

## SOCIOECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE TRANS-BORDERS AREAS

Electra Pitoska<sup>\*</sup>

### Abstract

In the last two decades in Europe and Greece an influx of economic immigrants from various parts of the world (India, Pakistan, Nigeria, the Philippines, Southeast Europe, the former Soviet Union, etc.) has taken place. In remote and disadvantaged border areas entrance and settlement of immigrants differs regarding not only their countries of origin but also the degree of integration into local society. The questions posed to the economy and host society preoccupied academic researchers and institutions to such extent that extensive research and studies have been developed.

The present paper is a case study on the identity and role of economic immigrants in the border prefecture of Florina. Even before the Second World War the prefecture of Florina, whose welfare indicators are lower than the national average, had relations of cooperation with neighbouring Albania and F.Y.R.O.M. During the Cold War it paid dearly for the "frontier" and then, since 1990, welcomed immigrants mainly from neighbouring Albania. This trans-border immigration flow towards Florina went through three stages: initial settlement, the period of "prosperity" and the period of contraction due to the economic crisis.

The object of this research is to map the professional identity, financial assistance and social burden to the system and the difficulties that the Albanian immigrants are facing due to the crisis in the prefecture of Florina. Contributions made to employment, financial contributions to social security services and services issuing permits, as well as participation in education are being recorded for the decade 2001 - 2011 by collecting data from local services.

Additionally, an empirical sampling research with questionnaires took place, supplemented by personal interviews with Albanian immigrants, for a two month period between November and December 2012. The analysis of responses revealed the degree of socioeconomic integration, their attitude towards the host society, the intensity with which they experience the financial crisis and their expectations for their future.

**Key words:** border economy, Albanian immigrants, socioeconomic integration, expectations.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the last twenty years Europe and Greece saw an influx of economic immigrants from various regions of the world (India, Pakistan, Nigeria, the Philippines, Southeast Europe, the former Soviet Union, etc.). In remote, disadvantaged border areas the entrance and settlement of immigrants differs regarding both their countries of origin but also the degree of integration into the local society. Issues arising in the economy and the host society preoccupied academic researchers and institutions, which have produced important research studies.

This work is part of a local range case study, which is under way and regards the identity and role of economic immigrants in the border prefecture of Florina.

The Prefecture of Florina, with welfare indicators below the national average, before the 2nd World War had cooperative relations with neighboring Albania and F.Y.R.O.M. During the Cold War paid dearly "the frontier" and subsequently, since 1990, welcomed immigrants mainly from neighboring Albania. This border emigration flow in Florina went through three stages: the initial installation period, the "prosperity" period and the period shrinkage due to the economic crisis

## **2. THE RESEARCH**

Object of the research is to register the professional identity, the economic assistance and burden to the social system and the difficulties faced by Albanian immigrants due to the crisis in the prefecture of Florina. The recording of contributions to employment, financial contributions to Social Security and the Services that issue residence permits and participation in education for the decade 2001 - 2011 is currently in progress. The collection of these data from local services took place in a first level in 2011 and in a second level data is checked and cross-referenced. According to the officers responsible many economic immigrants issue permits and necessary documentation in Florina, where they have relatives, friends, and generally good access and then depart and live and work in other areas of Greece.

An empirical sample survey was also held with questionnaires, which were filled in through personal interviews to Albanian immigrants who reside in the Municipality of Florina, in November-December 2011.

The Municipality of Florina is a municipality of the region of Western Macedonia constituted by the Kallikratis Program. It resulted from the unification of the pre-existing municipalities of Florina, Kato Klines, Perasma and Meliti. The area of the (new) Municipality is of 827.62 km<sup>2</sup> and its population is of 33.282 inhabitants according to the 2001 census. The municipality's seat is the city of Florina.

The Register of Foreigners of the municipality of Florina has 1,621 foreigners registered, who make up 4.87% of residents. The detailed distribution of the foreigners among the municipalities

merged includes: Florina: 989, Kato Klives: 40 Meliti: 183 Perasma: 409. The types of residence permits issued by the Municipality of Florina are: Residence permit for family reunion (up to 18 years, for free), for studies (150 €), for employment (biennial 300 €), independent permit (18-21 years, renewal is made by the father), wife of Greek citizen (five years, for free), special certificates, ten-year permit (900 €) and reissuance.

