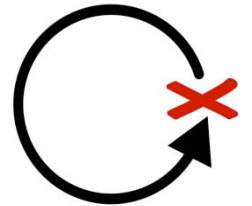




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METOIKOS Project

CIRCULAR MIGRATION BETWEEN ALBANIA AND GREECE

Dr. Thanos Maroukis, Ms Eda Gemi
European University Institute



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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.

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

The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS), directed by Stefano Bartolini since September 2006, is home to a large post-doctoral programme. Created in 1992, it aims to develop inter-disciplinary and comparative research and to promote work on the major issues facing the process of integration and European society. The Centre hosts major research programmes and projects, and a range of working groups and ad hoc initiatives. The research agenda is organised around a set of core themes and is continuously evolving, reflecting the changing agenda of European integration and the expanding membership of the European Union. One of its core themes is Migration

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Thanos Maroukis (thanosmaroukis@gmail.com) is a research fellow at the European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, in Florence, Italy and at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) in Athens, Greece. He is a sociologist with special interests in the investigation of irregular migration, labour migration and migration policy, nationalism and diversity. His research experience includes Southern, Western Europe and the Balkans. He has written several articles and chapters in academic journals and books, and has authored and co-authored 2 books.

Eda Gemi (egemi@hotmail.com) is a research assistant at the European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, in Florence, Italy and PhD Candidate at the University of Athens, Institute for Migration and Diaspora Studies (EMMEDIA). She is a political scientist with special interests in the investigation of social integration, political participation, gender and migration policy.

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
European University Institute
Via delle Fontanelle, 19
50016 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI), Italy

Fax: + 39 055 4685 770
<http://metoikos.eui.eu/>

Abstract

This study reviews the diverse back-and-forth migration patterns of Albanians to Greece that have been taking place since the 1990s. It sheds some light on the features of Albanian circular migration to Greece and its determinants through an analysis of the existing literature, which usually focuses on the other two types of movement of Albanian migrants: settlement and return migration. This analysis brings up the diversity of the circular patterns of mobility of the Albanian migrants, and identifies and critically assesses policies at both sides of the border that promote or put obstacles to different types of circular migration.

Keywords

Albania, Greece, circular migration, irregular migration, return migration, settlement

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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 shed some light on the features of Albanian circular migration to Greece and its determinants through an analysis of the existing literature, which usually focuses on the other two types of movement of Albanian migrants: settlement and return migration. Through this analysis we aim to bring up the diversity of the circular patterns of mobility of the Albanian migrants, formulate hypotheses to be tested by the METOIKOS case study and identify and critically assess policies at both sides of the border that promote or put obstacles to different types of circular migration. 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 likelihood of circular migration patterns of Albanians to Greece through the available literature, while section 3 assesses the adequacy of policy landscape towards managing circular migration movements.

1. Contemporary Albanian Migration: Facts and Figures

1.1. Emigration from Albania

Albania is a small country located in Southeast Europe with a total population of 3.4 million inhabitants (IOM, 2009). Since the 1990s it has witnessed one of the greatest and most dramatic migration flows (Carletto et al., 2004). The push factors which led to the largest ever known Albanian migration were the political instability, social unrest and economic downturn. For most people, the emigration was seen as a solution to immediate problems, and as some scholars have asserted, it is not a long-term life choice, and as such it may be reversed at any time (Kazazi & Lambrianidis 2006). However, today, Albania remains a country with its population in flux and unfortunately emigration is still seen as a panacea for many families (Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou, 2005). In the words of Carletto et al. (2004): "*A poor family is considered to be one that does not have a member who can emigrate abroad*", while King (2004) argues that domestic and international migration are basic survival strategies for poor families in Albania. Up to today over a million Albanians - about 30 percent of the population or 35% of its active population (IOM, 2009) - have migrated abroad.

There are no systematic data documenting the year-on-year development of Albanian emigration in the post-1990 period. The first official data on emigration were issued by the Albanian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in 2000. The ministry estimated there were 800,000 Albanian migrants living abroad at the end of the 1990s: 500,000 in Greece, 200,000 in Italy and the remainder scattered across a range of other European countries and the United States, Canada and Australia. A more accurate perspective on the scale of emigration was made available with the 2001 Albanian Census. Using the census residual method¹ the INSTAT (2002) suggested that 600,000 Albanians had emigrated and remained abroad during the period 1989-2001. This figure, however, excluded short-term migration of less than one year's duration, and thus, much emigration to Greece, which is temporary (Vullnetari, 2007).

¹ calculating net emigration as the residual of inter-censal population change minus the net difference between births and deaths

Table 1: Estimates of Albanians living abroad, 1999 and 2005

Country	1999	2005
Greece	500,000	600,000
Italy	200,000	250,000
USA	12,000	150,000
UK	5,000	50,000
Germany	12,000	15,000
Canada	5,000	11,500
Belgium	2,500	5,000
Turkey	1,000	5,000
France	2,000	2,000
Austria	2,000	2,000
Switzerland	1,000	1,500
Netherlands	-	1,000
TOTAL	742,500	1,093,000

Source: Barjaba (2000) and Government of Albania (2005).

As can be easily noticed, the above table² shows a clear increase of 350,000 in the number of Albanians living abroad between 1999-2005, but it is difficult to draw any conclusion regarding the recent fluctuation trends of Albanian migration flows. Interestingly, although Greece and Italy remain the main receiving countries, other destinations such as the USA, the UK and Canada have become attractive to an increasing number of Albanian emigrants (Vullnetari, 2007).

According to Vullnetari's typology (2007), the episodes of the contemporary Albanian emigration started with the "embassy migrants" that invaded many Embassies in Tirana in the summer of 1990 in an attempt to leave the country (Barjaba, 2000). Then there was the period 1991-1992 where thousands of people were leaving the country out of fear for the mounting unemployment (27.9% of the labour force was unemployed by the end of 1992). 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 Greece (through the land border) and Italy (by boat).



² a serious problem is the lack of disaggregation of this data by sex

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

The emigration of Albanians continued despite the political and economic stabilization that started to take place in the period 1993-96. 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. Tragic boat exoduses to Italy were registered in early spring 1997, while another flow of Albanian emigration was crossing the northern Greek borders. In 1999, around 500,000 ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo entered the country destabilising the already fragile economic and demographic situation, especially in northern Albania. As Kosovars moved onwards to European asylum destinations, many (northern) Albanians mixed themselves in with them. *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.* Within the context of the Albanian migration in the host countries gradually becoming more regular, it is important to note that in recent years, legal channels of emigration have become more accessible, such as seasonal migration and family reunification (Vullnetari, 2007).

What are the main features of the Albanian emigrants? The first migrant flows of the early 1990s were overwhelmingly men. The number of female migrants increased in the late 1990s and throughout 2000, mainly because of family reunification, which has been reflected also in the considerable presence of children (King & Vullnetari, 2009). However, in recent years, the number of female students and highly skilled migrants has increased, which implies that Albanian women are now choosing to migrate alone. According to INSTAT (Albanian Institute of Statistics) data of 2002, emigration has been particularly evident among males (largely between 18 and 35 years of age) whose population in Albania dropped over 20 percent. Furthermore, although **many studies talk** about the emigration of the low skilled Albanians from poor rural backgrounds, we should note that an important segment of Albanian emigrants have been skilled ones. According to the data provided by INSTAT in 2005 there were about 2,500 persons employed as scientific personnel in public universities and research institutes in Albania. This implies that for the period surveyed (1990-2005) more than 50 percent of academics and scientific workers had emigrated abroad (Germenji & Gedeshi, 2008).

