

METOIKOS Project

CIRCULAR MIGRATION BETWEEN ALBANIA AND GREECE: A CASE STUDY

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European University Institute



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

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The METOIKOS Research Project
Circular migration patterns in Southern and Central Eastern Europe: Challenges and opportunities for migrants and policy makers

The METOIKOS project looks at circular migration patterns in three European regions: southeastern Europe and the Balkans (Greece, Italy and Albania); southwestern Europe and the Maghreb (Spain, Italy and Morocco); and Central Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, and Ukraine). More specifically, METOIKOS studies the links between different types of circular migration and processes of integration (in the country of destination) and reintegration (in the source country). It identifies the main challenges and opportunities involved in circular migration for source countries, destination countries and migrants (and their families) and develops new conceptual instruments for the analysis of circular migration and integration. The project will develop policy recommendations (a Guide for Policy Makers, available in 10 European languages) for local, regional and national policy makers as to how to frame circular migration with appropriate (re-)integration policies. It will also organise three Regional Workshops (on Spain, Italy and Morocco; on Greece, Italy and Albania; and on Poland, Hungary and Ukraine). The project will foster online discussion on circular migration with a view to raising awareness about the challenges and advantages of circular mobility in the wider EU Neighbourhood and the Euro-Mediterranean region more generally.

The METOIKOS project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou (anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu).

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Abstract

Although diverse back-and-forth migration patterns of Albanians have been taking place throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the phenomenon of circular migration is the most under-researched of all. This case study intends to bring up the diversity of the circular patterns of mobility of the Albanian migrants, try to understand the prospects of this circularity for the parties involved (the migrant, the employer, the host economy and the economy of origin), and critically assess policies at both sides of the border that promote or put obstacles to different types of circularity.

Keywords

Albania, Greece, circular migration, return migration, settlement, integration and reintegration policies

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1. Introduction

The post 1990s Albanian migration to Greece has been discussed in a significant number of studies. The volume of the inflows of Albanian migrants during the 1990s and the changes it brought both to Greece and Albania has shifted most scholars' focus on the immigration experience in the host country. Yet during the last decade, when Albania got out of the recurring economic and political crises of its capitalist transition and the Albanian migrant communities abroad stabilized, the interest on return Albanian migration has also grown. Although diverse back-and-forth migration patterns of Albanians have been taking place throughout this period, the phenomenon of circular migration is the most under-researched of all. This paper intends to bring up the diversity of the circular patterns of mobility of the Albanian migrants, try to understand the prospects of this circularity for the parties involved (the migrant, the employer, the host economy and the economy of origin), and critically assess policies at both sides of the border that promote or put obstacles to different types of circularity. This paper starts with an overview of facts and figures of Albanian emigration to Greece in its different forms (section 1). Section 2 discusses the different types of circular migration of Albanians to Greece, while section 3 assesses the adequacy of the policy landscape towards managing effectively circular migration.

The episodes of the contemporary Albanian emigration started in the early 1990s with the “embassy migrants” that invaded many Embassies in Tirana in the summer of 1990 in an attempt to leave the country (Barjaba, 2000; Vullnetari 2007). Altogether, between 1991-92, an estimated of 300,000 Albanians left the country (Carletto *et al.* 2006) seeking refuge and work abroad, the overwhelming majority in the neighbouring Greece (through the land border) and Italy (by boat).

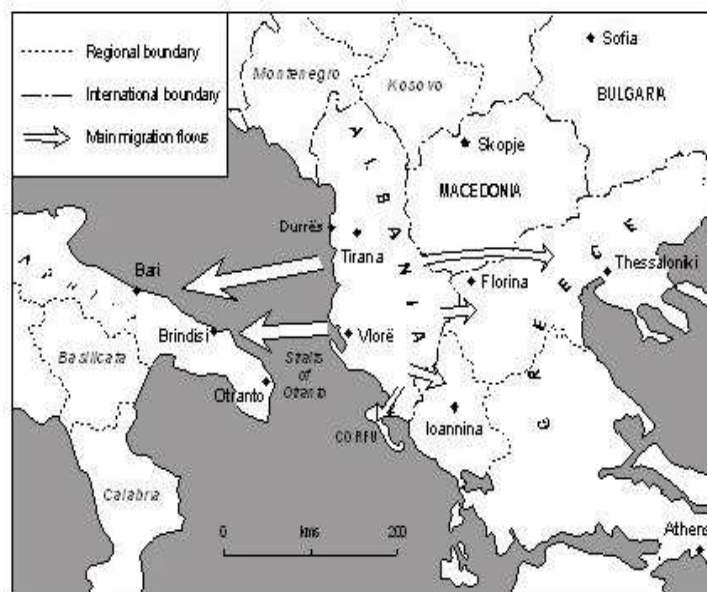


Figure 1: Albania and its Neighbours: Main Migration Routes (Vullnetari, 2007)

In 1996 the number of emigrants had reached 428.000 (250,000 migrated in 1993 alone) reflecting the poverty and the lack of job opportunities that the country was encountering. In 1997 came the collapse of the pyramid scheme “bubbles”, which precipitated severe civil disorder, putting economic growth into reverse. *Finally the period 2000-07 is a period of relative economic and political stability, consolidation of emigrant communities abroad and it marks the end of large-scale mass emigrations* (Vullnetari, 2007).

Estimates in literature suggest that more than half of the migrant population in Greece is Albanians. According to Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou (2005) the total number of Albanians in Greece is 450,000-550,000. The population of legal Albanian migrant residents has grown during the last 5

years (Maroukis 2008) since Albanians have by and large integrated in local labour markets and since stay permit renewals occur every 2 years as opposed to every year as was the situation before the Law 3386 of 2005¹. The numbers of apprehended and deported Albanians during the period 2002-2009 indicate that the increase of the regular population goes hand by hand with the evolution of the irregular population. It should be noted that an important segment of Albanian citizens are Greek co ethnics (known as *Vorioepiotes* in Greece). This group holds Special Identity Cards for *Omogeneis* (co-ethnics) (EDTO) issued by the Greek police. On 1.1.2008 there were 185,000 EDTO holders (Maroukis 2008).

Some scholars have asserted that the emigration of Albanians was seen as a solution to immediate problems and, as it is not a long-term life choice, it may be reversed at any time (Kazazi & Lambrianidis 2006).

A recent analysis of the 2005 Albanian Living Standard Measurement Survey (ALSMS) suggests that the main destination country for circular migrants among many countries has been Greece (88 per cent) and that the circular migrants mainly come from poorer and larger families and rural areas (Vadean & Piracha 2009: 9-10). Azzarri and Carletto's analysis of ALSMS further indicates that the flow to Greece up to 2004 has been of a temporary nature (whether seasonal or circular) involving all the more younger migrants with poorer education; in fact, the more educated are the least likely to return (2009: 417, 421, 428).

The existing bilateral agreements between Greece and Albania² entail no reference to reintegration policies in place for the types of migrants concerned (forced returnees and seasonal migrants). In fact the two countries' bilateral relations have been haunted for years by the existence of a Greek ethnic minority in southern Albania and the issue of contested land ownership in parts of North-western Greece by Albanian governments. In this context, a rapprochement that would foster an integrated economic collaboration in the region has been absent.

Throughout the 1990s the main priorities of Greek migration policy as regards Albanians have revolved around their expulsion from Greek territory. At the same time voluntary return for a shorter or longer period has been a fact of migratory patterns of Albanian migrants for quite a while. However, Greek legislation and migration policy does not include any provision in order to regulate or encourage return. Moreover it creates obstacles; indicatively, there is no provision for the transfer of social security rights to the home countries of prospective returnees (Kanellopoulos & Gregou 2006:18).

Since 2000, successive Albanian governments have been concerned with tightening regulations in order to stop irregular migration towards neighbouring countries through apprehension of Albanians at the border *before* they cross to the other side (King & Vullnetari, 2009). Partly this stems from the talks between the EC and Republic of Albania that resulted in the signing of the Readmission Agreement between Albania and the EC in April 2005³. One of the aims of this Agreement was to facilitate return migration from Greece to Albania. In this context a project on 'Building on Mechanisms to Effectively and Sustainably Implement Readmission Agreement' has been implemented between the Hellenic Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, Hellenic Ministry of Public Order, IOM Tirana, Hellenic Migration Policy Institute, and Hellenic Agency for Regional Development and Local Government. Amongst its activities and aims there was

¹ In 2008 and 2010 Albanian immigrants represent around 65% and 71% accordingly of the legal foreign population that resides in the country while they represented approximately 55% of the total immigrant population in 2001.

² The Friendship, Cooperation, Good Neighbourliness and Security Agreement signed in 1996, the Police Cooperation Agreement ratified by law No 2147/1993, and the Agreement on seasonal workers to Greece of 1997.

³ The CARDS Regional Programme allocated to Albania 1 million euros in 2002 and 2003 each for integrated border management (Kruse 2006:124).

the issue of the re-integration of returnees (Kanellopoulos & Gregou 2006: 48). The results of this policy initiative are yet to be seen. Yet Imke Kruse (2006:128-9) offers some insights not only as to the institutional infrastructure deficits that this effort is likely to come up against to but also to the unpredictable socioeconomic effects of a return flow that was stimulated so far by externalities. Indeed the forced character of the return of Albanian emigrants from Greece or the fact that they stemmed from individual success and small-scale family-investment planning could propel undesirable social evolutions. Kruse mentions the challenges of internal migration and rapid urbanisation caused by the fact that most returned illegal emigrants from Northern and Southern regions of Albania tend to concentrate in or around Tirana (2006:131). However, as regards to the role of the 'family-oriented' return flow, there are quite a few studies stressing the positive side of the small-scale family investment of Albanian emigrants back home (see for example Nicholson 2001).

