

Chapter 8

Albanian Seasonal Work Migration to Greece: A Case of Last Resort?

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Since the collapse of the communist regime in 1990, Albania has witnessed large-scale emigration—particularly to neighbouring Greece and Italy, but also further afield to the UK and the USA. By 2010 it was estimated that more than 1.4 million Albanian emigrants lived abroad, comprising nearly 45% of the resident population of Albania of 3.2 million (World Bank 2011, p. 54). However, such emigration was not without historical precedent. Albanians had migrated far and wide for centuries, whether for work or forced to do so by wars, local conflicts, and strife. Indeed, labour migration played a central role for Albanians as it did for all Mediterranean peoples (Psimmenos and Georgoulas 2001, p. 9). The earliest mass migration in the collective memory of Albanians took place in the second half of the fifteenth century, following the death of Albania's national hero Scanderbeg in 1467 and the beginning of the Ottoman conquest. Five centuries under Ottoman rule were accompanied by further emigration. Many Albanian men fled to escape blood feuds, local lords, or Ottoman persecution; yet others simply emigrated to escape poverty or to work in various trades and professions, especially craftsmen such as masons, road-builders, carpenters, ironsmiths, and goldsmiths (Tirta 1999). Others left to study in key centres of learning such as Cairo and Constantinople, while many professional men settled in the bigger cities of the Empire for a career in administration, the army, or in professions such as medicine and the law. The vast space of the Ottoman Empire provided ample opportunities for such movements, and destinations included Bulgaria, Romania, and Egypt (Tirta 1999). During that time, present-day Turkey became an important destination, where an Albanian presence is noted from the beginning of the fifteenth century (De Rapper 2000, p. 3). Greece too was important, especially for communities living along what is now its border with Albania. Patterns of what were then translocal movements and activities were part of everyday life and continued to some extent even after the creation of the Greek state and border demarcation (see Green 2005; also Vullnetari and King 2013). Much of this Ottoman period emigration is known in Albanian history and collective memory as *kurbet*, referring to the act of going away and being distant in a foreign land, usually for work (King and Vullnetari 2003). At the turn of the twentieth century,

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Albanians became (a very small) part of the transatlantic migrations from Southern Europe. Some were refugees fleeing the bloodshed that resulted from the Balkan Wars and the two world wars. Others sought to improve their lives by emigrating for work in the rapidly expanding industrial cities of North America and the agricultural industries of Australia. As a result of these historical migrations, significant communities of Albanians formed in Greece, Italy, Romania, Egypt, Turkey, and the USA. With the ascendance of the communists to power at the end of World War II, unauthorized emigration from Albania was banned and severely punished, with the result that only a trickle of people managed to escape during these years. The large-scale post-communist emigration, therefore, was not simply the expression of economic necessity but also of the desire for freedom and re-connection with the neighbouring world and beyond.

Given its geographical and cultural proximity, Greece became once again the most important destination for post-communist Albanian migrants. During most of the 1990s these movements were largely irregular and short-term in character. The first regularization in Greece in 1998 signalled the beginning of a stabilization period for the migrant community there, as well as more diverse flows towards it from Albania. One of these flows is composed of seasonal labour migrants—the focus of my analysis in this chapter.

There is now a burgeoning literature on Albanian migration to Greece. However, most of it has focused on urban areas, particularly in and around Athens and Thessaloniki, with rural areas largely overlooked (for key texts of the latter see Kasimis 2008; Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005; Kasimis et al. 2003; Labrianidis and Sykas 2009a, 2009b). On the Albanian side, the impacts of migration on rural areas, especially from seasonal migrants working in agriculture, are not well understood (but see Gërmenji and Swinnen 2004; Gërmenji et al. 2001; McCarthy et al. 2006; Miluka et al. 2007; Samson 1997; Vullnetari 2012a; Vullnetari and King 2011). This chapter seeks to make a modest contribution to both of these bodies of literature. Migration for seasonal work in the agricultural sector in Greece is considered by many Albanian migrants as the least preferable form of migration, yet it is often the last resort for many poor and lower-skilled individuals. The discussion in this chapter is also situated within debates on migration and development, with particular relevance to the recent global discourse on circular (temporary) migration and its effects on development in migrants' areas of origin.

The aim of this chapter is threefold. First, it presents a picture of seasonal migration from rural Albania to Greece through the words and perspectives of migrants and their families. Secondly, it discusses the impact of this migration on migrants and their families: to what extent does this form of mobility perpetuate dependence on seasonal remittances or provide a lifeline and skills to build sustainable livelihoods back home? Finally, it considers the impact on a local scale in areas of origin, especially on rural landscapes and economies. Issues of mobility, border controls, and Albanian-Greek relations are explored as part of these three overarching streams.

