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Reintegration trajectories in contexts of high mobility: insights from Albania and Kosovo

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Reintegration Trajectories in Contexts of High Mobility

Insights from Albania and Kosovo

Ruth Vollmer \ BICC

CONTENTS

Main findings

Migrants' aspirations are key to understanding and assisting reintegration

Understanding and facilitating reintegration requires a holistic perspective that includes understanding people's reasons for leaving as well as their migration- and return-related aspirations. These determine whether migrants aim and prepare for their return themselves, resulting in different levels of return preparedness and pointing to potential reintegration barriers.

Clear correlation between no return aspiration, low return preparedness and assisted return

Data from this study shows a clear correlation between (a) aspiring to return at the time of migration and self-organised (unassisted) return and (b) between a lack of return aspirations resulting in low or no return preparedness and assisted return. A lack of willingness and / or readiness to return is what makes reintegration assistance a particularly challenging endeavour.

Migration and return are shaped by their social context

Migration and return are embedded in social and often transnational networks, with the most substantial and reliable reintegration support from family networks. Support capacities of these networks are, however, often negatively correlated to the needs of returnees. Family support can dwindle or stop altogether while support capacities of families are often only maintained through those who have migrated.

Continuities of socio-economic inequality throughout cycles of migration

While economic opportunities are the most prominent reasons for migration and obstacles to reintegration, the long-term data analysis shows that migration itself has only a limited effect on improving livelihoods. In most cases, the potential to capitalise on migration-related opportunities depended on resource and network endowments from before migration; otherwise, positive effects of migration are confined to maintaining a livelihood.

Notions of home and belonging are translocal

Rather than by geography, respondents more likely defined 'home' and belonging as a social place (often the family) and / or as a state of mental and psychological well-being. At the same time, they experience an inability to combine everything they aspire to in one geographical place and having to live continuously in transnational families as well as re-negotiations of social relations upon return as distressing.

Reintegration assistance: Critical yet fragmented

Return and reintegration assistance is part of the contested multi-stakeholder field of return governance, leading to a diversity of approaches and gaps regarding access, needs orientation and evidence base. In the initial phase after return, reintegration assistance can be critical to some returnees. What makes for a sustainable effect are long-term trustful relationships, flexibility and needs orientation, actively engaging returnees in shaping their future, opening social spaces and helping to (re-)establish connections. A more systematic matching of individual-level and structural / institutional assistance and including vulnerable non-migrants can increase positive effects.

Preface and Acknowledgements

Even I would like to thank you for coming. In fact, nobody has ever come to ask us how we coped after return, and nobody wants to understand the problems of returnees and families without a house. I understand the reasons for your study, but the problems need to be solved by our government (RA102, 22 February 2022, Kukës).

The research for this study was filled with encounters that left me humbled and grateful. First and foremost, I would like to thank all the migrants who volunteered their free time to participate in the research, answer our questions and share stories of joy, sadness and endurance. I would like to invite the readers of this Working Paper to join these conversations and listen to these people describing their own situation and past and future trajectories like no one else can.

The research benefitted vastly from the trust, generosity and accompaniment of individuals and organisations working in reintegration assistance in Kosovo and Albania. The DIMAK centres in Tirana and Pristina deserve special mention for providing crucial information and contacts. More invaluable support and facilitation of research has been provided by staff members of the following organisations:

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Introduction

Academic and policy interest in return migration and reintegration has been growing with an emphasis on the nexus between return migration and development on the one hand (Ammassari, 2012; Hagan & Wassink, 2020; Nyberg-Sorensen et al., 2002) and the policy aim of facilitating returns of irregular migrants and supporting their reintegration on the other (Biehler et al., 2021; Salgado et al., 2022). Yet, many questions are still unanswered, for example, which role the local context, the type of migration and return play in the acquisition and transferability of skills and other resources (King, 2022). Little is known about whether and how return and reintegration assistance influences return decision-making, reintegration processes and outcomes as well as re-migration aspirations (Koser & Kuschminder, 2015) due to a lack of data as well as a lack of conceptual clarity as to what constitutes (successful) reintegration (Lietaert & Kuschminder, 2021; Salgado et al., 2022). Also, the aspiration of migrants regarding their migration and return, as well as subjective experiences and individual/collective reintegration strategies, have not received much attention so far (Grawert, 2018; Kerpaçi & Kuka, 2019; Olivier-Mensah et al., 2020).

Scope of the Study: Return and Reintegration in Contexts of High Mobility

Against this backdrop, this *Working Paper* presents research findings on the dynamics, strategies and processes that shape migrants' lives after return to their countries of origin, in this case Albania and Kosovo, from any place and for various reasons. The experience of returning to one's country of origin is highly individual. It reflects the prospects people see for themselves upon return—whether returning was a part of their initial plan when migrating and in how far they have achieved their migration-related aims. Therefore, the *Working Paper* adopts the conceptual framework of individual and institutional return preparedness to address if, and in how far, institutional support can compensate for lacking individual return preparedness and how each of them influences reintegration trajectories. It will do so by focusing on the subjective experiences of returned migrants and drawing on empirical research conducted in Kosovo and Albania between April 2019 and January 2023.

In the remaining parts of this *Working Paper*, I provide a brief note on the case selection, the data collection and the conceptual framework. Then, I present the empirical research findings, starting with the respondents' return aspirations and their return decision-making processes. Regarding reintegration, respondents' experiences are clustered along the four dimensions of reintegration (see, e.g., Koser & Kuschminder, 2015; Ruben et al., 2009), however eclectically, as many nuances within and between the two countries, urban and rural areas and social groups would have exceeded the scope of this *Paper*.[1] Selected cross-cutting issues are highlighted in boxes. The final section presents respondents' experiences with reintegration assistance and discusses in how far the current structures qualify as constituting 'institutional return preparedness'.

Note on the Case Study Selection

The relevance of the two country cases for understanding return and reintegration lies in the context of high migration and mobility dynamics, as will be shortly outlined in the following paragraphs covering the major recent migration and return developments.

ALBANIA

Since the fall of the Albanian communist regime in 1990, which had strictly regulated and mostly prohibited internal and international migration for 46 years, the country has been known for its 'mass emigration' (García-Pereiro, 2019, p. 361), as an 'emigrant nation-state' (Krasniqi, 2010) and a 'laboratory for the study of migration and development' (King, 2005). Throughout the 1990s, most of this migration remained irregular, quite literally 'across the sea and over the mountains' (King, 2008) towards the two main destination countries Greece and Italy. By the end of that decade, one in five Albanian citizens lived

1 \ Also, experiences of post-war return to Kosovo are mostly excluded from this *Working Paper*, as this would add a significantly different context to the discussion.

outside the country (King, 2008), with many of the predominantly male labour migrants circulating (including many forced returns). Return migration in this period was temporary and largely invisible (Labrianidis & Hatziprokopiou, 2005). In 1997, several financial pyramid schemes[2] collapsed, destroying the equivalent of 40 per cent of the national GDP in private savings, a lot of it generated by working abroad (Burazeri et al., 2008). For the second time in this decade, the government and public order broke down, and protests turned into country-wide violence, particularly pronounced in the south. Many people, especially families, left during this time for security reasons, while migration for economic reasons also increased. In 1996, Greece signed a labour migration agreement with Albania, and so did Italy in 1997 (Ruedin & Nesturi, 2018). Just when the migration system between Albania, Greece and Italy (Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021) had stabilised to an extent, the two main destination countries were among those hardest hit by the economic and financial crisis of 2008, putting mostly immigrants out of work or forcing them to close their businesses. The repercussions were tangible for several years in terms of increased involuntary and premature return migration to Albania, typically of people who—regardless of their return intention—had not been able to complete their migration project (Cena & Heim, 2021).

In 2010, Albania was granted Schengen Visa liberalisation, and the three-month visa-free stay in Schengen countries provided additional opportunities for short-term informal labour migration or job-seeking trips. Asylum applications by Albanian citizens in EU countries increased slowly and saw a massive peak in 2015 with over 67,000 applications just in Germany (Gëdeshi & King, 2022). Rumours that Germany was accepting immigrant labourers had started in Kosovo a few months earlier and were likely spread by smugglers (Hackaj & Shehaj, 2017). They quickly gained traction, mainly among socio-economically marginalised groups and those still suffering the repercussions of the financial crises (lack of seasonal and other work opportunities in Greece and Italy, drastic decrease of remittances). Like in Kosovo, seeking asylum was characterised by family migration, many of whom had no intention of ever returning and sold everything before leaving. Recognition rates for Albanian asylum seekers were already only between two and three per cent across the European Union, before Germany gave Kosovo and Albania the status as safe countries of origin in 2015. Between 2015 and 2017, Albania had the highest number of returns from EU countries (Gëdeshi & King, 2022). While most asylum seekers migrated for economic reasons, a smaller number in both countries fled gender-based violence and revenge threats in the context of family feuds or organised crime (Albania). However, this hardly made a difference regarding chances for recognition, especially after the safe-country-of-origin status. So, while return migration to Albania became increasingly significant and visible, with peaks between 2010 and 2013 and 2015/16, this was not for positive reasons (Gëdeshi & King, 2022). Since 2017, the Albanian government has implemented border management measures to prevent potential asylum seekers from leaving (Hackaj & Shehaj, 2017). In recent years, migration from Albania has become more diversified, in terms of types of migration and destinations. For example, Albanians constituted the largest group of International students In Italy (Barjaba, 2018). But Eurostat data also shows that Albanians continuously rank high on the list of nationalities returned from EU countries for legal reasons[3] , and in 2022, the United Kingdom recorded an exponential growth in irregular immigration of Albanians, who formed the largest group of those crossing the Channel on small boats in 2022.[4]

2 \ Financial pyramid or Ponzi schemes emerged in Albania during the early years of transition, partly due to a lack of regulation, lack of experience with market-based institutions and high remittance inflows. Several companies promised unrealistically high return rates or capital gains on private savings, which were initially paid through the constant recruitment of new investors, until these systems collapsed (see Jarvis, 2000 for more details).

