Albanian circular migration in Greece: beyond the state?

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Abstract
Albanians have been moving back and forth between Greece and their home country throughout the last 2 decades. Doing so, often, was part of different migration plans. Nowadays, after two decades of immigration experience and in the context of the economic crisis and the different crossroads that these two countries stand before the EU, the options of return and circular migration become all the more pertinent in the agenda of the Albanian migrant household. This paper brings up the diversity of the circular patterns of mobility of the Albanian migrants, and discusses the scope of spontaneous vs state-managed forms of circularity with a view to understanding the prospects of this circularity for the parties involved (the migrant, the employer, the host country and the country of origin).
1. Introduction: A brief history of Albanian migration to Greece

The explosive mass emigration flows of Albanians in the beginning of the 1990s were considered to be both a unique case and an «exceptional» type of the international migration (Barjaba and King 2005, King and Vullnetari 2009).

Between 1991-1992, an estimated of 300,000 Albanians left the country, including 150,000 crossing the Greece borders (Carletto et al. 2006). Irrespective of the stabilization that seemed to take place in period 1993-1996, the emigration of Albanians continued at large-scale particularly toward Greece. Only in 1995, 295,000 emigrants left Albania with their main destination being Greece, whilst in 1996 the number of emigrants reached 428,000. In the beginning of 1996, following the collapse of pyramid schemes, about 70,000 Albanians left the country. During the period 2000-2008 the emigration of Albanians has continued albeit at a lower scale, thus marking the end of highly intense mass emigrations (Migrant Remittances 2010:7).

![Figure 1: Albania and its Neighbours: Main Migration Routes (King & Vullnetari, 2003)](image)

In total, over a million Albanians – almost about 30 percent of the population or 35% of its active population (IOM, 2008) - have emigrated abroad. According to the OECD database on immigrants and repatriates, almost 64.4% of overall Albanian migrants abroad live in Greece, which corresponds to approximately 577,500 people.
On the other side of the border, the Greek Labour Force Survey (Triandafyllidou and Maroufof, 2011) estimated their number at about 501,000, which comes to around 60% of the total immigrant population (out of 839,000) living in Greece, as well as 5% of the total native Greek population. It should be noted that among these legally residing Albanians, there are 197,000 who hold special permits as Albanian citizens of ethnic Greek descent.

The back-and-forth movements of Albanians to Greece throughout the 1990s were temporary, predominantly irregular and involved semi-skilled and low-skilled or unskilled migrants. These migration patterns were circular insofar as their repeated frequency is concerned. Albanian migration particularly around the border regions of Greece and Albania presented features of a repeated, seasonal migration (Markova, 2005). At the same time, the forced nature of the return to Albania did not qualify these circular movements of Albanians to Greece as circular migration. The mass deportations by the Greek state indeed constituted a peculiar variant of the return strategy (Reyneri, 2001:37).

Albanian migrants 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. These ‘circular’ movements remained illegal for a long time, due to the restrictive immigration policy of Greece. 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 and returned home in the off season (Reyneri, 2001).

However, in the early 2000s most of these back and forth irregular movements turned into permanent settlement (or just became legal and easier, as we shall see below) mainly due to the legalization procedures which 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. Indeed, the successive regularization programmes in Greece (1998, 2001, and 2005) gave the Albanian migrants the opportunity to settle down and travel in a legal manner.

On the other hand, the migrants without a stay permit could move legally between the two countries only through the process of inviting foreign workers for seasonal or temporary labour, the so-called metaklisi (in Greek), introduced by the

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1 The government of Albania estimates that the number of Albanians abroad in 2005 was over one million, representing 30 percent of the total population. A 2008 report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that about 860,485 Albanian migrants, more than a quarter of the population, lived abroad at some point in 2005.
Greek government in 2001 under a system of annual quotas (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). This system of seasonal invitation of Albanian workers took into account the bilateral agreement of 1997 between Greece and Albania and, in theory, involved all seasonal professions. In practice, though, it has only worked for seasonal jobs in Greek agriculture (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).

The stay permits granted to Albanian nationals for seasonal and/or temporary reasons are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Stay Permits for Seasonal and Temporary Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATIONALITIES</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALBANIA</td>
<td>FISHERMEN (L.3386/05, article 16A)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEASONAL WORK (L.3386/05, article 16)</td>
<td>13,414</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBANIA TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>13,416</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBANIA TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>13,732</td>
<td>13,697</td>
<td>13,696</td>
<td>40,845</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Interior, October 2010

After the introduction of the 6-month window of the seasonal metaklisi system in 2001, formerly irregular circular migrants followed a more fixed pattern of circularity. Those that came to Greece under seasonal metaklisi did not overstay because they did not want to lose the opportunity to come during the following year\(^2\); the option of legal entry and stay has been too strong to ignore for people that experienced illegality for many years (Maroukis & Gemi, 2011).

