



# The Incomplete Trajectory of Albanian Migration in Greece

Eda Gemi

Deliverable 7.1  
Case Study: Migration System One (Albania)



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# **The Incomplete Trajectory of Albanian Migration in Greece**

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**May 2015**

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## 1. Introduction

The third decade of Albanian presence in Greece has signalled a change in the human geography of migration for the largest immigrant group in the country. The impact of an ongoing economic crisis, in combination with the liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian citizens, has given a new dynamic to the ‘irregular’ features of Albanian migration. The temporary/circular movements for seasonal, informal employment in specific sectors of the economy (e.g. agriculture and tourism) is now the most frequent means by which the non-legal migration of Albanians to Greece<sup>1</sup> is reproduced.

At a theoretical level the discussion addressing the governance of irregular migration places great emphasis on the structural elements of a country’s national economy, as well as on the broader migration system to which it is subjected. In particular, the discussion focuses on two basic questions. The first sketches the ambiguous nature of this ‘invisible’ phenomenon which, in a broad manner of speaking, hinders an understanding of its true dimension and consequently allows greater room for incorrect and misleading interpretations. The second may be traced to the sphere of management of both migration itself but also the domestic labour market, which turns to the hiring of an irregular (and therefore cheap), available, and flexible workforce.

The real problem however lies in that policy-makers in Greece engage with the second issue, mostly striving to adopt legislative measures whose purpose is to curb irregular migration through repressive policies. Nevertheless, the increased complexity and dynamic of irregular labour pre-empt the need for further understanding migration systems through the prism of scientific research and an in-depth analysis of empirical findings. Ultimately, it seems that in highlighting the fundamental characteristics of the migration system of the Balkans to the EU (Albania to Greece), the actors and migration networks, as well as the structural and institutional characteristics that relate (directly or indirectly) to the reproduction of irregular migration, may lead to the spherical ‘mapping’ of the phenomenon and by extension to the reiteration and implementation of effective policies to manage it.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive analysis see Gemi, Eda, 2013. ‘Albanian Migration to Greece: A new typology of crisis’. IRMA Background Report, ELIAMEP

### *Research questions*

In addressing this issue, this study addresses the Migration System 1: Balkans to the EU – Albania to Greece. In particular, it analyses the key findings of the fieldwork among Albanian migrants, and the dynamic of irregular migration from Albania to Greece, the factors and the actors who affect them as well as the success or failure of the relevant control policies. The intention of this study is focused on answering the basic research questions:

- a) How do Albanian migrants shape or change their plans and strategies in reaction to the policies that limit their movement towards Greece?
- b) Which bodies, state or other, local, national or transnational, impact on their decisions and actions?
- c) How do these agents impact on the decisions and actions of would-be migrants?
- d) Why are some agents more effective than others and in particular more so than state policies in shaping the plans and decisions of migrants?

### *The profile of the target group*

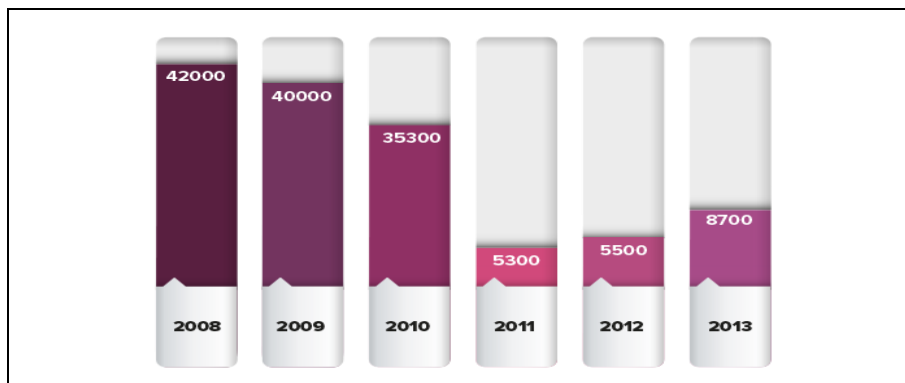
It is now widely acknowledged that Greece is the basic entry point for irregular migrants in the EU. However, according to the data from the OECD (2014) the number of irregular migrants was reduced to 43,000 in 2013 from 99,000 (detained) in 2011, with Albanians occupying the top five positions (2014, p. 258).

Until recently, the Greek-Albanian borders were the basic point of entry for irregular migrants to the country. However, according to FRONTEX (2012) the number of irregular border crossings was reduced significantly, by 85% (5,269) in 2011, providing a sharp contrast to 2009 (40,250). This significant drop in irregular crossings reflects the great impact of the liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian migrants entering the EU in shaping irregular flows. Data provided by the Greek police force (2014b) corroborates these findings, suggesting that the arrests of Albanians for irregular entry and stay in Greece for the 11-month period in 2014 make up 21.53% (15,635) of the total number of foreigners' arrests (72,632). Meanwhile, the statistical data registering expulsions for the 11-month period of 2014, displays 8,754 (47.93%) Albanians in a total of 18,474 deportations, whereas during the same period the number of Albanians expelled made up 27.82% of the total (7,123 in a total of 25,602) (Ministry of Public Order, 2014b).

Nevertheless, FRONTEX data (2014) shows an increase (60%) of irregular Albanians who were detected on the Greek-Albanian borders in 2013, in comparison to the two previous years (about 5,000 for the years 2011 and 2012) (2014, p. 30). This development may be associated with cases of violation of the (temporary) terms of residence (90 days) in Greece, stipulated by the liberalisation of the entry visa<sup>2</sup>. Thus although in 2013 the number of Albanians with counterfeit documents was reduced by half, they come in second place at the EU level, with the greatest number of incidents being identified on the Greek-Albanian borders (FRONTEX, 2014a, p.29).

As a result of the broadened possibility for regular entry into Greece, the phenomenon of irregular border crossing has been significantly reduced. Irregular circular movement, however, continues to be a basic feature of Albanian migration. As such, it is related not only to irregular border crossing, but also with irregular seasonal work and the violation of the terms stipulated by the liberalisation of the entry visa regime. In 2013 FRONTEX (2014b) records an increase in circular migration by 59% (8,700) in comparison to the previous year (Diagram 1). Nevertheless, this increase is low in comparison to the 2009-2010 period (40,000 and 35,300 correspondingly), that is, the period during which the liberalisation of the entry visa began to be implemented (FRONTEX, 2014a, p. 38).

Diagram 1. Irregular border crossing in circular routes between Greece and Albania



Source: FRONTEX, 2014b

Meanwhile, a very interesting piece of information brought forward by the newly created Asylum Service is that 1,077 Albanian migrants submitted an application for asylum status

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/117555.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/117555.pdf)

(in a total of 6,245 persons) in the period January-August 2014, thus leading to an increase of 17.25% of applications with respect to 2013 (8.7%) (Ministry of Public Order, 2014a, 2013). This phenomenon may be tied to the need to revert to legality for certain social groups (e.g. the Roma), who because of the economic crisis and the subsequent unemployment that follows find themselves in an irregular status.

In reality, the irregular migration of Albanians is an endemic element of the Migration System 1: Balkans to EU – Albania to Greece. Albania's own fate, it is worth remembering, was once intertwined with the largest exodus of Albanian nationals in the recent history of the country. Ultimately, this mass emigration was a paradigm shift that followed the collapse of the communist regime and the destruction of the country's socio-economic fabric.

In Greece, the gradual re-evaluation of the legislation and the management policies of the migration phenomenon, towards the end of the 1990s in particular, signalled a change in this 'ingrained' irregular image, with a significant number of Albanian migrants being regularised even in a temporary regime and with incomplete stay permits (e.g. certificate of temporary stay). At the same time, however, the 'pool' of persons without papers continues to replenish itself with both new or circular entering migrants in search of employment, as well as with others who lose their legal status for reasons primarily tied to job insecurity and insurmountable bureaucratic obstacles.

In the Greek literature, the irregular migration of Albanians has largely been investigated with respect to: the estimation of its dimension (Lianos et al., 2008), the structural inadequacies in the job market and the broad informal economy (Zografakis et al., 2007), the incomplete regularisation programs (Cavounidis, 2002 and 2007, Fakiolas 2003), and ethnic and transnational networks (Iosifidis, 2007).

With regards to the broader picture, the present circumstances of the economic and political crisis in Greece mean a historical shift in the trajectory (approximately 25 years) of Albanian migration. The crisis has led to an increase in unemployment and a displacement of a great number of Albanians, those working in the construction sector in particular. Thus the data provided in May 2014 by IKA, a key social security agency in Greece, shows that 51.37% of its contributors are Albanian citizens (Table 1). And among this group, the overwhelming majority (45.27%) are employed as "Unskilled Workers, Labourers and Small Businessmen", whereas 29.95% are employed in "Providing services and as vendors in stores and outdoor markets", and only 8.32% work as "Specialized Craftsmen".

Table 1. Employment of Albanian migrants in common businesses and construction work

Form of employment	Men	Women	Total	%
Common businesses	49,851	39,069	88,920	5.09
Structural-technical works	12,213	96	12,309	34.73
Total number of persons insured	62,064	39,165	101,229	5.68

Source: IKA, May 2014

In comparison to previous years, the number of insured Albanians shows a gradual decline, during the 2009-2013 period in particular (from 7.3% in 2009 to 5.38% in May 2013), whereas the data for May 2014 shows a (relatively) smaller decline, of 5.09%.