The chapter is structured as follows. After this introduction, I present a brief overview of Albanian migration to Greece within the context of wider debates on

seasonal and temporary migration. This is followed by a background section on Albanian rural life and agriculture. I then say a few words about the study from which data for this chapter is drawn. This brings me to a discussion of the findings, followed by a conclusion.

8.1 Albanian Migration to Greece: Background

Albania emerged from almost five decades of communist rule as the poorest country in Europe, with a third of its population under 15 years of age, high underemployment, and in dire poverty. The latter two problems escalated over the early 1990s, as the closure of industries and rural cooperatives led to mass unemployment, while ‘shock therapy’ economic reform meant that prices and inflation shot upwards overnight. Desperate Albanians rushed towards the coastal cities of Durrës and Vlorë in the hope of boarding one of the ships leaving for Italy, while many more walked over the mountains to Greece. The scale of this exodus was not easily quantifiable, since most of these migrants were irregular, and there was much to-and-fro, especially with Greece (King and Vullnetari 2003). However, an indication of the numbers is given by figures for mass expulsions from Greece: an average of 200,000 migrants per year between 1990 and 1995 (Baldwin-Edwards and Fakiolas 1998, p. 197).¹

Contemporary Albanian migration is considered a significant and unique case by reason of its massive concentration over a short period of time as the country moved almost overnight from total closure to large-scale out-migration (Barjaba and King 2005). Starting off as a crisis migration, its typology has changed over the years. First, the largely irregular feature characterizing these movements throughout most of the 1990s gradually made way for more managed flows of regularized migrants. This was primarily a consequence of the regularization schemes in Greece (1998, 2001, 2005, and 2007) and Italy (1995, 1997, and 2002), in which considerable numbers of Albanians participated successfully. Some irregular migration does take place these days, but it is far from the dominant type. Secondly, the migration destinations have diversified. Although Greece and Italy remain the top countries in terms of stocks, flows to other countries such as the UK and the USA have seen the largest increase over the years, especially during the 2000s (Government of Albania 2005). Thirdly, the typology of individuals participating in the migratory flows has transformed from a dominance of young men, to families being the norm rather than the exception. The presence of women has been particularly strong in the transatlantic flows. As Albanian migration has been maturing (see for this especially, King et al. 2011), a considerable second generation has become an important group to reckon with. Finally, although most migrants have settled in their countries of destination, temporary migration is a continuing feature of overall Albanian migration, particularly to Greece.

¹ These figures include repeat migrants.

The first reliable figures of the Albanian presence in Greece came to light after the first regularization programme of 1998 in which 241,561 Albanian immigrants applied, constituting 65% of the total non-EU, ‘non-ethnic Greek’ immigrant population in Greece. Only 17% of them were women (Cavounidis 2004, p. 41). The male-to-female ratio has changed over the years, and according to the 2001 census it was around 60:40 (Baldwin-Edwards 2004). A similar ratio was present amongst the stay permit holders as of March 2010 (Maroukis and Gemi 2010, p. 15).² By 2010, an estimated 700,000 Albanians lived in Greece, representing more than half of the total migrant population there; the next most important group was Bulgarians at only 5% (Maroukis 2008, pp. 6–8; Maroukis and Gemi 2010, p. 13).

The Albanian migrant community in Greece has undergone significant changes over the years in terms of migrants’ profiles, demographic composition, and socio-economic conditions. There is broad agreement amongst researchers that there is generally an improved socio-economic situation, especially as migrants settle in urban areas. Many have moved from rural to urban areas of Greece and from work in agriculture to employment (and even self-employment) in industry and services—especially in construction and the tourist sector. Comparing data from the 2001 Greek census with those collected by Labour Force Surveys in 2006, Baldwin-Edwards (2008, p. 23) suggests that employment of Albanians in Greek agriculture decreased by 50%. Yet, they continue to constitute a considerable—if not a dominant—presence in Greek agriculture (Kasimis 2008). Albanians are especially found in the plains of Thessaly and close to the Albanian border (Fakiolas 2003; Kasimis et al. 2003). Until recently they performed the heaviest and most stigmatized tasks, such as harvesting, hoeing, weeding, and fertilizing. However, according to newspaper reports, new arrivals from Asia have been taking over these jobs as the lowest-paid migrants in agriculture.³ Albanians also perform many other minor tasks around the farm, for which they are not always paid. However, as Labrianidis and Sykas (2009b) find in their study, Albanians have an opportunity for upward economic mobility after some years of work on the same farm. Studying the impact of immigrant labour in the agricultural sector in three rural areas of Greece (Ioannina, Corinthia, and Chania), Kasimis (2008, p. 520) confirms that Albanians present faster upward professional and socio-economic mobility than other migrant groups in rural areas. In addition, as many settle in these rural areas, they play a key and multifunctional role not just as workers. Migrants’ overall support for Greek elderly households—which constitute the majority of the rural population—is particularly important (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005). According to Cavounidis (2006), immigrant—especially Albanian—labour has replaced virtually all waged as well as a large part of ‘family’ labour in Greek agriculture.⁴