The nationalities comprising the foreigners established in Florina, according to data from the municipality, are: Albanians, citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bulgarians, Serbs, Croats, Romanians, Italians, Poles, Moldavians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Czechs, Poles, Belarusian, Israelis, Russians, Colombians, Argentines, Cubans, Dominicans, Nigerians, Filipinos and Chinese. The overwhelming majority, 95.05 % are Albanians and only 4.95% represents all other nationalities. It is noted that the composition of economic immigrants in the acritic and border municipality varies from the composition of foreigners in Greece. Florina is a receiving place for immigrants from neighboring Albania and furthermore, the majority of them come from the two border provinces of Viglista and Korca. Some economic immigrants (Cubans, Argentineans, Poles, Serbs, Croats, Czechs, Romanians) have settled in Florina due to the existence of relatives. The Prefecture of Florina is one of the three prefectures of Greece that lost 52% of its population due to immigration (voluntary and involuntary) in the 50's.

The annual average of issuance & renewal of licenses realized in the municipality of Florina for the decade 2001-2011 is 550 licenses (of various categories) per year. According to the department of the municipality responsible, in the last three years the image of issuance / renewal of licenses is: 2009: 478, 2010: 732, 2011: 438. According to the assessment of officials, the revenue from the license renewal amounts approximately to 65.700 € It is difficult to calculate the amount with precision because the payment of money for the issuance or renewal of the residence permit is made either to the Municipality Fund or the Public Treasury.

### **3. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

In order to ensure an objectively representative survey, the method employed to determine the sample was the method of systematic sampling. According to it, the total population of registered foreigners in the municipality Florina is 1,621 people, so  $N=1,621$ . The desired specimen number is 50 units, so:  $\lambda=N/n$  συνεπώς  $\lambda= 1621:50 = 32$ .

The first unit of the sample was found by randomly selecting a number from 1 to 32. The random number is 8, so the units of the population that have a serial number in the Registry for Foreigners 8,  $8 + 32$ ,  $8 + (2 \times 32)$ ,  $8 + (3 \times 32)$ ,  $8 + (4 \times 32)$ ,  $8 + (5 \times 32)$ , .....,  $8 + (49 \times 32)$  constitute the research sample.

The questionnaire is structured by 10 sections of questions, of which nine are closed-type sections and only one is open-type. The first section registers the age, sex, place of birth, date of entry in Greece, religion (and where it was acquired), marital status, place of marriage, number of children. It also records the current occupation, the insurance carrier, the occupations exercised by the foreigners since they entered Greece and until today, the level of education and where the certificates of study were acquired. The second section, the only one involving open-type questions registers the fundamental difficulties they faced when they came for the first time in Florina.

The third section, with eight questions, records the Albanian immigrants' level of relations with the local society. It registers the existence of relatives, compatriots, friends, the familiarization with the customs of Florina regarding marriage and funerals and the assistance they had from neighbors and the Church during the first stages of their settlement.

The fourth section of questions records their wish to return to their birthplaces, if they have regretted their decision to migrate, if they, at a certain point, wish to return to their place of origin for a permanent settlement or if they wish to settle in Florina for life. In addition, it is registered if they wish to settle in another country (other than Albania & Greece) and also, if they have relatives that are immigrants elsewhere.

The fifth section registers the desired place for the acquisition of a residence.

With the sixth section of questions the relationships they maintain with their place of origin are depicted (frequency of visits, communication, immigrant remittances etc.).

The seventh section regards the appreciation extent (satisfaction) Albanian immigrants have towards their employers, their neighbors, their friends and local lords in Florina.

The ninth section of questions regards the appreciation extent (satisfaction) Albanian immigrants have towards the municipal and public services in Florina and specifically towards the Municipality, the Work Permit office, the Residence Permit office, Greek Police, services like IKA, OAED, OGA, education, the General Hospital and Banks.

The ninth section of questions registers the sectors in which, between 2009 and 2011, the immigrants face difficulties. In short, the sectors are: Employment, Income, Rent payment, Nutrition (purchase of provisions), Clothing – Footwear, Recreation, Health, Children upbringing, Education.

Finally, with the tenth section of questions it is investigated how they assess the future of the Greek economy, their professional situation and the quality of life.

With the method of personal interview to Albanian immigrants residing in the Municipality of Florina a total of 50 questionnaires were filled in, in the two months of November-December 2012.

