Contemporary Albanian migrations towards Greece: an updated state-of-the-art

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Abstract

Albanian migration has been a mainstream phenomenon in the last three decades, so much so that the country has been characterized as 'a laboratory for the study of migration' (King, 2005). Albania is among the twenty major export-countries in the world with respect to its population (World Bank, 2016). In 2020, the Albanian emigration rate worldwide exceeded 30% (1.25 million people), most of Albanians abroad residing in Italy (39%) and Greece (36%), according to statistics from UN DESA. Therefore, Greece, that has been a major destination for Albanian emigrants since the 1990s, still receives an important part of this out-migration. Indeed, according to consecutive Greek census data, Albanian citizens accounted for 8% in 1991, 57% in 2001 and 53% in 2011. In the last Greek Census (2021), Albanians are still the major migrant group, reaching 49% of foreigners.

The proposed paper seeks to provide an updated state-of-the-art on contemporary Albanian migration towards Greece, relying upon census data from both countries over the past thirty years, with a particular focus on the post-2010 era. We conduct a spatio-temporal analysis to explore the directionality of Albanian international migration, with a specific focus on the Albania-Greece axis. By examining migration patterns from the 1990s to the present, we analyze the areas in Albania that "expel" migrants and those in Greece that "absorb" them. We assess whether migration trends from the 1990s-2000s share similarities with earlier and more recent movements; and we also seek to evaluate the impact of Albania's urban and territorial reorganization before and after 1990 on these dynamics. A key aspect of our investigation focuses on place-based characteristics and their potential in shaping the degree of migrant integration at the local level in host communities. Finally, we investigate the linkages between the regions, districts, and places of departure in Albania and the corresponding arrival points in Greece, identifying commonalities that influence settlement patterns.

1. Introduction

Albanian migration has been a mainstream phenomenon in the last three decades, so much so that the country has been characterized as 'a laboratory for the study of migration' (King, 2005). Albania is among the twenty major export-countries in the world with respect to its population (World Bank, 2016). In 2020, the Albanian emigration rate worldwide passed over 30 percent (1.25 million people), most of Albanians abroad residing in Italy (39%) and Greece (36%), according to statistics from UN DESA. According to the World Migration Report (2024) of the International Organization for Migration/IOM), Albania is listed as one of the countries most affected by mass immigration, 40% of country's workforce being estimated to work abroad (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024: 82).

Greece, that has been a major destination for Albanian emigrants since the 1990s, still captures an important part of this out-migration. Indeed, while in 1991 Albanian citizens accounted for 12% of the whole migrant stock in Greece, in 2001 they surpassed 57%, and in 2011 they were approximately 53% of the total foreign population. In the last Greek Census (2021), Albanians are still the major migrant group, reaching 49% of foreigners (and more than 3,5% of Greece's total population).

The proposed paper seeks to provide an updated state-of-the-art on contemporary Albanian migration towards Greece, relying upon census data from both countries over the past thirty years, with a particular focus on the post-2010 era. We conduct a spatio-temporal analysis to explore the patterns of Albanian migration, in particular out-migration towards Greece. By examining migration patterns from the 1990s to the present, we analyze the areas in Albania that "expel" and those in Greece that "absorb" Albanian citizens, along with foreigners from other countries . We assess whether migration trends from the 1990s-2000s share similarities with earlier and more recent movements. We are also interested in assessing whether Albanian migration patterns offer similarities and/or discrepancies with other major groups of foreigners in Greece, with regard to their spatial distributions.

2. Methodology & data

For the purposes of this endeavour we rely on desk research, particularly on several reports of the Albanian Institute for Statistics (INSTAT), as well as a body of research based on data coming from the Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) in Albania in 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2012. The LSMS survey is a World Bank project that concerns the survey of households in a number of countries such as Albania. The LSMS in Albania is conducted by the World Bank and INSTAT. LSMS focuses on household research systems and the micro-data generated, seeking to better inform relevant development policies. The LSMS provides data only from households still residing in Albania, while households that have permanently settled outside the territory (that is, no member of the household resides in Albania anymore) are not taken into account.

We also build upon the seminal research of Alain Jarne (2020), who has harmonized Albanian censuses from the Ottoman era (around 1881) until 2001. For the study of immigration to Greece, we analyze data from the consequent Greek censuses (ELSTAT 2001, 2011 and 2021), as well as UN DESA data.

We employ cartographic tools (GIS) to study the spatial distribution of Albanian migrants in Albania and Greece across time, mapping the Location Quotient index (LQ), which enables the comparison of two concentrations of a subgroup: the subgroup's concentration/presence in a geographical unit as compared to the subgroup's concentration in the entire study area (see also Brown & Chung, 2006).

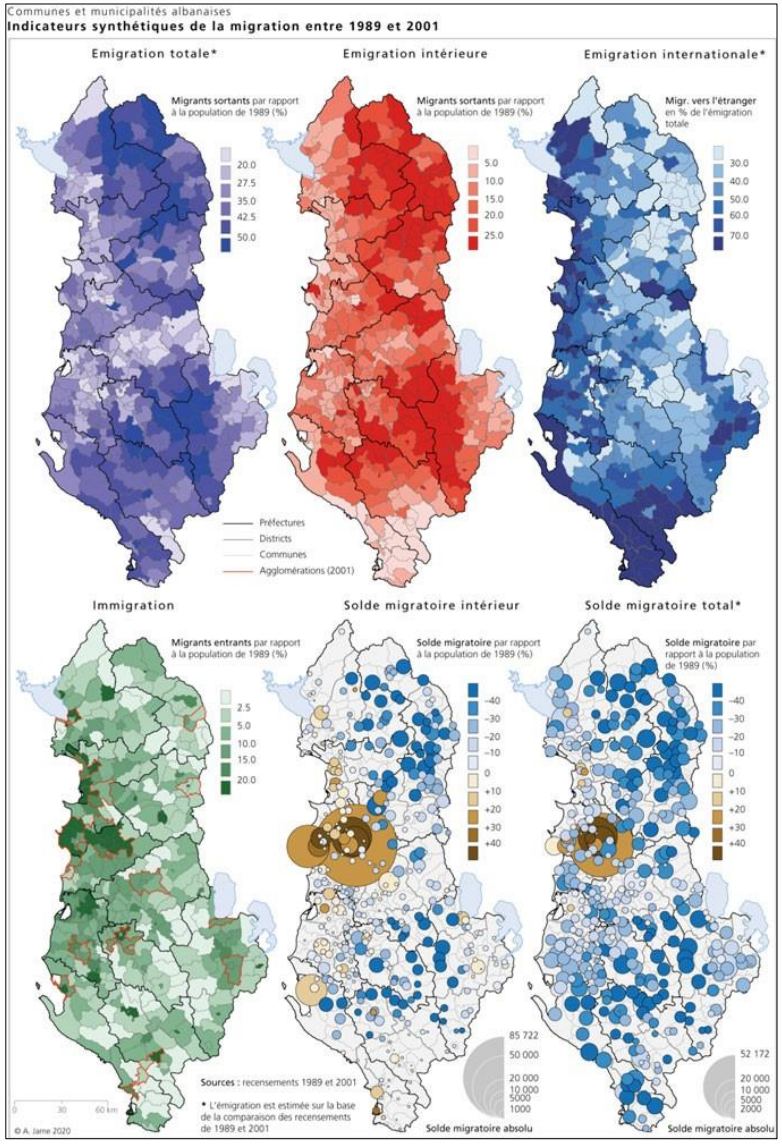
3. Migratory Movements in Post-1989 Albania

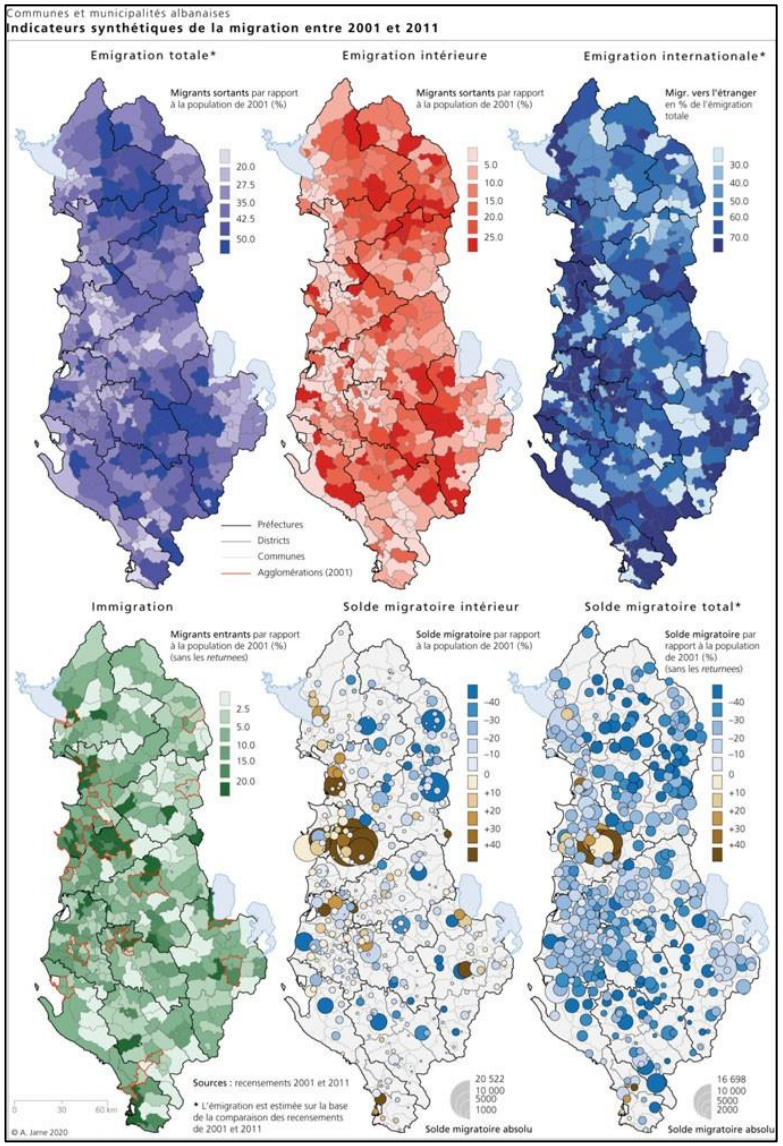
It is well known by now that, in the afterday of the fall of the Berlin Wall, thousands of Albanians left Albania (approximately 300,000 during the period 1991–1992, and many more in the subsequent years 1992–1997). It has been estimated that, by the end of the decade, approximately 800,000 Albanian citizens were living abroad, mainly in Greece and Italy. In the early 2000s, approximately 25% of the total population (or over 35% of the workforce) had emigrated abroad. In 2017, about half of the country's population was missing due to international migration (that is, approximately 1.5 million people for an average population of 2,873,457, in 2017). Compared to 1990, the current size of the Albanian resident population decreased by approximately 12% due to emigration, followed by a decrease in the birth rate of about 65%, together with an increase in the death rate (of about 20%), (Kokkali, 2024: 269-270; Kokkali & Rembeci, 2024).