² In March 2010 there were 368,269 valid stay permits held by ethnic Albanians living in Greece, a share of more than 70% of third country migrants in Greece (Gemi et al. 2010, p. 26).

³ Greek daily newspaper *Kathimerini*, 22 August 2010, p. 4. Thanks to Hans Vermeulen for this update.

⁴ The role of Albanian migrants in the Greek economy is extensive and covers a wide array of sectors and jobs. Providing an analysis of this is a major task, which is important but beyond the remit of this chapter.

Demand for migrant labour in rural Greece increased after the first 1998 regularization, when many newly regularized Albanians (and others) moved from rural to urban areas, where they had access to better-paid and more secure jobs. But demand continues to be high for fruit-picking and other labour-intensive tasks, especially during summer peaks of activity. During these periods, additional labour is recruited from Albania through the seasonal work visa programme introduced in 1997.⁵ Although the government of Albania has released no statistics, it estimates that some thousands of Albanians, mainly from the southern regions of the country, have benefited from the programme over the years (Government of Albania 2005). On the Greek side, Baldwin-Edwards and Apostolatos (2009) suggest that the number of such visa holders was at around 7000 between 2003 and 2004, the majority of whom worked in agriculture. Recently released data from the Greek Ministry of Interior show that more than 40,000 stay permits for seasonal and temporary employment were granted to Albanians during 2007–2009: 13,416 in 2007, 13,732 in 2008, and 13,697 in 2009 (Gemi et al. 2010, pp. 27–28).⁶ Typically such migrants spend up to six months in Greece and the rest in Albania.

While these seasonal workers are invariably referred to as ‘temporary’, many return to Greece to work year after year—giving credence to the adage that nothing is more permanent than temporary migration.⁷ In fact, temporary migration—repackaged as circular migration—is becoming fashionable again amongst policymakers and researchers worldwide, as high-income countries struggle to strike a balance between supplying their economies with the right amount of labour, at the right time, yet to absolve themselves from responsibilities for migrants. In Hahamovitch’s (2003, p. 92) words, states try to ‘open their markets without opening their borders’, thus creating the ‘perfect immigrant’. Hahamovitch (ibid.) further argues that within the framework of global capitalism, such programmes are designed to keep the cost of production low, to put downwards pressure on wages, and to keep migrant workers segregated in low-wage sectors of the economy (see also Hennebray and Preibisch 2012). The interest in temporary migration has also increased within debates on migration and development. In this context, while emphasis is on migrants as ‘agents of development’ for their origin countries—primarily through the financial capital that they remit—their temporary status provides host-country governments a way out of granting social and citizenship rights. Temporary migration provides a lifeline for numerous families from low-income countries worldwide,

⁵ Seasonal labour migration in Greece is managed (at least in theory) mainly within the framework of *metaklisi*, or the system of inviting foreign workers to enter through visas for dependent work. This is regulated by existing bilateral agreements which Greece has with Albania (Law 2482/1997), Bulgaria and Egypt (see Maroukis 2008, pp. 12–13). See also Gemi et al. (2010) for a discussion of the legislation and data on temporary and seasonal migration in Greece.

⁶ Not to be confused with 40,000 individuals, as there is a core of repeat migrants who benefit from these permits each year. Furthermore, a number of other migrants enter Greece without documents (over the mountains from Albania) and work there seasonally, as we shall read later in this chapter.

⁷ For definitions of seasonal and temporary labour migration, and the distinction between the two, see Triandafyllidou (2010).

especially pertinent in the context of global and regional economic and political restructuring.

As Albania moved from a centrally-planned, one-party system to a political-pluralist market economy, it gradually integrated itself within the wider global structures of markets and capital, although retaining a peripheral position. This affects the agricultural sector, whose importance in overall GDP has been slowly shrinking over the years, as we shall see in the following section.