This chapter is based on research that aimed to identify the existing patterns of circular migrants between the two countries, to map out the respective trajectories that they have followed so far and to understand the prospects of this circularity for the parties involved (the migrant, the employer, the host country and the country of origin). Concretely, it investigates the factors that motivate or hinder the circular movements from the perspective of stakeholders from either country, and also with a view to capturing the migrants’ perception/experience at both sides of the border.

\(^2\) During the last couple of years seasonal migrants needed to have their passport stamped before the 6 months ran out in order to re-apply the following year (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). This seems to be an efficient control mechanism for the detection and, therefore, the prevention of seasonal visa overstays.
1.1. Methodology Employed

This chapter builds on 36 interviews with circular migrants and 19 interviews with stakeholders (state officials, NGOs, experts) in both countries. The main criterion employed for the selection of the sample has been the occurrence of a temporary, repeated, and cross-border migration for economic reasons. As regards the access to interviewees, we followed snowball sampling in combination with targeted sampling based on key informants input. Fieldwork in Albania was conducted at several locations including Shkodra (Northern Albania), Tirana (Albania capital), Berat (in South), and Sarande near the border with Greece. Conducting interviews with circular and return migrants in Albania showed from a close angle the social underpinnings that frame circular migrants’ investments back home, and what drives them back to the immigration host country. Interviews with stakeholders in Albania gave a more rounded picture on the features of circular and return migrants deriving from different parts of Albania as well as information on the implementation of existing relevant policies.

In Greece, the relevant information was collected in three locations: Athens, the region of Central Macedonia, and the island of Sifnos in the Cyclades. The former was chosen since the majority of Albanians are concentrated in the Greek capital. Businesses of Albanians and ethnic Greek Albanian citizens as well as high skill workers are more likely to be concentrated there. The latter fieldwork location included features of a local labour market combining a) constructions, renovations, building maintenance and other preparatory activities for the tourist season, b) the actual tourist industry, c) the all-year-long constructions sector industry, as well as a migrant community that was attracted to the island by the booming tourism and building activity on the island during the last 15 years. The prefectures of Imathia and Pella of the Central Macedonia region that concentrate over 60% of the total of seasonal work visa applications during 2007-2010 were selected for conducting fieldwork on legal seasonal migrants working in agriculture. In addition, the proximity of this rural region with the city of Salonica offered an opportunity to investigate the geographical and labour market mobility of the circular migrants. The fieldwork was conducted by the authors in a time span of 4 months, from May to August 2010.
### Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular Migrant</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return Migrant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Sector and the Type of Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Albania</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>Domestic service</td>
<td>Own Business</td>
<td>High status job</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular Migrant</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return Migrant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Interviews with key informants in Greece and Albania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brain Gain Programme, PNUD</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Governmental Organisations (2)</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Labour</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Employment Agency</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Tirana, Faculty of Economics</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Tirana, Faculty of Law</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Interior</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Institute of Diaspora</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality of Tirana</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Commission Delegation</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher, Sussex University</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Interior (3)</td>
<td>Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Officer</td>
<td>Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Insurance Organisation</td>
<td>Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2. The types of circular migrants

Our case study in Greece and Albania identified 4 types of circular migrants according to their level of skills, the legal or irregular nature of their movement, its regulated or spontaneous character and the time length of each stay and return.

**Table 5: Typology of Circular Migration between Greece and Albania**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF CIRCULARITY</th>
<th>Type 1: Legal seasonal migration</th>
<th>Type 2: Irregular seasonal migration</th>
<th>Type 3: Legal circular migration of low-semi skilled worker</th>
<th>Type 4: Legal circular migration of semi and high-skilled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIMENSIONS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type 4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Demographic features</td>
<td>Single male migration, age 21-58</td>
<td>Single male migration, age 15-23, 35-45</td>
<td>Single male migration, age 30-55</td>
<td>Diverse - younger ones are usually Omogeneis (Greek decent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Legal status in Greece</td>
<td>Short-term/seasonal stay permit</td>
<td>Undocumented</td>
<td>2-year to 10-year stay permits</td>
<td>Indefinite stay permit or Special Identity Card of Omogeneis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Duration</td>
<td>6 months – usually from May to November</td>
<td>Longer cycles depending on age, arrival arrangement and sector of employment</td>
<td>Construction: winter season in Greece, Easter break and August in Albania. Services: more varied pattern</td>
<td>Frequent travels back and forth (almost every month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Skill level of occupation in Greece</td>
<td>Low skill</td>
<td>Low skill</td>
<td>Low or semi skilled</td>
<td>Semi-High skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Employment in Albania</td>
<td>Agricultural work on family land</td>
<td>Agricultural work on family land, work on family house or no work</td>
<td>Low-skill work or running a small business in Albania mainly in: agriculture, construction and tourism/service sectors.</td>
<td>High skill work or running their own business in Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Employment in Greece</td>
<td>Work mainly in agriculture or other seasonal employment such as herding or tourism. They usually work for more than one employers</td>
<td>Work in agriculture and construction sector or tourism.</td>
<td>Mainly in construction but also in agriculture and service sectors</td>
<td>High skill work and business/self-employment and entrepreneurship for Omogeneis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Country where migrants’ families are permanently situated</td>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Greece, Albania</td>
<td>Greece, Albania</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We shall analyze the profiles of the circular migrants configured in the aforementioned typology, the factors that favour or stop each type of circular migration and the scope of spontaneous vs state-managed forms of circularity with a view to understanding the prospects of this circularity for the parties involved (the migrant, the employer, the host country and the country of origin).