3 \ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Returns_of_irregular_migrants_-_quarterly_statistics#Non-EU_citizens_ordered_to_leave

4 \ https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-63473022

KOSOVO

During Yugoslav times, people were able to migrate from Kosovo and had established diaspora networks, e.g. in Germany or Switzerland since the 1960s (Kölker, 2016). Apart from economic reasons (Kosovo was the economically poorest part of the Yugoslav Federation), migration dynamics were shaped by the longstanding contestations over territorial control of the province, especially—but not only—in the years leading up to the war (Hajdari & Krasniqi, 2021; Gashi & Haxhikadrija, 2012). The Kosovo war in 1998–1999 and systematic displacements, mainly of ethnic Albanians, forced around 800,000 people to flee, mostly to Albania, neighbouring Yugoslav republics, western European countries (family networks) and the United States / Canada (resettlement). After NATO intervention ended the war in June 1999 and United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 factually put Kosovo under UN administration (United Nations Mission in Kosovo—UNMIK), one of the fastest, self-organised refugee returns in history occurred (Hajdari & Krasniqi, 2021): By August 1999, around 850,000 Albanian refugees had returned to Kosovo (Elsie, 2010). In the same time period, around half of the Serbian population of Kosovo (around 100,000 people) fled to Serbia (Elsie, 2010), and insecurity and displacement continued for Serbs and other minorities in Kosovo, mainly Roma, but also Ashkali and Egyptians[5], at least until 2004. Drawing on experiences from Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN resolution 1244 established that return in safety, not just to Kosovo, but to a displaced person's hometown, had to be ensured (Dünnwald, 2013), while since 2001, pressure on war refugees in EU countries to return has increased and many have returned to utter destruction. UNMIK negotiated an order of (ethnic) vulnerability that returns from the European Union had to follow, thereby delaying the returns of Ashkali, Egyptians, Roma and Serbs (Dünnwald, 2013). After independence, the Kosovar government negotiated a cap on deportations of Roma with Germany (Dünnwald, 2013), which again delayed, but did not prevent, their forced return, which is still ongoing.

After Kosovo declared independence in 2008, the main reasons for emigration changed to family reunification and employment (UNDP, 2014). Germany and Switzerland remained preferred destinations, followed by Scandinavian countries, the United States and other EU countries. The high unemployment (and even higher youth unemployment), lack of health insurance and other social services continued to constitute driving factors. In 2014/15, an unprecedented number of 100,000 people (for post-war times) left Kosovo out of frustration and a perceived lack of perspectives (Hajdari & Krasniqi, 2021), but also guided by false promises spread through social media and personal networks and by eased travel conditions (Möllers et al., 2017). In 2015, Germany classified Kosovo as a safe country of origin to accelerate asylum processing and returns, leading to high numbers of premature and ill-prepared returns. Under the Western Balkans Regulation that Germany introduced in late 2015 to ease labour migration from six Western Balkan countries, Kosovar citizens had the highest share of granted applications to work in Germany (with 38 per cent of the total in 2016-2017). However, less than 25 per cent of those were actually issued visas (Brücker & Burkert, 2017). Unlike Albanians and, in fact, citizens of all other Western Balkan countries, Kosovars do not have visa-free access to the Schengen area.[6] At the same time, transnational family networks had again proven crucial in terms of livelihood and risk diversification during the Covid-19 pandemic, when remittances to Kosovo increased rather than decreased.

5 \ Both countries have ethnically Albanian majority populations. In Albania, Greek, Macedonians and Montenegrins are recognised as national minorities and Roma and Vlachs as cultural / linguistic minorities. Egyptians are recognised as neither since they do not have a distinct language other than Albanian. In Kosovo, non-Albanian ethnicities are referred to as communities. There are Serbs, Bosniaks, Turks, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians and Gorane, whose rights and political representation are enshrined in the constitution (see Minority Rights Group: www.minorityrights.org). In both countries, available census data is outdated and does not adequately represent the size of each group. In terms of reintegration and generally, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians are often considered vulnerable groups (see e.g. IOM Germany, 2021).

6 \ Recently discussed draft law foresees the inclusion of Kosovo into the visa-free Schengen travel regime in January 2024: https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/11/30/eu-to-discuss-granting-visa-permits-to-kosovo-passport-holders

The migration potential—defined as the intention to migrate—is high and rising in both countries, even though in different ways (cf King & Gëdeshi, 2020; Loxha Stublla, 2021). In Albania, potential migrants increasingly have higher levels of education, employment and medium-to-high income; the highest (re-)migration potential was found among recently returned migrants with 71 per cent (King & Gëdeshi, 2020). For Kosovo, Loxha Stublla (2021) notes that for young urban professionals with above-average incomes, the migration potential is only slightly increased, while generally the willingness to migrate is still reversely linked to household income. Qehaja & Krasniqi (2021) found high re-migration intentions also among the return migrants in Kosovo (data from before 2014) and highly-skilled emigration in specific professions, such as medical ones. Despite unquestionable benefits of migration, there are also downsides, especially the unabatedly high emigration trends, which raise fears of depopulation and harmful economic effects.[7]

Data Collection and Methodology

Data collection for this study followed a qualitative approach. Between April 2019 and January 2023, the author and 15 researchers and students in both countries conducted qualitative interviews with returned migrants based on a semi-structured interview guideline. In Kosovo, most interviews were conducted after November 2021, and in Albania, the pandemic interrupted data collection for some time, too. The interviews covered the entire cycle(s) of migration, including the situation before migration, reasons for leaving, migration trajectories and experiences, reasons for and type of return[8] as well as future perspectives. The selection of respondents followed the aim of maximising diversity in terms of time and type of return, migration experiences, reasons for leaving, places of origin and return, individual characteristics, types of assistance, etc. The team achieved this on the one hand through systematic serendipity and snowballing, which also included the various networks of the local researchers and research assistants. On the other hand, the team approached reintegration projects and organisations hoping to gain access to their beneficiaries, which was often provided after they consented. To capture changes over time, a second meeting, interview or at least a phone call was arranged for a follow-up with as many of the respondents as possible. The project's context and purpose were explained to each respondent, including the option of asking questions and withdrawing consent for the use of data at a later point. Moreover, 58 talks and interviews with experts, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders were conducted, mainly by the author. Online meetings and other means of communication were used to address questions of understanding and contextualisation between the researchers in the countries and the author. All interviews were then coded, following (a) selected reintegration dimensions based on a literature review as well as the analysis of the first round of interviews and (b) following an open approach to allow for local, contextual specificities and individual priorities to be included (inductive as well as deductive coding). Academic and grey literature, recent statistics, the expert and stakeholder interviews, as well as a project workshop in Pristina with participants from both countries were drawn on to contextualise and triangulate the information.

The map indicates the research sites and number of interviews per site. Interviews did not only take place in the cities and towns indicated here, but also in villages and settlements around them.

7 \ See e.g., recent newspaper headlines: 'Is emigration bleeding the economic life out of Albania?' (https://www.euronews.com/2023/01/12/is-emigration-bleeding-the-economic-life-out-of-albania) and 'Leaving Kosovo: Legal Migration Upsurge Causes Depopulation Fears' (https://balkaninsight.com/2019/04/25/leaving-kosovo-legal-migration-upsurge-causes-depopulation-fears/).

8 \ For ethical reasons, minors were not interviewed. Also, initially, deportations were excluded as type of return. The inclusion of deported returnees in this study is mainly due to the fact that they are recipients of reintegration assistance. However, they are underrepresented in the sample in comparison to the actual ratio of assisted returns vs deportations.

Map 1

Research Locations in Kosovo and Albania

In Kosovo, 92 interviews were conducted with persons who returned at one or more points in time between 1996 and 2022 and in Albania, 129 interviews on returns between 1995 and 2022 (see full list of interviews in Annex). In Albania, three focus group discussions were held before the start of the pandemic, one in Kukës and two around Korça, which are considered in the analysis, but not in the detailed lists of data. Table 1 lists some individual characteristics[9] of the respondents as well as the types of assistance received.

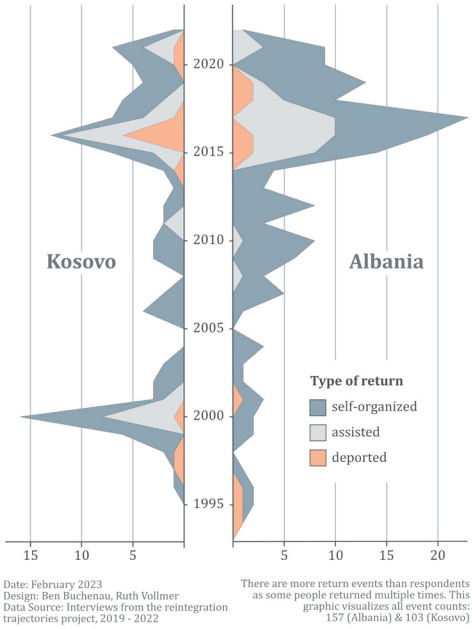
In Kosovo, 18 respondents self-identified as Kosovar and one as German (i.e. qua citizenship). Of those remaining, 56 identified as Albanian, six as Ashkali, three as Bosnian, five as Roma, two as Serb, and one as Turkish. In Albania, 'Albanian' can refer either to citizenship or to nationality and applies to 110 of the respondents, while another eight identified as Roma, five as Egyptian, four as Greek, one as Italian and one as Cham Albanian. As concerns age, at the time of the first interview, the majority of respondents were in their 30s or 40s, smaller groups were above 50 years of age and between 18 and 30.

Figure 1 shows all returns considered in this study on a timeline. It thus illustrates that the interviews correspond with the main return movements to the two countries. While returns occurred continuously, there is a peak after the war in Kosovo, heightened return numbers to Albania after the financial crisis of 2008 and high return numbers to both countries mainly by rejected asylum seekers after 2015. It also distinguishes between return by deportation, with return assistance (excluding reintegration assistance) and self-organised return, showing that deportations mainly occurred during the 1990s and early 2000s as well as in the context of rejected asylum seekers after 2014/15. Assisted returns occurred immediately after the war in Kosovo otherwise started later, in small numbers after 2008 and also increased significantly with returning asylum seekers, which shows that (at least in this sample) return assistance is linked with certain types of return, mainly legal, i.e. lifting or not granting a protection status. Respondents were also chosen from different returning countries, as Figure 2 below shows.

9 \ This refers to the person who acted as the main respondent, even though in some situations, family members, friends or entire families were also present and contributed to the conversation.

Figure 1

Number of Returns by Year



Conceptual Framework

Throughout the *Paper*, the terms 'returnee' or 'return migrant' are used to refer to any person who has moved to their country of (ancestral) origin for now or forever and regardless of circumstances, intentions and degree of voluntariness, while recognising the need to unpack these generalising notions and acknowledging that this terminology often does not coincide with self-identification. The main criterion to distinguish types of return applied here is whether the return was legally mandatory, which is the case when the respondent could not legally remain in the destination country, while acknowledging that returns that are not legally mandatory can still occur under high pressure, such as economic hardship. Reintegration is used in a non-normative way, simply referring to the varied and non-linear processes and experiences that characterise the period after return, which in itself is not clearly delineated temporally,[10] while acknowledging that it depends on the type and

10 \ Recently, 10 years was suggested as an appropriate time period for the long-term study of reintegration, see Malakooti & Zwick (2022). Mostly, however, research, monitoring and assistance have focussed on the first or maximally first few years after return.