1.1. Methodology employed in the case study

Our case study employed different methodologies in order to identify the existing types of circular migrants between Greece and Albania. The main criterion for the selection of an interviewee has been the occurrence of a temporary, repeated, and cross-border migration for economic reasons. Statistical data through which one may discern patterns of circularity were available only for legal seasonal migrants in agriculture. Furthermore, the researchers' expertise and human capital have been critical in the identification of the research target groups. For example, the fact that one of the co-author researchers is an Albanian migrant herself that is also involved in NGO work has been a great advantage in terms of contextual knowledge and the identification of different target groups. As regards the access to interviewees, we followed snowball sampling in combination with targeted sampling based on key informants input.

There were several locations that were eventually chosen for fieldwork. Interviews with circular migrants and stakeholders were conducted both in Albania and Greece. Conducting interviews with circular and return migrants and stakeholders in Albania was particularly useful for two reasons. It brought forward the reintegration experience of returnees (int. 5, 9, 17) and the factors that could trigger their circular migration to Greece. Second, it showed from a close angle the social underpinnings that frame circular migrants' investments back home, and what drives them back to the immigration host country (int. 50). Fieldwork in Albania was conducted at several locations including Shkodra (Northern Albania), Tirana (Albania capital), Berat (in South), and Sarande near the border with Greece. Interviews with stakeholders in Albania gave a more rounded picture on the features of circular and return migrants deriving from different parts of Albania as well as information on the implementation of existing relevant policies (int. 47-50). Fieldwork was conducted in three locations in Greece: Athens, the region of Central Macedonia, and the island of Sifnos in the Cyclades. The former was chosen since the majority of Albanians are concentrated in the Greek capital. Businesses of Albanians and ethnic Greek Albanian citizens as well as high skill workers are more likely to be concentrated there. The latter fieldwork location included features of a local labour market combining a) constructions, renovations, building maintenance and other preparatory activities for the tourist season, b) the actual tourist industry, c) the all-year-long constructions sector industry, as well as a migrant community that was attracted to the island by the booming tourism and building activity on the island during the last 15 years.

Central Macedonia was chosen because it is one of the biggest agricultural regions in Greece that is in proximity with Salonica, the second biggest city in Greece involving other labour markets. These particularities of the region, on the one hand, render access to key informants and migrants in the countryside easier and, on the other, offer an opportunity to investigate the geographical and labour market mobility of the circular migrants. According to data on seasonal Albanian migrants working in agriculture provided by the Dept of Law Implementation and Design of the Ministry of Interior, the majority of stay and work permits for Albanian seasonal workers are issued by the Regional Offices of

Central Macedonia in Northern Greece. These data served as an additional indicator for the fieldwork location.

The specific selection of locations and time of the year for fieldwork on seasonal migrants was further verified through key informants and interpreters' input whilst preparing for fieldwork, through pilot interviews with circular migrants, telephone interviews with police officials of the regions as well as informal discussions with farmers selling their produce in open air street markets. The prefectures of Imathia and Pella of the Central Macedonia region that concentrate over 60% of the total of seasonal work visa applications during 2007-2010 were finally selected for conducting fieldwork on legal seasonal migrants working in agriculture (see Table 1). Fieldwork was conducted in the first week of August of 2010 during which the arduous harvest of peaches and nectarines reaches its end.

All in all, there were 36 interviews with circular migrants and 17 interviews with stakeholders in both countries.

Table 1: Applications for seasonal work broken down by year of submission and issuing prefecture (Albanians in Central Macedonia and Totals) ⁴

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Applications of Albanians in Imathia	2.579	4.638	3.662	4.546	4.406	4.698	4.416
Applications of Albanians in Pella	2.626	7.201	3.725	4.750	4.831	4.550	4.527
Share of Albanian applicants in Imathia and Pella in the total	26,9%	33,8%	35,4%	60,5%	61,9%	61,6%	65,4%
Total No of Applications in Greece	19.374	34.975	20.894	15.364	14.930	15.010	13.683

Source: Ministry of Interior, Greece

2. Types of Circular Migration between Greece and Albania

There are 4 types of circular migrants that were identified during this case study according to their level of skills, the legal or irregular nature of their movement, its regulated or spontaneous character and the time length of each stay and return:

- legal seasonal migration for work in agriculture,
- irregular seasonal migration,
- legal migrants with 2-year or 10-year stay permits doing low skill work in Greece (usually construction sector workers) and low-skill work or running a small business in Albania,

⁴ The share of Albanian applicants in those two prefectures is smaller in the years prior to 2007 for two reasons. First, up until their country's accession to the EU in 2007 Bulgarians had been also applying for this seasonal temporary work permit. Second, according to the Greek Ministry of Interior, applications' data prior to 2008 were not efficiently registered in the municipalities; the actual number of Albanian migrants for whom the visa for temporary seasonal work (metaklisi) was granted should be much higher.

- legal circular migration of semi- and high-skilled people with a secure stay status in Greece occupied in high skill jobs or running their own business in Albania.

In the proceeding sections, we shall analyze the profiles of the circular migrants configured in the aforementioned typology, the factors that favour or stop each type of circular migration and finally, in section 3, the effects of each type of circular migration for the migrant, the host society and the country of origin.

2.1. Legal Seasonal Migration for Work in Agriculture

The scheme of invitations for seasonal work in agriculture stems from the bilateral agreement of 1997 between Greece and Albania⁵, as it has been amended by laws 2910/2001 and 3386/2005. In theory it involves all seasonal professions; in practice, though, it has worked only for agricultural workers (int.37). The seasonal *metaklisi* procedure is as follows, according to the Legal Coordination and Planning Dept of the Greek Ministry of Interior: the employer submits (via the Municipality) to the *Perifereia* (Region) how many seasonal workers he requires and for which months. He also submits a tax declaration document (E1) in which his arable land property is registered as well as an affirmation stating which part of the declared land is cultivated. When all the claims are gathered, the Regional Committees under article 14 of 3386/2005 convene and send their reports to the Ministry of Employment. The Agricultural Insurance Organisation (OGA) informs the Ministry of Employment about the number of workers required per acre per type of cultivation. The Ministry, in turn, issues a KYA (Common Ministerial Decision) that specifies the needs of every prefecture of the country in workers and specifications according to the reports sent by the Regions.

When the KYA is out, the employer whose claim for a certain number of workers has been approved is called by the *Perifereia* in order to declare nominally the workers he/she wants to invite. After checks made on these workers' cases, the *Perifereia* informs the Consulate in Albania about the names of invitees that were approved for entry in the country for seasonal work and the Consulate is supposed to inform the foreigners. Then an appointment is booked, within which the check is made, the contract is signed, and a special visa, Type D, is issued. As soon as the worker arrives in Greece, he applies for a work permit at the municipality, pays 150 euros expenses for this permit and gets a certificate type A that gives him the right to work and stay in the country up to 6 months (int.27, 28).

The seasonal workers under the short-term invitation of *metaklisi* have their social security contribution paid by the employer who invites them. The Greek State in this case contributes with 7% as opposed to 14% in the case of regular stay permit holders working in agriculture (int. 39). The average stay permit holder insured in OGA may claim labour-related benefits only after 150 days of employment (that is 6 months). The seasonal *metaklisi* migrants are exceptionally entitled to a health booklet after 3 months of stay and work. However, OGA will not issue a health booklet for them unless they hold a stay permit for 3 months already (int.39) and stay permits for seasonal *metaklisi* workers are rarely issued or are issued at the end or after the 6 month stay of the seasonal migrant in Greece, according to the Ministry of Interior (int.37). This means that these migrants cannot make use of their social security contributions in practice.

The extent to which Albanian migrants coming to Greece seasonally under the system of *metaklisi* (invitation of foreign worker as it is stipulated in article 16 of L.3386/2005 and its amendment of L.12311/2008) are circular migrants is evident in that nearly half of the 65,462 registered individuals

⁵ The bilateral Agreements between Greece and Albania are: The Friendship, Cooperation, Good Neighbourliness and Security Agreement signed in 1996, the Police Cooperation Agreement ratified by law No 2147/1993, and the Agreement on seasonal workers to Greece of 1997.

that applied for a seasonal work permit during the period 2001-2011 have applied for such a permit more than once in Greek municipalities. The rate of the repeated seasonal migration under the system of *metaklisi* should be much higher considering the fact that applications' data prior to 2008 were not efficiently registered in the municipalities (int.37). Vadean & Piracha (2009) in their analysis of the 2005 Albanian Living Standard Measurement Survey indeed find that circular migrants have returned mainly after the expiry of their seasonal work permit, with the intention to migrate again (2009: 10). This repeated seasonal migration pattern corroborates the circular migration definition employed in the case study because there is further evidence that these migrants go back and forth for economic reasons. Most of the qualitative interviews with migrants conducted in the region indicate that the people working temporarily in Greece under the system of scheme of seasonal agricultural work usually go back in order to be with their family and at the same time help towards the family business (in most cases it is a farm) (int. 20, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29). They return to Greece every year usually at the beginning of May and stay until October/November.

