But I was so

scared ... I would rather borrow money from someone than get wealth care, I didn't want any wealth care in my record.

[translated only the part in Albanian] ... We received financial support from the government for a few months... from May to September. But we didn't really want it. I was worried it might affect our future immigration applications.]

A central dimension of this second phase of settlement concerns the confrontation with linguistic boundaries. Language acquisition occupies a pivotal place in migration studies, often understood as both a practical necessity and an embodied terrain of power. As Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut state, "Learning to live simultaneously in two social worlds is a requisite of "successful" immigrant adaptation. In a world so different from one's native land, much must be learned initially to cope - especially, the new language."²²⁹ The women in this study identified language as a central axis of their settlement experience.

Three of the women who arrived in Canada as adults reported having only basic knowledge of the English language at the time of arrival, three described their English proficiency as advanced, while the remaining participants assessed their skills as intermediate or upper-intermediate. When reflecting on their linguistic competence, the women often evaluated it critically and retrospectively. As Dita stated, "*Unë nuk dija mirë anglisht kur erdhëm*" [I did not know English well when I arrived], while Alda explained, "*Unë dija anglisht, po të folurën nuk e kisha shumë advanced*" [I knew English, but my spoken English was not very advanced].

Language thus emerged not merely as a communicative obstacle, but as a deep psychological barrier that shaped their early settlement experiences and often pushed them into silence. Ela recalled, "*Kur binte telefoni kishim frikë ta kapnim sepse gjuha ishte zero*" [When the phone rang, we were afraid to answer because our language skills were zero], capturing the anxiety

²²⁹ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (University of California Press, 2014), 249.

embedded in everyday interactions. Similarly, Zade reflected, “*Për shkak të gjuhës ndjeja mungesë besimi te vetja, nuk flisja, nuk pyesja*” [Because of the language, I felt a lack of self-confidence; I didn’t speak, I didn’t ask questions]. These testimonies illustrate how limited linguistic proficiency constrained not only practical communication but also self-expression and participation during the early stages of migration and settlement.

Learning English was not merely a technical or pedagogical exercise, but a profoundly psychological and existential undertaking. Enrolling in language programs such as LINC, ESL, or EAP did more than equip the women with linguistic tools; they gradually reconstructed their voice, confidence, and sense of authority within a new linguistic and social regime. Language learning became closely tied to feelings of self-redefinition, autonomy, competence, and belonging. For most participants, this demanding process unfolded alongside other responsibilities, including paid employment, childcare, household management. and the broader pressures of daily life in emigration. As Dita recounted:

Unë shkova në adult learning për të mësuar gjuhën ... Ndërkohë punoja part time si lunch assistant, bëja punë vullnetare të shkolla e fëmijëve sepse doja të njihja sistemin arsimor kanadez dhe mbrëmjeve punoja part time, 3 herë në javë në një piceri, deri në 12:00 midnight.

[I went to adult learning to study the language... At the same time, I worked part-time as a lunch assistant, volunteered at my children’s school because I wanted to understand the Canadian education system, and in the evenings, I worked part-time three times a week in a pizzeria, until midnight.]

Even those who arrived with strong English skills (university graduates, professionals, teachers) described insecurity in everyday communication.

Ariana: Më ka ndihmuar njohja e gjuhës angleze ... natyrisht që emocionohesha sepse isha duke folur anglisht me native speakers dhe unë akoma vazhdoj të kem një accent ... vazhdoj të kem një rezervë sidomos për gjuhën e përditshme.

[Knowing the English language has helped me... of course I would get emotional because I was speaking English with native speakers, and I continue to have an

accent... I still feel some hesitation, especially when it comes to everyday language.]

Lira: Unë ndieja siklet se më dukej se studentet e mi e kuptonin që unë e flisja anglishten me accent.

[I felt uncomfortable because it seemed to me that my students could understand that I spoke English with an accent.]

Nevertheless, as in many other aspects of their settlement experience, the women emphasized that despite feelings of discomfort and linguistic insecurity, they did not experience their accented speech as a source of exclusion or judgment within Canadian society. Rather than withdrawing, they continued to participate actively in institutional and social settings. Comments about their accent were interpreted in different ways, sometimes as affirmations that could be claimed with pride, and at other times as reminders of difference that triggered frustration, but these moments did not deter their involvement.

Dita: Unë shkoja çdo muaj te takimet me prindërit [në shkollën e fëmijëve] ... unë s'dija as gjuhën mirë atëherë, [megjithatë] unë merrja pjesë. Këtu nuk e kam patur asnjëherë problem që nuk e dija mirë gjuhën.

[I attended the parent-teacher meetings every month [at my children's school] ... at that time I did not know the language well, [nevertheless] I participated. Here, I have never had a problem because I didn't know the language well.]

Dori: Ne e paragjykojmë më shumë veten sesa na paragjykojnë – [shoqeria kanadeze] është shume e hapur, shumë bashkepunuese, shumë të thjeshtë, nuk kam ndjerë ndonjëherë vështirësi apo paragjykim.

[We judge ourselves more than others judge us - [Canadian society] is very open, very cooperative, very uncomplicated; I have never felt any difficulty or prejudice.]

Mari: Nuk ndiej ndroje, të flas a prezantoj në anglisht, më shumë ndiej siklet kur flas anglisht me shqiptarë.

[I don't feel shy about speaking or presenting in English; I feel more uncomfortable when I speak English with Albanians.]

Lira: Kur më pyesnin nga vjen ky aksent i bukur? E thosha me krenari - nga Shqipëria.

[When I was asked 'Where does this beautiful accent come from?' I said it proudly - from Albania.]

Ela: E kur më thoshin “oh you have a lovely ascent” më shkatërroheshin nervat.

[And when people said to me, “oh, you have a lovely accent,” it really got on my nerves.]

Parallel to the challenges of learning English, many of the women faced the necessity of re-entering formal education, whether through college programs, university studies, or professional certification pathways, despite already holding university degrees from their countries of origin. Driven by a strong desire to integrate more effectively into the Canadian labour market and to enhance their competitiveness, they chose to resume their studies even after having built long and established professional careers in the homeland. This return to education was both a strategic instrument for economic integration and a symbolic act of adaptation, reflecting their determination to rebuild professional identities within a new institutional and social framework.

Dori: Arsimimi është investim për veten ... Më ka hapur shumë mundësi në karrierë.

[Education is an investment in yourself... it has opened many opportunities for me in my career.]

Ela: Nuk donim të punonim gjatë në fabrika, kishim pretendime ndaj vetes, donim të bënim shkolla ose kurse, fabrika nuk ishte zgjidhje, ishte zgjidhje e detyruar për nevojat e fillimit.

[We didn’t want to work in factories for long; we had expectations of ourselves. We wanted to pursue education or take courses - factory work was not a solution; it was a forced choice to meet the needs of the beginning.]

Nexhi: Vështirësi mund të them që ishte se duhet të rifilloje prapë shkollën ... Po vend i huaj, rregulla të tjera - duhet të përshtatesh patjetër nëse do sukses.

[A difficulty, I would say, was that you had to start school all over again... but it is a foreign country, with different rules - you must adapt if you want to succeed.]

Becoming a student again was, as Nexhi clearly expressed, an unquestionably difficult experience. This decision was accompanied by a series of dilemmas related to professional continuity versus the necessity of starting a new career trajectory. At the same time, the lack of reliable information, limited familiarity with the host country’s education system, and uncertainty

about the structure of the Canadian labour market further intensified feelings of ambiguity and insecurity. Decision-making was shaped by multiple intersecting factors, including whether foreign credentials would be recognized, the time elapsed since previous studies had been completed, the duration and demands of returning to education, available time in relation to family and work responsibilities, and prevailing economic conditions. Within this context, returning to school was often an emotionally charged process of readjustment, undertaken amid structural constraints and personal uncertainty. Zade, who had studied law in North Macedonia, explained:

Zade: Të vazhdoja në të njëjtin profil ishte rrugë e gjatë këtu. Zgjodha një gjë më praktike e më të shkurtër, u regjistrova në kolegji për nursing program. M'u desh të rimerja disa klasa gjimnazi, Math and Biology, që të mund të vazhdoja – sepse kishin kaluar pesë vite nga koha që unë kisha bërë shkollën e mesme.

[It would have been a very long path continuing in the same field here. I chose something more practical and shorter, and enrolled in a college nursing program. I had to retake several high-school classes; math and biology, to continue, because five years had passed since I had completed secondary school.]

Ela: Unë nuk isha shumë e qartë çfarë doja të bëja, të vazhdoja diçka në shkencat shoqërore, siç kisha studiuar në Shqipëri apo të vazhdoja me shkencat natyrore. Bëra një semester gjuhë e pastaj studiova për biologji – kimi. Ne nuk dinim ... nuk kishim informacion ... pyesnim, por me ndroje të madhe... me atë gjuhën tonë ... kishim shumë ndroje, mos harro ne vinim nga Shqipëria ... çdo gjë e arritëm me vështirësi të medha ... Vitin tjetër e ndryshova fushën e studimit, fillova master në environment studies.

[I was not entirely sure what direction to take - whether to continue in the social sciences, which I had studied in Albania, or to move toward the natural sciences. I first completed a semester of language training and then pursued studies in biology and chemistry. At the time, we did not have sufficient information... we asked questions, but with great hesitation, limited by our language skills. ... We were very insecure - after all, we had come from Albania ... everything we accomplished required considerable effort. The following year, I changed my field again and began a master's program in environmental studies] - explains Ela, who had originally earned her degree in History and Geography in Albania.

The resumption of formal education did not entail merely the acquisition of academic knowledge; rather, it involved a broader and more complex process of *learning how to learn again*. This process required participants to unlearn the rigid expectations and hierarchical norms that had characterized their educational experiences in Albania / Kosovo, while gradually constructing a new sense of competence within Canadian academic and institutional frameworks. This transition was rendered even more demanding by the fact that instruction took place in English, a language that, for many, still needed to be learned, practiced, and enriched. As they reflected on their experiences as students once again, participants emphasized not only the challenge of returning to education, but also the psychological strain of navigating unfamiliar pedagogical expectations while simultaneously rebuilding linguistic confidence:

Mari: Ndihesha e ndrojtur në klasë - isha mësuar me ligjeratat e gjata të pedagogëve shqiptarë, nuk isha mesuar të jepja mendim për çdo gjë. ... Më pelqente qasja e mësimeve këtu, mirëkuptimi i tyre dhe mbështetja - ata e kuptonin që jashtë shkolle ka një jetë e impenjime - ishin tolerant. ... Sfidë ishte studimi në një gjuhë të huaj. Pavaresisht njohjes së mirë të gjuhës - mua më duhej më shumë kohë për të bërë një detyrë sesa do më duhej ta beja në shqip.

[I felt shy in class - I was used to the long lectures of Albanian professors, and I was not used to having to give my opinion about everything. ... I liked the approach of the teachers here, their understanding and support; they understood that outside of school there is a life with responsibilities - they were tolerant. ... Studying in a foreign language was a challenge as well, despite having a good command of English. I needed much more time to complete an assignment than I would have needed if I were doing it in Albanian.]

Zade: Gjithçka ishte e re; gjuha, fusha e studimit. ... Stresi me i madh i jetës sime të bëja prezantime në klasë për shkak të anglishtes sime të varfër –

[Everything was new - the language, the field of study. ... The greatest stress of my life was having to give presentations in class because of my poor English.]

The experience of starting over as a student required to reconstruct their academic identities, often under conditions of significant strain. This process unfolded alongside the demands of paid employment, childcare, household responsibilities, and persistent financial

insecurity, producing what many described as an overwhelming and cumulative burden. Rather than representing a singular educational endeavor, the return to formal studies became a layered experience marked by the simultaneous negotiation of multiple roles and responsibilities, intensifying emotional exhaustion and limiting opportunities for rest or recovery:

Alba: I went to school while I was working overnight and having two little kids at home ... ishte shumë e vështirë. Ndonjëhere doja vetëm one hour break, that's all I wanted.

[I went to school while I was working overnight and having two little kids at home ... It was very hard. Sometimes I just wanted one hour break, that's all I wanted.]

Ariana: 24 orët e ditës ishin pak të vështira për të mbuluar të gjitha detyrimet si akademike, si nënë, si bashkëshorte, sepse kryesisht në familjet shqiptare detyrat kryesore për mbarëvajtjen e familjes, detyrat e përditshme janë përgjithësisht përgjegjësi e gruas ... unë isha full time në punë dhe full time student, gjë që çonte në abuzimin e orëve të shpłodhjes, së gjumit, ... ishte një mbingarkesë në lodhjen mendore, më shumë se atë fizike ... unë shtrihesha në krevat, por nuk flija, nuk shpłodhesha, unë vazhdoja të mbaja shënime për gjërat që më duheshin për punën, shkollën.

[The 24 hours of the day were never enough to cover all my responsibilities, as a student, as a mother, as a wife, because in Albanian families, the main responsibility for keeping the household running, the everyday tasks, usually falls on the woman. ...I was working full-time and studying full-time, which meant abusing my rest hours, my sleep... it was mental exhaustion more than physical. I would lie down in bed, but I didn't sleep, I didn't rest - I kept taking notes about what I needed for work and school.]

Dori: Po studioj të marre CPA licence - është angazhim i madh; nuk m'u njoh asnjë nga lëndët e universitetit në Shqipëri – kishin kaluar 10 vjet nga diplomimi. Jam full time në punë, duhet të kujdesem për familjen, shtëpinë, fëmijën - ti e di ne duam t'i bëjmë të tëra.

[I am studying to get my CPA license -it is a major commitment. None of my university courses from Albania were recognized; ten years had passed since I graduated. I work full-time, I must take care of my family, the house, the child - you know how we are; we want to do everything.]

These educational demands intersect closely with profound lifestyle adjustments and gradual shifts in family roles. Migration destabilizes previously established gendered responsibilities within the household, requiring their renegotiation under conditions of uncertainty

and heightened pressure. While migration creates space for change, the women's narratives make clear that such shifts unfold slowly and unevenly. The expectation that husbands might assume a greater share of domestic or caregiving responsibilities was often tempered by the realities they themselves faced, as men struggled to adapt to a new socio-economic environment and to fulfill intensified obligations as primary economic providers. Their testimonies illustrate how women, despite being multiple-burdened, consistently expressed an awareness of, and gratitude for, their spouses' economic sacrifices. They simultaneously acknowledged the pressures experienced by their partners, whose priority often became securing financial stability for the household. Rather than framing these dynamics as conflictual, the women's accounts reveal a complex landscape of shared strain, mutual dependence, and negotiated endurance, in which gendered roles were not radically overturned but reworked incrementally within the broader project of family survival and integration.

Dita: Me kujdesin e shtëpisë, kujdesin për djemtë jam marrë gjithmonë unë ... kur unë punoja dhe bashkëshorti ishte në shtëpi, ai kujdesej për pastrimin e shtëpisë dhe gatimin ... por kur unë jam available ai nuk gatuan, gatuaj unë.

[I have always been the one taking care of the household and looking after the boys... when I was working and my husband was at home, he would take care of cleaning the house and cooking... but when I am available, he doesn't cook - I do.]