Table 1

Overview of the Data*

Respondents	Albania	Kosovo
Number of returnees	129	92
Number of returns mentioned**	157	103
(Latest) return to previous place of residence	105	71
Male respondents	64	51
Female respondents	65	41
2nd generation returnees	2	5
Received return assistance	31	25
Received reintegration assistance	38	46
Received return and reintegration assistance	20	20
Returned by deportation	13	9
Number of stakeholders interviewed	27	31

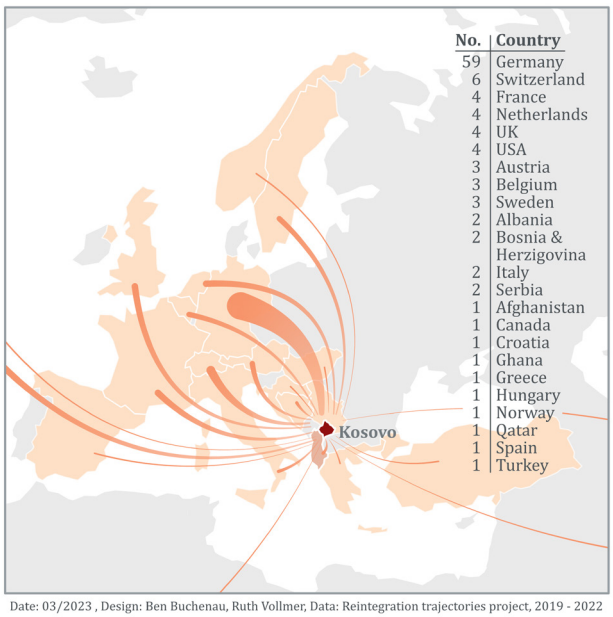
**References to literal quotes from the interviews consist of a code (RK for a returnee in Kosovo, RA for a returnee in Albania), with a randomly assigned number, followed by the date and place of the first interview. Other stakeholders are quoted only by the code (KP for expert / practitioner / decision-maker in Kosovo; AP for Albania), a number and the date to protect their anonymity (see Annex for a list of all interviews).*

*** In some instances of circular migration, particularly from Albania, respondents themselves did not remember the exact number of returns, therefore only longer-term returns were counted.*

Figure 2

Returnees to Albania and Kosovo by Return Country

Date: 03/2023 , Design: Ben Buchenau, Ruth Vollmer, Data: Reintegration trajectories project, 2019 - 2022



Date: 03/2023 , Design: Ben Buchenau, Ruth Vollmer, Data: Reintegration trajectories project, 2019 - 2022

duration of migration and the individual experiences post-return, whether returning migrants themselves perceive this time period as a distinct phase in their lives or not.[11] The data collection for this study neither predefined any dimensions nor was the term 'reintegration' used during the returnee interviews. Instead, the interview guideline refers for example to ideas about the good life and feelings of being settled, thus giving space to the respondent's own prioritisations and understandings regarding 'reintegration'.

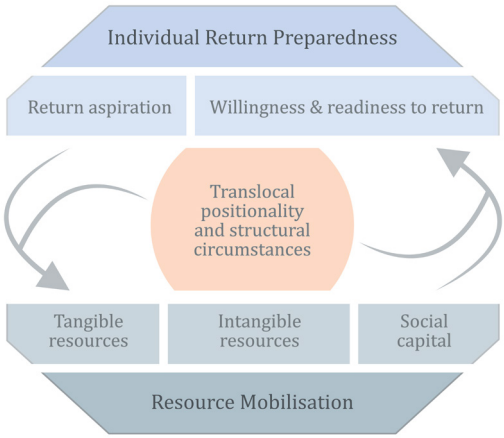
Returns can be planned and wished for or unexpected and involuntary, as respondents's statements show:

> *When I returned from Italy, I felt like returning to my home, to my people, to my friends, to my previous life. Returning from Qatar, I felt lost because I hadn't planned to return, and I couldn't fulfil my initial objective [...]. I was disappointed, and I found myself unemployed with a single click of a button. [...] Total shock. I had to reorganise myself, search for a job, and finding a job here is not so easy* (RA92, 24 November 2021, Tirana).

The concept of 'return preparedness' (Cassarino, 2004, 2014) is useful for capturing these dynamics. Return preparedness is defined as an unabated willingness to return (which leads the migrant to aim for the accumulation or mobilisation of resources for the return) and the readiness to return, which results from this resource mobilisation. In an adaptation of this concept, I will distinguish between an underlying aspiration to return,[12] already at the time of departure to migrate, and the willingness to return as a component of return decision-making before and during return, thus taking into account that return intentions can change over time. I also include the role of (translocal) positionality (Anthias, 2008) of the migrating person in addition to structural, contextual factors. Migration and return, even between the same places, occur under extremely different conditions, which are shaped by pre-existing and changing resource and network endowments. It is this positionality and situatedness that influences capabilities for resource mobilisation. This framework may help to understand the complexity and 'non-linearity' of today's return migration movements and reintegration processes (Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 3).

Figure 3 illustrates the model of individual return preparedness applied in this study.

Figure 3
Individual Return Preparedness



adapted from Cassarino, 2004

In many instances, migrants return with limited or no return preparedness. The two most common reasons for this are a) legal reasons (not being granted or losing the right to stay in the destination country) and b) economic reasons (unemployment or loss of income opportunities, e.g. in the wake of economic recession). In these situations, the question of institutional return preparedness takes on enhanced relevance (Kandilige & Adiku, 2020). Institutional return preparedness refers to the preparedness of state and non-state institutions to deal with the arrival and reintegration of little- or unprepared return migrants, sometimes in large numbers, as well as to the level of coordination among these stakeholders (Kandilige & Adiku, 2020).

11 \ For example, one respondent explained that after return, 'there was no specific process. I made up my mind and continued my life as if I had never left' (RA90, 10 November 2021, Tirana), while for another one, 'it was like adapting in an unknown, new place' (RA94, 8 August 2021, UK).

12 \ Flahaux (2021) defines aspiration as 'underlying factors driving migrants toward a situation which they feel will be better for them and their family', while return intentions are more specifically about the desire to return or not; those with return intentions aspire to live in the country of origin and imagine positive reintegration experience and the other way round.

'We signed…': On the Roles of Individual Return Preparedness and Return Assistance in Decision-making

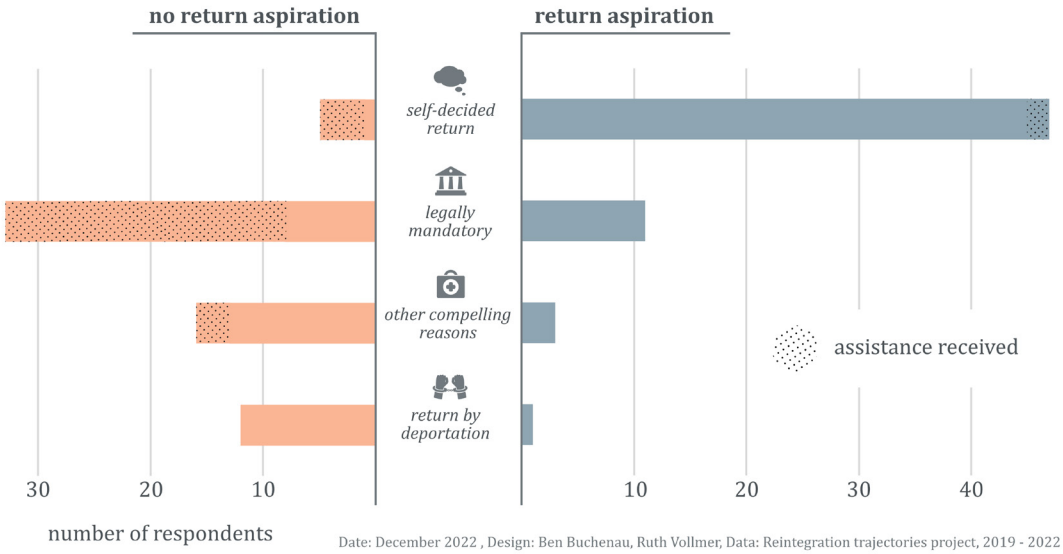
'We signed, but it wasn't voluntary' (RA102, 23 February 2022, Kukës).

'In July 2014, I emigrated to never return to Kosovo again. I have been back since April 2015', says one respondent (RK35, 29 November 2021, Pristina), who organised his own return from Belgium soon after realising that his life and opportunities abroad were utterly different from what he had hoped for. Return intentions can change. Generally, however, the aspiration to return or not to return (at the time of departure) reflects the reasons for leaving (Ghosh, 2000) as well as the nature of the envisaged migration project and, as such, tends to be relatively stable. As predicted by the concept of return preparedness, persons leaving their country of origin with plans to return one day are likely to prepare for return and reintegration throughout their migration (Flahaux, 2021).

This research showed that there are links between (a) high return aspirations and self-organised return (without assistance) and (b) between a lack of return aspirations and assisted return. The following diagram shows respondents' return aspirations at the time of departure and, for each of them, lists the type of return and whether their return was assisted or not.[13]

When there is no legal pressure, return decision-making is complex, as it involves matching aspirations (sometimes of various family members) with the (changing) opportunities and perspectives that the country of residence, the country of origin and possibly other places may hold, both in the present and the future. Even among those who returned willingly and organised their own return, only few fulfilled the conditions of return preparedness.

Figure 4
Return Aspirations and Types of Return



Note: *This calculation is based on around two-thirds of the interviews conducted for this study, as interviews with persons who migrated as children, were born abroad, fled during the war in Kosovo or with lacking / unclear data on return aspirations were not included.*

13 \ 'Self-decided' refers to the absence of legal reasons for the return, it does not necessarily imply high levels of return preparedness; the category of 'other compelling reasons' mainly refers to health emergencies of close relatives in the home country or to lockdown-related impacts on livelihoods abroad. The distinction between self-decided and compelled is based on a continuum of increasing pressure rather than a clear-cut line.

Deciding whether to return can be a drawn-out negotiation process within families or even within individuals, and it is more common that migrants return later rather than earlier as planned. The chance for future mobility facilitates the decision to return, e.g. in the case of war refugees from Kosovo, who were resettled and received a permanent residence title in the United States or Canada rather than temporary protection in the European Union. If possible, people like to think about their return 'in tems of living here for now, and not in terms of burning bridges' as one respondent put it (RK73, 16 February 2022, Pristina).

Even among those who returned willingly and in a self-organised manner, only few fulfilled the conditions of return preparedness. Family reasons had a major impact on return decision-making, such as wanting to be close to the family, having to care for family members, or wanting to start one's own family:

> *I had some family problems, then I also missed my family. I could not stand it anymore. I started thinking only about Kosovo, the family and everyone. And I decided to return to Kosovo* (RK28, 13 December 2021, Pristina).