This type of the Albanian circular migrant consists predominantly of men aged 35-58 that first came in Greece in the early 1990s as irregular migrants. Throughout the 1990s the time Albanians spent in Greece was dependent on police controls and work opportunities available. If there was work, the return to Albania was delayed unless apprehended and deported by the police.

“when we had no papers, I used to stay here for 3 months, then the police would catch us and sent us up [Albania]. I was staying up for 3-4 months, 1 month, and then again on foot [to Greece]” (int.25).

Such forced returns to Albania followed by re-entry into Greece do not constitute circular migration according to the operational definition of this case study. There have been, however, cases of irregular migrants who were going back voluntarily within the year in order to see their family and do some work on the farm.

“if there was no work, then I would go by myself back to Albania. Not just with the police throwing me out” (int.31).

After the introduction of the 6-month window of the seasonal *metaklisi* system in 2001, formerly irregular circular migrants follow a more fixed pattern of circularity. Finding work that exceeds the 6 months period will not keep them in Greece any more. They do not want to lose the opportunity to come during the following year; the option of legal entry and stay is too strong to ignore for people that experienced the twilight zone of illegality for many years. At the same time, the fact that they have to leave after 6 months and cannot stay in the host country works as an incentive to invest towards something back home⁶.

All in all, the policy of seasonal invitation of a foreign worker has encouraged circular migration patterns. To what extent and at what cost though? In order to look deeper into what works and what does not work in the policy of seasonal *metaklisi* and towards which direction, we need to see the way the local demand for agricultural workers interacts with the supply of seasonal migrant labour in that very policy context. In particular, we need to answer the following questions: what are the formal and informal networks behind the arrangements of the visa for seasonal work? What do they indicate about the local labour markets and the agricultural sector? Which direction do the legal seasonal migrants head towards in terms of economic sector, internal and cross-country mobility?

There are certain points in the process of *metaklisi* described above that give room to **informal networks between migrants and employers** to develop parallel structures leading to different patterns of dispersion in the country and different levels of integration in local labour markets. The

⁶ Interestingly, during the last couple of years seasonal migrants needed to have their passport stamped before the 6 months ran out in order to re-apply the following year (int.27, 28). This seems to be an efficient control mechanism for the detection and, therefore, the prevention of seasonal visa overstays.

different ways that migrants are connected to each other and to employers is crucial in order to understand how the local labour market nexus unfolds around a specific labour policy for the agricultural sector.

First and foremost, there is no mechanism to check which part of the land property declared in the farmer's tax declaration is cultivated other than the farmer's affirmation and the OGA correspondent's limited controls⁷. This means that the number of agricultural workers requested often does not correspond to the work required for the land that is actually cultivated. Indeed, phenomena of employers putting down the names of, say, 10 workers when they actually need 3 (on the second level of nominal requests to the Perifereia) are widespread in the Greek countryside. There are several ways in which migrants and employers take advantage of this situation.

A common practice witnessed by different people in our sample (key informants, seasonal migrants in agriculture, construction workers with 2-year permits, int.: 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 31, 32, 33, 34) has been the **payment of 250-500 euros to the employer so that he declares the name of the prospective seasonal migrant in his nominal request to the Perifereia**. Key role in this transaction is an Albanian middle-man. As one of our respondents explains:

“it is the employer and one of us of course who takes the money, and they do the link. Because the Greek cannot know 10 Albanians in Albania. The employer asks, for example, 10 names that would give him 250 euro each or more. He asks from an Albanian middle-man who does the connection. And he brings people and he either shares the 250 or asks for more from the others [the Albanian migrants]” (int.21).

In other cases when the migrant is towards the final stage of his temporary stay in the host country (around September/October) he negotiates with the employer the wages of the following year. In fact, in certain parts of Central Macedonia it is standard practice for **employers to offer a smaller salary if they arrange the nominal request of the migrant worker and a bigger if they do not**. In other words, putting one's name down on the list to Perifereia affects wages.

“if there is someone for whom the employer has not done any papers, the employer gives him work. With 25 euros per day are the ones without papers being done [by the employer]. Half the village is with 25 euros and the other half with 23” (int.27-28).

In other occasions asking employers to add a name in their yearly request to the Perifereia is done as a favour (int. 31, 23, 25). This is the case where the mediator Albanian worker has a family/friendship connection with the prospective seasonal worker and a long-standing relationship of trust with the employer and/or good reputation within the local rural community. In such cases the invited seasonal worker usually goes to work to the Greek employer only when needed.

“when the man needs help, my father goes there and helps. For 2, 3 days. Sometimes the employer finds it hard and tells my dad to come and help him. We help him because he helps us. We take the visa. Because we know that one pays up to 700 euro for a visa...Sometimes it does not happen at all [work at the employer]. But when we go, we never take money from him. He wants to pay us but we do not take the money” (int. 23).

Indeed **chain migration networks** play a significant role in the make-up of a local workforce, not only in agriculture but also in the constructions sector. There are various locations in Greece that

⁷ The OGA correspondents constitute the main inspection mechanism for employment in the agricultural economy. The OGA correspondent is actually a civil servant working in the municipality, doing the job of the correspondent on top of every other job relevant to his position in the municipality. The number of OGA correspondents is also small since they are appointed by the Region (Perifereia) and not by the Prefecture (Nomo). These structural features of the correspondent limit his inspecting availability and capacity (int.39).

present high concentrations of migrants coming from specific locales in Albania. This has been the case in all the types of low-skill circular migrants (int.25, 31, 32, 23, 27, 28, 29 for agricultural workers under the scheme of seasonal invitation, int. 21, 22, 24, 33, 34, 35, 36 for long term stay permit holders).

It is also observed that when the employer has been employing the migrant for many years, he himself may ask other employers to put the worker's name down in their list to the Perifereia. Communal practices of local labour markets, therefore, bend external legal rules.

“Last year he [the employer] didn't get any visa for workers.....he [my father] came with another employer who had had 7 visas and added him as well. That's how it goes. It's not that he issues our permits every time. He just helps. And when he cannot get a visa issued, he tells someone else [another farmer]: “since you take 5 [visas], get another one for me” (int.23).

Interestingly, there are also **structural factors that contribute to this side arrangement between temporary, permanent migrants and employers**. In particular, the phenomenon takes place in cultivations that require many workers (e.g. harvest of tobacco, peaches). Moreover, in years where the labour supply is above the labour demand, employers are likely to profit from the situation.

“when the peach season starts the albanians used to call the employer ‘boss are you going to do the application for me so that I come?’ if there was a lot of demand from Albania, what would the employer do? He would take...I know this from two farmers in the region who did it. The people that they brought sometimes did not even work on their fields. They were brought here in order to work elsewhere”. (int.25).

The multiple employers, the sectoral and geographical dispersion of the seasonal metaklisi migrants indicate how integration in local labour markets bends legal rules on employment. The majority do take up work in the same region that they did more than a decade ago. Indicative of both the circular migration pattern of seasonal migrants coming under metaklisi and the density of labour networks developed in a place is that 3,998 out of the 5790 (70%) applicant seasonal workers in Pella for 2010 have reapplied before in the same prefecture (Ministry of Interior data). Having said that, they do not necessarily work in the same village (int. 23, 27). **Seasonal agricultural workers work with several employers during the 6 months that they are situated in Greece (int.24).**

“not just one employer, I work with many employers. If the work finishes with the employer you did the papers with, you go to the other employers to find work” (int. 27-28).

Sometimes these employers are related to the employers that did the metaklisi and share the available migrant labour locally.

“no no, it is not just with him. When he [employer] has made lots of visas...because sometimes things go like that...he might send him to his brother or friend. It is not always the same employer [that does the nominal request]” (int.23).

Furthermore, **legal seasonal migrants often move around the different locations they have worked across the country**. Working for the employer that did one's metaklisi papers does not mean that migrants work solely within the area or even the region during the 6 months they are in Greece. 56 year old T. that has been coming to Greece since 1991 goes to Imathia every May, moving on to Keratea, an area nearby Athens, for the harvest of grapes and olives in September and returns to Imathia for the kiwi harvest in October (int.31).

The seasonal metaklisi workers alternate sectors too.

“Here we start with tobacco, peaches, almonds, kiwis, and there is a bit of olives as well. I can find work in all that. 15 September to 20 October there is no work here. That’s when I do greenhouses, small allotments, I clean yards and everyone knows me. That’s why I’m ok [financially]. Today for example we were handymen” (int.31).

“In 2004 he stayed with the employer that arranged his visa. Then I took him with me...3 months after the day his visa was issued he had three months to go, and I took him in building works [οικοδομή/construction sector]” (int.23).

Moreover, **the seasonal migrant workers that pay their way into Greece via fellow-national mediators and Greek employers do not work for these employers and often do not even work in the region or the agricultural sector.** R., for instance, got his seasonal stay permit in 1999 from Giannitsa (Central Macedonia) and came straight to the Cyclades to work as a construction worker (int.19).

“Most of them come this way, buying the metaklisi from employer and Albanian middle-man. Then they go to the cities though. They don’t stay here” (int.32).

Does the circularity of the migrants under seasonal metaklisi perpetuate cross-border mobility or not?