**Type 1: Legal Seasonal Migration**
The first type of circular migration is a side effect deriving from the seasonal metaklisi procedure that is in place. The policy of seasonal invitation of a foreign worker has unintentionally set a framework in which circular migration patterns occur. How safe is it, though, to argue that Albanian migrants coming to Greece seasonally under the system of foreign worker invitation (as it is stipulated in article 16 of L.3386/2005 and its amendment of L.12311/2008) are circular migrants? Some statistical evidence indeed exists: nearly half of the 65,462 registered individuals that applied for a seasonal work permit during the period 2001-2011 have applied for such a permit more than once in Greek municipalities. The rate of the repeated seasonal migration under the system of metaklisi might be much higher considering the fact that applications’ data prior to 2008 were not efficiently registered in the municipalities (Maroukis & Gemi 2011).

Most of the qualitative interviews with migrants conducted in the region indicate that the people working seasonally in Greece under the system of foreign worker invitation usually go back in order to be with their family and at the same time help towards the family business (in most cases it is a farm). The very fact that they have to leave after 6 months of stay in Greece ‘pushes’ them to build a life and therefore invest back home. They return to Greece every year usually at the beginning of May and stay until October/November.

**Type 2: Irregular Seasonal Migration**
The second type of circular migration (irregular circular) is generally characterized by

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3 Interestingly, during the last couple of years seasonal migrants needed to have their passport stamped before the 6 months ran out in order to re-apply the following year (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). This seems to be an efficient control mechanism for the detection and, therefore, the prevention of seasonal visa overstays.
longer cycles than the other types; yet it depends on age, arrival arrangement and sector of employment. There are two kinds of irregular migrants that present elements of circularity. The first involves young Albanians, often under 21 years old, coming irregularly in Greece to work in the fields of Central Macedonia and other areas of Northern Greece. There are also young Albanians over 21 years old that come to Greece for seasonal work in the fields but lack the kin networks that would assure them a metaklisi visa. By and large, there is no long-term plan behind their irregular movements between Albania and Greece. They come to work in Greece in order to get by without burdening their parents.

The second kind of irregular seasonal migrant regards migrants like R, who have been coming to Greece for more than a decade but cannot come through a legal avenue. Some of them are people who were deported to Albania and were registered in the ‘list of undesirables’ to whom the entry to the country is forbidden for a period of 5 years.

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

Type 3: Legal circular migration of low-semi skilled worker
The 2-year and 10-year long migrant permit holders working in low-skill jobs in Greece constitute a spontaneous circular migration. Albanian circular migrants of this third type working in the construction sector usually stay in Albania from December to February/March, working until July in Greece possibly with a break during Easter, then return back to Albania in August, and finally come to work between September and November in Greece. Most Albanians of this category follow more or less this cycle because their main work is in Greece and their work back home (agricultural
work) takes place in certain fixed times over the year. The cycles of Albanian migrant workers in the service sector in Greece are more varied. This is mainly due to the different cycles that characterize their diverse entrepreneurial activities in Albania and their work in Greece.

The circular migrants working mainly in the construction sector are people who have lived or live with their families in Greece. They work in Greece in order to supplement the income earned in Albania and/or fund their investment there and at the same time maintain the bonds that are formed from life in the host country. Their work often oscillates between the agricultural and the construction sector. So they also work informally (usually registered with OGA and work in constructions sector).

The circular migrants working in the service sector in Greece take different entrepreneurial paths in Albania from the construction sector workers. They rely on family too, yet they tend to invest more in new businesses rather than existing ones. Apart from the different ways their families experienced migration (more family reunification than single male migration), the kind of their investments in Albania is also related to the specificities of their work in Greece.