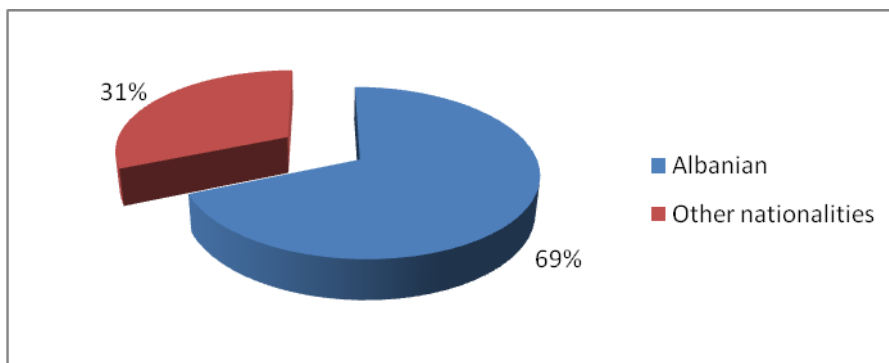
Given the current situation in Greece, it is estimated that a great number of Albanians have returned to Albania. The 2011 census in Albania showed that approximately 139,827 Albanians had returned between 2001 and 2011, the majority of which were men travelling from Greece (IOM and INSTAT, 2013, p. 9). Moreover, the study carried out by International Organization for Migration (IOM) Albania in 2013 recorded 133,544 returns in the 2009-2013 period only. The majority of returns were voluntary and concerned Albanian migrants who were previously in Greece (70.8%), and then Italy, but with a great difference (23.7%). It is estimated that the tendency to return to Albania is primarily due to the impact of the economic crisis on the Greek job market (IOM and INSTAT, 2013, p. 9). It is also not a coincidence that for the first time in the history of Albanian migration, the percentage of Albanians residing outside Albania, is greater in Italy than in Greece (43%) (IOM and INSTAT, 2013, p.11).

Meanwhile, the impact of the crisis in combination with the liberalisation of the visa regime have differentiated the migratory destinations, with Albanian migrants moving towards other industrial countries of Western Europe with the aim of finding employment opportunities. Data brought forward by FRONTEX (2012) shows a significant number of Albanian irregular migrants in Western European countries (2012, p. 19).

For regular migration, according to the recent data for the residence permits issued by the Interior Ministry (2014) 329,756 (69%) out of a total of 480,084 legal immigrants in Greece are of Albanian nationality (Diagram 2).



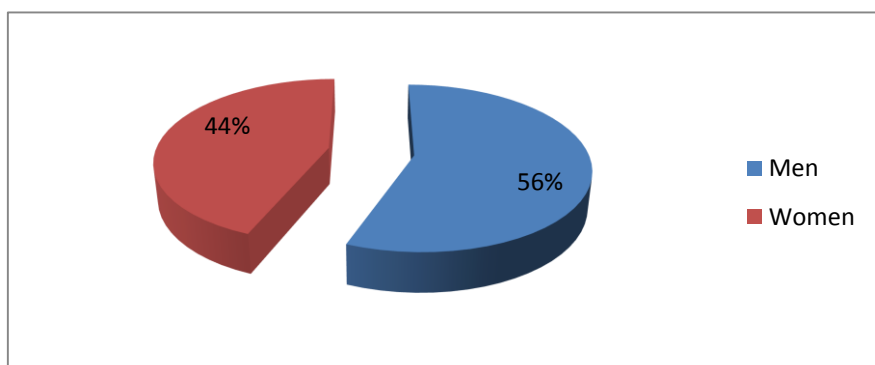
Diagram 2. The percentage of Albanians with respect to the total number of regular migrants (%)



Source: Interior Ministry, December 2014.

As shown in Diagram 3, despite the great unemployment and the tendency of return, Albanian men are over-represented (56%) with relation to women (44%).

Diagram 3. The distribution of regularly residing Albanians by gender (%)



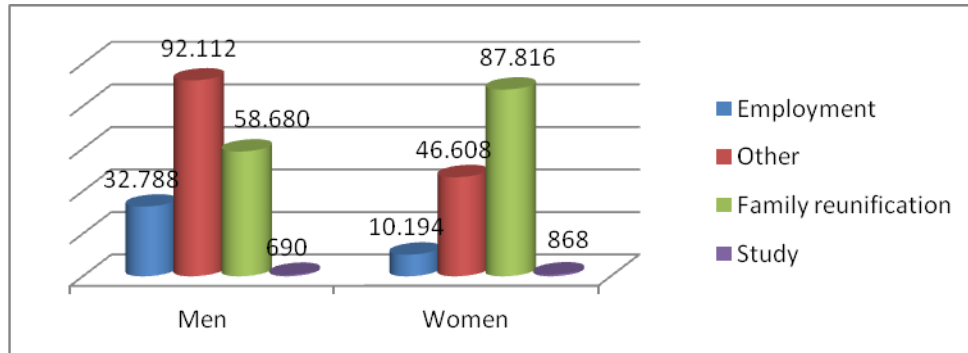
Source: Interior Ministry, December 2014

At this point it would be interesting to note that in comparison to 2012 (300,839), the number of regular Albanian migrants in 2014 is slightly increased by 29,000. This may be due to the implementation of the transitional provisions in the new immigration ‘codex’ (Law 4251/2014 that entered into force as of 1/6/2014), which provided the opportunity for a return to legality in the case of unemployed migrants, and instituted the residence permit for the second generation.

This tendency is confirmed by the data from the Interior Ministry (2014) in relation to the reasons for stay (Diagram 4). Thus we note a significant decrease in the number of stay permits issued for “Employment”, as well as for “Family Reunification”, whereas an increase

is found in the “Other” category (which includes the sum of individual residence permits issued for long-term stay or temporary residence).

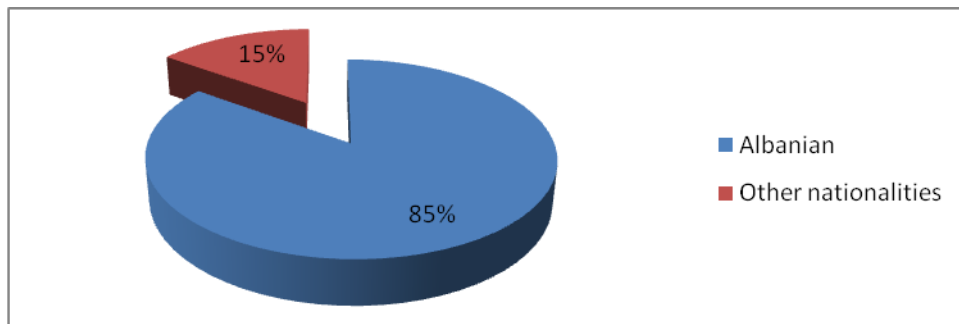
Diagram 4. Residence permits held by Albanians, by category



Source: Interior Ministry, November 2014

Moreover, an increase is noted in the number of naturalisations with 56,274 (85% of the total number of naturalized immigrants) Albanian nationals having obtained Greek citizenship in the 2010-2014 period (Diagram 5).

Diagram 5. Percentage of regularized Albanians with respect to the total number of regularized immigrants, 2010-2014 (%)



Source: Interior Ministry, November 2014

The present study is structured in three parts. The first defines the overall context of the study; it delineates the national framework of development of this phenomenon, presents the research questions and outlines the methodological tools for carrying out the empirical research. The second part analyses the basic findings of the ethnographic research with Albanians conducted both in Greece and Albania. The explanatory context of analysis of the

findings follows the logic of the development of the phenomenon, as this development is narrated by the actors in combination with the theoretical elaboration of various phases of the migrant cycle (e.g. transnational, circular and return). Finally, the third part takes the research findings to the political sphere of analysis of the phenomenon, in an effort to respond to the two central questions of IRMA, namely, how the control policies of migration impact on the plans and actions of the (potential or current) irregular migrants and how certain policies are more effective than others.

### **1.1 Methodology**

The present study adopts a holistic perspective on the analysis of the phenomenon developed on three levels: micro, meso, macro. The micro-level approaches the migrant as an independent actor. The meso-level probes into the relational structures and networks that the individual migrant develops, whereas the macro-level analyzes the broader national framework within which the dynamic of irregular migration develops.

The methodological approach relies on the multifocal ethnographic fieldwork. Thus we carried out 87 interviews with irregular migrants, members of their families, representatives of migrant associations, and smugglers in Greece and Albania.

The sampling method was purposive and qualitative. Initially, the snowball technique was implemented, and was followed by the purposive sampling of the available sample. We visited public (e.g. squares) and private (e.g. cafeterias) locations frequented by irregular Albanian migrants, and the offices of the Confederation of Albanian Associations, the “Studenti” Student Association, and the [www.albanians.gr](http://www.albanians.gr) website.

The search for the sample outside of Attica was carried out with the guidance of persons and associations that are active in migration-related matters, such as the Migrant Integration Council of Rhodes Municipality, ARSIS and the “Mother Teresa” Associations in Thessaloniki. Moreover, following special permission from the Public Order Ministry, visits were made to the Immigration Department of Athens on Petrou Rali street, where 13 interviews were held with irregular, detained, Albanian migrants.

Particular emphasis was placed on the diversity and the geographical diaspora of the sample, with the intention of enriching it with a broad range of migrant biographies and paths and with persons of different gender, different age and family background, different educational level and employment sector.

It is worth noting at this stage that despite the inherent difficulties encountered, two interviews were carried out with smugglers from both sides of the borders. This gave us the opportunity to probe deeper into the matter and reveal the paths, as well as the informal mechanisms and intermediaries that facilitate the perpetuation of this phenomenon. Moreover, interviews were held with employees and owners of bus services running from Athens to Tirana and back, adding important information with relation to the means, the causes, and the profiles of irregular migrants.

In the August-December period of 2013, 57 qualitative semi-structured interviews were held with irregular Albanian migrants in Greece. A recording of the field took place as well as the identification of the basic locations and intermediaries. Through these, the greatest possible access to the target group was achieved.

The second phase of the study focused on the country of origin: Albania. More specifically, in the December 2013-March 2014 period, two trips were made to Albania, where the researcher visited various parts of the country. Contacts were first established with organizations and individuals in both Albania and Greece. The assistance of both made the interviews possible. The table below shows the regions and the number of interviews by region and country.

**Table 2. Number of interviews by country and region**

Region in Greece	Number of Interview	Region in Albania	Number of Interview
Athens	18	Tirana	8
Korrydalos	2	Shkodër	6
PetrouRali detention centre	13	Sarande	3
Thessaloniki	7	Vlorë	3
Alepohori, Boeotia	2	Fushë-Krujë	3
Gytheio	2	Laç	5
Rhodes	13	Durrës	2
<b>Total by country</b>	<b>57</b>		<b>30</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>87</b>	

*Source:* Fieldwork data

The interviews followed the chronological trajectory of the migratory experience, in order to probe into the process behind the decision to migrate, the intermediary stages, the factors and the agents that played some part in the process, the exchange of relevant information, the

migrant's expectations and the success (or failure) of their realisation. With the completion of the interviews the final interview protocols were completed and so was the relevant thematic codification. The analysis of the data was carried out using the MaxQDA processing software.

