

# **Balkan Roma immigrants in Greece: An initial approach to the traits of a migration flow.<sup>i</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper we examine aspects of Balkan Roma migration to Greece, which started in early 90s. Different Roma groups have been settled in Greece since then or are continuing to engage in seasonal work in the country. The initial findings of our ongoing field research are presented in this paper. At present are no other independent studies dealing directly with the profile of Balkan Roma immigration in Greece. The aim of this paper is to identify the integration features of the various Roma groups residing in Greece. The findings in our research support the notion that there exist a strong relation between the degree of previous social integration of the Roma in their country of origin and the one in Greece. The location they select to settle, the type of settlement they create and the types of employment they undertake in Greece are detrimental to their integration in the host society. Additionally, the existence, prior to their settlement in the country, of social or family ties in the host country, as well as the presence of other type of social networks are conducive to their integration. Roma groups, who migrated to Greece, on the contrary of the common belief, have utilized and were assisted by the regularization programmes for irregular immigrants. Findings are also indicate that some of the most integrated sedentary Roma groups have undergone an “invisibility” process, which has resulted in them being perceived as non-Roma in the host country. What has been observed is that Roma groups adapted to state policies and administrative practices in Greece. Some of the better integrated groups were favored by the legislative immigration framework as it was implemented in a non-austere and easy to be infringed manner.

**Key words:** Balkan Roma; immigrants; Albanian; Bulgarian; Greece

The following paper is the result of an ongoing and mostly unpublished research. During the years of research more than 45 locations of Balkan Roma establishments were visited. Most sites were re-visited, two or three times.<sup>ii</sup> The field research included interviews with local authorities and the inhabitants of Balkan Roma communities. Supplementary to the field research, desk and archival research has been conducted.<sup>iii</sup>

The aim is to analyze and compare these data in regards to situation of the Balkan Roma residing in Greece and identify the possible significance that social networking and patterns of migration might have on Roma social integration in the host country and in the development of certain aspects of their social attitudes.

After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc regimes in the neighboring countries, a mass irregular migration towards Greece took place, mostly from Albania and to a much lesser extent, but still not negligible, from Bulgaria and Romania. Due to the political entanglement of Greece with the Republic of Macedonia, migrants from the newly formatted independent state were limited to a number of few thousand persons, the majority of whom claiming an ancestral connection with Greece.<sup>iv</sup>

In order to examine the Roma migration to Greece we have to clarify certain points of migratory legislation and administrative practice that have been in place for the past decades.

Greece's growing economy from early 1990s enabled the creation of the migration fluxes to the country. Immigrants were coming mainly from the Balkans, the ex-Soviet Union and the Indian sub-continent. In early 2010s, in a country of a population of 11 million there were more than 1.5 million persons residing in Greece, people who migrated gradually after early 1990s: More than a million of them were foreign nationals, more than three hundred thousand were "co-ethnic" Greeks from ex-Soviet Union and Albania who were granted the Greek citizenship<sup>v</sup> and the rest, more than two hundred fifty thousand were irregular immigrants. The number of undocumented immigrants has topped four hundred thousand in the years 2008-2009, according to estimations. Now, after five years of financial crisis and a ca. 25% contraction of the GDP, no major affect has been witnessed so far in the figures of immigrants legally residing in the country.<sup>vi</sup>

In regards to the immigration framework, it was only in the years 1996-7 that the Greek political system initiated a realistic legal regulation for the third country nationals (TCNs) immigrants in Greece. Two more major legal reforms took place in 2001 and 2005, permitting the majority of the irregular immigrants in the country to be granted a residence permit, at least for a while, as the preconditions set by the state for their renewal were rather prohibitive or excessive. In the end of the year 2014 there were six hundred thousand TCNs residence permit holders residing in Greece. Of them the two thirds, that mean four hundred thousand were Albanian citizens (not ethnic Greeks), a number which is relatively stable in the last six years.<sup>vii</sup> Additionally a few thousands of Albanian citizens are granted seasonal working permit every year. Furthermore there are more than fifty thousand Bulgarian citizens residing officially in Greece and more than thirty five thousand Romanian ones.<sup>viii</sup> Evidently the number of Bulgarian citizens and to a lesser extends of the Romanian ones residing in Greece is much higher as the figures of the 2011 population census indicate.<sup>ix</sup> There is also an unknown number of Bulgarian and Romanian citizens hired for seasonal-type work, now days mostly in Northern Greece.<sup>x</sup>

## 1 "Facts and figures"

Within this migrant population there were various Roma (and related) groups that migrated to Greece, not necessarily from early nineties.<sup>xi</sup> Although Roma migration from early and mid nineties is not that rare, it seems that in the Albanian case it is in the late nineties and the following period that many groups are arriving in Greece and residing for a shorter or longer period of time, even permanently. For sure until late nineties the numbers are not that big,<sup>xii</sup> although the case of Bulgarian Roma immigrating that time to Northern Greece needs further research. Surveys conducted in Albania found out that the first mass immigration to Greece of Albanian Roma appeared in 1997, just after the financial and social turbulences of late 1996 (Gedeshi, Cela and Kamberi, 2014: 63). There is no doubt that the lift of visa requirement for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens in 2000 and 2001 respectively, has allowed large numbers of immigrants to enter Greece.

