



# Albanian Irregular Migration To Greece: A New Typology Of Crisis

Eda Gemi

Deliverable 2.1.

Background Report: Migration System 1 (Albania)



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49, Vas.Sofias Avenue, 106 76 Athens, Greece  
Tel.: (+30) 210 7257110, Fax: (+30) 210 7257114, e-mail: eliamep@eliamep.gr  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	<i>Introduction</i>	4
1.1.	Methodology	5
2.	<i>Setting the background of Albanian migration to Greece</i>	5
2.1.	Albanian Migration: New Trends and Dynamics	6
2.2.	Legal and institutional framework in Greece	11
2.3.	Albanian Migration to Greece: the vicious circle of irregularity	14
2.3.1.	New trends of irregularity in the midst of Greek economic crisis	16
2.3.2.	Estimations of Albanian irregular migration	20
3.	<i>Types of Albanian Irregular Migration</i>	22
3.1.	Legal Entry-Irregular employment	24
3.2.	Migrants lapsing from a regular status into an irregular one	24
3.3.	Irregular stay and employment	26
4.	<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	27
5.	<i>ANNEX I - List of Interviews with key informants in Greece and Albania</i>	28
6.	<i>Bibliographical References</i>	29

## FIGURES

Figure 1:	Map I- Albania	6
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## TABLES

Table I-	Resident Albanian citizens ever residing abroad returned after 1 January 2001 by country of previous residence and year of returning	9
Table II:	Stay Permit Issued 2005-2012	17
Table III:	Long and short-term valid permits of stay issued	18
Table IV:	Permits of stay by purpose of Albanian migrants 2010- 2012	19
Table V:	The percentage of insured workers with IKA 2007-2012	20
Table VI:	Estimates of Albanian irregular migration stock	21
Table VII:	Apprehensions of Irregular Albanian migrants during the period 2002-2012	21
Table VIII:	Typology of Albanian irregular migration to Greece	23

## DIAGRAMES

Diagram 1:	The level of unemployment 2002-2012 (LFS)	16
Diagram 2:	The fluctuation of regular Albanian migrants 2005-2012	18

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1990's, Albania has witnessed one of the greatest and most dramatic migration flows of its history. Today, over a million Albanians - about 27,5% of the total Albanian population and 35% of the active population (RoA, 2010) - have migrated abroad; by far the highest proportion amongst the Central and East European countries.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century Albanian migration continued, albeit at a lower scale, thus marking the end of highly intense mass migrations from the previous decade (Migrant Remittances, 2010:7). In the meantime, the phenomenon of voluntary return migration has emerged, mainly due the irregular or insecure situation of migrants and the on-going economic crisis.

In Greece, Albanians constitute by far the largest migrant community. The literature suggests that more than half of the migrant population in Greece is Albanians, with estimates referring to the pre-2005 period as high as 57.5% or even 65% of the total (Cavounidis & Chatzaki 2000, Kasimis 2004).

The migratory movements of Albanians to Greece throughout the 1990s were temporary, predominantly irregular and involved semi-skilled, low-skilled, or unskilled migrants. They were generally employed on a seasonal or temporary basis, in labour intensive sectors noted for informal activity: agriculture, construction, tourism, small scale family factories and housekeeping. It is estimated that over 550,000 unauthorised migrants were working in Greece by the late 1990s, and most of them were employed in seasonal work, returning home in the off-season (Reyneri, 2001).

However, in the early 2000s, most of these irregular movements and employment evolved into permanent settlement. This was mainly due to the legalization procedures that were first introduced in 1998 and set the Greek state's requirements for social insurance contribution in order to prove legal work and obtain/renew one's residence permit (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).

Little is known of the segment of irregular Albanian migrants living in Greece today. The annual apprehensions data issued by the Greek Police are the main data source indicating numbers of irregular Albanian migrants. While the land border between Greece and Albania used to be one of the main entry points of irregular migrants, the detections of illegal border-crossing reported at this border section dropped considerably over 85% (5,269) in 2011 comparing to 40,250 in 2009 (FRONTEX, 2012). This decrease follows the introduction of a visa free regime for Albanians as of 21 December 2010. However, reports suggest that Albanians are still irregular circular migrants in Greece but their irregularity, this time, is mainly related to their employment in the informal economy.

Evidence refer to the regular migrants losing the legal status and lapsing back into irregularity due to the high unemployment rates, which has been estimated to reach 36% for the third quarter of 2012 (Labour Force Survey, 2012c). Journalist sources, citing data provided by the Ministry of Interior, refer to about 130,000 to 140,000 Albanian migrant workers losing their stay permits because they were unable to secure the required number of social insurance stamps (IKA) in order to renew their documents in Greece.<sup>1</sup> Yet, it is suggested that over 180,000 Albanians have returned to Albania in search of better employment prospects there (Interview no.1, ACIT, 2012).

In this context, the background report seeks to present the size and main trends of Albanian irregular migration to Greece as part of the Balkans to EU migration system. The report is divided into two main

<sup>1</sup> Ελευθεροτυπία, 2 January 2010 'Δικαίωμα στη ζωή μ' ανοιχτά χαρτιά' by Ioanna Sotirchou, available at: <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=117071>. See also 'Η οικονομική κρίση οδηγεί τους μετανάστες...στη μετανάστευση', 23 August 2010.

sections. Section one set the background of Albanian migration in Greece by presenting an overview of Albanian migrant stock and respective socio-demographic features. Special emphasis is placed on analyzing the relationship between Albanian migration and irregularity, in turn, divided into three subsections. Irregular migration is first shown to be a systemic process, filtered through a range of institutional/structural, socio-economic and individual-level factors. In that context, the return migration or migrating to other destinations are seen as an immediate alternative strategy to cope with the financial crisis and unemployment. Section two discusses the typology of irregular migration of Albanians to Greece as it has been identified by this study. In this section, we shall analyse the types and the profiles of irregular migrants configured in this typology, the socio-economic factors and policies that motivate or prevent the irregular movements with a view to reflect the reality on the ground and to understand the perspective of the irregular Albanian migrants to Greece in the years to come.

### **1.1. Methodology**

The research undertaken in this report concentrates on the **Balkans to EU migration system** within which the irregular migration of Albanians to Greece is the most important element. We have selected Albania because it is the most important source country of both legal and irregular migration to Greece and it offers a control case where the authorities of the source and destination countries cooperate for the management of irregular migration. At the same time and despite the settlement of the Albanian legal migrant population in Greece, there are high numbers of irregular migrant apprehensions at the Greek Albanian border. Recent studies have also shown that there are still a significant number of Albanian workers that work without appropriate permits in Greece at temporary or seasonal jobs (Maroukis and Gemi 2011). Therefore, Albanian irregular migrants are an important group to study for Greece.

At the methodological level, the background report combined different methodologies and a rich source and types of data in order to identify the existing types of irregular migrants between Greece and Albania. During the first phase, a desk research was conducted, which made use mainly of secondary sources including scholarly literature, statistical data, media materials and NGO reports. Conducting interviews with key informants and stakeholders both in Albania and Greece was considered particularly useful for two reasons. It brought forward the recent trends of irregular migration and the socio-economic factors related to economic crisis that could trigger it to Greece. Second, it showed from a close angle the structural and political underpinnings that frame irregular migration and what drives migrants back either to Albania or to other destination countries (USA and Canada). As regards the access to interviewees, we followed targeted sampling based on key informants input. All in all, there were 9 interviews with Albanian and Greek key informants and stakeholders in Greece, 4 interviews with the respective stakeholders in Albania and 4 with informal informants (bus drivers and police officers) in Greek-Albanian border. Fieldwork was conducted between January and May 2013.

## **2. Setting the background of Albanian migration to Greece**

Neither in Greece, nor in Albania there are any reliable direct sources from which we can estimate the number of irregular migrants. Therefore, we seek to examine the irregular migration outflows of Albanians in the continuum of irregularity-regularity, in order to draw a real picture of irregularity of Albanians in Greece.

Part one of this chapter constructs a comprehensive puzzle of Albanian migration to Greece through an analysis of facts and figures viewed from an Albanian perspective. Part two examines the migration policies in Greece aiming either at tackling irregular migration or to setting up a frame for the social integration of migrants. The chapter concludes with an exploration of data and estimates of regular versus irregular Albanian migration in Greece in the light of economic recession that Greek economy is currently facing.

## 2.1. Albanian Migration: New Trends and Dynamics

Albania, has witnessed one of the greatest and most dramatic migration outflows of the last two decades (Carletto et al., 2004). The pictures of hopeless Albanians “breaking the walls” of Western embassies or that of the desperate Albanian refugees piled into crowded rusty ships to escape a country collapsing into political and economic chaos, became part of the iconography of global migration in the 1990’s (King and Mai, 2008). Twenty three years later, over a million Albanians - about 27,5% of the total Albanian population and 35% of the active population (RoA, 2010) - have migrated abroad. Moreover, the Albanian migration flows are five to six times higher than flows detected in developing countries with regard to active population (IOM, 2009; Piracha and Vadean, 2009; ETF, 2007).