The intensity by which international migration takes place in Albania, during the last three decades, places the country among the twenty major export countries in the world with respect to its population (World Bank, 2016a, b). It is worth pointing out that the Albanian 'exodus' abroad occurred in parallel with internal movements. According to the 2001 Albanian census, between 1989 and 2001, about 183,000 persons moved *within* Albania, from one region to another. This accounts for 5.7% of the total population of the country in 1989 (INSTAT, 2004: 11). Accumulatively, it is estimated that about 800,000 people – or almost 30% of the resident population – have changed their place of birth during the last three decades in Albania (Rembeci et al., 2023: 147).

An analysis of the interregional movements during the first post-socialist period identifies two distinct migratory patterns. The first was related to long-distance movements directed toward the main economic poles in the middle of the country. The second concerned short-distance migration directed toward the coastal districts, which were both receivers of internal movements but also senders of international emigrants. Nonetheless, the major movement during this period relates to the growth of Tirana (by more than 33%), which attracted more than half of the interregional movements between 1989 and 2001 (54% or 136,576 migrants from other parts of the country), with Durrës being the second most important destination for internal migrants (18%, see **Annex Table 1**). The districts that lost population were mainly located in the mountainous areas in the north-east (see **Annex Table 2**), such as Kükes and Dibër, that lost up to 34% of their 1989 population (Kokkali, 2024: 271; Kokkali, 2010: 115; INSTAT, 2004: 11–14).

1991-2001. Based on LSMS data, Carletto *et al.* (2004) and Zezza *et al*. (2005) showed that, in the 1990s and until the beginning of the millennium, internal migrants in Albania originated predominantly from the north and the north-eastern parts of the country, whereas international migrants originated mainly from the wealthier districts in the south (districts in the Greek border such as Korçë) and along the coast (facing Italy, such as Durrës, Tirana, and Vlorë). Proximity sufficiently explained this short-distance international migration. Tirana was a major source of international emigrants, but, at the same time, together with coastal regions such as Durrës, the main destination for internal migrants (coming mainly from Dibër, Kukës, and Pukë). Tirana was indeed the main absorption area (with only 69% of 2001-residents reporting living there in 1989), followed by a number of coastal areas. Conversely, five districts in the southern and northern ends of the country (Delvine, Tropoje, Sarande, Puke, and Skrapar) had less than half of their 1989-inhabitants still living there in 2001. Jarne (2020) found an obvious spatial differentiation of coastal areas from the hinterland, as well as the indisputable dominance of international destinations (i.e., Greece) in the south of the country (see **Figure 1c** on emigration abroad which correlates external migration with total migration and not with population). **Figure 1a** (on total migration) has roughly the same structure as **Figure 1b** (on internal migration), yet with the addition of a coastal strip that seems to correspond to the very widespread preference of the coastal regions to cross the Adriatic into Italy. Apart from regional preferences on migration along coastline-valley-hill-mountain differentiation, the maps exhibit north–south differentials, but also variances according to the degree of urbanity. Jarne (2020: 267) maintains that internal movements seem to be organized in a very structured way according to the differentials of urbanity, whereas emigration abroad is best described by the regional dimension. (Kokkali, 2024: 274-280).





(left) Figures 1a-f. Internal and international migration in Albania, 1989-2001 (% of missing persons between the two censuses and net migration balances).
Source Jarne (2020). *Géohistoire del' Albanie moderne. Une lecture des recensements de 1918 à 2011*. Thèse de Doctorat, Lausanne, EPFL
(right) Figures 2a-f. Spatial distribution of national and international migration, 2001–2011.
Source: Jarne (2020, p. 285).

2001-2011. In the next decade, the resident population continues to drop, yet the decline increases: from 3.14 million inhabitants in 1989, the population of Albania dropped to 3.07 million in 2001, and to 2.8 million in 2011. This is equivalent to an annual decline of 0.19% in the period 1989–2001, and 0.91%, in 2001–2011, as well as to a total population loss of no less than 11%, for both periods (Jarne, 2020: 277). Apart from a decline in fertility, significant out-migration has contributed to this development. Simultaneously, the spatial redistribution of the population within the country is pursued: in 2011, 10% of the population lives in a different town or village compared to a decade ago, or 8% of the population (228,952 persons) when considering the change in district of the usual residence. Almost half of these internal migrants have settled in Tirana—and more specifically in the peri-urban area of Tirana, such as in the surrounding area of Sarandë, Xarrë, and Ksamil (INSTAT, 2014).

The intensity of migration remained almost the same: one third of Albanians (28.8% or 895,000 persons) left their commune in the inter-censal period. The share of those who opted for emigration abroad remained the same (slightly more than half and about 480,000 persons), but migration patterns changed; international emigration from the countryside increased, while emigration from cities decreased. Besides, migration at that time strongly affected the central regions (around Berat and Kuçovë), and even the North-East, whose emigrants, in the previous decade, had opted almost exclusively for the capital region (Jarne, 2020: 286; INSTAT, 2014: 35; Kokkali, 2024: 283-285). During this decade, thus, migration became 'more rural' and geographically more diffuse as regards the places of departure (for the spatial distribution of national and international migration, see **Figures 2a-f** below).

According to OECD data, the destination countries preferred by Albanian immigrants are still (as in the previous decade) Italy and Greece, followed by the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany. A significant reversal of trends concerns the most popular destinations: Italy now becomes the most preferred destination (47% of Albanian expatriates), followed by Greece (43%) and far behind the United States. The trend of international emigration to increase with city-size is pursued in this decade, Tirana exempt. The volume of emigration from the urban centers is maintained; still, while, in the previous decade, 75% of this emigration was directed abroad, now internal emigration accounts for 76% (Kokkali, 2024: 283-285).

The maps on net migration (see **Figures 1e and 1f** above, compared with **Figures 2e and 2f**) reveal the fragmentation of positive balances from the centers to the suburbs of metropolitan areas; the flattening of globally negative balances, whose intensity remains a characteristic of the mountains; the regional and peripheral local centers maintain strongly negative internal migration balances (Jarne, 2020: 286).

Outflows came mainly from rural areas (84%), and half of these flows (52%) headed to the prefecture of Tirana. Rural areas are the destination of at least half the flow from urban or semi-urban areas. If we aggregate all internal flows, albeit the area of origin, almost half of them head to the prefecture of Tirana (**Annex Table 3**). These arrivals to the prefecture of Tirana (112,180 new residents coming from other prefectures – see **Annex Table 4**) have a significant demographic effect, since they represent 18% of the population in 2001. They thus reinforce the concentration of the Albanian population in the prefecture of Tirana, where, in 2011, resides more than a quarter of the total population of the country (27%). This urban and coastal residential concentration has significantly increased, in 10 years, considering that, in 2001, in the prefecture of the capital lived only 20% of the country's population.

Other coastal prefectures also benefit from this dynamic, such as Durrës, in which reside 15% of internal migrants between 2001 and 2011. These developments result in that the prefectures of Tirana and Durrës are the only ones to have a positive migration balance of 100,000 and 24,000 persons, respectively. It is to note that rural areas of coastal prefectures also benefit from this predilection for the coast, as is the case of the prefectures of Lezhë and Fier (which become the destination of, respectively, 6 and 7% of the total internal migrants). Still, while this attractiveness allows Lezhë to maintain a positive internal migration balance (+4,000 during the decade), it is not enough for Fier, where the entries cannot compensate for the departures, and this results in a negative internal migration balance (10,000 in 10 years), (Kokkali, 2024: 283-285; Parant, 2020, pp. 43–44; INSTAT, 2019).