These circular migrants are not temporary migrants. They have made investments in Greece. The social insurance contributions they have paid towards their pension for at least 10 years now is something that cannot be overlooked. Stepping down from the stay permit system and using instead the visa-free regime in order to enter and work in Greece when the opportunity comes up is not an ‘easy-to-take’ option that they would gladly switch to.

E., an EDTO permit holder, in 2004, after 13 years of living in Greece and working as a cleaner, opened with her husband a restaurant and a rooms-to-rent business in an Albanian tourist destination and returned to Albania. Her children could not adapt to the Albanian reality and were persistently begging her to come back to Greece. In 2007 she returned to Greece with her children. Her husband lives permanently in Albania in order to keep running the restaurant and she works as a cleaner in Greece in the winter doing regular visits to Albania; in the summer season she returns to Albania with her children to run her tourist business. Family migration and reunification involves integration in the host society on more complex levels.

4 The case of G, a builder with a 2 year long stay permit, is unique since he does the same work in both countries and he goes to Albania from 3 to 6 times per year. “I go when I don’t have work here [in Greece]. Now for example I will leave again on the 26th of June. I will have the mobile phone open all the time….i will be waiting phone calls to tell me to come for work” (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).
and thus leads to more durable circular patterns compared to single male migration.

Type 4: Legal circular migration of semi- and high-skilled workers
This type concerns migrants with higher educational backgrounds coming from various parts of the country of origin. Higher education is either an ‘import’ from Albania or pursued in Greece.

For the case of ethnic Greek Albanians, their ethnic origin and related privileged legal status has been a key factor in their entrepreneurial success and its circular character. Indicative is the fact that most of the circular movements of ethnic Greek Albanians identified in the case study commence almost at the same time with their settling down in the host country. It is no coincidence that many studies find that ethnic Greek Albanians have a high incidence of self-employment and entrepreneurship among the wider community of migrants from Albania (Lyberaki & Maroukis, 2005; Maroukis, 2009). As regards ethnic Albanians, high skilled work in Greece is reached for these migrants both at the onset as well as after going through a series of low status jobs.

Circular migration is necessary for these high skill circular migrants in keeping employment connections with Albania and following up the types of investment made there. F’s journalist work in Greece and Albania and I’s art collaborations involve 8 to 10 visits per year to Albania for work purposes. Furthermore, when it comes to the opening of a business with its own premises it is clear that it needs to be an enterprise for two partners.
3. Legal, institutional and social factors which favour/hinder circular migration between Greece and Albania

Albanian circular migration to Greece is a phenomenon that developed spontaneously and, to a certain extent, irrespectively of/ independently from state policies on either side of the Greek-Albanian border.

To start with, Greece does not provide an appropriate legal framework that would favour a circular migration flow. The existing law in force, L.3386/2005, does not cater for the eventuality of circular migration. Article 16 on seasonal invitation of a foreign worker treats this type of migration as a one-off activity not likely to be repeated since there is no provision for the regular renewal of the relevant permit. Interestingly, in Italy employers could apply for three-year seasonal work permits for seasonal migrant workers who were employed on quota-based seasonal work permits for two consecutive years under law no. 40/1998. Research in early 2000s indicated that this measure had little resonance amongst seasonal migrant workers (Censis, 2002; Devitt, 2011). The same measure would probably have different results in Greece where the seasonal invitation system already has a momentum in the local labour markets of rural Macedonia, and at a time where migrants are unemployed for most part of the year and cannot bear the living costs in Greece.

On the other hand, prospective migrants have to commit to the social and cultural capital at home and at the host country in order to make use of the entry channel of seasonal foreign worker invitation. Access to the relevant seasonal visa has been conditioned, on the one hand, by the practices and structures of local labour markets and, on the other, by phenomena of corruption in Greek consulates in Albania at the initial and the final stages of the application process respectively.

For example, a common practice witnessed by key informants has been the payment of 250-500 euros to the employer (mostly via an Albanian middle-man) so that he declares the name of the prospective seasonal migrant in his nominal request to the Region (Perifereia). The other option is for one to maintain strong social ties with immigrants and/or employers in Greece. Such is the case where the prospective seasonal worker has a family/friendship connection with a mediator Albanian worker who in turn has a good reputation within the local rural community and is in a

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5 The last law in force
position to ask local employers to put another name down on the list to Perifereia as a favour (Maroukis & Gemi, 2011). These informal arrangements in local labour markets find fertile ground to grow because there is no mechanism to check what part of the land property declared in the farmer’s tax declaration is cultivated other than the farmer’s affirmation and the OGA (Agricultural Insurance Organisation) correspondent’s limited controls. Indeed, several of our key informants argued that phenomena of employers putting down the names of, say, 10 workers when they actually need 3 (on the second level of nominal requests to the Perifereia) are widespread in the Greek countryside.