There are no reliable enumerations on the numbers of Albanian, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma residing in Greece. We would say that estimations lack any validity as on the basis of the usual difficulties concerning the Roma "counting" and the preconditions that have to be set as "who we count as Roma", it must be included the seasonal residence of many of them and the invisibility of others who are living in urban or rural settlements, not neighboring to Greek Roma. Nevertheless, the Greek central and regional authorities never tried to carry out a reliable research in regards to the numbers of Greek Roma. Obviously they lack any "counting" tools for their own Roma citizens let alone those of an alien citizenship. Thus, estimations about the Balkan Roma in the country vary and usually the source of information about them is not mentioned.<sup>xiii</sup> It seems that all surveys conducted by Greek Authorities

underestimate the presence of Balkan Roma, even of those who are not well integrated in Greece. We would dare to say that a procedure of “invisibility” appears, penetrating every person or body involved: from the researchers appointed by the central or regional authorities, who are not skilled or interested to identify Balkan Roma, to local authorities who are also not interested or have a reason to not acknowledge that.<sup>xiv</sup> The example of the Region of Thessaly is quite indicative of this practice as there are two rather reliable surveys conducted in the years 2003 and 2012. The 2012 survey counts 10-15 sedentary families of Albanian Roma in Aliveri Nea Ionia-Volos (in Magnessia district), a maximum of 30 families, mostly from Albania, temporary residents in Palaios Oikismos Sofades and 2 families from Albania occasionally residing in Neos Oikismos Sofades, in Karditsa district, 15 persons from Albania occasionally residing in Farsala (Larissa district) and 5 families from Bulgaria occasionally residing in the Mavrika settlement in the city of Karditsa. Only in Nea Smyrni in the city of Larissa is estimated that ca. 500-1000 persons or 50 families, mainly from Romania and Bulgaria, are residing occasionally.<sup>xv</sup> In the 2003 survey no Balkan Roma are reported in Farsala and Tymnavos (in Larissa district),<sup>xvi</sup> and only two individuals are spotted in Nea Smyrni.<sup>xvii</sup> The picture is similar to other regions of the country: The 2012 research project of the Region of Western Greece, a heavy Roma populated region of the country, records “many” Roma from Albania, Bulgaria and Romania residing occasionally in the outskirts of Patras, some seasonal Roma farm workers from Bulgaria in Traghano Eleia, and probably the neighboring villages.<sup>xviii</sup> That means that the research did not spot any Roma families residing in a more permanent way in the districts of Aitolokarnania, Achaia and Eleia, which is not compatible even with the common knowledge regarding their presence in many villages, towns and cities of the region.

Furthermore, it is difficult to evaluate, even roughly, the percentage of Albanian Roma that are residing in Greece without a residence permit. The lift of visa requirement for Albanian citizens in late 2010 makes any estimation exceptionally difficult, as many individuals and families can move from Albania to Greece for three months and return to their homes without violating the laws relating to the entrance and residence in Greece. Secondary sources on irregular and possibly seasonal residence of Albanian Roma must be used with major concern: In the summer of 2013 many Roma settlements in Peloponnese faced police checks.<sup>xix</sup> 1446 Roma of a foreign citizenship were checked and it was found that only 109 did not enjoy lawful residence in Greece (*Ελευθεροτυπία*, 2013). This could lead us to the conclusion that a small percentage of the Albanian Roma (and *Evgjit*)<sup>xx</sup> lacks lawful residence in Greece. But this reading could be partly false as the checks did not take place in the districts of Eleia and Achaia in Peloponnese<sup>xxi</sup> where high numbers of Albanian Roma reside.

There are however many indications provided by residence permits examination supporting the argument that the majority of the Balkan Roma are residing in Greece lawfully, having obtained a residence permit since at least the early 2000s. This is not an observation which refers exclusively to non marginalized groups.<sup>xxii</sup> Our research indicated that many of the Balkan Roma, including Bulgarian and Romanian, up to 2009, were managing to get residence permits as farm workers. The conditions set for obtaining this type of residence permit were easier to be met by the Roma and in some cases the competent regional authorities were more relaxed or ready to accept interpretations or even violations of the law in order to favor the Roma.<sup>xxiii</sup> There are strong indications to support the argument that holders of residence permits are stimulated to integrate themselves to Greece in cases where there is compatibility between the real type of employment of the holder and the type of residence permit he/she obtains. Persons who are working as dependent employees or small businessmen but are holding farm workers’ residence permit are recognized as being of a lower social integration.

In Votanikos settlement case in Athens (see below), many Albanian Roma were holding residence permits as dependent employees or farm workers, all issued by four separate district authorities, while some others had no valid residency in Greece.<sup>xxiv</sup> What Votanikos settlement and other cases revealed is that a not negligible part of Balkan Roma was granted residence permits for dependent employment. These permits were issued, as far as we know, by four to five particular districts. This is not related with any preference of the Roma for these specific administrative districts of Greece, but it indicates that the residence permits legislation had been violated in these districts. More importantly it is highly probable that a violation of the law concerning the family reunification residence permits granted to many Albanian Roma has occurred. Many persons we interviewed living in hovels could not meet the conditions of house rental and of minimum annual income. But overall it seems that this immigration laws violation in the past was in favor of a better integration in Greek society for many non marginalized Roma groups, residing both in rural and urban areas of the country.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to support that the big majority of Albanian and Bulgarian Roma and related groups had at least one family member that worked or resided for a while in Greece the last 25 years.

Most of Albanian Roma coming from the southern parts of the country have stayed and worked for a certain time, at least once, in Greece during the past years. As it is set by the mayor of Delvinë in South Albania, 60 percent of his town's Roma migrate to Greece for a portion of the year (De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi, 2005: 74). There is a certain preference of the Roma of the Albanian south to migrate to Greece, as showed the detailed data covering most of the Roma settlements in Albania ([Unicef] [2011]), although it seems that the percentage is much higher in certain areas like in Luchnjë (*ibid*). There is one research conducted in Albania which includes the international migration of Roma and Evgjit in its focus. According to that

*“Roma migrants (89 percent) overwhelmingly choose Greece as their destination. Even in Vlora and Fier, districts with direct sea access to Italy, 94 percent preferred Greece. Only Roma in Durrës preferred Italy, although international migration was much less frequent in Durrës than in central or southern districts. Most Egyptian migrants also selected Greece as their recipient country, but do not migrate there as frequently as Romas. The Egyptian preference parallels that of Albanian international migrants, of whom 60 percent choose Greece as a host country”* (De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi, 2005: 79).<sup>xxv</sup>