Meanwhile, for the purposes of mapping the movements of Albanians in the sample, the visualization of their migratory routes was opted for (see Appendix 1: Mixed flows of Albanians to Greece). More specifically, in the case of migratory flows from Albania, the land routes follow the existing road network and pass precisely by the points of entry to Greece. With respect to maritime movements, the sections of the routes that constitute existing maritime connections (e.g. Piraeus-Rhodes) have been described exactly as they are observed on maritime maps, whereas irregular routes were described in approximation. We must note that a qualitative rating of the size of every section of each route was carried out: it corresponds to how popular the route is. Thus many individual routes converge in certain sections, creating in this way the dominant migratory routes.

Finally, in the case of migrant flows from Albania, whereas on the one hand alternative movements from and to each node are more numerous, and on the other are motivated by a different status (e.g. they can be made by bus) or in a status of regularity, either as a whole or partially, we opted for mapping the total of the sample that was gathered in the context of the research. The dominant routes emerged from the sections in which the trajectories that were mapped actually converge.

## 2. The analysis of the empirical data

In discussing the migration system in question, we could not fail to account for the particularities that characterize it, and the dynamic behind the diptych of migration and irregularity. The data available shows a number of intertwined trajectories, factors, networks and strategies, that make up the multi-faceted and particular nature of Albanian migration.

In order to accurately establish the complexity of the phenomenon and its individual facets, we define the notion of the (Albanian) irregular migrant<sup>3</sup> as that person who falls into one or more of these categories:

- (a) Does not hold a valid entry visa
- (b) Violates the conditions and the terms of entry and/or stay in the country
- (c) Does not possess legal status
- (d) An expulsion order has been issued in their name

We extend this definition to include the case of persons who have lost their legal status or are in a semi-legal status (or semi-regular) regime<sup>4</sup>. Since irregular employment can be attributed to structural factors on both sides of the border that supply irregular migration of Albanians to Greece, the boundaries between legality and irregularity are often blurred, especially when discussing legally entering or residing migrants whose employment is irregular. Thus, in the present study the term ‘irregular migrant’ includes the legally entering or temporarily staying on Greek soil, yet who officially do not enjoy the right of access to the labour market (Gemi, 2013; Gregou, 2014, p. 510). As such, their irregular labour goes against the laws and regulations outlining the framework of immigrants’ employment, social security, taxation and the functioning of the labour market more generally (Jandl, et al., 2009, p.12).

Meanwhile, the consequences of the economic crisis and the strict fiscal adjustments have dramatically altered the socio-economic circumstances and terms of functioning of the labour market in Greece, with unemployment being at very high levels. In this light, a pertinent question one might ask is how the new irregular practices of Albanians in Greece may be traced, what factors (institutional or other) and actors affect it and to what extent. In an effort

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<sup>3</sup> In article 3 of the Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, informal stay is defined as “...the presence on the territory of a Member State, of a third-country national who does not fulfil, or no longer fulfils the conditions of entry as set out in Article 5 of the Schengen Borders Code or other conditions for entry, stay or residence in that Member State”.

<sup>4</sup> This category concerns the cases of those holding a temporary stay certificate and stay permit for extraordinary circumstances/humanitarian reasons.

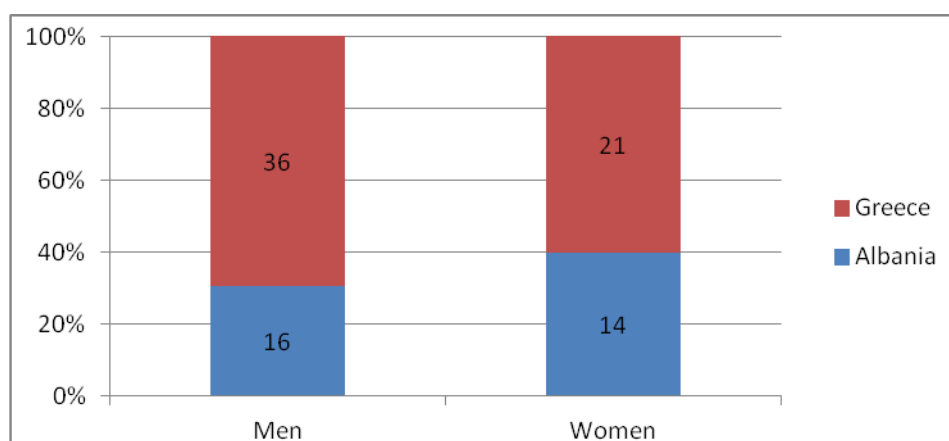
to shed light on the ‘irregular’ facet of Albanian migration to Greece given the present circumstances generated by the crisis, this section focuses on analysing the fieldwork data.

## **2.1 The demographic composition and the features of the sample**

The demographic and morphological features of the actors involved play a key role in shaping irregular migration flows.

In the case of the present study, 60% of the total sample are men and are mostly first-generation migrants (Diagram 6).

Diagram 6. Distribution of sample by gender

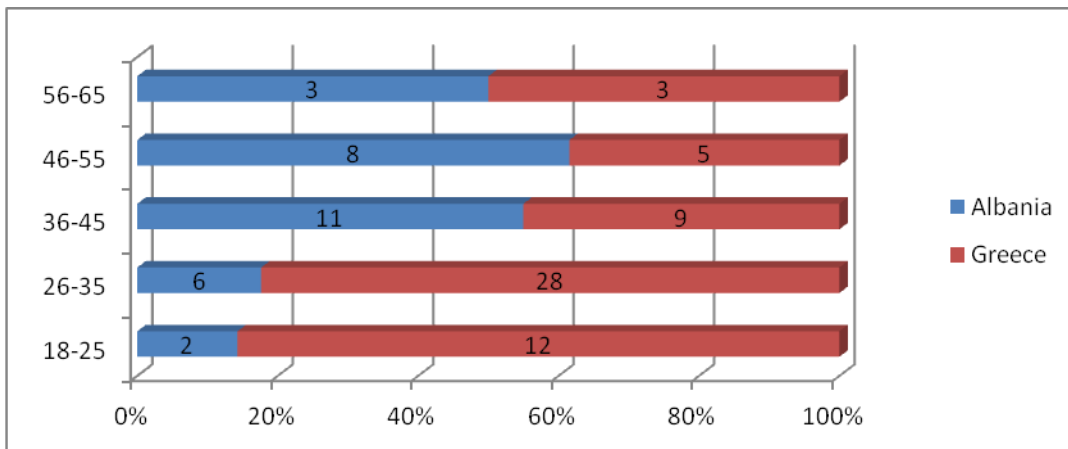


Source: Fieldwork data

Indeed, as highlighted by the background report (Gemi 2013), most migrants involved in irregular labour are men working in the construction and tourism sectors, followed by women who mainly work as domestic workers (2013, p.30).

The bulk of the sample corresponds to the 26-35 age cohort and is immediately followed by those aged 36-45 (Diagram 7). These elements demonstrate the excellent demographic dynamic of the actors involved in irregular (mostly circular) routes for seasonal work in Greece.

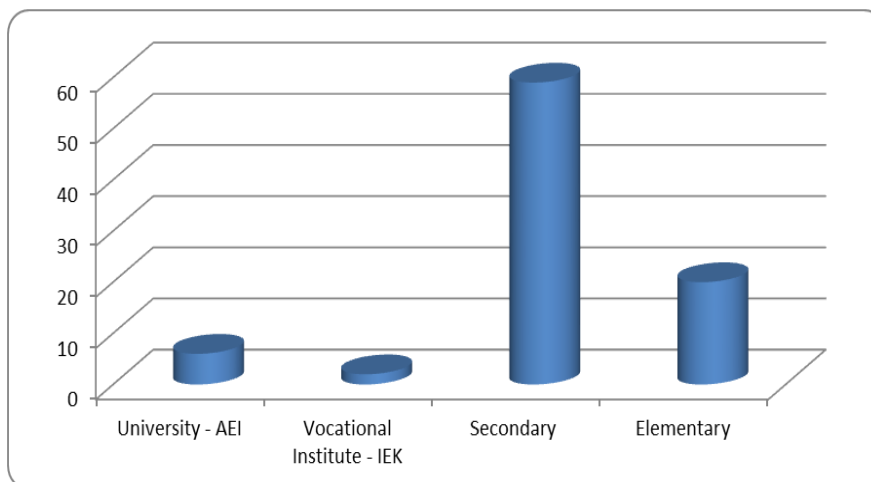
Diagram 7. Distribution of sample by age



Source: Fieldwork data

With respect to the educational level, the sample is mostly made up of primary and secondary school graduates (Diagram 8), thus confirming the estimation that irregular migrants are of a low educational capital and work as unskilled or semi-skilled workers (Gemi, 2013, p.27). It is worth noting that University and Technological education institute graduates belong to the group of the second or “one-and-a-half” generations, they are students and they have completed their studies in Greece.

Diagram 8. Distribution of sample by educational level

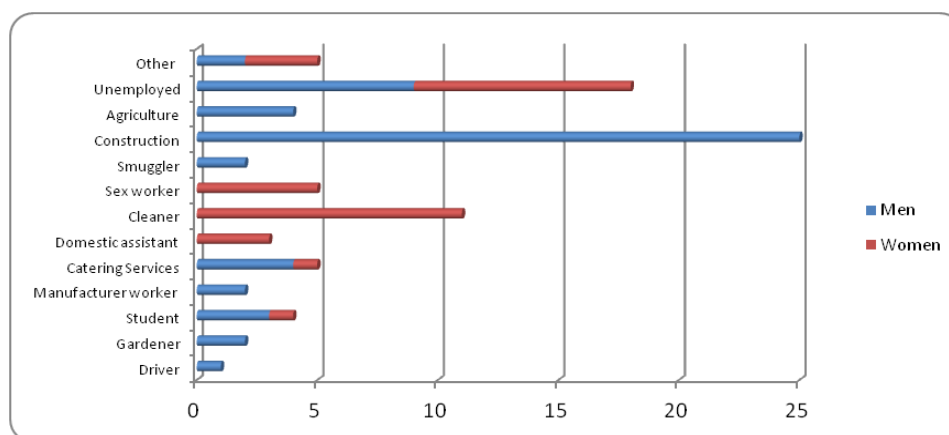


Source: Fieldwork data



With relation to the employment status, 15% of interviewees claim to be unemployed at the time of research (Diagram 9). The category in question mostly concerns those based in Albania, who either work in Greece seasonally (summer and autumn) or are supported by members of their family who live or travel (irregularly) to Greece.