2011-2021. As mentioned above, according to the Albanian census, by 2021, the resident population of the country has decreased by about 12% (**Annex Table 5**) due to emigration (together with a decrease of about 65% in the birth rate and an increase of 20% in the death rate compared to 1990, see **Annex Table 6**). Major structural demographic changes become evident; the most important is that the young population currently represents about 16,5% of the total population, compared to 33% in 1990, while the elderly have increased almost three times during the same period (from 5% to 15,5%).

Against this national background, at the regional level, internal migration is still the major factor contributing to the shrinkage of the population of some areas in Albania. The largest population decline seems to have taken place in

the prefecture of Gjirokaster (approximately -64%), followed by Diber, Kukes, and Berat (respectively at about -47 to -50%). For the rest of the Albanian prefectures, the loss of population varies between 28 to 45%. As in the previous decades, the only prefectures that register significant population growth are Tirana and Durres, respectively estimated at 104% and 33%, compared to the 1990s. Regarding the annual population growth rates, the largest negative growth rate is –as expected – registered in Gjirokaster, and the lowest in the prefecture of Elbasan (-0.9%). The prefectures of Tirana and Durres, which make about 43% of the Albanian population, count – as expected – for positive annual growth rates, respectively of 3.5% and 1.1% (Rembeci et *al.* 2023: 146).

More recent data from INSTAT (2023: 55) shows that between 2020 and 2021, the average population of Albania decreased from 2,811,666 to 2,777,689 inhabitants (**Annex table 7**). As expected, in 2022, the prefecture with the largest average population in Albania was Tiranë, with 922,386 inhabitants, followed by the prefecture of Durrës, with 290,561 inhabitants. At the same time, the two prefectures with the smallest average population during the same year were Gjirokastër and Kukës, with 54,296 and 72,133 inhabitants respectively. In 2022, the prefecture of Tiranë was the only one to witness population increase, while all the other prefectures registered negative population growth rates. The prefecture of Tiranë had the highest population growth rate, with an increase of 0,7% compared to 2021, while the prefecture of Gjirokastër marked (again) the lowest rate of population change (-4.2%).

The study of crude net internal migration rates[1], which exposes the impact that internal movements have on the population of specific prefectures, leads to similar conclusions. Tiranë, Durrës and Vlorë were the only prefectures with a positive crude internal migration rate (respectively +8.0, +4.1 and +1.3 persons per thousand inhabitants). On the contrary, the prefectures of Dibër and Gjirokastër had the highest negative net internal migration rates (respectively -16.9 and -12.1 persons per thousand inhabitants, see **Figure 3**), (INSTAT, 2023: 52, 63).

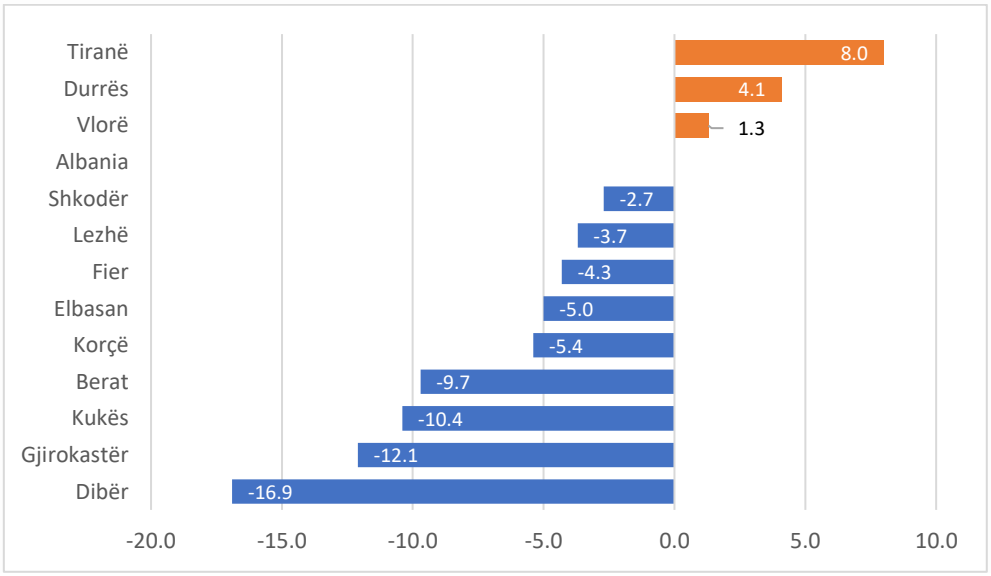


Figure 3. Crude net internal migration rate by prefecture, 2022

Source: INSTAT (2023). Regional Statistical Yearbook, 2023, p. 53. Annual INSTAT calculations.

At a lower spatial level, the municipality with the highest net internal migration in 2022 was Tiranë, with 6,004 inflows more than outflows, followed by the municipality of Durrës (with a positive inflow of 1241 persons); while the municipality with the lowest net internal migration was Dibër, with 744 outflows more than inflows (INSTAT, 2023: 12-13, 21, 53).

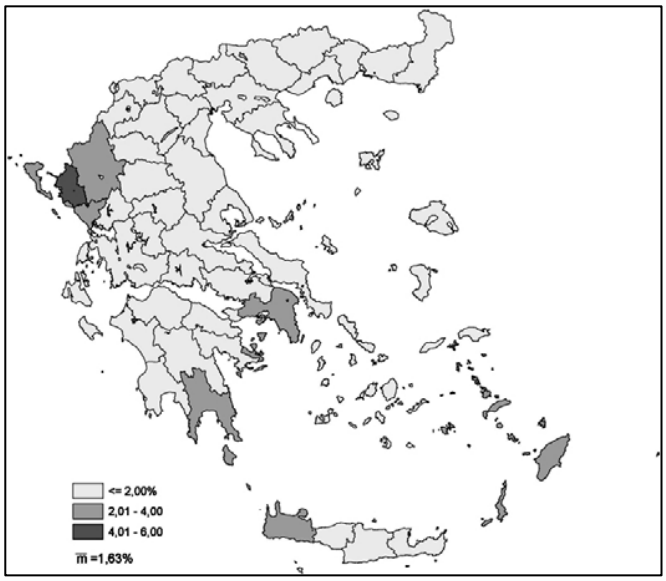
As regards the directionality of international migrations of Albanians, a main development during this period concerns the fact that, from 2020 onwards, Greece is no longer the main destination of Albanian out-migration; Italy becomes the most preferred destination followed by Greece. In 2020, 446,614 Albanian citizens were residing in Greece *vs*. 493,666 in Italy, representing respectively 39% and 36% of Albanian emigrants residing abroad. The other 25% of emigrants mostly reside in OECD countries in Western Europe and North America, particularly the United States (8%) and Germany (5%), and in neighboring North Macedonia (5%), where ethnic Albanians represent

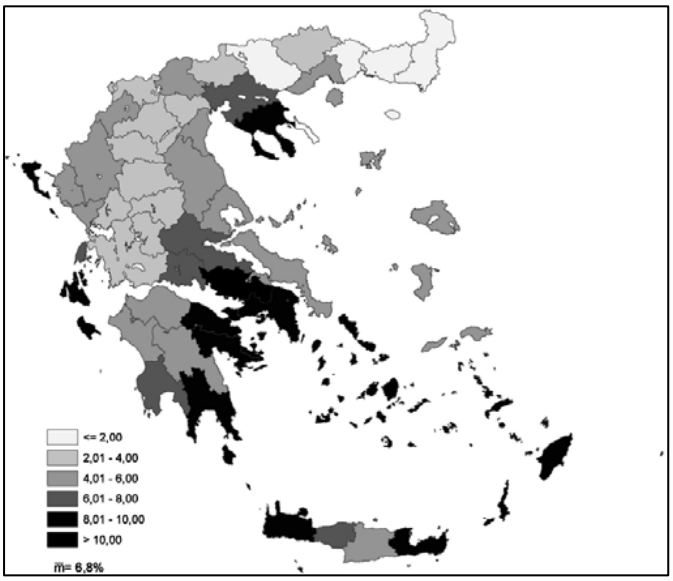
[1] The ratio of the net internal migration to a given territory (prefecture) and the respective population, in a given year, expressed per 1,000 inhabitants (INSTAT, 2023: 63).

the second largest ethnic group. In 2024, Albanians counted for 474,441 and 542,638 persons in Greece and Italy respectively (UNDESA, 2024).

4. Immigration in Greece: different origins, different spatial patterns, 2001-2021

By the end of the 1980s, the countries of Southern Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece) became lands of reception of immigrants. Greece has been no exception to the rule: a country of traditional emigration during the first four post-war decades, it counted for 762,000 foreigners according to the census of 2001. Being a Balkan country itself, sharing borders with some of the countries in which the sociopolitical regimes collapsed by the 1990s, it is without any surprise that, in 2001, foreigners from Eastern European countries constituted approximately 70% of foreigners registered in Greece. Of these, 58% were from Albania and 17% from the other Eastern European and ex-soviet countries, i.e. Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia. That is to say, 75% of the total foreign citizens registered in Greece in 2001 were coming from Eastern European – mainly Balkan – and ex-soviet countries. Indeed, nationals from other countries, such as reunified Germany, Cyprus, the United States and Australia accounted for only 9%; while, if adding the nationals of the European Union, we would barely reach 13%. At the same time, nationals coming from the six most represented countries of Africa and Asia in the 2001 census, namely Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, India, Iraq and the Philippines, would only make for 6.5% of all foreign nationals recorded at the time (Kokkali, 2006: 11).