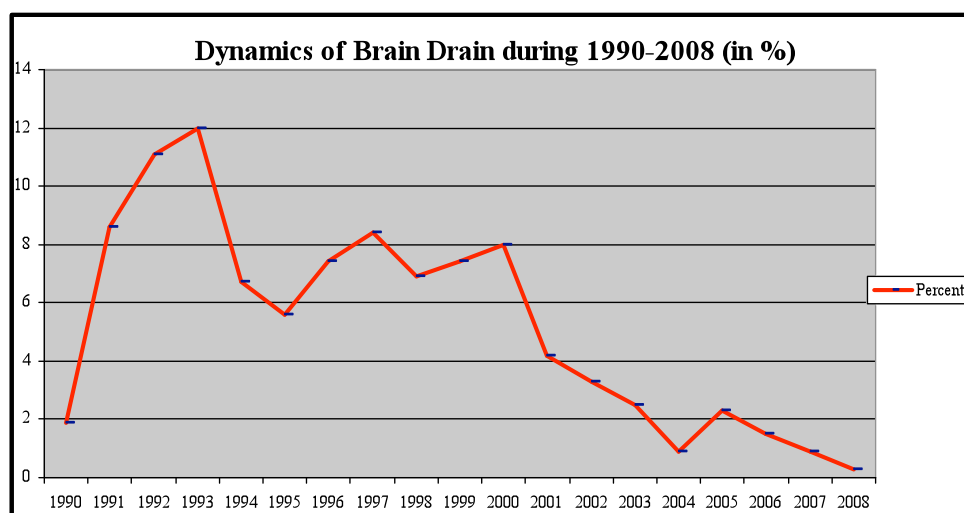


Figure 2: Gedeshi, 2008

Furthermore, nearly 66 percent of Albanians, known to have completed a doctoral degree in Western Europe or the US since 1990, have either emigrated from Albania or never returned after their

graduation (UNDP, 2006a). Most of them are reported to be young³ and 71.4 percent have emigrated with their families, which means that the perspectives for an eventual return are very weak (Ngjela, 2006; Vullnetari, 2007; Germenji & Gedeshi, 2008). Concretely, in late 2005, the main host countries for the Albanian lecturers and researchers were the US (26.3 per cent), Canada (18.4 per cent), Italy (13.7 per cent), Greece (12.9 per cent), France (9.7 per cent) and the UK (2.9 per cent) (Gedeshi & Gjokuta, 2008). From the above data, it appears that although the main destination countries of Albanian emigration are Greece and Italy, the highly educated Albanian emigrants preferred to go much further (Germenji & Gedeshi, 2008). Also it is estimated that every year 2,000 to 4,000 Albanian students⁴ continue to leave the country in order to attend universities abroad, mainly in Italy, France, Germany, England, Greece and USA (Tafaj, 2005; Nazarko, 2005). Presumably, this figure would be much higher if we count thousands of Albanian households have emigrated to Greece, Italy, England, Germany, the US, Canada, etc., whose children enrol each year in the universities of the countries of settlement⁵.

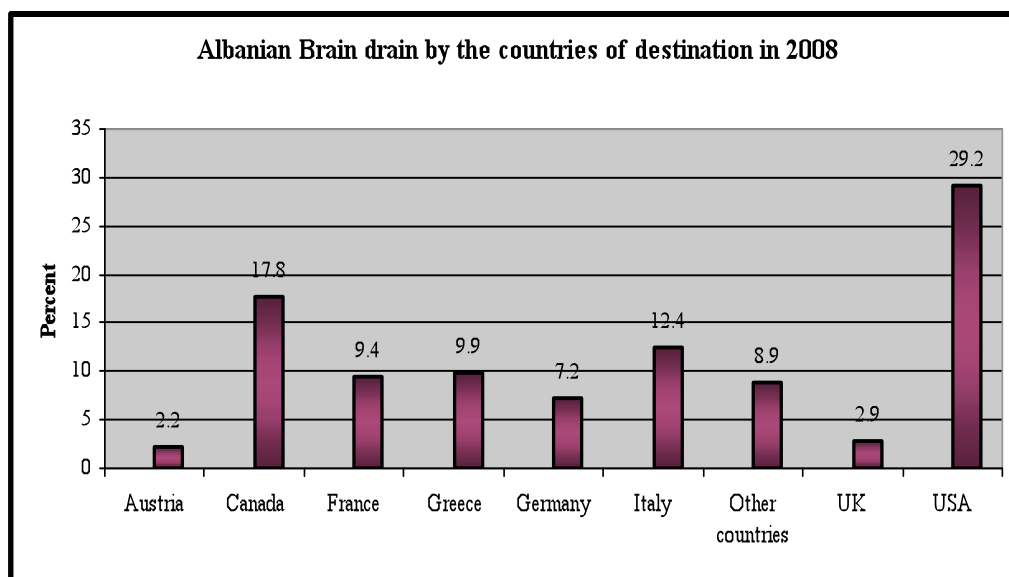


Figure 3: Gedeshi, 2008

As regards the composition of the low-skilled migrants in the host countries it should be noted that as many as 60 percent of Albanian intellectuals emigrated abroad are not working in their profession, including 74 percent in Greece, 67 percent in Italy, 58 percent in Austria, and 70 percent in the United States (Ngjela, 2006). In this sense, a significant proportion of the Albanian migrants undergo occupational deskilling when they emigrate (Barjaba, 2004; Glytsos, 2006). Meanwhile, as the survey of Germenji and Gedeshi⁶ (2008) revealed, the degree of “brain waste” seems to be smaller for Albanians who have completed their Master's or PhD studies abroad.

³ 47.3 percent were aged between 25 and 34 at the time of emigration

⁴ representing 5 to 10 percent of students enrolled in public higher education institutions in 2002-03

⁵ This process will be further accelerated by the policies of several countries to stimulate the flow of foreign students, whilst the Albanian universities and research institutions are suffering a decline of competitive capacities and a weakening of the quality of their work, as a consequence of brain drain (Gedeshi and Gjokuta, 2008)

⁶ The study was based on qualitative and quantitative data collected in Albania in 2006 as well as quantitative data derived from a data bank established by CESS in collaboration with the Soros Foundation over 1998-1999 and 2003-2004. The data bank contains information on some 1,140 Albanian scholars who at the time of the survey had either completed or were still attending a master's or doctoral programme at universities or research institutions in Western Europe and the US.

1.2. Albanian Migration in Greece

Greece is a country on the southeast border of the European Union (EU). For the greater part of the twentieth century, Greece was predominantly a country people emigrated *from*. Emigration trends from Greece started diminishing in the mid-1970s. The inward flows in the 70s and 80s mainly consisted of returning Greek guest workers, and members of the Greek Diaspora from Egypt or elsewhere. In the beginning of the 1990s the size of the migratory influx in Greece grew exponentially due to the events of 1989 in the former socialist countries.