Diagram 9. Sample employment status



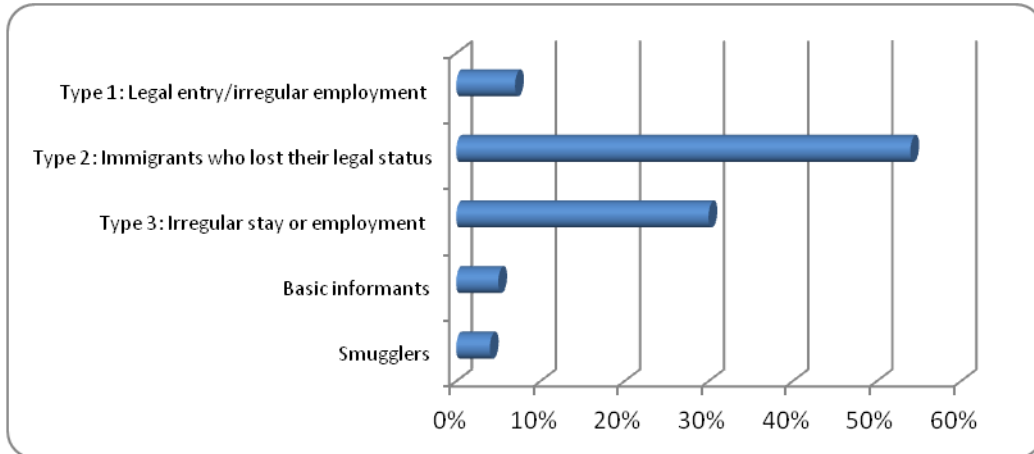
Source: Fieldwork data

As shown in Diagram 9 the majority of men work in construction and agricultural work, in a regime of seasonal or partial irregular employment. With respect to family status, the most highly represented category in the sample are married (32%), followed by unmarried persons with a relatively small difference (25%).

The human geography of the sample in combination with the typology of its irregular character<sup>5</sup>, is differentiated with respect to the country in which the research was carried out, as well as the legal and socio-economic status of those involved. Thus, in the case of Greece, the greatest percentage of irregularity is identified in the category of those who lost their legal status (54%) as a result of unemployment and by extension also lost the opportunity of renewing their residence permit (Diagram 10).

<sup>5</sup> The relevant typology of irregular migration of Albanian migrants is analyzed in detail in the background report by Gemi (2013, pp. 27-31).

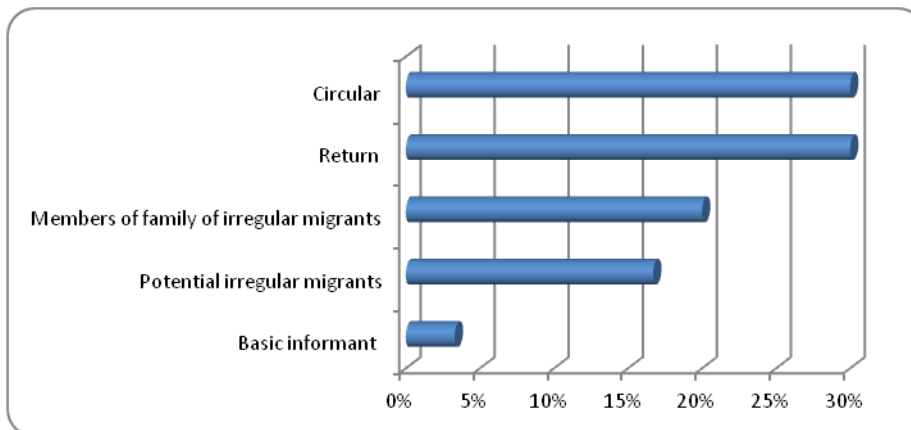
Diagram 10. Typology of the irregularity of the sample in Greece (%)



Source: Field data

For the fieldwork carried out in Albania (Diagram 11), the greatest percentage of the sample represents circular irregular migration (30%), whereas the percentage of potential irregular migrants who were planning on migrating to Greece in the near future, is restricted to approximately 17%.

Diagram 11. Typology of irregular migration of Albanians to Albania (%)



Source: Fieldwork data

These findings, combined with the fact that 22% of the sample has stayed in Greece for 16 to 20 years and that 17% has stayed for 6 to 10 years, are an indication that irregular flows do

not involve ‘new’ migrants to a significant extent, but rather ‘recycle’ those who perhaps have basic knowledge about the Greek environment and maintain contact with migrant networks (ethnic, family, and/or with Greek employers) in Greece.

We will have to note, moreover, that in the case of our informants in Albania, as well as some informants in Greece, their stay followed various stages and episodes of circular mobility, a return to Albania, an attempt to migrate to other countries of the EU and a return to Greece.

The dynamic of these multiple migration trajectories has been shaped in accordance to:

- The consequences of the crisis on employment opportunities in Greece
- Legal status, for those who risk de-regularisation in particular
- The degree of influence and facilitation offered by migrant networks
- The (loose or strict) control and integration policies in Greece
- The liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian nationals (which entered into force as of December 2010)
- The bilateral (conflictual or good) relations between Albanian and Greece, and
- The (unstable) political and socio-economic situation in Albania

## **2.2 Greece as a pole of attraction for irregular migration**

In the case of irregular migration of Albanians to Greece, it is widely acknowledged that it is mostly tied to informal labour. In reality, irregular movement is facilitated by new, even flexible and insecure modes of employment relations, because of the pressure exerted by the economic crisis on the formal labour market.

Meanwhile, the difficult economic situation in Albania in combination with the ‘opening of borders’, that is to say, the difficulty of entering Greece with biometric passports, lowered irregular border crossings. Nevertheless, some choose to enter the country irregularly, and they are usually young men in search of seasonal work. As one of the smugglers says:

*“Now we get younger people who work in the fields or in construction, on a seasonal basis. I bring many more in spring and in autumn”* (TD, 55, Athens)

Another interviewee gives further information on the profile of migrants and the regions that supply irregular migration.

*“Another category is the young men who come from central and Northern Albania. Only a few come from Gjirokastër or Saranda. Now you’ll get a few more from Korçë”* (Fredí, 47, Athens).

Indeed, the impressions below confirm the recent tendencies of irregular border crossings as well as the motives behind them.

*“I’ve done it over six times by foot... Once I was handed a fine of 1,200 euro because I’d overstayed my time in Greece. I didn’t pay. And now I just cross the borders like that, by foot. When there is no work I leave, but there usually is. Many Albanians travel like this. They come because they may want to work for five months and their passport only allows them to do it for three” (Ylli, 34, Rhodes).*

Despite the changes in the legal status and the new possibilities for crossing the border irregularly, certain categories of young men follow the ‘traditional’ routes that made up the model of irregular migration in the 1990s. This group usually opts for irregular migration, either because there is a certain pending issue between themselves and the Greek state, or because they have violated, in the past, the terms of entry and stay in Greece.

*“I’ve been turned back several times, and I’ve used a lawyer many times as well. And I’ve been handed an expulsion order. They’d keep us for one or two weeks in the detention centres of the area where I was caught. I’d go to Albania, and I’d come back. I was caught by the police and I went with an extradition. I went back home where I stayed for a week and then I went back to Greece. I went the same way as many other people. I now know this route inside out. I was in Athens again four days ago. In the same place, for the same work” (Leonard, 27, Athens).*

On the other hand, the tightening of policies aiming at border control and the deterrence of irregular migration of Albanians to Italy, in combination with the risk inherent to the “seaward adventure”, have led to a re-direction of migratory routes towards Greece. One of the smugglers comments on this subject:

*“In 2002 the number of people who wanted to leave for Italy was reduced. The reason was fear. What’s more, things in the [Greek] embassy had become easier. They issued visas with a 4,000 euro bribe so they preferred to go there and have six-month or annual visas rather than go to Italy because it was risky to travel by sea. People were afraid of the tragedies that had occurred . . . . From 2011 onwards they left with 00passports because they can’t only stay for three months, they send their passport to the borders in order to get it stamped” (BP, 48, Vlörë).*

As we can see in the smuggler's narrative, the subject of irregular migration is constantly reviving and being revived in turn by a chain system of corruption and illegal profiteering that cuts right through a string of mechanisms, from the state worker to a network of traffickers. This is confirmed in the testimony of an interviewee on his own brother's story:

*"My brother stays in Ithaca and sends his passport with money to get it stamped at the border"* (Landi, 29, Athens).

As mentioned earlier, another irregular category of migrants is the people who either face problems with justice and/or have a pending expulsion order, or are engaged in illicit activities. This category usually uses illegal means of transport or crosses the border by foot.

*"Now they go illegally, those who have a problem, who must be expelled or who have been caught for drugs and have served time in a Greek prison for nine months to 1.5 years"* (BP, 48, Vlorë).

Another interviewee, a worker from a bus agency in Athens that does itineraries to and from Albania, sketches the profile of irregular migrants:

*"They come for work that almost lasts a season and want no stamp on the passport. There are then those who have been handed an expulsion order. Then there's the women they use for prostitution, they don't have papers. They can't work legally, only illegally"* (Freda, 47, Athens).

The human geography of irregular Albanians is marked by an intense diversity of cases, in the stories of which we notice the involvement of inter-generational personal or family histories with the failure of the related policies, which see social inclusion in terms of control. The testimony that follows is from the Petrou Rali detention centre, and is typical of this blurred image:

*"... I came to Greece in '98 with my mother, with a visa. I was twelve. We settled in Piraeus. We had two aunts there. I went to school up until tenth grade. I started out as a waiter. In 2004 I was caught because I had no papers. I was an adult and I had no work stamps to apply for my own papers. I was expelled. I came back on foot and I did my papers. A one-year permit the first time, two the second. Until 2009 I was regular. Then my work stopped and I had no money to purchase the work stamps and continue with the papers. From 2009 I've spent more time in Albania than in Greece. I was caught and returned for three or four months. . . . I've been handed four expulsions from 2010 to this day and one in 2004"* (Goni, 28, PetrouRali detention centre, Athens).

