



Challenges of returned migrants regarding the integration in the country Focus on families (with children)

Findings from Fier Region

May 2017

WITH FUNDING FROM
 AUSTRIAN
DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION



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This assessment refers to information collected during the period March – April 2017 by **Observatory for Children’s Rights (Observatory)** through interviews with central and local institutions, with service providers, as well as through focus groups with returned migrants, in Dibra, Fier and Tirana region.

The initiative for realizing this assessment was realized in collaboration with **Austrian Development Agency (ADA)**.

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INTRODUCTION

During the last 3 years (2014-2016), Albania has received the attention of international authorities as one of the main countries of origin of illegal migrants towards European Union (EU) member states especially towards Germany¹. Significant departures of individuals, mainly families with children, occurred in certain regions of the country². Soon after, this phenomenon was accompanied by that of forced return to the country. The refusal of the asylum applications in a foreign country means the beginning of the deportation process in the country of origin. The state authorities of both countries exchange communicate to organize the return to the country. In most cases, the entry point remains Tirana's "Mother Teresa" Airport. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) [General Directorate for Border and Migration(GDBM)], and in the case of unaccompanied children, the State Social Services (SSS) remain the focal points for the registration of returnees³.

Generally, little is known about this category of population, since it is under investigated / explored both as population group and the phenomenon with its consequences, mainly on children. The assessment undertaken by the Observatory for Children's Rights (hereinafter, Observatory) with the support of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) in Albania aims to identify / understand some of the needs that families face in their reintegration process in the country after returning from emigration. Trying to keep the assessment focused, the target group remains the deported families (with children) without expanding into other subgroups of immigrants (e.g. seasonal, etc.). The previous assessment from the Observatory⁴ notes the problems in reaching this population group from various local institutions, implying the existence of potential challenges in their reintegration into basic local services (health, education, social protection, employment, pensions).

¹ EUROSTAT database accessible at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

² UNICEF and Observatory. 2015. UNICEF and Observatory. 2015. *Massive Emigration of Albanian citizens toward EU member states and the new Administrative Units capacity to face the needs of the returned migrants*. Available at: <http://observator.org.al/case-investigation-massive-emigration/>

³ UNICEF and Observatory. November 2016. Albanian Returned migrants: a child focused overview of data management. Available at: <http://observator.org.al/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Case-investigation-06-12-2016.pdf>

⁴ Ibid

To achieve such a purpose, the Observatory pursued a qualitative research methodology using various sources of information, as follows:

- Interviews with central institutions [Ministry of Education and Sports (MES), MIA, Ministry of Health (MH), Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY)];
- Interviews with local institutions [Regional Education Directorates (RED) / Education Offices (EO), Regional Public Health Directorates (RPHD), Regional Directorates of State Social Services (RDSSS), Regional Directorate of National Employment Service (RDNES), Municipalities, Migration Counters and Regional Directorates of Border and Migration Police (RDBMP)];
- Interviews with service providers (School, Health Center, Civil Registry Office);
- Focus groups with returned migrants (parents).

The evaluation focused on three initial areas: Dibra, Fieri and Tirana. Selection of the Fier region has occurred because this region is from the biggest regions in the country referring to its territory, with a total number of population 497,724 inhabitants, with 23% comprising children aged 0-18 years old (Year 2016) ⁵. According to INSTAT⁶, Fier is ranked second, after Tirana, regarding the number of migrants. It is also considered the main destination for returned migrants.

Following, are presented the findings obtained, sorted by different service areas, to better understand the needs and challenges identified.

⁵ Data available at: <http://observator.org.al/odf2/qarqet.html>

⁶ INSTAT, 2013, *Return migration and reintegration in Albania*, Available at: http://www.instat.gov.al/media/255982/return_migration_and_reintegration_in_albania_2013.pdf

FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT



On-site reception service

Due to their status (deportation in the country of origin), the first point of contact remains the GDBM at the border crossing points. Returnees, part of the focus groups of this assessment, express little about this initial contact, also expressing the difficult emotional state they are in. In the case of return of unaccompanied children, the other important institution is the RDSSS, conducting interviews and observations in the minor's family in order to gather information about the socio-economic situation of the family as well as about their readiness and their ability to welcome this minor.

Migration counters are considered as the first entering point to facilitate the reintegration process for returned migrants, referring them to the necessary services. Although subordinated to various departments of the MSWY, they are located at the Employment Offices and their main function is also related to the function of the Employment Office, mediation in employment. From discussions with returned migrants, it results that most of them do not know the existence of these counters.