In a population of 11,237,068 people in 2008 according to the National Statistical Service of Greece (ESYE) (the most recent estimate of population in Greece by ESYE is for the middle of 2008), there were 678,268 migrants with stay permits (of those approximately 363,700 still had a valid stay permit in March 2009 and another 314,568 were in the process of renewing their permits) (Maroukis 2008).

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. Kanellopoulos, Gregou & Petralias (2006) looking at the foreign population without social insurance in LFS reports of the period 1999-2002, argue that 60% of the legal immigrants and 64% of the irregular ones are Albanians. The 2001 Census indeed shows that 438,000 out of 762,000 (57% of the total) Third Country Nationals (TCNs) are Albanians. 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 and is therefore not included in the Ministry of Interior data on aliens in Table 2. The EDTO 3- and 10-year permits of *Vorioepiotes* on 1.1.2008 were 33,000 and 152,000 respectively according to data made available by the Greek Police Headquarters (Maroukis 2008).

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 2005⁷. In March 2010 there were 368,269 Albanian permit holders (146,050 females and 222,219 males) registered in the stay permit database out of a total of 518,675⁸. Yet little is known of the segment of irregular Albanian migrants living in Greece today. The yearly apprehensions data issued by the Greek Police are the sole direct data source indicating numbers of irregular Albanian migrants. Interestingly, the absolute numbers of apprehended and deported Albanians during the period 2002-2009 are increasing, and comprise around 50% and 80% of the totals respectively (Table 3). Looking at numbers only, one would not hesitate to argue that the increase of the regular Albanian migrant population in the post 2005 period goes hand by hand with the evolution of the respective irregular population. Is this really the case? Or is it a case of double counting and an increase of the enforcement practices on the Greek-Albanian border due to the implementation of the Readmission Agreement signed in 2005 between the European Commission and Albania, the Protocol of Cooperation on the control of the Greek-Albanian sea border (signed on 19.12.2005), and the amelioration of Greek-Albanian bilateral relations (Konidaris 2005)? One cannot tell with certainty. These questions are of particular interest to this study because the circular patterns of the Albanians' mobility, as will be explained below, have been to a certain extent a result of the tightening of Greek migration policy and, therefore, are likely to be related with irregular Albanian migration.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Another number of legal migrants regards the applicants for permit renewals: this number should be another 115,141 (63.5% times 700,000-518,675) approximately having in mind the share of Albanians in the total of permit holders from previous years (in 2008 Albanians constituted the 63.5% of the total) and that the total number of both permit applicants and permit holders should be around 700,000 in 2010 (as mentioned above there were 678,268 permit holders in 2008).

1991 and 1997 were the years of mass Albanian emigration towards Greece (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2001). The availability of various access points from the difficult to guard mountainous north-western border of Greece together with the historical links between Greece and Albania and the proximity of the two countries were the main factors that qualified Greece as one of the major migratory destinations for a significant part of the Albanian population that migrated during the 1990s (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2001). There have been cases where Albanians went back and forth many times (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2001), often in a forced manner under mass deportations (Barjaba & King 2005, Maroukis 2008). Gradually, however, a substantial part of them settled down in Greece. Fieldwork in 2000 and 2004 in Thessaloniki and Athens indicated that the majority, as time went by, were bringing most members of their family in Greece (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2001, Lyberaki & Maroukis 2005). At the same time, other studies have looked at another angle of the Albanian migration patterns and registered return flows of Albanian emigrants to Greece during the period 1999-2004 (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2004, Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou 2005, Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006, Azzarri & Carletto 2009, Vadean & Piracha 2009).

Table 2: *Migrant population in Greece according to 2001 Census and Ministry of Interior data*

Country of Origin	Census 2001		Valid stay permits April 2008	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Albania	438,036	57.49%	274,390	63.51%
Bulgaria	35,104	4.60%	18,154	4.2%
Georgia	22,875	3.00%	12,825	2.96%
Rumania	21,994	2.88%	10,574	2.44%
USA	18,140	2.38%	1,893	
Russia	17,535	2.30%	10,564	2.44%
Cyprus	17,426	2.28%		
Ukraine	13,616	1.78%	17,456	4.04%
UK	13,196	1.73%		
Poland	12,831	1.68%	876	0.20%
Germany	11,806	1.54%		
Pakistan	11,130	1.46%	11,084	2.56%
Australia	8,767	1.15%		
Turkey	7,881	1.03%	1,069	0.24%
Egypt	7,448	0.97%	10,090	2.33%
India	7,216	0.94%	8,688	2.01%
Philippines	6,478	0.85%	6,790	1.57%
Italy	5,825	0.76%		
Moldavia	5,718	0.75%	8,767	2.02%
Syria	5,552	0.72%	5,586	1.29%
Bangladesh	4,854	0.63%	3,761	0.87%
OTHER	68,385	8.97%	29,455	6.81%
TOTAL	761,813	100.00%	432,022	100.00%

Source: Ministry of Interior, National Statistical Service of Greece, authors' compilation

Table 3: Apprehensions and deportations of Albanians and their share in the respective totals during the period 2002-2009

Country of origin	Apprehensions 2002	Apprehensions 2003	Apprehensions 2004	Apprehensions 2005	Apprehensions 2006	Apprehensions 2007	Apprehensions 2008	Apprehensions 10months 2009
Albania	36,827	35,789	31,637	52,132	57,466	66,818	72,454	55,756
Total	58,230	51,031	44,987	66,351	95,239	112,364	146,337	107,972
Share in total	63.24%	70.13%	70.32%	78.57%	60.33%	59.46%	49.51%	51.63%
	Deported 2002	Deported 2003	Deported 2004	Deported 2005	Deported 2006	Deported 2007	Deported 2008	Deported Jan-Oct'09
Albania	4,498	6,406	8,602	13,945	12,167	14,403	18,203	14,605
Total	11,778	14,993	15,720	21,238	17,650	17,077	20,555	17,376
Share in total	38.18%	42.72%	54.72%	65.66%	68.93%	84.34%	88.55%	84.05%

Source: Ministry of Interior, authors' compilation

The social and demographic characteristics of Albanian migrants in Greece can be discussed both from stay permit data and case studies on Albanian immigrants in Greece as well as from case studies on former Albanian migrants to Greece that returned to Albania, with the view of capturing and comparing the features of the settled and the mobile segments of the Albanian migration in Greece.

The gender picture of Albanian migrants in Greece indicates a principally male population of returnees and, potentially, circular migrants as opposed to the more balanced gender distribution amongst settled migrants in the host country. In particular, in March 2010 60% and 40% of the Albanian stay permit holders in Greece were men and women respectively (Table 4). In 2007 the equivalent share was 65% and 35%. In the 2001 National Census there were 59% Albanian men and 41% women respondents. On the contrary, Vadean & Piracha's statistical analysis of the 2005 Albanian Living Standard Measurement Survey (ALSMS) indicates that being a female decreases significantly the likelihood of being a migrant, and in particular a circular migrant (Vadean & Piracha 2009). This finding translated into the reality of Albanian emigration to Greece reads as follows: *the women that have followed their men abroad usually settle down in the host country*. Labrianidis & Lyberaki's (2004) 'snowball' sample of Albanian returnees consisting of 300 men and 24 women who had lived as migrants in Greece and Italy for at least a year is not representative of the gender distribution of Albanian returnees but it gives an insight to what is likely to be the case on the ground.

