

Integration a few kilometres away from the motherland: Albanians' internal migration, settlement and voluntary return in Epirus and the Ionian Islands in Greece

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the interconnection between internal migration in Greece, integration and voluntary return prospects of Albanians currently living in Epirus and the Ionian Islands. It is based on field research conducted during 2008 among immigrants who live in Ioannina, Preveza, Arta and Kerkyra. The study highlights the different types of internal trajectories that migrants had follow before settling in the neighbouring areas of Greece, just a few kilometres away from their homeland. Migrant's current economic integration and some of the socio-economic barriers they face are discussed and linked to their will to return permanently to Albania. Internal mobility is found to be a preceding step in search for integration; integration, in turn, acts as a counterbalance to both further internal movement and voluntary return prospects, at least for the next foreseeable years.

Keywords: Albanian migration, internal migration, integration, return, Epirus, the Ionian Islands, Greece.

Introduction

Southern European localities have attracted the scientific interest of many international migration scholars, as they have become migrant receiving destinations. This is also the case for Greece, a country that has received a significant wave of the Albanian exodus since 1990. Between 1991 and 2001, migrants living in the country had an enormous increase and, nowadays, they consist more than 10 per cent of the Greek population. According to recent estimates, Albanians are more than 600.000 and correspond to 60 per cent of all migrants in the 13 Greek regions (King *et al.*, 1997; Fakiolas and King 1998; King, 2000; Labrianidis *et al.*, 2004; IMEPO, 2006).

The reasons why Albanians choose Greece and their integration within different spatial contexts, from small villages to big cities, have been widely examined. The present paper offers a contribution in an issue that still remains under-covered; this has to do with the interconnection between Albanian internal migration in Greece and the decision to settle in urban areas in border regions close to motherland. The latter decision is examined in terms of the current socio-spatial integration of Albanians, and the way integration affects voluntary return intentions. Internal migration within Albania is out of

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the paper's scope. Comparing its primary material with previous studies in the field, the research sheds light on the differences between integration in urban and rural areas of border regions (Vullnetari, 2007).

The primary data of the study has been collected through the use of an appropriate questionnaire addressed to Albanian immigrants who live in four cities in the regions of Epirus and the Ionian Islands in Northwestern Greece, namely the cities of Ioannina, Preveza and Arta in Epirus and the city of Kerkyra on the island of Corfu. The aim of the study is:

- To link Albanians arrival in Greece with internal migration by exploring the main migrants' trajectories within the host country, thereby revealing the different spatial forms of the migratory process.
- To discuss immigrants' economic and social integration and connect assimilation in border regions with the internal routes previously followed and the voluntary return prospects.

The paper is structured as follows: at first it presents a brief theoretical inquiry on the interconnections of internal and international migration with integration and return. Next, the methodology of the field research and the basic findings concerning the selected sample's internal trajectories and economic and social profile, are outlined. Issues of integration, home ownership, return as well as similarities and differences between the sample and rural border areas are examined. Finally, a concluding section with a policy remark is presented.

Albanian immigrants in Europe and Greece: Linking internal migration to integration and voluntary return

Internal migration and integration of international migrants into the hosting economies

King *et al.* (2008) identify the distinction between internal and international migration as one of the main dichotomies in the field of migration studies. They argue that narrowing the theoretical and empirical gap between these two forms of migration is a promising field of inquiry for migration scholars. In the level of theory, studies of migrant integration and others such as the migration- development nexus, hold such a bridging potential. Despite their persisting differences, both internal and international migration are in many cases related to the same factors (e.g. unequal socio-productive and labour structures across different localities), while they are often complementary. As widely acknowledged, both types of migration are in various practical ways interconnected, as in cases when international migration is followed by a subsequent internal migration in the host country. This is also the case explored in this paper, which gives particular attention to the internal mobility of Albanians in Greece. In any case, such unified analysis can lead to integrated theorizations of contemporary migration that are spatially-sensitive and encompass

geographical concepts such as place, scale and mobility across space (Samers, 2010).