On the other hand, the ‘young’ irregulars show a different pattern of movement to Greece. One of the smugglers sketches this group’s profile:

*“They’re young, 22-30 years old. They come from villages. They ask to go to Athens and Thessaloniki in order to work and make clean money, whereas they go to Kalamata to make dirty money with little work”* (TD, 55, Athens).

As the smuggler implies, the first case concerns those who begin the journey to Greece to work seasonally, whereas in the second category we find people who work in what are *par excellence* illicit activities, such as drug trafficking.

A particular category that doesn’t fall in the ‘typical’ case of irregular migration is the women who come to stay in Greece for reasons of family reunification, but without the legal papers.

*“My wife is without papers from 2002 when she came to Greece, and always moves secretly. There was no way to bring my wife with papers. I paid and they brought her to Megara in a taxi”* (Xhimi, 29, Alopohori).

An interesting element that distinguishes this category from the previous ones, is that these women are under the ‘protection’ of the family environment, their children are born in Greece and they usually work as domestic workers. The husband and the children usually hold valid stay documents.

*“I have a problem with my papers and my wife. To go through with family reunification, I need some form of income, and I don’t have one. I don’t have a problem though, no one’s bothered us for four or five years”* (Nektarios, 37, Rhodes).

The breath-taking testimony of a woman, who managed, after several attempts, to cross the border by foot in 2006 in order to find her husband, highlights in the most eloquent manner the human drama unfolding on the Greek-Albanian border.

*“. . . they caught us once. It was a frightening experience. We were women, one with children and the other pregnant. They didn’t treat us badly but they abandoned us on the mountain. The others were married and joined their husbands. One had a five-year-old child, the other was pregnant and another was engaged, like me. They held us for three days in these detention areas. Then they let her free because her husband had papers. Another girl and myself weren’t allowed to go because they thought we’d come to work as prostitutes. Later, they let me go and I left for Albania”* (Shpresa, 29, Korydallos).

### 2.2.1 The routes, the middlemen, and the cost of irregular movements

The crossing of the Greek-Albanian border in the 1990s has been recorded in collective memory as the epitome of the greatest irregular movement of Albanians towards Greece in history. The mapping of these movements includes a series of factors, such as entry points, regular or irregular transit, or the actors and middlemen who shape the human geography of the routes.

One of the smugglers describes the ‘market’ of irregular transit as follows:

*“Fieri has a monopoly for Greece, 100-300 euro at most by foot to take you to the Greek side. There’s also taxi drivers who will do part of the trip for 350 euros... There are people from Gjirokastër and Lazarati who will smuggle migrants for 100-200 euro a head”* (BP, 48, Vlorë)

When asked about the cost and the means of transporting irregular migrants, one of the smugglers says:

*“I take about 50 people a month. I might take two persons or an entire family. There’s a particular ‘square’ near the border. That’s where the price is bargained. If the demand is high I ask for more. Those who know me call me up and we arrange the necessities”* (TD, 55, Athens).

Going one step further, the smuggler discusses the sum required on both sides of the border in order to ‘accomplish’ his mission.

*“I need 100 euro for the Greek side and 50 euro for the Albanian one”* (TD, 55, Athens).

Moreover, the networks of smugglers appear to have completely ‘mapped’ the impossible and weak points in border control and adapt their strategy and the cost of transit accordingly.

*“We might take 700 euro, we might take 800. A friend of mine does this job and takes 700, whereas others work with 1,000 and others with 600. The charge for the police here is 50 to 150 euro a head. If a Greek officer I don’t know is on shift, he might get 150 euro and that way you know that job won’t be spoiled”* (Fredri, 47, Athens).

The interviewee then describes the degree of difficulty faced by smugglers in the two basic customs points on the Greek-Albanian border.

*“These days if you want to take someone through both customs points, the most difficult way is through Kapshtica. The possibilities of letting a driver through*

*there may be 10%, whereas from Kakavia it may be at 60%. In Kapshtica there is more control and the police officers are tougher” (Freda, 47, Athens).*

Another young interviewee who crossed the border irregularly for the first time in 2010 describes the trajectory and the money needed to pay the smuggler.

*“... by foot through the mountain. It was very difficult. I have heard of many who have done it by I couldn't imagine it. We may have been 300-400 Albanians who came to Greece. They were in groups of 50 people. We walked for 5 days to reach a village in Igoumenitsa. My feet were covered in wounds. There, after six hours, a car picked us up and took us to Athens. When we arrived my sister had paid 1,000 euros, whereas the initial agreement was for 800 euros” (Landi, 29, Athens).*

However, certain individuals claim that they didn't need to pay because they'd memorised the route.

*“I've never paid. Always with friends, from the mountain, who knew the way. They'd done it many times. The police caught them a few times and they then memorised the path” (Leonard, 27, Athens).*

On the other hand, the attempts at regularisation were not always an easy task for a category of migrants who found themselves trapped between the dysfunctionality of the institutions and the alternatives offered by middle men.

*“I called a lawyer to see if he could do my papers, back when they could do them, but he asked for a lot of money and I had none, and I didn't want to give it. See, I was doing just fine. No one bothered me. Why would I get into all this?” (Guri, 27, Rhodes).*

### **2.3 The economic crisis and de-regularisation**

The background report (Gemi, 2013) that preceded the present study processed the typology of irregular migration of Albanians to Greece. The typology made use of three types (2013, p. 27). The second type includes the category of migrants who have lost their legal status because of the inability to meet the requirements for renewing their residence permit (Gemi, 2013, p. 28). As an interviewee mentions:

*“Up until two months ago I had a two year permit, I went to renew it, but I didn't have the work stamps they asked for. They didn't give me a temporary*



*confirmation either, but they told me rather that the permit would be rejected”* (Zybi, 45, Rhodes).

Indeed, Albanian migrants who hold a temporary residence permits often face serious difficulties for renewing it because of unemployment or missing work stamps.

*“The company closed. I took no money for the 15 years that I spent there. The compensation and gifts that they didn’t pay me was worth 4,500 euros. But the worst was the work stamps. I have no health booklets, I’ve lost the papers and I’m 54 years old”* (Luarasi, 56, Athens).

In conditions of high unemployment and a dramatic drop in income in combination with the unelastic and bureaucratic spirit of the legal framework (which was in force during the period of carrying out the interviews), an important section of the Albanian population has been led to irregularity or, in the best of cases, to a semi-legal status. Even if one were to appeal against the decision of rejection, the temporary permit doesn’t grant one access to the labour market. As one migrant explains:

*“Up until 2011 I had a card. After 2011 I never went through with renewing my papers because I had no work stamps... I went to court, I took the paper they gave me after a month but I can’t work”* (Cimi, 53, Rhodes).

The study records the most extreme cases where a handful of missing work stamps means someone who has settled in Greece for years could end up being irregular the next day.

*“I lost it last year. I was missing two work stamps and they wouldn’t do them for me. I have three small children born in Greece. I’d submitted the application in October and 11 months later, September this year, they told me that my papers couldn’t be renewed because I was missing two work stamps. I called a lawyer and I went to court and they gave me a special confirmation until the trial was held”* (Sadi, 40, Rhodes).

Even with work, the lack of valid documents in combination with the lack of prospects for a return to regularity in the eventuality of securing formal work, may invigorate the vicious cycle of irregularity.

*“I lost my papers two years ago. I was without insurance for a while. In the summer I work for six to seven months, when the wages are lower and life is expensive. In the winter it’s very difficult. I’ve now found a job with work stamps in a construction company and they can’t hire me because I don’t have a permit. They won’t take me for informal work and that means I have a serious problem.*

*That I haven't been there, or anything. And at IKA I went to buy the workstamps but they won't accept"* (Mondi, 36, Athens).

Women are also part of this picture, although the level of unemployment for men is evidently higher. And this is because the impact of the crisis on the construction sector is deeper, leading most men to lose their work from the beginning of the crisis and for longer than women. On the other hand, women—who mostly work as domestic workers and stay in Greece under the status of family reunification—lose their legal status from the moment their husbands are unemployed, and don't pay the required income in order to benefit from the renewal of a residence permit. As described in one interview:

*"My husband is unemployed for two years. His residence permit expired last year, like mine. He went to renew it but he had no work stamps or income for me to secure a permit. We were told to consult a lawyer but we had no money and so we let it be. And I can't do anything either because now it's not like in the old days where you put as many work stamps as you liked as long as you paid for them, now your employer must go to the bank to declare the hours you work and acquire them on their own"* (Xhilda, 46, Nea Ionia).

In other cases, the administration appears exceedingly strict, even in cases where the migrant, despite the fact that he has followed the legal procedures and has submitted the required contributions, loses the right to stay because of an error on the part of the employer. The following case is typical:

*"I had papers until 2011 for family reunification with my husband and my children. In 2010 we left Thessaloniki and there was no more work with stamps and so we went to Domokos. My husband dropped out of the IKA system and found work stamps from OGA, paid for by the employer. A year later we received a negative reply from OGA, that he didn't recognize the security because the employer had accidentally put him down as having worked more days. We went to a lawyer to sort our papers but they rejected them because of OGA and because in Domokos we had no lease contract because we were being hosted by the employer. A paper arrived saying that in we should leave the country within 30 days. How were we supposed to leave? Our children were born here and go to school here. With the paper from the children's school the lawyer made an appeal against the decisions and submitted the papers in Athens, at the Interior Ministry,*

*an application for a permit for extraordinary circumstances that told us we'd wait for up to 1.5 years"* (Mira, 31, Thessaloniki).

Even the children of second generation children are faced with the same terms as the first generation. In order to have the right to an independent residence permit, these children will have to prove that they are working or studying, since after turning 18 they will no longer be protected persons. One interview describes this in detail:

*"I have no papers. I was born in Greece. Until the age of 18 I was supported by my mother, on paper. I was a protected family member and now that I'm 18 I'll have to do my papers independently. I applied but because I no longer had the required documents they wanted (work stamps, employer or studies) it was not approved and now I am illegal here"* (Andi, 19, Athens).