(left) Figure 4. Foreigners in Greece by Prefecture (% of the total population of each Prefecture). 1991 Census
(right)Figure 5. Foreigners in Greece by Prefecture (% of the total population of each Prefecture). 2001 Census
Source: Alvanides & Kotzamanis, 2005.

The spatial patterns of these different groups of foreigners present interesting variations. Differences are particularly sharp when we distinguish between foreigners coming from the republics of the former Soviet Union, the Balkan countries and Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and nationals issued from more distant motherlands in Africa, Asia or the Americas, on the other. The latter were present almost exclusively in the Athenian metropolitan area, while the former were more diffused across the Greek national territory (**Figure 6**).

Indeed, more than 70-80% of the latter group was concentrated in Athens and Attica (Piraeus exempt): 72.49% of the total population of Africans residing in Greece were registered in Attica, and this was also the case for 72.64% of all Asians residing in Greece at the time. On the other hand, regarding Eastern European and Balkan countries, the spatial pattern was radically different, since the concentration rate in Attica (Piraeus exempt) was respectively about 41% and 40%. Nonetheless, the presence of migrants from non-Balkan Eastern European countries in Athens was approximately 71% of their total population registered in Greece at the time. Foreigners from the former Soviet Union offered a more balanced distribution within the Greek territory: approximately 32% were based in the Athenian agglomeration, and another 27.5% in the agglomeration of Thessaloniki.

When we refine our analysis according to the nationality of foreigners, it becomes eloquent that the spatial pattern of migrants coming from Eastern European countries (including the Balkans) follows clearly the distribution of its most populous group, namely the Albanian citizens (**Figure 7**). A close look at the spatial distribution of the Albanians in Greece, according to the 2001 census, reveals that they offer a very diffuse distribution across the national territory compared to other groups of migrants, although their main destination remains the agglomeration of Athens. In comparison, Bulgarians, who made the second largest group of migrants in Greece by 2001, present a spatial distribution that is less diffuse (**Figure 8**). Unlike the Albanians, who were (almost) omnipresent across the Greek territory, the Bulgarians were mainly concentrated in the districts of Thessaloniki and Athens (Attica); they were also present in Northern Greece (Macedonia and Thrace) – perhaps because of their proximity to Bulgaria, in Thessaly (central Greece), as well as in the Peloponnese and Crete (southern Greece), (Kokkali, 2006: 11-14).

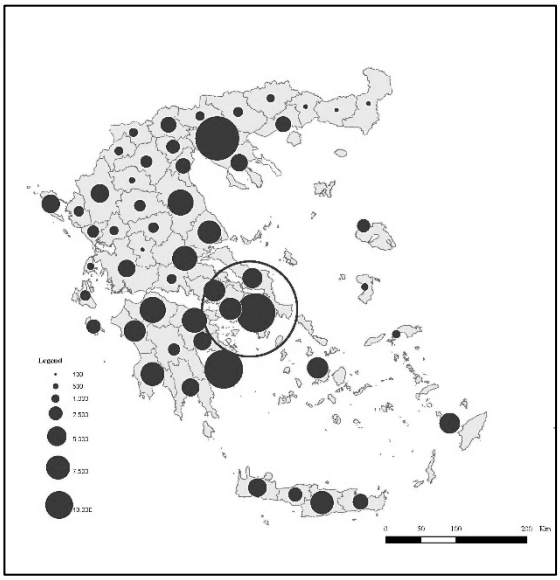
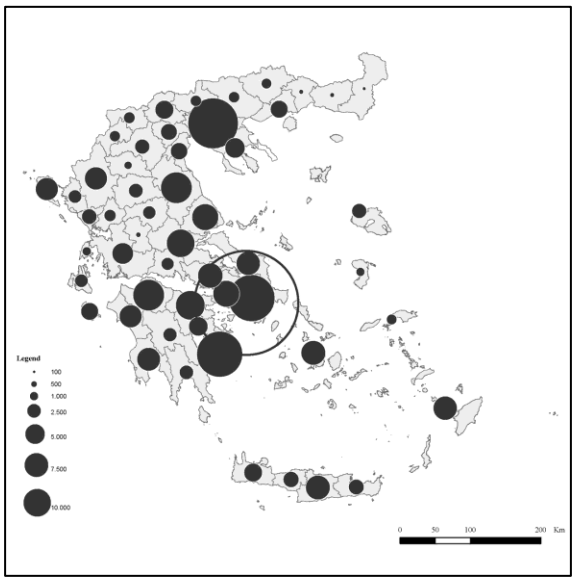
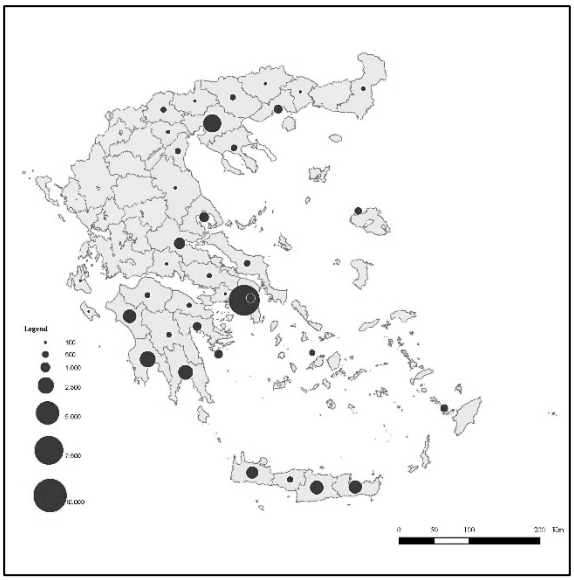


Figure 6. Distribution of the Central European Migration Population in Greece (2001)





(left) Figure 7. Distribution of the Albanian migratory population in Greece (2001)

(right) Figure 8. Distribution of the Bulgarian migration population in Greece (2001)

Source: Alvanides & Kotzamanis, 2005.

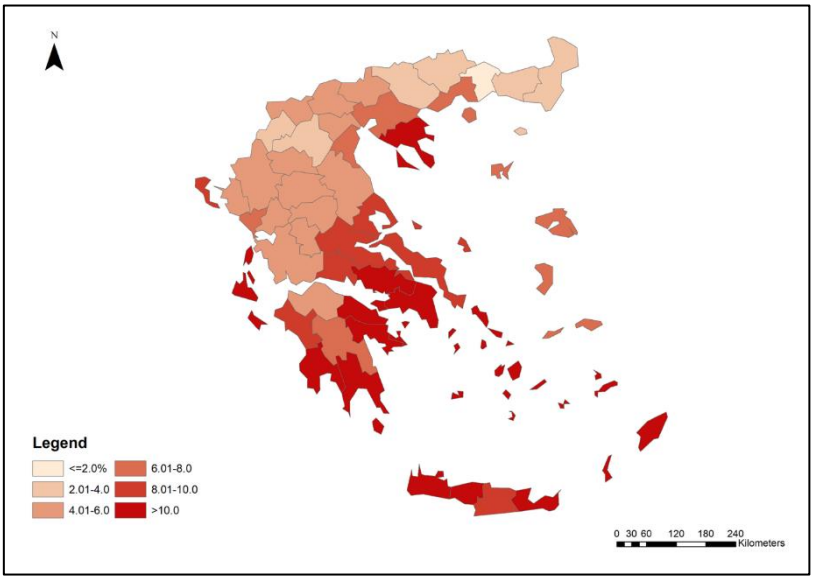


Figure 9. Foreigners in Greece by Prefecture (% of the total population of each Prefecture). 2011 Census

The proportion of foreigners (individuals not holding Greek citizenship) within the total population of Greece in 2011 varied substantially across regions (**Figure 9**). Nationally, foreigners accounted for 8.4% of the population However, this percentage exhibited marked regional differences. The highest proportions of foreigners were recorded in Zakynthos (14.7%), Kefallinia (13.9%), Kyklades (13.8%), Voiotia (13.0%), and Lasithi (12.6%), all significantly above the national average. Other regions with high shares included Messinia (12.1%), Chalkidiki (11.8%), Chania (11.7%), Dodekanisos (11.1%), Lakonia (11.1%), and Attiki—the capital region—at 10.5%. In contrast, the lowest shares were observed in Xanthi (2.0%), Rodopi (2.1%), Evros (2.9%), Drama (3.3%), Kozani (3.7%), Kastoria (3.9%), and Serres (3.8%). These findings highlight a pronounced geographic disparity in the distribution of foreigners, with higher concentrations in island and southern regions, as well as urban centers, and lower proportions in northern and border areas.