8.2 Rural Life and Agriculture in Albania

During the communist period, private agricultural land in Albania was collectivized in large Soviet-type cooperatives and state farms, thus stripping peasants of titles to the land. More than half of rural workers were women, and this share was higher in areas close to industrial centres, as men took up paid off-farm work (Samson 1997, p. 172). The land reform of 1992 aimed at land distribution amongst members of the cooperatives and state farms, in one of the fastest land privatization processes in all of Eastern Europe. By 2004, agricultural land consisted of around half a million private farms averaging 1.1 ha each (McCarthy et al. 2006, p. 4). Each household's 'farm' was further fragmented on average into four plots, bringing the total number of single plots to almost 2 million (World Bank 2007, p. 6; see also, for micro-level examples, Stahl and Sikor 2009).⁸ Land ownership is also complicated by various land titles—with titles to the same plot held by pre-collectivization and post-1992 owners. The outcomes for the sector have been harsh, as disputes over titles have weakened the land property and rental market, while in some cases old blood feuds have been ignited. In addition, there are difficulties with land consolidation and mechanization, which in turn affect private investment (Samson 1997). The situation is exacerbated by ineffective and short-sighted development policies—where they do exist—whether they are designed at the central or the local level. Generally, rural areas have borne the brunt of corruption and nepotism as both the causes and consequences of limited and badly managed public investments in rural roads, education, and medical care. This has led to deteriorating socio-economic conditions in villages, resulting in intensive rural to urban migration, especially from the northern and southern highlands (King and Vullnetari 2003; Vullnetari and King 2011).

Yet, agriculture remains one of the most important sectors of the economy. Although it contributes only 25% to the country's GDP, it provides, according to official statistics, almost 60% of total employment countrywide and half of the household income for rural families (McCarthy et al. 2006; World Bank 2007).⁹ Some

⁸ This fragmentation was due to the distribution process—the criteria for which involved household size (number of persons per household) and grading of land type according to land quality, terrain, its access to irrigation, distance from main roads, and markets.

⁹ The employment rate in agriculture is slightly misleading because all those who own agricultural land in rural areas, including those who have migrated abroad but are still registered as living in

large-scale farming has been on the increase, but by and large the sector continues to be dominated by low-productivity subsistence farming, based primarily on the (often unpaid) labour of family members. The latter, combined with stigmatization of manual labour in agriculture, is a strong factor affecting decisions of rural youths to take up off-farm work such as construction in local urban areas or to migrate seasonally to rural Greece. Ironically, most of those who take the second route become employed in agriculture, thus replacing Greek youths who themselves have left in large numbers for the cities, for precisely the same reasons (Cavounidis 2006, p. 108; Kasimis 2008; Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005).

8.3 Methods and Fieldwork Sites

Data for this chapter are drawn from research for my doctoral degree, which examined the links between internal and international migration in Albania from a development perspective. Taking inspiration from Marcus's (1995) theorizing on multi-sited ethnography, I 'followed the people' on their migration trajectories. My fieldwork started in a cluster of four villages of origin in Devoll, southeast Albania, from where I traced migrants and their families to their internal destinations—Korçë, the biggest town close to the villages, and Tirana, the capital of Albania—and to their international destination—the Greek city of Thessaloniki. Experiences and perspectives of migrants and their families in these four locations were collected through 150 in-depth interviews, two group discussions and ongoing participant observation during 2005–2006. Participants in the rural areas included seasonal work migrants, returnees from Greece and migrants on short visits to the village who worked in Greek agriculture. Although my fieldwork in Greece focused on urban Thessaloniki where obviously migrants were employed in urban jobs, the vast majority of them had previously lived and worked in rural areas of Greece in their early migration years. They thus had many stories to tell about those experiences. All names of interviewees in this chapter are pseudonyms, in order to safeguard interviewees' anonymity.

8.4 The Bean Farm and the Peach Orchard: Working and Living in Rural Greece

Migrants in my research who worked seasonally in Greek agriculture constituted three groups: those who had a long-term residence permit but worked seasonally for family reasons; those who had a seasonal work visa; and those who ventured

Albania, are considered—for statistical purposes—as fully employed in agriculture, thus obscuring underemployment.

seasonally over the mountains to Greece without documents.¹⁰ Let us now look at their working and living conditions in Greece and discuss their socio-demographic profiles.