Even where someone studies in the higher or highest educational institutions in the country, the subsequent residence status is uncertain.

*"I'm in Greece since I was eight. When I enrolled in the university I did all my papers as a student. I got a one-year residence permit and I renew it every year... I had no other choice. I preferred to take a permit as a student rather than go through the hassle of looking for work stamps, etc. I know that when my studies are over my stay in Greece will be an issue. That is, I will be a foreigner who came only to study and must now leave. But until that time, who knows? Perhaps the laws will have changed"* (David, 24, Athens).

The findings presented so far would allow us to 'sketch' the profile of a migrant-agent who is relatively well informed on the 'condition' of irregular migration to Greece. His basic goal is to benefit from the work opportunities and the relatively good pay in Greece (always in comparison to Albania), and the lowest possible cost, often following 'rational criteria' in choosing his destination and the means he uses to get there. He appears, meanwhile, to adequately acknowledge the distinction between regular and irregular border crossing, as well as the rules that determine cross-border transit and employment in Greece. Moreover, he plays an active role in the shaping of the 'trajectory' and in the relationship of cost to efficiency, with respect to the means he uses to reach his destination. This means that he draws from informal information that serves his goal in the short term, but which he nevertheless cross-references, making use of informal (ethnic) networks and middle men who are mostly based in Greece. A critical part in this process is undoubtedly Greek language proficiency, combined with a long-term 'interaction' with the Greek environment.

Nevertheless, official information is restricted to basic knowledge of those institutional rules that impact directly on their migration plan, e.g., the decision to liberalise the entry visa. Meanwhile, contacts, as well as the level of interaction with formal institutions of the Greek state and civil society institutions, are much more restricted and marked by intense suspicion on both sides.

On the other hand, the role of institutional and other factors such as the police, the consular authorities and the network of smugglers, seems to facilitate the realisation of the irregular migration plan, but does not ultimately shape its dynamic.

We will have to note, meanwhile, that this image is not representative of the category of migrants who for a number of reasons have lost their legal status. From their testimonies, we may conclude that structural and institutional factors, such as the economic crisis, unemployment, and the excessive strictness of the regularisation system, have provoked a wave of de-regularisations, thus overturning the integration condition for the first and second generation of Albanians. It will have to be noted, however, that from the time of initiating the fieldwork to the present, the Code of Immigration and Social Integration (Law 4251/2014) has entered into force, and it may perhaps cause a shift in the current pattern of de-regularisation.

In covering the micro-level of analysis that focuses on the migrant as an autonomous agent, it would be interesting to examine the role of the meso-level, in other words, the role of migrant networks in shaping the dynamic of irregular Albanian migration to Greece.

We will have to note, meanwhile, that this image is not representative for that category of migrants who, for a variety of reasons, have lost their legal status.

From the testimonies we may reach the conclusion that structural and institutional factors such as the economic crisis, unemployment, and the excessive strictness of the regularization system, have led to a wave de-regularization, thus leading to a reversion of the integration dynamic for both first and second generation Albanians. It is worth noting, however, that from the period of the initial fieldwork to the present day, the Code of Migration and Social Integration (Law 4251/2014) has been implemented; the law in question would perhaps have acted as a buffer vis-à-vis the trajectory of de-regularization.

In covering the micro-level of analysis that held the migrant as an autonomous agent at its core, it would be interesting at this point to examine the role of the meso-level; that is to say,

of the migrant networks themselves, in shaping the dynamic of irregular migration of Albanians to Greece.

### 2.4 Migration networks

Another dimension that the current study engages with is migration networks. The approach in question is deemed extremely important in the study of irregular migration, because it focuses not only on the persons involved, but on its socially ingrained nature in particular, recognizing that migrants either begin their ‘journey’ with their families and/or friends, or that they follow their relatives and/or friends who have previously settled somewhere (Massey et al., 1998; Portes 1995). As one interviewee says:

*“One of the friends we crossed the border with has relatives in Rhodes and told us that we could find work more easily”* (Albi, 29, Rhodes).

From the field research it appears that the existence of networks of relatives (and not only friends) plays an important role in the decision to migrate to Greece in contrast to the friendly, inter-group or transnational networks.

*“My sister told me to come here... I came to Greece because my sister was here and her husband found work for me”* (Nori, 26, Athens).

*“I chose Greece because the older ones came first. My aunt’s sons came here, my older brother and then myself. We came one after the other”* (Edi, 28, Githio).

As has been shown by several studies (Iosifidis, 2007), the most basic reason behind the close ties to relatives is found in the type of family migration that marks the particular group.

Broadly speaking, migration networks are defined as a web of interpersonal ties and relationships that interconnect current migrants, former migrants and non-migrants through networks of relatives and friends. They also include those from a common ethnic and community background, both in the country of origin as well as in the receiving country (Massey, 1988). The networks in particular contribute to the development of relationships of trust and to the promotion of individual or collective interests, strengthening social capital. Consequently, on the basis of this social capital, agents may call for help and ensure access to work, housing and social protection (Jandl *et al.*, 2009, p. 20).

In our case access to irregular migration usually occurs with the mediation of ‘irregular’ migrant networks of co-ethnic and Greek employers.

*“It all starts from personal contacts. I know such and such employer who asks for workers for a particular job and I offer my own. That’s how it goes...”* (TD, 55, Athens)

Another interviewee adds:

*“There’s a place where you can work everywhere: construction, taverns, hotels... there’s work in the fields. Here there are jobs with 15 and 20 euros and I don’t do them but if someone lives in Albania it is worth it to work here and get 450 a month, whereas in Albania you get 150.000 (100 euro) lek. So many come and work for one season, three months. The young ones come more for seasonal work. They already know the employer and they might work for three months without stamps or social security, and the employers usually bribe the IKA agency”* (Zybi, 30, Rodos).

The demand for seasonal, cheap and flexible working hands in combination with the reduced risk in crossing the Greek-Albanian borders, have intensified irregular mobility over time. One interviewee, when asked the reason he decided to come to Greece, gave the answer below.

*“Greece is very close. Everyone told me there is lots of work. When I came here I found work immediately. And if I had no work I could go back whenever I wished without paying or risking my life”* (Tedi, 35, Rhodes).

The particular ‘exchange’ was made easier by the liberalization of the entry visa for Albanians in EU countries.

*“The three-month visas came out and I came to see how it is and to work with my sister-in-law on the island”* (Teuta, 19, Athens, PetrouRali detention center).

What is interesting is the tendency of individuals to develop international migration networks, as a strategy for finding a solution to the consequences of the economic crisis in Greece.

*“My brother had a hairdresser’s and he shut it down. Now he’s up in the air, and he’s waiting for a chance to go to Norway. There he has more employment opportunities. He has some friends from Albania who have now left and have Greek papers. You can’t go to one place when you have no contact with it”* (Morina, 23, Athens).

Nevertheless, the complication in this process appears uneven between various groups of Albanian migrants, despite the years of stay and the degree of integration in Greek society.

Those holding valid documents enjoy a relative freedom of movement within the EU, in contrast to the irregular or semi-regular Albanians who find themselves institutionally trapped. Nevertheless, even in the eventuality of return to Albania, the role of the migrant networks in re-integration is deemed to be critical.

*“The other thing is that in Albania you have to know and go to a safe place and find work. You must be in constant contact with your people there and in other EU countries”* (Klajd, 23, Athens).

### 2.5 The dimension of transnationalism

One of the important dimensions of Albanian migration is that of trans-nationality. This notion is often used to define that form of social formation that crosses and stretches beyond national borders, and is activated through national migrant networks (Baubock and Faist, 2010, p. 9).

At a practical level, trans-nationality is defined by the cross-border social and symbolic ties and practices that are preserved both by the individuals and the household (Fauseretal, 2012, p.4). In this context, trans-nationality refers to a network of various relationships such as the familial, social, religious and political, which go beyond the conventional borders of states and link the societies of origin and settlement (King et al., 2013:127). These relationships are seen as basic (micro-level) units on which other forms of trans-national behaviour and institutions are structured (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2002).

Among other approaches, others (see Faist, 2010) locate the question of trans-national mobility of migrants to the context of socio-economic exclusion that may lead to the reproduction of transnational practices.

*“I go to Albania for a bit of work and I come back, I have a restaurant, I have a home in Tirana. I bought it in 2007. For a while now I’ve wanted to buy something there. I’ve earned money from the restaurant but not from the house. The money from the restaurant I spend in Greece now that we have no work”* (Zybi, 45, Rhodes).

In this case, trans-nationality may be involved in the creation and/or reproduction of the social inequalities that are in turn defined with relation to the inequality of opportunities for different forms of capital (economic, cultural and social), and not so much with the result (Faist, 2011). In the context of this approach, the economic, political and social participation of Albanian migrants in transnational activities is seen as an alternative strategy for



confronting the risk of exclusion, whereas at the same time it is inscribed in the effort to create a protective environment vis-à-vis the marginalization that they experience in Greece.

*“For many years, we worked the tobacco fields in Katerini. As we were unemployed, we started a tobacco business in Korçë. But we didn’t manage to sell the tobacco and the enterprise went bust. We lost all of our savings. We went to Thessaloniki again to find work. But this time, we are left with no work and no papers”* (Mokra, 32, Thessaloniki).

This last version that has been dubbed a ‘reactionary transnationalism’ suggests that the greater the exposure to marginalization, the greater the participation in transnational activities that do not necessarily lead to better results (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005, p. 904).

In the context of the expansion of the basic factors behind the diptych of irregular migration and transnational practices, one should not fail to account for the dynamic of the family. As has already been mentioned, family networks are the basic support mechanism and the solidarity structure through which the phenomenon of Albanian migration to Greece was developed. Moreover, most Albanian migrants identify with the narrow and/or expanded notion of family structure (Mai and Paladini, 2013, p. 60).

*“Two years ago we were without work or papers. My father wanted to open an electric goods store with me to help the family there. I couldn’t say no. I used all the money I’d saved up in Greece. But the shop didn’t go well so we shut it down. That’s how we lost our money and work”* (Nori, 26, Athens).