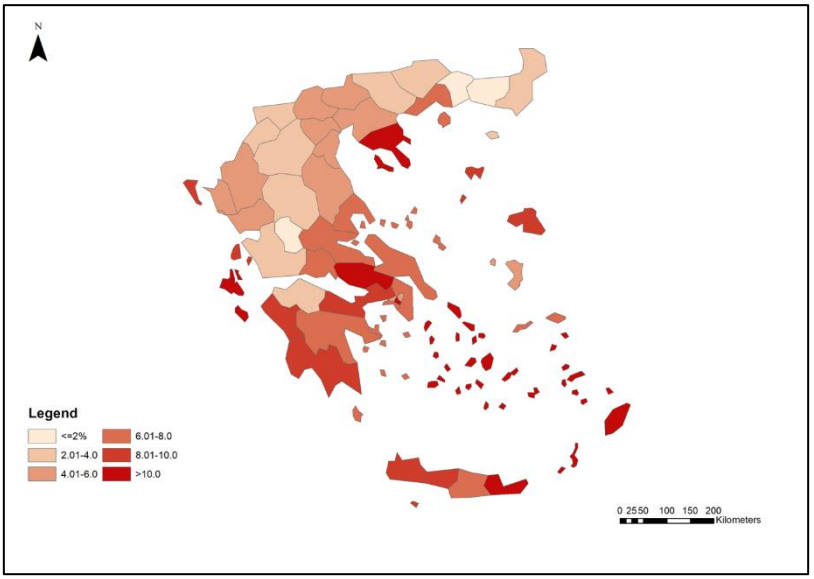


Figure 10. Foreigners in Greece by Prefecture (% of the total population of each Prefecture). 2021 Census

According to the 2021 Census data, the share of foreigners in the total population varies significantly across the prefectures of Greece (**Figure 10**). The proportion of foreigners (defined here as residents with citizenship not of the reporting country) highlights both urban concentration and notable regional differences. The highest concentration of foreigners is found in Central Athens (Kentrikos Tomeas Athinon), where they make up 15.6% of the population, reflecting the capital's status as a major urban and economic hub. Island prefectures such as Zakynthos (14.5%), Lasithi (12.6%), and the Cyclades (Andros, Thira, Kea, Milos, Mykonos, Naxos, Paros, Syros, Tinos) with 11.7%, also report notably high shares, likely due to their strong tourism sectors and seasonal labor

demand. In contrast, several northern and rural prefectures, including Rodopi (1.6%), Xanthi (1.7%), and Evrytania (1.8%), display the lowest proportions of foreigners, suggesting limited migration inflows and fewer economic pull factors. Overall, urban centers and tourist regions tend to attract higher shares of foreign residents, while more remote or less economically developed areas host smaller foreign populations. This pattern highlights the influence of economic opportunity, urbanization, and tourism on the spatial distribution of foreigners in Greece.

Data from UN DESA (2024) on the migrant stock in Greece over time reveals that, since the 1990s – when Greece converts to a land of immigration – Albanians have by far been the most important group of foreigners: approximately 10% of the total population of foreigners in 1990, 36% in 2000, 33% in 2020 as in 2024.

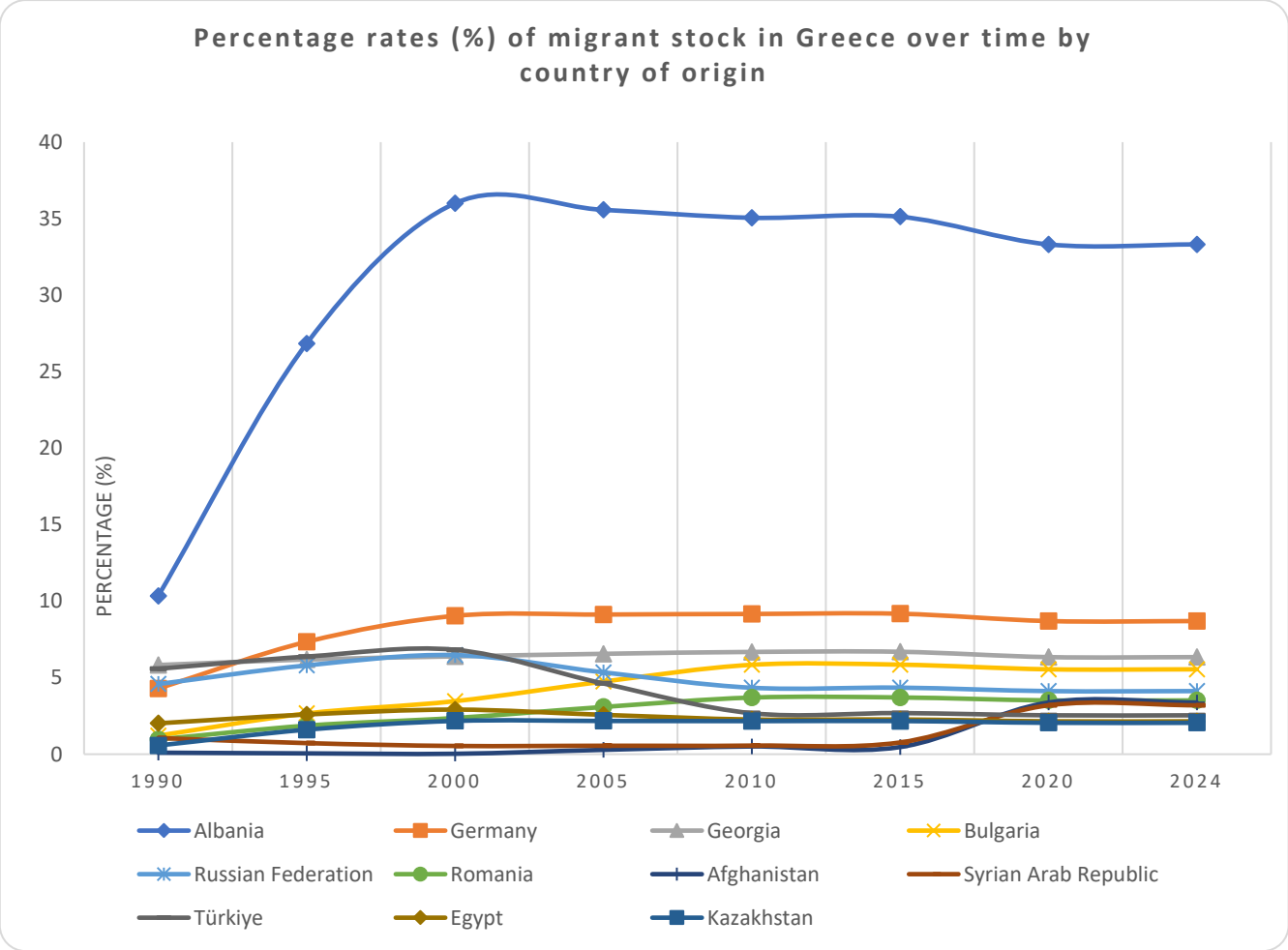


Figure 11. International migrant stock at mid-year, both sexes combined, country of origin* (% of total foreign population living in Greece) (*) 11 most numerous groups of foreigners in Greece (>2% of total foreign population living in Greece)

These rates are substantially different when calculating migrant stock after leaving out EU citizens, Bulgarians exempt, so to "capture" the image of economic migration and refugee/asylum seeker stocks. Let us remind that the establishment of EU nationals in Greece from the late 1990s concerns a different phenomenon, that is the retired Northern Europeans (and lately French citizens as well), who – showing a predilection for the climate and quality of life in Southern Europe (Greece, yet also Spain and Portugal) – move their residence in Crete, the Peloponnese, and the islands (or even practice an alternation of their residence during the year)[2]. We suppose that the trend of the digital nomads, together with a veritable "explosion" of short-term residence via platforms such the AirBnB, have accentuated the establishment of high- or medium-high income foreigners in specific areas of Greece, who cannot be regarded literally as 'migrants'[3].

As aforementioned, in the beginning of the millennium, migration towards Greece has been essentially Balkan and ex-soviet. Indeed, the German foreigners exempt, in the mid-2000s, Bulgarians, Georgians, Romanians and Russians

[2] German citizens constitute, indeed, the second most important group of foreigners, since 1995 (see **Figure 11**)

[3] The term 'expatriates' is usually employed in such cases, while instead of 'migration' the term 'mobility' is prioritized. We will not address this issue within the limits of the present paper, as it exceeds our purpose herein.

constitute the most important groups of migrants, yet, far behind the Albanians. Following the crisis in Syria since 2015, nationals coming from Syria and Afghanistan present increasing stocks with time, as expected.

5. Mapping Albanian migration in Greece in the last census (2021)

Relying upon census data of 2021, we map the spatial distribution of Albanian citizens in Greece at Prefecture (NUTS3) and municipality level (LAU1), to study their spatial distribution. This will allow us to compare the current spatial pattern of the Albanian migration in Greece with the one generated 20 years ago. We expect that the feminization and stabilization of Albanian migration during the last three decades, but also the establishment and regularization of a migration network between Albania and Greece, have – all – contributed to the changing of these spatial patterns.