These informal work arrangements between prospective migrants, immigrant residents and employers that come into play for the acquisition of the seasonal worker invitation visa indicate that the social capital accumulated between and within migrant groups and employers in local labour markets often bends external legal rules on employment and state policies and controls the migrants’ access to these markets.

Once in Greece, the seasonal invitation workers’ rights are in fact curtailed to the minimum. The social contributions paid by the employer and the Greek state for each worker theoretically entitle the latter to health care. However, OGA is eligible to issue health booklets for the seasonally invited migrants only after the 6 months that they are supposed to be working in Greece (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). This means that these migrants cannot make use of their social security contributions in practice. Nevertheless, this has not really affected their decision to migrate again and again over the years in the same way. Opportunities for work and integration in local labour markets weigh more in their life plans than state-awarded rights.

Paying towards one’s pension is not an option in the case of the seasonal foreign worker invitation scheme. Social contributions only relate to health care. This is likely to pose problems in the future for the migrants involved, yet again it made no difference so far to their decision to move back and forth every year. This is related to the fact that many usually have some private savings on the side or to the younger age of many migrants using the seasonal foreign worker invitation channel.

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6 The OGA correspondent is actually a civil servant working in the municipality, working as an inspector for employment in agriculture on top of every other job relevant to his position in the municipality. The number of OGA correspondents is also small since they are appointed by the Region (Perifereia) and not by the Prefecture (Nomo). These structural features of the correspondent limit his inspecting availability and capacity (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).
Albanian circular migration has benefited significantly from regularisation programs and other laws in place (such as the privileged treatment of the Albanian citizens with Greek ethnic origin) that de facto facilitate frequent circular movement. This is evident in that a significant segment of the Albanian circular migration to Greece regards long-term stay permit holders. Long term stay permits give not only long term but also short stay options to their holders. Having the option to move becomes particularly significant in times of economic depression and high unemployment as the one that Greece is going through since late 2009. As an unemployed construction sector worker respondent in our case study indicatively said, it is easier to go back to Albania when you have assured the return to Greece: “now I’m waiting to get the 10-year long permit, then I will go back [to Albania] and will be coming here [Greece] whenever work comes up” (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).

Yet being attached to a 2-year long permit makes circularity difficult to maintain in the long term. After more than a decade of haggling with employers for working days (OGA) and social insurance stamps (IKA) for the renewal of stay permits and while being on the brink of losing their legal residence status, several Albanian circular migrant interviewees were looking for self-employment options in order to return to Albania at the time of the interview (Maroukis & Gemi, 2011). Journalist sources, citing data provided by Ministry of interior, refers to about 130.000 immigrant workers losing their stay permits because they were not able to secure the required number of social insurance stamps (IKA) in order to renew their documents in Greece.

The positive steps made in recent legislation with regard to legal migrants that are settled down to Greece are expected to have a positive spill-over effect on circularity in the long term. The mobility prospects of migrants with 2 year long stay permits can benefit from the recent introduction of a transparent process of citizenship acquisition to immigrants and their children who have been born or finished their

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7 The main legislation regulating Greek immigration policy is the L. 3386/05, which in 2009 was amended by L. 3801/09, which introduced more favourable provisions for family reunification of immigrants, long-term residents, etc.

8 Up to 2009 migrant workers insured with OGA were supposed to bring in employer affirmations proving 150 days of work per year for the renewal of their permits. The resulting illegal market of working days affirmations from employers and certificates from OGA correspondents forced the authorities to change the procedure in 2009 and get rid of the employer’s involvement. Until then many construction workers who were initially registered in their stay permits as agricultural workers would find farmers that affirmed the working days required either through actual work on the farm when necessary or by paying the Greek farmer a certain sum (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).

9 Ελευθεροτυπία, 2.1.2010 “Δικαίωμα στη ζωή μ’ ανοιχτά χαρτιά” written by Ioanna Sotirchou, see: [http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=117071](http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=117071). See also «Η οικονομική κρίση οδήγησε οι μετανάστες… στη μετανάστευση», 23/08/2010
education in Greece (L.3838/2010). Crucially through this legislation parents of children who qualify for naturalisation (being born in Greece or having attended Greek education for at least 6 years, with parents residing legally in Greece for 5 years) are able to obtain a renewable 5 year stay and work permit as parents of Greek citizens.

Interestingly, the risk of lapsing into illegality for women holders of stay permits for family reunification whose husbands lose their jobs and therefore their chances to renew stay permits is largely moderated by the following legal provisions according to which: migrant holders of a family reunification permit may switch after 5 years to a self-contained (aftotelous) stay permit (art.60 L.3386/2005 modified by art.45 L.3731/2008), while 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). At the same time the introduction of “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 offers a pathway to legalise their so far undeclared work. These legal developments help maintain legality and, depending on the household strategies, the option of circular migration at a difficult time when all the more migrant women become the ‘breadwinners’ of their households working mostly as undeclared carers and cleaners in private homes.