As mentioned in other studies (Michail, 2013), the transnational practices of Albanians are an alternative response to both the economic and political instability in Albania, as well as to the problematic migratory environment in Greece (2013, p. 266).

*“It no longer made sense to stay in Greece legally when you have no work or money. I got a small shop in Vlorë with my sister. She does the orders for weddings and baptisms and I go and do the decoration”* (Dori, 24, Gytheio).

Of course the geographic proximity between the two countries plays an important role in the development of transnational practices, as it facilitates both mobility and physical presence.

Nevertheless, with trans-nationality being redefined under the pressure of the economic crisis and the nature of membership being called into question, transnational practices have been radically re-assessed. Thus, certain practices are no longer carried out with the same intensity



and spread as before, whereas others have died out as a matter of necessity (e.g. the frequency and the quantity of remittances), and others yet take place on different geographical scales.

*“Last year I went to Vienna and Bratislava with a passport and I came back. I stayed for 1.5 months. I neither knew the language, nor could find work. If I had papers it might be different. A friend of mine went to England recently, he paid 8,000 euro and he still has no work”* (Albi, 29, Rhodes).

However, despite the difficulties, most have not succeeded in reaching their goal, which is to settle in another country. And this is because the lack of legal documents annuls their plans to settle in other countries in which the national framework leaves no room for irregular employment. Moreover, the weak ethnic networks do not provide an adequate basis for providing support to their co-ethnics.

*“Last year I went to Stockholm with some friends. Some other friends had gone earlier and promised they would help us. We didn’t find work, we spent all our money and we came back to Greece. We couldn’t pay the hotel. We couldn’t rent a house because we had no papers or social security number. There if you had no papers you were dead and life was extremely expensive”* (Stefanos, 27, Athens).

The lack of language skills in combination with the dysfunctional aspect of migration networks contributes to the annulment of the transnational project.

*“I was in Brescia, Italy, for one month, and from there I came here. I tried to find work in Italy but I had no papers, I didn’t know the language and my friends didn’t help me”* (Ylli, 34, Rhodes).

In summary, the transnational dimension of Albanian irregular migration is defined as a process of individual/family reaction vis-à-vis institutional and social exclusion (de-regularization), but also towards the discrimination they experience in the public sphere. Moreover, where transnational ties and networks back in Albania or in other countries are adequately mobilized, they may offer a small respite or access to minimal resources with respect to the dream for a better and more secure living.

### 2.6 Circular mobility

As we highlighted in the last section, recent socio-economic developments have caused a greater transnational and circular mobility. What is more, the unstable legal status has brought back to the fore the informal and flexible movements that defined the 1990s, with the difference being in the “legal” institutional framework that allows border crossing.

*“They’ve made biometric passports. They’ve left their papers unpaid as they didn’t have the financial means to pay and now that the visas are ‘liberalized’ they went along with the logic that says that instead of paying 200-300 euro for our papers, we work for three months and we rest for another three, or we stay there even without papers”* (Tefta, 37, Tirana).

The circular dimension in particular includes the irregular migrants who move between Greece and Albania on a repetitive, circular basis. In the words of a private travel agency representative from Tirana:

*“They’re 40 years and older, which means that they’ve been in Greece for 20 years. Now that they don’t have the means to pay to hold onto their papers they come to Albania for three months and they go back to Greece for another three. They work in the season. The key areas are Corinth, Tripoli, Sparta and Kalamata where there’s olive groves. Many of them go in November, during the harvest. And in spring, in March, April and May, they go to Lamia and Larissa to sow the fields there”* (Tefta, 37, Tirane).

Ultimately, the dynamic of developments in the economy in combination with national control policies (e.g. the entry visa and the limitations on the duration of stay) as well as the circular model, are directly tied to irregular migration for work to Greece.

*“I was back in Albania in December 2012. I go to Greece when I have work there. Now I’ll leave on 26 May. When I was in Greece, I was forced to stay there because on the one hand I only had the permit and on the other I had to find the work stamps to renew the stay permit. Now I travel with my passport, I work, I take my money and when the work is over I go back to Albania”* (Dede, 53, Shkodër).

With regards to social characteristics, a significant number of those involved are low-skilled or unskilled workers employed in the informal economy, performing low-status jobs (the so-called 3D jobs).

*“My husband does a day’s work or so on the construction site with his brothers. They also have some fields in Pukë where they grow apples. In the summer he comes to Kefalonia, he stays at my sister’s and works with her husband, they paint hotels, they fix the plumbing in the pools and so on. . . . with their passports,*

*like everybody else. Sometimes he goes through the mountains. It depends on the case or the job that he has there” (Vefi, 32, Tirane).*

Moreover, we can distinguish between two categories of irregular migrants who fall within the definition of circular migration and differ with respect to age, duration of stay, means of entry into Greece and employment sector. Thus one category relates to unemployed young persons and unskilled workers who usually originate from blighted mountain areas in the North and South of Albania.

*“The opening of the borders (2011) lowered the age of irregular Albanian migrants to Greece. Now we get the younger ones who work in the fields or in construction, on a seasonal basis” (Smuggler, 55, Athens).*

As one interviewee explains:

*“Unemployment is greater in Albania and there’s greater demand for Albanian workers here” (Fredri, 47, Athens).*

The second category includes older men who follow circular routes for years. In certain cases they come to Greece irregularly and in others regularly because they may have a newly-issued or pending expulsion order in their name, or their names are on the ‘unwanted list’.

*“My son goes there often because my brother-in-law is a contractor. When he takes on a big job he gives him the heads up and the boy leaves for work. The police then caught him and he was returned. Since then he goes back and forth, sometimes by foot, other times by bus, secretly” (Naile, 58, Tirane).*

In other cases, however, migrants stand out for their entrepreneurial spirit, and they are extremely self-reliant, with skills above average.

*“I’ve haven’t left Greece entirely. I visit every season when there’s work and I fix shop windows in the Attika and Golden Hall shopping centres. In Albania I started my own business, which does gift accessories and internal decoration. When I go to Greece I stay in a special facility owned by the company in Kolonaki” (Violeta, 41, Vlorë).*

Since the liberalisation of the entry visa for movement within the EU entered into force (December 2010), a significant drop has been noted in irregular border crossings by circular migrants.

*“I go to Greece twice a year. Once in April, for 2-3 months, and once in autumn, in October. No, they don’t invite me. I know there’s work during that time. In autumn I also work with the olives, because there’s olives in Agrinio. I then go*

*back to Albania and I work wherever there is work... I cross the borders with my passport. I don't overstay the three months. I do it five days in advance. Before 2010 I would cross over by foot, whereas after the 'visa' I cross over with my passport"* (Dede, 42, Shkodër).

An interesting finding with respect to the circular character of young Albanians is the following testimony of a travel agency representative in Tirana:

*"The young people who go are those who have their contacts, they work and they go back for the season. Nevertheless, some use this route as a means of transit to other counties... it's difficult to go from Durrës to Italy by boat, and so they go from Igoumenitsa or Patras... Italy and Germany are more desirable destinations"* (Tefta, 37, Tirane).

Between Albania and Greece, irregular circular migration has been the most common form of irregular border crossing for about twenty years. One of the main reasons for this is the once strong demand for seasonal work in construction and agricultural. Today, one notices a very significant drop in irregular circularity, and this not only because of the economic crisis, but because of the opportunity for legal entry into Greece, which followed the liberalisation of the visa for Albanian citizens in the EU. In other words, the abolition of the entry visa gave a new direction to irregular migration from Albania; it made it more brief, highly circular and irregular. In other words, it created the conditions for the development of an 'particular' model of circular mobility.

Finally, the provisions of the law regulating seasonal work and the invitation of seasonal workers (metaklisi) remain inactive from the moment that both sides feel 'facilitated' by the flexibility of informal labour, while 'exempting themselves' from the associated bureaucracy and the obligations that it may entail for employers.

## **2.7 Return**

Before 2009 return to Albania was considered an act of desperation and failure. Those returning were either those who had failed to integrate in Greece or those who were expelled by the police. This perception has gradually shifted as the conditions of migration and the reasons of return have radically changed. Return is considered a strategy for confronting the negative consequences of the economic crisis, unemployment and de-regularisation.

A significant number of interviewees feel trapped and overtly express the uncertainty created by the current situation in Greece. Meanwhile, they have no hope or prospects for the future, which forces them to seriously examine the prospect of returning to Albania as the only foreseeable solution to ‘de-regularisation’. Even for the younger ones, the prospect of return is seen as an ultimate attempt to escape from the vicious circle of insecurity.

*“Perhaps it is better now that I’ll go back there, instead of staying here with no work, no papers, scared of the police and with unpaid bills. There I could at least stay at home and walk safely and freely without being afraid of the police, as I am here”* (Teuta, 19, Athens, PetrouRali detention center).

The fieldwork showed a strong tendency of return. The subjects are over 40, with over ten years of stay in Greece, and seek to settle in large urban centres.

*“A large number return every day. The reason is unemployment, or losing one’s papers, or both. They have usually invested in a house there and that way it’s easier to go back because they know they won’t pay rent”* (Freda, 47, Athens).

This wish to return is stronger where an investment has been made in a home or store in Albania, especially if it is in or near the capital.

*“We’ll go to Tirana. We’ve bought a small flat two years ago. Unfortunately we only bought a house there. If we’d bought a shop we’d have left earlier”* (Stefanos, 27, Athens).

According to the findings from the fieldwork carried out as part of IRMA, in combination with the data from the Immigration Office (Sportelet e Migracionit) in Albania (IOM, 2013, p. 9), returnees have the tendency to settle in areas with a high level of socio-economic development, with Tirana being the preferred area. The interviewee below is from Tepelena and settled in Athens when she was 14. However, should she return, she prefers the Albanian capital despite the fact that she’s hardly familiar with it.

*“Three months ago we bought a flat in Tirana for a very good price. Whatever money my parents and I had saved, we gave to buy a sense of safety. If things turn sour here we can go back there. We’ll stay until April and if the situation persists, we’ll leave”* (Alda, 26, Athens).