The Bulgarian case is not that distinct. According to a survey conducted most probably in 2011 *“The main target destination for Roma emigrants is Greece: almost 30% of those surveyed have worked in this country during their latest stay abroad, while 23% intend to choose it as a desired employment destination in the future”* (Angelov and Vankova, 2011: 4). That makes Greece the most desired destination between the surveyed Roma, even after the economic depression, although without any other data on the survey it would be a speculation to consider these results something more than strong indications. Certain groups of Bulgarian Roma disclose greater preference for immigrating to Greece: The Romanian speaking *Rudari* groups in general, mostly in early nineties, the Burgas group of *Rudari* in particular and the “Turkish Gypsies” (meaning Muslim Roma) from Sandanski in the South are among them (Slavkova, 2008: par. 13, 18). For the Romanian Roma, Greece is not one of the top destinations (Șerban [2012]; Bîrsan and Hirian [2012]), but still has not been ignored by them even after 2010-1: It is at this time that many *Dacia* pick up trucks with Romanian licence plates appeared in the streets of Athens loaded mostly with scrap metal and recycling paper.

## 2 Roma groups, networks and migration patterns

The Roma groups that have been residing in Greece are quite different amongst each other in their sociological features. Some of them can be classified as less integrated to their home societies with a non-sedentary background; others were better integrated even with a pre-communist period sedentary profile. Within the sedentary Roma there are groups that reject the Roma and/or *Gypsy/Tsigani* self-identification,<sup>xxvi</sup> or they are not even perceived by the Greek communities as such. This is the case for some of the Bulgarian and Romanian groups.<sup>xxvii</sup> Most of these groups are quite invisible and much more accepted by the local Greek communities, a fact that is accelerated by the absorption of them in a rural or in a not marginal urban area: Sedentary Muslim Turkish speaking groups from Plovdiv region of Bulgaria are perceived as Bulgarians by rural communities in Greece.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In this context we can include other specific cases of a rapid immersion, acceptance by the local communities and inclusion in Greek society. A quite indicative example of this process is that of Albanian Roma who are related with the sedentary Greek Roma of the village Parakalamos, in Ioannina district.<sup>xxix</sup> The family relations were so important that the newcomers, besides residing in the village and Ioannina city where the majority of the community has moved, were feeling secure enough, even from mid-nineties, not only to declare Parakalamos as their village of origin but to follow the labour patterns of their relatives, working as musicians. Although the majority of Parakalamos Roma was converted to Christianity only after the end of WWII, they did not turn their backs to their Muslim heritage relatives from Albania. On the contrary, the sedentary Roma of Florina town, converted *en masse* to Orthodox Christianity in 1968, avoid to declare their family relations with a big group of Roma of Korçë and to a lesser extend of Elbasan in Albania, despites their existing family ties.<sup>xxx</sup> The ties with a Muslim Albanian Roma group would have negative affect on their status in the local society. In general terms, it seems that previous ties of any kind with Greece facilitate not only the migration but also a more permanent way of living in the country. This is the case with the Muslim Roma of Filiati in Thesprotia who, following the expulsion of the Muslim Albanian Chams from Greece in 1944-1945, were settled in the village of Shkallë Sarandë in Albania. The majority of the families, more than fifteen, gradually settled in Greece. However, we have observed cases in which previous ties between Greek and Balkan Roma communities were not used by the later in order to work or to reside in Greece, as they did not find it attractive and not because they were not accepted by the Greek group: The Bulgarian relatives of some of the Turkish speaking sedentary Muslim Roma of Ifaistos (Kalkantza) Rodopi,<sup>xxxi</sup> although they often visit their relatives, they do not work or reside in Greece.

There are also some indications of the patterns of migration in relation to the language and the religious heritage of the Roma communities. In the region of Epirus in Northwestern Greece, the knowledge of Albanian language seems to be of certain significance in the areas where Greeks are of an Albanian speaking background or where they still speak the language: in the plains of Fanari in Preveza district for example, Roma farm workers are exclusively Albanian. In the small village of Kestrini Thesprotia, where Albanian language is still vivid, there are at least two Albanian Evgjit women of Muslim background married with (Christian Orthodox) Greeks of lower social and financial status. Orthodox Christian Evgjit from Leskovik and Përmet<sup>xxxii</sup> are working and residing rather exclusively in Epirus. In Thrace (Northeastern Greece) we observed also that Turkish speaking Roma from Bulgaria are more relaxed and self-confident with their knowledge of Turkish language, which is spoken in the area not only by the members of Muslim-Turkish minority but by some adult Greeks, at least in an elementary level: Speaking a variety of Eastern Rumelian Turkish very close to the one/ones spoken in Thrace may allow them to be “camouflaged” as local Roma.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

There are also other parameters that must be examined in order to identify possible emigrational patterns. One parameter is the existence of social networks. Our research in

Albania strongly indicated that there were relations between certain Roma and Evgjit communities, the “visa market” and the Greek Authorities in Albania. According to many testimonies and direct admissions by Greek officials, the Greek Consular Authorities were granting visas to persons that were affiliated and voted for the pro-Greek minority and Greek government supported political party of “Human Rights”.<sup>xxxiv</sup> One impressive social network was that of Bulgarian Roma and Greek speaking Sarakatsani of Bulgaria (sometimes called Karakatsani in Bulgarian).<sup>xxxv</sup> The latter were granted visa for Greece much more easily and were helping their neighbors and friends in Bulgaria to migrate and get a job in Northern Greece, where Sarakatsani newcomers were residing as it is there that close family ties existed.<sup>xxxvi</sup> One similar network is the one that led more than half of the Roma population of Çukë village (in Sarandë, Southern Albania) to migrate to Greece.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Other networks are quite unexpected as the one between the Romanian speaking group of Roma in Aghios Georgios neighborhood in Alexandria Imathia in northern Greece and the Romanian speaking Roma of Bulgaria in Sofia and Zlataritsa: the network was initially created through the antiquities commerce.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