Being a male, having a lower education level, originating from a rural area and having positive short term migration experience are the determinant factors of circular migration according to Vadean and Piracha (2009: 17). This stands true for the type of circular migration discussed here.

The majority of the circular migrants working under metaklisi in Greece use this channel in order to invest in their agricultural land holdings back home. Some maintain more long-term investment plans involving the purchase of agricultural equipment like tractors, while others just do enough to get on by. As 36 year old M. reasons his decision to return to Greece in 2008 using the channel of metaklisi,

“the fields need a tractor, they need water, they need a lot. I earn some money here in order to do something there. So that both my wife with my father there, and I from here, can earn something” (int. 25).

The growing interest of younger people to return to rural parts of Albania leaving the sprawling capital of Tirana is an opportunity that together with investment on basic infrastructures (roads, water) could lead towards a more stable socioeconomic environment for Albanian agriculture (int.49). Such a development would be beneficial for the return of the circular migrant to the country of origin on grounds of expansion rather than survival which often is the case today, especially if we focus on elder Albanian circular migrants.

58 year old G. is interested to get by when he returns to Albania. *“He will work with the fields. He will plant some tobacco, he will yield it in the summer and then sell it. Just ‘to earn their bread’, let’s say. So that he does not sit doing nothing...he will do this with my mother. Then they also have the grapes, a bit of cherry tries (int.23).*

As regards the prospects for cross-country mobility of this type of circular migrant, the role of family networks is crucial. Young Albanians coming to Northern Greece in their early 20s to work in the fields following the steps of their fathers is a particularly interesting development in this context. Characteristic is the case of 23 year old M (int. 29) who got the metaklisi visa with the help of his brother-in-law who works in the fridge-warehouses where fruit and vegetables are stored before they are sent all over Greece. Family culture, more evident in rural Albania, also pushes towards perpetuation of this type of fixed short-term circular migration. Indicatively, a middle-aged couple of

metaklisi Albanian workers in Giannitsa are thinking of stopping this back-and-forth movement in some years so that their son takes over and supports them (int.28).

2.2. Irregular seasonal migration for work in agriculture, construction or tourism

This type of circular migration is generally characterized by longer cycles than the other types; yet it depends on age, arrival arrangement and sector of employment. There are two kinds of irregular migrants that present elements of circularity. The first involves young Albanians, often under 21 years old, coming irregularly in Greece to work in the fields of Central Macedonia and other areas of Northern Greece. The Police Directorate of Pella in Central Macedonia verifies that most irregular migrants in the area are 20 years old or even younger men who have just finished school and come to work in agriculture for the summer (int. 41). The General Police Directorate of the Western Macedonia Region corroborates this; he argues that the age composition of irregular seasonal migrant inflows ranges from 18 to 25 years old (int. 42). Such is the case of 20 year old A. who came in Greece irregularly (int.30). He came to work with his father who has been coming to Greece for the last 6 years under the seasonal metaklisi system. A's father did not agree with his son's decision to come to Greece. Nevertheless he helped him find work and they stay together until they go back to Albania at the end of the 6month period. The reason that A did not come under metaklisi, like his father, is that people under 21 years old cannot apply for metaklisi (int.30, 27). Next year he will come with the visa for metaklisi following his father's path. Therefore, this kind of irregular migration can be short-lived. There are other young Albanians though, who come to Greece for seasonal work in the fields but lack the kin networks that would assure them a metaklisi visa. Their repeated irregular entries for seasonal work in the country are likely to continue for longer.

The young Albanian irregular migrants do not work though or fund a business of their own when they return to Albania. More likely to come to Greece this way is youth coming from a rural town or village in Albania where the only option available is work for the family's farm; and this option equals to no work for them. The aspirations of Albanian youth living in a post-emigration society clash against the rural settings that are associated with their parents' generation. What an interviewee replied slightly disturbed, when asked if he is going to help his parents in the farm upon return to Albania, is indicative:

“with this school [university] that I have finished, I can get a job” (int.29).

By and large, there is no long-term plan behind their irregular back and forth movements to Greece. They come to work in Greece in order to get by without burdening their parents. A, for example, has come to Greece in order to raise some money for the purchase of a sports car (int.30). This is why the case of these migrants is better described as seasonally repeated irregular migration and not as irregular circular migration.

The second kind of irregular seasonal migrant regards migrants like R (int.19) who have been coming in Greece for more than a decade but cannot come through a legal avenue (metaklisi or regularization proper). Some are people who were deported to Albania and were registered in the 'list of undesirables' to whom the entry to the country is forbidden for a period of 5 years. In practice such a deportation decision follows people even after that period and does not allow them to come to Greece the legal way or poses problems to the renewal of their permits (int.1).

These migrants tend to come from rural Southern Albania. They go back and forth to Greece because their family is situated in Albania and they need to cover its pressing financial needs. When back to Albania, they work and invest on the family farm.

“now if I work 5-6-7 months here, I will go back to Albania; If I find work there [in his village next to

Berat] ok, if not I will go to the village up above in order to plant olive trees, raisins. But this requires money now. If I need money, again back to Greece” (int.19).

They keep repeating this treacherous journey and even pay 700-1,000 euros to a smuggler in order to reach, in most cases, Athens⁸, mainly because of the work opportunities that arise through the family and informal networks they have in host country (int.19).

“ when I was without papers, I used to hang around for 2-3 months [in Albania]. If friends or family told me there is work, I used to come [to Greece]” (int. 28).

However, since it is expensive and risky to travel back and forth these migrants are likely to spend longer cycles of stay in Greece than the other types of circular migrants identified in the case study. The number of times that they will go back and forth within a year depends on how much work they will find in a certain period of time. At the time of the interview when jobs in the constructions had become scarce due to the economic crisis, R who has been coming irregularly to Greece since 2006 to work in the construction sector had not gone back home for 9 months. **The combination of irregular residence status and less work in the host country increases the likelihood to stay put in the host or origin country and stop circular migration.**

The liberalization of the visa regime, in force since January 2011, will facilitate the circularity prospects of already irregular migrants and migrants that are going to lapse into illegality due to stay permit renewal problems. Indicative are the words of L, a construction worker that goes back and forth between Greece and Albania since 1999 and today lacks social insurance stamps for the renewal of his 2-year long stay permit.

“if they take the visas out I will be coming only during the summer. I will work as a waiter for 3 months, ok, it’s going to be fine. I want to open some job there [in Albania], get a taxi. We’ll see. Maybe I’ll do a greenhouse. We’ll see” (int.24).

As the Director of the Lidia Foundation in Sarande argues, *“whoever wants to go back home, can do it now very easily because he knows that Greece, in any case, remains there” (int.48).*

Finally, the forced back-and-forth movements of Albanians have an element of circularity. At the same time, the forced nature of the return to Albania does not render them as circular migration. Most of the migrants interviewed in this case study have had experience of deportation. An insight on the current volume of irregular ‘circular’ Albanian migration to Greece is given by the Chief of the Albanian Border and Migration Police Directorate, Ministry of Interior.

“I will tell you just a number. Out of a number of 55,000 repatriations that we have every year, 22,000 are repeated ones. That is people that have gone there in January, worked for 2 months, got arrested and repatriated. After 2 months they went again and worked; they have seasonal work waiting for them after personal negotiation with the Greek employer. We have cases where people have gone back and forth 5 times within a year” (int.52).

⁸ 700 euros is the deal according to which one reaches Athens by bus. With 1,000 euros the transport to Athens is done by a taxi (int. 19, 33, 34).

2.3. Legal migrants with 2-year or 10-year long permits working in low-skill jobs in Greece

Our case study identified the following categories of low-skill jobs that the Albanian circular migrants, holders of 2- and 10-year long stay permits, perform in Greece: builders in the construction sector and agricultural workers (int. 8, 22, 24, 36), waitresses/waiters/ chefs in cafés, restaurants (int. 1, 14, 4, 6), private employees (int.13) and house cleaners (int.15). It seems that their diverse trajectories in Greece and their legal status lead to different patterns and prospects of circularity.

The 2-year and 10-year long migrant permit holders working in low-skill jobs in Greece are treated as a distinct type of circular migration for the following reasons. First, their working in low skill jobs in Greece is different from the legal seasonal workers' involvement in similar occupations in that the former's pursuit of employment is framed primarily by their integration in local labour markets and not so much by the limitations of the season and the caps set by the host State mechanisms. Second, these circular migrants are people who have lived or live with their families in Greece. They work in Greece in order to supplement the income earned in Albania and/or fund their investment there and at the same time maintain the bonds that are formed from life in the host country.

Below we shall describe the profile of this type of circular migrants and analyse the determinant factors of such a population flow.

This category of circular migrants is not as male dominated as the ones described above. Insofar as our qualitative survey permits, this type concerns migrants from various educational backgrounds and various parts of the country of origin. **The circularity of this group is determined by different factors** to the ones pointed out by Vadean and Piracha (2009: 17) (being a male, having a lower education level, originating from a rural area and having positive short term migration experience) fitting better the type of the seasonal metaklisi migrants.