#### 4. THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

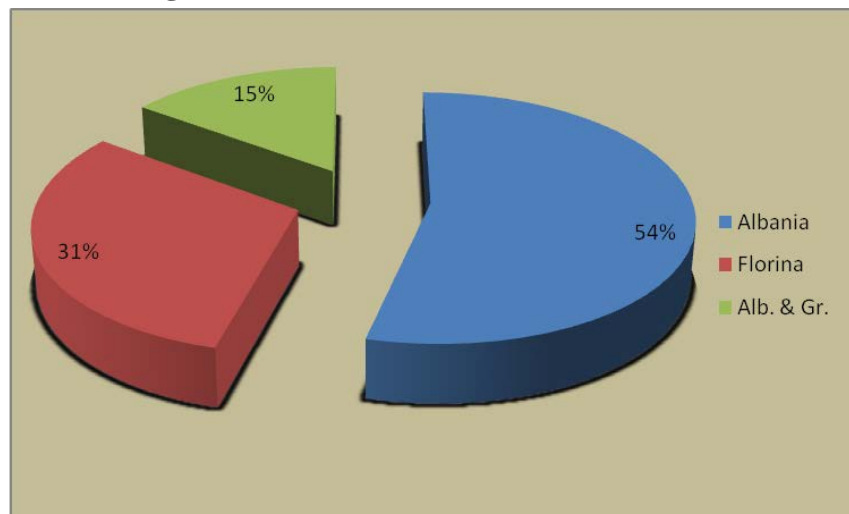
Following the statistical analysis of the responses it can be noted that:

The age of Albanian immigrants located in Florina ranges from 20 to 60 years, with the largest concentration in ages ranging from 31 to 40 years (32%). 74% of the participants are male and only 26% women. 96% were born in Albania and only 4% were born of Albanian parents in Florina. 52% have entered Greece from 1990 to 1995, 30% between 1996 and 2000. Only 14% entered the country from 2001 to 2005.

Regarding religion, 78% of the respondents claim to be Christian Orthodox, 4% Muslim, 4% of no religion and 14% did not answer.

Their family situation is mostly married (66%), and the place where they held their marriage is: Albania at a percentage of 54%, Greece at a percentage of 31% and in both parts at a percentage of 15%, as shown in the graph below:

**1<sup>st</sup> Graph: Place of wedding**



Of those married 51% have two children, 20% have one child, 17% have three and 12% have four children. Two of the single participants have children without having been married.

The occupations exercised by the respondents, since they entered Greece and up to today are shown in the following table:

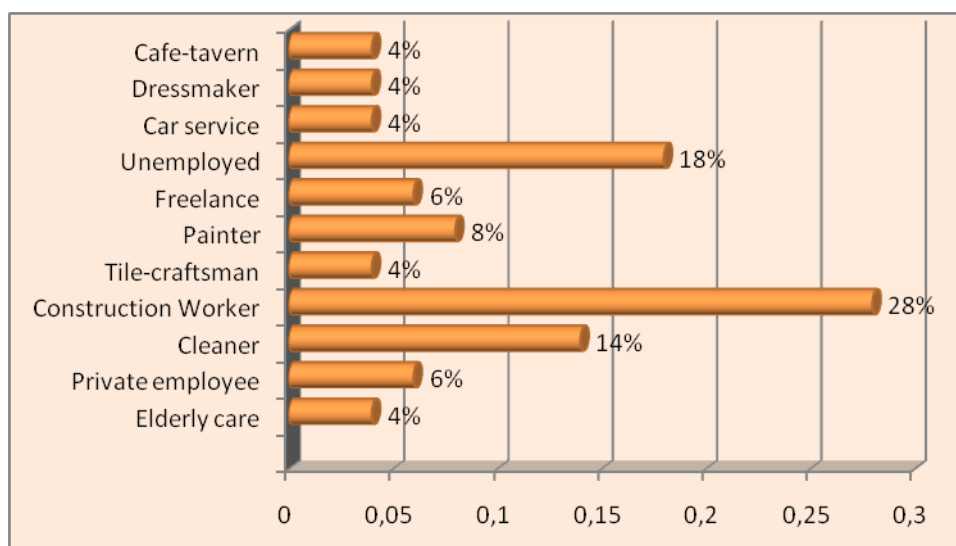
**1<sup>st</sup> Table: Immigrants' initial occupations**

Occupations exercised upon arrival until today	
Private Employee (café, taverns, restaurants etc.)	11%
Hair-salon employee	1%
Farming	19%
Building cleaning	9%
Construction	37%
Plumbing	11%
Drilling	1%
Smith	5%
Carpenter	3%
Seamstress	3%

It is obvious that the majority were initially occupied in construction (48%), a great percentage in farming (19%) and in building and house cleaning (9%).