Integration should be part and parcel of such holistic theorizations. Following Hatziprokopiou (2003) and Iosifides *et al.* (2007), the paper understands 'integration' as a process related to the conditions under which Albanian immigrants become gradually accepted and socio-spatially incorporated in the host society. Integration is thus connected to the successive steps that define a 'positive' migratory experience for immigrants who have largely avoided social marginalisation, and have accomplished their central expectations in the host country. Under such a definition, parallel trends of social, labour and institutional exclusion that unavoidably exist are not of a definitive character. Furthermore, integration is understood within a framework of mutual obligations and rights between the immigrants and the receiving country. Central features and socio-economic characteristics of the host economy facilitating/ discouraging the integration process that have been widely examined, are: a) pre-existing ethnic and race relations with the incoming groups, b) the characteristics of the local labour market and job availability, and c) official policies and regulating mechanisms for immigration and migrant labourers. Another feature that has attracted scientific interest is the changing nature of international boundaries that blurs the distinction between internal and international migration (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005; Cavounidis, 2006).

Integration and upward social mobility should have a close, yet largely under-researched, relationship with internal migration in the host society. Factors that favour the integration of Albanians into European countries (Mai *et al.*, 2005; Iosifides *et al.*, 2007), such as good working and living conditions (e.g. housing and urban issues, health and social services, education) act as 'regulators' of the desire of migrants to move internally, in search of more promising local conditions and instead of stay in a locality and contribute to the prosperity of both their household and the host economy. As far as the process of gradual integration is accompanied by social tensions while the host economies retain an ambiguous attitude towards the immigrants, there is not an easily identifiable relationship between integration and internal movements. For example, although the two processes seem to be mutually exclusive, there are cases where prosperity and upward mobility is accompanied by inter-regional migration (King *et al.*, 2008).

Integration and voluntary return

Adding return migration to the international-then-internal migration pathway further complicates the analysis. Certain studies have focused on groups of emigrants who worked abroad for a period of time in order to collect a satisfactory amount of money and then returned to start their own business in Albania. Although relevant literature does not provide precise numbers of returnees and their trajectories within the host and sending country, it does examine many other elements of the return process, as well as profiles of re-

turnees (Kilic *et al.*, 2007: 10, 22; Vadean and Piracha, 2009; Germenji and Milo, 2009). As highlighted, immigrants 'tend to return to their country of origin after all' where they often start small family firms, where trusted and willing to work family members are employed (Labrianidis and Lyberaki, 2001; Baldwin-Edwards, 2004). This return is conceived as the outcome of a 'zero-sum migratory game' that benefits both the Albanians and the natives (Labrianidis and Lyberaki, 2004; Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou, 2005). Labrianidis and Kazazi (2006), referring to return migrants from Greece and Italy claimed that these return migrants create an urbanization wave within the country as they tend to settle in cities, preferably close to the villages of their origin or in Tirana (cf. Agorastakis and Sidiropoulos, 2007).

Nicholson (2004) observes that in the 1990s migrants tended to leave without their families and periodically return in Albania every few months in order to assist their family, serve in the army or rest, until a new migration decision producing internal mobility in the host country was taken. In other cases, when a residence permit and relative economic prosperity were already achieved, return was on holidays and to-and-fro movements were mostly between the host and the sending locality. Other studies demonstrate emerging type of emigrant seeking for permanent settlement and integration rather than an occasional stay or internal mobility in the host country. Despite the above, after two decades of Albanians' massive migration, there is no clear picture regarding the size of return migration, the trends to return (permanently or temporarily) in Albania, nor are there indications of important incoming investments based on the capitals accumulated from the host economies (Barjaba, 2000; Vullnetari, 2007; King and Vullnetari, 2009).

Methodological note

During the field research, that was conducted between July and September 2008, 124 mixed type questionnaires (with open- and close-ended questions) were completed by migrants, living and working in the urban areas under study (Gialis, 2011). Migrants were questioned by the research team at the places where they live or frequent. Thus, biased answers related to the presence of employers or natives were hopefully avoided. The questionnaire consisted of 28 questions divided into five sections (*demographic characteristics, education and employment, reasons for migrating to Greece and the study area, voluntary return and views and bonds related to both the host and the sending economy*). Choosing a random sample of immigrants was rather difficult as there is no complete record of the Albanians living in the study cities. This is a common problem that all similar studies in Southern European localities, where large populations of non-registered migrants live, face (cf. Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou, 2005). Consequently, the *snowball sampling process*, a non-probability method ensuring

random transition from one immigrant to another, following mutual referrals, was chosen (Cornelius, 1982)¹.

