



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

*Findings from Dibra Region*

*May 2017*

WITH FUNDING FROM  
 AUSTRIAN  
DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION

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

*Findings from Dibra Region*

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 Dibra region has occurred because this region is from the poorest regions in the country with 54.1% of children aged 6-15 years living in families supported with Economic Aid (EA) (2016) <sup>5</sup>. According to INSTAT<sup>6</sup>, Dibra is ranked second among the regions in the North regarding the number of migrants and returnees. Dibra population is estimated to be 178,382 inhabitants, with 28% comprising children aged 0-18 (Year 2016)<sup>7</sup>

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> 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>6</sup> INSTAT, 2013

<sup>7</sup> Data available at: <http://observator.org.al/odf2/qarqet-en.html>

## 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 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 a better economy"*



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 were worse than when we left, with no savings or any kind of revenue"*



RDSSS Diber 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 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.



*“The benefit of Economic Aid was interrupted and I had to start the application all over”*



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 persons remains only in the provision of disability allowance, which has continued the same as before migration.



## Employment services

RDNES Diber 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 providing vocational courses whenever this is considered necessary. 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 Dibra region who approach these offices are not expressed uniformly in terms of services that they have received. Part of the returned migrants claim that the services received in these offices have been different employment opportunities or are registered as unemployed and have been able to benefit from unemployment benefits.



*“I was offered temporary jobs that helped us a little”*





*“I received the unemployed status and I benefited for some time from the unemployment payment”*



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 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 Diber has not provided any statement regarding these instructions and their application. From interviews realized with school staff and from focus groups with the returned migrants, it is acknowledged the unification of documentation by RDE, but other services are not implemented in a standardized manner. The application of the individual working plan is rejected by most participants in focus groups, while school staff claims that teachers compile a more compressed plan for a few weeks to help the return children to fill the gaps created due to leaving school for a period of time.



*“When I returned I went to school and registered my daughter. She followed a class abroad and started the next class here. I didn’t do the equivalence of documentations”*



*“My son followed a year of school abroad and when we returned we was treated with Individual working plan, but he wasn't tested and he didn't receive any psychological assistance”*

*“My three children didn't follow school in emigration and I haven't registered them to school after our return yet. I don't know if I am going to”*

Some questions arise as to whether additional workload is effective in facilitating the reintegration process in schools for migrant children. Performing a test is also denied by most migrants and the provision of psycho-social service for the returned children is not mentioned in any of the stages of the process.

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 which 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.

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.

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).



*"I have to pay for every service that I receive in health centers"*



*"My children followed the immunization scheme abroad and they follow it here too"*



*"In health centers we were treated the same way as before after our return"*



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

*“I would emigrate if the foreign authorities would give us the opportunity to stay. There are better chances there for our children and for us. I feel not protected in my own country”*

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.
- 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.