Ariana: Në Tiranë ishte përgjegjësi e mamit çdo gjë në familje, këtu nuk ishte e lehtë. Në familjen tonë pyetja ishte: çfarë kemi për drekë mami? Jo - çfarë kemi për drekë babi? U desh pak kohë, të bashkërendojmë rolet. Sot, pas 25 vitesh në Kanada, në shtëpinë tone ka raste që unë jam duke bërë research për një artikull e im shoq duke bërë drekën – që para 25 vitesh as që nuk mendohej. Nuk është se kjo ndodhi lehtë - ishte rrugë e përpjetë për ta ndryshuar këtë.

[In Tirana, everything in the family was my responsibility; here it wasn't easy. In our family, the question was always: 'What are we having for lunch, mom?' - never 'What are we having for lunch, dad?' It took time to coordinate our roles. Today, after 25 years in Canada, there are moments when I am doing research for an article while my husband is cooking lunch - something that would have been unthinkable 25 years ago. This did not happen easily - it was an uphill road to change this.]

Mari presented a different perspective, describing how family roles were adjusted through mutual sacrifices to balance childcare and future aspirations:

Mari: Bashkëshorti im kujdeset jashtëzakonisht shumë për birin tim... për të akomoduar nevojat e mia për studim ai ka punuar edhe 7 ditë në javë që të mund të përshtaste më pas, në ditët e mia të ngarkuara, oraret me nevojat e djalit. ... Nuk mund t'i kërkojë më shume sakrifica bashkëshortit tim - bashkëshorti im ka sakrifikuar jashtëzakonisht shumë në momentin që ne erdhëm në Kanada për studimet e mia – në atë kohë ai ishte në majën më të lartë të karrierës se tij ndërsa këtu filloi në entry level positions në të njëjtën fushë, pavarësisht ekspertizës dhe experiencës që sillte me vete.

[My husband takes exceptional care of our son... to accommodate my need to study, he even worked seven days a week so that later, on the days when my schedule was particularly demanding, he could adjust his hours around our child's needs. ... I cannot ask for any more sacrifices from my husband - he sacrificed tremendously when we came to Canada for my studies. At that time, he was at the peak of his career, and here he had to start in entry-level positions in the same field, despite the expertise and experience he brought with him.]

Ela: Im shoq filloi një punë me të ardhura të mira pas diplomimit, kjo na dha një siguri financare dhe ishim të qetë. Edhe unë punoja... Im shoq më ka inkurajuar shumë, dhe kjo më jepte besim, forcë, por edhe kur me dekurajonte, prapë më jepte forcë, “O, ti s’beson ne unë?” e unë doja t’i tregoja që unë mundesha.

[After graduating, my husband found a job with a good income, which gave us financial security and peace of mind. I was working as well... My husband encouraged me a great deal, and that gave me confidence and strength. Even when he discouraged me, it still pushed me forward: ‘What, you don’t believe in me?’ and I wanted to show him that I could do it.]

Building on the reconfiguration of gendered roles within the household, for several of the women the decision to form a family or to raise young children after migration introduced an additional layer of complexity to the post-settlement experience. Five of the participants formed their families and gave birth to their children after arriving in Canada, while two arrived with toddlers. In this context, the absence of extended kin networks, grandparents, siblings, and long-standing community ties, profoundly reshaped the landscape of care, placing a

disproportionate emotional and practical burden on mothers. In Albania and Kosovo, childcare is typically embedded within dense kinship structures and reciprocal systems of support, where caregiving responsibilities are shared across generations and extended family members play an active role in daily child-rearing. In contrast, migration to Canada confronted these women with pregnancy, childbirth, and early motherhood under conditions of profound isolation. Without familial assistance, every aspect of care fell upon the nuclear household and, in most cases, primarily, on the mother herself. This burden was frequently compounded by the necessity to continue working or studying, forcing women to navigate the difficult balance between economic participation and childcare, and in some cases to make choices between employment, education, and the direct care of their children:

Ela: Shtatëzaninë e kisha shumë të rëndë, m'u desh ta lë punën, nuk e përballoja dot ... nuk kisha asnjë njeri që të më ndihmonte ... Gjatë shtatëzanisë së dytë, punoja dhe vazhdoja studimet ... shtatëzania, puna dhe ngarkesat e tjera - m'u desh ta shtyjë për disa semester graduation.

[My first pregnancy was very difficult; I had to leave my job because I couldn't handle it... I had no one to help me. ... During my second pregnancy, I was working and continuing my studies at the same time... the pregnancy, the job, and all the other responsibilities - I had to postpone my graduation for several semesters.]

Alba: I chose to work overnight at a restaurant ... and I would come home in the morning and still get them [the children] ready for school, because my husband would go to work, ... Taking care of them during the day, while working all night ... sometime I would go 18 hours without having an hour of sleep ... It's not that I had support... everyone was busy, nobody had time to help me, because the people I knew, were in the same situation I was.

Mari: "It takes a village to raise a child" – e unë atë fshat nuk e kam patur këtu. Kopshti ishte shumë shtrenjtë – nuk mund të përballoja shpenzimet. Ndërkohë punoja, studioja - e kam shtyrë veten shumë, kam qendruar natën pagjumë të punoja e ditën të rrija me fëmijën. Fajësoja veten se mos nuk po i jepja fëmijës tim vëmendjen e duhur. ... Më vjen keq që fëmija im po rritet vetëm, nuk e ka askënd këtu ... As unë nuk e kam – unë jam rritur me shumë njerëz përreth, kushërinj, large family.

[It takes a village to raise a child' - and I didn't have that village here. Daycare was very expensive; I couldn't afford the costs. At the same time, I was working and studying - I pushed myself a lot, staying awake at night to work and spending the

day with my child. I blamed myself, wondering whether I was giving my child enough attention. ... I feel sad that my child is growing up alone, without anyone here... and I don't have anyone either - I grew up surrounded by many people, cousins, a large family.]

Zade: Pasi linda fëmijet, duke mos patur asnjë lloj ndihme, unë zgjedha të punoj part time turn të natës që ditën të mund të rrija me fëmijët. Une kthehesha nga turni i natës e bashkëshorti nisej për punë, takoheshim në parkimi i makinës.

[After I had the children, without having any kind of help, I chose to work part-time night shifts so that during the day I could stay with them. I would come back from the night shift just as my husband was leaving for work - we would meet in the parking lot.]

Alda: Pasi lindi vajza unë doja të punoja, të gjeja një punë që më jepte fleksibilitetin që më duhej për t'u kujdesur për vajzën – po nuk e gjeta ... dmth prioritet u bë fëmija. Nuk mund të angazhohesha profesionalisht si im shoq – edhe ai nuk mund t'i angazhohej familjes sa donte, sepse i duhej të punonte.

[After my daughter was born, I wanted to work and to find a job that would give me the flexibility I needed to take care of her - but I couldn't find one... the child became the priority. I couldn't engage professionally in the same way my husband could - and he also couldn't be as present for the family as he wanted, because he had to work]

The women's experiences demonstrate the emotional weight of raising children at a distance from the places, people, and practices that once anchored their own sense of belonging. In this context, the act of building a family becomes a phase defined by both joy and sacrifice. What emerges consistently from their narratives is that, in every case, the women prioritized being physically and emotionally present for their children and assumed primary responsibility for their care. This choice did not translate into withdrawal from public life; rather, it reshaped the conditions under which work and education were pursued. Progress and integration, in this sense, were not abandoned, but recalibrated. Advancement was at times slowed, deferred, or negotiated around caregiving responsibilities, yet never fully relinquished. Most women remained active through paid employment and/or continued studies, often at considerable personal cost, enduring prolonged periods of sleep deprivation, night shifts, limited social lives, and diminished attention

to their own well-being. These strategies reflect not individual resilience alone, but a deeply rooted value system in which family care is essential, while economic contribution and personal independence are understood as equally fundamental. In relation to this, Alda stated:

Ne në Shqipëri presim nga një grua me fëmijë / një nënë që t'i bëjë të gjitha - të jetë e sukseshme profesionalisht, të jetë e përkushtuar ndaj familjes, ndaj shtëpisë – është jo realiste – e shoh këtë edhe te komuniteti shqiptar këtu.

[In Albania, we expect a woman with children - a mother - to do everything: to be professionally successful, to be devoted to the family, to the household. It's unrealistic - and I see the same expectation within the Albanian community here as well.]

Similarly, Rosa, a second-generation Albanian who grew up navigating both Canadian and Albanian value systems, reflected critically on these gendered expectations in her account. In speaking about her mother, she recalled, “I have seen my mom taking care of everyone,” a statement that encapsulates the centrality of care and self-sacrifice in Albanian women’s lived experience. From Rosa’s perspective, Albanian society conceptualizes women’s roles primarily through contribution to the family, framing femininity as a position of service, obligation, and moral indebtedness “almost like you have to pay this sacrifice.” At the same time, she recognized the extraordinary resilience demanded by these expectations, observing that “Albanian women, they’re like overachievers in every category,” a realization that fills her with admiration even as it prompts critical reflection.

Overall, these narratives demonstrate that the second stage of settlement is not a linear progression toward stability but a multifaceted process in which language acquisition, educational reinvention, shifting family roles, children-rearing and professional reconstruction. They reflect broader structural dynamics that shape immigrant incorporation across time and space. Their experiences offer a textured understanding of settlement as an ongoing project, one in which

identity, belonging, and aspiration are continuously reworked in response to both past histories and present realities. The next chapter examines integration as a multidimensional and ongoing process, encompassing economic participation, cultural adaptation, social relations, civic engagement, as well as identity and belonging.

CHAPTER IV

INTEGRATION, IDENTITY, AND BELONGING

Patterns of Integration

After navigating the initial phase of settlement, the women in this study described entering a period marked by greater economic stability and predictability. Securing stable employment, whether through career advancement, professional re-orientation, or long-term position retention, represented a significant milestone that reshaped their everyday lives. For some participants, this phase was characterized by upward mobility, as they gradually progressed within their fields, transitioned into roles better aligned with their skills, or assumed greater responsibility.

Dori: Nuk më duket normale të fillosh një punë e të qendrosh aty, sepse gjen rehat, sepse nuk ke nerva të rifillosh ... unë doja t'i tregoja si vetes dhe të tjerëve që mund të bëja më shumë ... nuk rreshta së aplikuari ... I thashë vetes nuk ka gjë të pamundur.

[It didn't feel right to me to start a job and then stay there just because you get comfortable, just because you don't have the energy to start over... I wanted to prove, to myself and to others, that I could do more. ... I never stopped applying. I told myself; nothing is impossible.]

For others, economic integration took the form of consolidation, with stability itself valued as an achievement that enabled planning, security, and a balance between work and family life.

Dita: Unë e kam shumë të fortë ndijesinë e familjes. Nuk mund të mendosh: unë do vijë e do bëjë karriere, do kujdesesh edhe për familjen ... [fillimisht] nuk kam punuar full time ... kam qënë shumë presente te fëmijët ... I shoqëroja në kurse, në aktivitete, në klasat shqipe – isha gjithë kohës me ta ... mund të zgjidhja të punoja natë e dite e të bënim para, por unë doja të isha me familjen, fëmijët.

[I have a very strong sense of family. You can't think only in terms of coming here and building a career - you also must take care of the family. ... [At the beginning] I didn't work full-time. ... I was very present for my children. ... I took them to courses, to activities, to Albanian classes - I was with them all the time. ... I could

have chosen to work, day and night and make money, but I wanted to be with my family, with my children.]

Within these decision-making processes, however, additional dilemmas emerged, including self-assessment and self-doubt, feelings of insecurity, and the challenges posed by cultural differences and unfamiliar institutional systems. Language once again constituted a barrier. In her narrative, Ana illustrated how these factors shaped her career-related decisions:

Punoj edukatore në kopësht... zgjodha të punoj në kopësht, Sepse doja të isha më e qetë me gjithë sfidat e emigracionit ... arsimi do të ishte shumë i lodhshëm për mua... jo se nuk e bëja dot mësuesen se e gjithë eksperiencia ime [mbi 20 vjet] është aty ... po me anglishten time nuk doja të keqkuptohesha, të keq interpretohesha ... do të duhet ta studioja gjithë sistemin [arsimor] kanadez dhe më duhej të ç'rrenjosja sistemin tim shqiptar ... Midis sistemit shqiptar dhe atij kanadez mendoj se ka ndryshime të mëdha.

[I work as an early childhood educator in a kindergarten... I chose to work in a kindergarten because I wanted to feel a bit more at ease with all the challenges of migration. ... Teaching would have been very exhausting for me, not because I couldn't be a teacher, since all my experience, more than twenty years, is there, but with my English, I didn't want to be misunderstood or misinterpreted. ... I would have had to study the entire Canadian education system and, at the same time, uproot my Albanian one. ... Between the Albanian system and the Canadian one, there are very big differences.]

Across varied trajectories, economic positioning emerged not only as an indicator of material well-being but as a foundation for confidence, autonomy, and the ability to make long-term choices, influencing how women experienced integration in other areas of their lives. However, their professional trajectories were often accompanied by cultural hesitation alongside professional competence, feelings of inferiority coupled with sustained effort, and a combination of gratitude toward colleagues and determination to perform to the highest standards:

Ela: Në punë në aspektin profesional ndihesha shumë mirë ... përvoja shqiptare më ndihmoi shumë ... dhe kjo më bëri të rrisja besimin te vetja, të mundja ndrojen që fillimisht më sillte niveli im i anglishtes.

[At work, professionally, I felt very good... my Albanian experience helped me a lot... and that made me grow more confident in myself, to get past the shyness that my level of English initially brought.]

Mari: Në fillim e kisha një ndjenjë inferioriteti, por u largua shpejt, për shkak të klimës këtu, shumë mbështetës, mirëkuptues.

[At first, I had a sense of inferiority, but it went away quickly because of the environment here - very supportive, very understanding.]

Dori: Vështirësinë më të madhe që kam ndjerë në punë nuk ka qënë asnjehere aspekti profesional, ka qënë gjuha profesionale... Unë e di që nuk do ta arrij dot nivelin e gjuhës së native people Mua step kjo... unë nuk e shpreh dot mendimin lirshëm... më ofruan punë menaxhere në institucionin ku punoj dhe une u stepa – në veten time nuk ndihesha rehat / e bindur që unë mund të menaxhoj njerëz me nivelin e gjuhës që kam ...Këtu nuk më kanë gjykuar për mënyrën si flas apo për theksin ... por unë e kam kompleks këtë ... Unë nuk vonohem të gjejë zgjidhjen e problemit, unë vonohem ta konceptoj përgjigjen ashtu siç duhet në anglisht. Për mua gjuha është barrierë.

[The greatest difficulty I have felt at work has never been the professional aspect - it has been the professional language... I know I will never reach the level of native speakers. That stops me. I can't express my thoughts freely. They offered me a managerial job position where I work, and I hesitated - I didn't feel at ease, or convinced, that I could manage people with the level of language I have. Here no one has judged me for how I speak or my accent... but I have a complex about it. I don't struggle to find the solution to a problem; I struggle to articulate the answer properly in English. For me, language is a barrier.]

Lira and Eva drew attention to an aspect of work culture in Canada that differs markedly from their previous professional experience in Albania, and which contributed to strengthening their confidence and supporting their professional advancement. In their accounts, they highlight a workplace environment in which learning, adaptation, and skill development are valued over immediate mastery:

Eva: Në Shqipëri presin që ti t'i dish gjërat të gjitha kur fillon një punë, ... këtu nuk presin që t'i dish, presin që t'i të kesh aftësinë të mesosh.