Willingness and readiness to return do not necessarily coincide (cf. García-Pereiro, 2019). In the above example, there is high willingness and low readiness to return. The opposite was also found, when deported returnees quickly managed to re-establish themselves economically thanks, for example, to transnational networks. Quite a number of returns relate to unfulfilled hopes and expectations, such as ending professional downward mobility abroad, finding an unfavourable ratio between the costs and benefits of migration, failure to receive documents or high obstacles to family reunification:

> *We lived in Greece for two and a half years before returning to Albania. That time made me understand that not everything that shines is gold* (RA74, 12 April 2022, Durrës).

In the case of Kosovo, 42 persons in this sample returned because it was legally mandatory,[14] and 13 of them were deported. Regarding Albania, 54 respondents returned because they did not have the right to stay, nine of whom were deported.[15] Some asylum seekers returned without waiting for the formal decision about their application once they learned that conditions and opportunities were nothing as they had expected.

Even though legally mandatory returns severely restrict the space for decision-making, the responses were quite diverse. Many signed up for assisted return schemes (see below). Others hired a lawyer or moved on to a different country, yet again, others did not accept assisted return without taking further action to prevent deportation, as they did not want to return and perceived the decision to be unjust. For many, the decision-making took place without adequate access to reliable and understandable information regarding their status, legal context, rights and possibilities. One issue was the language barrier and the inability to understand and interpret the content of official letters. People also relied on various sources of information. In quite a few cases, teachers or neighbours had been petitioning for the right of families to stay; hardship commissions had become involved with their outcome still pending, or lawyers provided a deceptive sense of optimism, which left respondents unaware that none of these processes could legally override the decision made by the migration authorities. Quite a number of those who eventually got deported were unclear about their situation beforehand and had not consciously decided against assisted return (cf Dubow et al., 2021, who also found this for return to Albania).

> *The police returned me; I did not know that they would return me. I had a lawyer, and he told me that*

14 \ 'Legally mandatory' refers to the perspective of the migrant, not to that of the law, i.e. migrants who were never registered as such and decided about their own return are not counted here, even though according to the law they may have been obliged to leave their destination country all throughout their stay.

15 \ Deportations from Germany to both countries have been high, mainly following the rise in asylum application 2014/15: More than 6,000 migrants were deported to Albania in 2016 and still over 900 in 2021; almost 6,000 to Kosovo in 2015 and over 300 in 2021 according to the German government https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/zahlen-zu-asyl/265765/abschiebungen-in-deutschland/.

> *they would not take me back to Kosovo. I had evidence that my family was in trouble; I had evidence that I had a son with a rare diagnosis (*RK15, 8 February 2022, Vushtrri).

This relates to the overall vulnerabilities of migrants with an insecure or no legal status, who face substantial obstacles towards claiming their rights or garnering the support they need, due to a lack of language skills and a lack of knowledge regarding legal and institutional processes (cf Olivier-Mensah et al., 2020). Pre-departure counselling, which is provided in most EU countries and often by a diversity of actors (European Migration Network, 2019), intends to bridge this information gap. Some respondents confirm that it helped their return to have the entire process explained well and with a good interpreter, and professionally facilitated. However, the aim to increase the uptake of assisted return schemes can conflict with realistic expectation management. Even though no one in our study (similarly cf. Schmitt et al., 2019) linked their return decision primarily to the availability of return or reintegration assistance, especially in Kosovo, some respondents mentioned that they had been promised assistance they did not receive after return. Access to and information about return counselling is patchy, and some respondents with high needs for assistance returned without any counselling. Furthermore, there are significant differences regarding the approaches taken towards counselling. According to the head of a reintegration organisation in Albania,

> *there is no distinction [between people returning with and without predeparture counselling], it is not noticeable. The only thing one can notice is the effect of good counselling. That can have a positive impact, people are in a different place when they return* (AP21, 24 February 2022).

Most legally mandated returnees in our sample did not have access to good quality[16] return counselling. Some accepted assisted return out of fear or to save their children from a potentially traumatising experience, and some were directly pressured into accepting 'voluntary return':

> *We were given only one month to prepare our return, even though my husband worked there with papers. His boss even called the foreigners office to put in a word for him. But they just said, "you have to sign this, or they will come at night and take your children!" Out of fear, I signed. We worked so hard in Germany, but they left us with nothing. My husband was always so good, it was so bad. They put so much pressure on people and then say "you have to leave voluntarily"* (RK82, 21 February 2022, Mitrovica).

The preference for assisted returns over deportations is founded in domestic policy considerations (e.g. lower cost, higher acceptance in the population) (Kuschminder, 2017), but in practice, one does not work without the other (Currle, 2006; Dünnwald, 2013). Experiences of returning migrants collected for this study confirm that there is a continuum rather than a clear-cut distinction between deportation and assisted return (Ayasse et al., 2022; Koch, 2014; Newland & Salant, 2018). The claimed voluntariness of assisted returns is more often a product of the institutional context of return than an actual reflection of migrants' decision-making (cf. Blitz et al., 2005; Cassarino, 2014; Currle, 2006; Dünnwald, 2013; Feneberg, 2019; Genova, 2002; Olivier-Mensah et al., 2020; Webber, 2011). Even in contexts of legally mandatory returns, the most significant aspect is the migrants' aspirations. Those respondents who left with a clearly defined aim, be it to never return, find a remedy for a health issue, escape threats posed by organised crime or family conflicts, as well as those who feel that they would be able to accomplish their migration-related objectives if only they were allowed to stay just a little longer are reluctant to return, with or without assistance. People who had been misinformed about their opportunities to work and gain a legal status at the destination or who are unable to fulfil other—for example family-related aspirations while staying abroad—are more likely to accept assisted or opt for self-organised return.

16 \ Good quality in this context can be understood as counselling that aims to support an individual or family in achieving their aims and in overcoming challenges through enhancing their agency (Olivier-Mensah et al., 2020) rather than being a means to an end.

Dimensions of Reintegration

'Here, the family is the only institution…': Social Reintegration, Networks and Translocality

'Here, the family is the only institution; who doesn't have one is poor, basically dead' (RA97, 24 February 2022, Tirana)

A significant proportion of migration and return in both countries is influenced by the individuals' role and responsibilities towards the family. Motives for migration are becoming more individualised (Hajdari & Krasniqi, 2021), but the role of international migrants as providers of informal but still very effective social support (for Albania, cf Dhëmbo, 2020) is still essential, depending on the families' socio-economic background: There are also families that do not have the means to establish somebody abroad and others, which do not need to rely on transnational support mechanisms. Nevertheless, for many, the notion of international migration as a livelihood and risk management strategy families adopt in contexts of high wage differentials between countries and the absence of public social protection schemes, as put forward by the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theory (Taylor, 1999) still applies, as the following quote illustrates:

> *Life here is a lot more difficult. No health insurance, no job security, no contracts, you are working today for today. The hospitals are not good, police and fire brigade, well… Here, things are different from Germany, we do expect anything from the government, we have to manage on our own, also with the help of our relatives abroad* (KP14, 18 November 2021).

It is in this context, that families are also the most important and reliable *providers of reintegration assistance*. Respondents received various types of support and reintegration assistance from their families. This involved shelter and accommodation (short- and long-term), the provision of relevant information for preparing their return, re-connecting with local institutions and stakeholders after return and job opportunities (for example in the family business). Often, family members shared care duties, such as looking after children, upon return. For the initial period, returnees also report having received financial support from relatives in the country and even more frequently from family members living abroad. Family members even contributed to paying for child care and professional training courses, as well as investments into a returnee's business for returning migrants. Respondents also emphasise the importance of moral and emotional support they received from their families.

Connections are reportedly also crucial in accessing public services and institutions. While this appears to be more strongly the case in Albania, stakeholders in Kosovo also state: 'In order to really achieve something, you need to go through people, not institutions' (KP5, 21 October 2022). If family support networks verge on clientelism, as described in the following quote, one person's support network can be the reason for others' failure to claim their rights.

> *Life in Albania goes smoothly if you have the support of influential people. My family supported me financially and morally. So, we had no obstacles. You get by either by bribing or by acquaintances. […]. To start a business, you needed someone to help you get through the official documents in the taxation department, and I had the right person in the right place. People often complain about education and healthcare. A lot of my relatives are doctors, so I easily find solutions for that […]. The whole society in Albania functions like this, in all sectors. So, you always look for connections, family or friends to rely on and get by. We take this for granted, and we get used to dealing with problems in this way. […]. Education is another issue. There are drawbacks to the public educational system. Public schools are overcrowded. However, I registered my daughter in one of the central schools in Tirana where my mother was a teacher, so she had the right attention (*RA82, 25 May 2021, Tirana).

Only few respondents had received informal assistance through other types of networks outside the family, a mosque in one case or a friend who paid the rent in another. One respondent in Albania lives off *zakat* (monetary charity in Islam) provided by a fellow believer in the United States. Yet, religious networks or institutions do not play a more prominent or systematic role in supporting returning migrants and professional or student networks from before the migration as well as friendships turned out to be significant only regarding re-employment.

Respondents from both countries state that they remained in close contact with family members during their migration(s). Most respondents in both countries also moved back to their previous place of residence, mainly because this is where they have a family and 'the home that only the family can provide' (AP8, 19 June 2019). Regarding reception upon return, migrants' return itself mostly did not have a noticeable impact on their social relations or how their families perceived them. Family members who had not migrated and expressed regret about the return usually did this in an empathising way: 'Family members welcomed us but were also normally upset because they knew we didn't even have a home here' (RK26, 20 January 2022, Fushë Kosovë). At the societal level, there is a perception of return as a failure, which returnees experience to varying degrees. Literature on Albania attributes this to a scarcity of examples to the contrary: While there are much fewer 'successful returnees' than those who return due to hardships or legal reasons abroad (Barjaba, 2018, p. 221), this perception also seems linked with the important role and high desirability attached to migration by many. Forced return is not stigmatised. On the contrary, people who returned by choice may have a lot of explaining to do. As one respondent, who returned to Kosovo many years ago and of her own volition, explains her family's reception:

> *They were very happy to see me when I came back, they still treat me well, but I think there are some prejudices now. The prejudices come from society, for example, "you could not find yourself there, you could not find work, you did not know how to integrate, why did you come back?" and so on* (RK25, 17 November 2021, Pristina).

For Albania, a young returnee from Greece (2nd generation) offers a detailed explanation that fits well with our findings:

> *About the term returnee, there is a little bit of a positive stigma, or a negative one—it depends. People stigmatise returnees not for their reasons for return but for the reasons why they shouldn't have returned. For example, people around my family keep asking us why we returned and say that our life would be better if we had stayed in Greece* (RA76, 3 March 2022, Tirana).

She elaborates that exchanging a (perceived) higher standard of living with a lower one by choice gives rise to questions and even doubts regarding the voluntariness of people's return.