Figure 1: Map I- Albania



Source: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

It is estimated, that the destination country for more than 50% of Albanian migrants is Greece, whilst 25% have migrated to Italy and the rest 25% in other EU countries, U.S.A. and Canada. The 2011 census found that the resident population in Albania was 2.821.977 marking a decline at around 8% compared to the 2001 census. It is estimated that during the inter-censal period 2001-2011 around 500,000 persons or 25% of the Albanian population have emigrated abroad (GoA, 2010; INSTAT, 2012).

The massive concentration of migration outflows over a short period of time as the country moved almost overnight from the absolute isolation to a massive large-scale migration, its ratio to the country’s population and the typology of these moves, marks Albania as a significant and unique case (King and Vullnetari, 2009; Vullnetari, 2011). Furthermore, the “uniqueness” of Albanian migration consists in the fact that it has been directed almost exclusively towards two neighbouring countries: Italy and Greece (Labrianidis and Kazazi, 2006). Barjaba and Perrone (1996) use the phrase “*migration of economic refugees*” to describe the initial Albanian migration to Italy and Greece, whilst Van Hear (1998) talks about “*a new migration order*”. King (2005) goes a step further by pointing out that emigration from Albania represents a unique “*laboratory for the study of migration and development*”. Other scholars support the view that the international migration is at the

core of the economic and social changes that have occurred in Albania (Florin and Matloob, 2009). Finally, King and Vullnetari (2009) set contemporary Albanian migration against the backdrop of the collapse of communist regime in East Europe, which reflected the historic economic divide between East and West.

The “*Albanian model*” of emigration as it has been developed by Barjaba and King (2005) entails the following characteristics:

- ☞ it is *recent* (post 1990) and *intense* - a rate of emigration much higher than any other Eastern European country;
- ☞ it has a *high degree of irregularity*, with many irregular migrants and clandestine departures in host countries such as Greece;
- ☞ it is largely *economically driven* – it can be described as “*survival migration*”, and
- ☞ it is *dynamic and rapidly evolving*, especially regarding new destinations and migratory routes.

### ***Does this model continues (or not) to address the main features of Albanian migration today?***

First, as far as the *intensity* is concerned, when referring to the increased numbers of registered migrants in Greece there are no indications of further increase in overall emigration. On the contrary, the high rate of unemployment as a consequence of the deep economic recession in Greece has almost reversed the trajectory of Albanian migration. In fact, the revised figures of the Government of Albania for 2010 suggest that this intensity has significantly decreased in recent years (GoA, 2010).

Second, the next feature of the model, notably the *ratio of irregular to regular* migration has been significantly moderated, particularly during the last years. A series of institutional developments, notably the Presidential Decree of November 1997 and the respective migration laws introduced in 2001 and 2005 by the Greek government and the visa liberalization regime for Albanian citizens introduced in December 2010 have significantly reversed the ratio of regular versus irregular migration.

However, due to the high unemployment rates as a consequence of the economic crisis, along with the temporary legal status and bureaucratic obstacles during the process of renewing the stay permits, Albanian migrants in Greece are likely to fall into an irregular situation within a very short time. In the context of the Albanian migration gradually becoming more regular, it is important to mention that in recent years, legal channels of migration (even though on temporary basis) have become more accessible due to the seasonal work schemes provisions and the introduction of visa liberalisation regime with the E.U.

Third, with regards to the emigration as a *survival strategy*, we have already seen in the beginning of the 1990s, Albania emerged as the poorest country in Europe and therefore emigration became the only means of survival for many households (King, 2003)<sup>2</sup>. Today, however, moving abroad has been considered as an investment in the future, providing opportunities for a second generation of migrants (Barjaba, 2004)<sup>3</sup>.

### ***But are Albanians still migrating?***

In the second decade of the twenty-first century Albanian migration continues, albeit at a significantly lower scale, marking as such the end of highly intense mass emigrations from the previous decades (Migrant

<sup>2</sup> This research indicates that Albanians view migration as both an individual and a family survival strategy.

<sup>3</sup> From a gender perspective, the Albanian migration represents a male-led typology: men migrated first and women followed as dependents (King & Vullnetari, 2009). The first migrant flows of the early 1990s were overwhelmingly men. However, by 2001 Albanian migrant women in Greece constituted around 40 percent of all Albanian migrants there. This change has been manifested in several ways, as can be seen in the uneven balance in numbers of female and male migrants (INSTAT, 2004, IOM, 2006). 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).



Remittances 2010:7). The findings of a very recent survey (April 2013) conducted by the Albanian Institute for International Studies<sup>4</sup> (AIIS) show that 61% of the Albanian citizens expressed their strong desire to leave the country if they could<sup>5</sup>. In fact, the main driver behind migration trends continues to be the lack of employment opportunities, poverty and the political instability in the country. An additional push factor is the lack of demand for labour force, particularly in the formal sector and the unregulated agriculture sector which has led people to start their own independent economic activities. Hence, migration may serve two goals: to obtain gainful employment, which could contribute directly or indirectly towards capital accumulation and/or to raise financial capital from higher wage income abroad in order to start up a business upon return (Piracha and Vadean, 2009).

As the consequences of the economic crisis and high rates of unemployment caused by it have begun to fully manifest themselves in the country where the Albanian migrants are mostly settled, new departures are taking place, either repatriating or continuing the never ending migratory “journey” to a third country.

In fact, through these years, the phenomenon of voluntary **return migration** emerged within the Albanian migration community, mainly due to the irregular or insecure situation of migrants or/and their families<sup>6</sup>. According to the 2011 Census, 6.08% of Albanian population that was ever-residing abroad returned after 1991 (INSTAT, 2012). Over 70% of the returnees started to return to Albania after 2001, when the socio-economic and political situation started to improve (ETF, 2007, Gedeshi and Gjokutaj, 2008).

From a historical perspective, during the first period of the massive Albanian outflows and because of their irregular status, Albanian migrants were subject to forced returns in their thousands. Once in Albania, many would return back almost immediately. Again, in the coming years, most returnees were forcibly repatriated migrants, albeit to a smaller degree (de Zwager et al, 2005). It is becoming increasingly evident how the initial flood of migrants to neighbouring countries is slowly generating a stream of voluntary returnees who, often after multiple moves back and forth, have decided to settle back in Albania (Kilic et al., 2007). As it is shown in Table I, Greece is the country where 62% of the total numbers of returnees were previously settled down.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://aiis-albania.org/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/2013/04/24/sondazhi-demokracia-para-zgjedhjeve-per-66-situata-eshte-keq-dhe-shume-keq/>

<sup>6</sup> However, in general Albanian immigrants residing irregularly in the EU and particularly in Italy and Greece were more exposed to forced return than regular emigrants who returned voluntarily.



**Table I- Resident Albanian citizens ever residing abroad returned after 1 January 2001 by country of previous residence and year of returning**

Country of previous residence	Year of returning											
	Total	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total	139.827	5.058	7.267	8.161	8.228	9.376	8.350	8.584	11.572	18.775	27.150	27.306
Greece	86.417	2.957	4.298	5.040	5.044	5.359	4.319	4.709	6.565	11.506	18.665	17.955
Italy	34.525	1.145	1.533	1.449	1.584	2.175	2.375	2.444	3.447	5.293	6.323	6.757

Source: Albanian Statistical Authority, INSTAT 2012

As the census figures show, the number of returnees has intensively increased during the period 2008-2011 mostly as a result of the Greek economic crisis. However, it is extremely difficult to assess whether all of them settled in Albania, eventually returned again to Greece or moved to another destination. As one of the key informant suggests:

*“people are returning to Albania for a very short period of time... a kind of collect themselves maybe they have a lot of expenses in Greece They can't afford them if they are unemployed.. So if they have a house in Albania and say ok what's the next project? If they are up to the 50' with young children they insist to find another way to go to a third country and particularly the UK and Germany which have become the two attractive poles of migrants” (Interview no.12).*

Sources from Albanian border officers suggest a significant increase of migrants' number entering the Albanian borders since 2011 and not all of them return to Greece (Interview no. 11). Journalist sources<sup>7</sup>, claimed that 15-20% of Albanian migrants residing in Greece has returned to Albania. Almost the same figure, 15% or 75,000 was quoted in a Reuters report in April 2012<sup>8</sup>. According to the estimations of the Albanian ambassador in Athens, approximately 180,000 to 200,000 have returned to Albanian since 2010 (Interview no.1).

A recent study on the Economic Impact of the Greek Crisis in Albania suggests that around 18 to 22% of Albanian migrants in Greece have returned to Albania (ACIT, 2012). According to the same study, returnees are mostly concentrated in the south part of the country, with 50% of them in the district area of Korca, Gjirokastra, Saranda and Fier, whilst 60% of those have settled in rural areas. Almost 70% of them are male, between the ages 25 and 45, who had returned to Albania in search of better employment and life prospects there (Interview no.1 and 5; ACIT, 2012). Citing institutional sources in Albania, the ACIT study estimates that around 30% of returnees have worked in the Greek construction sector and they have low level of skills. It is worth noting that despite the fact that a large number of Albanians in Greece work in the tourism sector, few of them have reportedly returned to Albania. This probably means that despite the deep economic recession, the tourist sector remains the “stronghold” of the Greek economy.