The questioned migrants were representatives of 124 households with a total of 447 members on an aggregate level (3.6 persons per household as compared to 2.4 for the population of the whole country). As far as its geographic distribution is concerned, the questionnaire was mainly completed by immigrants living in the two cities that are very close to the sending economy (Ioannina 46.8 per cent, Kerkyra 33.9 per cent) and secondarily in the two more distant ones (Preveza and Arta 19.3 per cent in total)².

Nearly two out of three (64.5 per cent) among the interviewees were males, while the rest were women. This share is in line with the findings of the 2001 Census and other local studies which reveal that the percentage of male Albanians ranges between 57 and 65 across the municipalities of Epirus and the Ionian Islands (Dellaris, 2008). Most respondents were married (77.4 per cent) and they were at a working age; indicatively 55 per cent were aged 31 to 45. This distribution is in accordance with the general demographic profile of the Albanians in Greece which mostly belong to young- or middle- age groups and live in larger families when compared to the Greek population (Baldwin-Edwards 2004).

Internal migration, integration and return for Albanians in Epirus and Ionian Islands

Connecting international and internal migration to integration

Data concerning the first entrance year highlight that 82.3 per cent emigrated during the 90's while 17.7 per cent entered the country after the year 2000. The post-90s migratory flow appears more intense in the mainland, especially in Ioannina, as compared to the city of Kerkyra.

The study of Albanians internal migration after arrival in Greece reveals that two groups should be distinguished: the prevailing one of immigrants who initially dispersed throughout Greece, and a smaller consisted of those

¹ The research team implemented the method in a way that reduced possible bias. For example, migrants questioned at the first round of the research were asked to exclude their relatives when recommending the researcher to other Albanians, while test interviews were conducted and the research team was properly trained in order to minimize migrants' distrust.

² Ioannina is the capital while Preveza and Arta are the next two biggest cities in the region of Epirus; almost all other cities there are small towns with less than 10.000 inhabitants. Kerkyra, the capital city of Ionian Islands is the only insular city very close to the Greek-Albanian border. All four cities hold a population of 164.092 individuals in total (30.4% of the population in both regions) and they are the main urban agglomerations found in the study area, each one located no more than 90 kilometers far from the Greek-Albanian border line. Certain differentiations from the national profile are observed in the study regions, as far as immigrants' ethnicity is concerned. Epirus presents the highest homogeneity among Greek regions: 86.4 per cent of migrants in the area are Albanians. This applies to some extent to the Ionian Islands which are among the four top-rated regions regarding the homogeneity of immigrants' origin (Dellaris, 2008; Fakiolas and King, 1998; Baldwin-Edwards, 2004; IMEPO, 2008).

who temporarily resided in the study areas since their first entry in Greece (*see relative answer in Table 1*). Those who have not been in another city before have a higher presence in Kerkyra while they are most coming from Southern Albania. The booming, until recently, local tourist economy and the proximity to Sarande and other Southern areas in Albania explains this higher presence.

Table 1. Migrants' answers in relation to key integration, internal migration and return migration questions

	Yes	No	Possibly*	No reply	Total
Holding a work and residence permit?	94.2%	3.2%	-	2.6%	100%
Paid above the minimum wage agreement?*	41.9%	53.3%	-	4.8%	100%
Unemployed?	3.2%	94.6%	-	2.2%	100%
Working atypically or informally?	67.5%	27.4%	-	5.1%	100%
Own a private house in Greece?	22.6%	77.4%	-	0.0%	100%
Own a private house in Albania?	72.6%	25.8%	-	1.6%	100%
Settled in another Greek city before?	53.9%	34.4%	-	9.7%	100%
Migrate to another region in the future?	13.8%**	70.1%	4.8%	11.3%	100%
Wish to return?	35.5%	54.8%	8.1%	1.6%	100%
Wish to return?***	36.4%	37.6%	26.0%	0.0%	100%

(*) *A minimum salary of about 700 Euros according to Greek regulations and official agreements.*

(**) *Of which, 12.2% concerns regions in Greece while 1.6% the USA*

(***) *Among the migrants that wish to migrate in another region in the future*

Source: Author's field research in the study cities in 2008.

Among the immigrants that have been in another city/ locality before, four types of internal mobility can be identified. These distinct types are presented below and correspond to 27 per cent, 15.3 per cent, 38.4 per cent and 23.1 per cent of the total internal trajectories, respectively:

a) Initial settlement in the Greek capital, Athens, and then move to the cities under study.

b) Start from a relatively big city, namely Larisa, Patras and, to a lesser extent, Thessaloniki, and then forward migration to the cities under study.

c) Initial settlement in the region of Epirus and then inter-regional migration; this is further sub-divided into two cases: one of immigrants that started from a small town or rural community of the Epirus region before moving to the study cities, and another, of those that have internally moved between the cities.

d) Finally, settlement in the study cities after spending a period of time in a peripheral city (e.g. Veroia, Serres) or rural community of Central and North Greece.