8.4.1 *Working and Living Conditions for Agricultural Workers*

The majority of migrants from my study villages who worked seasonally in Greece went primarily to two locations: (i) the small Greek villages (such as Microlini) near the Greek-Albanian-Macedonian border and (ii) the rural areas near Veria, north-western Greece. In the first location, employment was often on family farms cultivating beans; these farms were owned by older Greeks. Migrants earned € 15 a day for 10 hours of work. The employer provided two meals a day—‘a thin potato soup’ as one of the migrants put it—and free accommodation, often in barns. For many migrants, this ‘spartan’ way of life was a compromise allowing them to save money for their return. In Veria, migrants worked in larger commercial farms pruning fruit trees and picking fruit—mostly apples and peaches—at orchards that supplied the chain of agro-industry, locally and for export. They earned slightly more than on the bean farms, at € 18 to € 20 a day for eight hours of work, but they had to pay for their own food and accommodation. Pajtim, 53, working in rural Veria told me:

We earn €20 a day, this is the wage in the Veria area. *Merokamoto* as they call it [in Greek]. We work fixed hours, eight hours. So from six in the morning till two pm... If we work in the afternoon we get paid for extra hours, an additional €10, so we may work for two or three hours if there is work. But it's usually just the eight hours.

Although these wage-rates are quite low, there has been progress compared to the 1990s. Berti, 39, has been going to Greece to work since 1991 and has always worked in agriculture—picking peaches, grapes, tomatoes, and cotton and hoeing tobacco in areas as wide as Athens, Lamia, Kilkis, and Crete, but especially rural Veria. This is how he recounts those early years:

In the beginning the wages were really low... Then gradually they started going up year by year... Especially here in Veria they [employers] paid 2,000–3,000 drachmas per day. If you calculate it in euros it was about € 10 a day.

Another seasonal migrant Drini, 35, who had also worked in various jobs and various geographical areas in Greece, added:

We would work until the employer [using the Greek word *afentiko* derived from the Turkish for boss] completed a particular process. Sometimes even until midnight. Non-stop, just like a petrol station.

While Greek employers usually paid the wages owed, there were those who took exploitation to extremes, not paying the migrants at all for the work they had done. This unleashed retaliation of the latter, as Berti recounted:

¹⁰ The latter two types fit the definitions of Triandafyllidou (2010) of ‘seasonal legal labour migrants’ and ‘seasonal irregular migrants’, respectively.

Every time you were employed you would agree the wage with the prospective employer.... But in some cases the employer would delay paying us our wages, or didn't want to pay. When the work was over he would say: come to pick up your wages after a week because I don't have the money now. There were good employers who paid, but at other times you had to go and beg the employer for your money every day.... There were also those who didn't pay at all.... Albanians would work for months and months on their farms, it wasn't just a day or a week, but several months. They had been told they would be paid their wages at the end of the working period. But when the time for payment came the Greek employer would simply send them away and withhold their money. So the Albanians would destroy their orchards, or set fire to their greenhouses for revenge.

Two key factors that improved their situation were the regularization of their status and the extended duration of their migration. That latter, especially, facilitated relationships of mutual trust. Thus, as Rogaly (2008) argues, it is important to emphasize the dynamism of labour relations and migration in time and space, and to acknowledge migrants' agency in shaping these relations even when the space for doing so is constrained by structural factors.

Relationships and trust are particularly important for those on seasonal work visas as the permits can be obtained only after a Greek employer submits a request for a named individual through the Greek Organization of Employment and Labour (OAED) to a Greek consulate in Albania. The permits are valid only for work in the agricultural sector and are tied to a particular employer, that is, migrants are not allowed to work for anyone other than the sponsoring farmer, although many do and with the latter's permission.¹¹ Labrianidis and Sykas (2009b) argue that unlike in other high-income countries where such seasonal work schemes are used, the interpersonal labour relations between migrants and farmers still prevalent in the Greek countryside, facilitate migrants' strategies for continued employment during low peaks of agricultural demand. During such periods, migrants may take up jobs in the agricultural sector in other parts of Greece, or in other better-paid sectors in urban areas such as construction and small-scale manufacturing. As the jobs are carried out informally, migrants crucially depend on strong social capital—a network of friends and relatives who are already settled in Greece with long-term permits and who are able to introduce the migrant to potential employers, as well as being able to help them with accommodation.