First of all, these circular migrants have made investments in Greece. The social insurance contributions they have paid towards their pension for at least 10 years now is something that cannot be overlooked. **Out of legality stem rights and not only obligations.** As V, a construction sector worker holder of a 2year long stay permit, explains, stepping down from the stay permit system and using instead the visa-free regime in order to enter and work in Greece when the opportunity comes up is not an 'easy-to-take' option that many of his co-nationals would gladly switch to. It might suit the plans of a young Albanian or those of a seasonal metaklisi migrant, but not the plans of someone that has been paying for 10-15 years of social insurance in Greece.

"I'm thinking... now with the visas people from Albania will be able to go wherever they want in Europe. We, however, have paid so much money here in Greece with ensima [social insurance stamps], we have a hope to be insured. Now that they are going to liberalize the visa you can go wherever you want but you will not be able to work...we, however, have been working for so many years in Greece, why should we not get something?" (int.35).

Second, part of the circular migrants of this category regards people who have recently lived or live with their spouse and children in Greece. The case of E is indicative of the balance that is drawn between family needs and personal aspirations and the way this perpetuates circularity. E, an EDTO permit holder (int.15), in 2004, after 13 years of living in Greece and working as a cleaner, opened with her husband a restaurant and a rooms-to-rent business in an Albanian tourist destination and returned to Albania. Her children could not adapt to the Albanian reality and were persistently begging her to come back to Greece. In 2007 she returned to Greece with her children. Her husband lives permanently in Albania in order to keep running the restaurant and she works as a cleaner in Greece in the winter doing regular visits to Albania; in the summer season she returns to Albania with her children to run her tourist business. **Family migration and reunification involves integration in the**

host society on more complex levels and thus leads to more durable circular patterns compared to single male migration.

Third, **positive employment experience in the destination country and maintenance of contact in both ends** seem to be prerequisites not only for a successful return (Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006) but also for a sustainable circular movement of the migrant. The skills and ‘know how’ acquired abroad are used, for example, in the businesses that migrants develop upon return: many of the enterprises of Albanian returnees are ‘replicas’ of the ones their owners used to work in abroad (Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou 2005: 108). This is evident both in the above cases and right below:

“Even for 6 months or a year I want to open a small shop, café because I know things better in this field. I have been working in cafeterias during the last 10 years” (int. 1).

“In Albania I have friends that tell me ‘come so that we make a group and work there in constructions with 20-25.000 lek daily earnings. There I’m god. First, they ask you if you have worked in Greece. If you say yes, they employ you at that very moment without anyone intervening and vouching for you”(int.8).

Moreover, maintaining an employment relationship in the destination country while running a business in the country of origin proves crucial in order to support the latter. E recently opened an internet café in the premises of the University of Tirana with the help of a friend fellow-graduate. Since January 2010 he has been running his café Monday to Thursday, spending his Friday and weekends in Athens suburbs working as a waiter in a fish-tavern. E keeps doing the job he’s been doing since 2001 in Greece because it offers him a safety net.

“I don’t know [if I will keep going back and forth]. It depends on work. If work goes really well in Tirana I will not be able to come as I do now. Now though that work is less [the interview was taken in late June at the end of the academic year] the money I earn in the fish-tavern is essential” (int. 4).

Similarly M who returned with her husband and children to Albania and opened their own shop with building materials in Tirana had to go back to the island of Paros in Greece, where she used to live with her family working as a waitress and/or a cleaner, in order to earn some more capital for their business (int.14)

Interestingly, **the economic crisis cuts both ways as regards circularity of Albanian migrants**. On the one hand, it has severely reduced the work of migrants in Greece (especially in the construction sector) and has hampered their chances to renew stay permits and, therefore, move back and forth. The migrants that are affected most are workers insured under IKA (the National Insurance Organisation). Migrants insured under OGA (Agricultural Insurance Organisation), either working actually in agriculture or irregularly in construction, are not affected as much. This happens mainly because the social security contributions for agricultural workers are much less compared to those of IKA (int. 8, 22, 24, 36, 39). Second, the agricultural worker holder of a regular stay permit pays himself the social security contributions to OGA unlike the paid workers (say, builders) of IKA for which the employer is supposed to pay most (80%) of the social security contribution (L. 3386/2005)⁹.

⁹ Up to 2009 migrant workers insured with OGA were supposed to bring in employer affirmations proving 150 days of work per year for the renewal of their permits. The resulting illegal market of working days affirmations from employers and certificates from OGA correspondents forced the authorities to change the procedure in 2009 and get rid of the employer’s involvement (int.39). Until then many construction workers who were initially registered in their stay permits as agricultural workers would find farmers that affirmed the working days required either through actual work on the farm when necessary or by paying the Greek farmer a certain sum.

On the other hand, the economic crisis has boosted, at least temporarily¹⁰, the circularity of some migrants that were, until previously, going back and forth between Greece and Albania for family reasons. As one of our respondents working in the construction sector characteristically explains the increasingly circular character of his movements in the region:

“It is the last 2 years that I go back and forth for work. The times before that, I used to go only to see the family. Here work started to dry up and I needed to get prepared for there as well. So that we are not out of work there too (int. 8).

The existence of construction workers going back and forth for work in Greece and Albania has been further verified by the Lidia Foundation in Sarande.

“Once this village [Plaka] had only one builder and he was not local. The elders of the village used to employ him and pay him with the pensions they got from Greece. Today this small village of Southern Albania has nine builders going back and forth to Greece depending on labour demand” (int.48).

Nevertheless, being attached to a 2-year permit makes circularity difficult to maintain in the long term. After more than a decade of haggling with employers for working days (OGA) and social insurance stamps (IKA) for the renewal of his stay permit and while being on the brink of losing his legal residence status, L. is looking for self-employment options in order to return to Albania. At the same time, he is committed to alter his return plan and continue his circular migration pattern on a different basis in the eventuality of the liberalisation of visas between the EU and Albania.

“if the visas are out I will be coming [to Greece] only during the summer. I will be working as a waiter for 3 months. It will be fine. I also want to open some kind of work there [Albania], get a taxi. We will see. A greenhouse maybe”. I will either do the taxi plan or plant fruit and vegetables and sell it at the open air markets (int.24).

What cycle does this type of Albanian circular migrants do?

Albanian circular migrants working in the **construction sector** usually stay in Albania from December to February/March, working until July in Greece possibly with a break during Easter, then returning back to Albania in August, and finally coming to work between September and November in Greece. Most Albanians of this category follow more or less this cycle because their main work is in Greece and their work back home (agricultural work) takes place in certain fixed times over the year¹¹.

These construction sector workers often circulate between the place where papers were first issued and the place where they work for most of the time, and their work oscillates between the agricultural and the construction sector (int. 36, 22, 24). For example, B (int. 36) moves to Agrinio for 2-3 months every year in order to work as an agricultural worker to the Greek employer that affirmed his working days for OGA in the recent past. And another 5-6 months he works as a builder on the Cyclades island that he was interviewed.

Interestingly, a certain shift of construction sector workers insured under OGA back to agriculture, where they begun, is likely now that the construction sector is severely hit by the crisis and unemployment has risen.

¹⁰ It boosts circular migration patterns as long as the migrants' stay permits do not expire.

¹¹ The case of G, a builder with a 2 year long stay permit, is unique since he does the same work in both countries and he goes to Albania from 3 to 6 times per year. *“I go when I don't have work here [in Greece]. Now for example I will leave again on the 26th of June. I will have the mobile phone open all the time....i will be waiting phone calls to tell me to come for work (int. 8).*

“I would not come in September, I had no hope for work this year but luckily I have this one now [a construction site on the Cyclades island that he was interviewed] and I came. I would have been in my place [in Berat, Albania] now where we pick olives and then in November I would go to Agrinio, I wouldn't be here” (int.36).

Construction sector workers under IKA, like G (int.8), lack the cushion of informal employment and are likely to lose their stay permits and be forced to return to Albania¹².

The cycles of Albanian migrant workers in the **service sector** in Greece are more varied. This is mainly due to the different cycles that characterize their diverse entrepreneurial activities in Albania and their work in Greece.

E, holder of a 10year long-term permit, moves back and forth every week. Due to the crisis his working days in Greece have decreased substantially. He now works as a waiter in Athens only during the weekend and runs his business in Tirana from Monday to Friday (int. 4). M visits Albania 10-12 times per year in order to do market research in various locations in Albania and materialize her business plan to open a café (int.1). V and E move with their children during the summer months in Albania in order to run their respective tourist and wedding-venue businesses and return to Greece in September when schools start and the tourist season ends working respectively as a show-window decorator and a cleaner (int. 13, 15). Albanian migration expert, Julie Vullnetari, verifies the existence of such patterns where “the family may come to their other home in Albania during the summer vacations when children are not at school” (int.45).

How viable do the circular migration patterns of these low-skill construction and service sector workers look like from the angle of their investments in Albania? In other words, do their entrepreneurial steps in Albania suffice towards **the perpetuation of their circularity?**

Unlike the interviewees working in the service sector (waiters and cooks in restaurants and cafeterias, cleaners in businesses and private homes), almost all of the **construction sector** workers interviewed had their families settled in Albania from the onset of their emigration experience and have been going back and forth ever since. They circulate between Greece and Albania in order to see their families back home and build a viable way of earning a living that their family can rely on and their return/retirement can be cushioned against. Their investments range from technical equipment like tractors and water pumps for their fields to the purchase of various crops and livestock.