Data provided by Directorate of Migration Policies, Return and Re-integration of the Ministry of Labour of Albania<sup>9</sup> for the purpose of this research, estimates that approximately 28,000 to 30,000 have returned since 2010 (Interview no. 9). However, the most impressive evidence is that Albanian migrant's returnees from Greece represent 86% of the total numbers of returnees in Albania in 2012. Interestingly, 88% of them refer to

<sup>7</sup> <http://top-channel.tv/artikull.pht?id=237328>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/06/albania-greece-migrants-idUSL6E8F38XL20120406?feedType=RSS&feedName=everything&virtualBrandChannel=11563>

<sup>9</sup> based on the numbers of returnees registered in Migration Services (Sportelet e Migracionit)

the unemployment as the main reason behind their decision to return and only 2% to the lack of appropriate stay permit. While there is a considerable trend of Albanian migrants returning, a large number of them still move back and forth so as to benefit from their contacts in Greece till they are reintegrated and find a proper job in Albania. Others stay in Albania for 6 or 12 months before returning to Greece. However, as some experts suggest, the reality out there does not justify the “voices” talking of massive waves of return or the estimation of the ACIT’s study, according to which 22% of Albanian migrants in Greece have returned to Albania (Interviews no. 12 and 13).

Indeed, much of the Albanian migration outflows and in particular those directed to Greece have traditionally been temporary in nature, whether **seasonal or circular** (Azzarri & Carletto, 2009). As return migration is a relatively recent phenomenon, 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 and Hatziprokopiou, 2006). As regards the tendency to re-migrate after return, the survey of the 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 Italy. 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 assumptions that some studies (ETF 2007) make with regard to salaried workers that worked for a long time in low-status jobs. 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). Forced returnees represent the least re-integrated group with the highest non-participation rate in employment upon return and are more oriented towards re-migration (Germenji and Milo 2009). In that context, one might assume that circular migration patterns of Albanians between their home country and Greece are largely a result of circumstances.

### ***What are the new trends shaping the irregularity landscape of Albanian migration?***

As we have seen so far, Albanian migration has been characterized by a high degree of irregularity with clandestine departures and a large proportion of migrants classified as “illegal” and “undocumented” in host countries (Dedja, 2012:116; Barjaba, 2000). In 1999, Albania had been identified by a report of the EU High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration as a critical factor in the trajectory of irregular migration into the EU<sup>10</sup>. Albanian irregular migration was directed towards neighboring countries, including Greece (98%) and Italy, and only a small proportion towards other European member states (GoA, 2010). The number of irregular migrants consists of Albanian citizens returned mainly from Greece or/and also apprehended in attempt to cross the border irregularly. According to statistics, from 62,639 migrants returned in 2009 in 2010 the registered number was 50,735. Compared to 2009 a decrease to 12,567 cases of irregular migration is observed in 2010 (Albanian Migration Profile, 2010:83). In addition, since 2010, another significant decrease of irregular migration is observed, with detections of illegal border-crossing having dropped considerably over 85% (5,269) in 2011 comparing to 40,250 in 2009 (FRONTEX, 2012). This is a result of the visa liberalisation regime for Albanian citizens since late December 2010, the measures taken for the strengthening of border control in the framework of the commitment of Albanian government to meet the obligation with EU and the deep economic recession in Greece. Moreover, with tighter and more restrictive migration policy along with the dramatic rise of neo-nazist anti-migrant political forces, Greece has ceased to be an attractive migration destination.

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<sup>10</sup> HLWG, Final Report of the High-Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration, 10950/99, JAI 67, AG 27

## ***Is irregularity still an issue for Albania?***

In spite of the very positive institutional developments on the prevention of irregular migratory movements of Albanians, in fact, irregular migration still remains a major challenge. As our empirical fieldwork has shown, the main destination country for irregular migrants remains Greece with irregular employment in the informal economy constituting the major structural feature of “new” irregularity. As one of the key informants address it:

*“Greece continues to be the first destination country of irregular Albanian migrants. Of course, there has been a dramatic decrease of irregular outflows in particular after 2010. In fact, we don’t know yet whether this is due to the “maturity” of migration flows, the Greek crisis, the better life prospects in Albania or visa liberalization regime” (Interview no.8).*

According to the same sources, most of the irregular migrants originate from rural and mountainous areas either from the north or south regions closer to Greece<sup>11</sup>. As for factors favoring or discouraging irregular migration of Albanians, the available studies offer few indications. Nevertheless, the existence of informal migrant social networks either with relatives and friends abroad or with Greek friends and colleagues after return, is one such factor. Keeping trans-national contacts with the host countries, on the other hand, helps returnees develop economic relationships with the host countries (Gedeshi and Gjokutaj, 2008) and, in this sense, offers opportunities for back-and-forth movements. However, the main driver behind irregular migration outflows of Albanians continues to be the lack of employment opportunities and poverty in the country, with the majority of those who are unemployed in Albania intending to migrate for economic reasons.

As we’ve seen so far, a lot of things are happening on the ground and a lot of migration trends are emerging at the same time. The economic crisis is pushing Albanian people out of Greece and whether they are returning to Albanian or going somewhere else is still unclear. Presumably, it’s not only time of return but is also time of a new emigration cycle to the most economically robust countries in E.U (i.e. England and Germany) or even longer journey to U.S.A. and Canada. Concluding, it has become clear that although not as powerful as they were in the early 1990s, the impact of pull and push factors still determine the Albanian irregular migratory dynamics in the new era.

## ***2.2. Legal and institutional framework in Greece***

Greece faced important irregular immigration inflows in the early 1990s, with Albanians being the largest national group among the total migrant population in the country. In fact, most of the crucial sectors of the Greek economy, notably agriculture, construction sector, tourism and domestic services were dependent on the “irregular” labour hands of Albanian migrants. State politics appeared reluctant to institutionally address and hence appropriately manage the phenomenon of irregular labour migration, in order to alter the convenient intersection of interests (Maroukis, 2008). As such, it didn’t address the core issues, which were the legal status and social integration of migrants, on the one side, and implementing an appropriate legal framework for the maintenance of circular labour movements, on the other. Instead, what was implemented is a restrictive and bureaucratic labour immigration policy thus making difficult for Albanian migrants to acquire and then renew their stay permits, whereas the return migration has been viewed mainly in relation to forced return (Maroukis and Gemi, 2010). This was probably related to the insistence of the Greek legislator on the temporary character of immigration that indeed was based on the idea of preservation of the Greek race and ethnicity (Baldwin-Edwards and Apostolatu, 2007). In addition, the presence of this “old” ethnic group was perceived as a “threat” to the myth of national homogeneity, a crucial formative element of the Modern Greek nation. In that context, Albanian irregular migration to Greece is a phenomenon that has been developed spontaneously, and to a certain extent, irrespectively of and independently from state policies on either side of the Greek-Albanian border.

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<sup>11</sup> Using data from the ALSMS 2002, Carletto et al. (2006) show similar geographical patterns of permanent and temporary migration.

In 1991, the government in power (New Democracy) reacted to this new situation by introducing Law 1975/1991 titled “Entry-exit, sojourn, employment, deportation of aliens, procedure for the recognition of alien refugees and other provisions”. The main aim of the law was to control the massive irregular entry mostly of Albanians by making their apprehensions and “administrative deportation” an easy affair. Besides, this policy was used, among others, as a means of exerting pressure on the Albanian government with regard to its treatment of the Greek minority in Albania (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011). A very characteristic picture reflecting the migration reality in the 1990s, was the “*skoupa*” operations taking place in public places where Albanian irregular migrants were arrested, loaded on buses and sent to Albania without prior notification either to their relatives or Albanian border authorities. However, despite the intensified efforts of the Greek governments to control the country’s borders with Albanian- as the main point of entry of irregular migrants- Albanian irregular migratory routes towards Greece continued throughout the 1990’s.

In 1997, Greece adopted its first legalization program in an attempt to address the irregular migration stock in the country. Despite the efforts, it soon became clear that legalization managed to provide only temporary solutions to the phenomenon of irregular stay and work of Albanian migrants. A characteristic example of the limited effectiveness of the first regularization programme was the fact that 40% out of 370,000 people initially applying to regularise their stay in Greece (white card), did not apply for the yearly green card (Maroukis, 2008).

The second regularization law introduced in 2001 (2910/2001) tried to address the complex reality of legal stay of migrants, while extending the focus on entry regulations and expulsion of irregular migrants. Under this program 361,110 immigrants managed to acquire a temporary legal status (6 months temporary stay permit). This number consisted of those who failed to register in 1998 program, those who did not manage to extend their initial temporary stay permit (white card) and new migrants (Maroukis, 2008). As it is characteristically highlighted by a key informant:

*“...from 1998 to 2001 many people lost their legal status. From an administrative point of view the regularization programme introduced in 2001 did not function at all. It provided separate stay permit and separate work one. This provision blocked the administrative mechanism. Hence, it was forced to provide consecutive extensions in order to manage somehow the chaotic situation. In fact stay permits could not be renewed. On the other hand, it saved many people from falling into illegal status”* (Interview no.14).