For first-time migrants who lack ties to Greek employers, Albanian friends and relatives act as intermediaries. At the same time, these migrants often need to place an informal bond of € 500 with their prospective employer for protection of the latter's 'investment' against the migrant's absconding before the season's work is over. This sum is roughly equivalent to a worker's monthly wage, which the employer

¹¹ For a more detailed account of this process, see Maroukis (2008) and the discussion in Gemi et al. (2010). The European Commission recently issued a proposal for a directive regulating the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of seasonal employment (2010). It aims to bring closer the member states' provisions on this issue and goes some way to addressing the vulnerability of seasonal labour migrants, a condition which results primarily from tying the migrant worker to his or her employer, not allowing them to work in more than one sector of the economy, and not being granted a multiple-entry visa. For a critical review of this proposal, see Triandafyllidou (2010).

is required to place as a guarantee bond with the relevant insurance fund before the work visa is issued (Articles 14 and 16, Law 3386/2005; Maroukis and Gemi 2010, p. 26, n 27). The burden is once again shifted from the employer to the migrant worker. First-time migrants who have no one to facilitate their visa process sometimes buy a visa from a dealer who is allegedly linked to consular staff in Korçë or from a local non-governmental organization, as the latter may get visas for their members much easier. The fee of € 1000 to € 1300 is recouped with great difficulty from 6 months' work in Greece. Some poorer Albanians who have neither much money nor social contacts, simply venture over the mountains to the Greek border villages and work there as undocumented migrants until they are caught by the Greek police and deported back to Albania. Roma and Egyptians constitute a significant share of this group (Vullnetari and King 2011).

8.4.2 Migrants' Profiles

Seasonal migrants have been, and continue to be, overwhelmingly men (hence, the frequent reference to migrants as 'he' in this chapter). It is very rare for women to work seasonally on their own. When they migrate, they do so with their husband or another male family member such as a son. Drita, 32, is one such case:

My husband arranged a work visa for me. So I stayed there [Greece] for six months and worked with my husband. I was working in a cooling warehouse, they called it *psygeio* in Greek. I was selecting apples.... This is where I worked for three months.... The rest of the time I worked with my husband in the apple orchards picking apples.

The male-dominated character of migration to Greece is to a certain extent a reflection of the strongly patriarchal norms of Albanian society, even for more egalitarian regions such as the study villages in the south-east of the country. Women in rural areas who travel for work on their own are not well regarded (Vullnetari 2012b). Particularly in seasonal agricultural work, women's participation is further conditioned by the circumstances in which seasonal migrants live in rural Greece. Most live in barns or outdoor sheds and in old kitchens of their employers; they do not have separate spaces—they sleep and eat in the same room. Showers and toilets are also shared and, especially in the 1990s, many simply washed with cold water out in the courtyard. Petrit, a returnee aged 55, recalls those early years as a 'dog's life'. Others pointed out that such living conditions depended on the geographical location within Greece itself. Berti again:

If you went to rural Veria, where they have always had day labourers [using the word *argatë*]¹² they have gradually created some better conditions for *argatë* there. Separate rooms, bathrooms, and showers, etc. Whereas if you go to more remote areas it's more difficult. Imagine that there is absolutely nothing there, he [the farmer] puts you in a big hangar... you have just a blanket for cover and that's it.... To the point where you have to wash yourself with cold water outside... Living conditions in agriculture are very bad.

¹² This is likely derived from the Greek *ergatis*, meaning worker or labourer. The Albanian word has a strong pejorative connotation of servitude and perhaps exploitation attached to it.

A further reason for the absence of women is that since most seasonal migrants come from rural areas of Albania, wives are needed back home in order to look after the household and other family members—sometimes younger grandchildren of migrant sons (and less often daughters)—and also to take care of the family's farm and livestock.

Men's dominance amongst seasonal migrants is also confirmed by two other sources. First, quantitative analyses of data from the 2005 Albanian Living Standards Measurements Survey (ALSM) show that men are by far in the majority as temporary international migrants (Azzarri and Carletto 2009). Secondly, primary quantitative research carried out in rural Greece also confirms that Albanian women are far less numerous in rural Greece, especially as agricultural workers (Iosifides et al. 2006; Labrianidis and Sykas 2009b).

In terms of age, most seasonal migrants are either single men in their early to mid-20s or married men in their 40s and 50s. However, as one of the migrants put it 'there are also men in their 60s who come to work' on such visas. In the first group—the young men—are generally from relatively poor families, or young men who are not keen to work in agriculture in their village, but at the same time cannot access opportunities for other employment or for other types of migration. Those comprising the group at the other end of the spectrum generally are household heads of poor families who work in agriculture. In their analysis of the 2005 ALSMS, Vadean and Piracha (2009, p. 8) find that circular—that is, mostly seasonal—migrants working in agriculture come from poor households. Similarly, Labrianidis and Sykas (2009b) researching Albanian and Bulgarian migrant workers in northern Greek agriculture confirm the more economically disadvantaged position of seasonal immigrant workers compared to other workers in agriculture; the gap in relation to those doing off-farm work was even greater. According to this study, seasonal migrants earned on average around € 4600 per year, or only 65 % of the wages of agricultural workers with longer staying permits, and almost three times less than more skilled workers in longer-term agricultural employment (*ibid.*, pp. 804–805).