Formal reintegration assistance, especially by the state, usually builds on family support. In Kosovo, the state aims to provide only what families cannot offer, while in Albania, reintegration is generally considered the responsibility of families than of the state (AP6, 19 June 2019). Yet, family-based reintegration assistance comes with some ambivalences and gaps. First, the support capacities of families vary considerably and do not necessarily correspond with returning family members' needs or only in a negative sense:

> *My family had nothing to support me with; they were just upset that I had come back to Kosovo. They welcomed me but were upset because I had come back to hell again* (RK15, 8 February 2022, Vushtrri).

Second, not everyone has family to return to. A young man who had spent his entire life in Germany and had been deported a few days before I met him was supported by a friend of his deceased grandfather, as he did not have any living relatives in Kosovo. The friend not only provided him with accommodation but also spent all day supporting him logistically and

with translations, as the returnee did not speak the language and had no local knowledge to navigate public transport, let alone public services. 'If I continue like this, I risk losing my job', the supporter said (RK50, 15 November 2022, Kukës) illustrating the enormous burden that enforced and unprepared returns put on families or even returnees' acquaintances who all have their own everyday life struggles to deal with, too.

Third, even family support is not provided unconditionally, and returning migrants also encounter decreasing levels of solidarity in society and transnationally (for Albania cf. Kerpaçi & Kuka, 2019). Some families would no longer support women who had divorced their husbands. Failure to live up to certain expectations and norms can also undermine a migrant's eligibility for support: In the words of a migrant who had lived in Germany and France for several years to support his own family, however without much success:

> *I have a sister and a brother who live in Frankfurt, but they didn't help me at all. My brother only works for himself. […] Too many people are now in Germany, but they didn't help me at all; all just work for themselves* (RK40, 20 November 2021, Podujeva).

Conflicts within and between families are reasons to leave and major obstacles upon return; in cases of revenge threats or conflicts between families, kinship can even turn into a liability rather than an asset.[17]

In assessing the links between family-based and formal reintegration assistance (institutional return preparedness), three potential fields of tension emerge. First, as indicated above, there are cases where the family may be expected to provide support but is either unwilling or unable to do so, and still the returnee is not able to claim any formal assistance due to the existence of family networks and possibly assets. Second, as support capacities of families depend to an extent on their transnational networks, the return of one family member often triggers the migration of others or re-migration, which runs contrary to the stated objective of most formal reintegration assistance: 'I wanted to return to invest here. It is our culture: the son lives with the parents, and elderly parents need support. When I returned, my younger brother and my sister both went to the UK' (RA101, 22 February 2022, Kukës). Third, informal or network support is based on reciprocity. For returned migrants, this can mean that their own networks support them until they receive formal support and, once this is the case, they may be expected to return the favour. Recipients of start-up support are usually advised to charge market rates for their products or services to not undermine the economic viability of their endeavour. At the same time, they may feel unable to do so if their clients are mainly people they know, to whom they owe something or are themselves in economic difficulties.

'If I have a good job here, I don't want to go …' : Livelihood Strategies and Economic Reintegration

> *'If I have a good job here, I don't want to go, but if I don't have a job here, what to do?'* (RA6, 25 June 2019, Fushë-Arrëz.)

Economic framework conditions play a central role regarding the decision to leave and migrants' reintegration or re-migration after return. The feeling of 'being settled' is linked with a stable source of income, and in both countries, the official understanding of 'sustainable reintegration' is mainly about generating a sufficiently high income, which—at the same time— is identified as 'the main challenge' (KP5, 9 November 2021; AP6, 19 June 2019). Both countries have seen a massive loss and destruction of

17 \ There is an emerging body of literature on the more ambivalent and also harmful roles social networks can play in the context of migration and return, see e.g. Ayasse et al., 2022 for an overview. Particularly in Albania, human trafficking is among them, see the recent UNICEF report 'Trafficked by someone I know' (Davy, 2022).

production and processing facilities during the 1990s and the end of socialist-type social policies. Today, poverty rates are significantly lower than before the war / transition, but there is high and deepening inequality and social exclusion (Mustafa, 2020). Both countries have high unemployment rates, low average salaries, large informal sectors, inconsistent implementation of labour laws even in the formal sector and a low share of social transfers in the state budget. While in Kosovo, better working conditions in the private sector create a preference for public sector employment, the difference between the two is smaller in Albania. Salaries for teachers, for example, are so low that several respondents have left teaching jobs to migrate. Kosovo has the highest unemployment in the region and no unemployment benefits; in Albania, unemployment benefits are half of the national minimum wage of €285 and can be paid to people who have been in formal employment for at least 12 months. However, in both countries, the largest groups of people without income have been in this situation for long periods (KP11, 11 November 2021) and are thus only eligible for social welfare far below the minimum subsistence level. The high levels of informal employment entail job insecurity, a lack of workplace safety, ineligibility for public pensions or, in the case of small businesses, lockdown compensation for those concerned. At the same time, recent formalisation initiatives, such as on trade, have had a detrimental impact on the livelihoods of the most marginalised groups, like Roma, if they trade second-hand clothes or collect scrap metal (Gëdeshi, 2018 on Albania). In both countries, economic opportunities are concentrated in a few urban centres (Hackaj & Shehaj, 2017). Rural areas provide not only fewer economic opportunities but also less infrastructure, and fewer social services, such as childcare facilities, and public transport is often a problem, thereby increasing the marginalisation of rural areas (AP15, 2 July 2019). 'Some towns are only dormitories' (AP2, 24 February 2022). At the same time, high living costs and rents make life in bigger cities unaffordable to many.

Two aspects matter when it comes to the question if and under what circumstances migration can increase individual return preparedness: a) Whether and in how far migrants find the opportunity to accumulate resources and skills during their migration and b) whether these can be transferred and utilised after their return).[18] People who migrate to escape from a dire economic situation (often without return aspiration), such as lack of income, house and/or other basic necessities, are more likely to be ill-prepared for their migratory journeys. With lower levels of formal education, income and transnational connections, they do not fulfil the criteria for a visa, making them prone to irregular immigration and 'economic' asylum seeking. Their chances to accumulate skills or resources during their migration to improve their situation post-return, i.e. to generate return preparedness, are minimal due to constraints pertaining to their legal status and mostly short stays. They may be able to save a small amount of money, however, this often gets spent on repaying debts, renovating a house (not necessarily their own one) or other family obligations, such as funerals or medical expenses. At the same time, they may have sold property or livestock before they migrated, thus facing higher expenses and lower incomes upon return. The low salaries and high prevalence of informal employment mean that even if family members have work, the income may not cover the most basic necessities. These destitute situations are often protracted, as people cannot generate the support they would require, neither through their networks nor from the government. Children are required to add to the family income as soon as they can, thus placing them in low-skilled jobs rather than further education. Due to the lack of health insurance, illnesses can become a substantial financial burden for families, and if they turn chronic, people become physically unable to work.

18 \ Due to the diversity of destination / return countries considered in this study, there is no space to detail the role of circumstances in host countries. However, other studies have looked into the role of legal context, accessibility of the labour market, social reception including stereotypes in various destination contexts on return preparedness (Adamczyk, 2016; Carletto & Kilic, 2009; King & Mai, 2008; Zenelaga et al., 2013).

Care work, for children as well as for elderly, sick and mentally ill family members, is added to the duties of household members, usually women, who can often not work or only work from home for this reason. A returned asylum seeker from Germany describes her and her family's situation since having returned in 2016:

> *We didn't have money to repair our house, which is badly damaged, nor to pay the bills to reconnect energy and water that was cut while we were in Germany because we had not paid the bills. I started working in the same tailoring factory as before I left and was paid the same salary. But [...] my daughter has health problems, so after some months, I had to quit my job and worked as a cleaning lady for three years. [...]. My husband? One day he is working, the other he isn't; there is no stable income from him. Every month we need money for my daughter's medications that cost a fortune, and often I cannot afford them. There are also the costs for school materials, but the most important is to put food on the table* (RA85, 19 July 2021, Xhaf Zotaj).

For this group of returnees, the smaller share of their problems is related to reintegration, while the larger bulk of challenges predate their migration and relate to broader issues of economic integration. While ethnic minority groups, particularly Roma, Egyptians and in Kosovo Ashkali are overrepresented in this group, Albanian families can be equally affected by economically precarious situations, particularly in rural areas. The recently conducted follow-up interviews with these families show that rising food and energy prices turn fragile economic situations into completely inviable ones, often triggering remigration.

The second category are returnees who migrated for a variety of reasons, often temporary or circulating, but mainly to improve their own and their family's economic situation, i.e., to remit or save for investment, earn money for study fees (Albania), mostly by relying on the opportunities provided by their transnational networks. Their chances of benefitting from their migration are higher, as they usually find work. However, earnings, especially from informal work are low; many remit more than they save. Quite a few people in our sample have been negatively affected by the economic crisis or other unforeseen events and thus returned with less than hoped for. Also, particularly in Albania, while some returnees invest in their own business, others assess the risks of investing as too high and prefer to live off their savings until they migrate again (AP1, 7 May 2019). The following statement by a returned labour migrant from Italy, asked about the good life that he aspires to but does not find, summarises a general sentiment:

> *A good life? It means not having to do two jobs, not having to ask to work more just to fulfil a minimum standard of living and being able to raise the children without big sacrifices [...]. Having a good life also means feeling appreciated for your effort* (RA65, 12 February 2022, Bulqizë).

And is echoed by a return migrant in Kosovo:

> *I myself can do everything, construction carpenter, bricklayer, concreter, but I hardly earn any money. Employers even expect gratitude for the work you do. There is a new law that sets the minimum wage at 250 Euros, but who pays that? Only the big companies and there, you have to work 12 hours a day. There is no labour law, or it is not accepted (*RK62, 11 February 2022, Gjakova).

They express concern about the high levels of economic insecurity and disappointment, because their efforts and labour are neither valued in monetary terms nor through appreciation or success. Their response to these difficult conditions are high levels of flexibility: Rather than working in one career, they work several jobs, both simultaneously and over time, which also means that human capital is often unutilised, not only in migration. There is a perceived need to grasp any opportunity: 'Here, you have to be like a vacuum cleaner, you have to take whatever you can get', comments a returned migrant in a background talk in Pristina (November 2021).

There is a third category of returned migrants who struggle less with economic reintegration. They did not migrate for economic reasons but to pursue higher education abroad, join their family or for fun. They return to leave situations of professional downward mobility abroad or to contribute to their home countries. 'In Athens, I was nobody, just an immigrant. Here I am the daughter of the professor, a lot of doors are open for me', explains RA82 (25 May 2021, Tirana). International students are likely to benefit from their migration, as foreign diplomas unlock more prestigious jobs, especially if obtained from renowned universities. Returning academics may encounter an often-deplored lack of meritocracy, especially if they have been away for a long time. In this case, the foreign degree or the returning expert programme[19] provides some welcome support. RA16 (1 July 2019, Tirana) is thankful to the programme for introducing her to her current employer. 'You need connections here, especially in the public sector. I can see how this is a problem for others', she resumes. Her two main challenges are the resistance to change and the low salary once the support runs out. 'There are many obstacles to innovative ideas; it is very hard to convince our manager. Either there is no follow-up or they simply say no'. This observation points to the difficulties of transferring migration-related ideas and capital despite smooth reintegration trajectories.