Both the above regularization programmes and the introduction of the third one in 2005 (which has been amended by the L. 3536/2007) failed to establish a stable and permanent mechanism of regularization. Moreover, it came out that the phenomenon of lapsing anytime back into illegality still persists, perpetuating as such the vicious circle of irregularity. The main reasons regularization programmes did not manage to properly address irregular migration are the temporariness of legal status, the restrictive and bureaucratic labour immigration policy, the administrative obstacles and delays during the process of acquiring and renewing stay permits and the difficulty in securing the required number of social security stamps from employers.

Admittedly, this law made some steps forward with regard to the introduction of Labour Migration Provisions for migrants (by the invitation procedure). More concretely, according to the provisions of Chapter E’ (articles 14-23) of Law 3386/05, labour migration in Greece is managed on the basis of two systems. The first one (invitation procedure) includes the local labour market and it usually covers the low skilled workforce. The second one refers to more simplified and short admission procedures in favour of highly skilled third country nationals.<sup>12</sup> However, what was missing from this Law (3386/2005) was a clearer provision regarding the management of circular migration phenomenon. Article 16 on seasonal migration, for instance, treats it as a

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<sup>12</sup> The directive 2004/114/EC on the conditions of admission of third country nationals for the purposes of studies is also implemented and was transferred into national legislation with P.D. 101/08 (Official Gazette A’ 190/15-9-08), along with the national provisions for certain categories (exchange programmes, professional training, traineeship etc). Furthermore, the admission of researchers, according to the Directive 2005/71/EC, which was transferred into national law with P.D.128/08 (Official Gazette A’190/15-9-08) has also been applied.

one-off activity not likely to be repeated since there is no provision for the regular renewal of the relevant work permit. Meanwhile, there is no provision in the law allowing for the conversion from a seasonal residence permit to any other type of permit, in case the seasonal migrant wishes to prolong his stay in the country for more than 6 months (Maroukis and Gemi, 2010).

The case of *metaklisi/invitation* for seasonal labour is mainly regulated by the existing bilateral agreements for particular economic sectors with Albania (L.2482/1997). It was officially introduced by the Greek government in 2001 (L.2910/2001) under a system of annual quotas and in 2005 (L.3386/05) under that of seasonal invitation. In practice, though, it has only worked for seasonal job in Greek agriculture (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). In practice, however, this channel didn't work since many Greek employers, who have tried to put the procedure of *metaklisi/invitation* into force, have been strongly disappointed and consequently quitted from the relative procedures (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). As METOIKOS study<sup>13</sup> has revealed, years after the bilateral agreement on seasonal labour between Greece and Albania, the two countries do not seem ready to benefit from the realities and dynamics of the geographical mobility of labour observed on the ground. Although the circular migration does indeed take place mainly through informal channels and outside labour inter-state agreements, the current migration policy in the two countries actually remains trapped in a dichotomy of temporary versus permanent migration (ibid).

Following the liberalization of the EU visa regime for Albanian citizens in December 2010<sup>14</sup> the procedure of *metaklisi/invitation* of Albanian circular migrants to Greece has turned to be *de facto* inactive. In reality, a new form of irregularity has emerged, notably that of irregular seasonal circular employment that enter legally to Greece.

In times of deep economic recession, of decreasing wages and high unemployment that Greece is going through since late 2009, being a two-year long stay permit holder makes its renewal difficult, if not an impossible mission. After more than a decade of putting enormous efforts and energy to cope with both public administration and employers in order to stay legal, many of Albanian migrants are once more becoming irregular.

In 2010, the newly elected Greek government (PASOK) made a promising start in the field of migration, integration and asylum. Its main priorities were focused on a better management of irregular migrants and promoting migrants' social integration. A significant step in this direction was the introduction of the citizenship law (3838/2010) "*Contemporary Provisions for the Greek Citizenship and the Political Participation of Omogeneis (ethnic Greeks) and legally residing migrants and other*" that had been welcomed as a sign of the Government's serious intention to pursue policy change (Maroukis and Gemi, 2013). However, it did not resolve the problem of migrants and their children who have been born or finished their basic education in Greece, as the number of those benefited from it appears to be extremely limited.

At the same time, the introduction of some positive steps in recent legislation was expected to have a positive effect on maintaining the legal status for certain migrant's categories that are settled on a permanent basis in Greece. Consequently, the risk of lapsing into irregularity for both female holders of stay permits, for family reunification whose husbands lose their jobs and second generation migrants who reach their adulthood, has been moderated by three legal provisions. First, migrant holders of a family reunification permit may switch after five years to a self-contained stay permit (art.60 L.3386/2005 modified by art 45 L.3731/2008). Second, persons that lapsed into illegality and can prove a long presence and bonds developed in the country may exceptionally be awarded yearly stay permits for humanitarian reasons (art. 42, L.3907/2011). And third, the introduction of the "ergosimo" under art. 20 of L. 3863/2010 as a single method for the payment of wages and social security contributions of occasionally employed workers in the domestic sector offered a pathway to legalize undeclared work retroactively (Maroukis and Gemi, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> <http://metoikos.eui.eu>

<sup>14</sup> Visa liberalisation for the Albanian citizens with the EUMS has been put into force since the 15th of December 2010.



In practice, however, the adoption of these legal provisions didn't produce the expected outcome. According to data provided by the Ministry of Interiors, the number of stay permits for humanitarian-exceptional purpose decreased from 2010 onwards (YPES, 2011). Yet, the Plenary Session of the State Council, with decision 460/2013, declared anti-constitutional two fundamental provisions of the citizenship law (3838/2010), notably the access to Greek citizenship for the second generation of migrants and the local voting rights for the long term first generation immigrants. According to this decision, the local voting rights are exclusively attributed to Greek citizens and can not be extended to those who are not Greek, without prior amendment of the Constitution. Therefore, the re-introduction of *jus sanguinis* principle was likely seen as a necessary prerequisite to "fortify" the superiority of Greekness. This is considered to be an extremely negative development, as it clearly reveals the radicalization trends that along with the rise of neo-nazist political forces that have entered the Greek parliament, have recently overshadowed the social and political life in Greece, putting in danger the fundamental values of democracy in the country. These simultaneous legislative developments, accompanied by the public violence and hate speech against migrants, have actually carried the Greek immigration policy backwards rather than forward (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011).

### **2.3. Albanian Migration to Greece: the vicious circle of irregularity**

Albanian migrants in Greece are the most numerous of all countries. In fact, Albanians constitute by far the largest migrant community in Greece. According to the peplemovin<sup>15</sup> the outflows of Albanian migrants to Greece as of 2010 are estimated at 676,846 persons. The Greek Labour Force Survey estimated their number at approximately 449,706 (4<sup>th</sup> trimester 2011), which amounts to around 57% of the total migrant population (out of 790,431) living in the country, as well as 5% of the total native Greek population (Triandafyllidou and Marouf, 2012). The reasons can be traced back to the dynamics of Albanian migration in the early 1990's, the geographical proximity, the structural features of the labour market in Greece and policies and politics in both countries.

It should be noted however that there are two categories of Albanians residing in Greece; Albanian citizens and Albanian citizens of Greek ethnicity. The second group refers to Greek co-ethnics from Albania belonging to the Greek minority in the country. As such, they are not treated as migrants or aliens and their legal status falls under a different legal provision, which allows them to enjoy almost the same rights with Greek citizens. More specifically, their legal status is regulated by the Special *Omogeneis* Identity Card (EDTO) issued by the Greek police, whose number is not registered in the stay permit database of the Ministry of Interiors. However, during the last years, a significant decrease in the number of EDTO identity card holders has been observed, from 197,000 in December 2009 shrunk to 6,509 in December 2011 (Triandafyllidou and Marouf, 2012). These developments came as a result of a different political stance adopted by the Greek state in relation to both Albanian citizens of Greek ethnicity and the Albanian state *per se*. From 2007 onward the EDTO identity card holders were strongly motivated to become Greek citizens, a process that gradually altered the number of EDTO issued<sup>16</sup>. At the same time, the Ministry of Citizens' Protection and Greek Police, in collaboration with Albanian Ministry of Interiors, started a cross-checking operation of allegedly fraud personal data and ethnic affiliation (of Greek decent) of the previously issued EDTO.

With regard to the first category of Albanian migrants in Greece, in the 1990's the overwhelming majority of them came from Albania, following mostly irregular migratory pathways. They entered Greece mainly on foot crossing the Greek-Albanian mountainous border. After two decades, the irregular Albanians in Greece still constitute the largest portion, at about 34% of the total irregular migrants (Maroukis, 2008).

The historical links between the two countries, their geographical proximity and the easiness in crossing the borders were the main factors that qualified Greece as the main destination country for the majority of Albanian migrants. The *ratio of irregular to regular* migration was extremely high, particularly in the early 1990s

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<sup>15</sup> source: <http://peplemov.in/>

<sup>16</sup> Of course such a devolution come after the bilateral protocol signed by Greece and Albania on property rights of Greek minority the content of which still remains unpublished

(Barjaba and King 2005). In 1997, Greece counted 40 irregular Albanian migrants for every one regularised, whereas in Italy this ratio was two irregular Albanian migrants for every one regularised (Vullnetari, 2007). By the end of the 1990s, as a result of the first regularization programme (Presidential Decree of 1997) these ratios became approximately 1:1 in Greece (Barjaba 2000, 2003). However, the equilibrium of irregular to regular ratio has been extremely fragile, since migrants were likely to fall into an irregular situation any time, largely due to the short-term validity of most stay permits, the informal seasonal employment, the bureaucratic obstacles and delays, and “*the discretionality and corruption involved*” during the process of acquiring or/and renewing the documents (Barjaba and King, 2005).