“We gather money here and do jobs there. For the tractors, the fields, I sell many more cows nowadays as well... We have 100 olive trees and we're planting another 80 now. We have a bit of vine. And 100 apricot plants. We sell them to merchants... the kilo of olives can go up to 1 euro, 1 euro 20cents” (int. 22).

B. a builder with a 10-year long permit under OGA who alternates between work in constructions in the Cyclades islands and agricultural work to the western mainland of Greece, proves that investing in land back home can be a profitable business giving jobs to locals and even opening the road to different kinds of investment.

“I have 30 acres with olive trees. I plant them, I work on them when I go back. My wife and my son also work on the field. And when I'm not there we employ people to do the work for us...I never fall

¹² Recent policy developments might prevent this from happening though. Article 44 of the recent law 3907 voted in January 2011 by the Greek Parliament gives an opportunity to migrants that have been living in Greece for nearly a decade and lapsed into illegality to regain their legal status.

below 4,000 euros per year, and now that I have planted more trees, the state is also helping us [subsidies for olive trees], I will have planted 600 roots with the new ones” (int.36)

“we went there [in Durrës] to see first, we are looking in renting a shop, to make kebabs, sell fruit, you know a shop.....We are seriously thinking about it. We will rent the place all year long, and see how it goes....You know, there is a lot of tourism there, they have done things that you cannot imagine” (int.36).

However, as mentioned above, key condition in order to move from a model of survival to one of expansion of the agricultural business, is investment on basic local infrastructure like road building and access to water supplies. The story of a family of returnees from Italy is illustrative of the difficulties encountered in many rural areas of Albania.

“Seeing that they did not have any prospects in the olive grove in Italy, they returned to the village and made a big olive grove investment. What they built was indeed remarkable. However, I’m telling you that they did not have water for the trees and they borrowed water from a neighbour under great difficulties and they had opened individual furrows for every single tree so that the water would reach them. And all that because they did not have 8,000 euros in order to build an irrigation unit. And they are not the only case that I know of...” (int.49).

The circular migrants working in the **service sector** in Greece take different entrepreneurial paths in Albania from the construction sector workers. They rely on family too, yet they tend to invest more in new businesses rather than existing ones. Apart from the different ways their families experienced migration (family reunification as opposed to single male migration), the kind of their investments in Albania is also related to the specificities of their work in Greece. In particular, the crisis-hit Greek leisure-services industry has a strong element of seasonality and more fixed periods of turnover than the construction sector. The latter requires continued presence on-site and regular trips to Albania are often out of the question.

Furthermore, the capital required for someone that invests in the Albanian services industry in Tirana or a desirable tourist destination is of a different scale to the capital required for farm expansion in rural parts of Albania. Therefore the problems are different. As many of our respondents mentioned, certain cultivations are subsidized by the Albanian State. Should one wish to invest towards a restaurant, a cafeteria or another business of the kind, the main problems that he/she is expected to come up against are corruption, red-tape and the lack of attractive loan offers for small-businesses (Int. 1, 13, 14, 24).

“You may get a loan. But the interest rates are much higher than in Greece” (int.8).

“I wanted to buy a land parcel where I could organize wedding venues and other cultural and social events. There is no such thing there [near her town]. A loan under good terms would be of great help, but...(int. 13).

2.4. Legal circular migration of semi- and high-skilled people with a secure stay status in Greece occupied in high skill jobs or running their own business in Albania

Another type of circular migration between Greece and Albania regards legal migrants with 2-year, 10-year permits (int. 2, 3, 7, 18) or ethnic Greek Albanians who are high skilled workers or entrepreneurs in Greece and are involved, at the same time, in entrepreneurship or high skill work in Albania.

This type concerns migrants with higher educational backgrounds coming from various parts of the country of origin. Higher education is either an 'import' from Albania (int. 3, 18) or pursued in Greece (int. 2, 7). J (int.3) was an established professional in his field when he came to Greece; he actually came having signed a contract for a play in prestigious Greek Theatre stage (Lyriki Skini). A (int. 18) was a technician in the Albanian Military. F and G pursued and got higher education degrees in Greece (int. 2, 7).

For the case of ethnic Greek Albanians, their ethnic origin and related privileged legal status has been key factor in their entrepreneurial success and its circular character. Indicative is the fact that most of the circular movements of ethnic Greek Albanians identified in the case study commence at the same time almost with their settling down in the host country (int. 10, 11, 16, 26).

For example, during his first year in Greece (1991) N has been transporting people to and from the borders 2 times a week and since 1993 he has been selling informally a variety of merchandise (batteries, glasses, wallets, handbags, camera films) to Albanian merchants that he met during his journeys as a taxi driver at the other side of the border (int.11).

It is no coincidence that many studies find that ethnic Greek Albanians have a high incidence of self-employment and entrepreneurship among the wider community of migrants from Albania. (Lyberaki & Maroukis 2005, Maroukis 2009).

As regards ethnic Albanians, high skilled work in Greece is reached for these migrants both at the onset (int. 3) as well as after going through a series of low status jobs (int.18, 7, 2).

Pursuing studies in Greece has been a key factor in these migrants' disentanglement from low skill work and realisation of trajectories of upward professional mobility in the host country. F, in Greece since 1996, was working as a cleaner in private homes and hotel units of the area of her first residence in the Peloponnese; at the same time she had been studying marketing and public relations in a private college in Athens (int.2). G came in Greece in 2002 with a visa for the purpose of study and had been working as a waiter in parallel to his studies in a private college in the Greek capital (int.7). Furthermore, both of these interviewees were determined to study abroad from very early on, when they were still in school in Albania. All in all, in combination with other factors analysed below, their commitment to study in Greece is a factor that determines the character of their circular movement and its prospects.

Having had positive employment experience in the host country in a field that meets the migrant aspirations is an essential element in order to take it a step further and establish a link with the country of origin.

"The experience I acquired from the insurance sector in Greece will be valuable to me. If only I managed to unite two insurance firms between Greece and Albania, it would be the best occurrence especially for the Albanian market that is very weak" (int.7).

However, it is not the positive employment experience in host country that renders circularity a viable possibility but the family and ethnic networks developed within that environment. One of our interviewees managed to open an insurance office in Tirana since 2009 mainly because of a former colleague of his who had been working in the same firm in Greece and returned to Albania to settle down (int.7).

Moreover, the stark contrast between the negative aspects of the migration experience (incl. low status work, racism and discrimination) and the pre-emigration educational background and aspirations can strengthen people's commitment to pursue their goals.

“I had built in my mind that which often people living in a disrupted country do, the picture of a, mostly idealized, democracy that will belong to them once they are there; and when you are there and face the new country it seems illuminated, beautiful and you see yourself in a basement, in a basement of soul, spirit and mind and nothing belongs to you in the end. You have to start from below zero. The advantage that Greece gave me is that it taught me to fight for what I want... (int.2).

The legal status of residence in the host country is a precondition for the perpetuation of circularity of high skill migrant workers as it is with low skill ones. Nevertheless, the likelihood of losing one’s legal status may push the migrant to explore the possibilities of continuing his work in the country of origin and, temporarily at least, open a circuit of labour and capital investment between the two countries.

“I am not allowed to exercise my profession because after the end of my studies I need to leave the country. I’ve done everything, I even considered a bogus marriage opportunity some months ago, paying 4.000 euros, in order to ensure my stay and work in Greece. While I was trying in this direction, and in search for alternative scenarios in case of a return, I started opening up to the vast and new, yet problematic, insurance market of Albania....in 2 months my stay permit finishes and I might have to return to Tirana for good (int.7).

The types of investment made in Albania and the ways these high skill circular migrants keep employment connections with Albania certainly need frequent circular migration patterns.

F’s journalist work in Greece and Albania (int.2) and I’s art collaborations (int. 3) since 2004 involve 8 to 10 visits per year to Albania for work purposes. When it comes to the opening of a business with its own premises it is clear that it needs to be an enterprise for two partners, at least. G’s successful operation of an insurance office in Tirana specialized in Albanian returnees’ repatriation (int.7) and A’s failed attempt to run 2 small businesses in both countries on his own (int.18) are indicative examples.

As Julie Vullnetari argues *“there are types of employment which can allow for, and even benefit from, circularity, whereas there are others for which a constant physical presence at work throughout is a must“ (int.45).* We have seen so far that circularity works better with the easier to plan timelines of agriculture; amongst migrants living and working in rural areas of Albania, who continue to see their future in these rural areas, but who work in agriculture in Greece for part of the year.

The circular connections that migrants establish between their country of origin and the host country also need infrastructures for reintegration of people, ideas and capital alike. When it comes to capital investment, what G says applies to entrepreneurial ventures of several types of circular migrants.

“The truth is that Albania has a lot of development potential. However, the state produces red tape, the taxes are not paid, and in the end the state does not collect revenue in order to provide services and is obliged to borrow continuously” (int.7).

As regards business and trade across countries, corruption in the Albanian Customs office is something that prevents medium-small merchant enterprises from investing in Albania and needs to be addressed.

“I don’t face any problems with the customs because the others are collecting the merchandise at the customs. They bribe, not me. Albania needs to adapt to the terms under which the European Custom offices function” (int.11).