[In Albania, they expect you to know everything when you start a job... here, they don't expect you to know everything; they expect you to have the ability to learn.]

Lira: Kujtoj që për festa duhet t'ju mësonim fëmijëve këngë – unë kisha punuar gjithmone me të rritur. Pata shumë support nga kolegja ime; 'unë nuk di këngë' - i thoja dhe këtë e bëja me shumë vështirësi, sepse në Shqipëri ti ke mbaruar për anglisht dhe duhet t'i dish të gjitha. I thashë që unë nuk di këngë për fëmijë dhe e vura re që ajo nuk reagoi fare. ... Në Kanada mësova që nuk është turp të thuash nuk e di, dhe është normale, si mund t'i dish të gjitha ... Nga koleget e mia kanadeze mësova shumë. ... shumë nga kultura e punës, komunikimi, marrëdhënia me nxënësit... Pak e nga pak unë fillova të ndihem më e lirshme, më e shpenguar.

[I remember that for the holidays we had to teach songs to the children - I had always worked with high school students. I received a lot of support from my colleague. I would tell her, 'I don't know songs,' and I said this with a lot of difficulty, because in Albania, if you've graduated in English, you're expected to know everything. I told her I don't know children's songs, and I noticed that she didn't react at all. ... In Canada, I learned that it's not a shame to say, 'I don't know,' and that it's normal - how can you know everything? ... From my Canadian colleagues I learned a lot... a lot about work culture, communication, the relationship with students. Little by little, I began to feel freer, more at ease.]

Participants' narratives convey a nuanced experience of integration marked simultaneously by recognition, opportunity, and moments of subtle exclusion. Several women described feeling valued within professional and institutional settings, highlighting merit-based advancement, encouragement from colleagues, and recognition of their skills and efforts, while at the same time contrasting these experiences with those in Albania, where, in their view, the absence of meritocracy and professional appreciation is more common. For some, this translated into tangible professional achievements, reinforcing a sense of confidence and legitimacy within the host society.

Ela: Kanadaja është një vend që ju jep mundësinë të tërëve ... kush është i zoti dhe i motivuar ecën. Nuk ka rëndësi në je mashkull apo femër ... nuk kam pasur ndonjëherë problem se jam femër ... nuk mendoj se gjinia të pengon të jesh e suksesshme ... ndonjëherë mendoj se është mindset.

[Canada is a country that gives opportunities to everyone... those who are capable and motivated move forward. It doesn't matter whether you're a man or a woman. ... I've never had a problem because I'm a woman. ... I don't think gender prevents you from being successful. ... Sometimes I think it's about mindset.]

Dori: Më bën përshtypje sjellja dhe vlerësimi që i bëjnë njeriut ... këtu ecën kollaj shkallë shkallë në karrierë, nëse punon, tregon që ke aftësi. Brenda sistemit motivohesh, të shtyjnë, të ndihmojnë, të japin dorën të ecësh.

[What strikes me is the way people are treated and valued... here you can move forward step by step in your career if you work and show that you have skills. Within the system, you're motivated - they push you; they help you; they give you a hand to move forward.]

Lira: Nëntë vjet që punova si mësuese në Calgary, u vlerësova si mësuese e vitit, mora pjesë në konferencat e përvitshme që bëheshin në Kanada për mësuesit ESL ... Këtu në Halifax tre herë kam prezantuar në Konferencat e mësuesve ESL për provincën e Nova Scotia.

[For nine years that I worked as a teacher in Calgary, I was recognized as Teacher of the Year, and I took part in the annual conferences held in Canada for ESL teachers. Here in Halifax, I've presented three times at the ESL Teachers' Conferences for the province of Nova Scotia.]

At the same time, these experiences coexisted with episodes of everyday indirect or normalized micro-aggressions. Participants recounted assumptions linked to Balkan origin, or presumed socio-economic background.

Is this assumption that people do if you are from Balkans you work under the table, or you are less educated, is this expression "Balkan style", as Nare notes while recounting a personally lived experience: - In a dinner with my professors one of them said to me "your dad probably works under the table" while a Canadian student was asked: "what do your parent do?"

I had a person who once said to me, "oh, I'm so shocked, you don't feel embarrassed to say that you used to be a refugee." And I was like, NO, I'm not. Why would I be embarrassed of that? It's a fact. ... I'm a very prideful person. I'm happy where I come from. – recounts Eni

While some women contextualized these experiences as minor in comparison to past, more overt forms of discrimination. Nexhi asserted:

Ne kemi qënë vërtet vërtet të diskriminuar në Kosovë prej serbëve; në shkollë, në punë, kudo - këto janë gjëra të vogla për ne ... Unë nuk ndihem e diskriminuar, unë ndihem e respektuar.

[We were really, really discriminated against in Kosovo by Serbs, at school, at work, everywhere - so for us, these are small things. ... I do not feel discriminated against; I feel respected.]

Integration as an ongoing process was strongly related to cultural adaptation, which emerged in participants' accounts as an everyday negotiation. Women described learning how to navigate social norms, institutional expectations, and gender roles in ways that felt both practical and emotionally complex. Language and communication played a particularly central role, functioning as tools for interaction and autonomy, while also shaping feelings of both comfort and discomfort in public spaces:

Dita: Unë nuk e kuptoja dot kur dikush fliste, se çfarë ndiente - njerëzit këtu janë poker face – e pata gjithë kohën këtë ndijesi dhe kjo të bënte shumë të pasigurtë. ... Ne jemi shumë direkt dhe kjo të bënte të dukesh rude këtu ndonjëherë.

[Sometimes I found it hard to understand what people were feeling - many people here have a 'poker face'. It made me feel a bit unsure at first. ... Where I come from, we're very direct, and sometimes that can seem rude here.]

Ana: Komunikimi është shumë ndryshe – vendasit janë shumë më të kujdesshëm, më elegant në komunikim, nuk i kalojnë kurrë kufijtë – ndryshe nga ne shqiptarët që na e tregojnë dhe fytyra se çfarë mendojmë... ndonjëherë jemi dhe të patakt në mënyrën se si shprehemi.

[Communication is very different - locals are much more careful, more elegant in how they communicate; they never cross boundaries. We Albanians, on the other hand, our faces show exactly what we think... and sometimes we're not very tactful in how we express things.]

Dori: Ne kulturalisht jemi ndërtuar ndryshe dhe e shohim të vështirë këtë ndryshimin ... Kultura e punës ndryshon – te ne në Shqipëri kufijtë kalojnë lehtë, këtu secili ka përgjegjësinë e vet, nuk ndërhyjnë në punën e tjetrit ... Ne jemi shumë të drejtpërdrejtë, ndryshe nga stili sandwich i kanadezeve - ne nuk lodhemi me kaq shumë shtresa, ne kalojmë direkt te thelbi.

[Culturally, we're built differently, and I find this change hard. ... Work culture is different - back home in Albania, boundaries are crossed easily; here, everyone has their own responsibility and doesn't step into someone else's work. ... We're very direct, unlike the Canadian sandwich style - we don't go through all those layers, we go straight to the core.]

In some instances, overcoming these differences was described as relatively straightforward. As Eva noted, observing how people interacted with one another made it feel natural to adjust one's own behaviour, accordingly, allowing adaptation to occur without significant difficulty, *“unë u përshtata - të them të vërtetën nuk e pata problem,”* [I adapted - honestly, I didn't find it difficult] she said. In other cases, however, this process was more complex, particularly when it involved reconsidering or reshaping values that had previously been transmitted to children. Dori recounted a school-related episode involving her daughter to illustrate how the same behaviour could be interpreted differently across contexts: an action that, within the Albanian cultural framework, would have been perceived as dishonesty was instead framed in the Canadian context as an expression of politeness:

Me rastin e Shën Valentinit vajza duhet t'ju shkruante kartolina shokëve të klasës, ndërmjet tyre edhe një djali që e bullizonte herë pas herë në klasë. Ajo shkroi fjalë të bukura për të gjithë fëmijët dhe kritika për djalin që bullizonte shokët e klasës. Mësuesja ma tregon çfarë kishte ndodhur dhe i kërkon vajzës që të shkruante dhe njëherë kartolinën. Vajza u irritua që duhej të shkruante diçka që nuk e ndjente, dhe rezistoi ta rishkruante kartolinën, sepse nëse do ta shkruante siç mësuesja i kërkoi, do të gënjente.

[For Valentine's Day, my daughter had to write cards for her classmates, including a boy who bullied her from time to time in class. She wrote kind words for all the children and criticism for the boy who bullied the others. The teacher told me what had happened and asked my daughter to rewrite the card. My daughter got irritated that she had to write something she didn't feel, and she resisted rewriting it, because if she wrote what the teacher asked her to write, she felt she would be lying.]

However, cultural adaptation did not require the abandonment of practices and values carried from the country of origin. Instead, participants often described selective adaptation, whereby elements from both contexts coexisted and were gradually adjusted over time. Ela illustrated this process by reflecting on how she preserved certain aspects of parenting rooted in

the Albanian model, while also redefining her relationship with her daughters in comparison to how she herself was raised.

[rrugëtimi ynë] Nuk ka qënë i lehtë, kjo na ka bërë të jemi shumë kërkues ndaj fëmijëve ... ngandonjëherë vështirësitë tona ua kemi përcjellë edhe atyre... Prindërimi është i stilit shqiptar... [megjithatë] vajzave u kam mësuar të kenë besim në vetë vete, të kenë qëllime të qarta, të kenë ambicie, të jenë të pavarura e të punojnë fort që të jenë të sukseshme. Mbështetjen tonë do ta kenë gjithmonë për këtë... [ndërsa] Prindërit tanë nuk na e bënë kurrë qejfin, jemi rritur duke na thënë “eee nuk jeni nga ata ju... janë të tjerë ata” ...prindërit e mi gjithmonë donin të rrinim afër shtëpisë, dëshira e tyre ishte të bëhesha mësuese, ata e kishin vendosur si duhet të ishte jeta ime.

[Our journey hasn't been easy, and that has made us very demanding toward our children... sometimes we've passed our own difficulties on to them as well. Our parenting is in the Albanian style... [but] I've taught my daughters to believe in themselves, to have clear goals, to be ambitious, to be independent, and to work hard so they can be successful. They will always have our support in this. ... Our own parents never showed that they were proud of us. We grew up hearing, 'well, you're not like them... the others are the good ones.' My parents always wanted us to stay close to home; their wish was for me to become a teacher. They had already decided what my life should be.]

Ela situates herself between two parental models, describing her approach as simultaneously supportive, strict, and protective, noting that “*vajzave u kemi siguruar gjithcka që na na ka munguar ne.*” [we have ensured our daughters have everything that we ourselves lacked.]

At the same time, women's accounts reveal how processes of cultural integration often reshaped their own mindsets, as well as those of their children, highlighting cultural adaptation as a dynamic and reciprocal process rather than a unidirectional one:

Eva: Jeta ime ndryshoi rrënjësisht. Këtu e shikoja jetën ndryshe, më seriozisht, - ndryshoi mentaliteti; psh. në Shqipëri e konsideroja shtëpinë e prindërve të mi, shtëpinë time, kjo është mënyra si mendojmë ne, unë studiova dhe shpenzimet e mia gjatë studimeve i mbuluan prindërit e mi, ishte mentalitet normal që unë vetëm të fokusohesha te studimet, ndërsa këtu mora përgjegjësi dhe ia vura vetes synim që këto ti realizoja vetë, jo me mbështetjen e prindërve. Doja të isha e pavarur dhe të merrja përsipër gjithë përgjegjësitë që pavaresia mbart.

[My life changed completely. Here, I began to see life differently, more seriously - the mindset changed. For example, in Albania I considered my parents' home to be my home; that's how we think. I studied, and my parents covered my expenses during my studies. It was normal, the mentality was that I should focus only on studying. Here, instead, I took on responsibility and set myself the goal of achieving things on my own, not with my parents' support. I wanted to be independent and to take on everything that independence comes with.]

Ana: Vajzat në Shqipëri po jetonin jetën e tyre më të mirë... nuk punonin, shijonin pushimet, festat, kusherinjtë ... ndryshimi i kulturës dhe mënyrës si e perceptojnë jetën është i madh me Shqiperinë ... në Shqipëri rinia feston dhe jeton në kurriz të prindërve ... Këtu vajzat morën përgjegjësi, studiojnë dhe punojnë njëkohësisht.

[In Albania, the girls were living their best lives... they didn't work, they enjoyed holidays, celebrations, their cousins. ...The difference in culture and in how life is perceived compared to Albania is very big... in Albania, young people celebrate and live at their parents' expense. Here, the girls took on responsibility - they study and work at the same time.]

Participants' accounts also reveal how cultural integration reshaped the lenses through which they evaluated social norms and behaviours in the country of origin. In speaking about Albania and their return visits, Ariana and Dita, who have lived in Canada for over two decades, highlighted shifts in perception that emerged organically in their accounts:

Ariana: Kur shkoj në Shqipëri më revoltojnë gjëra, që edhe atëherë [kur ajo jetonte në Shqipëri] ndoshta kanë kenë normale. Ajo që më revolton më shumë në Shqipëri është mungesa e gëzimit për arritjen e tjetrit...karshillëket dhe xhelozitë, futja e hundëve në punët e tjetrit – këto kanë ekzistuar edhe atëherë në Shqipëri...këto kam filluar të mos i toleroj tani. Kjo është influence e Kandasë.

[When I go to Albania, there are things that upset me - things that, even back then, [when she was living in Albania], were probably considered normal. What upsets me most is the lack of joy for other people's achievements... the gossip, the jealousy, the constant interference in other people's lives. These things existed back then too in Albania... but now I've started not to tolerate them. This is the influence of Canada.]

Dita: Sot komunikimi në Shqipëri me duket rude - ajo karakteristika jonë e të qenurit të drejtpërdrejtë sot më duket rude, arrogante; e folura me zë të lartë më duket e zhurmshme.

[Today, communication in Albania seems rude to me - our way of being so direct now feels rude, arrogant, and speaking loudly feels noisy.]

Rather than indicating a rejection of Albanian identity, this shift reflects a process of reflexive comparison, whereby norms once perceived as familiar or acceptable came to be reassessed through newly internalized cultural frameworks.

As described in Chapter 3, during the early stages of settlement many participants initially relied on close family ties and co-ethnic networks. Over time, however, their social worlds expanded in diverse ways, including through workplaces, children's schools, and community involvement. Ela described how becoming familiar with, and feeling comfortable within, a group for new mothers facilitated her sense of social inclusion. Other participants pointed to positive relationships with colleagues, emphasizing how such connections supported not only opportunities for social interaction but also processes of cultural learning and adaptation:

Lira: Me koleget shkonim shumë mirë... Çdo të premte koleget dilnin për drink e unë bashkohesha me to nuk doja të shkeputesha, doja të socializohesha me vendasit, të kuptoja mindset e tyre.

[I got along very well with my colleagues... every Friday they would go out for drinks, and I would join them. I didn't want to disconnect; I wanted to socialize with locals, to understand their mindset.]

However, the degree of interaction beyond the Albanian community varied, shaped by factors such as time constraints, language confidence, and prior experiences of inclusion or exclusion. Participants' stories highlight how social relationships both facilitated everyday coping and reflected broader patterns of belonging, distance, or connection within the host society.