Nevertheless, in Greece of austerity the fact remains that it is difficult for Albanian migrants to find work, demonstrate/purchase the social security contributions required for stay permit renewals, and thus secure their chances to circulate between Greece and Albania for work purposes (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011: 24). According to Labour Force Survey data, the migrant population in Greece is decreasing from early 2010 onwards for the first time in the last 20 years (Triandafyllidou & Maroufof, 2011). In 2011, more than half a year after the...
completion of the field research, legality mainly feeds return to Albania and leaves the option to come back open.

Looking back to Albania is not only a development of the last couple of years and should not be interpreted as the result of a failed integration. Return flows of Albanian emigrants to Greece are recorded already during the period 2001-2004 and what starts as a return migration may turn into circular as various literature (Labrianidis & Hatziprokipoiou 2005, Labrianidis & Kazazi 2006, Vadean & Piracha 2009), including our case study, indicates.

Unemployment had reached a considerable share of Albanian migrant households since 2009 and the shrinking of the construction sector in Greece and, as mentioned above, it re-opened the road to return\textsuperscript{14}. Literature suggests, however, that returnees of the last decade tend to represent immigration stories of success rather than failure (Labrianidis & Kazazi, 2006; Labrianidis & Hatziprokipoiou 2005, Germenji & Milo 2009). Vadean and Piracha (2009) find that failed migration may act as a deterrent for future migration movements while past positive migration experience affects circular [and return] migration [alike]. The successful integration of Albanians in Greece that opened the paths of return and/or circularity some years ago neither followed a linear trajectory nor was necessarily positive. Albanians’ social integration in Greece may be lately ‘celebrated’ (mostly in comparison with the phenotypically and religiously different migrant arrivals in Greece during the last five years) yet it has been carved through xenophobic reactions, discrimination and rejection in all levels of encounter with Greek society (a similar development occurred in Italy as Nicola Mai explains in his chapter). The high self-employment patterns of Albanian returnees (Labrianidis & Hatziprokipoiou 2005) and circular migrants (this study), their commitment to ‘build something of their own’ and the work ethic acquired in Greece and experimented in Albania are tinted by negative and positive immigration experiences alike.

Looking at Albania, the circular connections that migrants establish between their country of origin and the host country need infrastructures for reintegration of

\textsuperscript{14} In 2009 the number of unemployed Greeks rose about 30\% over the previous year, while the number of unemployed foreigners doubled with foreigners comprising 9.8\% of employment and 10.5\% of unemployment (SOPEMI 2010).
people, ideas and capital alike. As G puts it, referring to capital investment from circular migrants.

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

There are no re-integration policies in place for circular migrants accounted for by the Greek side. Return migration (which often is the prelude to circular and repeat migration) has been traditionally viewed by Greece mainly in relation to forced return (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). When it comes to the opening of a business or trade between the two countries, indeed, a laissez-passer provided by the host country for the individual immigrant is only one condition among many. The free movement of goods, the taxation of businesses and the banking system in the country of origin are equally if not more significant issues that affect the re-entry of the circular migrant as an economic actor back home. The main problem of the mainly medium-small businesses of return and circular migrants is indeed the restricted access to bank loans and the Albanian customs offices corruption when imports are involved (Maroukis & Gemi, 2011).

The main conduit, however, that makes circular migration a reality is family. The maintenance of social and family networks at both ends seems to be a prerequisite for the successful return (Labrianidis & Kazazi, 2006) and the circularity prospects of the migrant. Being close to an ageing parent, to a partner and/or children, to extended family and friends is not only a pulling factor but also the main support infrastructure for people to both return and work between the countries.

As is the case in Italy (Devitt, 2011), immigrants in Greece have been obliged to be self-reliant, which often translates to family-reliant for the case of Albanians, due to low wages (one of the lowest annual average wages, based on purchasing power parity, in Europe according to OECD, 2011) and a weak welfare state with a traditional focus on pensions (Ferrera, 2006; Sakellaropoulos ed 1999). The economic recession accelerated this process and many people drew on family and social networks to pursue work opportunities back home while remaining formally resident in Greece. In the words of a builder who retained connections with friends and family in Albania while he was settled in Greece:
“It is the last 2 years that I go back and forth for work. The times before that, I used to go only to see the family. Here work started to dry up and I needed to get prepared for there as well. So that we are not out of work there too (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).