When it comes to the perpetuation of high skill university employment in both countries, one should note the existence of a scholarship of the Albanian Ministry of Education, named *“fondi i ekselences”*

for graduates that wish to proceed with postgraduate courses abroad. There is also the Brain Gain Programme that provides financial incentives to members of the Albanian diaspora who return to Albania and find employment in public administration after a competitive call. The programme generally works in order to change the human resource strategy and ethos in Albanian public administration and to simplify the administrative aspects such as recognition of degrees and professional experience acquired abroad (int.10). According to the Brain Gain programme the minimal numbers involved in visitor professor programs of the government (only one person from Greece participates in the visitor professor program, int. 47) verify that they have a low education background and come mainly from rural locations (Carletto et al 2009), as well as the deskilling experience that Albanians in Greece have been exposed to.

3. Concluding remarks

The idea of ‘circular’ migration has been heralded by policy makers with great enthusiasm as the one-fits-all solution to many of the migration ‘problems’ (supposedly addressing at once labour market shortages without any migrant integration challenges). The situation on the ground, however, differs.

First of all, as it is clear from the types of circular migrants identified in the case study, a considerable segment of circular migrants are recipients of existing integration policies in the host country as much as the settled immigrants are. Only the circular migrants under the seasonal work invitation scheme and of course the irregular ‘circular’ migrants fall out of the scope of integration policies at the host country.

At the same time these people remain, in theory, target groups for reintegration policies in the country of origin. They are, along with the other categories of circular migrants, bearers of small-scale capital and skills and should be supported in order to change Albania’s neglected rural landscape which is a key variable towards unlocking the country’s development potential. What is needed though is, as it will be analyzed further below, that these migrants reach out to and ‘be reached’ by Regional Labour Offices and NGOs working on reintegration of returnees on the local level, and the Labour Offices provide consultation that corresponds to the character and the needs of the Albanian market broken down by locality and sector.

Moreover, not all types of employment and not all niches of labour fit with circular migration patterns. Sectors of employment which have a seasonality built into them are also more conducive to circulatory flows, namely, agriculture, tourism and to some extent construction. (int. 45). Indeed these are the main sectors that circular migrants find employment in both the host and the origin country.

So, who is really benefiting from circular migration? At this point, we need to discuss whether the concept of circularity is useful or not and under what conditions and policies it could be. We have seen groups of people who move back and forth between Greece and Albania, a set of policies and legal rules often creating difficulties to them and missing opportunities for host and sending economies, and various profiteering groups in between. The main problem here is that the positive effects of circular migration are skewed, are not balanced out well. Below we shall analyse the effects that circularity carries for the migrant, the employer, the host economy and the economy of origin and formulate policy suggestions that, we argue, would bring and balance out the positive effects of this type of migration.

3.1. Effects of circularity and policy suggestions – host country

What are the effects of circularity from the perspective of the circular migrant’s work in Greece?

The main benefit for circular migrants currently working under the system of seasonal work invitation in agriculture (but also for the rest of the types of circular migrants) is that they have earned a living all these years and sustained their family back home (e.g. built houses, invested in their family farm). The main problem for them is that they cannot make use of their health insurance payments in practice in the host country even though positive steps have been made in this direction by OGA. Secondly, they do not have the option to pay in pension contributions for half of their working life that they work in Greece.

The main problems for the circular migrants having a 2year long stay permit in the host country (mainly constructions and services workers) are:

- a) the long-standing structural difficulties in collecting the required number of social insurance stamps for the renewal of their permits that are aggravated due to the crisis-related increase of unemployment and undeclared work,
- b) whether they will ever be entitled to claim a part of their pension from the Greek State should they retire back to their country of origin.

In particular, in the construction sector where builders work for different contractors/beneficiaries and/or employers/owners on different sites, IKA, in its effort to limit undeclared work, has introduced a formula of calculating a posteriori the stamps to be paid according to the size (square meters) of the construction (Maroukis 2010). Thus, IKA decreased the number of constructions using undeclared work but it did not address the volume of undeclared workers within a construction; it created a situation where there are a few stamps to be shared amongst many workers leading to a 'black' market of social security stamps between (sub)contractors and workers.¹³

The just-in-time availability of trustworthy labour hands has been the main advantage of Albanian circular workers in Greek agriculture. Either the legal seasonal workers or the longer term stay permit holders working in the construction and/or the agricultural sector are, in fact, people always on-call that Greek employers have known for years. Moreover, a segment of Greek farmers and OGA correspondents had been profiting significant amounts of untaxed money until recently (2009) from the black market of working days affirmations and certificates that the stay permit system rules brought as a side-effect. This black market around the renewal of the long term stay permits of agricultural workers was recently ended (the employer is not involved in the process any more). Yet the high incidence of Albanian migrants' undeclared work remains.

In any case, the social security contributions paid to OGA directly by the stay permit holder migrants (who are likely to continue to pay them during the crisis as opposed to IKA insured paid workers) counterbalance the negative effect of the growth of the informal work to a certain extent.

Key messages for Greek policy makers:

1. The seasonal workers under the short-term invitation of metaklisi have their social security contribution (healthcare only) paid by the employer who invites them but they cannot claim it in practice. In this respect, we suggest the following:

- amend the law so that the metaklisi migrant gets the OGA health booklet after 3 months upon demonstration of the vevaiosi/certificate or the temporary stay permit.
- introduce a registration of pension rights in the recorded files of these workers in the Ministry of Interior. The fee for the pension should be directly paid in (to a bigger percentage) by the migrant and indirectly (to a smaller percentage) after equivalent reduction of the tax return sum he receives by the employer.

2. This case study indicates that circular mobility benefits from **papers with which one can travel back and forth when there is a need to**, as there is now during the economic crisis. The number of Albanian circular migrants is likely to increase substantially also due to their integration in local labour markets and society, the proximity with Albania and the Schengen visa liberalization regime although it is probably too early to assess the impact of this last. Renewing the stay permit nowadays translates in keeping a door open to Greece, for the migrants, and not losing a significant volume of social security contributions for the Greek State. This regards not only circular migrants but also

¹³ Therefore, this phenomenon reflects a structural problem of the labour market related with the constructions sector and concerns Greeks and immigrants alike. Immigrants, however, are in a more vulnerable position than Greeks in terms of bargaining power.

settled migrants in case they return to Albania due to unemployment in Greece. Given the increasing difficulties to renew stay permits we suggest:

- Changing the way social insurance contribution is paid in for all categories of dependent work. The employer pays, for instance, 50% of the social insurance stamps and the rest is paid by the migrant. Employers declaring their third country national employees would get a decrease of 7-10% over the social insurance fees cost, to be covered by the state.

The migrant would pay obligatorily only for healthcare. Paying towards one's pension would be an option given the fact that many legally staying migrants will not necessarily retire in Greece and even prefer to make other individual arrangements.

3. The issue of irregular work. The incidence of irregular work and the expected loss of revenue for the main social insurance funds could be kept in low levels should the migrants pay for this directly under the measure described right above. Maintaining unrealistic barriers to the way the market runs and leading once again the biggest migrant community in Greece into illegality is not advisable. Involving employers directly in the different stay permit processes has not worked in the past. It has only reproduced phenomena of exploitation of the migrant workers and untaxed enrichment of employers.

4. Recent arrivals of unemployed irregular migrants and asylum seekers exercise pressure in major Greek cities. Thoughts of replacing the Albanian legal seasonal agricultural workers with these recent arrivals have been expressed by different stakeholders interviewed (int.39). However, things are not that straightforward according to the METOIKOS case study. The trust relations and social networks maintained for at least a decade between Albanian seasonal agricultural workers and their employers, the proximity with Albania and the visa free regime are factors for which any envisaged relocation policies would be bypassed by the social dynamic of the local labour markets.

5. Bilateral agreements for the transfer of gained pension rights, money transfer, removal transfer, monitoring mechanisms for the operation of customs offices are other measures that need to be taken. We have seen that doing business that transcends the Greek-Albanian border, especially when commerce is involved, suffers from corrupt customs authorities.

3.2. Effects of circularity and policy suggestions – country of origin

What is the usefulness of circularity from the perspective of the migrant's activities in the country of origin? What are the reintegration measures that need to be taken in this respect?

Circular migration for work purposes so far has helped the majority of migrants involved in this orbit sustain their families, maintain and at times expand their agricultural activities. However, the returnees' and circulars' capital investment in agriculture and even agro-tourism lags far behind from the potential of the Albanian countryside.

The construction sector in Albania has become a booming sector of the Albanian economy mainly due to this way that remittances have been by and large invested (Nicholson 2001). This development has absorbed part of the internal migration pressures in Albania. The current population makeup of the region of Sarande in Southern Albania is indicative.

“people knew the region well and knew that it was richer from the villages of the North and the destroyed farms of Central Albania that they came from. Certainly a significant part of today's inhabitants of the region are migrants that arrived in the area with the hope of entering Greece. Some saw that the expenses from the traffickers were a lot, some managed to cross the border but returned

and in the meantime the construction industry in the area started to boom and these people found work as builders and thus settled in the area” (int.48).

The booming construction industry of Albania has also absorbed (and even got influenced by) returnees and circular migrant construction workers from Greece. Yet the building activity is not enough in order to lead Albania to paths of sustainable development. As the respondent from the association Hope for the Future puts it,

“the biggest problem is unemployment. Most people are unemployed. Inside the wonderful, newly built villas that you see, live unemployed people that may not even have something to eat” (int.49).