Table 4: Gender of Albanian migrants from stay permits (in March 2010)

Gender	Men	Women	Total
Count	222,219	146,050	368,269
%	60.35	39.65	100

Source: Ministry of Interior

The younger the Albanian migrants are the more likely they are to be involved in different forms of migration. This is what the few studies on Albanian returnees more or less agree to. According to Vadean & Piracha's (2009) and Azzarri & Carletto's (2009) analysis of the 2005 ALSMS, circular migrants, being less educated, are likely to start the migration process earlier in their life-time. Without claiming representativity, the available studies on immigrants in Greece indicate that Albanians have a particularly 'dynamic' age structure. For example, 31% of the Labrianidis & Lyberaki (2001) study respondents are below 18 years old while 56.5% of the respondents are in economically active age (18-45 years old). The March 2010 data on Albanian stay permit holders indicate that almost 1 in 3.5 Albanians is a minor while another 57% approximately is in economically active age (Table 5). The research of Lyberaki & Maroukis in Athens (2005) indicates that although age does not affect significantly the Albanian immigrants' tendency to settle down in the host context,

people aging 50yrs old and above seem more eager to stay permanently in Greece than younger people.

Table 5: Age groups of Albanian migrants from stay permits (in March 2010)

Age	00-18	19-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66+	Total
Count	105,312	31,181	96,470	81,798	42,310	9,899	1,299	368,269
%	28.6	8.5	26.2	22.2	11.5	2.7	0.4	100

Source: Ministry of Interior

Vadean & Piracha (2009) argue that although the primary (or less) educated are more likely to be circular migrants, location seems to be more important a factor than education in determining the form of migration, with individuals from rural areas and from the Central and Mountain regions being more prone to choose circular migration, while those from urban areas temporary or permanent migration. The Labrianidis & Lyberaki (2001) research on Albanian immigrants living in Thessaloniki indicates that their sample also derives from the areas of Southern Albania (62% of men and 70% of women) while a significant share comes from central Albania and in particular Tirana. This picture does not change in the study of Lyberaki and Maroukis in Athens 4 years later (Lyberaki & Maroukis 2005). For the respondents of this study, however, settling down or not depends respectively on having immediate family members in Greece or at home.

Finally, the sectoral employment of permanent and circular migrants does not seem to differ according to the above studies on Albanian returnees and settled migrants in Greece. It differs, though, when it comes to gender: men are more prone to taking jobs with a more seasonal character (e.g. in construction, farming and tourism) as opposed to women (Vadean & Piracha 2009, Azzarri & Carletto 2009). The types of employment of returnees, on the other hand, indicate higher self-employment patterns than the circular or temporary migrants (Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou 2005), as the types of employment of settled immigrants also do⁹.

2. Types and Dynamics of Albanian Migration

2.1. The view from Albania: international and return migration

International Migration

In the Albanian case, three types of international migration have been identified (Carletto et al., 2004). First, there is the very common short-term migration (for periods of days, weeks, or months), almost exclusively to Greece. Second follows the long-term migration mainly to Greece and Italy as well as to the other countries in the EU, and third, there is the legal long-term migration to the US and Canada. Many scholars support that Albanian migration follows a cycle. Hence, Albanians from rural or remote areas of the country migrate first to Tirana or to a richer coastal region. This internal migration acts as a platform both for a better life for the family as a whole, and for the emigration of some of its younger members abroad once they have accumulated enough capital. Some of these international migrants move on from the country of first destination to countries with higher income opportunities and better living conditions. A study conducted in 2007 showed that 21 per cent of those who originally migrated to Greece moved on to the UK, 12.6 per cent to Italy and 9.4 per cent to Germany (Germenji & Gedeshi, 2008). Many migrants see Greece as a “transit country” or as a “first step before migrating somewhere else” or like ‘the key to open the gate’.

Going a step back, though, what are the main features of the Albanians who decide to emigrate in the first place? Historically Albanian emigration involved irregular border crossing. In this sense,

⁹ The study of Lyberaki & Maroukis (2005) has found an increase in business ownership compared to the employment situation of Albanian immigrants observed in the late 1990s (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2001).

proximity and ease of access played an important role in the decision of where to emigrate (first). Still official statistics show that the number of people who attempt to make an irregular border crossing is still high¹⁰. Furthermore, the choice of the destination country is strongly affected by educational level according to a recent study (European Training Foundation 2007)¹¹. Thus, migrants with primary education prefer Greece, while those with secondary general and vocational education prefer the UK and Italy, whereas potential migrants with university education prefer North America¹².

The main driver behind emigration continues to be the lack of employment opportunities and poverty in Albania (Sefa, 2009) with the majority of those who were unemployed in Albania (53%) intending to migrate for a short spell abroad (ETF, 2007).

The study of Azzarri and Carletto (2009)¹³ observes that individuals from the Coastal and Central regions, particularly if they are from urban areas, are the most likely to migrate permanently, while individuals from the Mountain region are less likely to migrate compared to individuals from Tirana. According to Castaldo et al. (2005)¹⁴ the most qualified (university educated) appear less likely to migrate as opposed to those with either secondary or vocational education.

Return Migration

In Albania little attention has been paid to return migration, and there is a lack of evidence with regard to the factors which influence the patterns of re-integration and the broader sustainability of the return process. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly evident how the initial flood of migrants to neighbouring countries is slowly generating a stream of returnees who, often after multiple moves back and forth, have decided to settle back in Albania (Kilic et al., 2007). As was previously seen, much of the migration from Albania and in particular that directed to Greece has traditionally been temporary in nature, whether seasonal or circular (Azzarri & Carletto, 2009). The limited empirical evidence available seems to suggest a “migration cycle”, involving multiple migration episodes prior to settling, either in the host or the source country (Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou, 2006). Meanwhile, many return episodes have happened under different forms, including individual voluntary return, organized voluntary return and forced return.