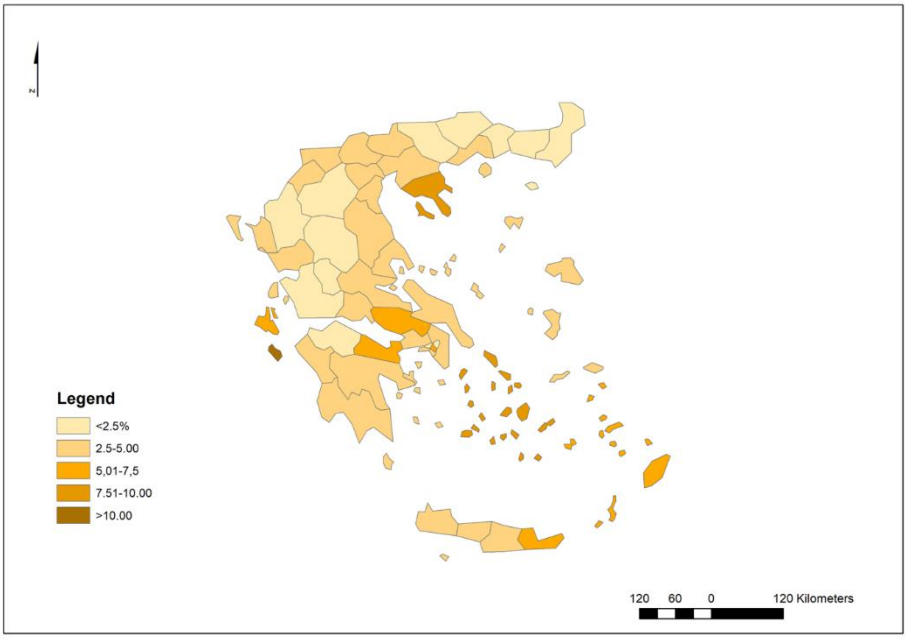


Figure 12. Albanians in Greece by Prefecture (% of the total population of each Prefecture). 2021 Census

The prefecture with the highest share of Albanians compared to its total population (**Figure 12**) is Zakynthos (10.33%), followed by Chalkidiki (9.09%), the Cyclades islands (8.04%), and the Ionian islands of Ithaki–Kefalonia (6.70%), all indicating substantial demographic presence. These are mostly island or coastal regions with high demand for migrant labor due to tourism and, secondarily, to seasonal agricultural activities. Other regions with Albanian shares above 5% include Central Athens (5.53%), Rodos and neighboring islands (5.74%), Korinthia and Voiotia (5.16% each), and Lasithi (5.11%) in Crete. Several other areas, both urban and rural, such as Thasos–Kavala, Lakonia–Messinia, and Ileia, also report values between 4.4% and 4.6%. Regions with moderate percentages (between 3% and 4%) include much of Crete, Eastern and Western Attica, Thessaloniki, Pella, Lefkada, and Magnisia, indicating steady migrant presence spread across both rural and urban zones. The lowest Albanian population shares are found in Rodopi (0.31%), Evros (0.37%), Xanthi (0.60%), and Evrytania (1.38%), highlighting areas where Albanian migration has had minimal impact. Similarly low figures are reported in Florina, Drama, and Karditsa–Trikala, with values ranging between 1.5% and 2.5%.

These results are not surprising, considering the low presence of Albanian migrants in these areas (mainly the regions of Thrace and Western Macedonia), already in 2001. Besides, the fact that the main economic activity in these regions is not related to tourism and/or agriculture seems to justify this pattern. However, compared to 2001, there is a major change in the spatial distribution of Albanians: the districts of the region of Epirus, and in general Western Greece, which are adjacent to and/or facing Albania (by the sea) register very low Albanian shares, which was not the case 20 years earlier. Then, the Greek-Albanian border was shown a predilection, the agglomerations of Athens and Thessaloniki exempt.

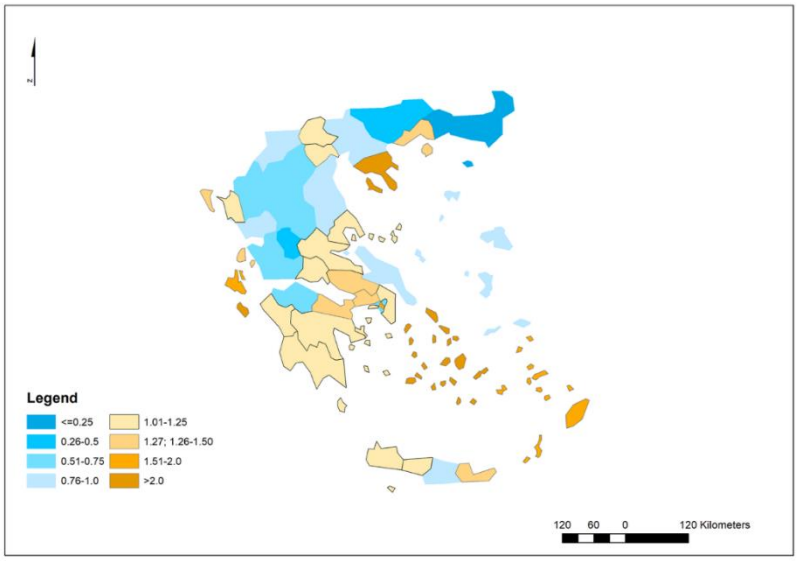


Figure 13. Location Quotient for Albanians in Prefectures of Greece. Census 2021

Figure 13 presents the location quotient (LQ) for Albanians by prefecture, highlighting areas where the Albanian population is over- or under-represented compared to the national average. The Location Quotient (LQ) index highlights regions where the concentration of the Albanian population is significantly higher than the national average, pointing to areas of relative specialization (in dark yellow). The Location Quotient (LQ) reflects the concentration of the Albanian population relative to the national average. The highest values are observed in Chalkidiki (2.54), Zakynthos (2.89), and the Cyclades islands (2.25), all areas with strong tourism economies and seasonal labor demand. Other areas with high LQs include the Ionian islands of Ithaki–Kefalonia (1.87), Rodos and surrounding islands (1.60) in the Aegean, as well as Central Athens (1.55), highlighting, therefore, urban and island destinations with long-standing Albanian communities. Additional areas with LQs above the national average (greater than 1) include Lasithi (1.43), Korinthia (1.44), Voiotia (1.44), Thasos–Kavala (1.27), Ileia (1.25), and Lakonia–Messinia (1.25). Several Central and Northern Greek rural areas also register slightly elevated LQs, such as Pella (1.07), Chania (1.06), and Eastern Attica (1.05). In contrast, very low LQs (in dark blue) are observed in Rodopi (0.09), Evros (0.10), Xanthi (0.17), and Evrytania (0.39), where the concentration of Albanian citizens is significantly below the national average. Similarly, many urban or interior mainland areas like Central and Northern Athens sectors, Florina, and Ioannina show LQs between 0.5 and 0.9, indicating a below-average but still noticeable Albanian presence.

These results showcase a somewhat parallel but not identical pattern provided by mapping the share of Albanian residents per region (Figure 12) and the LQ of Albanians at the same spatial level.

Our spatial analysis at prefecture level highlights some continuities and discontinuities with time in relevance to the distribution of Albanians across Greece, but is, however, limited due to the relatively high spatial scale employed. It is well known that regional averages dissimulate disparities at a finer scale, such as the communal level. For this purpose, we proceed to the mapping of foreigners in Greece at municipality level. However, data released so far from ELSTAT, the National Institute for Statistics of Greece, do not allow for a detailed analysis by nationality/origin of foreigners. Only data for big groups of countries (e.g. EU countries or European countries outside the EU, etc.) is available.

Against this background, we tempt a hypothesis: according to the last Greek census, Albanians in Greece accounted for 374,927 persons out of the 439,255, which is the total of foreigners in Greece coming from the group of European countries outside the EU (EoEU) in which Albania is considered. The share of the Albanian nationals in the total population of the foreigners from EoEU surpasses, therefore, 86%; that is to say there is an overwhelming contribution of Albanians to the total population of EoEU, and this is very relevant to the spatial distribution of the former and the latter. We expect, indeed, that the spatial pattern of the foreigners from EoEU “follows” the one of the Albanians, due to their decisive weight in the population of the EoEU.

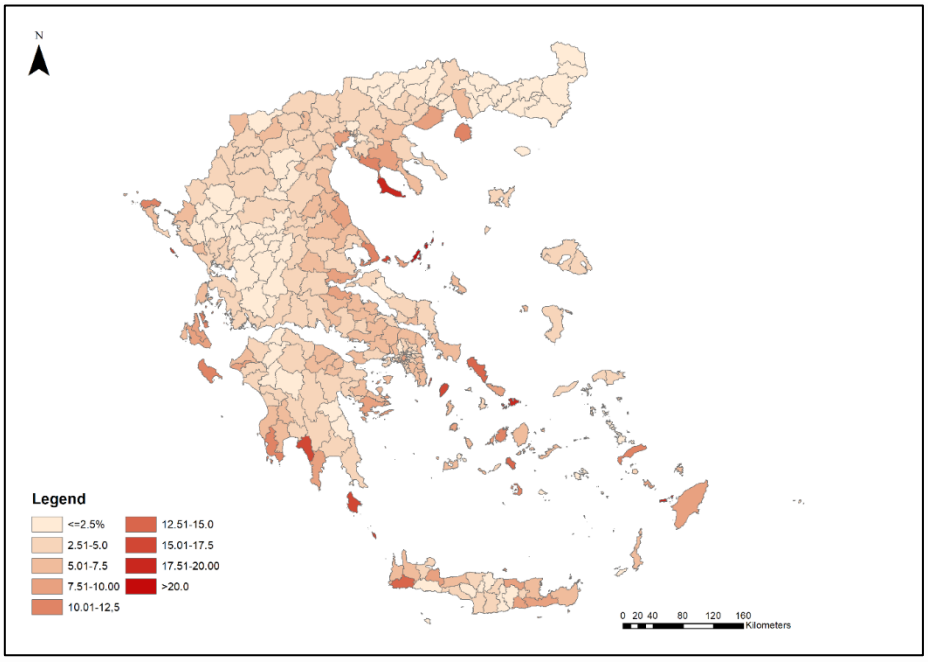


Figure 14. EoEU (85% of whom are Albanians) in Greece by Municipalities (% of the total population of each Municipality). 2021 Census

Figure 14 presents a close approximation of the share of Albanians in the population of each municipality across Greece. The proportion of EoEU/ Albanians within the total population of each municipality, providing insight into the absolute demographic weight of the Albanian community at the local level. According to the 2021 data, the municipalities with the highest values are predominantly found in island and tourist destinations. Alonnisos stands out, with EoEU/Albanians comprising 26.0% of the local population. The overwhelming majority of them – if not all of them – are Albanian nationals, in all probability. Other municipalities with substantial EoEU/ Albanian shares include Chalkidiki (19.87%), Mykonos (18.17%), Kassandra (18.96%), and Paxoi (17.32%). In several additional municipalities, such as North Corfu, South Pelion, Zakynthos, and Santorini, EoEU/ Albanians account for more than 10% of the population. In major urban areas, the absolute share is lower but still significant; for example, in Athens, EoEU/Albanians represent 7.91% of the total population, while in Thessaloniki, the figure is 3.69%. Many rural and border municipalities, including Arriana (0.09%), Myki (0.13%), and Didymoteicho (0.14%), report negligible EoEU/ Albanians shares, as at the Prefecture level.