It is quite difficult though to define a more general emigrational scheme concerning Balkan Roma residence places in Greece. Proximity to the country of origin for example, was and still is crucial for many Bulgarian Roma. Availability of jobs seems to be the most important factor of selecting a place of residence: Bulgarian and a fewer Romanian Roma are still working seasonally in the fields of Southern Greece.<sup>xxxix</sup> It has been observed that there are certain places of Greece that Roma and *Evgjit* of specific regions of Albania prefer to work or to settle in a more permanent way:

*“Favored host regions in Greece are agricultural areas near the Albanian-Greek border. Some Roma return en masse to specific Greek villages and towns. Korça residents head for Prespa<sup>xl</sup> and Larisa. Delvina Roma work in Patra and in the nearby town of Arta. Gjirokastra’s Roma families can be found in Larisa and Patra. Some Baltëz families from the Fier district work in Kardica and Kavala, while Llakatund and Levan families work in Patra, Volos, and Lamia. For those migrants in non agricultural professions, Thessaloniki and Athens are preferred cities.[...] Most Egyptians migrate to major cities or towns, but Egyptian farm workers migrate to the same agricultural areas as the Roma”* (De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi, 2005: 79-80).

The type of migration is also of a big variety. In the Albanian case it seems that Roma and Evgjit of the south in many cases have a more long term residence in Greece, as the residence permits indicate<sup>xli</sup> while seasonal and short term migration is not being unknown. Family migration is supportive to a more permanent residence and there are many Balkan Roma, of various groups that have opted for that.<sup>xlii</sup> The family migration was fostered by the fact that Greek administrative practice was favouring the family reunification for immigrants from Balkan countries and discouraging it for those coming from the Indian sub-continent.

Nevertheless, typical chain migration has not been observed, even though it can not be in principle excluded in the nineties. As far language is concerned, we did not make any observations and did not identify any works that referred to the linguistic intelligibility/affinity between certain Romani speaking Balkan and Greek groups of Roma and their choice of residence or work location in Greece, or even how this intelligibility might affect the movement of certain groups which tend to migrate more often than others, such as the Meckari/a/ (Meçkars) of Southern Albania.<sup>xliii</sup>

### 3 Settlement patterns

Co-habitation with Greek Roma is observed in numerous cases, but it's not the rule, even for the groups which are not sedentary. There is only one region that Balkan Roma are not cohabiting with Greek ones (except from rare cases and in small numbers): In (Western) Thrace, where the big majority of Roma is Muslim and most of them are self-identified as Turks.<sup>xliv</sup> In the heavily Roma populated area of Western Attica a large, but unknown, number of Roma, mostly from Albania, lives. In most cases immigrants move in the same settlements where less integrated Greek Roma reside. Usually Balkan Roma are the least numerous group of the settlement.<sup>xlv</sup> Sometimes the cohabitation is seasonal or lasts for a short period of time.<sup>xlvi</sup> A kind of a *prima fasciae* solidarity between Greek and Balkan Roma has been recorded, mostly in the nineties,<sup>xlvii</sup> although much more frequent are the incidents of hostility between them. It seems that solidarity comes when issues that concern them are common, as it happened in Etoliko, when clashes between Roma and non-Roma broke out the previous years, causing the arrest of two Greek and two Albanian Roma (Kanistras 2012). As it was mentioned, cohabitation of Balkan and Greek Roma is not always comfortable: this was the case in Acharnes/Menidi (Western Attica). It appears that avoidance of identification as non Greek Roma, necessity, such as residence in already existing illegal settlements and the type of labour are the connecting lines between the groups that promote the cohabitation rather than any other similarities between them. Greek speaking *Chalkidaioi* Roma were cohabiting with Romani speaking Albanian Roma in Athens near the Olympic Stadium in Kaloghreza-Maroussi Attiki. Although they kept, from early 1990s up to mid 2000s, their distinct space, and despite the fact that the Greek Roma were in conflict with the Albanian ones, the two groups were living next to each other for more than a decade, as the settlement was evacuated due to the Olympic Games of 2004 (Daskalaki (2005; 2007: 199, 207, 210; 2010: 56-57)). In other cases Greek Roma are gradually departing from settlements where Albanian Roma are settling, as in Nea Zoi Aspropyrgchos (Attiki). There other cases that Greek Roma are cohabiting with more than one group of Balkan Roma in a more permanent way, like in Farsala Larissa.<sup>xlviii</sup> It is not rare though that one or more Balkan Roma groups are settled separately from the Greek ones. There are also cases that families originating from a specific agglomeration are settled together in urban centers: Many families from Ura Vajgurore in Berat (Albania) are settled in the same neighborhood of Aghios Ioannis Rentis in Attiki. In Patras many Balkan Roma groups have been settled together.<sup>xlix</sup> These settlements vary in scale: In Nea Artaki Evoia three to four Albanian Roma nuclear families have settled in an abandoned poultry establishment away from Greek Roma groups. In Koropi Attiki 45-75, depending on the period, Albanian Roma families were settled in late 2000s near a highway, away from the settlements of Greek Roma in the area.<sup>1</sup> There are also some short lived settlements due to various other reasons. Local communities' hostility towards non sedentary Balkan Roma is a primal reason. They perceive their establishment in the area as a threat to their security therefore they see the settlement eviction as a prevention measure against delinquency.<sup>li</sup> Less integrated Balkan and Greek Roma sometimes are facing the same problems. Most important is the eviction of illegal settlements which initiated as a policy in late 1990s. Obviously, in such cases Balkan Roma cohabiting with Greek Roma are also forced to abandon the settlements.<sup>lii</sup> However, the last couple of years, the traditional type of settling for many non sedentary Albanian Roma has been modified due to various factors, one of them being the forced eviction and destruction of their settlements.<sup>liii</sup> Riganokampos in Achaia and Votanikos in Athens had been the two such exemplary symbolic Albanian Roma settlements. The Votanikos (group of) settlements, with a mixed Greek and Albanian Roma population, had been evacuated twice in the past, with the Roma reconstructing their hovels and re-inhabiting abandoned buildings.<sup>liiv</sup> In August 2012, after a quite controversial fire, the Votanikos settlements were dismantled by Police authorities and the municipality of Athens. In these settlements a high number, probably more than one thousand, of Albanian Roma was residing and was mostly involved with scrap metal, barely legal or illegal, business.<sup>liv</sup>