Eni: I do prefer to have Albanian friends more than Canadian friends because they understand how I was raised and why I am the way I am. ... I don't think Canadians will understand how our parents are and how we were raised. I've always noticed there was a huge cultural difference. So, I always connected more to my Albanian

friends. ... So, I never had to explain why my parents are like this or why I'm like this. They just understand. There's no explanation either. –

Nexhi: It is hard – [my children] bring friends home and I don't know what to say to them, what is appropriate and what is not, because it's different here. ... nëse sjellin ndonjë shoqe prej Kosove, unë jam më e çlirët, di çfarë të them, çfarë të bej, e di që mund t'i perqafojë, nuk je e frustrime çfarë bën e çfarë nuk bën.

(Translated only the part in Albanian) [... if they bring a friend from Kosovo, I feel more relaxed - I know what to say, what to do, I know that I can hug them, you're not stressed about what you should or shouldn't do.]

Alba: Unë kam miq kanadez, kam miq nga etni të ndryshme, nga Evropa, Azia, Amerika e Jugut ... [por] është shumë më e lehtë për mua të rri në një komunitet shqiptar.

[I have Canadian friends, I have friends from different ethnic backgrounds, from Europe, Asia, South America... [but] it's much easier for me to be within an Albanian community.]

Some women noted that the multiple demands of daily life left little time for socialization, while others expressed difficulty in recreating the kinds of close friendships they had left behind in Albania, choosing instead to maintain long-standing relationships across distance. For others, the reunification of extended family in Canada reduced the need to seek social connections beyond familial networks, as the recreation of a broader family environment fulfilled many social and emotional needs. Alba stated that “we came here and managed to bring everyone here,” using this phrase to describe the process of bringing close family members, parents and siblings, together in Canada. Similarly, Ela recounted:

Prindërit dolën në pension në Shqipëri dhe erdhën këtu – që atëherë jetojnë këtu - unë prindërit i kam pasur krahë tërë kohës – ata më kanë ndihmuar me rritjen e vajzave, janë kujdesur për to.

[My parents retired in Albania and then came here, and they've lived here ever since. I've had my parents by my side all along - they helped me raise my daughters and took care of them]

While women's engagement in civic and public life as well as formal political participation was not central to their narratives, many participants expressed interest in community-based

activities, volunteering, or informal advocacy, particularly around Albanian community. Several participants linked their level of engagement in civic and community life to a broader contribution to the preservation of the Albanian language and cultural traditions. Their narratives suggest that civic participation functioned both as a reflection of, and a contributor to, their sense of belonging.

Beyond everyday social and cultural negotiation, participants also reflected on how legal status and institutional stability shaped their sense of security and orientation over time. Legal stability and access to services were central in fostering feelings of predictability and safety, and for most of the women in this study, having a stable and permanent legal status facilitated a faster and easier integration process. As Dori expressed, “*Ne e morëm permanent residency që në aeroport, kjo ishte siguri dhe lehtësi e madhe.*” [We received permanent residency at the airport; this gave us a great sense of security and relief.] By contrast, participants who lacked such legal security described both supportive and challenging institutional encounters, emphasizing how prolonged uncertainty generated stress and constrained everyday life. Mari, who entered Canada on a study permit and is currently in the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) stage, recounted how repeated immigration applications, lengthy and exhausting procedures, and the maintained status (formerly implied status) between applications made travel outside Canada impossible: “*kam dy vjet e gjysëm pa shkuar në shtëpi. Babi im nuk e ka parë nipin e tij.*” [I haven’t returned home for two and a half years. My father has not seen his grandson.] She further described how this ongoing insecurity extends into her future planning:

“Duke qënë nënë e një fëmije të vogël, pa asnjë njeri e mbështetje për mua është shumë e vështirë për të punuar full time – për të fituar përvojë kanadeze – për Express Entry.”

[Being the mother of a little child, with no one and no support, it is very difficult for me to work full time, to gain Canadian work experience, for Express Entry.]

Similarly, Alba highlighted the difficulties and limitations created by the absence of full legal status, particularly in relation to access to services for her children:

Fëmijët ishin [My kids were] American citizen, their claim for refugee status was not approved, ... our application was accepted, for the kids was not accepted... we had to pay for all doctors' visits, emergency visits, everything, out of pocket. Their health care was not covered.

Even in cases where legal status did not generate immediate day-to-day anxiety, participants noted that it continued to shape their lives in indirect but significant ways:

Nare: Ne jemi të shkëputur nga familja e madhe – tezeve të mia u duhet vizë që të vijnë të na takojnë, këtë nuk e kupton dot një vendas a dikush që e ka tezen në Angli, që mjafton të presë biletën e të vijë të takojë njerëzit e dashur në Kanada – janë këto barrierat institucionale në jetën e një emigranti.

[We are separated from the extended family - my aunts need visas to come and visit us. That's something a local person, or someone whose aunt lives in England, can't really understand, where all it takes is buying a ticket to come and see loved ones in Canada. These are the institutional barriers in the life of an immigrant.]

Taken as a whole, the women's narratives point to integration as a gradual and unfinished process, unfolding at different rhythms and depths across the life course. While many participants had achieved stability, competence, and a sense of orientation within Canadian society, integration was rarely described as total or fully resolved. Instead, it was experienced as something that develops over time, shaped by openness, effort, and changing circumstances, and often evaluated relationally, particularly through the trajectories of children. Participants reflected on their own integration with a degree of reflexivity, acknowledging both progress and limits, and situating themselves at an in-between point rather than at a definitive endpoint. Ana, who has lived in Canada for only three years reflected:

Integrimi ndodh ngadalë, ngadalë – ngadalë, ngadalë, por për sa kohë je mendje hapur, gjërat mund të bëhen ...besoj se jemi në rrugën e mbarë për të jetuar në një vend që na ka hapur krahët.... Ne jemi emigrant të rinj ... Shqipëria është akoma e fort në jetën tonë ... është shumë e freskët.

[Integration happens slowly, slowly - very slowly, but as long as you are open-minded, things can be done. I believe we are on the right path to living in a country that has opened its arms to us. ... We are still new immigrants... Albania is still very present in our lives... it is still very fresh.]

Additionally, Alda after twelve years in Canada stated “*Ndoshta unë nuk jam integru kaq shumë këtu*” [Maybe I haven’t really integrated that much here.] Likewise, Ela, who has lived in Canada for twenty-six years, articulated a comparable assessment, noting: “*Nuk mund të them që integrimi për ne brezin e parë është 100%.*” [I cannot say that integration for the first-generation is one hundred percent.]

These accounts reveal integration as an ongoing negotiation that coexists with sustained attachments to the country of origin, while identity and belonging emerge as ways of living across, rather than fully within singular social worlds, an issue that will be examined in greater depth in the following section.

Identity and Belonging

Across the interviews, belonging emerged not as a stable or singular feeling, but as fragmented, situational, and deeply relational. Many women described feeling functionally integrated into everyday life; working, raising children, navigating institutions, while simultaneously expressing uncertainty or ambivalence about where they truly belonged:

Eni: I am too Albanian for Canadians and too Canadian for some of the Albanians. I kinda felt a bit lost when I was younger – I didn’t know where I belong - Am I Albanian? Am I Canadian?

Ela: Unë sot nuk jam kanadeze, as shqiptare më - shkoj atje dhe nuk më rrihet, vij këtu dhe e urrej dimrin, por kjo është shtëpia, kjo është home.... Unë kam pashaportë kanadeze, por unë nuk jam kanadeze, - unë kam ardhur këtu 26 vjec.

[Today I'm not Canadian, but I'm not Albanian either anymore. I go there and I don't feel like staying; I come back here and I hate the winter - but this is home, this is home. ... I have a Canadian passport, but I'm not Canadian. I came here when I was twenty-six.]

For some, Canada had become “home” through safety, opportunity, and stability, yet emotional belonging remained anchored elsewhere, in Albania or Kosovo. Others articulated a dual sense of home, using the same expression, “back home”, to refer to both places, depending on context.

Zade: Kjo [Kanadaja] është shtëpia ime. Por unë jam shqiptare. Megjithatë jeta ime, eksperiencat e mia, arritjet e mia janë këtu në Kanada... E duam vendin tonë se atje jemi rritur, atje kemi rrënjët ... sa herë që flas unë them “Atje te ne” për Shqipërinë, Maqedoninë, e kur shkoj atje them “Atje te ne” për në Kanada.

[This [Canada] is my home. But I am Albanian. However, my life, my experiences, my achievements are here in Canada ... We love our country because that's where we grew up, that's where our roots are. Every time I speak, I say 'back home' when I mean Albania or Macedonia, and when I go there, I say 'back home' when I mean Canada.]

Alba: I am Canadian, but I have my Albanian roots that are always with me ... Të qenurit shqiptar është pjesë e imja. I keep growing it with me.

[I am Canadian, but I have my Albanian roots that are always with me... Being Albanian is a part of who I am. I keep growing it with me.]

Belonging was thus shaped less by formal status or length of residence and more by emotional resonance, social intimacy, and everyday comfort. Feelings of acceptance in public spaces coexisted with a persistent sense of distance, especially in relation to deeper social bonds, which many women felt were harder to form and sustain:

Ariana është 100% shqiptare... unë kam trupin këtu dhe shpirtin atje.... Unë nuk ndiej që i perkas këtij vendi. Unë kam arritur suksese në Kanada, ... por I have been a patch, and I will remain a patch in this country ... unë jam qytetare e këtij vendi, e respektoj historinë e tij, respektoj ligjet por përkatësia ime është Shqipëria.

[Ariana is one hundred percent Albanian... I have my body here and my soul there. ... I do not feel that I belong to this country. I have achieved success in Canada... but I have been a patch, and I will remain a patch in this country. ... I am a citizen of this country; I respect its history, I respect its laws, but my belonging is Albania.]

Alda: Unë e ndiej veten shqiptare... deri vonë e quaja veten newcomer, po kur thoja vitet sa kisha këtu e kuptoja që unë nuk jam me newcomer... nuk mund të them që jam kanadeze, por ka gjëra që më pëlqejnë në kulturën kanadeze.

[I feel Albanian... until recently, I used to call myself a newcomer, but when I started saying how many years, I've been here, I realized I'm not a newcomer anymore. ... I can't say that I'm Canadian, but there are things in Canadian culture that I like.]

By contrast, Dita, whose life has been shaped across three different national contexts, reflected a sense of belonging that spans them all. Each country in which she has lived has contributed to her cultural formation and identity, leading her to describe herself as belonging simultaneously to all three:

Unë jam miks me tre kultura ... shpeshherë unë e ndiej Italinë si shtëpinë time, më shumë sesa Tiranën, po shkuam në Shqipëri ne do shkojmë në Itali se s'ben ... Unë ndihem Kanadeze, i respektoj shumë vlerat që ka Kandaja.

[I am a mix of three cultures... often I feel Italy as my home, more than Tirana. If we go to Albania, we will go to Italy as well, no doubt. ... I feel Canadian; I deeply respect the values of Canada.]

Participants consistently articulated identities that were layered, hybrid, and actively negotiated over time. While adaptation unfolded through work culture, communication styles, and everyday practices, cultural continuity was maintained through language use at home, food, media consumption, family values, and community participation.

Alba: Shqipëria zë 80% të përditshmërisë sime, siç jetonim në Shqipëri ashtu jetojmë dhe këtu ...me të njejtat parime ... traditat, cooking, how we see family, how close we are with kids, cousins, parents and everyone else – gjithcka është shqiptare ... dëgjojmë muzikë shqiptare, dëgjojmë lajmet për Shqipërinë, kemi televizionet shqiptare ... nuk kemi ndonjë tv kanadez në televizorin tonë... shkojmë në festa shqiptare, ne çdo aktivitet që zhvillon komuniteti shqiptar.

[Albania makes up 80 percent of my everyday life. The way we lived in Albania is the way we live here as well ... with the same principles. ... Traditions, cooking, the way we see family, how close we are with our children, cousins, parents, - everything is Albanian.... We listen to Albanian music, we follow the news from

Albania, we have Albanian TV channels - we don't have any Canadian channels on our television. ... We go to Albanian parties, to every activity organized by the Albanian community.]

Alda: Unë jam fanatike – me fanatizëm e kam mbajtur gjuhën shqipe – unë kam folur gjithmonë shqip e jam munduar ta përcjellë te goca. Ne duhet ta ruajme gjuhën – ne kemi idenë se shqipja na pengon të integrohemi këtu – po shqipja na ndihmon të lidhemi me njëri tjetrin. ... Shkojmë në Shqipëri shpesh, mundohemi të shkojmë çdo vit. Vajza ndihet mirë në Shqipëri.

[I'm almost fanatical - and I've preserved the Albanian language with real determination. I've always spoken Albanian and I've tried to pass it on to my daughter. We need to preserve the language - we often have the idea that Albanian holds us back from integrating here, but Albanian helps us connect with each other. ... We go to Albania often; we try to go every year. My daughter feels good in Albania.]

Identity was not experienced as a source of confusion alone, but also as a site of reflexivity, where women actively assessed what they wished to preserve, modify, or let go of, selectively embracing values such as family cohesion, transparency, and mutual support while critically distancing themselves from aspects of both Albanian and Canadian social norms perceived as misaligned with their sense of self:

Nare: Në kulturën shqiptare më pëlqejnë lidhjet e forta në familje. Në Kanada më pëlqejnë që janë gentle, willing to support, less competitive – while in Albania we have strong ties within the family, we are very competitive within the social group. We don't want others to achieve more than we do.

[What I like about Albanian culture are the strong family ties. In Canada, what I like is that people are gentle, willing to support others, less competitive - while in Albania we have strong ties within the family, we are very competitive within the social group. We don't want others to achieve more than we do.]

Alda: [Në shoqërinë kanadeze] ndonjëherë më duket e tepruar diplomacia, kujdesi për të qënë korrekt...më pëlqen transparenca, rregulli.

[In Canadian society, sometimes the diplomacy and the constant care to be correct feel excessive to me... but I do like the transparency and the sense of order.]

Eni: In Kosovo I like the culture, people are friendly. In Canada is not very easy to make friends.

Eva: Ne jemi një shoqëri e orientuar shumë drejt familjes, në Shqipëri si vajzë e re ndieja presionin e të ndjekurit hapa që shoqëria i cilësonte të duhurat – studio, diplomohu, fillo një punë, krijo familje, lind fëmijë – pa llogaritur që ti je një individ që ke aspirata dhe ambicie personale që mund të të plotësojnë si njeri, nuk është vetëm familja – në Kanada ke mundësi të jesh vetja ... të mos i vesh kufij ambicieve të tua.

[We are a society very oriented toward family. In Albania, as a young woman, I felt pressured to follow the steps society considered the right ones - study, graduate, get a job, start a family, have children - without taking into account that you are also an individual, with personal aspirations and ambitions that can fulfill you as a person; it's not only about family. In Canada, you have the possibility to be yourself... to not put limits on your ambitions.]