8.5 Back Home in the Albanian Village: Survival or Development?

As we saw earlier, work in agriculture is poorly paid and quite precarious. Despite being target migrants—that is, their main aim is to earn as much as possible and return home with the savings—many seasonal workers find it hard to bring back any substantial amount of money. Depending on the various factors discussed earlier, such as location, type, and availability of work, they are generally able to save € 230 to € 350 per month, or a total of € 1500 for their entire stay in Greece. Rarely does this amount exceed € 3000. Usually, migrants send € 150 to € 200 to Albania as soon as they have been paid their first wages. The most common channel for doing so is through family and friends, though sometimes, in case of emergency, a money transfer operator (MTO) such as Western Union or MoneyGram is used. The rest of

the money is brought back when migrants return home at the end of their working period.

Given that most of those on seasonal work visas come from the poorer ranks of Albanian society, the money earned in Greece is often used to cover the daily expenses of the family in Albania—such as food, some clothing, and electricity and water bills. I illustrate with a quote from Mira, the 39-year old wife of a seasonal migrant:

He [her husband] brought home € 1,000 this year. What can you do first with that? It's difficult, because there are many things in the household to take care of. Our sons are growing up and the eldest wants trousers for 2,000 lek [€ 17],¹³ a jacket for 3,000 lek [€ 25], wants trainers and shoes; then the house needs this and that. You go to Korçë and before you know it you have spent all that money without having bought anything big. Everything is so expensive now, and there is no money.

However, migration is not simply a survival instrument. For numerous households it also represents one aspect of a more complex risk-diversification and income-generating strategy, alongside (meagre) old-age pensions, wages from local day labouring, and especially farming. As such, some remittances are also invested in agriculture, as Pajtim, whom we met earlier, described:

With that money [remittances] we planted an apple orchard, bought stuff, made repairs to the house, bought furniture.... We have 1,000 apple trees, 600 of which are producing fruit and the others are still saplings.... With the money I also pay for a tractor to spray them.

Although most farming is at subsistence level, some profitable farming activities have been on the increase, especially apple orchards. They are preferred for three main reasons. First, they provide an opportunity for higher household incomes; secondly, they require less intensive labour than other farming processes;¹⁴ and thirdly, this activity is considered to be semi-skilled, so rural youths attach less stigma to it than the back-breaking work required for row crops.

Such agricultural undertakings have been sustained by financial and skills transfer from Greece to Albania. Seasonal migrants working in apple and peach orchards in rural Greece have acquired a number of skills—such as pruning, spraying, and watering techniques—related to this farming sector. They have introduced these in their villages of origin in Albania by developing and expanding their own apple orchards there. Pajtim continued his story:

I have been working there [rural Veria] for 15 years now... I have learnt a lot about how to prune, how to tend the trees. Because there I work in orchards of apple, pear, peach trees.... When I come here [in the village] I do all these myself, I know how to do it now... I work here and there [in Greece]. I also bring all the pesticides from Greece with me when I come here to visit (interviewed in the village in Albania, August 2005).

¹³ The rate of exchange averaged 120 lek to the euro over the period during which this fieldwork took place.

¹⁴ McCarthy et al. (2006), using data from the 2002 and 2003 ALSMS, similarly conclude that migration in rural Albania has affected land reallocation towards less labour-intensive production, although their findings suggest that most of this diversion is towards the livestock sector.

In a much larger and quantitatively significant study of Albanian migrant workers—including seasonal—in Greek agriculture, Labrianidis and Sykas (2009a, p. 408) found that almost all of them (97% of respondents) had successfully applied experience gained from work in Greek agriculture to their own agricultural undertakings in Albania. The authors' main suggestion is that geographical proximity enables such migrants to work both on the Greek farms and on their own agricultural plots, and to combine the various farming processes to this effect.