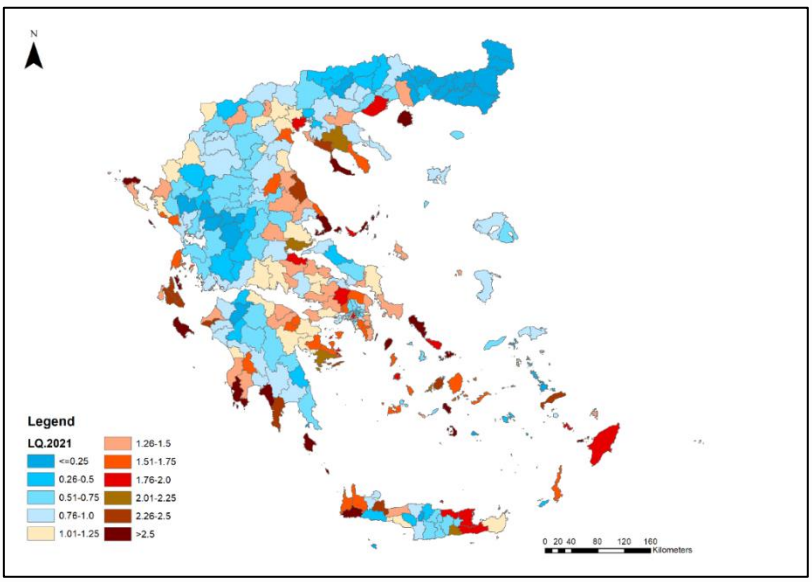


Figure 15. Location Quotient for EoEU (85% of whom are Albanians) in Municipalities of Greece. Census 2021

The Location Quotient index (**Figure 15**) provides a measure of the relative concentration of EoEU/ Albanians in each municipality compared to the national average. Analysis of the Census data (2021) reveals considerable spatial heterogeneity in the distribution of the EoEU/ Albanian population across Greece. The highest LQ values are observed in several island and tourist municipalities, indicating a local concentration of EoEU/ Albanians several times above the national mean. Notably, the municipality of Alonnisos exhibits the highest LQ (6.21), followed by Chalki (4.74), Mykonos (4.34), Kassandra (4.52), and Paxoi (4.13) – all of them characterized by intensive touristic

activity. Other municipalities with LQ values above 2.5 include North Corfu (2.93), South Pelion (2.92), Zakynthos (2.90), and Santorini (2.81). These findings highlight a pronounced clustering of Albanians – in all probability – in specific insular and coastal areas. Urban centers such as Athens also display elevated LQ values (Athens: 1.89), reflecting both the size of the Albanian community and the overall population base. In contrast, several rural and border municipalities, including Arriana (0.02), Myki (0.03), and Didymoteicho (0.03), record very low LQ values, denoting a minimal EoEU/ Albanian presence relative to the national average.

The spatial patterns analyzed above suggest that the distribution of the Albanian population in Greece is closely tied to labor market opportunities, particularly in construction, agriculture, and tourism-related services. The LQ index is indeed a valuable tool for identifying regions with structural reliance on migrant labor and potential vulnerabilities in demographic shifts.

6. Main preliminary conclusions

Since the collapse of the previous regime in 1990, Albania has been a veritable laboratory for the study of migration, considering that not only is among the twenty major export-countries in the world with respect to its population, but important mouvements also take place within the country. Overall, it is estimated that about 800,000 people (or almost 30% of the resident population) have changed their place of birth during the last three decades.

Greece, that has been a major destination for Albanian emigrants since the 1990s, still captures an important part of this out-migration, but it is no longer the first preference of international emigrants: since 2020, Italy has become the most preferred destination of Albanian expatriates, followed by Greece, and far behind the United States.

The present paper sought to provide an updated state-of-the-art on contemporary Albanian migration towards Greece, relying upon census data from both countries over the past thirty years, with a particular focus on the post-2010 era. We have conducted a spatio-temporal analysis to explore the patterns of Albanian migration, in particular out-migration towards Greece. Methodologically we have relied in cartography (GIS) to map census data, calculating the Location Quotient (LQ). The LQ index is a valuable tool for identifying regions with structural reliance on migrant labour and potential vulnerabilities in demographic shifts.

The spatial distribution of the Albanians in Greece, according to the 2001 census, reveals that they offer a very diffuse distribution across the national territory compared to other groups of migrants, although their main destination remains the agglomeration of Athens. Twenty years later, the image has changed: the Greek regions registering the highest shares of Albanian migrants are mostly island or coastal regions with high demand for migrant labor due to tourism and, secondarily, to seasonal agricultural activities. Even more importantly, compared to 2001, there is a major change in the spatial distribution of Albanians: the districts of the region of Epirus, and in general Western Greece, which are adjacent to and/or facing Albania (by the sea) register very low Albanian shares, which was not the case 20 years earlier. Then, the Greek- Albanian border was shown a particular predilection, together with the agglomerations of Athens and Thessaloniki.

To refine our analysis we have tempted a hypothesis: according to the last Greek census, Albanians in Greece accounted for 85% of foreigners in Greece coming from the group of European countries outside the EU (EoEU) – the group of countries in which Albania is included (for data coming from EUROSTAT and ELSTAT). This said, there is an overwhelming contribution of Albanians to the total population of EoEU, and this is very relevant to the spatial distribution of the former and the latter. The spatial pattern of the foreigners from EoEU is expected to “follow” the one of the Albanians, due to their decisive weight in the population of the EoEU. The analysis of this pattern suggests that the distribution of the Albanian population in Greece is closely tied to labour market opportunities, particularly in construction, agriculture, and tourism-related services. That it to say, it is very much alike with the spatial distribution at a higher scale.

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8. Annex

Table 1. Inter-regional migration in Albania (absolute numbers and percentages), 1989–2001

Prefecture of departure	Prefecture of destination												
	Berat	Diber	Durres	Elbas	Fier	Gjirok	Korce	Kukes	Lezhe	Shkod	Tirane	Vlore	**Total**
Berat	0	97	4241	951	5824	1034	1148	348	164	529	8773	2567	**25,676**
in%	0.0	0.4	16.5	3.7	22.7	4.0	4.5	1.4	0.6	2.1	34.2	10.0	**100.0**
Diber	72	0	10,997	964	1144	47	116	153	2134	281	32,898	278	**49,084**
in%	0.1	0.0	22.4	2.0	2.3	0.1	0.2	0.3	4.3	0.6	67.0	0.6	**100.0**
Durres	51	62	0	149	221	38	232	18	902	108	5397	110	**7288**
in%	0.7	0.9	0.0	2.0	3.0	0.5	3.2	0.2	12.4	1.5	74.1	1.5	**100.0**
Elbasan	826	64	5191	0	5618	197	2313	38	197	105	11,076	1020	**26,645**
in%	3.1	0.2	19.5	0.0	21.1	0.7	8.7	0.1	0.7	0.4	41.6	3.8	**100.0**
Fier	1881	117	2042	1201	0	443	444	39	126	65	7560	2618	**16,536**
in%	11.4	0.7	12.3	7.3	0.0	2.7	2.7	0.2	0.8	0.4	45.7	15.8	**100.0**
Gjirokaster	600	5	1817	183	2074	0	705	15	30	85	7634	3950	**17,098**
in%	3.5	0.0	10.6	1.1	12.1	0.0	4.1	0.1	0.2	0.5	44.6	23.1	**100.0**
Korce	324	31	3718	2170	1545	272	0	8	99	44	13,848	1410	**23,469**
in%	1.4	0.1	15.8	9.2	6.6	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.2	59.0	6.0	**100.0**
Kukes	42	287	6728	79	1489	47	117	0	1106	1285	31,769	229	**43,178**
in%	0.1	0.7	15.6	0.2	3.4	0.1	0.3	0.0	2.6	3.0	73.6	0.5	**100.0**
Lezhe	62	361	3390	184	693	38	163	79	0	1137	5522	316	**11,945**
in%	0.5	3.0	28.4	1.5	5.8	0.3	1.4	0.7	0.0	9.5	46.2	2.6	**100.0**
Shkoder	47	543	2670	79	726	30	180	223	5758	0	8892	260	**19,408**
in%	0.2	2.8	13.8	0.4	3.7	0.2	0.9	1.1	29.7	0.0	45.8	1.3	**100.0**
Tirane	142	81	3647	667	632	139	309	95	138	122	0	379	**6351**
in%	2.2	1.3	57.4	10.5	10.0	2.2	4.9	1.5	2.2	1.9	0.0	6.0	**100.0**
Vlore	213	34	418	140	1377	401	147	23	43	54	3207	0	**6057**
in%	3.5	0.6	6.9	2.3	22.7	6.6	2.4	0.4	0.7	0.9	52.9	0.0	**100.0**
Total	**4260**	**1682**	**44,859**	**6767**	**21,343**	**2686**	**5874**	**1039**	**10,697**	**3815**	**136,576**	**13,137**	**252,735**
in%	**1.7**	**0.7**	**17.7**	**2.7**	**8.4**	**1.1**	**2.3**	**0.4**	**4.2**	**1.5**	**54.0**	**5.2**	**100.0**