The women also demonstrate that, beyond the space of the home, they have actively sought to contribute to the transmission, preservation, and celebration of the Albanian language and cultural traditions as elements of Albanian identity. Dita described her sustained involvement and contribution to a range of activities organized within the Albanian community. Zade similarly recounted that her family has been actively engaged in the Albanian association; however, she also reflected on how the demands of everyday life, work and family responsibilities, often make sustained community engagement more difficult. Alda, who is likewise active within the community, shared similar concerns:

[Aktivitet e komunitetit] kërkojnë investim personal, por kërkojnë dhe financim...Ne jemi një komunitet i vogël, i ri... ne jemi ende duke u angazhuar për të stabilizuar veten këtu, e kemi të nevojshme që këtu të punojme shumë për të siguruar të ardhura. Nuk mund të merremi intensivisht me këto lloj aktivitete, sepse nuk na siguron jetesën, ai detyrimisht do mbetet dytesor.

[Community activities require personal investment, but they also require funding... we are a small, young community. ... We are still working on stabilizing ourselves here; we need to work hard to secure an income. We can't be deeply involved in these kinds of activities, because they don't provide a livelihood, they inevitably remain secondary.]

Nexhi, by contrast, spoke with passion about the ongoing activities organized with Albanian women in the Kitchener–Waterloo region, Ariana, Lira, Ana, and Mari recounted about

the Albanian language schools where they have contributed, and continue to contribute. Despite the varied forms and levels of engagement, all participants shared the view that within the Canadian context, characterized by extensive cultural diversity, it is relatively easy to preserve the customs and traditions of one's country of origin.

Importantly, women often evaluated their own experiences alongside those of their children, observing how the younger generation navigated belonging with greater ease, confidence, and social legitimacy, even as intergenerational tensions around language, expectations, and cultural norms persisted. Mothers expressed strong responsibility for transmitting language, values, and cultural memory, often positioning themselves as guardians of origin identity within the family. This generational dynamic produced both pride and emotional tension, as children became more linguistically and culturally fluent in the host society, sometimes responding in the dominant language or resisting heritage practices.

Ariana: Ne ishim me fat që fëmijët tanë u integraun në shoqërinë që zgjodhëm të ishim, por jo të asimiloheshin ... fëmijët tanë duhet të kuptojnë që atje [në Shqipëri] i kemi rrënjët në gurë, këtu [në Kanada] i kemi rrënjët në rërë ... Në shtëpi jemi përpjekur të krijojmë një ambient tamam shqiptar [ajo tregon fotot e gjyshërve të vendosur në mur, flamurin shqiptar mbi një desk, kornizë me veshje popullore / tradicionale shqiptare] They were not sprinkled with Albania, they were emerged with Albania... Ata u rritën me respektin për Kanadanë dhe me admirimin për Shqipërinë.

[We were lucky that our children integrated into the society we chose to live in, but without being assimilated. ... Our children need to understand that there, in Albania, our roots are in stone, while here, in Canada, our roots are in sand. At home, we have tried to create a truly Albanian environment. (She points to photographs of grandparents placed on the wall, the Albanian flag on a desk, and a framed piece of traditional Albanian clothing.) They were not sprinkled with Albania; they were immersed in Albania... They grew up with respect for Canada and admiration for Albania.]

Dita: Fëmijët kanë shkuar te shkolla shqipe çdo të shtunë; shkruajnë, lexojnë dhe flasin shqip mirë. Kur erdhëm këtu ne vendosëm që në shtëpi do flasim shqip. Fëmijët

kanë marrë pjesë në organizimet shqiptare, vinin me dëshirë në çdo aktivitet... Në Shqipëri shkojmë çdo vit, fëmijët kur ishin të vegjël vinin gjithmonë me ne ... tani vijnë më rrallë ... Ata kanë dëshirë të shkojnë në Shqipëri, këtë vit kanë planifikuar të shkojnë me shoqet e tyre.

[The children have attended Albanian school every Saturday; they write, read, and speak Albanian well. When we came here, we decided that at home we would speak Albanian. The children have taken part in Albanian community activities - they came willingly to every event. We go to Albania every year; when the children were younger, they always came with us... now they come less often... but they do want to go to Albania. This year they've planned to go with their friends.]

Nexhi: Unë jam tradicionale, edhe fëmijët i kam rritur kështu... kam ruajtur gatimet shqiptare. Dëgjojmë shumë muzikë shqip, radio shqip ... Ne në shtëpi flasim shqip, megjithëse nuk është gjithmonë e lehtë, sidomos kur ke shumë fëmijë, sepse ata mes veti flasin anglisht, e ne përfundojmë duke folur gjysmë shqip e gjysmë anglisht.

[I am traditional, and I raised my children that way as well. ... I've preserved Albanian cooking. We listen to a lot of Albanian music, Albanian radio. ... At home, we speak Albanian, although it's not always easy - especially when you have many children, because they speak English among themselves, and we end up speaking half Albanian and half English.]

Zade: Shkojmë shpesh në Shqipëri, fëmijët i rritëm të jenë shqiptarë. Fëmijët kanë emra shqiptarë ... Jemi munduar t'u mësojmë traditat tona, t'i përfshijmë në aktivitetet e komunitetit, i kemi çuar në shkollën shqipe. Megjithatë fëmijët takojnë në jetë njerëz të tjerë e ata ndikojnë në formimin e fëmijëve, shkolla po ashtu.

[We go to Albania often, and we raise our children to be Albanian. The children have Albanian names. ... We've tried to teach them our traditions, to include them in community activities, and we've taken them to Albanian school – however, children meet other people in life, and those people influence their development, and school does too.]

Women's accounts reveal belonging as an intergenerational process, in which their own sense of place is deeply intertwined with their children's identity formation. Yet, as becomes clear from their narratives, this process is far from easy in the context of migration. As Ariana told me, *“Nuk është e lehtë Adelina. Fëmijët e ndiejnë veten të shtrirë ndërmjet dy kontineteve e në fakt nga ana kulturore ndërmjet dy botëve”* [It's not easy, Adelina. Children feel themselves stretched

between two continents and, in fact, culturally between two worlds]. The children themselves, the 1.5 and second-generation of the participants, echo this experience in their own reflections:

Nare: Kur isha më e vogël unë u rrezistojta traditave... është cikël, gjithë adoleshentët kundërshtojnë prindërit e tyre ... kur je i vogël you want to fit in and when you grow up, you realize everyone is different ... tani jam unë që kam qejf të flas për traditat ... Unë flas shpesh për traditat tona edhe kur jam me miq kanadez: ‘Ne në Kosovë kështu e bëjmë...,’ ‘o provojeni këtë ushqim shqiptar,’ ‘dëgjojeni këtë këngë shqiptare’

[When I was younger, I used to resist traditions. ... It’s a cycle, all teenagers push back against their parents. ... When you’re young, you want to fit in, and when you grow up, you realize that everyone is different. ... Now I’m the one who enjoys talking about traditions. ... I often talk about our traditions, even when I’m with Canadian friends: ‘This is how we do it in Kosovo,’ or ‘try this Albanian food,’ or ‘listen to this Albanian song’]

Rosa: Traditions of Albania - they dominate my family life. I'm proud of my culture. I like the stories, the traditions... I have a deep respect for my culture too, but I think I'd like to practice it a little bit differently than they [the parents] do.

Eni: I know everything about Kosovo. Oh, everything. My parents made sure for it. My parents taught us to be prideful from where we come from. I go to Pristina every year, sometime twice a year.

Stretched, as Ariana put it, “between two worlds,” young people often must live with principles and expectations that differ between the family and the host society, a circumstance that frequently gives rise to intergenerational tensions. Rosa articulated this experience through her relationship with her parents’ mindset, which she described as shaped by fear, pressure, and survival. She recounted how she felt angered by their expectation of hard work, which according to them “makes you resilient,” as well as how deeply she resented sustained parental control, in which “everything was a threat, everything was a risk,” and a conception of success closely tied to sacrifice and obligation. Rosa also challenged gendered perceptions of value, describing how, despite her personal achievements, “that really does not matter... because I don’t have a husband.”

These reflections show that second-generation integration involves not only personal adaptation

but also a profound renegotiation of inherited family values “for the good things and the bad things.”

A different concern emerges in Nare’s account. She reflected on how growing up in an immigrant family can be difficult, as she pointed to the asymmetry of language proficiency across generations, explaining that “my parents speak English, but not one hundred percent; I speak Albanian, but not one hundred percent,” which means that parent and child “will never speak to each other one hundred percent,” a condition she associated with ongoing tension throughout upbringing.

For second-generation participants, identity and belonging were further shaped by the legacy of conflict between Albanians and Serbs, although this history was often experienced indirectly rather than lived firsthand. “*Unë ju tregoj shumë për historinë, për luftën. Dikush thotë që fëmijët nuk duhen ngarkuar, por unë mendoj se fëmijët duhet të dinë,*” [I talk to them a lot about history, about the war. Some people say that children shouldn’t be burdened, but I believe that children need to know] stated Nexhi. The young women reflected on how memories of war, fear, and displacement, transmitted through family stories, coexisted with their own social realities, which included everyday interactions with peers of Serbian background. Eni remembered:

When I was little, I remember them [the parents] being a little bit more frightful because, you know, there were Serbians around. They didn't want us to wear our T-shirt with the Albanian flag because they were just scared something bad might happen to us.

Ela reflected on how her daughters, when they were younger, were enthusiastic about sharing stories of Albania and Albanian traditions at school, but later began to feel uneasy following a particular incident that took place in the classroom:

Vajza e vogël pati një fëmijë me origjinë (me prinder) serb në klasë që i tha: ‘ti je shqiptare, po nuk ka problem, unë nuk do të vras ty’ – ka akoma prindër të brezit të parë të emigrantëve që ua kanë kaluar urrejtjen fëmijëve dhe kjo na tronditi.

[My younger daughter had a classmate with Serbian parents, who said to her, ‘You are Albanian, but it’s okay, I won’t kill you.’ There are still parents from the first-generation of immigrants who pass their hatred on to their children, and this deeply shook us.]

While parents often carried deep emotional scars and protective instincts rooted in lived trauma, second-generation participants described a more nuanced relationship to this history, marked by reflection rather than hostility. Eni while expressing empathy for her parents’ fear and pain and acknowledging that intergenerational understandings of history were shaped by unequal experiences of loss and violence, emphasized her ability to separate individual relationships from collective responsibility.

I consider myself lucky to have friends or to have met people from Serbia who are like closer to my age. ... I don't hate them. ... I can't hate on someone who was my age because it's not, they were the ones who started the war. They were babies too, you know? ... it just kind of reminded me that like at the end it's not their fault, like these specific people's fault.

Together, these narratives show that for young generation women, integration and identity formation involve ongoing negotiation between inherited family memories and expectations and the relational, moral, and emotional frameworks of the host society, making belonging a complex and continuously renegotiated process. Yet, although they may at times resist traditions, speak limited Albanian, or express resentment toward their parents’ mindset, these women articulated a clear sense of their own identity. When asked whether they considered themselves Albanian or Canadian, the young women responded:

Definitely Albanian - Nare

Just Albanian – Rosa

I feel like the one of the first things I talk about, is me being Albanian. - Eni

Comparison and Reflection

The final section of this chapter adopts a comparative and reflective approach to examine how integration has been experienced, interpreted, and evaluated by women who arrived in Canada under different circumstances and at different stages of their lives. This section foregrounds variation across trajectories, highlighting how timing, migration pathways, socio-economic positioning, and prior migration experiences shaped women's long-term integration outcomes and senses of belonging.

Variation in women's integration trajectories can be understood in relation to the conditions under which migration took place, particularly the historical moment of departure and the resources women carried with them at that time. Integration was not shaped solely by individual characteristics, but also by broader structural factors, including the level of socio-economic development in the country of origin and the forms of support available in the hosted country. The competencies, expectations, and degrees of familiarity with institutions, languages, technologies, and transnational movement that women possessed at the moment of departure influenced the ways in which they encountered and navigated the new environment.

At one point in her narrative, Ela remarked, "*Ishim të ndrojtur; - mos harro ne vinim nga Shqipëria*" [We were timid - do not forget that we were coming from Albania]. Albania in 1999, when Ela left for Canada, was still a poor and fragile post-communist society, burdened by sharp political tensions, high unemployment, weak investment, uneven economic development, and the wide expansion of informality. The weaknesses of the state and the economy were reflected in everyday life through deficient infrastructure. The country's earlier isolation continued to leave a deep imprint on society: access to information remained limited, internet communication had not yet become widespread, and knowledge of English was still relatively low, particularly among

generations educated before 1990, when Russian had often been the principal foreign language studied at school. International mobility likewise remained severely constrained, as Albanians were required to obtain visas for travel abroad, a process that was difficult for most citizens and effectively prevented free movement outside the country until the liberalization of the visa regime in 2010. In the broader European imagination, Albania was still frequently perceived through the twin lenses of clandestine migration and the violent collapse of order in 1997.

For women belonging to the migration cohort of the late 1990s and early 2000s, therefore, the gap between the country of origin and the host country was particularly wide. As Zade put it, *“ishte nje botë krejt tjetër”* [it was a completely different world.] Lira, for example, recalled that “using a bank card was unfamiliar to me,” since in Albania she had used only cash. She did not drive and did not hold a driver’s licence back home; in Albania of those years, women who drove could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Computer use was likewise limited, largely confined to office settings rather than everyday personal use. Lira recounts that, during the early stage of her life in Canada, some of her teaching hours required her to work with students on computers, something she experienced as particularly challenging.

Unë atje ‘gati e vrisja veten’, sepse ishte gjithmonë ai kompleksi që nuk mund të them që nuk e di... kishim patur në punë në Shqipëri kompjuter, por e përdornim shumë pak e unë kisha njohuri bazike.

[I was almost beside myself there, because I always had that feeling that I could not admit I didn’t know... We had had computers at work in Albania, but we used them very little, and my knowledge was only basic.]

Additionally, the lack of information channels meant that knowledge about the host country was often extremely limited. When this was combined with the fact that many women had never travelled outside Albania before migration, the challenge became even greater. Ela, for instance, explained that her journey to Canada was the first major journey she had ever undertaken, apart

from the trip to the Canadian Embassy in Hungary for her immigration interview. For women of this cohort, therefore, the encounter with a completely new world took place with less information, less prior exposure, and fewer practical resources, which meant that adaptation required greater effort and a more intensive personal investment.

What these narratives reveal is that integration depended not only on formal qualifications, but also on practical competencies of everyday life, competencies related to movement, technology, communication, and the handling of ordinary institutional routines. These resources, however, were not distributed evenly across cohorts, since changing political, economic, and social conditions shaped what forms of preparation were possible or even imaginable before migration. Approaching integration from this perspective makes it possible to link individual trajectories to historically situated contexts, without implying that differences in points of departure necessarily hindered adaptation, integration, or the achievement of success, but rather that they shaped the amount of time, energy, and personal effort that women had to invest in these processes.

If everyday practical competencies were often limited by the material and institutional conditions of Albania / Kosovo, the women nevertheless emphasized that they brought with them other resources, formed through hardship, work, and responsibility, that became equally important in the process of adaptation.