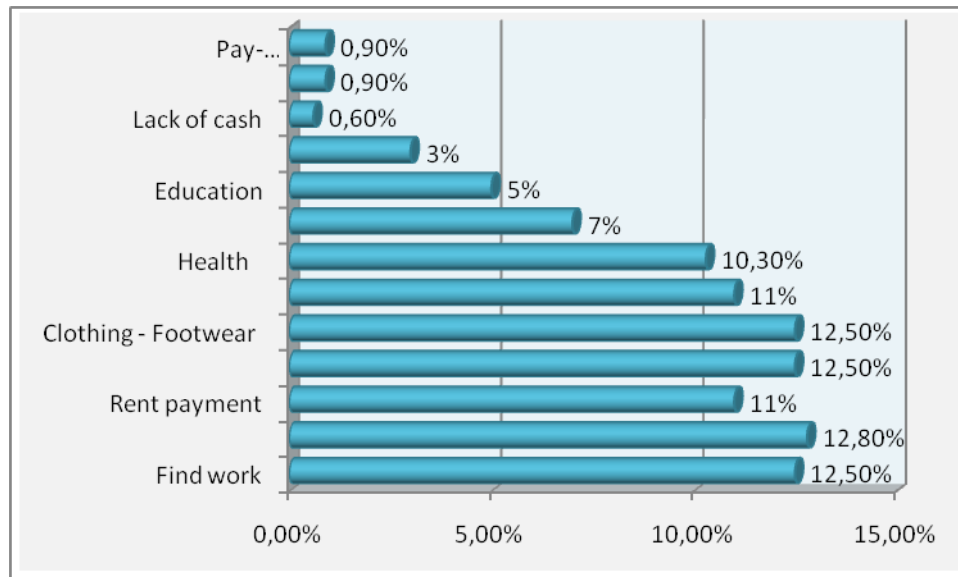
The occupations exercised by the participants today are mainly (40%) related to the construction work. The survey today records a considerable percentage of unemployed participants (18%). The basic insurance carrier (62%) in which they are insured is IKA. The occupations they exercise are shown in the graph below:

**2<sup>nd</sup> Graph: Current Profession**



Among other things, it seems that the economic crisis has had a direct impact on Albanian immigrants as well, especially in regards to finding a job (12.5%), to their income (12.8%), their nutrition (12.5%), to paying rent (11%), in clothing and footwear, recreation, insurance, health, parenting and travel. The graph below presents the areas in more detail:

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Graph: Impact of the economic crisis



Participants at a percentage of 62% regard as very important the difficulty they face in finding work, 64% characterize the impact on their income as very significant. 42% of them find it very difficult to secure the money for the rent of their home and 56% have reduced considerably the costs for nutrition. The degree of difficulty faced per area is shown in the following table:

2<sup>nd</sup> Table: Assessment of the difficulties faced by immigrants

	Non e	Minimu m	Medium	Import ant	Very important	Extremely important
Finding work		8%	13%	7%	63%	9%
Income		4%	14%	10%	64%	8%
Rent Payment		8%	8%	30%	42%	8%
Nutrition		16%	16%	56%	12%	
Health	12%	18%	16%	20%	30%	4%

In regard to their assessment of the future, 43% of the participants believe that the Greek economy will improve, taking into account the fact that the interviews were held during the last two months of 2012. 38% of them do not expect an improvement of the Greek economy and 19% considered the situation likely to improve. 46% do not expect any improvement amid the crisis on their professional and personal situation, but state they will stay in Florina, because if they return to their birthplaces their lives will be worse.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS – SUMMARY

Following the literature research and the empirical investigation it can be concluded that; the majority of the Albanian immigrants living in 2012 in Florina, have come in Greece from 1990 to 2000. After 2001 the inflow is minimal. Today, a small proportion of immigrants are born in Florina and many have been baptized and have made their wedding in their new homeland. The majority of immigrants initially worked in construction, in rural activities and in cleaning houses and buildings. The professions they practice today are mainly related to building works, they have IKA as their primary insurance carrier and now there are many unemployed. The economic crisis has had a direct impact on Albanian immigrants as well, especially in regard to finding jobs, to their income, nutrition, to paying rent, clothing and footwear, recreation, insurance, health, parenting and transportation. In regard to their assessment of the future, 43% of the participants believe that the Greek economy will improve, taking into account the fact that the interviews were held during the last two months of 2012. 38% of them do not expect an improvement of the Greek economy and 19% considered the situation likely to improve. 46% do not expect any improvement amid the crisis on their professional and personal situation, but state they will stay in Florina, because if they return to their birthplaces their lives will be worse.

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