On the other hand, some interviewees appear disappointed by the situation that persists in Albania, which according to them, is worse than in Greece. When confronting such urgent dilemmas and unprepared to engage in a rational weighing of the pros and cons in each country, their judgment is clouded. Moreover, and as some will admit, they are no longer in a

position to re-live the experience of migration and integration, even if it's in their own country of origin. Thus, despite the fact that the majority of those who were asked express their intention to return to Albania, the timing depends on the composition of the family (e.g., the age of children), the duration and depth of the crisis, and the dynamic of pull factors, such as migrant networks.

For those who have returned, the picture appears altogether different. Returnees feel trapped in the Albanian reality and plan their return to Greece, but this time on a circular basis.

*“They think of coming here to build a future, they didn't manage to do it. Here they can't get by with a wage of 200,000-300,000 lek. So they leave their families behind and they take off for Greece once again. There they try seasonal work, they make some money, they come here. In any case, their life is always in movement, fathers in particular. Many migrants returned and then went back to Greece” (Zybi, 45, Rhodes).*

The return to Greece, however, leads to an erosion of the typical family model of Albanian migration. This is, inter alia, tied to the insecurity of stay and the inability to support a family. Those who return to Greece therefore leave their family behind in Albania.

*“I stayed in Albania for a year and I went back. I was in Fiere, at home. I brought my wife with me and two small children. I bought a truck, I started a butcher's shop in Tirana but it went bust. I have my own livestock in the village. I had papers because I rented the store and I had no problem. But I had no work. The rent was high, and so were the taxes. In Greece I made more money than there. So I went back to Rhodes. I left my wife and children with my parents” (Ylli, 34, Rhodes).*

It is thus estimated that the most recent returnees are most likely to migrate once again in the foreseeable future, since the lack of opportunities in Albania works as a push factor towards new destinations. The social capital they have acquired also helps them to migrate again, since they realize that the opportunities for survival in Albania are no longer satisfactory for them.

*“In Greece the husband worked as an aluminium worker. He was unemployed for the past two years and with no papers, which means that the family could no longer pull through either. They came to Albania, hoping they might find work. The husband found work. But the wage here in Albania is 400.000 lek at most and*

*because they had no house they also paid rent. They stayed for seven months and now they're preparing to leave for Germany in search for work, and perhaps they'll ask for asylum"* (Tefta, 37, Tirana).

Back in Greece, the younger ones, instead of returning to Albania, wish to migrate to other countries like the United Kingdom, the US, Canada and Australia.

*"Some want to stay only in order to travel elsewhere. Most are young. For instance if someone wants to go to England, he needs 4,000 euro he pays up and he goes. If he wants to go to Canada the price is higher. They don't go directly from Greece, they often make a stop in other countries"* (Fredri, 47, Athens).

Whereas the first generation is negotiating the new condition of 'de-regularisation', the second generation is struggling to define its identity. This contrast stems from the fact that whereas they are officially Albanian, in reality their point of reference is Greece; it is there that they grew up, studied and were socialised. Thus, whereas one migrant is in Greece with their family, the older children are usually unwilling to follow the parents. This may also go for older people.

*"It was my own and my husband's bad luck that he was caught by police officers and returned to Albania because the permit had expired and he hadn't applied for a re-evaluation. Thus I was also forced to leave. I took the boy with me and we came here. My older son refused to come with us to Albania. He's staying in Athens with his sisters. I prepared his application for a permit for extraordinary circumstances"* (Drita, 47, Tirane).

Meanwhile, some of those resisting the prospect of return will make plans for moving to other countries, for study purposes in particular.

*"I don't believe that this also goes for the second generation. I believe that we will be strangers in Albania. They want to stay in Greece. So I think that because the second generation grew up here they don't want to go back to Albania. Some may go abroad for graduate studies or for some job"* (Klajd, 23, Athens).

There is, however, one small category of highly skilled persons among the second generation who believe that upon returning to Albania they'll be able to be absorbed professionally by the Greek businesses in the country.

*"Because there are several Greek businesses in Albania and many of us have studied in Greece, they will try to make the first move, to look for work with them"* (Klajd, 23, Athens).



There is a strong gender dimension with respect to the decision to return. Women, despite the difficult circumstances they face, prefer to stay in Greece even in a regime of irregularity. The reasons they may use to justify this resistance are linked first to the fact that they continue to work even on different terms and second, the issue of their children's adaptation to the reality of Albania.

Finally, a critical issue that came up in the interviews in Albania is the non-recognition of pension rights for those who came to Greece formally in search of formal work and then lost their legal status, before returning to Albania.

### **3. Evaluating the efficiency of migration policy**

When analysing the phenomenon of irregular Albanian migration we could use the term *incomplete migration*<sup>6</sup> which may theoretically cover the migration condition of Albanians with relation to the efficiency (or not) of migration policy. In adopting the above definition, with its variations adjusted to the Albanian case, we could outline the trajectory of migration from Albania as follows:

The first phase concerns the 1991-1998 period. It is marked by the collapse of the system of a centralised economy in the former communist country, which led to a constant irregular outflow, mostly of unskilled migrants. This led to the mass escape of Albanian citizens towards neighbouring nations, with Greece being the most easily accessible country of destination (by foot). The incomplete legislative framework and the persistent political blindness to accept the transformation of the country into a pole of attraction for migrants led to a long-term irregular stay and irregular employment of Albanians, whereby irregular border crossing became the "norm" for entry into Greece.

The second phase, 1999-2009, is marked by the permanent and legal settlement that followed a family model. Meanwhile, we have the planning of a process of social integration, whereas the question of the second generation gradually begins to make its appearance especially with respect to socio-political rights and citizenship. In this development, the constant legal interventions (Law 2910/2001 and Law 3386/05) played a determinant role, and contributed to the limitation of irregularity and the significant increase of legal settlement and employment.



The third phase, 2010-2015, was marked by a series of subversive structural and political developments such as the liberalisation of entry visas for Albanian citizens entering the EU, the economic crisis and the strong tendency of de-regularisation that followed, as well as the uncertain status of the second generation. The cascade of events that followed relate to the return, the increase of circular movements of unskilled workers and the search for other migratory destinations. The legislative interventions contributed on the one hand to the limitation of irregular movement, yet they provided the impetus for other forms of irregularity such as informal employment. Moreover, the repealing of the relevant articles in the Citizenship Code (Law 3838/2010) led to the institutional ‘victimisation’ of the second generation. The result of the above developments is the creation of a particular category of migrants that essentially remains socially excluded on both sides.

It is worth nothing, however, that the implementation of the Code of Migration and Social Integration (Law 4251/2014) is expected to limit the trajectory of de-regularisation, while providing an opportunity for reverting to regularity for all those who lost it, introducing the stay permit for the second generation and finally, establishing the long-term residence permit. Following this *incomplete migration cycle of Albanians*, an interesting answer is provided to the question of how Albanian migrants shape or change their plans and their strategies, in reaction to the policies that limit their movement towards Greece. As shown by the present study, the expanding possibility of legal entry into Greece has had the immediate consequence of limiting irregular border transit. But the question of irregular circular mobility for seasonal work remains. And this because a significant number of Albanians make use of the possibility of legal entry into Greece, enter the country with the aim of finding irregular work, thus violating the terms imposed by the relevant regime of the liberalisation of the entry visa. On the other hand, the increased circularity as a product of legal border transit facilitates the mobility of the (by and large unskilled) Albanian labour force between the two countries, and its adaptation to new, even more flexible and dangerous forms of labour relations because of the pressure exercised by the economic crisis in the labour market, both in Greece and Albania. Meanwhile, an important element that shows the ‘flexibility’ of Albanians to the adaptation to the new reality is the increase in asylum applications (2014) submitted to the newly formed Asylum Service. The tendency here—although Albanians do not fall under this category—may very well be interpreted in the context of seeking the time

(Contd.) \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>6</sup> This definition was developed by Okólski (2001) as an interpretive framework for the migration of Poles and other Eastern Europeans to the West after 1990 (in Black, R. *et al.*, 2010, p.12; Brinkmeier 2011, p. 47).

and means of reverting to a legal status for those who have lost it as a result of the economic crisis and unemployment. It shows, meanwhile, that Albanians are informed on new political developments and the means of using them. Moreover, the new measures introduced by the Code of Migration and Social Integration in relation to the return to legality and the establishment of the residence permit for the second generation, provided the opportunity (perhaps temporarily) of returning to Greece for certain families, which, unable to respond to the impact of the crisis, had previously returned to Albania.

In an effort to understand which institutions (state or not, local, national, transnational) are more involved and how these act upon decision-making for Albanians and their activities, what emerges is that the dynamic of attraction exerted by the demand for seasonal work in sectors of the economy like tourism and agriculture, is critical in shaping the 'irregular' migration condition. At the meso level, the existence of relative and family networks plays an equally important role in the involvement of Albanians in irregular work, in comparison to inter-group or transnational networks. Moreover, access to irregular work usually takes place with the mediation of 'irregular' migration networks of co-ethnics and Greek employers. Even in the eventuality of return, the role of migration networks (on a familial and friendly basis) in re-integration is considered critical. The data of the present study showed that irregular flows are not significantly implicating 'new' migrants. Rather, we see that the involvement of those who perhaps possess even rudimentary information about the Greek environment and maintain contacts with the migration networks (ethnic, family and/or with Greek employers) in Greece. Moreover, the consequences of the crisis on combination with the liberalisation of the entry visa and the development of ethnic networks outside of Greece, have differentiated migratory destinations, with Albanians moving towards other industrial countries with the aim of finding work opportunities.

With respect to why certain agents are more effective than others (and more so than state policies in particular) in shaping the plans and decisions of migrants, the answer lies in the 'concealed' (by definition) nature of the phenomenon and the endemic irregular element that it entails. Finally, the plans and decisions of Albanians have been shaped accordingly with the impact of the crisis on opportunities for employment in Greece, the legal status, the level of influence and facilitation provided by migration networks, the (loose and strict) policies of control and integration in Greece, the liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian nationals (implemented in December 2010), the bilateral relations between Albanian and Greece, and

the unstable political and socio-economic situation in Albania.

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## Annex 1. Map of migration flows of Albanians in Greece



Source: Fieldwork data