Across the interviews, women consistently emphasized personal agency such as determination, a strong work ethic, adaptability, and perseverance, when explaining their integration outcomes. Although structural barriers and institutional support were acknowledged, they often went parallel with narratives of self-reliance and moral responsibility. Ariana, for example, stressed that *“sfidat e emigracionit nuk varen aq nga gender, sesa nga skill qe sjell me vete individit.”* [the challenges of migration do not depend so much on gender as on the skills the

individual brings with them.] Other women expressed similar views in different terms. Alba pointed to “hard work,” adding, “We were taught how to work hard.” Eva reflected that “*Vështirësitë që ti kalon në Shqipëri të rrisin shumë, të bëjnë të fort. ... Shqipëria të përgatit.*” [the difficulties you go through in Albania make you grow, make you strong... Albania prepares you.” Dita likewise emphasized a problem-solving mentality, explaining that “*ne kemi mentalitetin që nuk ka vështirësi që nuk kalohet, jeta në Shqipëri na ka aftësuar të orientohejmë drejt zgjidhjes së problemeve.*” [we have the mentality that there is no difficulty that cannot be overcome... life in Albania has trained us to orient ourselves toward solving problems.]

What is striking in these responses is that personal agency is articulated in similar terms, regardless of differences in education, age, or prior migration experience. In this sense, agency appears not as a purely individual or innate quality, but as something historically formed through earlier life experiences and later reinterpreted as a resource for adaptation. Women thus retrospectively framed hardship, instability, and responsibility in Albania / Kosovo not only as burdens, but also as forms of preparation that supported their settlement and integration in Canada. Dori’s remark made while recounting her own trajectory “*Ti e di si jemi ne*” [you know how we are] further reinforces this pattern, suggesting that the qualities she described in herself were understood not simply as personal traits, but as characteristics she perceived as widely shared among Albanian women. This pattern suggests that personal agency, as narrated by the participants, was understood as both individual and collective: rooted in personal experience, yet shaped by a broader social and historical context that had cultivated resilience, endurance, and a practical orientation toward overcoming difficulty.

Women’s integration trajectories were also shaped by the specific migration pathways through which they arrived, including skilled migration, family reunification, refugee or

humanitarian entry, and international student routes. These pathways influenced not only access to legal security and institutional support, but also the amount of time and stability available for adoption and integration. While some women experienced relative stability early on, others described prolonged uncertainty, repeated status transitions, and the need to begin again more than once. Alba, for example, explained that “*Sfida më e madhe ishin dokumentat – na u desh të kalonim through lawyers and staff... it was a long journey.*” [The biggest challenge was our legal status - we had to go through lawyers and immigration staff ... it was a long journey]. Nexhi recalled spending three months in a refugee camp with four young children, while Mari described the stress, insecurity and restrictions produced by successive immigration applications. Such conditions affected not only women’s emotional well-being, but also their sense of continuity and their ability to integrate into the labour market, achieve financial stability, and plan. In this way, different starting points created unequal pressures and expectations, shaping both the pace and the emotional weight of integration. Yet, despite these differences, integration was not evaluated solely in administrative or economic terms, but also in relation to the extent to which these pathways enabled women to regain agency, dignity, and a sense of control over their lives.

A particularly salient axis of comparison emerged between women who migrated directly to Canada and those who experienced serial migration through other countries before arrival. For women with prior migration histories, earlier experiences of exclusion, discrimination, or precarious legal status shaped both their expectations of Canada and the strategies they brought with them. As Eva explained, she had grown up in Greece, where she had lived with her family as an immigrant for ten years. Having been raised with what she described as a strong “sense of emigration,” she initially feared that in Canada she might relive the same hardships once again. “*Unë u rrita me ndijesinë e emigracionit ... Kur erdha fillimisht kisha merak mos do të perjetoja*

një déjà vu, do të kaloja dhe njëherë vështirësitë e emigracionit.” [I grew up with that sense of emigration... When I first arrived, I was afraid it might feel like a kind of déjà vu, that I would have to go through the hardships of migration all over again.]

Women with such prior experiences often described themselves as arriving with greater resilience, more practical knowledge, and a stronger emotional preparedness. Dita, for instance, remarked that “*në Itali në fillim kemi vuajtur jashtë mase*” [we suffered enormously when arrived at Italy], whereas Ana, who was experiencing migration for the first time, repeated several times throughout her narrative that “*ne kemi dalë nga rehatia jonë që kishim në Shqipëri*” [we left behind the comfort we had in Albania.] The contrast is telling: whereas Dita associated her earlier migration experience with suffering, Ana recalled her premigration life primarily in terms of comfort and security. This contrast is evident even when they describe their integration in Canada, Dita:

Integrimi në Kanada në krahasim me integrimin në Itali ishte si dita me natën, ... këtu askush nuk të pyeste nga vjen, edhe pse ne nuk flisnim mirë anglisht, ndërsa në Itali, edhe pse italishten e flisnim mirë, sa hapnim gojën, për shkak të theksit, na pyesnin: ‘nga vjen ti?’ Unë ngaqë kisha vuajtur shumë në fillimet në Itali, ky fillimi këtu më dukej shume i lehtë.

[Compared to Italy, integration in Canada was like day and night. ...Here, no one asked where you came from, even though we didn’t speak English well. In Italy, on the other hand, even though we spoke Italian well, as soon as we opened our mouths, they would ask, because of the accent, ‘where are you from?’ Since I had suffered so much in the beginning in Italy, the beginning here felt very easy by comparison.]

In contrast to the relative enthusiasm expressed by Dita, Ana stated that “*ishte e vështirë ... emigracioni na ka dobësuar zemrën.*” [it was difficult ... migration has weakened our hearts]

These are not isolated examples. Eva voiced a similar view with Dita when reflecting on the contrast between her earlier experience of displacement and her life in Canada. She explained that Canada surprised her and made her love the country even more:

Kanadaja më surprizoi dhe më bëri që ta doja akoma më shumë si vend ... Unë e dua shumë Greqinë, kam kaluar 10 vite të fëmijërisë sime, e konsideroj shtëpi... por në Greqi unë isha gjithmonë Shqiptarja ... kur u ktheva me familjen në Shqipëri, edhe pse isha në vendin tim, unë në Shqipëri konsiderohesha grekja, e pastaj vij në Kanada e askush nuk të pyet nga je, nga vjen. Nuk më bëri në asnjë moment të ndihesha e huaj.

[Canada surprised me and made me love it even more as a country... I love Greece very much, I spent ten years of my childhood there, and I consider it a kind of home. But in Greece, I was always the Albanian. When I returned with my family to Albania, even though I was in my own country, there I was seen as the Greek. Then I came to Canada, and no one asks you where you are from, where you come from. Not for a single moment did it make me feel like a stranger.]

While Dori, who was also encountering migration for the first time, recalled that during the first months she packed and unpacked her suitcases countless times, uncertain whether she would stay or return. Arriving with such different past experiences, it is understandable that these women would experience the transition to yet another country in different ways, and that the emotional weight of migration would also vary significantly.

Participants' narratives also show how prior migration experiences shaped interpretations of fairness, belonging, and opportunity in Canada. Alba, who had previously experienced migration in both Greece and the United States, compared the three settings by saying that, even though her children were still young when they arrived, in Canada, while in the prior displacement she has been single, they found settlement in Canada easier:

Pavarësisht se kur erdhëm, fëmijet ishin të vegjël, e patëm më të lehtë se në Amerikë
[Even though our children were still young when we arrived, we found it easier here than in the United States] ... everything... the whole process ... since the first day we entered to Canada ... In Greece they were very racist at the time I was there.

I know they are not so racist now... The US was pretty much the same... we went there in early 2000 and after 2001 they were racist toward emigrants and foreigners as well.

Ariana, who had lived in the United States before emigrating to Canada, similarly explained that she chose Canada because “*Amerika nuk me dukej vendi i përshtatshëm për të rritur dy teenagers e mi*” [the United States did not seem a suitable place to raise my two teenage children.] She contrasted the reception of immigrants in the two countries by pointing to the meanings embedded in the language used to describe them. In her view, the Canadian term *newcomers* suggested a more welcoming approach, whereas the American term *aliens* conveyed greater distance. She linked this distinction to broader models of incorporation: the American *melting pot*, which implies assimilation into a dominant culture, and the Canadian understanding of multiculturalism, closer to a “mixed salad,” in which diversity is publicly recognized and encouraged. She felt that this difference was also visible in the labour market and in everyday interaction. Recalling her experience in the United States, she stated:

Në US bëja intervista për punë dhe sa filloja përgjigjen - anglishtja ime ishte akademike, por accent ishte i dukshëm – ata më pyesin, Nga vjen ti? Unë përgjigjesha – nga San Diego. Ata pyesnin, jo jo, nga vjen? me qëllimin për të gjetur nacionalitetin ‘jo-amerikan’. Kjo pyetje është e ndaluar me ligj të bëhet në intervistë pune në Kanada.

[In the U.S., I would go to job interviews, and as soon as I began to answer - my English was academic, but my accent was noticeable - they would ask, ‘Where are you from?’ I would reply, ‘From San Diego.’ Then they would ask again, ‘No, no, where are you from?’ clearly trying to identify my non-American nationality. In Canada, that kind of question is legally prohibited in a job interview.]

Taken together, these examples show that prior migration did not simply add another geographical stage to women’s lives; it shaped the interpretive frameworks through which Canada itself was understood. For some, earlier exposure to marginalization made Canada appear comparatively fairer, more inclusive, and emotionally less burdensome. For others, especially

those experiencing migration for the first time, the move involved a sharper rupture with familiarity, comfort, and emotional security. In this sense, serial migration influenced not only practical adaptation, but also the emotional and comparative meanings women attached to integration, belonging, and opportunity in Canada.

It is only natural that the age at which women encountered migration influenced their process of adaptation to a new society. “*Mosha nuk na ndihmonte*” [Our age did not help us], Ana remarked, reflecting on her arrival in Canada at the age of forty-three. During her narrative, she repeatedly used expressions such as: “*duhet të ç’rrenjosja sistemin tim shqiptar*” ... “*duhet të filloja të mendoja ndryshe*” ... “*duhet të bësh atë ndërrimin, të bëhesh ai njeriu tjetër*” [I had to uproot my Albanian system, ... I had to begin thinking differently, ... you have to make that shift, to become a different person] - suggesting the depth of the adjustment required at that stage in life [“*pasi je mësuar dhe strukturuar në një vend*”] once a person has become accustomed to and structured within one country demands a profound internal reorientation. Alda expressed a similar idea, though in more reflective terms, observing that “*është një luftë e brendshme të mposhtësh mentalitetin. Mentaliteti ynë na ndikon në vendimmarrje, në veprime*” [it is an inner struggle to overcome one’s mentality. Our mentality affects our decisions and our actions]. By contrast, Eva, who arrived at the age of twenty-six, stated more simply: “*Unë me thënë të drejtën nuk e pata problem ... u përshtata*” [To be honest, I did not have a problem... I adapted].

Beyond the fact that mentality may be more fixed or more elastic at different stages of life, women who arrived at a point when they had already built a life and a career in their home country experienced migration differently from those whose adult lives and professional trajectories were only beginning in Canada. As Lira explained, “*Unë kisha një punë të mirë në Shqipëri – duhet të filloja nga e para*” [I had a very good job in Albania... here I had to start from the beginning.]

What they left behind, what they missed, what caused them pain, and the memories they carried were naturally more extensive. Yet the continuation of their stories also shows that age brought with it other resources: greater experience, stronger resilience, and a deeper sense of discipline, which in some cases compensated for the reduced flexibility that younger age might have provided. “*përvoja e punës në Shqipëri më ndihmoi shumë*” [my work experience in Albania helped me a great deal], Ariana noted. Ana similarly emphasized her emotional self-control, saying that she never gave voice to many of her worries, while Dita framed hardship through a language of effort and refusal of victimhood: “*Kemi kaluar vështirësi, po kush nuk ka kaluar? Kush punon e gjen gjithmonë mënyrën ... [mund të ankoresh] po do të bësh viktimën e to të mbetesh gjithmonë viktimë*” [We have gone through difficulties, but whoever works always finds a way... you can complain, but if you make yourself into a victim, you will remain a victim forever.]

Their words and experiences therefore suggest that age did not operate simply as an obstacle or an advantage. Rather, it shaped adaptation in complex ways. Younger women often appeared to move with greater flexibility into the new environment, while older women, though more challenged by the need to reorganize established habits, identities, and expectations, often drew on broader reserves of work experience, emotional endurance, and practical judgment. In this sense, age influenced not whether integration was possible, but the form it took, the aspects of life in which it was most deeply felt, and the kinds of resources women mobilized to achieve it.

The welcoming environment in Canada was not mentioned only in relation to the moment of arrival but recurred throughout the women’s narratives as a retrospective assessment of their entire migratory experience. Alba stated, “I am very thankful for everything Canada has done for us,” while Ela described migration to Canada as “*vendimi më i mirë jetës sime*” [the best decision of my life]. Eva emphasized that Canada gave her all the opportunities, and Ana similarly remarked

that the country opened its arms to them. For many, Canada was remembered as both a place of security and a country of opportunity, as Zade put it, “*Kanadaja është vendi i mundësive – kufiri është qielli*” [Canada is the country of opportunities - the sky is the limit], not only in economic terms, but also in the space it offered for the preservation and development of ethnic identity. Yet the narratives also suggest that settlement and integration unfolded under changing Canadian conditions. In their recollections, one often hears comments such as “*Kanadaja ishte ndryshe atëherë*” [Canada was different back then], “*ishte më e lehtë kur erdhëm ne*” [it was easier when we came], “*çmimet ishin më të ulta*” [prices were much lower], or “*ne patëm mbështetje*” [we received a great deal of support]. While earlier arrivals often recalled lower prices, greater support, and a less demanding economic environment, women from later cohorts more frequently emphasized “*me këto çmime e pamundur të blesh një shtëpi me rroga në Kanada,*” “*tani është e vështirë të gjesh punë*” the high cost of living, the difficulty of buying a home, and a more competitive labour market. These reflections suggest that integration was shaped not only by personal and premigration factors, but also by the specific historical moment in which women entered Canadian society.

A recurring insight across accounts is that functional integration, economic stability, institutional familiarity, and social participation, did not always translate into emotional belonging. Many women described feeling settled yet emotionally divided, secure yet nostalgic, grateful yet ambivalent. What really has value to be analyzed is the fact that emotional belonging is not parallel with the number of years in Canada, the legal status or the socioeconomic position. Ariana, after twenty-five years in Canada, describes herself as having achieved success and becoming someone established, yet she still reflected that “I have been a patch, and I will remain a patch in this country.” By contrast, Eva, who has lived in Canada for six years, stated with certainty: “*Patjetër*

që ndjej që i përkas këtij vendi, sepse i ka hapur dyert për mua dhe më ka dhënë të gjitha mundësitë.” [Of course, I feel that I belong to this country, because it opened its doors to me and gave me all the opportunities.]

Thus, belonging did not develop in a simple linear relation to the number of years spent in Canada, but it was shaped by the meanings women attached to their experience. For some, Canada became a place of belonging because it had offered safety, opportunity, and the sense of not being treated as foreign, so that attachment could form relatively quickly through contrast with what had been left behind in Albania. For others, belonging was measured against a more demanding standard: not only whether life had become established there, but whether they felt fully of that place and recognized as such. In this sense, longer residence could bring not a stronger sense of belonging, but a sharper awareness of its limits. Feelings of belonging were therefore often relational and situational, rather than formal markers of integration.

Examining how women explained success or struggle reveals not only what helped or hindered integration, but also how they assigned meaning and value to their journeys. A recurrent theme across the interviews was that women frequently assessed their own integration through the experiences and future trajectories of their children. Almost everyone said the same thing, I am choosing to express it with the words of Nexhi: “My biggest achievement is the success of my children - I feel I have somehow contributed to that.” In this sense, the narratives return to the very starting point of migration itself: many of the women had come to Canada precisely to offer their children better opportunities.