When it comes to the perpetuation of high skill university employment in both countries, one should note the existence of a scholarship of the Albanian Ministry of Education, named “fondi i ekselences” for graduates that wish to proceed with postgraduate courses abroad. There is also the Brain Gain Programme that provides financial incentives to members of the Albanian diaspora who return to Albania and find employment in public administration after a competitive call.

Next to high skill circular migrants, Albanian reintegration policies need to pay probably even more attention to the other more numerous categories of low- and medium- skill circular migrants. They are bearers of small-scale capital and skills and should be supported in order to change Albania’s neglected rural landscape, which is a key variable towards unlocking the country’s development potential. What is needed though is that these migrants reach out to and ‘be reached’ by Regional Labour Offices and NGOs working on reintegration of returnees on the local level, and that the Labour Offices provide consultation that corresponds to the character and the needs of the Albanian market broken down by locality and sector.

Albanian policy stakeholders need to realize that loans, basic infrastructure, consultation and information services and vocational training are equally crucial to bigger and smaller migrant investors that return or go back and forth in urban and rural areas.

All in all, years after the bilateral agreement on seasonal labour between Greece and Albania, the two countries do not seem ready to benefit from the realities 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.
4. **Is circularity good and for whom?**

So far in our analysis, we have distinguished between groups of people who move between Greece and Albania, mapped out policies and legal rules that are difficult to follow up by local societies creating at times problems to circular migrants, and observed various profiteering groups in between. Is circularity good though and for whom? At this point, we shall analyse the effects of circular migration on the individual level of the circular migrant, and on the level of the host and source economy. As we shall see, the positive effects of circular migration are skewed.

The main benefit for low skill circular migrants working in the constructions and/or agricultural and/or the service sector is that they have earned a living all these years and sustained their family back home (e.g. built houses, invested in their family farm). Depending on their age, their immersion in local labour markets in Greece and the legality of their circular movements, they build a viable way of earning a living that their family can rely on and their return/retirement can be cushioned against.

The majority of the circular migrants working under seasonal metaklisi in Greece come from rural areas of southern and central Albania. Some maintain more long-term investment plans when in Albania involving the purchase of agricultural equipment like tractors or other infrastructure for their land holdings, while others just do enough to get on by. The problem for them is that they cannot make use of their health insurance payments in practice in the host country even though positive steps have been made in this direction by OGA. Secondly, they do not have the option to pay in pension contributions for half of their working life spent in Greece.

Young Albanians, age 16-20 years old, coming irregularly to Northern Greece to work in the fields or other Albanian youths up to 25 years old using the seasonal worker invitation channel following the steps of their fathers are other sub-categories identified in our research. For them moving between Albania and Greece is an easy way to make some money without burdening their parents and most of them do not have any particular investment plans ahead; at the same time, this survival strategy leads them deeper into the trap of inertia, since it neither pushes them forward to migrate for good nor forces them to invest in some activity at home. On the other hand, there are middle-aged Albanian migrants circulating irregularly from Albania to Greece that could not get a stay permit during the past regularization programs in Greece and still need to cover their families’ pressing financial needs. When back to
Albania, they work on the family farm or are unemployed.

“now if I work 5-6-7 months here, I will go back to Albania; If I find work there [in his village next to Berat] ok, if not I will go to the village up above in order to plant olive trees, raisins. But this requires money now. If I need money, again back to Greece” (Maroukis & Gemi, 2011).

Circularity has helped Albanian migrants that are in possession of a 2- or 10-year long stay permit in the host country (mainly constructions and services workers) adapt work around the demands of their family life and periods of unemployment in either country.

Several legal migrants that had been living with their families in Greece returned or were about to return to Albania at the time of the interview, either because of family obligations, an opportunity to run a business of their own back home, and/or unemployment and slowing down of work activities in the host country. Our case study indicated that having worked in Greece already helps build prospects for having work in Albania.

“In Albania I have friends that tell me ‘come so that we make a group and work there in constructions with 20-25.000 lek daily earnings. There I’m god. First, they ask you if you have worked in Greece. If you say yes, they employ you at that very moment without anyone intervening and vouching for you’” (Maroukis & Gemi, 2011).

Maintaining an employment relationship in the destination country while running a business in the country of origin proves crucial in order to support the latter. Indicative is the case of E. who runs an internet café in the premises of the University of Tirana Monday to Thursday, spending his Friday and weekends in Athens suburbs working as a waiter in a fish-tavern.

“I don’t know [if I will keep going back and forth]. It depends on work. If work goes really well in Tirana I will not be able to come as I do now. Now though that work is less [the interview was taken in late June at the end of the academic year] the money I earn in the fish-tavern is essential” (Maroukis & Gemi, 2011).
Retaining their stay permit in Greece and going back to Albania while keeping in touch with local and co-national employers and colleagues in Greece seems to be the desired strategy of Albanian immigrants today who cannot afford to live in the country. Apparently circular migration patterns may not only help ameliorate economic prospects in the country of origin but also offer an alternative to hardships encountered in the host country.