Box 1
Cross-cutting Issue: 'Self-employment'

Links between return migration and self-employment are well-established in studies across different contexts (e.g. Kilic et al., 2007). Some migrants return with a plan to invest, while others are pushed into self-employment by the lack of jobs (KP17, 23 November 2021). Thus, motivations for and capabilities of running a business differ widely. The distinction between necessity- vs opportunity-driven self-employment (Kerpaçi, 2019) or 'own-account work' vs entrepreneurship (Piracha & Vadean, 2010) capture these. Especially necessity-driven own-account businesses suffer from a lack of entrepreneurship skills and investment capital, are usually opened without a proper market analysis and without registration. If opened at the right place and the right time, they can become a stepping stone for further economic opportunities, but more commonly, they do not generate sufficient revenues, forcing owners to either find additional sources of income or close them and lose their investment. All small businesses, including the more opportunity-driven ones, are ill-protected against external shocks and market vagaries. Legal context conditions in Kosovo are more conducive to opening a business, while in Albania, returned migrants feel overwhelmed with bureaucracy, a lack of transparency and high taxes: 'At least, give me a chance to be legal!', one of them exclaimed (RA14, 1 July 2019, Tirana). Many reported that corruption was an obstacle, especially in Albania, to running a business profitably and introducing innovation. 'We didn't need support. We only needed them to allow us to work as we used to in Greece with honesty. I often had to bribe public officials because it was impossible to finish your job otherwise' (RA94, 8 August 2021, United Kingdom). Hopes that returning migrants can boost the economy of their origin countries through investing in businesses should be treated with some caution.

'For society, we are all misfits'[20]: Psychosocial Reintegration, Aspirations and Belonging

Psychosocial well-being is essential to any holistic understanding of reintegration. Ruben et al. understand psychosocial embeddedness as encompassing everything that is 'important to construct one's identity, to feel at home, safe and psychologically well' (2009, p. 945). Belonging can either be constituted formally, i.e. by membership, such as citizenship or informally, in terms of 'experiences of being part of the social fabric and the ways in which social bonds and ties are manifested in practices, experiences and emotions of inclusion' (Anthias, 2008, p. 8). Belonging thus goes beyond identification as it also includes being accepted 'as part of a community, to feel safe within it and to have a stake in the future of such a community'(Anthias, 2008, p. 8). Psychosocial reintegration thus reflects other dimensions of reintegration in the sense that people's feeling of well-being is influenced by (the lack of) opportunities to realise their aspirations. It also encompasses the returnees' re-positioning vis-à-vis social norms, values and ways of relating with others independently of other dimensions of reintegration. Additionally, difficult migration and return experiences can have a lasting impact on mental health. The following chapter will focus on these three aspects of psychosocial reintegration.

19 \ https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/80044.html
20 \ RA13, 13 June 2019, Tirana

Obstacles to psychosocial reintegration and well-being are many and they are more severe for those who had hoped to escape their challenging living conditions through migration and failed. They often encounter the same or even worse risks and struggles after return and in the longer term, which undermines their ability to fulfil aspired-to social roles and negatively reflects on their self-image. In very few cases, people manage to turn their everyday struggles into a somewhat positive aspect of their identity:

> *I feel equal to others, and I think I am part of a social community. If we say "yes" to those without jobs, if we say "I belong to the returnees", my answer will be "yes", and also with people with limited opportunities, "here I can identify myself"* (RA51, 4 September 2021, Durrës).

Still, the mental stress of growing debts and constant struggles to make ends meet cannot be underestimated. In this context, King and Gëdeshi's finding that more and more people are planning to leave Albania due to a 'lack of hope' is all the more significant (2020). In Kosovo, this sentiment appears more confined to those groups that face a lack of inclusion. Five years after their assisted return from Germany, a couple in central Albanian reports: 'Everything here is difficult and black. There is no support, and we do not even have our own house' (RA22/23, 5 July 2019, Fier). Return is still a very emotional subject for them, mainly because they returned to the same challenging situation they had tried to escape. Other respondents experienced through migration that notwithstanding all efforts, they will not be able to achieve the things they aspire to—in most cases, nothing more than a humble 'normal' life without too many daily struggles in one and the same place—and express their disappointment and inner strife about this.

Again, referring to Albania, a young returnee addresses the psychological imprint that rapid and partly chaotic transition processes and resulting insecurities have left on society, which again highlights how reintegration is always a function of the specific context:

> *Change needs to start from the root, but here the mentality is "grab as much as you can quickly", just survive. When the drowning person drowns another to survive, it is not considered a crime, you understand? It is a problem of the institutions; people are constantly in survival mode. If you study this country from a psychological perspective, you will find so much emotional distress and depression, and the taboo to tackle this is a whole other story. I wanted to study psychology, but my parents were against it. "Who will admit that they need psychological support", they said* (RA97, 19 February 2022, Tirana).

Additional factors enhancing emotional stress are a lack of support networks upon return, being part of a social group that is constructed as somehow 'different' (such as single parents or ethnic minorities), which often coincides with the lack of supportive networks, and transnational family lives, which many returnees experience as emotionally painful.[21] A woman whose three children all live and work in Germany, where she had been during the war, concludes the interview: 'Sometimes, I think it is better to not go anywhere in the first place. Now, I feel sad every single day' (RK81, 21 February 2022, Mitrovica). The support by family structures must, however, not be taken for granted, as this returnee learned:

> *I met my husband, I got married, and I immediately became his and his family's maid. No, I am not part of any community. I do not even have the opportunity to think, much less to be a part (RK13, 28 February 2022, near Pristina).*

In another case, a single mother had returned to Albania already 15 years ago and by choice, but her situation is more difficult than expected: 'I don't think that I am settled here. My incomes are too low,

21 \ An overview of existing studies similarly highlights being female, belonging to a minority group (mainly Roma), having limited education, an extended stay abroad (in case of asylum seekers without permission to work), poor housing conditions, lack of social networks and unemployment as risk factors for mental health problems among returnees to Kosovo (Arënliu & Weine, 2016).

Box 2
Cross-cutting Issue: 'Health'

Difficulties in accessing healthcare and complaints about the low quality and the high cost were frequent in interviews in both countries. Among the asylum seekers from both countries, quite a number mentioned urgent health care needs as the reason for their migration. Elderly people especially consider the lack of health insurance to be a main cause for feelings of insecurity. Public spending on health care is significantly below the EU average in both coutries, resulting in low wages for health care professionals and lack of equipment and medicines. Health care professionals often emigrate due to unrewarding and difficult working conditions. While Kosovo has a public fund that covers the costs of medical treatment (of acute illnesses) abroad if the therapy is unavailable in Kosovo, this does not seem well known and not easy to access. Respondents reported that not being able to afford treatment for severe illnesses left them unable to work or that bills for medicine to treat chronic conditions were eating up the entire income of a family. Consequently, remittances are frequently mobilised for surgeries and other more costly treatments (if available). In Albania, where obtaining a visa is less of an issue, there are reports about elderly people re-migrating and or engaging in circular migration to access healthcare in Italy and Greece. Healthcare is indeed one of the reasons why migrants strive to receive documents for these countries. While organisations providing reintegration assistance partly recognise this, the solution requires a major effort and investment by the governments, as well as a rethinking of skilled labour migration policies.

emotionally and psychologically, I feel suffocated' (RA84, 21 July 2021, Durrës). She not only struggles with the low wages despite working more than one job, but also with social control exercised by her parents' friends and relatives, which affects her social life. Members of the Roma community and, to a lesser degree Ashkali and Egyptians who left Kosovo during or shortly after the war, experience the most drastic situation. Due to specificities regarding their readmission (see country context), they are still forcibly returned today. Many are second generation or left Kosovo as small children, have never been back, do not speak Albanian and have neither support networks nor a reintegration perspective upon return. Identity dynamics dating back to the Kosovo war make their (re)integration especially challenging. Returnees from other minority groups may 'only' face the language barrier and lack of a clear reference frame for identification: 'I feel like I don't belong to the Turkish or Albanian community; my home is Luzern' (RK22, 22 November 2021, Pristina), says a second-generation returnee from the Turkish community, who has—however—established himself rather well over the process of many years.

As outlined above, psychosocial reintegration and belonging involve (re-)positionings vis-à-vis social norms and values, and many respondents describe how they feel that migrating has changed them. This may often be in an enriching way, but perhaps with the effect that fitting back in after return has become more challenging, either in their social interactions or in terms of more fundamental disagreements, for example with gender norms. The following are examples for each of these aspects:

> *Experience abroad is an additional faculty. This experience teaches you how to live alone, to manage on your own. Humans have no boundaries. Some may set their own limits, but it all depends on the will and the skills* (RA52, 3 September 2021, Durrës).
>
> *As a migrant, you learn more about certain issues and situations. When you come to Albania, you feel foreign and empty as if it is not your country* (RA36, 19 July 2021, Durrës).
>
> *When I first arrived, I felt as if I had never been here before. The behaviour of people, their manners, I didn't like it at all. Too Mediterranean, too expressive, far too noisy. I was negatively surprised, even though it was exactly how it always used to be* (RA101, 22 February 2022, Kukës).
>
> *My mothers' family has some property issues in Peshkopi. Being a girl, according to the Albanian mentality, she does not inherit property. The law treats boys and girls equally, but the mentality does not. In Greece, girls have priority in inheriting property. This creates confusion and my mother insists that girls, just like boys, should inherit property from their family of origin* (RA67, 10.2.22, Durrës).

While these experiences seem more pronounced in Albania, returnees in both countries describe the mentality of those who have never left as an obstacle to their reintegration. People do not mind their own business and often, social obligations interfere with people's individual priorities.

Strategies of how people do or do not fit back into the social context depend on individual aspirations and their translocal positionality: some explicitly position themselves in opposition to certain 'mainstream' norms: 'I call myself "I resist"' (RA5, 23 June 2019, Shkodra) says a self-employed migrant, who has been able to re-establish her life and livelihood very much in line with her convictions thanks to the income from her business and continued transnational connectedness and mobility. Belonging—as defined above—is not only constituted through being part of a social group but also through having a stake in its future. Thus, people also assess their situation and, in fact, well-being vis-à-vis their chances to contribute towards the change that will make their place worth living in according to their very standards. Not everybody can do this so openly, or in fact at all. A female returnee and survivor of domestic abuse in her rural hometown in Albania explains: 'I write poems on facebook under a pseudonym. It is the only way I can express myself. People here gossip; there is no one around me whom I can speak with openly without being judged' (background talk, 5 July 2019). She confirms one of the main complaints of returnees in rural areas, which is about the mentality of the residents, that has made her withdraw from social interactions. In places with many returnees, friendships among the them provide consolation and support:

> *At least we had our friends who had also returned from Greece as we did. The fact that they were living in Tirana and we could go out with them was some degree of comfort or consolation. Every time we went out together, we discussed the problems we faced in Albania. It was like group therapy for us giving us strength to continue to deal with our problems* (RA94, 8 August 2021, United Kingdom).