In parallel, the high irregular nature of Albanian migration in the 1990s was accompanied by another characteristic pattern; that of temporary and circular to-and-fro mobility, which was facilitated by geographical proximity, particularly for communities living in the Albanian border areas (Vullnetari, 2007:40). As such the migratory movements of Albanians to Greece throughout that period were temporary, predominantly irregular and involved semi-skilled, low-skilled, or unskilled migrants (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). This temporary seasonal migration was shaped by the needs of the labour intensive sectors of Greek economy noted for informal activity: agriculture, construction, tourism, small scale family factories and housekeeping (Maroukis, 2008).

However, in the early 2000s, most of these irregular movements and employment evolved into permanent settlement. This was mainly due to the legalization procedures that were first introduced in 1998 and set the Greek state’s requirements for social insurance contribution in order to prove legal work and obtain/renew one’s residence permit (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). Indeed, the successive regularisation programmes (1998, 2001, 2005 and 2007<sup>17</sup>) gave Albanian migrants the opportunity to settle down, travel in a legal manner and allowed for family reunification (Labrianidis and Lyberakis, 2011; Lyberakis and Maroukis, 2005; Maroukis and Gemi, 2013). A number of studies have shown that towards the end of 2000’s, Albanians are more likely to be regular than irregular (Maroukis, 2009, Maroukis and Gemi, 2013). This is further corroborated by the fact that Albanian migrants staying regularly in Greece represent around 65% of the legal foreign population in the country (Table 2). On the other hand, major return flows to Albania have developed in the last couple of years and should not be interpreted as the result of failed integration. Unemployment has affected a considerable share of Albanian migrant households since 2009, and the shrinking of the construction sector in Greece have been the main causes of return to Albania. The economic recession accelerated this process and many people drew on family and social networks to pursue work opportunities back home, while maintaining their formal residence in Greece.

On the other hand, Albanian migrants without a stay permit could only move legally between the two countries if they were invited by employers for seasonal or temporary labour through the *metaklisi* system discussed above. After introduction of the sixth month provision of the seasonal *metaklisi* system in 2001, formerly irregular migrants followed a more fixed pattern of circular mobility. Since the option of legal entry and stay was finally available to Albanian migrants, the number of irregular entries was in a way under control (Maroukis, 2008). However, the irregular circular mobility of Albanian migrants in Greece still persists. As the study of Maroukis and Gemi (2013) has shown, one of the types of circular migration is that of irregular circularity, which till the end of 2010 entailed two kinds of irregular migrants. The first involves young Albanians arriving irregularly to Greece to work in agricultural sector of Northern Greece, which were not able to acquire a *metaklisi* visa. The second category has been coming to Greece for more than a decade but cannot enter through a legal channel. These are middle-aged Albanian migrants circulating irregularly from Albania to Greece that could not get a stay permit during the past regularization programs, and still need to cover their families’ pressing financial needs. When back in Albania, they work on the family farm or are unemployed. Some of them are people who were deported to Albania and were registered in the “list of undesirables”, for whom the entry to the country is forbidden for a period of years. However, since it is expensive and risky to travel back and forth they are likely to have longer cycles of stay in Greece.

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<sup>17</sup> Only between 2005-2007 four to five regularization programmes took place (Interview no.14)



From the turn of the century onwards, due to the regularisation programmes, the application of long-term validity of stay permits (in 2007), the introduction of visa liberalisation regime (2010) accompanying by very stringent procedures on both sides of the border, irregular movements have decreased. However, temporary migration for seasonal employment in the informal economy is one of the most important forms of “feeding” the irregular mobility of Albanians to Greece, particularly for those who cannot access or afford to gain other types of work or stay permits in the country.

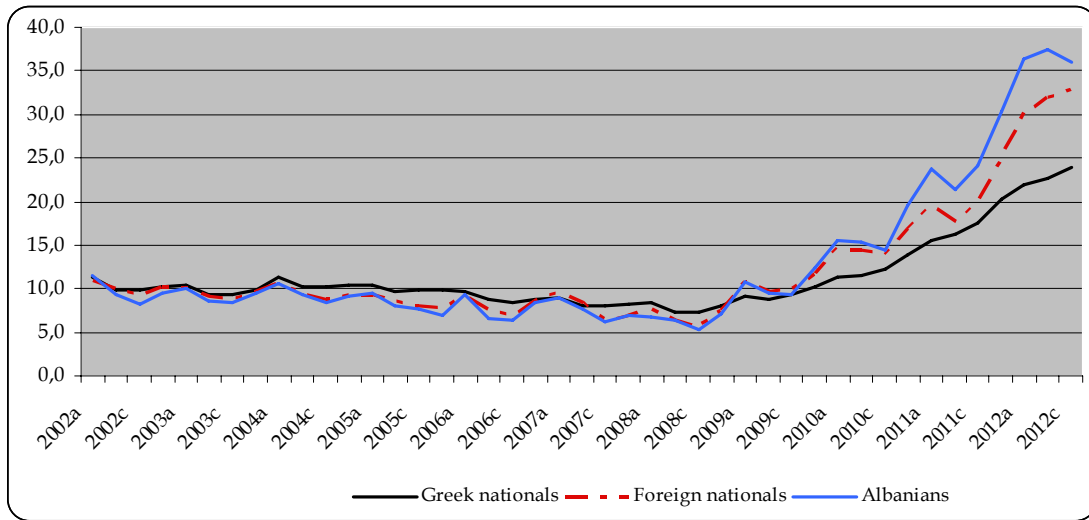
### 2.3.1. New trends of irregularity in the midst of Greek economic crisis

The breakout of economic crisis in Greece in 2010 and the austerity measures adopted have dramatically altered the economic and social conditions throughout the country and consequently deeply impacted the migrants. The impact of the crisis on migrant workers as the most vulnerable social group is multi-faceted and largely intertwined with the systemic features of migration in Greece (Maroukis, 2008).

In reality, the crisis has hit harder sectors of the Greek economy employing most of the migrants’ work force, notably the construction sector, which has seen significant unemployment since 2008 (OECD, 2012). At the same time, survey evidence refer to the regular migrants losing the legal status and lapsing back into irregularity due to the high unemployment rates which was estimated to reach 36% for the third quarter of 2012 (Labour Force Survey, 2012c).

According to the Labour Force Survey data of Hellenic Statistical Authority (EL.STAT) the Albanian migrant population in Greece is decreasing from early 2010 onward, for the first time in last twenty years. Having said that, the recent data from Labour Special Survey (Diagram 1) configure the average unemployment rate at 18.2% in July 2011, up by 6% higher over one year, and since 2009, the unemployment level of non-EU immigrants - and of Albanians in particular - has been by far higher than that of Greek nationals.

**Diagram 1: The level of unemployment 2002-2012 (LFS)**



Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, data provided upon request of the author on DATE

Under these circumstances, it is difficult for Albanian migrants to find work and to purchase the social security contributions required in order to renew their permits of stay. As a result, what many migrants actually suffer from is the reverse process of de-legalisation. Those who become unemployed, or fail to successfully acquire a long-term stay permit, are often left at their own fate, despite being in the country for more than 15 years and with children born and raised in Greece.

A glance at the stay permits database of Ministry of Interiors shows that in December of 2012 there were 300,839 Albanian stay permit holders out of a total 440,118 of registered foreign population registered in the permit database (Table II).