When it comes to businesses of the tertiary sector, the main problem of the mainly medium-small businesses of return and circular migrants is the restricted access to bank loans and the Albanian customs offices corruption when imports are involved.

The problem of the Albanian economy as regards return and circular migrants is that it has not a) disentangled their capital from the closed circuits of the family using it to get by and cover daily living costs or to build a house and b) channeled the family business (especially the agricultural family business) into an orbit of expansion. The explanation for this is twofold. It has to do both with the structural problems of Albania affecting the total of the population and not just the return and circular migrants, and the particular (re)integration policies implemented by the Albanian State aiming to increase the employment levels of certain population groups.

Overall, our study shows that the circular migrants that bring more capital and skills back to their country of origin are legal migrants that spontaneously circulate between the two countries (types 3 and 4). The legal seasonal migrants that come to work through the relevant bilateral labour agreement for 6 months every year and then return back home (type 1) generally do not disentangle from a survival-led consumption into a production-orientated pattern when situated in Albania. Clearly addressing chronic problems of Albanian society and economy is part of the answer. Would coordinated bilateral policy efforts be beneficial though? Whether a new labour agreement aiming to regulate the circular flow between the two countries would offer added-value in the above described flow of people and capital is debatable. Maybe policy efforts would be more effective if they addressed the de facto circular flows of people as opportunities carrying skills, social and economic capital; not under an overarching target of controlling how many go in and out but rather what they bring in or take out and how. The METOIKOS case study suggests certain measures to be taken in either countries that could eventually bring their policy targets closer to the realities, opportunities and problems formed under this flow of people and capital. Moreover, this discussion becomes crucial in the framework of the economic crisis where the number of spontaneous circular migrants is likely to increase given their (and their families') integration in local labour markets and Greek society, the proximity with Albania and the Schengen visa liberalization regime although it is probably too early to assess the impact of this last.

Key messages for Albanian policy makers:

Circularity can turn out useful for the migrant, the local economy of origin and the destination country if the migrant has an investment plan ahead of her/him and a supporting social infrastructure next to her/him.

The main problem for the reintegration of Albanian returnees and/or circular migrants is that they are not assisted by the local government with information regarding what to invest and where. Investments made are not supported by market research.

There are remarkable efforts made locally by certain NGOs and associations but what is needed is the set up of consultation services that would be provided at the municipal level and addressed to potential investors. Interestingly, the Lidia Foundation (int.48) conducted an econometric study of the possible profits of a hotel unit situated at the town centre, by the seaside and at the city suburbs overall demonstrating the unsuitability of the area for such an investment. The association Hope for the Future started working with returnees in 1998 through a pilot re-integration program for the repatriation of Albanian convicts imprisoned in Switzerland, continued with IOM collaboration for the support of young volunteer returnees and an awareness raising program against irregular migration in Albanian high schools and now focuses on young people returning in rural areas, working in agriculture. In all these programs, informing and consulting people on the market and labour market situation is the main support-basis for professional and social reintegration (int.49).

A positive development from the side of the Albanian State is the function of migration service counters in several regional and local employment offices. The provisions of this new strategy expand on the reintegration measures of the National Action Plan on Migration aiming to ensure sustainable return of returning migrants through support to the reintegration process, regardless of the form of return. The reintegration mechanism defined by the strategy assigns a very important role to Sportele Migracioni (SMs, migration service counters) at the regional and local employment offices under the direct responsibility of the National Employment Service. However, one of the biggest problems of the migration counters operation is

“the lack of a well-defined information mechanism concerning public services available and continuous referral” (int.43, 38, 50).

An even more serious problem of the employment offices is that there is a difficulty in translating strategic goals and policy documents into actions (int. 38). The lack of informed and adapted concrete policy targets spirals into misfiring as regards policy results. As a Migration Office Specialist of a Regional Labour Office argued,

“we offer subsidized training seminars but this training does not correspond to the labour market” (int.50).

In this respect, we suggest the following:

- **establishment of an information & referral mechanism concerning public services available**
- strengthening the role of the Labour Offices by a) **diverse expertise of Labour Offices’ consultants depending on the existing local labour market, the area and its potential for development, and b) local awareness raising campaigns** starting from the school onwards.

One other problem encountered in the employment offices in different municipalities in the south and the north of Albania is that the employers employ the program trainees only irregularly. This problem transcends the policy design problems of the Regional Labour Offices and the SMs and reflects more the structural features of the Albanian labour market. In an effort to cater the need of the trained people to work, employment offices turn a blind eye to undeclared work leaving the role of controlling and patrolling to the police and the labour inspectorate (int.48, 49, 50). The problem of undeclared work, however, needs tackling. The concrete results of this policy are ‘shady’ and this might pose obstacles for the justification of the funding continuation in an era where funds are missing.

Vocational training programs fail to meet their targets not only due to their serious design flaws and the structural problems of Albanian labour market that they hit against, but sometimes also due to their clientele, e.g. returnees and circular migrants that have no plan other than going to Greece,

“He who wanted to work would learn; but he who was constantly thinking how to go back again

would not pay attention to work” (int.49).

Employment orientation advice also needs to take into account the diverse skills and vocational experience that Albanian return migrants acquired abroad. This could be achieved horizontally through local surveys that update the knowledge on the local population expertise and investment patterns; and vertically, through incentives given to return migrants to share (and even sell) their vocational experiences abroad. The newly established National Agency for Investment (AIDA) in Albania could feed into and from such local investment educational schemes. The vocational experience that Albanian migrants bring back to Albania is something that policy needs to support and build around.

Reintegration problems undoubtedly transcend the policy design problems of the Regional Labour Offices and the SMs and reflect the structural features of the Albanian labour market. The major problem for the actual reintegration of circular migrants and returnees is the lack of basic infrastructure for investors of all kinds in Albania. In this respect, we suggest the following□

Access to competitive loans for return and circular migrants intending to invest in different sectors.

Apprenticeship in medium small enterprises is a good practice that has been applied by associations and NGOs as part of the support package towards the opening of businesses (int.49).

Other measures that are needed cross-sectorally would be economic incentives for returnees’ investments in the form of **bureaucratic facilitations for the opening of businesses, tax decrease for the initial return period.** (int.51).

Albania’s rural landscape is a key variable towards unlocking the country’s development potential. The majority of return and circular migrants are bearers of small-scale capital already involved in agriculture. They should be supported with basic **infrastructure like roads and irrigation for agriculture and other related investments like agro-tourism** (int.48, 49).

Additionally, the problems of the **education infrastructures across the country** need tackling because they constitute a disincentive for Albanian migrants to return and for returnees to stay and invest. The latter are indeed led to always have a contact with Greece for the pursuit of their children’s education.

“There are rich villages that have neither streets nor schools and this is a disincentive for Albanian migrants with families to return” (int. 48).

All in all, policy stakeholders need to realize that loans, basic infrastructure, consultation and information services and vocational training are equally crucial to bigger and smaller migrant investors that return or go back and forth in urban and rural areas. In this respect, both larger scale infrastructure investment and decentralized local support is needed. Such policies are necessary in order to overturn the ‘climate’ that is formed about the ‘Albania outside Tirana’; a social climate in which the following belief prevails *“the demands of both the labour market and the migrant himself for professional training and specialization is very limited”* (int.50).

As many studies have shown remittances and return migrants’ capital is consumed in order to cover daily needs or towards the overrated (due to the high demand from Albanians abroad) housing market. What needs doing, however, is *“help migrants develop a clear picture of the country’s market and locate the economic sectors with a higher long-term turnover of their investment, with a particular focus on the agricultural sector”* (int.51).

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ANNEX

Stakeholders interviewed

No	Date	Organisation	Position	Place of interview
37	27/05/2010	Ministry of Interior, Greece, Directorate of Aliens and Immigration	Official, Dept of Legal Coordination	Athens
38	15/06/2010	Ministry of Interior, Greece	Project officer of Aeneas Program	Athens
39	16/06/2010	Agricultural Insurance Organisation	Official, Dept of foreigners	Athens
40	22/06/2010	Police Directorate of Imathia, Central Macedonia	High official	Athens (tel. interview)
41	22/06/2010	Police Directorate of Pella, Central Macedonia	High official	Athens (tel. interview)
42	21/06/2010	General Police Directorate of the Region of Western Macedonia, Kozani	High official	Athens (tel. interview)
43	14/07/2010	IOM Tirana	Project officer	Tirana (email intv.)
44	15/07/2010	EC Delegation, Tirana	Task manager- Justice	Tirana (email intv.)
45	07/09/2010	Sussex Centre for Migration Research, UK	Research Expert	Athens (email intv.)
46	28/06/2010	Ministry of Justice, Dept of Jurisdictional foreign Relations	official Dept of International Acts	Tirana
47	02/07/2010	The Brain Gain Programme	Manager	Tirana
48	04/07/2010	Lidia Foundation, Sarande	Executive Director	Sarande, Albania
49	01/07/2010	Association Hope for the Future	Executive Director	
50	01/07/2010	Regional Labour Office, Ministry of Labour	Migration Office specialist	Shkodra
51	02/07/2010	Law School, University of Tirana	Lecturer	Tirana
52	29/06/2010	Albanian Border and Migration Police Directorate, Ministry of Interior	Chief of Integrated Border Management	Tirana
53	30/06/2010	National Institute of Diaspora, Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Former Director	Tirana