Of course the significance of circularity depends on the type of work involved. As Julie Vullnetari argues “there are types of employment which can allow for, and even benefit from, circularity, whereas there are others for which a constant physical presence at work throughout is a must” (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).

Nevertheless, stay permit holder circular migrants actually face difficulties in renewing their stay permits due to unemployment and financial difficulties in Greece. They will not be able to move as often as they need for their work between the two countries; the visa liberalization between EU and Albania, in force since January 2011, will only help short-term and seasonal informal work (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). Any obstacles to the legal circularity of Albanian migrants because of the loss of stay permits are not in the interest of the expenditure and revenue balance of Greek insurance funds. One needs to keep in mind that Albanians compose more than half of Greece’s total legal immigrant population and that a certain number of them already moved and is expected to move back to Albania in the coming years. Greece will lose the social security contributions from an important segment of its workforce should these persons maintain contact with the Greek labour market (through the visa liberalization regime) without having a legal right to work.

The social and economic integration of Albanian migrant workers in Greek local labour markets would be another loss for Greek economy. The just-in-time availability of trustworthy labour hands has been the main advantage of Albanian circular workers in Greek agriculture for years. Albanian construction and agricultural sector workers, under seasonal or long term permits, have been people always on-call that Greek employers have relied upon.

As regards the effects of circular migration back to the country of origin, they have far from gained their full potential.

Circular migration for work purposes so far has helped the majority of migrants involved in this orbit sustain their families, maintain and at times expand their agricultural activities and/or open a small business. Overall our study shows that
that majority of (low- and medium- skill) circular migrants generally do not disentangle from a survival-led consumption feeding construction and imports into a production-orientated pattern when situated in Albania.

The circular migrants that are likely to bring more capital and skills back to their country of origin are legal migrants that spontaneously circulate between the two countries (types 3 and 4). The legal seasonal migrants that come to work through the relevant bilateral labour agreement for 6 months every year and then return back home (type 1) tend to bring some capital often invested in their agricultural land holdings, building or renovating a family house/flat, or merely fund their living expenses in Albania through their labour in Greece. The irregular circular migrants’ (type 2) work in Greece is usually just enough to make ends meet in Albania. Not working or investing in some entrepreneurial activity when ‘back home’ can have devastating effects on local societies in the country of origin. Buying consumer or durable goods for their homes and help their families survive is what most Albanian circular migrants employed in low-skill jobs in Greece do. However, the consumption patterns that they introduce to their village create phenomena of relative deprivation to other families, pushing more people to emigrate. Indeed, this seems to be the case with younger generations of Albanians from rural parts of Albania that start doing what their parents did.

5. Concluding remarks
We shall describe in this concluding section in a nutshell the contribution of the case study of Albanian circular migrants to Greece discussed in this chapter to our understanding of the phenomenon of circular migration. Is circular migration after all a matter of migration policy and geography? Is the impact that circular migration may yield for the source and origin country primarily a product of legal regulations and geographical limitations influencing the control over flows of people? Or is it down to the social process and policy through which the migrant (transnational) household integrates and re-integrates in local labour markets?

Geography plays a certain role. As distance sets the tone in the case of Moroccan migrants living with their families in Italy who find it more difficult to save and travel back home less often (Devitt, 2011), the case of Albanians in Greece
indicates that the proximity of origin country unravels more options for circular migration patterns.

Legality gives the option to move. The stronger the legal status and the less the restrictions on the duration of time spent abroad the more likely immigrants are to engage in circularity. However, migration policy and legal restrictions to movement do not suffice in explaining why some migrants move back and forth rather than establish themselves in the country of immigration. We have seen that the system of seasonal invitation of foreign workers in agriculture may oblige the workers it involves to build their life back home but it is the social dynamics developed in local labour markets that assure their return to Greece every year. The role of migration policy is even more limited when called to explain the shaping of the other more spontaneous forms of circular migration encountered. We have seen that the integration trajectories of Albanians in the immigration country, the social and technical skills obtained through immersion in labour markets and localities with different characteristics, the family ties maintained in the place of origin and developed in the host context all set different patterns of return and circularity when juxtaposed with the objective realities of a host and origin country with weak welfare states, traditionally characterised by informal economic activity and corruption and, lately in the case of Greece, high unemployment.

Whether a new labour agreement or legislation aiming to regulate the circular flow between the two countries would offer added-value in the above described flow of people and capital is debatable. Maybe policy efforts would be more effective if they addressed the de facto circular flows of people as opportunities carrying skills, social and economic capital; not under an overarching target of controlling how many go in and out but rather what they bring in or take out and how.
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