



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

*Findings from Tirana Region*

*May 2017*

WITH FUNDING FROM  
 AUSTRIAN  
DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION



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

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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 Germany<sup>1</sup>. Significant departures of individuals, mainly families with children, occurred in certain regions of the country<sup>2</sup>. 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 returnees<sup>3</sup>.

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 Observatory<sup>4</sup> 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).

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

<sup>2</sup> 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/>

<sup>3</sup> 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>

<sup>4</sup> 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 Tirana region has occurred because this region is the capital of Albania and the most populated region in the country, as well as the region with the most heterogenic population (Total number of population in 2016 is calculated to be 1,148,642 inhabitants, with 22.76% comprising children aged 0-18 years old<sup>5</sup>). In this region is also located the only international airport, that is the main entering point for the returned migrants. According to INSTAT<sup>6</sup>, Tirana is also the region with the highest number of migrants and the main destination for the returned migrants.

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

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

<sup>6</sup> 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](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.

RDSSS Tirana confirms the follow-up of procedures from the collection of information on the juvenile's family to informing the family on details of his/her arrival (or their settling in the state social care centers), and further assistance of cases. Through co-operation with the labor offices they have tried to provide employment opportunities for returnee family members, or by cooperating with the Child Protection Units (CPUs) of the relevant units regarding the cases when the children are repatriated after the school year has begun to make possible the facilitation of procedures for their enrollment in the school and its pursuit.

Difficulties are encountered in contacting the family as some of them refuse to communicate and provide information, hoping to secure the position of minors abroad.

There are cases where the social administrator of the administrative unit where the juvenile is resident has no information about the family, as it is not a beneficiary of social protection programs. This leads to difficulties in data and verification.

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.



*“We don't know the migration counters”*



## 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.

*“[I have emigrated] For economic reasons and because of unemployment”*

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.

*“I sold my car to leave, and I returned without any progress”*

DRSSS Tirana admits that they do not treat migrant returnees as a special category. The only service that is provided by them is the provision of Economic Aid (EA) in cases where the family meets the conditions for being a beneficiary, without having any distinction from the rest of the population.

This is also confirmed by returnees themselves who admit to having followed 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, although their economic situation has generally not changed or has deteriorated.

But despite the lack of a legal basis to assist this category in a particular way, to facilitate their reintegration process, DRSSS Tirana assists, in cooperation with social administrators at the administrative units, for the possibility of applying for EA (in cases where family members are not informed about the criteria for its benefit)

Regarding other social care services, participants in the discussions express their reservations about the existence of services, e.g. for children with

disabilities, for mothers with many children, etc. Care for these people remains only in the provision of disability allowance or in the provision of pension, which has continued the same as before migration.



*“I receive a pension because I have triplets. It wasn’t interrupted during the time I was abroad”*



## Employment services

RDNES Tirana identifies and collects information about returned migrants based on the self-declaration of individuals approaching these Labor Offices. These offices are responsible for mediating in finding a job for individuals who approach them as well as 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, but the priorities offered to them remain questionable, even though their need to provide a job is imminent.



*“(After my return) I needed to re-find a job and to register the children to school”*



Most of the returned migrants in Tirana region who have approached these offices are not satisfied with the services provided to them. The delay or inability to provide them with a job is seen as a major barrier in the reintegration process of this category.



*“I approached the Employment offices but the low education level doesn’t allow me to find a job”*



*“I didn’t receive any service or facility in the employment office”*





## 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 District Tirane, RED City Tirane, EO Kamez and EO Kavaja also admit that instructions sent by MES are shared with each school and their implementation is realized.

During the interviews realized in schools and during 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 other services do not apply in a standardized manner.



*“My two children followed a year of school there, and when we returned they were registered to the following class. There was done the equivalence of documentation and they were tested, but so Individual working plan or psychological services were provided for them”*



The application of the individual curriculum is rejected by the majority of participants in the focus groups, while the school staff says that they realize additional hours after regular classes to help the returned students to fill the gaps formed due to disconnection from school for a period of time. What is noticeable is the lack of specific guidance on how to apply these individual plans.

During the focus groups is also evidenced that performing a test is not realized in all cases. To emphasize is also the lack of adequate psychological service for returnees. Failure to apply an adequate individual plan and lack of psycho-social service is mainly related to insufficient human resources for the realization of these processes. These tasks are mainly carried out by existing staff in schools and are additional tasks that can 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.

Returned migrants are provided with health services such as: registration in the family doctor, provision of a health card and control of the entire vaccination scheme, services that go in the same line with the services provided to the rest of the population. But some difficulties remain in identifying the newly returned.



*"I don't know if my kid has to receive any medical service. I was always notified by the medical centre staff about the immunization but I didn't receive any notification after my return. Maybe they don't know we have returned".*



Even returned migrants claim that no problems have arisen while they have approached to receive health services.



*"We didn't face any difficulty in health services. We were served as always"*



The provision of these services has continued in the same way as before migration (free or paid depending on their health insurance pay). 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.

## CONCLUSIONS



*“If I could [attempt to re-emigrate], I would try it over and over again. We lack essential services in Albania”*



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. To facilitate the access to specific services, each sector may prepare a package of comprehensive information on the services that they provide, and this information may be shared at the main contact points that returnees have with institutions (School, Health Center, Municipality, Border crossing points).
- With regard to employment service, the inability to provide a job to returned migrants should be considered to be accompanied by the immediate provision of unemployment benefit and in parallel with the

provision of a professional course for those who do not have the proper professional training.

- 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. The promotion of positive practices that promote the finding of an inter-institutional co-operation route for the concrete resolution of cases would be a very positive step, which can be further extended by being translated into legal grounds.