Riganokambos' evacuation was rather more gradual:<sup>lvi</sup> The initial attempt to dismantle it, partly successful, goes back to 2005, when 11 sheds of Albanian Roma were demolished.<sup>lvii</sup>

A quite interesting observation is related with the nomadism of certain Balkan Roma groups which have migrated to Greece. Although such procedures are visible in certain groups as those from Elbasan city and Korçë region, we have to examine carefully the past of these groups during the communist regimes and the period before their migration. In fact, the well advertised housing programmes for non-sedentary Roma were not that successful and internal migration was always the case for a number of groups especially in Albania and Bulgaria. Certain groups readopted different kinds of an itinerant lifestyle immediately after the collapse of the regimes, years before their migration abroad ([Gedeshi and Jorgoni], 2011). Some families coming from the two regions mentioned above have indicated that they were sedentary before their arrival to Greece, although they admitted that their relatives in Albania, at least most of them, maintain a similar lifestyle.<sup>lviii</sup>

#### **4 Working patterns and aspects of social attitudes**

In a few studies there are some references dealing with the employment of Balkan Roma groups in Greece. The seasonal type of agricultural or other types of employment associated in a stereotypical way with the Roma (i.e. scrap metal recycling), have already been mentioned in the studies.<sup>lix</sup> An interrelation between the kind of employment in homeland and the one in Greece has been observed in some cases.<sup>lx</sup> Many of the Roma employed in Roma associated jobs are long terms residents in Greece. In addition, there are many Roma residing in Greece who are employed in the primary sector of the economy not in a seasonal nature employment. These groups are less "visible" and consequently are escaping the attention of the researchers. It is true that Balkan Roma can be found working in every sector of the economy. Some of them are following "employment routes" common to other Greeks or to Greek Roma: Where tourism flourishes Balkan Roma are also present. Nowadays many Balkan Roma reside in Greek islands and are employed in different types of jobs throughout the year.<sup>lxi</sup>

Begging, a "business" dominated by Balkan Roma minors until 2003-2004, has been reduced the last decade but has not been disappeared.<sup>lxii</sup> Finally Albanian and Bulgarian Roma women are also numerous in the "low cost" prostitution market.<sup>lxiii</sup>

There are not any surveys regarding the delinquency rate of the marginalized Balkan Roma groups which are residing in Greece. However, many observers, from police officers to social workers, confirm that there is a kind of co-operation between Greek and Balkan Roma in criminal activities. In some cases this is easily observed, like the "drug market" in Dendropotamos Thessaloniki, where Greek and Albanian Roma are co-operating. In other cases this cooperation ensues from police arrests data.<sup>lxiv</sup> However, Albanian Roma were often used as scapegoats or as the "easy target" in such cases: In Aspropyrgos Attiki, a municipality populated heavily by Roma and Greeks from ex-Soviet Union, Albanian Roma are usually blamed for the criminality in the area. And being an Albanian Roma could justify every action: Back in 2001, the mayor and a deputy-mayor of Aspropyrgos explained the demolition of the sheds of a Roma settlement by declaring that the inhabitants after all were Albanian Roma, when in fact they were Greek Roma.<sup>lxv</sup>

Evidently, there are many Greek and Balkan Roma marriages or unmarried partners living together and having children. This practice appeared relatively early in Greece. In late 90s there were already many marriages or unmarried couples with children in many areas.<sup>lxvi</sup> Mixed marriages are not limited in Northern Greece, but are common in many settlements



that Greek and Balkan Roma living side by side.<sup>lxvii</sup> There are also cases where Balkan Roma spouses are identified in settlements which are inhabited exclusively by Greek Roma.<sup>lxviii</sup>

In regards to language we did observe that in the Albanian Roma case, many families, irrespective of the fact of living with other Roma families (Greek or not), tend to neglect Albanian language learning.<sup>lxix</sup> This is also the case for many mixed marriages: Greek is favored over Romani and Albanian, as we observed at least in Etoliko Aitolokarnania.<sup>lxx</sup>

Concerning education, we confirmed that the back ground of the family and the group is of major importance. This was quite obvious for example in a family from Burrel Mat of Northern Albania.<sup>lxxi</sup> They had got a labour residence permit from late 1990s, a period when many non-Roma Albanians didn't bother to get one. Since, the residence permits were issued in Athens and Lamia Fthiotida. Their children not only attended elementary school but currently one of them is attending high school. The Roma (not Evgjit) community of Burrel is one of the better integrated ones in Albania. Our research supports findings that school attendance is strongly related with the settlement's environment. Thus, while the few Albanian Roma families in Korakonero (Karnaghio) and Tsairi<sup>lxxii</sup> in Rhodes island who settled near Greek Roma were not attending school following the attitude of their co-settlers, in Nea Ionia-Volos, where school attendance is of much higher value and the municipal authorities are deeply concerned about Roma education, the Albanian Roma children are attending school in a relatively regular base.<sup>lxxiii</sup> There are also other cases showing a higher rate of school attendance of Balkan Roma than the Greek ones. One striking case has been studied: Albanian Roma were much more concerned about the education of their children than Greek speaking *Chalkidaioi* Roma living next to each other in Kalogreza-Maroussi (Daskalaki 2007). In our point of view this "peculiarity" is just one more indication of the complexity and the variety of the Roma groups and can not be interpreted as a rule regarding school attendance. What we know for certain is that children of sedentary Balkan Roma residing in rural and not marginalized urban areas are attending elementary school on a regular basis.