"I don't know what migration counters are"



Social Protection Services

The main factor mentioned by the citizens themselves that has pushed them to take the decision to emigrate (or to start their children in emigration) has been their economic/financial status.



"The difficult economic situation obliged us to leave the country"



The likelihood that their situation has improved after returning from emigration is low, considering that the majority of Albanian citizens who have been irregular migrants have not been given the opportunity to work in the destination country.



“We spent all our savings to travel and when we returned we had neither money, nor a job”



RDSSS Fier admits that they follow the procedures for returning unaccompanied children together with the RDBM, but they don't give details about following further the cases (Identifying and fulfilling the needs for social support that children / their families may need).

RDSSS Fier claim that the equipment with Economic Aid (EA) continues after returned from migration for those who have been beneficiaries before emigration, is denied by returned migrants themselves.



“The Economic Aid was interrupted and we have started the application from the beginning”



The returnees themselves admit that they have been interrupted the benefit of EA in cases when he responsible person for withdrawing it has been in emigration and has not been present for a 3 months period to withdraw the EA. These persons, to return to its benefit, had to follow normal procedures to become part of the EA scheme. It is worth mentioning that they were interrupted in cases where the person responsible for the withdrawal of EA has been in emigration and has not been present for a 3-month period to withdraw the EA. To return to it benefit, these individuals have to follow the procedures from the beginning.



“I didn't benefit Economic Aid before emigration, but I have applied when I returned. I am gathering the documentation needed”



Another problem identified in this regard is the lack of equipment with EA for households in rural areas that own certain land areas (despite the fact that being abroad has caused them not to have cultivated the land, and in the moment of return they may not have any financial resources to afford life).

Regarding other social care services, participants in the discussions express their reservations about the existence of services, e.g. for children with disabilities, etc. Care for these people remains only in the provision of disability allowance, which has continued the same as before migration.



Employment services

RDNES Fier identifies and collects information about returned migrants based on the self-declaration of individuals approaching Labor Offices. These offices are responsible for mediating in finding a job for individuals who approach them as well as for providing vocational courses whenever this is considered necessary. Among the factors that are prioritized in providing a job (being a female head of household, being a mother with many children, just coming out of school banks, etc.) is also listed being returned from emigration. However, this measure has not brought about a complete resolution of the situation as there are other factors that are considered in providing a job opportunity such as the individual's level of education, vocational training and experience in the labor market. Returned young people, who are not engaged in work, education and/or vocational training remain the most excluded and vulnerable category. Professional training courses are offered to these individuals, but it remains unclear whether the extent of their provision is to the same extent as the needs of the population, in this case, to the needs of returnees.

But this category of population is not treated differently from the rest of the population, although their need to secure a job is imminent.

Returned migrants to the Fier region who approach these offices admit that services received by these offices have been different employment opportunities or are registered as unemployed and have been able to benefit from unemployment benefits.



"In employment offices I have been offered different employment alternatives"



However, there have also been statements under which they have been registered with the Labor Office and have not received any notice from them.



"I have applied for a job, but I dint receive any answer in Employment offices"





Children's Education

In the education sector, concrete measures have been taken by central institutions for data collection, reaching and integration of children of returned families into the education system. A specific guide has been issued by the MES for execution by subordinate institutions to take actions on priority registration in kindergartens and schools of this population group, and follow-up cases through individual curricula.

MES has also developed an information leaflet that contains information about the process to be followed to enroll children at school, which is distributed in every border crossing point.

RED Fier claims that instructions sent by MES are shared with each school and their implementation is realized.

During the focus groups with returned migrants, they admit that there is done the unification of documents attesting to the pursuit of education in the country of destination, but there has not been realized the evaluation of the child, the provision of a specific work plan or increase of staff in schools to facilitate the reintegration process for these children.



“In the Regional Directorate of Education has been done the equivalence of the documents and the children have been registered to school”



“The children have been registered to school and have continued the classes”



“There have been no extra school staff, and my daughter has not been visited by a psychologist”



In general, to overcome the difficulties that children may encounter due to their disconnection from school for a period of time, they are given additional tasks or, if this disconnection period has been relatively long, they enroll in a class below.

The question arises whether overloading children with additional homework or the loss of a school year efficiently facilitates the reintegration process in schools for returned children.