Importantly, the intention to stay cannot be equated with psychosocial well-being and belonging. It can also result from traumatising migration experiences, as was found in several cases. Also, the type of return and levels of return preparedness have a huge effect on psychosocial well-being. Data on returned asylum seekers in Kosovo shows that their life satisfaction is significantly lower than average, with levels of mental stress, health and chronic health issues far above average (Möllers, et al., 2017). When a migration project is cut short, as in the case of legally mandatory returns, people feel rejected by the institutions of the state that they turned to to build their lives or find protection. They also feel a loss of control through being denied the opportunity to follow their aspirations. A rejected asylum seeker from Germany states: 'Return came to us unexpectedly, like the war in Ukraine. There, in Germany, I felt that I was alive and someone cared for me' (RA117, 17 October 2022, Shkodra). A psychiatric pilot study with migrants returning from Germany through AVR programmes indicates that the impact of assisted returns on mental health deserve much more attention: It found a prevalence rate of 53 per cent for psychiatric disorders before return and of 88 per cent nine months after return (von Lersner et al., 2008)

Deportations are by themselves potentially (re-) traumatising experiences. A single mother, who was deported from Germany with her children, one of them chronically ill, describes her experience:

> *Yes, I had problems. I had 320 euros, and they were taken from me by the German police. Then they did not allow me to take my personal belongings, they gave me tranquillizers that put me to sleep, and I did not know where I was or who looked after my children until the plane landed in Pristina. I had a very bad experience. I was very upset, I was in a very serious emotional situation* (RK15, 8 February 2022, Vushtrri).

According to a trauma therapist working with returned migrants in Kosovo, 'the actual deportation is only one small piece in the puzzle that they are dealing with, the much bigger issue is having to accept that their life plans have been turned around by 180 degrees' (KP14, 18 November 2021). Regarding assisted returns, a stakeholder in Pristina states:

> *What is most difficult to see is how much they have invested in their migration. The return destroys them. In most cases, they did not intend to return and urgently wish to re-migrate* (KP4, 8 November 2021).

Asked what he would change regarding reintegration assistance in Kosovo, a staff member of one of the municipal offices for communities and returns responds: 'Don't return any more people from Germany. It creates big psychological problems' (KP19, 7 February 2022).

'The beauty of the whole thing? …' : Governance and Political Reintegration

'The beauty of the whole thing? Nothing is being done properly, and it doesn't matter' (RA17, 1 July 2019, Tirana).

Political reintegration is about whether and how migrants return to their role as citizens of the origin country, whether and how they can claim their rights and whether they are politically or socially active in the country of return. This dimension is often not included in practice-level definitions of reintegration (cf Malakooti & Zwick, 2022), but the findings from Albania and Kosovo indicate that the political context plays a prominent role in people's willingness and ability to reintegrate. While in Kosovo, the re-election of the Lëvizja Vetëvendosje Party in 2021 raised the hopes of many Kosovars mainly for its commitment to fight corruption, the rule of the Socialist Party in Albania—uninterrupted since 2013—has been accompanied by political contestations inside and outside of parliament over the years, so far without a tangible alternative.

Levels of disenfranchisement with political institutions in Albania expressed by many respondents are high. The main issues are corruption and clientelism, leading to a lack of meritocracy, low opportunities for social mobility (World Economic Forum, 2020) and high crime levels. A typical response to the question 'whom do you address when you need something?' is: 'Myself, my wife and my parents. I would mention the government, but our government does nothing to improve our lives' (RA92, 24 November 2021, Tirana). Aspirations to (re)integrate into the political system, especially in Albania, vary. Most respondents are not politically active and report low interest in becoming engaged as they do not trust the system, do not see it worth their while (believing, for instance that they cannot achieve necessary change by engaging with the established political system) and also disliking the hierarchical structures within political parties.

> *I don't trust our government, the politicians. If you become a member of any political party, you have to endure everything by the owners of the party. Here, we don't have party leaders but party owners. You see the parliamentarians yelling, shouting, accusing each other of corruption and then they hang out together or hug each other. My conscience doesn't accept this. Time after time, I think that our politicians only make a show in parliament, nothing else* (RA89, 13 December 2021, Kavaja).

At the same time, people perceive political connections as useful or even necessary for reintegration, as the following quote exemplifies:

> *Now that I have returned, I have become part of politics. I'm a member of the Socialist Party. Maybe because in Albania, life is very connected to politics, and you cannot have support if you're not connected with politics* (RA65, 12 February 2022, Bulqizë).

Young entrepreneurs especially express their desire to establish their business independently of political networks but are worried that it will fail. The high levels of migration and emigration, including

among highly skilled and employed people, are widely perceived to be indicative of a need for substantive change regarding governance, accountability of institutions and quality of public services. Respondents mention a lack of experience in civic action following five decades of harsh authoritarian rule as a reason for the lack of political organisation from below,[22] as well as the entanglements of citizens with politics and institutions:

> *People in Albania usually complain about how things function in the country but do nothing to change it. They do not organise, as some are entangled in politics, and some are afraid to exert pressure on the government because they would lose their job as most people work in public institutions. Others, again, do not raise their voice because they don't want to ruin their personal plans like getting a building permit to construct a 30-storey building in the city centre* (RA94, 8 August 2021, United Kingdom).

At the same time, some also blame emigration itself for the slow pace of change: As the head of a small youth organisation in a town in northern Albania puts it: 'It is mainly those between 20 and 50 who could be demanding better services and oppose the government, but most of them aren't here'. Some respondents hope that migration and return will give demands for institutional accountability a stronger voice, drawing on experiences that migrants have had abroad (RA2, 21 June 2019, Tirana). A study on the returned asylum seekers who generally report positive experiences with public institutions while in the migration countries concludes in this sense that this exposure had a larger impact on political awareness-building than any 'civic education project […] in the last 20 years' (Hackaj & Shehaj, 2017, p. 15). Yet, it also cautions that the continuing emigration of the middle class and skilled professionals leaves mainly the 'unconnected poor' and the 'politically connected rich to decide about the future of the country' (Hackaj & Shehaj, 2017, p. 15). Those—few—returnees who are trying to change political processes from within encounter significant obstacles: A returnee working in a high-ranking position in a ministry reports: 'Now I am making the experience that it is a lot easier to criticise and suggest when you are on the outside than to actually change things when you are on the inside' (RA3, 21 June 2019, Tirana).

Most respondents state that politics do not represent their interests, including at the municipal level, and that their voice is not heard. The following two quotes are exemplary of this: 'No, I don't think I have a voice in society, but even those who think they do, they really don't, at least in Albania' (RA68, 10 July 2021, Durrës) or 'Even, if you raise your voice, no one is going to listen to you' (RA54, 21 July 2021, Tirana). Regarding access to rights, many respondents stress the difference between having rights and being able to claim them, as the following quote shows: 'Here in Albania, yes, but just on paper, not in practice. There are laws, but they are not enforced' (RA84, 21 July 2021, Durrës).

In *Kosovo*, many people used to think similarly about the governance system. For example, Möllers et al. explained asylum migration from Kosovo (2014/15) as people voting with their feet after having 'run out of patience with its struggling state' (2017, p. 7). Recently, however, brain gain programmes report increased interest of potential returnees, also due to the political developments (KP16, 21 November 2021), and many respondents seem hopeful about the current government. While networks still play an important role in Kosovo, at least our interviews indicate that hard work is more likely to be rewarded. As one returnee and beneficiary of the returning expert programme states: 'For me, the foreign degree was the ticket to privilege. It became much easier to find a job in Kosovo, ask for money for it, and introduce my own

22 \ Political organisation from below is not completely absent, but it is also not driven in any significant way by return migration. A left-wing political movement has recently registered as a political party, the "Together Movement": https://progressive.international/members/1f6883b0-a132-4679-93c5-a362e7abb4d3-organizata-politike/en

ideas'. He challenges the notion that careers depend-end on network connections: 'Everybody likes good ideas. If you are good enough, the networks need you!'. (RK77, 18 February 2022, Pristina)

At the level of institutions and public services, however, change takes time: Problems with health care and the educational system, slow and selective implementation of laws make people feel that they may have to wait too long for things to improve. And outmigration, mainly of the youth, continues unabated, even though mainly for economic reasons. This quote is a good representation of issues that many are facing:

> *Politically, you can talk for hours. There has always been corruption here [...]. After Rugova, politicians have only been busy collecting millions, most prosecutors and judges are where they are because of their connections, and the dog you feed doesn't bite you. For one year, there have been no more scandals, that's good. But it takes time, the money is now going where it needs to go, hardly any more problems. Nevertheless, 20 years can't be wiped away overnight. The youth is very disappointed; they wait very long for their appointment for Germany. Many also want to leave because of the children; the children are very overwhelmed here [...]. I have no health insurance. There was something about this in parliament, but it is not implemented. There should also be school psychologists, but most of them don't exist; their job is done by the teachers, although the budget is actually there* (RK80, 21 February 2022, Mitrovica).

Yet, there is an understanding that Kosovo is a country in transition and that the administration is still young. Referring to the Municipal Offices for Communities and Returns (MOCRs), the head of a reintegration organisation explains: 'Sometimes the authorities get stuck, and then you have to help them out. Some officials simply don't know their way around yet' (KP2, 5 November 2021). Regarding links between migration and political change, the Kosovar diaspora politically more strongly engaged and thus migrants are not lost as political voice. Unlike in Albania, the diaspora has voting rights in Kosovo and has politically represented Kosovo abroad since before the war. An issue regarding Kosovo's political integration is the continuing influence of Belgrade on those municipalities predominantly inhabited by Serbs in the north, including dual political structures and frequent tensions with the government in Pristina. Another significant difference between the two countries is quota regulations for communities in legislative and administrative bodies in Kosovo. In the accounts of members of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, this has made a difference because they see better chances to claim their rights in Kosovo. The political context has major impacts on returning migrants' feelings of safety and well-being, and thus their prospects for reintegration: While in Kosovo—with few exceptions—respondents state that they feel safe (some hinting at insecurities pertaining to their economic situation or health care), Albanian respondents mostly report to not feel safe, and many link this to the political and legal context (as well as the economy and lack of health care). 'No, there is no security in Albania. The police catch the thief, and the court releases him' (RA50, 1 September 2021, Durrës) or 'No. How can you feel safe when your government is not taking care of you and is not interested in your well-being?' (RA38, 13 July 2021, United Kingdom) are just two examples. This research thus shows how political context has a strong bearing on the levels of well-being and feelings of belonging among returning migrants beyond their ability to claim rights or participate in political processes. It also shows how corruption and nepotism require difficult repositioning vis-à-vis informal institutions, which may run contrary to returnees' genuine aspirations (cf Paasche, 2016).