**Table II: Stay Permit Issued 2005-2012**

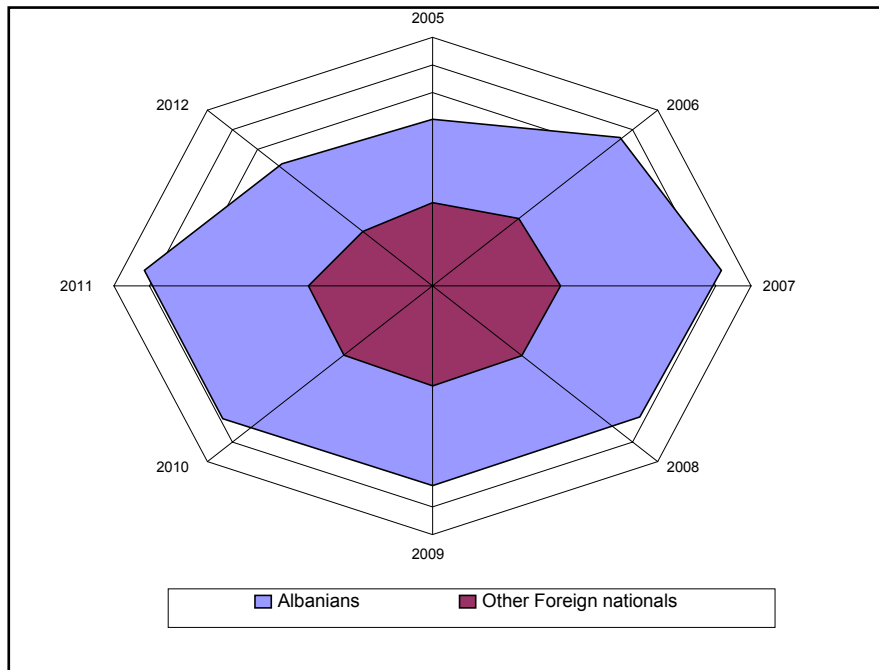
Year	Citizenship					
	Albanians	%	Other foreign nationals	%	Total Foreign Population	%
2005	301.622	67	150.497	33	452.119	100
2006	375.053	68	172.454	32	547.507	100
2007	408.431	69	180.655	31	589.086	100
2008	414.153	70	178.473	30	592.626	100
2009	429.683	70	181.126	30	610.809	100
2010	419.188	70	177.053	30	596.241	100
2011	406.993	70	175.119	30	582.112	100
2012	300.839	68	139.279	32	440.118	100

*Source: Ministry of Interior, 2012, data provided upon request of the author on date*

The above table shows that the highest number of stay permits issued for Albanian immigrants was registered in 2009 (429,683), while in 2012 their numbers reached the lowest level (300,839). Compared to previous years, the number of documented Albanian migrants gradually declined in the stock of immigrants in 2010 and 2011. The figures for the 2012 stood at 300,839, a decrease by 128,191 compared with previous years.

The fall in stock of registered Albanian immigrants cannot find any reasonable explanation or attributed to the number of Albanians granted Greek citizenship (L. 3838/2010). According to a recent press release of the Ministry of Interior (14/3/2013), only 7,791 Albanian citizens (of second generation) out of a total 10,145 foreign national, have been naturalized Greek, in the time period of 20/3/2010 - 22/08/2012. Therefore, we can make the assumption that the decrease in the number of regular Albanian migrants regards the category who lapse from a regular status to an irregular one. However, fewer stay permits do not necessarily imply that Albanian migrants have left the country. In fact, some, even though unable to meet employment and welfare payment requirements for permit renewal, may have lost their legal status but still remain in Greece.

Diagram 2: The fluctuation of regular Albanian migrants 2005-2012



Source: Ministry of Interior, 2012, author's elaboration

It is interesting to see how the “map” of stay permit categories was almost overturned during the last two years. As shown in Table III, there is a slight increase in the categories of long term stay permits especially those of 10-year duration and long term resident permit, while new permits issued for dependent and independent work were null.

Table III: Long and short-term valid permits of stay issued

Category	2010	2011	2012
Indefinite Duration (L.3386/05, art. 91, par. 2)	22.174	22.141	22.099
10-year duration	23.333	28.295	49.780
Long-term resident (L.3731/08, article 40, par.7)	267	442	578
Dependent work (L.3386/05 K.Y.A..21535/7-11-2006)	1758	3	0
Independent economic activity (L.3386/05 K.Y.A.21535/7-11-2006)	41	0	0

Source: Ministry of Interior, data provided upon request of the author on date

Undoubtedly, the application of long-term validity of stay permits recently adopted by the Greek government (even though with significant delay), gives to Albanian migrants the opportunity to return to Albania or to move elsewhere (within the Schengen area) with the option to return regularly to Greece when there is an available open work. On the contrary, Albanian migrants with temporary stay permits actually face difficulties in renewing their stay permits due to unemployment and financial difficulties in Greece. The visa liberalization between the EU and Albania, which gives space only for short-term stay (3 months) and seasonal informal work, does not provide any other employment rights.

However, it is worth pointing out how the dramatically decrease above 50% of stay permits for employment purpose issued in 2012 (Table IV), on one hand, and the slight increase of stay permits for *other* purpose, on the other, might provide a rational explanation to the increase of the number of long-term stay permits issued.

**Table IV: Permits of stay by purpose of Albanian migrants 2010- 2012**

Category	2010	2011	2012
Employment	146.835	133.912	66.997
Study	3.728	4.219	3.599
Other	69.392	75.806	93.427
Family reunion	199.233	193.056	136.816
<b>Total</b>	<b>419.188</b>	<b>406.993</b>	<b>300.839</b>

Source: Ministry of Interior, data provided upon request of the author on date

In addition, the decrease of stay permits for family reunification by 31% in 2012 comparing to 2010, confirm what IRMA field work research revealed. Specifically as one of key informant interviewed explained:

*“...many migrant men did manage to bring or to legalize later on in time their wives making use of family reunion status and their children were born in Greece. Now, when the income has dramatically fall, they can’t renew the stay permit for the purpose of family reunification and many migrant women have automatically become irregular”* (Interview no. 6).

Under these circumstances, Albanian migrants - men and women - might lose their legal status anytime if they or their spouses are jobless and without the required income for a certain period.

*“The amount of income required for a family reunification is unrealistic, namely if you ask for a 10.200 euros yearly family income for a migrant to secure the legal status of his family, he must be rich. Even Greeks do not make half of that amount per year”* (Interview no.14).

As a result, many are forced to accept work if any, for lower pay and without social security benefits. In such cases, they pay their own social security contribution in order for them and their family members to avoid lapsing into irregularity

A clearer account of the labour market situation of Albanian migrants who are dependent employees is given by the National Welfare Institute’s data (IKA, 2012). In June 2012, Albanian citizens accounted for 5.4% all insured workers at IKA and a nearly half of all foreigners registered with IKA (Table V).

**Table V: The percentage of insured workers with IKA 2007-2012**

Citizenship	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Greek</b>	86.3	86.3	86.65	86.6	87.6	89.5
<b>Albanian</b>	7.3	7.3	6.9	6.7	6.1	5.4
<b>Other</b>	6.4	6.4	6.45	6.7	6.3	5.1
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: *National Welfare Institute (IKA), 2012*

Comparing to previous years, the number of insured Albanian migrants gradually declined in 2010 and 2011 with figures for 2012 standing at 5.4%, a decrease by 2% compared to 2007. As previously mentioned, the economic recession has hit hardest the construction sector where Albanian migrants are largely employed. Clearer evidence of the employment situation of Albanian migrants in the construction sector is given by IKA. According to them, in 2007, approximately 50% of insured Albanian immigrants with IKA were employed in “constructions” and only 16% in “manufacturing”. In 2011, only 22.5% of Albanians were working in the construction sector and the rest mainly in the tourism sector, followed by manufacturing. For the first half of 2012 the average employment of Albanians in the construction sector is no more than 20%.

Of course, the total number of Albanian irregular migrants cannot be aggregated from these data alone. Besides, the above numbers do not indicate a real outflow but rather a strong trend towards de-legalisation occurring during the last years. However, analyzing the quantitative data provided by state institutions involved in migration management allow us to solidify the regular resident population of Albanians and therefore make a case for the irregular one.

### **2.3.2. Estimations of Albanian irregular migration**

In light of new developments, the question is how many irregular Albanian migrants are actually staying in Greece. This is, indeed, a difficult “equation” to be properly addressed because it is extremely difficult to draw reliable estimates on the size of irregular migrants and irregular work from official data. In the meantime, academic experts and respective studies provide different estimations of Albanian irregular migration. This is related perhaps to the nature of the phenomenon per se and to different methods applied with regard to data elaboration. Furthermore, the limited data collection, as well as the absence of a single dataset, put a further serious obstacle in calculation of the real irregular migrant stock in Greece.

In 2008, a survey carried out by IMEPO for the purpose of calculating the population of irregular Albanian immigrants in Greece, asked the representatives of thirty eight Albanian migrant associations, to make an estimate of the total population of immigrants and of the population of irregular Albanian immigrants in Greece. According to their answers, the total immigrant population is estimated at 819,000, while that of irregular immigrants is estimated, at 226,000. An interesting conclusion drawn from the survey was that the Albanian irregular migrants in Greece are not necessarily permanent residents. They could be coming to Greece in time periods when the economic activity is at peak and leaving as soon as these periods end. As a representative of an Albanian immigrants’ association has characteristically said, “*half of the Albanian irregular migrants live permanently in Greece whereas the other 50%t goes back and forth between the two countries*” (Lianos, et.al, 2008:105).

Yet, the survey revealed that part of the irregular Albanian migrants are also family members, parents and spouses of migrants, who are living irregularly in Greece either because they were unable to get an entry permit or because their permits have expired or for various other reasons. The study concluded that the real size of this population ranges between 172,000 and 210,000 or approximately 28% of the migrant population in Greece with the majority of them being Albanians.

Another study carried out by CLANDESTINO (Maroukis, 2008, updated in 2012), estimates 30.8% of irregular share in certain national group populations and 33.8% of certain nationalities share in total irregular stock are of Albanian nationality (Maroukis, 2008).