The intermediate period between initial settlement and onward migration to the study areas is differentiated among the above mobility patterns; in the first case, immigrants who decided to leave from Athens have usually been

there for less than a year period of time (11.5 months) while in the next three cases, the move was decided after a period of 32.5 months in average. In these latter cases, the decision was implemented within a period of more than 24 and less than 40 months, although there are a few cases in which the immigrant and his or her family moved after a decade or so of living in another Greek locality.

In Tables 2a and 2b, eight indicative migratory trajectories are listed in order to codify the contrasting patterns that are simultaneously present in the immigrants' internal movements: the 'counter-urbanization', the 'urban-to-urban' and finally, the 'rural-to-urban' pattern. The first one is mostly related to those that initially settled in Athens in search of good employment opportunities. Soon, living as an undocumented migrant in such a metropolitan area proved to be rather difficult and internal migration was decided. The basic motive behind this onward step was related to better working conditions. It is possible that the arrival of Pakistanis and other immigrants from south-east Asia in Athens had reduced the employment opportunities and led to internal migration of Albanians (Baldwin- Edwards, 2005). Thus, one type of international migration gives rise to another type of internal migration. Relatives that were already living in the study cities acted as a pull-factor in this follow-up step, as they support the incomers. The role of spatial proximity between the study cities and Albania was not so important for this onward migration, at least for cities in the mainland (*see Table 2a, cases a1, a2, b1 and b2*).

The second, 'urban-to-urban', trajectory is at large related to those that either moved on an intra-regional basis or have moved inter-regionally between certain middle-sized Greek cities (*see cases c1 and d1 in Table 2b*). Here, middle-sized cities are a step in the migration process of Albanians, acting as intermediate passages which connect international to internal migration. At last, the 'rural-to-urban' trend was mainly related to Albanians that started from a small rural community somewhere in Epirus or Central Greece. After a relatively large period of improving their working and living conditions, households' needs and priorities had changed and a decision to move towards the city was taken. In such cases, migrants are usually attracted by urban agglomerations in small distances from their initial settlement. Yet, local specialization and relatives and ethnic networks play an equally important role in this relocation process and attract migrants to more distant locations, as in the case of a female employee who moved between the island of Mykonos and Kerkyra (*Table 2b, cases c2 and d2*).

Overall, the reasons given for settling in the cities under study are relatives' presence (32.2 per cent) geographic proximity to Albania (24.2 per cent), employment opportunities (19.4 per cent), while a 6.5 per cent claims to have made its choices on a random basis. This distribution is differentiated among the immigrants living in Corfu, for whom the role of geographic proximity was given more weight, while relatives' presence made a smaller contribution.

Table 2a. Indicative trajectories of immigrants linking arrival and internal migration to socio-economic characteristics and voluntary return

Indicative cases		a1	a2	b1	b2
Gender		Male	Male	Female	Male
Current employment		Construction worker	Industrial worker	Nurse	Construction worker
Employment relation		Temporary	Open-ended	Temporary	Informal basis
Albania	Place of origin	Gjirokaster	Permet	Tepelene	Lezhe
Internal migration in Greece	Year of entry to Greece	2000	1993	1995	2000
	Place(s) of initial settlement	Athens	Athens	Patras	Larisa
	Reasons for leaving	Living conditions	Far from Albania	Marriage	Employment conditions
Move to study cities	City of settlement	Ioannina	Ioannina	Preveza	Kerkyra
	Year	2001	1994	1997	2002
	Reasons for choosing	Employment, living conditions	Relatives, employment	Relatives	Employment
Onward migration	City / Country	No	No	Athens, Greece	No
	Reasons	-	-	Permanent employment	-
To-and-fro mobility and return to Albania	Visits/ year	3-5	1-2	<1	3-5
	Private home	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	Reasons for visits	family reunion, recreation	family reunion, recreation	-	family reunion, recreation
	Voluntary return	No	Yes	No	Yes
	Reasons for return	-	Nostalgia	-	Start a business

Source: Author's field research in the study cities in 2008.