Nonetheless, the nature of Albanian farming—as discussed at the beginning of this chapter—combined with global structural forces presents difficult challenges for the vast majority of farmers. Even when yields are high, it is not unusual for entire stocks to be left to rot in barns and warehouses, while cheaper imported produce floods local markets. Consequently, many households, especially young people, continue to aspire to leave rural areas. This is not unique to Albania. For instance, as mentioned earlier, a similar trend was evident amongst rural youths in Greece as part of the rural-urban exodus during the 1950s and 1960s (Kasimis 2008). It is also part of the ongoing post-communist rural to urban relocation, a large share of which is fuelled by international remittances (Vullnetari 2012a; see also Miluka et al. 2007). While the richest segments of village populations aim for the big cities—Tirana, Durrës, and Korçë—this is generally out of reach for seasonal migrant households, owing to the high capital investment required for such a move. Most of such investments would go towards buying a home where the family could live, whether it is an apartment in a block of flats or—more often—buying a plot of land and building a house. This is a common pattern for internal moves, particularly from southern Albania, since the move to an urban area is considered a permanent one (Vullnetari 2012a). Moreover, it is a sign of prosperity to own one's home as opposed to renting—which, in the Albanian psyche signifies poverty and can be acceptable only as a very short-term and temporary solution. Bukurije, 57, the mother of a migrant son who works seasonally in Greece, explained:

To move to Tirana or Durrës you need at least 5 or 6 million lek [€ 50,000] to build a house or buy an apartment... Where can you find all that money? Of course then you have to emigrate, work abroad, and make such a move, if that is what you plan... I am talking about those who have been there [abroad] for years, because my son is working seasonally. He can't save that sort of money.

Under such circumstances, many similar households seem to find themselves trapped in a perpetual cycle of seasonal migration to Greece and survival in the village (Gërmenji and Swinnen 2005). In the words of Çimi, a 23-year-old seasonal migrant, such migration is 'a case of last resort. There is no other solution.'

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter sought to contribute to our understanding of one stream of post-communist Albanian migration: that of migrants working seasonally in agriculture in Greece. In spite of its small numerical size compared to the longer-term migrant

communities, this migration type deserves attention for several reasons. First, as has been demonstrated here, and as previous analyses confirm (e.g., Azzarri and Carletto 2009; Vadean and Piracha 2009), it concerns some of the lowest-paid migrant workers in Greece, many of whom come from poor segments of Albanian society. These groups are often—or at least ought to be—the focus of development policies and accorded a key place in migration–development debates. There are two aspects related to this debate: the contribution these migrants make to the economies of their areas of origin; and the expense at which this takes place, such as exploitation and lack of rights in host countries. The data presented in this chapter illustrate this duality quite well. Seasonal migrants work under deplorable conditions in order to save money which they remit or bring back home. In Albania, these remittances and savings are often only sufficient to sustain their families' most basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter: this is particularly the case for irregular seasonal migrants.

The second reason for examining seasonal migration is related to rural development and migration, brought together by both the overwhelming rural origin of these seasonal migrants and their employment in rural areas in Greece—usually in agriculture. As the financial benefits from such work are low, it is generally the least preferred form of 'regular' migration: a 'last resort' option rather than a choice. This is especially the case for those who seek ways out of agriculture and not just out of poverty. There is no legal transition from a seasonal work visa holder to a longer-term permit holder, which would allow migrants to negotiate better work and pay. Some households, however, do manage to deploy remittances to set up or to support existing agricultural undertakings in their own village of origin in Albania. Of particular importance here are the skills and knowledge that migrants gain while working in Greece and that they transfer to Albania: these relate to farm work and processes, although they are quite limited, since seasonal migrants in Greece perform manual and least-skilled tasks. When looking at development on the Greek side, such labour is absolutely crucial for the functioning of many rural areas there (Kasimis 2008).

This brings me to my third point: the recently increasing interest in seasonal labour migration amongst policymakers. The need for immigrant labour in agriculture is not a feature limited to the Greek economy but one that has become almost universal. Temporary migration has become the preferred tool to address developed countries' labour needs without giving away rights—as migrants are imagined and treated as a flexible and cheap labour force (Hahamovitch 2003). It is fitting that such migrants are also considered as 'tools' for fostering development of origin countries, as they bring back all their earnings and do not pose a threat in terms of a skills drain or brain drain.

Yet, this 'development tool' or the '*argat*', depending on which perspective one takes to describe the temporary migrant—origin or host country, respectively—seems to be the least heard. This chapter has sought to present a platform for the voices of these individuals to be considered, especially in policymaking. Their stories speak of human and social rights that states must protect and ensure. The most recent attempt to address the issue of seasonal labour migration at the EU level goes some way towards addressing this need (European Commission 2010). Yet,

as Triandafyllidou (2010) succinctly argues, the positive steps proposed need to go much further in their reach to protect such migrant workers and ensure that they, too, have opportunities to negotiate better work and pay and a dignified life.

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