Table 6: Albanian nationals returned from EU countries, 2007

	Country	No. of Albanian nationals
1	Greece	64,060
2	Italy	1,848
3	United Kingdom	769
4	Switzerland	356
5	Croatia	319
6	Germany	269
7	France	234

¹⁰ During 2008, border police stopped 16,032 potential emigrants from crossing the Albanian border irregularly

¹¹ European Training Foundation, (2007), The contribution of human resources development to migration policy in Albania

¹² It is interesting to notice that half of the respondents intended to stay abroad for between one and five years and only 16.1% wanted to leave the country permanently. The desired period of stay abroad for potential migrants varied according to educational level and employment status. On the other hand, a third of the people with university education stated that they wanted to stay abroad permanently

¹³ Azzarri, C. and Carletto, C. (2009), Modelling migration dynamics in Albania: a hazard function approach, at King, R., Vullnetari, J. and Gedeshi, I. (ed.) 2009. Migration and Development in Albania and Kosovo. Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, Vol. 9, Nr. 4, December 2009, ELIAMEP

¹⁴ Castaldo A., Litchfield J. and Reilly B., (2005), Who is most likely to migrate from Albania? Evidence from the Albania living standards measurement survey, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, Working paper T11,

8	Belgium	216
9	Slovenia	108
10	The Netherlands	64
	Total	68,243

Source: *Department of Border and Migration, Albanian State Police, 2008*

According to estimates, over 70 percent of the returnees started to return to Albania after 2001, when the socio-economic and political situation started to improve (ETF, 2007, Gedeshi & Gjokuta, 2008). From a historical perspective, during the first period of the massive Albanian emigration and because of the irregularity of their settlement, Albanian emigrants were forcibly returned to Albania in their thousands. Once in Albania, many would return back almost immediately. Again, in the coming years, most returnees were forcibly repatriated migrants, albeit in a smaller degree. An estimated 30,000 Albanians who failed to regularise their status in their host countries are said to have been repatriated in this way in 2004 alone (de Zwager et al, 2005).

Nowadays, emigration and return migration go hand-in-hand in Albania: whilst a stable flow of individuals continue to emigrate towards increasingly more distant destinations, a growing number of returnees are establishing residence back home (Azzarri & Carletto, 2009). Yet as far as the household return is concerned, it seems unlikely to happen mainly for two reasons: first, because the children of emigrants have been assimilated and return to Albania would mean another migration and, second, because of the “unfinished” and long-term transition in Albania. For those who return, however, there is evidence of a positive and strong relation between return migration and business ownership (Kilic et al 2007, Gedeshi and Gjokuta 2008, Germenji and Milo 2009). Interestingly, Kilic et al. (2007) find that the likelihood of being involved in one’s own business is highest among households returning from countries other than Greece. This could be related to the de-skilling hypothesis that some studies (ETF 2007) argue with regard to salaried workers that worked for a long time in low-status jobs. In any case, one should look into the type of business developed back home in order to gain a more informed picture on this matter.

As regards the tendency to re-migrate after return, the survey of European Training Foundation (2007) confirms that in the case of Albania the return of migrants is a dynamic and increasing process. The research conducted by Vullnetari and King (2009) indicates that the transnational practices of Albanian households are increasing and there is an emergent transnational social space, especially encompassing Greece and Italy¹⁵. The paper of Piracha and Vadean (2009) constitutes the first study that encompassed a clear circular dimension of Albanian migration. They find that 55.6 percent of circular migrants interviewed have at most primary education. The main destination country for circular migrants has been Greece (88.0 percent). Geographically, most permanent and return migrants are from urban areas (56.6 percent and 57.6 percent respectively), while circular migrants originate from rural areas (62.8 percent) and regions closer to Greece (i.e. the Central and the Mountain regions)¹⁶. Circular migrants were least likely to have legal residence during their first migration trip (only 23.8 percent of them) but that increased considerably in time to 54.5 percent for the last migration trip.

As for factors favouring or discouraging circular migration of Albanians, the available studies offer a few indications. The existence of informal migrant social networks either with relatives and friends still abroad, or with Greek or Italian friends and colleagues after return is one such factor. Keeping

¹⁵ Their data collection was based on a combined quantitative and qualitative methodology. Our findings are based on 350 quantitative questionnaires with remittance-receiving households in rural Albania, 45 in-depth interviews and two group discussions with remittance-receiving households in Albania and remittance-sending households in Greece, and 14 in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions with local, regional and national stakeholders both in Albania and Greece.

¹⁶ Using data from the ALSMS 2002, Carletto et al. (2006) show similar geographical patterns of permanent and temporary migration.

transnational contacts with the host countries helps returnees develop commercial and economic relationships with the host countries (Gedeshi and Gjokuta 2008) and, in this sense, offers opportunities for back-and-forth movements.

On the other hand, the lack of re-integration policies and adequate structures has led to a pattern of circular migration with returnees often re-migrating (ETF 2007). So far circular migration patterns of Albanians between their home country and Greece have been mostly forced by circumstances. Forced returnees represent the least reintegrated group; more concretely, they have the highest non-participation rate in employment upon return and are more oriented towards re-migration (Germeñi and Milo 2009). Whether re-integration policies would contribute to another kind of circular migration is yet to be seen.

2.2. Migration patterns of Albanians in Greece

Existing studies on Albanian migration in Greece mostly focus on the experience of their settlement in different parts of the country. However, the migratory patterns of Albanians in Greece, as Barjaba and King (2005: 12) put it, also involve “a great deal of seasonal, short-term and even daily cross-border shuttle migration”. It is no coincidence that in a survey of Albanians in Thessaloniki in 1999-2000 about one third of the male respondents saw Greece as a ‘transit’ country (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2001)¹⁷. The paper of Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou (2005: 97) further confirms that “migration to Greece arose ‘out of necessity’, a solution in order to cover immediate needs, where movement is facilitated by proximity, land borders and relative ease of entry”. Corroborating this argument is a recent analysis of the 2005 Albanian Living Standard Measurement Survey (ALSMS) suggesting 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). Circular migration of Albanians between their home country and Greece is more likely than other countries also because of the greater concentration of Albanians in Greece. As Labrianidis and Lyberaki put it, there exists a critical mass for them to form effective informal networks for information and solidarity (2004: 100)¹⁸.

There is only one study focusing clearly on circular migration of Albanian emigrants to Greece (Vadean & Piracha 2009). Circularity is mainly discussed in a few studies in the context of the return of Albanian emigrants from Greece (and Italy). However, ‘the constant back and forth flows of people cannot be captured by categories of permanent migrants, return migrants or sojourners’ (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2004:96, Glick-Schiller et al 1995:5); circular patterns can be ‘traced’ in sub-groups within those groups instead. The studies on return are also limited. This could be explained by the fact that the 1990s were too early a period for ‘successful’ returns to take place. Preliminary attempts of return were negated by the pyramid crisis in 1997 (Barjaba & King 2005: 19). Or were only regarded as a temporary option (Kule et al. 2002).

¹⁷ In a survey on Albanians in Athens in 2003-2004 the share of respondents viewing Greece as an intermediary stop for elsewhere was substantially less (Lyberaki & Maroukis 2005). However, the geographical position of Athens (far from the land-border with Albania) and the family reunification that took place after the 2001 legislation and regularization program are factors that render the sample of the Athens study different from the one of Thessaloniki when it comes to questions of settlement and movement.

¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that unlike the definition adopted by the METOIKOS study (Triandafyllidou 2010: 8), for Labrianidis & Lyberaki (2004) circularity is not only related to the pursuit of work opportunities (21 per cent of the sample) but also to tourism (32.9 per cent) and visiting family members (26 per cent) (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2004: 92).