Nowadays, the majority (80%) of the interviewees are well integrated as they consider that job availability and "living conditions" (usually housing, health and education provisions etc.) constitute a great advantage of their contemporary hosting localities, despite several disadvantages (especially insecure employment, bureaucracy etc.)³.

³ Greek official policy towards Albanian migrants has been instrumental in keeping migrants' labour cost at a low level. The legal framework for immigration still continues to be insufficient and hostile, and the necessary mechanisms to implement it are corrupted. The periodic forced repatriation (known as *skoupa*) operations held by the Hellenic Police aimed at retaining a "logical" level of foreign workers in the country. Yet, ease of access and loose border controls rein-

Table 2b. Indicative trajectories of immigrants linking arrival and internal migration to socio-economic characteristics and voluntary return

Indicative cases		c1	c2	d1	d2
Gender		Female	Female	Male	Female
Current employment		Self-employed	Service worker	High-school Teacher	Domestic worker
Employment relation		Self-employed	Open-ended	Open-ended	Informal basis
Albania	Place of origin	Vlore	Vlore	Sarande	Sarande
Internal migration in Greece	Year of entry to Greece	1991	1996	1991	1994
	Place(s) of initial settlement	Ioannina	Metsovo, Epirus	Kozani, Western Macedonia	Mykonos
	Reasons for leaving	Relatives in Preveza	Living conditions	Employment conditions	Employment conditions
Move to study cities	City of settlement	Preveza	Ioannina	Kerkyra	Kerkyra
	Year	1992	2007	2005	2007
	Reasons for choosing	Relatives	Living conditions	Employment, Living conditions	Employment, Living conditions
Onward migration	City / Country	Patras, Greece	No	Athens, Greece	No
	Reasons	Private home	-	Better employment	-
To-and-fro mobility and return to Albania	Visits/ year	< 1	< 1	> 10	> 10
	Private home	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Reasons for visits	-	family reunion	family reunion	family reunion
	Voluntary return	No	No	Yes	No
	Reasons for return	-	-	Nostalgia, private home	-

Source: Author's field research in the study cities in 2008.

This is possibly why almost three quarters of the immigrants questioned are willing to stay in the study area, while only a small share would like to proceed to onward migration (see Table 1).

The important similarities as well as differences that exist between Albanians' integration in the cities of the sample and rural societies in Greek border regions, previously studied by other authors, require a closer look. In terms of

force new waves of undocumented workers (Lazaridis and Poyago-Theotoky, 2002; Cavouridis, 2006; IMEPO, 2008).

labour market assimilation, Albanian male employees are a great part of wage labour in construction activities so much in cities as in villages, though migrants represent a higher percentage of the local population in Greek rural areas (Kassimis et al, 2005; Kassimis, 2008). Additionally, the seasonal character of tourist activities and the overall need for seasonal and temporary employment in many activities of the study cities, such as construction and industry, is a common aspect between urban and rural areas. Another common aspect is the one of extensive informal employment.

Despite the above, the region of Epirus is less privileged in comparison to other Greek regions due to its rural mountainous villages. Cities in the region and migrants found therein are relatively prosperous and well off. This is to say that, prospects for getting a permanent full-time job are much better in cities than in rural societies. This is due to the size, the expansive development and the extensive diversification of the urban labour markets. In parallel, urban labour structures are typically segmented among a primary and a secondary part; the former related to stable jobs and the latter to flexible and precarious employment. Primary labour markets are almost absent from small-scale farms and rural areas of the Southern Europe.

According to Kassimis et al 2005, the increasing demands for flexible migratory labour found in Greek rural localities are fairly connected to a new type of 'rurality', in turn associated with the demographic decline of the indigenous population, the unfavourable working conditions in primary activities, the expanding agrotourism and the prevailing 'urbanized' socio-cultural patterns. For cities heavily tertiarized, such as the studied ones, the demand for flexible labourers is rather differentiated; here, plenty low-status jobs were offered during the past two decades, as various segments of the Greek capital had to seek for enhanced profitability. For this reason many migrants were employed in low-skilled jobs in small shops, subcontracting activities, hotels and other services (Gialis and Karnavou, 2008). Another important part was involved in household activities, such as taking care of the elderly, often on an informal basis. Furthermore, a difference with the rural societies is that migrants in the cities are less isolated and enjoy the social and cultural advantages as well as the provisions of the urban society.