## 5 Conclusions

It seems that the integration and the social profile of every specific group and/or family in their home society is a crucial factor for their choices in Greece. Their profile in home societies is related most of all with the types of employment they follow and the living environment they choose in Greece. Another factor appears of major importance: the location and the type of settlement are strongly related with group and/or family integration. Some of the sedentary and already well-integrated groups were undergone an "invisibility" process in Greece, a "de-gypsyism" process if I can risk a coinage. This process is also related with the location and the type of employment.

The solidarity between Balkan and Greek Roma groups needs further research. There are indications though that could allow us to assume that solidarity faints as groups' common residence tie comes to an end.

The renomadism that appeared in many Eastern Europe Roma groups affected also Albanian and Bulgarian Roma. There are indications that some groups followed this renomadising process after they migrated to Greece. However, it seems that the same process had been followed by the group members in home societies. In general, there is not enough evidence to support a differentiated attitude between members of the group who remained home and those who migrated to Greece. On the contrary, there is evidence to support the idea that there are similarities in their social attitudes. There is sparse evidence that not all but only the better integrated groups and families/individuals in their home societies were advanced in their

socioeconomic status in Greece by joining the legalization-regularization programmes that were implemented the past decades. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the residence permit has turned out to be a more “helpful way to go” in cases where there is compatibility between the real type of employment of the holder and the type of residence permit he/she obtained. The above assumptions are not specifically related with Roma immigrants and systematic research has to be carried out in order to identify such links scientifically. Finally, there is enough proof to support the idea that any kind of affinity with Greece and any kind of social networks have been turned out to be quite helpful for the integration of the Roma.

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<sup>i</sup> In this text, following the institutional approach of the Council of Europe, the generic term Roma includes every related group. Every mobile and sedentary group for which the heteronyms traditionally used in different Balkan languages are related in etymology with the terms “Gypsies” and/or “Tsigani (Cigani)” is covered by the term Roma in the text, except in the cases where a more precise definition and differentiation is considered necessary. If the source of information is not stated, it comes from our ongoing research, initiated in the year 2007. I would like to thank Mr Dimitris Hormovitis and Dr Andriani Papadopoulou for providing me with data for Balkan Roma communities in Greece.

<sup>ii</sup> The regions where no research was carried out are: Ionian Islands, Crete, Cyclades and the islands of Northern Aegean.

<sup>iii</sup> The desk research included communications with local and regional authorities which provided us with unofficial data, and thus helping us to plan the field research or the manner of collection of information. Finally, research has been conducted at the archive of the Greek Ombudsman, which has been active since 1998. The archive has proven to be a useful tool as we did not examine exclusively the Balkan Roma cases, but more than 250 residence permit complaints of persons with Albanian and Bulgarian citizenship that due to their names or/and place of origin were possibly Roma.

<sup>iv</sup> In early nineties a limited number of Roma from ex-Yugoslavia arrived in Greece, most of them from Kosovo and the Republic of Macedonia. It is true that the majority of them were *de jure* or *de facto* stateless. As some of the Macedonian Roma were originating from Kosovo the issues that raised were much more complicated. The last decade or so, the Roma citizens of ex-Yugoslavia residing in Greece are not exceeding some dozens. The 2003 incidents in Medzitlija-Niki border crossing between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece when Kosovo Roma tried to enter Greece should be rather examined as a political action of symbolic value.

<sup>v</sup> In 2013 a number of ca. 150 thousand Albanian citizens classified by the Greek state as co-ethnic Greeks, have not been naturalised yet and thus are included in the one million of aliens.

<sup>vi</sup> The number of irregular immigrants though seems to have been affected by the crisis and the hard line policies against irregular immigration implemented from the years 2010-1. There are certain researchers who claim that today the irregular immigrants residing in Greece are no more than 150 thousand, a figure less than half of the one provided by the estimations before the crisis (Baltsiotis 2012).

<sup>vii</sup> According to the official data provided to the author by the Greek Ministry of Interior, at the 10th of November 2014 there were 495,500 valid residence permits and 112,500 pending for renewal -and initial granting residence permits-, a total number of 607,500. 416,000 Albanian citizens (non ethnic Greeks) were holders of a valid or pending for renewal residence permit (Baltsiotis, 2014). Figures are rounded to the nearest 500). In September 2009 the same number was 435 thousand (Tsioukas, 2009: 49).

<sup>viii</sup> According to the official data from 2007 up to the end of 2012, 44,995 Bulgarians and 34,756 Romanians were registration certificate and permanent residence status holders (Baltsiotis, Christopoulos and Tsioukas, 2012: 29).

<sup>ix</sup> Especially the figure of Bulgarian citizens residing in Greece is estimated to more than a hundred thousand persons (see also Stoyanova, 2011: 7, 30).

<sup>x</sup> That doesn't mean that some of the already mentioned as Bulgarians residing in Greece are not moving from Bulgaria to Greece for some months for seasonal work and return to Bulgaria.

<sup>xi</sup> For a 1991-1992 migration of Romanian Roma to Greece see Birsan and Hirian, [2012]: 71, 97-99.

<sup>xii</sup> In Avliza settlement (Acharnes Attiki) in 1997-1998 there are traced two families of Albanian Roma only, and in Vlyhos Megara Attiki just one (ΔΕΠΙΟΣ, 1999, Annex II: 6-7). Although these figures are underestimated, some years later, one could trace dozens of Albanian Roma families in Acharnes and Zefyri (Attiki), even settlements that are inhabited in majority by Balkan Roma, like Psari Aspropyrgchos Attiki, where Albanian Roma are settled.

<sup>xiii</sup> The most recent estimation is ca. 50 thousand “from the Balkan countries” (Papadopoulou, 2013). In 2010 the Roma foreign citizens in Greece were estimated in 100 thousand (Cahn and Guild, 2008 [2010]: 38).

<sup>xiv</sup> We interviewed in 2012 and 2013 a number of researchers who have conducted some of these surveys. They are regional and municipal public servants or employees at municipal medi-social support centers sent to the field without a minimum training.