A significant study on Albanian returnees from Greece is that of Labrianidis, Barjaba and Brahim (featuring in Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2004, Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou 2005, Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006) on 324 Albanian former emigrants to Greece and Italy focusing on people who had stayed in those two countries for more than one year, had returned to Albania and lived there for at least one year at the time of the interview (March and April 2002). The return wave to Albania had reached a peak around 1999-2000 for emigrants to Greece in the Labrianidis et al study. Azzari & Carletto (2009: 421-422) point out an increasing return rate in the period 2002-2004; at the same time they stress that the return flow goes hand in hand with re-emigration flows.

The sampling of Labrianidis et al study had captured by and large returnees that were satisfied with their experience abroad (Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou 2005:102). Indeed the main reason for return mentioned by their respondents was the achievement of initial aims after a generally 'successful' migration experience. One could take this argument 'with a pinch of salt' taking also into consideration that 37 per cent of the respondents actually planned to return from the very beginning of their emigration decision (Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou 2005: 100). Representativity as regards the profile of the Albanian returnee and circular migrant, however, remains an issue. The volume of returnees that succeeded abroad may be related with the very configurations of the sampling; it would not be unreasonable to assume that a successful returnee would fit in this study's sampling rule of staying for at least a year back home. What are, though, the people that stay for less than a year back in Albania before they re-migrate to Greece? Are they returnees that so far failed in their migratory plans and have no viable employment options in Albania or do they simply have different plans and are closer to the profile of the circular migrant that lives between two countries and organizes one's life in both places of origin and destination? Success stories are not necessarily indicated by permanent return to the home country (see again Labrianidis et al survey) or with permanent settlement in the destination country (Maroukis 2009). Indeed, going back to Greece and, in this sense a circular migration pattern, remains an option since 56 per cent of this study's by and large 'successful' sample would consider emigrating again if necessary and 11 per cent attempted to do so (Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou, 2005: 101, Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006: 64). Corroborating this study's as well as Borjas's and Bratsberg's findings (1996), Vadean and Piracha study (2009) argue that failed migration may act as a deterrent for future migration movements while **past positive short term migration experience affects circular [and return] migration [alike]**.

As is the case with the decision to (re)settle down in Albania or Greece, back and forth movements, too, sometimes have little to do with success in the destination country. After all, in the case of the Greek-Albanian 'laboratory', as King would put it, of migration flows a common type of return has been forced return (de Zwager 2005: 57). Indeed, the largest proportion of forced returns carried out by Greek authorities concerns Albanians (Kanellopoulos & Gregou 2006: 14). The late comers in Greece (in the period prior to 2004) are the more likely to return and their doing so may be due to the more restrictive migration policies adopted, according to Azzari and Carletto's analysis of the ALSMS (2009: 428). However, it should be stressed that the Albanians' share in expulsions has decreased significantly over the last decade (see Table 2 above). And evidence of independent return is beginning to take place in more recent years (King & Vullnetari 2009: 399). The finding that 24 per cent of the Labrianidis et al sample had been expelled back to Albania and then re-crossed the border (ibid., p. 105) does verify that there have been '**circular**'¹⁹ **migration patterns that are forced** by various externalities (expulsion, leaving because of expiration of legal documents) that have less to do with economic success of Albanian emigrants to Greece. Having said that, being forcibly returned through an expulsion does not mean that one did not meet (usually) his migration targets and that has no economic incentive to re-cross the border and return to the host country. There are studies indicating that migrants returned by force are more likely to re-cross the border than settle down and

¹⁹ The circular character of these movements is debatable since their repetitiveness would depend more on externalities and less on opportunities to invest back in the home country and return to the host one. These people would probably stay in the host country but are circular migrants by default.

re-integrate in their country of origin. In particular, the Germenji and Milo (2009: 515) study on a survey conducted by the European Training Foundation in Albania in 2006 found that forced returnees were the least economically successful and re-integrated group, had the highest unemployment rates and were more oriented towards re-emigration.

What is then an independent return dependent on? The fact that 36 per cent of the Labrianidis et al sample had social security stamps in their last job in Greece implies that non-forced return is to a certain extent related to legal status in the host country; the other two thirds of the sample not having social security stamps in their last job in Greece indicates that working informally ‘pays back’ eventually while it does not suggest anything about the ‘forced’ or not nature of the respondents’ last return to Albania. Vadean & Piracha (2009) in their analysis of the 2005 Albanian Living Standard Measurement Survey found that circular migrants are more likely to work illegally and have returned mainly after the expiry of their seasonal work permit, with the intention to migrate again (2009: 10). Having said that, legality per se does not seem to matter so much for the sample of Labrianidis et al research in the early 2000s when only 1.4 per cent returns to Greece in order to maintain their legal status (Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006:65). The fact that Greece does not impose any sanctions (such as apprehension or registration to re-entry ban), apart from a financial penalty, in cases when an irregular migrant presents himself voluntarily for exit in a border crossing (Kanellopoulos & Gregou 2006: 31) may indeed function as a lever for back and forth movements, without legality being a central concern. Overall, time spent in the host country seems to determine more the capacity of migrants to achieve their initial aims (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2001) and then go back (Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou 2005: 100). The skills and ‘know how’ acquired abroad are used, for example, in the businesses they develop upon return: many of the enterprises of Albanian returnees are ‘replicas’ of the ones their owners used to work in abroad (ibid., p.108). Even more so, in the Albanian case proximity and ease of entry (until recently at least) facilitate significantly flows back and forth and shape patterns of seasonal or temporary mobility depending on the nature of the employment of the migrants abroad (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2004:90-92, Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006:64). Maintenance of interpersonal and family bonds back home further facilitates the decision to return (Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou 2005: 100-101). Michail’s study on Albanian immigrants in a Greek town near the Greek-Albanian border speaks of the role that both the experience of the unwelcoming Greek migration and national policies and proximity with the home country has played in capital investments in Albania that keep the option of return open (2009: 552). The wish to work independently (exemplified by the increase of business-owners from 2 per cent before emigration to 36 per cent for men and 16 per cent for women in the post-return period) is another factor that could explain return. Yet the case may also be that entrepreneurship is a ‘necessary choice’ for returnees brought about by transformations in the Albanian economy (Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006: 106-7).

What is circular migration related to? According to Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou (2005: 113-114) the eventuality of circular migration remains open mainly due to the proximity between the host and the source country. Proximity and, also, ease of entry enhance the reversibility of migration plans (ibid., p. 97); proximity challenges the argument that the more time spent abroad the more likely you are to settle down there permanently. Other factors that ‘feed’ back and forth movements, and possibly circular migration, is the fact that the Albanian return migrant speaks the Greek language and, most importantly, has formed bonds in Greece: contacts and collaboration they maintain with friends, relatives or previous employers in the host country. Under these circumstances, either coming and going for temporary work or organizing one’s life in both countries of origin and destination, with the latter providing work and income for the improvement of the conditions of the former, are likely scenarios (ibid., p.95). 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). Labrianidis & Lyberaki specify one aspect of this positive Albanian migration experience that may explain its circularity. Namely, they stress the role of cross-border and domestic social capital (family and friends) in the smooth integration of returning migrants (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2004:93). Finally, whether a return followed by a successful re-integration benefits circular mobility or not is a question to be explored through the METOIKOS

project study. So far we know that the opposite, an unsuccessful re-integration of a returnee in his(her)²⁰ home country, is likely to orientate him(her) towards re-emigration (Germenji and Milo 2009).