Based on the above, the study reveals that in addition to a narrowing of the gap between urban and rural households, through what has been called as 'de-agriculturalisation' and relative 'urbanisation' of the Greek rural society (Kassimis, 2008), immigrants have contributed to an advanced exchange of social, material and cultural practices between Greek localities of different scale and size. Internal migration, during seeking for better working and living conditions between different localities, was the main motive of this exchange.

Return

Contemporary economic integration has a positive effect on the size of those that will possibly return; the majority (54.8 per cent) of all the questioned im-

migrants do not wish return in Albania, even on sometime in the future. This share is quite bigger among the immigrants that plan to internally migrate within Greece. These tendencies appear to be different between the areas of continental Greece and Corfu: 43 per cent of the immigrants in the former will return, as compared to a 29 per cent that do so in the latter. The main motives for return are nostalgia for the homeland (48.1 per cent) and family reunion (22.2 per cent). Among other reasons highlighted, a small share of 7.4 per cent is related to those that wish to start a personal firm in Albania (Tables 1 & 2).

The choice of permanent stay is mainly associated with the young, those who possess private property in Greece, those who don't possess a property in homeland and finally, those who frequently visit Albania. The latter was mostly prevalent in the case of Corfu. The reasons behind the limited willingness to return are related to one and a half to third generation immigrants with long lasting residence in the host economy; or they can be attributed to the socio-political instability and the poor development prospects of the Albanian society, so far frustrating migrants' return intentions. In any case, intentions of return are hardly the same as realities of return and the way as well as the degree to which the two overlap is hard to ascertain.

Conclusion

Albanians in the border cities under study enjoy improved working, earning and living conditions, which in addition to their willingness to stay 'here' and contribute, are positive signs of a successful, though controversial, incorporation into the hosting localities (Iosifides *et al.*, 2007). For many among the immigrants, current economic integration is, at least for a now, the end of a difficult route that started from the sending locality, passed through the borderline and continued with internal movements in Greece until desirable conditions for settlement were found. Others consider this route as unfinished and wish to settle in another locality, basically in Greece, where better working and living conditions will be found. Many immigrants and others that experienced no internal movements believe that voluntary return is not an option for the next foreseeable years. Internal migration trajectories that were followed, as seen divided into four different types, are the complex outcome of the interaction between local opportunities for prosperity, relatives support, personal and family choices and the institutional framework. The role of geographic proximity shapes migrants' choices, as it determines internal movements, to-and-fro mobility and the scale of everyday activities.

For the majority of the immigrants, internal mobility has been a preceding step in search for integration; integration, thus, is as a counterbalance to both further internal movements and voluntary return prospects of Albanian immigrants. Often, Athens and other middle-sized cities had been the necessary preceding step in the migration process of Albanians, acting as intermediate

passages which connect international to internal migration, and Albanian localities to Greek border regions.

The fact that return is not an option under the current circumstances for more than half of the Albanians in Epirus and Corfu, partly challenges views that migrants return after all. According to this paper's opinion, migrants' socio-spatial integration should not be theorised as a zero-sum game with equal benefits distributed among the natives, the migrants, and the sending and hosting economies (Labrianidis and Lyberaki, 2001). Although this might be true from a neoclassical migration theory perspective, some critical theory insights could lead to important re-theorizations on the issue (Samers, 2010).

This is to say that recent migratory movements reflect wider changes in the society and the economy, such as the move towards liberalization policies on various (local-to-global) spatial scales, enforcing new and uneven development patterns. These changes are not socially and politically neutral; in fact, they are part-and-parcel of a wider framework of existent social, spatial and class structures. When viewed from this perspective, Albanians' improved working and living conditions shouldn't obscure the unequal and socially stratified ways that their integration in the host economies, so far, has followed. As seen above, most migrants are economically integrated in the secondary labour market and enjoy atypical or even informal employment relations. Their salaries and working conditions are in general terms worse than those of the natives. In parallel, their social integration remains weak, as they often face discrimination, unequal treatment and bureaucracy.

A heavy cost was in most cases and places paid by the migrants; hunger, being chased by police, poor working conditions, years of living in misery, forced repatriation, even death during crossing the borders. This reality is not just history; it still can be found among many localities and workplaces in Greece. Moreover, the recent economic and political crisis in the wider EU zone and the downturn of the Greek economy, will possibly have significant negative effects on migrants, which are among the most vulnerable social groups of the European societies. Our theoretical inquiry as well as our socio-political concern should focus on these challenges for the years to come.

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