Two interrelated aspects are especially important here. First, helping their children succeed often required the women themselves to succeed, or at least to achieve sufficient stability, so that they could provide guidance, protection, and support. When Ela stated that “the children will

always have our support,” this support extended beyond emotional encouragement to include practical assistance, educational guidance, and financial help. Their own settlement and recovery therefore became inseparable from their role in enabling the next generation to move forward.

Second, through their everyday practices, less through explicit instruction than through their ways of living, thinking, and assigning meaning to ordinary life, these women also transmitted models to the second generation. For example, by consistently placing their children’s needs at the centre of everyday life, these women also embodied forms of care and family obligation that the children could not easily escape, even when growing up in a different cultural environment. Rosa, while at times critical of the role traditionally assigned to Albanian women in the family, nevertheless acknowledged the enduring influence of maternal example: “For better or for worse, [I find myself] doing a lot of the same stuff ... Because of how I watched my mom care for people... I feel like maybe you can’t get away from that way of caring when you see it.” Alba expressed a similar idea when reflecting on family life across generations: even though the children had grown up in Canada, they still observed arrangements such as grandparents living with one of their adult children and came to regard such patterns as “normal and familiar rather than exceptional.”

In this way, the second generation did not simply inherit Albanian identity through explicit teaching or unchanged tradition. At times, they resisted, modified, or selectively reinterpreted inherited practices. Yet Albanian forms of family life and mindset remained present in everyday experience, often in ways they did not themselves fully name as “Albanian.” What appears, then, is not straightforward continuity, but a more subtle process in which identity is reshaped across generations while still preserving recognizable cultural meanings.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis examined the settlement and integration experiences of Albanian immigrant women in Canada through an oral history approach that brought together personal narratives, historical context, and the specific institutional environment of Canadian immigration and settlement. It asked how Albanian women experienced migration, what challenges they encountered, how they integrated economically, socially, culturally, and emotionally, and how earlier lives in Albania, Kosovo, or North Macedonia continued to shape their trajectories in Canada. The study has shown that Albanian women's lives in Canada cannot be understood only through the moment of arrival, nor only through the structures of the receiving society. Their settlement and integration were shaped by the interaction of premigration histories, gendered socialization, migration pathways, the Canadian institutional context, and the resources, both practical and moral, that women brought with them.

The study drew on fifteen women's trajectories and intentionally brought together a heterogeneous cohort: women from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia; first-generation migrants, 1.5-generation migrants, and second-generation participants; women who arrived as refugees, through family sponsorship, skilled migration, study permits, and other formal immigration channels; women living mainly in Ontario, but also in Alberta and Nova Scotia; and women whose time in Canada ranged from only a few years to more than twenty-five. Among the adult-age migrants, the majority had university education and substantial prior professional experience, yet their integration in Canada unfolded unevenly and often through downward mobility, retraining, and occupational reorientation. This heterogeneity was not incidental to the

study; it was central to it, because it made visible that “Albanian women in Canada” do not constitute a single migrant type or a single integration model.

The oral history methodology proved particularly well suited to this object of study. In this thesis, migration was not treated as a movement that could be adequately explained through statistics, entry categories, or labour-market outcomes alone. The interviews showed that what mattered equally were memory, meaning, comparison, and retrospective interpretation. Women did not simply recount what happened; they explained what it had felt like to leave, what had been lost, what had to be relearned, what had been carried over from life before migration, and what counted, in their own view, as adaptation, success, or belonging. The oral history approach allowed this study to access precisely those dimensions of migration that remain largely undocumented in formal archives: fear, ambivalence, moral obligation, loneliness, relief, pride, exhaustion, and gradual reconstruction. In this sense, the method was not supplementary to the thesis; it was constitutive of its findings.

The early settlement period in Canada was experienced as a phase of compression, when many forms of uncertainty arrived at once. Housing, documentation, school registration, language, transportation, employment, and the simple organization of everyday life had to be addressed simultaneously. Many women arrived with only two suitcases, without close relatives in Canada, and with little prior knowledge of the country beyond what they had heard from acquaintances, sponsors, or immigration narratives. For some, especially those arriving from Albania in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the gap between the sending and receiving societies was experienced as very wide: not only in terms of income and infrastructure, but in the practical routines of daily life. Women narratives demonstrate that early settlement was not simply “difficult” in a general sense; it was difficult in historically specific ways, because many women were entering a social and

institutional world for which prior life in poor, unstable, or recently post-conflict societies had not always prepared them practically, even when they were highly educated.

At the same time, the Canadian context mattered greatly, and it mattered positively in ways that recur across the interviews. Women repeatedly emphasized the courtesy of Canadian officials, the warmth of first reception, and the practical importance of institutional support for newcomers. LINC, Job Bank, ISANS, free legal services, language training, employment coaching, orientation support, and even food bank access were remembered as real supports that reduced uncertainty and helped women and their families begin to orient themselves. In some cases, institutional support directly opened access to first employment. In other cases, these programs were remembered not only as practical assistance, but as mechanisms through which newcomers were introduced to Canadian society itself. This does not mean that Canadian institutions removed difficulty. Several women were equally clear about the limits of institutional support, stressing that it functioned more as orientation than as comprehensive support. Nevertheless, the findings of this thesis show that Canada's structured settlement regime, unlike the more precarious or discriminatory contexts some women had known elsewhere, made a substantial difference to the quality and meaning of arrival.

This thesis does not argue that Canada was free of barriers; indeed, many women encountered deskilling, the demand for "Canadian experience," lack of credential recognition, and the need to accept lower-status work in the first phase of settlement. Yet they often interpreted Canada as a society whose institutional and cultural logic was more open, more respectful, and more stable than the contexts they had left or previously inhabited. This appears most clearly in the comparative reflections of women who had experienced serial migration through Greece, Italy, or the United States.

Where formal institutions reached their limits and where emotional life began, the Albanian community became especially important during the first stage of arrival. Publicly, the Albanian community in Canada appears geographically dispersed, institutionally creative, and highly active in cultural preservation, business networking, women's initiatives, youth engagement, and language maintenance. Yet the interviews show that beyond this visible institutional surface, the community functioned in more immediate ways: as the first social circle, the first source of trust, the first shared language, the first guarantor, and sometimes the first place of shelter. The interviewee's phrase, "we have found a small Albania here," was therefore not merely symbolic; it referred to a concrete social infrastructure of settlement. Informal assistance among community members, expressed through a "pay it forward" philosophy, reveals a social norm of mutual obligation that helped reduce the vulnerability of newcomers during the most uncertain phase of settlement. In this respect, the Albanian community in Canada did not merely preserve identity; it materially participated in integration. Chapter II therefore becomes important not only as historical background, but as analytical context: it shows that the Albanian community in Canada must be understood as both a field of identity preservation and a field of social reproduction and support.

These women stories further show that integration was not reducible to employment outcomes, even though employment remained a central site of struggle. Women's stories repeatedly involved professional downgrading, first jobs far below qualification level, and the emotional difficulty of beginning again. But the study shows that women did not interpret these experiences only as loss. Rather, they often framed them as phases in a longer process of rebuilding, during which paid work, however modest at first, created financial calm, social exposure, knowledge of work culture, and an eventual bridge to recovery. The common trajectory

was not simple incorporation into the labour market, but downward mobility followed, in some cases, by partial or substantial recovery.

Personal agency emerged as a recurrent theme across the interviews. Women repeatedly referred to hard work, discipline, adaptability, humility, and a problem-solving mentality as resources that helped them navigate settlement and integration. These capacities were not presented simply as personal virtues, but as dispositions shaped through earlier life experiences. At the same time, migration trajectories were far from uniform. Age at arrival, legal pathway, family position, and prior migration experience all influenced how women encountered Canada and how much time, energy, and emotional labour adaptation required. Refugees often carried a different emotional burden from skilled workers or students; mothers experienced settlement through the schooling and wellbeing of their children; women arriving alone described acute uncertainty and isolation; and those with earlier migration histories often brought both practical knowledge and memories of exclusion that shaped their reading of the Canadian context.

Belonging, likewise, did not develop in a simple relation to years spent in Canada, legal status, or socioeconomic mobility. Some women with fewer years in the country expressed a strong sense of attachment because Canada had offered safety, opportunity, and the feeling of not being treated as foreign. Others, even after decades, continued to describe themselves as only partly of the place. What emerges here is not a contrast between integration and non-integration, but between different meanings of belonging. For some, it rested in stability and everyday ease; for others, it required a deeper emotional recognition that time alone could not secure.

A similar complexity marked the 1.5 and second generation. Their experiences point to intergenerational continuity, selective language maintenance, inherited memories of war and displacement, and the persistence of Albanian self-identification even where Albanian language

fluency had weakened. The second generation did not simply inherit Albanian identity through explicit teaching or unchanged tradition. At times, they resisted, modified, or selectively reinterpreted inherited practices. Yet Albanian forms of family life and mindset remained present in everyday experience, often in ways they did not themselves fully name as “Albanian.” Cultural preservation in Canada thus appears not as unchanged transmission, but as a negotiated and emotionally charged process.

Migration to Canada did not place Albanian women into a life detached from what came before. It opened a prolonged negotiation between inherited norms, family responsibilities, prior histories, personal agency, and the opportunities and constraints of Canadian society. The Canadian context did not remove hardship, but it altered its terms. Structured immigration pathways, settlement services, multicultural norms, legal protections, and a less exclusionary public environment helped make recovery, participation, and public identity preservation more possible. What emerges is a process marked by both difficulty and reconstruction, through which women rebuilt homes, careers, relationships, and meanings of self under new conditions.

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APPENDIX 1

1. Model of the Interview

Research: The immigration experiences of Albanian women in Canada

Researcher: Adelina Nexhipi

Date of Interview: [DD/MM/YYYY]

Form of interview: [online, in person]

Location: [City, Province]

- Section 1: Demographic Information

(only for the researcher – for analytical purpose)

1. Personal Background

- Age:
- Homeland (City & Country):
- Current Residency (City, Province, Canada)

2. Migration to Canada

- Status in Canada (Permanent Resident, Citizen, Temporary Resident, Refugee, etc.)
- Year of Arrival in Canada:
- How did you arrive in Canada? (Family sponsorship, refugee status, work visa,)

3. Marital and Family Status

- Marital Status when you arrived in Canada:
- Current Marital Status:
- Did you migrate alone or with family?

- Do you have children?
- How many were born in Albania / Kosovo?
- How many were born in Canada?

4. Language and Education

- What languages do you speak?
- Did you speak English or French when you arrived in Canada?
- Education in Albania / Kosovo (Highest level completed, field of study)
- Education in Canada (If any, degrees/certifications obtained)

5. Employment and Occupation

- Occupation in Albania / Kosovo (If any):
- Initial occupation in Canada (if different from current):
- Current Occupation in Canada:

Section 2 Experience, challenges, achievements, feelings, thoughts

1. Could you please describe your arrival in Canada? What were your first impressions?
2. What were your main concerns and expectations before migrating to Canada?
3. What were the biggest challenges you faced upon arriving in Canada?
4. Who or what provided you with the most support during your transition?
5. How would you compare your life in Canada to your life in Albania/Kosovo?
6. Are there specific struggles that as Albanian women you faced in integrating into Canadian society?
7. In what ways has emigration helped, or perhaps hindered, your personal and professional growth, independence, or empowerment as a woman?

8. Are there aspects of Albanian culture that you find difficult to preserve while living in Canada?
 9. In what ways has the Albanian origine influenced your overall experience in Canada?
 10. How has the Albanian community in Canada helped you stay connected to your cultural roots?
 11. Do you feel a strong sense of belonging in Canada? Please explain.
-

- **Section 3: Reflections**

1. Looking back on your journey, do you feel that moving to Canada was the right decision? Why or why not??
2. Is there anything else you would like to share, any final reflections or thoughts about your migration experience?

2. Participants' Demographic Information

Table 1. Demographic, Migration, and Residency Profiles

Interviewee	Country of Origin	Age / left Albania	Other Country of residency	Migration Category	First applicant / dependent	Residency	Age / time of interview	Time in Canada (years)	Current Status
Rosa	North Macedonia	—	—	Born in Canada		Toronto (ON)	30	—	citizen
Eni	Kosovo	5 m.	—	War refugee		Windsor (ON)	26	26	citizen
Alda	Albania	34	—	Family sponsorship		Toronto (ON)	46	12	citizen
Ariana	Albania	41/47*	USA	Landed immigrant	First applicant	Calgary (AB)	72	25	citizen
Dita	Albania	29/39*	Greece Italy	Landed immigrant	Dependent	Toronto (ON)	60	21	citizen
Eva	Albania	23	Greece	Study permit	First applicant	Toronto (ON)	29	6	PR
Nare	Kosovo	1.5	—	War refugee		Waterloo (ON)	28	26	citizen
Nexhi	Kosovo	37	—	War refugee		Waterloo (ON)	63	26	citizen
Zade	North Macedonia	24	—	Family sponsorship		Kitchener (ON)	49	25	citizen
Lira	Albania	44	—	Landed immigrant	Dependent	Halifax (NS)	69	25	citizen
Dori	Albania	39	—	Express Entry / FSW	First applicant	Halifax (NS)	45	6	citizen
Ela	Albania	26	—	Landed immigrant	Dependent	Toronto (ON)	52	26	citizen
Alba	Albania	17/27*	Greece / USA	Refugee claim		Mississauga (ON)	43	16	citizen
Mari	Kosovo	29	—	Study permit	First applicant	Calgary (AB)	34	5	PGWP
Ana	Albania	43	-	Express Entry / FSW	Dependent	Calgary	46	3	PR

* In these cases, the women experienced serial migration, meaning that the age at which they left Albania is not the same as the age at which they arrived in Canada. The first age refers to the age at which they left Albania, while the second indicates their age upon arrival in Canada.