To sum up, good employment experience in the destination country and maintenance of contact seems to be a prerequisite not only for a successful return but also for a sustainable circular movement of the migrant. Therefore, re-integration infrastructures for returnees aiming to promote the investment of capital, know-how and 'know-who' earned abroad (Maroukis 2005) is another necessary condition for that investment to expand and profit from the circulation of goods, capital and people, if that turns out to be the case.

3. Migrant Reintegration Policies in Albania and Greece

3.1. Migration Policy: The Case of Albania

The political programme followed by Albanian Governments after '90, dealt almost exclusively with emigration. Firstly (1991), emigration was treated as an issue of Foreign Policy focusing on enabling Albanians to move abroad through temporary employment agreements. Secondly (1996), the emigration was seen as a Diaspora issue focusing mainly on ethnic and cultural rights and less on employment and legal protection and thirdly (1997), as a Domestic and Foreign Policy focusing both *on employment opportunities in Albania* and collaborating with the Greek and Italian governments for the regularisation of Albanian migrants there (King & Vullnetari, 2009). The existing bilateral agreements between Greece and Albania²¹, however, entail no reference to reintegration policies in place for the types of migrants concerned (forced returnees and seasonal migrants).

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 coming into force of the Readmission Agreement in 2006. It regards the re-admission of own nationals and Third Country Nationals from the territory of the European Union back to Albania and is part of Albania's future accession requirements into the European Union.

Meanwhile, other policy documents related to emigration have been issued, such as the National Strategy for the Fight against Trafficking, the draft National Strategy for the Fight against Child Trafficking, the National Strategy on Employment and Vocational Training, and their respective action plans. The Action Plan on Free Movement contains provisions on the return of Albanian nationals, which are related mainly to implementation of readmission procedures, including the need for training police personnel in readmission issues.

However, the two most important policy and implementation documents on migration are the National Strategy on Migration (NSM) adopted in 2004 and the National Action Plan on Migration (NAM)

²⁰ Most studies on return and circular migration find out that women are less likely to be involved in such patterns of mobility. This is either because the studies are male biased (Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2004, Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2005, Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006), or because they do not look at the issue of gender (de Zwager 2005) or because it is likely to be the case (Azzarri and Carletto 2009: 416, 428). In any case, this is telling of the impact of the 'patriarchal nature of Albanian society and the limited economic and cultural opportunities for women to advance personally and professionally on the potential for return migration' (King & Vullnetari 2009: 399, Michail 2009).

²¹ 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.

approved in 2005. The aim of the NSM is to provide Albania with a more comprehensive policy on migration, and move from one that has mainly been reactive to irregular flows to a more holistic policy based on the management of migration. The NAP represents one of the very first attempts to concretize the idea of linking migration management and the development of the country of origin in line with the orientations of the common immigration policy of the EU. The action plan among other issues like the protection of Albanian emigrants abroad and the organisation of a labour migration policy, deals with the development of a return and readmission policy of Albanian illegal emigrants and other third country nationals and, finally, the development of the necessary legal and institutional framework for its implementation (GoA, 2005). Finally, the law “*On the Emigration of Albanian citizens for employment purposes*” of 2006 (Law No. 9668, 18 December 2006) touches indirectly upon the issue of the returnees’ re-integration when it refers to the protection of the economic, political and social rights of emigrants.

Institutional framework

According to Article 28 of Emigration Law the **Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MoLSAEO)** is the national responsible authority in charge of coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the NSM and the NAP on Remittances, through the Migration Policies Directorate, following a Council of Ministers Decision in July 2007 (IOM 2007). MoLSAEO through its Directory of Employment Policies develops policies for employment and vocational training facilitates the employment and vocational training of Albanian citizens that return from migration and also includes vocational training for Albanian citizens before their departure. National Employment Service (under MoLSAEO) through the Sector of Migration and the Employment Relations implement the state policies in the migration field. This sector supports the activities of Regional Employment Directories (Migrant Service Centers/ Sportele Migracioni, migrant registration) (Dyrmyshi, 2009).

The **Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration**, founded in 2003 within the framework of government measures for the formulation and application of the National Strategy for Migration Management, is an advisory body to the Council of Ministers on migration-related issues. There is also a special team on brain drain, appointed by the prime minister.

The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)** protects the rights and interests of Albanian migrants through the Consular Directorate which includes diplomatic corps and consular offices in the destination countries. Moreover, through the **National Institute for Diaspora**²² collects and disseminates information about the labor legislation and social protection, migrant rights protection and develops programs in collaboration with Albanian migrants communities;

Ministry of Interior (MoI) is responsible for border controls, to ensure the regular migration of Albanian citizens, to prevent and eradicate the trafficking of human beings and to issue the necessary documents to Albanian citizens that want to migrate. The Border and Migration Police Directorate, as well as the Nationality and Refugees Directorate are responsible for immigration issues, border controls, prevention of “illegal” immigration, emigration, and asylum matters. They work closely with the UNHCR, OSCE and IOM, especially regarding asylum seekers and the readmission of TCNs (King & Vullnetari, 2009).

Ministry of Science and Education (MoES) collaborates with the responsible authorities of the destination countries for the establishment of the Albanian education and cultural centres in these countries in order to facilitate the education of the migrant children; Implementation of the mutual programs for the voluntary return of the Albanian Students educated abroad; in collaboration with the responsible authorities in destination countries ensure the acknowledgment of the Diplomas and skills.

Institute of the Social Insurance (under the Ministry of Finance) negotiates with its homologues in destination countries about the signing of the Social Insurance Agreement.

²² It was originally created under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate migration policies. A government decision in 2006 included in the mission of this institution the drafting of migratory policies and migration management.

Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) provides data on migration phenomena. The Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) for 2005 was the first to have a migration module.

Inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other UN agencies (for example, the United Nations Development Programme UNDP) have become locally involved in a variety of activities aimed at regulating emigration from Albania. Besides these IGOs a multitude of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and development agencies exert great influence on Albania's socio-economic development. Both sets of external actors cooperate with local NGOs. Regarding the NGOs, their number by the end of 2005 was estimated at over 600 (Misha 2006), a third of which were located in the capital Tirana. Their fields of activities range from service provision, to advocacy, to consultancies, to think-tanks. A large number of NGOs are involved in various aspects of development, but very few are engaged with migration issues (King & Vullnetari, 2009).

3.2. Circular Migration in Greek Migration Policy

From the perspective of the immigration host country, circular migration has been the dream of getting cheap labour when you need it without the need to cater for its integration, as Triandafyllidou (2010 concept paper) and others (e.g. Labrianidis, Lyberaki, Tinios & Hatziprokopiou 2004) succinctly note. Return migration equally has been regarded as an alternative and durable solution to the thorny issues of integration and settlement of immigrants (Kanellopoulos & Gregou 2006:16). However, as it will be shown below, Greece fails to provide an appropriate legal framework for the maintenance of a circular flow by making it difficult for circular migrants to renew their stay. Return migration, on the other hand, has been viewed mainly in relation to forced return.