Another deficiency identified during this process is the lack of human resources for the realization of the didactic program (individual working plans) and the realization of the psychological treatment of returnees. These tasks are mainly carried out by existing staff in schools and are added tasks that may go beyond their capacities.



Health Services

MH has prepared leaflets containing information on the procedures and documents to be provided by Albanian returned migrants so that they can reintegrate into the health insurance scheme and benefit from health services. This information is also published on the official website of MH. According to MH, in RPHD, and in Regional Health Authority (RHA) in Tirana are built psycho-social services and mental health services. In these services are also treated returned migrants according to their needs, but these services are not mentioned during any of the interviews in RPHD, in Health Centers or in focus groups with returned migrants.

For children returned from emigration, the vaccination sector at RPHD requires the parents, through the nurses of the consultant of the relevant Health Centers, the documentation (if any) of possible vaccinations carried out in the country where they have migrated. These documents are translated and the child is offered the vaccination service free of charge on the basis of the national vaccination calendar.

Even returned migrants claim that no problems have arisen while they have approached to receive health services. The provision of these services has continued in the same way as before migration (free or paid depending on their health insurance pay).



“We have been served the same as before the emigration in Health Centers”





“We have only needed to immunize the children, that has been done regularly”



Regarding the provision of health insurance, this is mainly related to the employment status of the individual. In cases where the individual is regularly employed, health insurance is also paid according to the applicable law.



“I started a job and my employer pays for my insurance”



CONCLUSIONS



"I would like to live abroad, so that I could raise my children in a quiet environment and they could receive the best education"



An important conclusion of this exploration is that this category really is a group of people with special needs, and adds to vulnerable groups. Thus, from the analysis of the situation, as the main factors that have pushed these individuals to leave the country point out those related to difficult economic conditions, lack of necessary specific services, etc. Most factors in fact relate to the most favorable conditions for child rearing. Their departure has increased difficulties, taking into account the use of all available resources. Moreover, during the return to their homeland, their reintegration process is challenging.

This assessment confirms that the majority of returned migrants who have been living abroad for a certain period of time when returned to the country face challenges in accessing and obtaining the necessary services. Although state institutions, both central and local, have taken initiatives to facilitate the reintegration process of returned migrants, some situations have not yet fully resolved. However, these initiatives are not integrated to look at the family at all levels of the needs. Most of the services provided are based on sectors, but without providing the possibility of integrated services for this group of people.

From the findings of this assessment it appears that:

- The main barrier to which Albanian citizens returned from emigration face remains the lack of information regarding the institutions where they can address their needs. Thus, there is a need to strengthen the functions and capacities of the Migration Counters, as well as the wide promotion of their role. Perhaps should be considered their physical placement at Local Government Units.
- In employment mediation, despite the fact that being turned from immigration is listed as one of the most prioritized factors, there is a need for a more priority approach to this category. Furthermore, the inability to provide a job should be considered to be accompanied by the immediate provision of unemployment benefit and in parallel with the provision of a vocational course for those who do not have the proper professional background.

- Young people show special needs regarding vocational education and training, and this should be kept attentive to address through targeted programs beyond the state institutions.
- The health sector currently functions as a point of contact with this category. Recognition of this fact should be accompanied by awareness / guidance of health personnel in identifying returned children / families and informing them about continuing the benefits of health services.
- Beyond the difficulties of re-entering the EA scheme, it is necessary to address the needs of this group of people through complementary social care services. Moreover, it is necessary to engage social workers and psychologists to attend returned families in order to facilitate their adaptation after returning to the country.
- The education sector, despite the concrete steps it has taken to facilitate the reintegration process of returnees, faces some difficulties that need to be addressed urgently, such as: Lack of guidance or training to apply efficiently the individual working plans, lack of added staff to enable implementation of these plans, inadequate psycho-social service.
- School should co-operate with the parents' community, the class where the student continues, the student government, creating first and foremost a positive emotional climate that they use to reintegrate this category. Even realization of additional classes at weekends or during special-purpose vacations according to the needs of returnee children can be more efficient than giving additional tasks in facilitating the reintegration process of these children.
- Local governmental units are distinguished as the main institution where returnees are directed to seek support. Specific / dedicated initiatives / programs can be undertaken to respond to the needs of this category of population, furthermore the role of co-ordination may be theirs

Finally, the co-operation of all state and non-state actors would facilitate the reintegration process for migrant returnees and would ensure the fulfillment of specific needs for services for this category.