Source INSTAT (2004a, p.13) on 2001 census data

Table 2. Net internal migration for some Albanian districts, 1989–2001

Districts	Population in 1989	Net migration	
		Numbers	In % of 1989 population
Negative indicator			
1.Kukësi	79,421	-26,965	-34.0
2.Tropoja	44,779	-13,617	-30.4
3.Dibra	99,368	-30,139	-30.3
4.Pukë	48,969	-13,617	-27.8
5.Skrapar	46,503	-10,576	-22.7
6.Mirditë	50,447	-10,703	-21.2
7.Gramsh	43,565	-8931	-20.5
8.Tepelenë	49,850	-8792	-17.6
9.Mat	76,674	-13,075	-17.1
10.Kolonjë	24,781	-3946	-15.9
11.Përmet	39,775	-6118	-15.4
12.Has	21,881	-3168	-14.5
13.Librazhd	71,982	-9069	-12.6
14.Bulqizë	50,282	-4188	-8.3
15.Berat	136,461	-12,242	-9.0
Positive indicator			
1.Tirana	368,213	130,819	35.5
2.Durrës	164,484	37,598	22.9
3.Lezhë	62,001	5573	9.0
4.Kurbin	52,806	3882	7.4
5.Saranda	63,983	2802	4.4
6.Kuçovë	39,937	1402	3.5
7.Lushnjë	134,280	4709	3.5
8.Vlorë	176,788	4478	2.5
9.Gjirokastër	66,373	498	0.8

Source INSTAT (2004a, p.19) on census data 1989 and 2001

Table 3. Population according to the migration status (1989-2001) by urban/rural residence (landscape table), Albania 2001

Prefecture of destination	Non-migrants				Migrants*			
	Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban	
	In%	Numbers	In%	Numbers	In%	Numbers	In%	Numbers
Berat	58.9	85,875	41.1	59,802	57.0	2428	43.0	1832
Diber	80.2	108,780	19.8	26,800	76.0	1278	24.0	404
Durres	46.4	66,118	53.6	76,225	37.7	16,898	62.3	27,961
Elbasan	65.1	173,425	34.9	93,079	38.2	2585	61.8	4182
Fier	66.2	180,963	33.8	92,448	71.7	15,298	28.3	6045
Gjirokaster	60.8	52,831	39.2	34,016	48.9	1314	51.1	1372
Korce	63.0	129,261	37.0	76,060	53.4	3136	46.6	2738
Kukes	75.5	58,372	24.5	18,991	67.9	706	32.1	333
Lezhe	69.6	75,634	30.4	33,106	61.7	6597	38.3	4100
Shkodër	61.8	117,913	38.2	72,788	53.1	2025	46.9	1790
Tirana	33.2	109,543	66.8	220,726	37.2	50,748	62.8	85,828
Vlorë	48.0	66,437	52.0	71,914	28.2	3710	71.8	9427
All	**58.3**	**1,225,152**	**41.7**	**875,955**	**42.2**	**106,723**	**57.8**	**146,012**

*Lived in another prefecture in 2000.

Source INSTAT (2004a, p.16) on 2001 census data

Table 4. Internal census data matrix

Prefecture 2011	Prefecture 2001												
	Berat	**Dibër**	**Durrës**	**Ebasan**	**Fier**	**Gjirokastër**	**Korçë**	**Kukës**	**Lezhë**	**Shkodër**	**Tirana**	**Vlorë**	**Total**
Berat		283	154	673	2123	398	636	450	59	58	418	2852	**8104**
Dibër	569		154	774	1168	816	280	205	173	102	265	140	**4646**
Durrës	3098	10,064		4772	2045	1066	2055	3649	2160	1978	2791	381	**34,059**
Ebasan	664	534	362		1418	194	2320	717	345	1384	1141	278	**9357**
Fier	3023	588	339	2084		2384	808	1685	225	443	1626	2832	**16,037**
Gjirokastër	401	177	69	134	529		220	92	65	85	780	287	**2,839**
Korçë	609	624	241	2258	964	194		430	190	427	589	463	**6989**
Kukës	102	255	117	95	212	99	102		181	409	326	73	**1971**
Lezhë	1152	1936	868	2230	315	161	392	356		4016	2241	143	**13,810**
Shkodër	421	1046	1881	416	718	581	475	945	1356		869	462	**9170**
Tirana	9811	21,279	6048	10,120	13,968	7527	10,985	13,965	5230	8159		5088	**112,180**
Vlorë	1405	248	248	825	2200	2002	521	623	272	552	894		**9790**
Total	**21,255**	**37,034**	**10,481**	**24,381**	**25,660**	**15,422**	**18,794**	**23,117**	**10,256**	**17,613**	**11,940**	**12,999**	**228,952**

Source INSTAT (2014, p.19)

Note: The table shows the number of individuals who changed their usual place of residence between 2001 and 2011. For example, between 2001 and 2011, 283 people have moved from the Dibër prefecture to the Berat prefecture, while 10,064 people have moved from the Dibër prefecture to the Durrës prefecture.

Table 5. Population change by Prefecture (in thousands), 1989-2021

Prefecture	1989	2001	2011	2021	Index of changes
Berat	222.9	193.0	148.2	117.3	**-47%**
Dibër	226.3	189.9	142.6	111.6	**-51%**
Durrës	218.5	245.2	270.9	291.7	**33%**
Elbasan	357.5	362.7	304.9	262.7	**-27%**
Fier	379.3	382.5	322.8	282.2	**-26%**
Gjirokastër	156.0	112.8	77.2	56.7	**-64%**
Korçë	311.4	265.2	229.2	199.7	**-36%**
Kukës	146.1	111.4	88.6	73.6	**-50%**
Lezhë	165.3	159.2	138.8	119.0	**-28%**
Shkodër	285.3	256.5	224.1	195.1	**-32%**
Tiranë	449.2	597.9	772.2	915.9	**104%**
Vlorë	264.6	193.0	185.7	186.3	**-30%**
Albania	**3,182.4**	**3,069.3**	**2,905.2**	**2,811.7**	**-12%**

Source: Rembeci, G. Reka, A. & L. Haxhiu (2023). Data from INSTAT, calculation by the authors

Table 6. Demographic data and basic indices: Albania, 1989-2021

Albania	Population (millions)	Population change per period (%)	Total fertility rate (children/ woman)	Births (o/oo)	Deaths (o/oo)	Natural increase (o/oo)	Natural increase 2021-1989	Net migration (per 1000)	Life expectancy at birth,years (males)	Life expectancy at birth, years (females)	infant mortality (o/oo)	Pop <15 years (%)
1989	3,2	……	3,4					0,0			....	
2001	3,1	-3,1	2,8	17,4	5,17	11,7		-4,0	69,0	75,0	17,36	33,0
2011	2,9	-6,5	1,4	11,8	6,89	4,91		-3,0	73,0	78,00	8,7	23,0
2021	2,81	-3,1	1,3	9,68	10,85	(1,17)	-14,0	-0,5	78,0	81,00	8,4	17,0

Source: Data from INSTAT; cited in Kokkali & Rembeci (2024).

Table 7. Average population by prefecture, 2020-2022

Prefecture	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Berat	120.727	117.250	113.241	111.431	140.529	138.926
Dibër	114.771	111.634	107.983	106.380	106.507	104.624
Durrës	291.363	291.677	290.561	289.797	225.660	222.999
Elbasan	268.160	262.679	255.916	252.719	231.146	226.963
Fier	287.946	282.208	275.043	271.672	238.433	233.215
Gjirokastër	58.706	56.655	54.296	53.314	59.529	58.456
Korçë	203.512	199.748	195.115	192.925	171.695	168.064
Kukës	74.909	73.578	72.133	71.498	61.610	60.207
Lezhë	121.690	118.980	115.732	114.181	98.589	96.384
Shkodër	198.593	195.092	191.087	189.164	153.253	149.496
Tiranë	909.173	915.850	922.386	925.268	758.215	759.981
Vlorë	188.299	186.315	184.196	183.436	145.776	143.999
Albania	**2.837.849**	**2.811.666**	**2.777.689**	**2.761.785**	**2.390.942**	**2.363.314**

Source: INSTAT, 2023; annual INSTAT calculations available here