**Table VI: Estimates of Albanian irregular migration stock**

Nationality	Year	Estimate	Reference
Albania	2007/2011	34%	CLANDESTINO-Greece 2008/2012
	2007	28% of regular Albanian migrants	IMEPO 2008
	1999-2002	64%	KEPE 2006

Source: <http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net>

In that context, the decrease of Albanians share in the irregular migration stock of Greece seems quite significant compared to the equivalent share (64%) in the period of 1999-2002 (KEPE, 2006). As we have seen the above studies offered an indication of the patterns and size of irregular migration of Albanians but they mostly refer to the period 2005-2008, when the situation was completely different from now.

The yearly apprehensions data issued by the Greek Police is another significant variable that should be taken into account as the direct data source indicating numbers of irregular Albanian migrants. Data on apprehensions of Albanian irregular migrants provided by Greek policy show a dramatically decrease in 2012 by nearly 75% compared to previous years. Also, during the last three years the majority of those apprehended at the borders are not coming from Albania, as it happened at least until 2007.

**Table VII: Apprehensions of Irregular Albanian migrants during the period 2002-2012**

Year	Citizenship		Total
	Albania	Other foreign nationals	
2002	36.827	21.403	28.230
2003	35.789	15.242	51.031
2004	31.637	13.350	44.987
2005	52.132	14.219	66.351
2006	52.132	14.219	66.351
2007	66.818	45.546	112.364
2008	72.443	73.894	146.337
2009	63.563	62.582	126.145
2010	50.175	82.349	132.524
2011	11.743	87.625	99.368
2012	9.751	64.225	73.976

Source: Greek Police, data provided upon request of the author on date

While the land border between Greece and Albania used to be one of the main entry points of irregular migration, the detections of illegal border-crossing reported at this border section dropped considerably over

85 per cent (5.269/2011) compared to 40,250 in 2009 (FRONTEX, 2012). Nonetheless, Albanian irregular migrants are still the largest irregular migrant group deported and repatriated to Albania, compared to other nationalities (Ministry of Interiors, 2011). In 2010 only, the rate of executed expulsions for Albanian citizens reached 96% of the overall number of deported irregular migrants (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011). Albanian migrants apprehended for irregular entry or/and stay are usually returned to Albania in the framework of the Readmission Agreement between the E.C. and the Republic of Albania (RA) that came into force on May 1st 2006.

Indeed, as the data in Table VII clearly indicate, Albanian irregular migrants apprehended for irregular entry and stay during 2006 and 2010 are by far the largest irregular migrant group in the country. However, we've to bear in mind that the likelihood for double-counting of Albanian irregular circular migrants apprehended is considered to be very high (Maroukis 2008). As the Chief of the Albanian Border and Migration Police Directorate illustrated it *"there have cases where people have gone back and forth 5 times within a year"* (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).

Nevertheless, in the first half of 2012, Albanians are no longer the largest irregular category apprehended for irregular entry and stay as their number has decreased substantially over the last four years. This new trend can be explained by a series of interlinked factors such as the visa-free entrance regime, the return trend to Albania related to the de-legalization process and ongoing economic recession, and the social and political crisis that Greece is facing. Moreover, less Albanian migrants seek work in Greece as the largest sector where Albanian migrants usually find job, notably construction has been dramatically limited as a consequence of economic recession. At this point, it would be interesting to note that Albanians are now refused entry to Greece mostly due to an existing alert in the Visa Information System. It is assumed that in many cases, the alerts have been created following a previous attempt, before visa liberalisation, to cross the border in an irregular way (FRONTEX, 2012).

However, what studies and available data have suggested so far is that "irregular" Albanians are still circular migrants to Greece (Lianos, et. al. 2008; Maroukis, 2008 and 2012; Marouki and Gemi, 2011 and 2013), but nowadays this flow is not characterized by irregular entry rather than irregular seasonal employment. In light of these developments, Albanian citizens enter Greece for irregular work and generally do not stay beyond the period of three months that they are allowed to stay in Greece. In this sense they are not counted as irregular migrants. Finally, we should note that the available data has failed to capture the overall picture of irregular Albanian migrants in Greece. As the findings from IRMA fieldwork's revealed, there are additional "irregular" groups of Albanian immigrants, notably: "de-regularized" holders of 2-year stay permit for dependent work or/and independent economic activity, female holders of stay permits for family reunification whose husbands lose their jobs and the second generation of Albanian migrants who lost the right to a stay permit as dependent family member.

### **3. Types of Albanian Irregular Migration**

Who is an Albanian irregular migrant? Is there any definition which may capture the multi-faceted aspects as well as the very specific nature of Albanian irregular migration to Greece compared to other nationalities? In the concept paper of IRMA the causes of irregular migration are put in the context of intersection between people's search for a better life perspectives, labour market demand for cheap work force, and the restrictive immigration control (Hatziprokopiou and Triandafyllidou, 2013). If this is the case, then the interconnectedness of migration policy with migrants' strategies in the particular economic environment of Greece might explain the specific environment for the production of irregularity of Albanian migration to Greece (Maroukis, 2008). However, in order to understand the irregular migration of Albanians to Greece, we've to explore first the ways through which Albanian migrants become irregular. Empirical evidence suggests a variety of pathways into irregularity, among which irregular entry is just one, counting actually for the lowest percentage of irregular migrants of Albanians in Greece. In the previous chapters of this study we've already identified types of



Albanian irregular migration. How safe is it, though, to argue that all the types of Albanian irregular migratory routes identified by this study are theoretically qualified as irregular migration? Indeed, the broader theoretical concept of the phenomenon of irregularity elaborated by Hatziprokopiou and Triandafyllidou (2013:17) entails a broader spectrum of irregularity which enabled us to construct an analytical typology of Albanian irregular migration to Greece.

In this context, this study identified three types of irregularity according to the irregular or regular stay and/or employment in Greece, the demographic features, the skill level of occupation and the sector of employment. In this section we shall analyse the types and the profiles of irregular migrants configured in this typology, the socio-economic factors and policies that motivate or prevent the irregular movements with a view to reflect the reality on the ground and to understand the perspective of the irregular migration of Albanians to Greece in the years to come.

**Table VIII: Typology of Albanian irregular migration to Greece**

TYPES OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION				
		<b>Type 1</b> Legal Entry-Irregular employment	<b>Type 2</b> Migrants loss of legal status	<b>Type 3</b> Irregular stay and employment
DIMENSIONS				
	Category			
1	Demographic features	Single male migration	Married male and female, children/young migrant	single male/female/children, family,
2	Stay status in Greece	Regular (visa free regime)	Undocumented/semi-regular	Undocumented
3	Duration	3 months – usually for seasonal work Daily cross-border	Permanent/temporary/return/	Varies according to the activity
4	Skill level of occupation in Greece	Low skilled	Low and semi- skilled	Low skilled and unskilled
5	Sector of Employment	Work mainly in agriculture or other seasonal employment such as herding or tourism.	Male worked in construction sector or tourism. Women are mostly domestic workers. Second generation is student and/or work irregularly.	Mainly in agriculture and tourism, sex services, beggary, illegal activities
6	Country where migrants' families are permanently situated	Albania	Greece	Greece, Albania

### **3.1. Legal Entry-Irregular employment**

The first type of Albanian irregular migration constitutes a new irregular type, which derives from the introduction of a visa free regime for Albanians in E.U. Schengen area, in 21 December 2010. This policy development has significantly reversed the ratio of regular versus irregular migration. At the same time, it has unintentionally set a framework of legal entry in which irregular seasonal employment occurs. In other words, Albanians are traveling legally in Greece because of this agreement but they are undertaking employment, though they're not entitled to, according to the law.

There are two kinds of employment that present elements of irregularity. The first involves low-skilled Albanian men, arriving regularly to Greece to work irregularly mainly in agriculture or other seasonal employment such as herding or tourism. This group of people is the poorest in Albania. They work primarily in agriculture so they will go to the traditional area of agriculture in northwest borders of Greece (to collect peaches, apples and pears), close to Athens and in islands (olives).

As this study revealed, the daily payment in agriculture sector have been reduced to about 20 to 25 euros. Apart from the economic crisis, this is also a result of the competition generated by Bulgarian, Romanian and even Pakistani migrant workers (Interviews no. 12 and 13). They are predominantly male (who are not necessarily young) who are married with children at university level or young one, coming usually from rural and mountains areas and who find very difficult to find any type of job in Albania themselves. As one of a key informant characteristically described it:

*“they are very poor people coming to Greece to work in agriculture sector in North Greece. They know well that urban areas are not for them. In the rural areas is easier to find a temporary job”* (Interview no. 4).

This type of irregular employment is intertwined with return migration which is actually happening between the two countries. The migrants involved in this type usually stay for 3 months and then go back to their family in Albania. There are also Albanian workers who cross the border on daily basis in order to work in agriculture fields of northern Greece. This type of circular seasonal employment in informal economy is actually one of the most important forms of reproducing the irregular mobility of Albanians to Greece.

The question is, how safe is it to classify it as a type of irregular migration? The IRMA concept paper argue that *“the irregular employment may suggest that there is a demand not for irregular migrants as such but for the type of (irregular) work they offer and the specific conditions and wages this is provided”* (Hatziprokopiou and Triandafyllidou, 2013:14). Indeed, most of the qualitative interviews conducted with key informants indicated that the pull factors related to the demand for cheap and flexible seasonal labour workforce on the one hand, and the lack of legal channels to work regularly in Greece, on the other, leave no option to migrants but to use the visa free regime in order to pursue an irregular work. Of course, they do not live permanently in Greece but rather move back and forth in a circular way. In this sense, the EU's visa liberalization regime has served as a means to control the legally enter to Schengen area rather than irregular employment. In practice, the visa liberalization regime gives space only for short-term stay (3 months) but it does not provide any other employment rights..