Table 2. Migration Circumstances and Family Status from Arrival to Interview

Interviewee	Actual marital status	Children at time of interview	Marital status at arrival	Migrated alone or with family	Relatives in Canada	Children at the time of arrival	Age of the children at arrival
Rosa	single	—	—	Born in Canada	—	—	
Eni	single	—	—	Family	No	—	
Alda	married	1	married	Alone	Yes	—	
Ariana	married	2	married	family	No	2	17 / 12
Dita	married	2	married	Family	No	2	8 / 6
Eva	married	1	engaged	Alone	No	—	
Nare	single	—	—	Family	No	—	
Nexhi	married	4	married	Family	No	4	?
Zade	married	3	married	Alone	Yes	—	
Lira	married	2	married	Family	Yes	2	20 / 16
Dori	married	1	married	Family	No	1	8
Ela	married	2	engaged	Couple	No	—	
Alba	married	2	married	Family	No	2	4 / 1
Mari	married	1	married	Family	No	—	
Ana	married	3	married	Family	No	3	20 / 18 / 6

Table 3. Pre- and Post-Emigration Education and Occupation (Adult-Age Migrants)

Intervi ewees	Language proficiency at arriving	Highest education back home	Profile of degree	Occupation back home	First job in Canada	Education in Canada	Actual job
Alda	Intermediate English	University degree	Social Science	Research / projects	Volunteer work	Professional training	NGO Engagement
Ariana	Proficient in English	Master's degree	Education	Teacher & learning development specialist	Lecturer in University in BC	PhD	Visiting lecturer Retired
Dita	Elementary English	University degree	Agriculture	Vocational Teacher	Luch assistant	Professional training	Educational assistant
Eva	Intermediate English	University degree	Social Science	Expert of marketing		College Law clerk program	Legal Assistant
Nexhi	Intermediate English	University degree	Economics	Economist	Interpreter	College & Professional license	Translator
Zade	Elementary English	University degree	Faculty of Law	-	Nurse	Nursing school College	Nurse
Lira	Proficient in English	University degree	Education	Teacher & learning development specialist	Assistant teacher	Professional training	ESL teacher / Retired
Dori	Upper intermediate English	Master's degree	Accounting /Public administration	Financial Manager	Cashier / Financial analyst	Chartered professional accountant	Senior financial advisor
Ela	Elementary English	University degree	History - Geography	Researcher	Data entry	MA. in Environmental studies	Entrepreneur
Mari	Proficient in English	Master's degree	Education	Teacher / trainer	TA /RA Sale associate	PhD	Sessional Lecturer
Ana	Intermediate English	University degree	Education	Teacher	Early Childhood Educator	Professional training	Early Childhood Educator

APPENDIX 2

Figure 1. Map of the Distribution of the Albanian-Speaking Population in the City of Toronto, Based on the 2011 Census

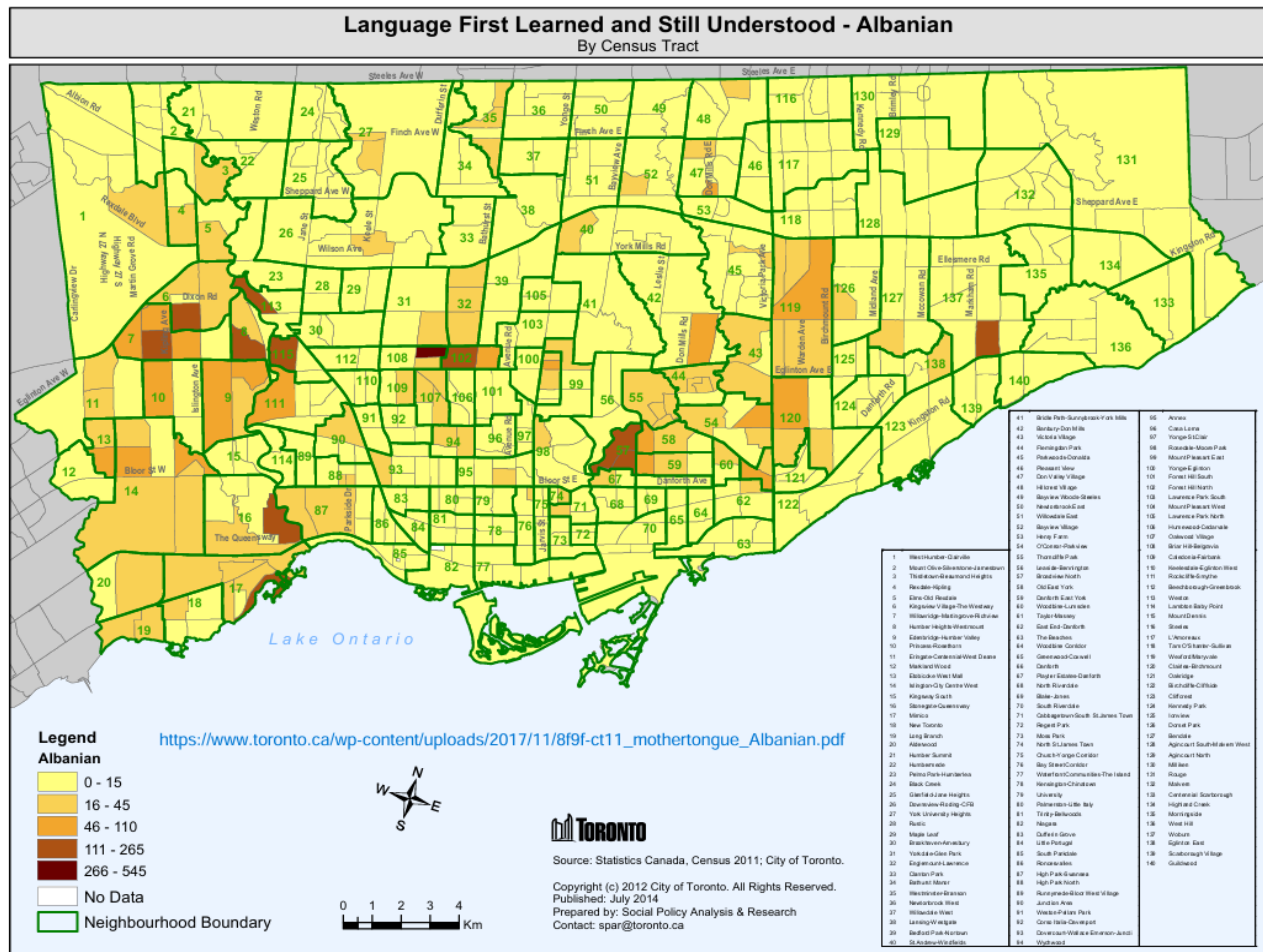
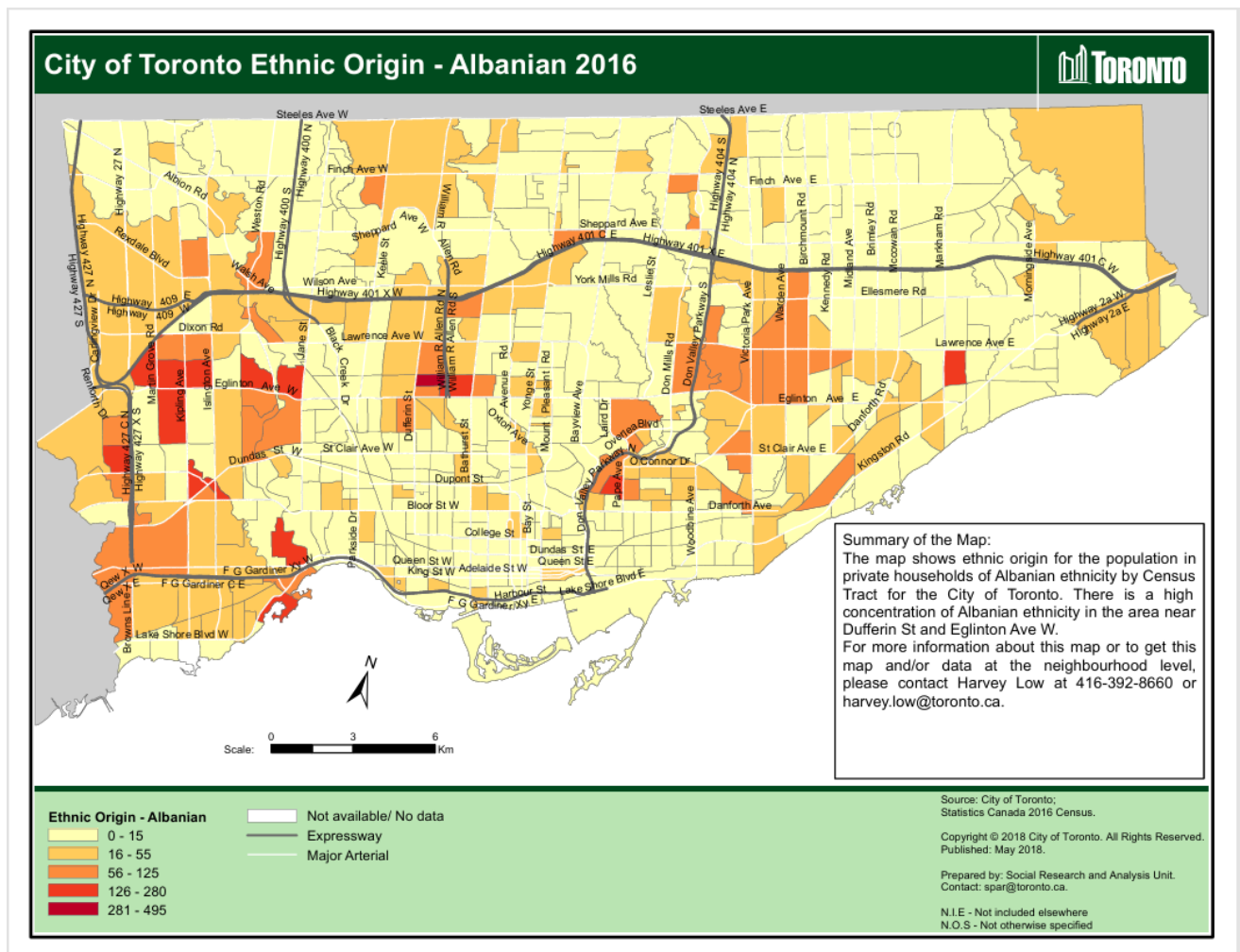


Figure 2. Map of the Distribution of Albanian Ethnic Origin Population in the City of Toronto, Based on the 2011 Census



Source: City of Toronto

Figure 3. British Columbia Proclamation - declaring November 2025 as “Albanian Heritage Month



Source: Government of British Columbia,

Figure 4. Bill C-209, An Act to establish Albanian Heritage Month

1st Session, 45th Parliament, 3 Charles III, 2025 HOUSE OF COMMONS OF CANADA BILL C-209 An Act to establish Albanian Heritage Month Preamble Whereas Canada's strength is reflected in the diversity of its population and of its local communities; Whereas Canada is home to many Albanian Canadians; Whereas Albanian Canadians have left and continue to leave a historic mark on Canada, with contributions that span communities across the country and are reflected in Canada's economic, political, social and cultural life; Whereas Parliament wishes to recognize that Albanian Canadians have made and continue to make significant contributions to Canada, and wishes to better inform Canadians about those contributions by recognizing and celebrating them; Whereas November is a significant month for the Albanian community as Albanian Canadians celebrate Albania's Declaration of Independence, which declared Albania an independent sovereign nation on November 28th, 1912; And whereas, in November, Albania also celebrates Liberation Day, which commemorates its liberation from Nazi forces on November 29th, 1944, following the Albanian resistance; Now, therefore, His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows: Short Title Short title 1 This Act may be cited as the <i>Albanian Heritage Month Act</i>. 451028 2025 Albanian Heritage Month Act Albanian Heritage Month Section 2 Albanian Heritage Month Albanian Heritage Month 2 Throughout Canada, in each year, the month of November is to be known as "Albanian Heritage Month".	1^{re} session, 45^e législature, 3 Charles III, 2025 CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES DU CANADA PROJET DE LOI C-209 Loi instituant le Mois du patrimoine albanais Préambule Attendu : que la force du Canada s'illustre par la diversité de sa population et de ses collectivités locales; que de nombreux Canadiens d'origine albanaise vivent au Canada; que les Canadiens d'origine albanaise ont marqué l'histoire du Canada et continuent de laisser leur marque dans les collectivités partout au pays grâce à leur apport à la vie économique, politique, sociale et culturelle du Canada; que le Parlement désire reconnaître les contributions considérables que continuent d'apporter les Canadiens d'origine albanaise au Canada et souhaite faire mieux connaître ces contributions aux Canadiens en les soulignant et en les célébrant; que le mois de novembre revêt une signification particulière pour la communauté albanaise, car c'est pendant ce mois que les Canadiens d'origine albanaise célèbrent la déclaration d'indépendance de l'Albanie, qui a fait de leur pays un État indépendant et souverain le 28 novembre 1912; qu'en novembre, les Albanais célèbrent également le Jour de la libération pour commémorer la libération de l'Albanie des forces nazies, le 29 novembre 1944, au terme de la résistance albanaise, Sa Majesté, sur l'avis et avec le consentement du Sénat et de la Chambre des communes du Canada, édicte : Titre abrégé Titre abrégé 1 <i>Loi sur le Mois du patrimoine albanais.</i> 2025 Loi sur le Mois du patrimoine albanais Mois du patrimoine albanais Article 2 Mois du patrimoine albanais Mois du patrimoine albanais 2 Le mois de novembre est, dans tout le Canada, désigné comme « Mois du patrimoine albanais ».
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Source: House of Commons of Canada

Figure 5. “Albanian Heritage Month” in Saskatchewan, November 2019

THIS ISSUE HAS NO PART 1 (DESIGNED REGULATIONS) OR PART 2 (REGULATIONS OF PART 2) OF THE CONTENT REGULATIONS OF THE SASKATCHEWAN GAZETTE (PART 1 AND 2 OF THE CONTENT REGULATIONS OF THE SASKATCHEWAN GAZETTE)		
		
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PART I / PARTIE I		
2019 THE SASKATCHEWAN GAZETTE, NOVEMBER 3, 2019		
SPECIAL DAYS/JOURS SPÉCIAUX		
The following week has been designated by the Minister of Health as:		
“Medical Radiation Technologist (MRT) Week” in Saskatchewan, November 3 to 9, 2019.		
The following week has been designated by the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure as:		
“Aviation and Aerospace Week” in Saskatchewan, November 3 to 9, 2019.		
The following week has been designated by the Minister of Immigration and Career Training as:		
“Skilled Trades and Technology Week” in Saskatchewan, November 3 to 9, 2019.		
The following month has been designated by the Minister of Health as:		
“Lung Month” in Saskatchewan, November, 2019.		
The following month has been designated by the Minister of Health as:		
“Radon Action Month” in Saskatchewan, November, 2019.		
The following month has been designated by the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport as:		
Albanian Heritage Month” in Saskatchewan, November, 2019.		
The following month has been designated by the Minister of Social Services as:		
“Adoption Awareness Month” in Saskatchewan, November, 2019.		
The following month has been designated by the Minister of Social Services as:		
“Indigenous Disability Month” in Saskatchewan, November, 2019.		

Source: Government of Saskatchewan

Figure 6. Bill 36, An Act to proclaim the month of November as Albanian Heritage Month

			
2ND SESSION, 41ST LEGISLATURE, ONTARIO 65 ELIZABETH II, 2016		2 ^E SESSION, 41 ^E LÉGISLATURE, ONTARIO 65 ELIZABETH II, 2016	
Bill 36		Projet de loi 36	
<i>(Chapter 29 Statutes of Ontario, 2016)</i>		<i>(Chapitre 29 Lois de l'Ontario de 2016)</i>	
An Act to proclaim the month of November as Albanian Heritage Month		Loi proclamant le mois de novembre Mois du patrimoine albanais	
Mr. S. Qaadri		M. S. Qaadri	
1st Reading	October 5, 2016	1 ^{re} lecture	5 octobre 2016
2nd Reading	October 6, 2016	2 ^e lecture	6 octobre 2016
3rd Reading	December 5, 2016	3 ^e lecture	5 décembre 2016
Royal Assent	December 8, 2016	Sanction royale	8 décembre 2016
Printed by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario		Imprimé par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario	
			

Source: Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Figure 7. City of Vancouver, BC, Proclamation "Heritage Week 2024"



Source: City of Vancouver

Figure 8. City of Victoria, Proclamation "Albanian Heritage Week"



Source: City of Victoria

Figure 9. City of Vancouver, BC Proclamation "Kosovo Independence Day"



Source: City of Vancouver