<sup>xv</sup> ΠΕΣΠΙ(Θ), 2012: 12, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23.

<sup>xvi</sup> [Somaras et al.] 2003b, 2003c.

<sup>xvii</sup> [Somaras et al.], 2003a.

<sup>xviii</sup> ΕΣΔΕΡ(ΔΕ), 2012: 133-134, 158, 162. There is a reference to c. 200 persons (40 families).

<sup>xix</sup> For a complete list of these police operations in Peloponnese and Attiki starting from early 2013 and going on until today, see [attikipress.gr](http://attikipress.gr) 2013-2014. Sometimes is not mentioned that the operations are against Roma settlements and the arrested aliens are not mentioned as Roma.

<sup>xx</sup> For the Albanian speaking group of (J)Evgjit/Jevgi, sometimes called in English Jevgs/Egyptians, see GSHDNJ, 2003: 103-112; CEDIME-SE- [Koinova] 2000. Their mother tongue is Albanian.

<sup>xxi</sup> According to the article, checks executed in Argolida, Korinthia, Messinia, Lakonia and Arcadia.

<sup>xxii</sup> Even back in 2004 a marginalized Albanian Roma group of 8 families residing in an illegal settlement in Patras was found holding valid residence permits (GHM 2004).

<sup>xxiii</sup> This is not necessarily related with corruption *stricto sensu*, but with the existence of various local networks appearing in some areas of Greece.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Police held in custody 85 individuals only in order to check their residence status (*H Καθημερινή*, 2012).

<sup>xxv</sup> Updated surveys confirm these figures ([Gedeshi and Jorgoni], 2012: 30).

<sup>xxvi</sup> Exceptions to this procedure can be traced in the case of Albanian Evgjit. For example, a successful Evgjit businessman from Girokastër, who was naturalised as a Greek citizen in late 2014, declared “Egyptian ethnicity” in front of the naturalisation authorities (author’s research).

<sup>xxvii</sup> For example, many of the Bulgarian families residing in the prosperous village of Pelasghia Fthiotida in Central Greece are rejecting any other autonym, at least outside the in-group discourse.

<sup>xxviii</sup> This is the case of the numerous families residing in Kourkoulioi, Rovies and other villages of Northern Evoia, employed as farm workers. As one inhabitant of Kourkoulioi set it in 2011 “We didn’t know that Bulgarians are so dark skinned”.

<sup>xxix</sup> The community and family ties were cut, for the most cases, after the end of WWII and the Greek Civil War, and reappeared in early nineties (see also Theodosiou 2004, Matras 2004).

<sup>xxx</sup> They belong to the “Arliora/Erlia race” according to their definition (Goutzamanis, 2003: 184, 199). Indeed, they are related with the *Karbuxh* group of “Erlinj” as they are self-identified in Albania (De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi, 2005: 231), obviously speaking an *Arli [Erlj]* Romani dialect. For their family relations and their migration from Florina to Albania even during WWII, see *ibid*: 200-201, 231. For the way they handle their relations with Albanian Roma, see Goutzamanis, 2003: 184, 199, 227, 237, 285-286).

<sup>xxxi</sup> A small part of the population of the Kalkantza settlement has migrated from Bulgaria during the 40s.

<sup>xxxii</sup> They latter declared that they are coming from Përmet.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> We observed this twice, once in Alexandroupolis in Evros district and once in Komotini (Rodopi district). In the second case, they were accepted as locals: In a traditional Kalkanza and Pos-Pos (also Turkish speaking and sedentary Muslim) Roma old meeting point in Komotini, called “Soutzoukakia” next to the Eski Cami, Muslim Turkish speaking Roma from Bulgaria are also present and accepted as locals by both Muslims and Christians frequent in this tiny restaurant. In June 2013 we witnessed the performance of old folk Turkish songs of a repertoire common in Greek and Bulgarian Thrace by two of the Bulgarian Roma. The performance of such songs was perceived by locals as a proof of the Bulgarian Roma *indigenoussness*.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> The above mentioned party (*Partia Bashkimi për të Drejtat e Njeriut (PBDNJ)*), had officially included certain Roma and Evgjit unions and associations as partners. The visa market came to an end in late 2010, when Albanian citizens got the right of entrance in Schengen area without a visa.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Sarakatsan(o)i is a Greek speaking and Christian Orthodox group which used to practice transhumance. A limited number of them was residing in Bulgaria.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Tomova, 2011: 115-116. It is observed that this network was active in Sliven, Berkovitsa, Sofia, Samokov and Kazanlāk (*ibid*).

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Çukë is a village inhabited in majority by ethnic Greeks.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Greek Roma were buying antiquities from Bulgaria. In their business abroad, Bulgarian Roma were used as translators and mediators (Δίκτυο IAK 2010).

<sup>xxxix</sup> Last year there were many Bulgarian Roma farm workers hired instead of Indian sub-continent ones in the strawberry harvest in Manolada Eleia in Peloponnese. They were perceived by Greek media just as Bulgarians though ([star.gr](http://star.gr) 2013).

<sup>xl</sup> Prespa is a region close to the Albanian border.

<sup>xli</sup> Family migration rate is higher in those groups coming from Southern Albania, a factor that has positive impact in long-term residence: “*In Gjirokastra and Delvina, international family migration is very common*” (De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi, 2005: 75).

<sup>xlii</sup> “*Forty-seven percent of Roma indicated that international migrants in their neighbourhood were young men, while 36 percent were entire families. For Egyptians, 56 percent were young men, and 27 percent, whole families*” (*ibid*).

<sup>xliiii</sup> Our observation, related exclusively with the Southern part of Albania, is not consistent with the results of another research: “*Distinctions also exist between Roma fise, since more Cergars and Bamill families migrate abroad than Meçkars and Karbuxhinj*” (*ibid*).