### **3.2. Migrants lapsing from a regular status into an irregular one**

The second type of irregularity involves the de-regularization process, as a consequence of unemployment and inability to fulfill the requirements in order to renew the temporary stay permit/or adulthood for the second generation The pathway from regularity to irregularity may be best exemplified by what has been termed “befallen illegality” to describe situations whereby migrants face difficulties in renewing their permits, mainly

due to inability to prove formal employment (Hatziprokopiou and Triandafyllidou, 2013:16, Triandafyllidou, 2010). As articulated by an interviewee:

*“The legislation instead of putting pressure to employer to pay the “ergosimo” asks from migrants to buy them with their own money in order to renew the stay permit” (Interview no.7).*

If this is the case, then the loss of legal status of Albanian migrants is not a question of individual preferences or strategies but rather depends on employment related developments and immigration policy (Hatziprokopiou and Triandafyllidou, 2013:17).

This type of irregularity has been developed more systematically than any other form of irregularity in the case of Albanians. How do regularized Albanian migrants lose their legal status? Albanian legal workers can lose their status because they lost their job during the economic crisis. In addition, mistakes and delays in administrative procedures can also cause legal migrants to lose their legal status. The causes are primarily linked to the legislation regulating the stay permit system, the structural features of Greek economy and labour market, the economic recession that hit Greece and the ways Albanian migrants interconnect with both these structures (Maroukis, 2012). However, not only the male migrant holders of a temporary stay permit are affected by the above developments. The immigration law has affected the regular status of female holders of stay permits for family reunification whose husbands lose their jobs.

As a key informant said:

*“... women in particular with their work in the care sector have been the pillar of migrant families during these years of crisis because men who have worked in construction have lost their jobs earlier and for longer period of times than women so they’ve been the one to sustain the families there financially” (Interview no.12)*

Another category is the second generation who when they reach their adulthood face the danger of falling back into illegality. According to the law, they will be expected to have a stay permit that needs to be justified on the grounds of work, studies or other as they are no longer be dependants in order to get a permit for this purpose.

*“After turning 21 they should prove that they work or study. If these children are not able to stick insurance stamps they must leave the country but go where?” (Interview no.14).*

Instead of granting the citizenship or at least the access to the long-term legal status, they are treated like any other temporary migrant. As a key informant illustrates it:

*“The only country in whole Europe that do not implement the long-term resident status for second generation of migrants is Greece. In Germany for instance it has been applied since 2005. It could help the youth second generation to go and look for job to other countries of E.U.” (Interview no. 6).*

Another key informant highlights the negative effects caused by the recent developments on citizenship law:

*“For the second generation what happened with regard to the citizenship law was a catastrophe. When reach the adulthood they suddenly realized that they are irregular Albanian migrants like their fathers used to be in the beginning of 1990s. Why that? They were born and raised here. Greece is their country”(Interview no. 5).*

Another key informant characteristically said that:

*“The children as not having been naturalized yet, when reaching adulthood. should demonstrate that they can work so as to continue to live in the country. Such a treatment creates an absolute mess for people who have never lived in another country but Greece” (Interview no. 7).*

Finally, most of migrants involved in this type of irregularity are male who used to work in construction sector or tourism followed by women who are mostly domestic workers.

### **3.3. Irregular stay and employment**

The third type of Albanian irregular migration involves different forms of irregular entry and stay. Some of these are related to legal entry on a visa-free regime and overstaying after expiration, the entry and stay using fraudulent documents as well as other illegal activities related to trafficking of human beings. Contributing to the continuity of this type of irregular migration of Albanians is also the fact that some persons have been registered in the list of unwanted persons (L.2910/2001, art.49), usually for illegal entry and stay in country. Appearing in the undesirable list (due to irregular entry, exit, employment and stay) means that for certain years one is not allowed to enter Greece. At this point, it would be interesting to note that Albanians are now refused entry to Greece mostly due to an existing alert in the Visa Information System. It is assumed that in many cases, the alerts have been created following a previous attempt, before visa liberalisation, to cross the border in an irregular way (FRONTEX, 2012).

Most of them are low skilled or unskilled single male or female working mainly in agriculture and tourism, sex services, beggary and other illegal activities. Their number is very difficult to estimate. Asking to give his opinion on number and profile of Albanian irregular migrants in Greece, one of the interviewees estimated at 20% the number of Albanian irregular migration in Greece. Consequently:

*“From those, 1 to 2% is classified as undesirable, other still continue to cross the Greek-Albanian border on foot and the remaining are involved in illegal activities”* (Interview no. 3).

The same opinion is shared by another interviewee who characteristically said:

*“irregular migration is not anymore an issue for Albanians as it was in the beginning of 1990’. A turning point has been the introduction of visa liberalization regime. Today irregularity is only connected to organized crime drug traffic”* (Interview no.1).

In reality, irregular activities are still going on. As it is characteristically illustrated by an interviewee:

*“There are types of drivers, for instance, that all they do is cross the border with this type of cases and they have made arrangements in advance with immigration and custom offices in Kapshtica case. The payment for one just trip is 250 to 500 hundreds euros just to have them cross the border”* (Interview no. 12).

## 4. Concluding Remarks

There are several questions that one should keep in mind when studying irregular migration between Greece and Albania. Is irregular migration and endemic characteristic - generating from the informal labour market - of Albanian migration to Greece or it is after all a matter of migration management and geography? What is the impact of irregular migration for the destination and origin country? It is primarily a product of legal regulations and geographical limitations that influence the control over the flows of people? Of course, geography plays a significant role. As the experience of Albanian migrants in Greece indicates the proximity of the host country offers them more option for irregular migratory routes.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, Albanian migration continues, albeit at a significantly lower scale, marking as such the end of highly intense mass emigrations from the previous decades. In spite of the positive institutional developments on the prevention of irregular migratory movements of Albanians, irregular migration still remains a major challenge for both Greece and Albania. As our empirical fieldwork has shown, the main destination country for irregular migrants remains Greece with irregular employment in informal economy constituting the major structural feature of “new” irregularity. However, we have to take into consideration that Albanian irregular migration is driven not only by push factors in Albania but also by strong pull dynamics in Greece, as well as various in-between human agencies and networks. In that sense, temporary migration for seasonal employment in the informal economy has emerged as one of the most important forms of reproducing the irregular mobility of Albanians to Greece, particularly for those who cannot access or afford to gain other types of work or stay permits in the country. Hence reinforcing the restrictive policies is not considered a useful strategy as these practices do not touch upon the core of the Greek labour market dynamics and their interests in migrant irregular labour hands. On the other side, the negative developments with regard to the recognition of political rights at local level as well as the access to citizenship for the first and second generation of immigrants living in Greece have dramatically overturned the situation of Albanian migrants in Greece with many of them lapsing into irregular status.

Obviously for migration to have a triple win effect, policies on both sides of the borders are very important, particularly regarding irregular movements. It has become quite clear that the Greek migration policy has been very similar to the Albanian one in a sense that they have both tried to adjust the situation after the irregularity has happened, rather than working in advance to prevent it.

## 5. ANNEX I - List of Interviews with key informants in Greece and Albania

No	Date	Organisation	Position	Place of interview
1	01/02/2013	Embassy of Republic of Albania in Greece	Ambassador	Athens
2	02/02/2013	Federation of Albanian Migrants' Associations/Network for Support of Migrants and Refugees	Board member	Athens
3	03/02/2013	Albanian second generation news portal <a href="http://www.albanians.gr">www.albanians.gr</a>	Director	Athens
4	09/02/2013	ARSIS -Association for the Social Support of Youth/Albanian migrant association "Mother Tereza"	Social Scientist/Board Member	Thessaloniki
5	15/02/2013	Albanian newspaper "Gazeta e Athines"	Editor-in-chief/Owner	Athens
6	15/02/2013	Greek Forum of Migrant	Coordinator	Athens
7	20/02/2013	Municipality of Athens	President of Migrants' Integration Council	Athens
8	07/03/2013	Independent Migration expert/IOM Tirana	Migration Expert/Project officer	Tirana (skype int.)
9	15/03/2013	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Directorate of Migration Policies, Return and Re-integration	Director	Tirana (email int.)
10	15-30/01/2013	3 informal interviews	Albanian bus drivers of bus lines Athens-Tirana	Greek-Albanian borders (Kakavia)
11	15-30/01/2013	2 informal interviews	Albanian Custom Officers (Kakavia)	Greek-Albanian borders (Kakavia)
12	6/05/2013	Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex	Post-doctoral Research Fellow, Albanian migration expert	Tirana
13	7/5/2013	Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Tirana	Executive director	Tirana
14	15/5/2013	Decentralized Administration of Attika, Directorate of Aliens and Migration	Head of Directorate of Aliens and Migration, Athens A'	Athens

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