Throughout the 1990s the main priorities of Greek migration policy as regards Albanians have revolved around their expulsion from Greek territory. Only recently has the issue of voluntary return occupied Greek policy makers mainly in relation to the return of other nationalities than the Albanians²³ and to making use of the European Return Fund operating since 2008 (Triandafyllidou & Ilies 2010:29). As shown in section 2, voluntary return for a shorter or longer period has been a fact of migratory patterns of Albanian migrants for quite a while. However, there is very little provision (if any) on the national level in order to regulate or encourage it. 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). Greek legislation and migration policy does not include any provision regarding return assistance either²⁴. Only certain NGOs and IOM do run special return programmes (including pre departure counseling and information on the vocational training programmes, reintegration possibilities and other facilities available for returnees in the country of origin) but these do not address Albanian prospective returnees (ibid., p.19).

A turning point in engaging Greek and Albanian authorities to look more thoroughly into the matter of return migration and the development potential it entails was the signing of the Readmission Agreement between Albania and the EC in April 2005²⁵. One of the aims of this Agreement is to facilitate return migration from Greece to Albania. In this context a project on 'Building on

²³ The media references to boosted inflows of irregular migrants next to descriptions of the inhumane living conditions of irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the centre of Athens during the spring of 2009 have generated an increasing interest of Greek policy makers in the return options of irregular migrants (Maroukis 2010: 106-7).

²⁴ Sole exception is the legal and financial assistance established for young Albanians (between 16 and 18 years old) under expulsion. This involves ensuring safe return back to their family place.

²⁵ The CARDS Regional Programme allocated to Albania 1 million euros in 2002 and 2003 each for integrated border management (Kruse 2006:124).

Mechanisms to Effectively and Sustainably Implement Readmission Agreement' is 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 is 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).

As in the case of return migration, legal provision and support (such as occupational training, investment support for returnees, family help and work search assistance) for circular migration are not part of the picture in Greek migration policy. In fact, Greek migration policy has put more obstacles to back and forth movements of Albanians than promoted it for more than a decade. Indicatively, 32 per cent of the interviewed returnees of the Labrianidis et al study in 2002 had never visited home during their stay in Greece either because, lacking permission to stay in the host country, their return would be difficult or because of their poor financial status (Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006:64). The only (debated) exception to this policy landscape is the bilateral agreement between Greece and Albania concerning seasonal migration through which migrants can legally enter to work for a period of up to 6 months (L.2486/1997). This agreement, however, was a first hesitant attempt from the Greek side aiming to regulate the irregular Albanian migrant inflows of the 1990s. It was not concerned with (re)integration measures at either side of the Greek-Albanian border. At the most, it made a general reference to "measures facilitating the return of the guestworker" (art.5, L.2482/ 1997) for which only the country of origin was responsible. All in all, the role of the existing bilateral agreement on seasonal migration in fostering circular migration patterns is doubtful. Whether Albanian migrants overstay their visas for seasonal work or return to their home country in time is a matter that requires further exploration. In any case, recent empirical studies show that seasonal workers move from a job and an area to another according to the season (for example, from agriculture to tourism and services and from primarily agricultural areas to multifunctional countryside) and sometimes settle in one place and do more than one job (Kasimis & Papadopoulos 2005: 106, Kasimis 2008).

Eight years after the bilateral agreement on seasonal labour, Greek migration policy does not seem ready to benefit from the realities of the geographical mobility of labour observed on the ground. The Law 3386 of 2005 does not take any substantial step further on supporting or promoting circular migration. In fact, article 16 on seasonal migration, which is the closest the Greek legislation gets to dealing with circular migration patterns, treats seasonal migration as a one-off activity not likely to be repeated since there is no provision for the regular renewal of the relevant permit. At the same time, there is no option in switching from a seasonal stay permit to any other kind of permit provided by the 2005 law in case the seasonal migrant wishes to prolong his stay in the country for more than 6 months. Renewal procedures for migrants working seasonally in Greece are set only for those holding the year long (as well as the 2-, 5-, and 10- year long) stay permits and work in the tourism industry²⁶

²⁶ These permit holders do not have to demonstrate a valid work contract *as long as they receive unemployment benefit during the renewal*. This means that they are not allowed to work legally in different sectors when they don't work in the tourist industry. This condition, therefore, opposes to the reality of multi-sectoral employment patterns observed in various regions of the Greek countryside (Kasimis & Papadopoulos 2005).

(par.5 article 12, par.2 article 15). The migrants without the yearly (at least) stay permit that opt to go back and forth between the country of origin and host country have no option but to do so every time either irregularly or through the bureaucratic, non-employer friendly²⁷ process of the application for seasonal labour. Last but not least, the Albanians working under a dependent employment relationship in Greek agriculture, constructions, and tourism industry are excluded from the multi-entry visas that are issued since 1 January 2008 for *bona fide travelers*, such as business people, drivers and representatives of organizations that need to travel frequently (<http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=351#edn1>). Thus an opportunity for the facilitation of the circular mobility of the majority of the Albanian emigrants moving back and forth between Greece and Albania is not materialised.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the features and factors of the migrant flows between Albania and Greece during the last two decades as they emerge from the existing literature. It has found that circular migration patterns have been related to the proximity and relative ease of entry in the host country more than anything else. The limited legal channels of entry in Greece and the positive experience there have contributed to various types of return flows and to a certain extent the likelihood of re-migration. While the re-integration experience in the home country seems to have forced rather than supported back-and-forth movements. The Greek migration policy so far has taken what it could from Albanian migration without any long-term perspective of managing more efficiently this population flow. The phenomenon of circular migration has not been given the attention it merits. Albanian migration policy has primarily revolved around the policing aspect of readmission procedures, especially after the relevant Agreement signed between Albania and the EC. Accepting migrant labour hands without having to integrate them in the host country and re-integrate them in the home country has been the prevalent opportunistic policy line of dealing with the circular flow of Albanian emigrants. Yet the reintegration challenge in Albania is, on the one hand, what the effectiveness of readmission procedures will eventually rely on and, on the other, a significant pillar of the development of the whole region. Various studies have shown, indeed, that the activities of Albanian migrants in Greece participate in the development process at both sides of the Greek-Albanian border (Labrianidis, Lyberaki, Tinios & Hatziprokopiou 2004, Maroukis 2005, Glytsos & Katseli 2005, Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006, Michail 2009, King & Vullnetari 2009). The METOIKOS case study on Albanian circular migrants moving between Albania and Greece aims to contribute to a) the mapping of the different types of circular migration observed in the region, b) the understanding of the determinant factors of such a population flow, c) the mapping and assessment of the relevant policies and initiatives and, building up on the above, d) the formulation of policy recommendations towards the management of circular migration patterns between neighbouring countries.

²⁷ The employer has to notify regularly the Organisation of Manpower Employment (OAED) about his/her business needs, the Regional Committee (to which OAED participates) has to issue the yearly labour vacancies in various sectors in various regions of Greece and then the employer needs to deposit a worker's monthly wage guarantee to the relevant Fund before the relevant working visa is issued (articles 14 & 16, L.3386).

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