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<sup>xliv</sup> In that sense it's not strange that only a few Bulgarian families are residing in Alan Koyu settlement in Komotini Rodopi (3 families according to ΕΣΔΕΡ (ΑΜΘ), 2012: 61), an impoverished, Romani speaking and overwhelmingly Muslim settlement, as well as some individuals in the Romani speaking Muslim settlement of Drosero Xanthi (see below). As soon as one exits Thrace, the picture changes: in Chrysochori Kavala, numerous Bulgarian Roma are residing for at least some months of the year (*ibid*: 24). The Roma of Chrysochori are coming from Western Thrace and are of Muslim heritage.

<sup>xlv</sup> But not always: For example, in Skarpa settlement (Aspropyrgos Attiki) Albanian Roma were the majority.

<sup>xlvi</sup> In Tegea Arkadia a couple of Albanian Roma did not manage to reside in the settlement for a long period of time.

<sup>xlvii</sup> "In some cases, Greek-Roma lent money to Albanian-Roma until the latter found employment" (De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi, 2005: 77) and housing (*ibid*: 78, 109). Back in 1997, the first job a Romanian Roma managed to get was after an offer by a Greek Roma (Birsan and Hirian, 2012: 104). Giorgos Mavrommatis (University of Thrace) kindly provided me with results of his research, indicating also a kind of solidarity. See also Mavrommatis, 2004.

<sup>xlviii</sup> In this settlement besides the Greek Roma, some families of Albanian and Bulgarian Roma are also residing.

<sup>xlix</sup> This was the case of Albanian, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma that have been settled, until their eviction, in an area that belongs to the campus of Patras University.

<sup>l</sup> The settlement called unofficially "Attiki Odos" was demolished in 2011.

<sup>li</sup> For example, in the year 2012, the small Albanian Roma settlement in an abandoned olive oil factory outside Nafplio Argolida was perceived as a major threat without any concrete evidence to support this fear.

<sup>lii</sup> Some of these early cases have been recorded: Anatoli Ioannina in 1999 (Greek and Albanian Roma), Garbage dump in Aspropyrgos/Ano Liossia Attiki in 2000 (Greek and Albanian Roma) (see GHM & MRG-G 2000). For a detailed description of such practices, see the eviction of 4 Greek and 3 Albanian Roma families and the demolition of their sheds in one of the Aspropyrgos Roma settlements in 2001 see OMCT 2001. For the forced eviction of an Albanian Roma settlement in Foinikas Thessaloniki in 2002 see ERRC-GHM, 2003: 81-82

<sup>liii</sup> The hard line policies are not implemented in a strict way though. Even in March 2014 a 10 members Albanian Roma family is found to reside in a hovel in "Parko Stratou" in the city of Tavros (Attiki) (EEK 2014).

<sup>liv</sup> In June 2005 Greek authorities demolished 11 sheds of Albanian Roma (see Amnesty International 2005).

Once more in the summer of 2007 the Albanian Roma settlements in Votanikos were evicted (ο τοç 2007).

<sup>lv</sup> For a detailed description of the eviction of the settlements see Theodoridis, 2012 [2013]: 60-64. For the Votanikos case see [Papadopoulou] [2012].

<sup>lvi</sup> For some aspects of this procedure, concerning both Greek and Albanian Roma see Theodoridis, 2012 [2013]: 66-67.

<sup>lvii</sup> See Amnesty International 2005. One more big Albanian Roma settlement in Koropi Attiki, named as "Attiki Odos" (see above) was demolished in 2011 without meeting any publicity, probably due to the high delinquency appeared in this settlement.

<sup>lviii</sup> All these families were interviewed in Greater Athens and Thessaloniki between the years 2008 and 2012.

<sup>lix</sup> [Gedeshi, I. and Miluka, J.], 2012: 47. See also Cahn and Guild, 2010: 38.

<sup>lx</sup> For the Albanian Meçkar case and their employment in agriculture see Gedeshi, Cela and Kamberi, 2014: 65.

<sup>lxi</sup> This is the case for a group of Christian Bulgarian Roma settled in Eressos Mytilini.

<sup>lxii</sup> "[This] phenomenon has recently reappeared, with several police and press reports referring to Bulgarian and Romanian Roma children who are begging mainly in Northern Greece. In 2012, 75 Bulgarian Roma children were identified as working on the streets of Thessaloniki" (Hormovitis, 2013: 24 where the relevant sources are cited).

<sup>lxiii</sup> They are one of the dominant groups in the traditional brothels in the center of Athens the last years ( Embirikos 2011).

<sup>lxiv</sup> For example, Albanian and Greek Roma were cooperating in drug trafficking in Chalkida and Thiva in Central Greece (egnomi.gr 2013).

<sup>lxv</sup> See inter alia ERRC-GHM, 2003: 55.

<sup>lxvi</sup> One member of the unique Albanian Roma family of Muslim heritage residing in the Roma settlement of the village of Chalastra Thessaloniki was married with a Greek Roma from the settlement in late 1990s (Chatzinikolaou, 2005: 371-372 and *passim*).

<sup>lxvii</sup> We met some Balkan Roma brides even in Kalamata Messenia in the settlement of "Viomihaniki Zoni" back in 2011.

<sup>lxviii</sup> In Drosero Xanthi, a rather semi-itinerant Muslim and Romani speaking settlement, there are female spouses coming from Albania, Bulgaria even from the Republic of Macedonia.

<sup>lxix</sup> We observed that in many settlements in Greater Thessaloniki city and Attiki.

<sup>lxx</sup> In Etoliko there are some Albanian Roma families settled within the Greek Roma settlement. We didn't research though if the possible differences of Romani dialects spoken by Greek and Albanian Roma had an impact on the shifting towards Greek.



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<sup>lxxi</sup> We interviewed them in October 2013.

<sup>lxxii</sup> According to the Greek Roma of the area 5 to 8 families are settled in Korakonero. We witnessed a couple of them in Tsairi. The small settlement of Tsairi was evicted gradually in 2013.

<sup>lxxiii</sup> For the Aliveri Nea Ionia/Volos settlement and the Greek and Albanian Roma education see also Δίκτυο IAK 2006.