Box 3
Cross-cutting Issue: 'Housing and Property Ownership'

Access to housing is an essential component of reintegration, and a lack of secure housing has been a particular driver of asylum migration from both countries. Overcrowded living conditions in large patriarchal families and actual homelessness prevail because families can not afford to build or rent. In both countries, many houses were built without a legal permit, mainly in the post-war (Kosovo) and transition (Albania) periods. While Kosovo has an ongoing—yet incomplete—legalisation process for these houses, legalisation campaigns in Albania have been selective and not very transparent and informal houses are demolished in urban development processes. Affected owners can apply for rent subsidies, which usually do not cover the rent fully, while their investment into the house is lost. After having to return their house to the previous (pre-communism) owner, families reportedly did not receive any rent subsidies or compensation. Despite high investments and international support in Albania, there are still people whose housing situation has been unresolved since the earthquake of 2019. Social housing programmes exist only in few locations and are completely insufficient to cover demand. Also, in some cases, there is a lack of adequate infrastructure, e.g. no connection with the state water and sewage system. Respondents in Albania also reported issues around tenure security: a lack of title deeds for older or informally erected houses and cases of forged title deeds that make investments risky, be it in business or housing. These and unresolved issues around land ownership are among the factors holding back agricultural development, too. Respondents in Kosovo reported that transferring the registration of land and property to the actual inhabitants (within the same family) was a challenging issue. As a result, houses and land can be registered with people who have passed away, which becomes a problem when conflicts over ownership arise or when people want to start a business from home, as they cannot register a business in a house that does not officially belong to them (RK39, 20 November 2021, Podujeva).

'If only one soul…': Experiences with Reintegration Assistance after Return

'If only one soul, just one person, had sent an email after we returned to ask how we were doing, it would have meant the world to me' (RK56, 21 November 2021, Pristina).

Reintegration assistance is gaining increasing popularity in the European Union and beyond (Salgado et al., 2022), and Germany plays a prominent role in the classical AVRR schemes and also as one of the few countries that aim to assist reintegration processes through development cooperation, currently in 12 partner countries.[23] On the ground, in countries with high levels of return migration, such as Albania and Kosovo, a large diversity of actors is now engaged in reintegration assistance—local (e.g. municipalities, small NGOs and initiatives, mosques and churches, families and networks), national (Ministries and national-level NGOs), external (such GIZ or Danish Refugee Council) and international (such as UNDP, IOM), operating under different donors and funding cycles, with different aims, approaches, structures, target groups, geographical coverage and with varying access to transnational information-sharing. Most destination country governments fund projects and measures through and beyond AVRR, implemented by or in collaboration with IOM and local partners. Only Germany has established separate structures for counselling, referrals and, in part, direct support of returning migrants (the DIMAKs and the URAs).[24]

Altogether, little is known about what works and what does not work in reintegration assistance. Calls for a better (or indeed any meaningful) monitoring and evaluation have first been raised by academia (e.g. Paasche, 2014) and become more widely recognised, also by donors. The multi-stakeholder character of reintegration assistance (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013; Kandilige & Adiku, 2020), hierarchical and power relations among the actors (Serra-Mingot & Rudolf, 2022), the competition (own observation) among stakeholders in this field, as well as the lack of an agreed-upon target definition (Lietaert & Kuschminder, 2021) and the diversity of activities and types of assistance are turning the design of comparative monitoring and evaluation frameworks for AVRR and reintegration assistance into a challenging endeavour (Salgado et al., 2022). Quite commonly, projects document the numbers of beneficiaries and types of services provided without collecting information about whether this had any effect at the individual, community or household level. Anecdotal evidence is provided, often by means of success stories, which do not allow to isolate the impacts of the assistance from other factors. An exception is assistance administered through IOM, which is monitored. However a recent cross-country analysis of reintegration assistance's impact on reintegration outcomes drawing on more than 5,500 cases finds no statistically significant effect of individual reintegration assistance on the sustainability of reintegration (EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, 2022).[25]

The last part of this *Working* Paper will provide an overview of returning migrants' experiences with reintegration assistance, regarding (a) access to it and (b) in how far their needs were met according to their own accounts. It concludes with a brief reflection on the level of institutional return preparedness in both countries and transnationally.

23 \ See for example here: https://www.giz.de/en/workingwithgiz/68352.html

24 \ URA Kosovo, currently funded by the German Ministry for Internal Affairs and nine German states or Länder, has been running since 2007, with URA Albania, the so called bridge component, following this model in 2021 with the support of 12 Länder. Both are implemented by GIZ. The DIMAK centers are BMZ-funded and part of the Programme "Returning to new Opportunities / Perspektive Heimat". The first opened in Pristina in May 2015 and a second one in October 2016 in Tirana, which later opened a side-branch in Shkodra. The DIMAK centres are also implemented by GIZ. Ura is Albanian for 'bridge'; DIMAK stands for Deutsches Informationszentrum für Migration, Ausbildung und Karriere / German Information Centre on Migration, Vocational Training and Career.

25 \ Collective assistance did have a positive effect (i.e. measures offered to groups of returnees) according to the same study. The sample did not include any data from Western Balkan countries though, and such effects are likely to be context specific.

Access to Reintegration Assistance

Access to pre-departure counselling and return assistance, which is meant to also connect returning migrants with providers of reintegration assistance after return, is patchy and not always needs-based.[26] In consequence, several people with low return prepared- ness and high support needs return outside of these schemes or through deportation. But even assisted returnees in this sample were not always informed about reintegration assistance or providers considered themselves ineligible for support. Persons deported from certain states of Germany are directly referred to the URAs in both countries. In Kosovo, deported returnees from non-URA German states are referred to the Diakonie (the welfare organisation of the German Protestant Church),[27] while the Nuremberg office of the German charity AWO (Workers' Welfare)[28] assists non-deported returnees from non-URA German states. In Albania, there is no such complement to the URA, and there are no comparable structures for deported returnees from any other country (except that URA Kosovo also assists returnees from France). Local and governmental structures in the origin countries can fill these gaps in the transnational referral system with their own referrals and services. While the government of Kosovo has a reception office for returning migrants at Pristina airport and allows for registration after return in each of the municipal offices for communities and return, Albania has neither and registration of returnees is possible through the migration counters in local employment offices, but not common. Registration requires a documented stay of at least one year abroad. Especially since Kosovo and Albania were assigned safe country of origin status to speed up asylum processes, many rejected asylum seekers no longer fulfil this criterion, while others do not fulfil the criterion of a documented stay abroad. During the peak of returns of rejected asylum seekers (2015/16), both countries did not provide public reintegration assistance: In Albania, the reintegration strategy had finished, and in Kosovo, assistance under the reintegration strategy was still only provided to people who had left before 2010. Today, even though Kosovo's municipal offices for communities and returns (MOCRs) provide support, the record regarding access was mixed, with some respondents being unable to claim their rights and others being excluded for legal eligibility criteria despite high needs. According to one stakeholder, access to public services is particularly difficult for members of certain minority groups:

> *Return and readmission of minority populations to Kosovo is, mildly said, extremely questionable. The support functions do not work. Their general situation is very difficult, due to exclusion and discrimination, reintegration is simply not happening* (KP1,3 June 2021).

In Albania, services that migration counters should provide to returning migrants seem little known and trusted. Not one respondent had relied on them in our study (similarly cf Dubow et al., 2021; Hackaj & Shehaj, 2017). Respondents—including but not limited to minority groups—also reported difficulties accessing support that they should have had access to. In both countries, approaches and capacities differ widely between the municipalities, making access to service provision a function of the place of residence. In Kosovo, municipality offices and the reintegration department in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Department for the Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and the Integration of Foreigners – DRRPIF)

26 \ See chapter on return decision-making above; also cf Vollmer et al., 2017 who speak of a 'return lottery' (p. 98).

27 \ https://www.diakoniekosova.org/

28 \ http://www.awo-nuernberg.de/migration-und-integration/kosovo-projekt/. AWO and Diakonie receive funding from the state of Bavaria, the German Foreign Office and private donations; their reintegration activities are more holistic, flexible and long-term than URA.

actively involve externally funded stakeholders and refer returned migrants based on their needs, while in Albania, the fact that most municipalities do not have a database of returnees is a considerable challenge in terms of access to the target group (AP6, 19 June 2019). In Albania, municipalities collaborate with international donors in the context of third-party-funded projects due to the scarcity of public funds for social services. While individual municipalities reported collaborations with up to 30 donors, residents of municipalities with less proposal writing capacities were even more cut off from support options.

While the DIMAK centres are generally open to everyone, inform about their offers online and accept referrals through the reintegration scouts in Germany, the civil society component of PME[29] actively conducts outreach activities. In Kosovo, the main channels are open calls on social media, referrals by municipality offices as well as word of mouth and pre-existing contacts to potential beneficiaries. In Albania, beneficiaries reported that they found out about reintegration offers through hearsay, friends, family members, school teachers, or simply because they happened to be in the neighbourhood. One NGO experienced that in municipalities run by the main opposition party, police (asked to provide contacts to returnees) and administration were unwilling to cooperate, even within the project. Other NGOs went from door to door, and some could draw on intense investments in trust-building with otherwise hard-to-reach communities from their previous work. One more aspect that was reported in Albania is that returnees do not want to be known as returnees, and many want to leave again quickly. This is why they are not attracted by reintegration assistance and not easily found (AP7, 19 June 2019). Although DC-funded reintegration assistance is not confined to people returning from the funding country, the beneficiaries of the projects visited for this study had mainly returned from Germany, even in municipalities where most migrants returned from elsewhere. Possibly, this relates to the high numbers of rejected asylum seekers from Germany, with higher support needs and fewer re-migration capabilities than most other returnees. Among those who returned against their will, interviews also revealed a reluctance to accept reintegration assistance.

Selection criteria for DC-funded projects vary. Outside of referral mechanisms, there are vulnerability assessments or competitions for start-up ideas. Sometimes ethnicity or gender play a role, depending on the project. None of the projects are implemented country-wide, but instead in varying numbers of municipalities, and access from remote, rural areas, where needs and vulnerabilities tend to be higher and the presence of public services lower, is a significant limitation. Only two of the PME projects visited for this study were able to implement mobile services (one of them a former PME project).[30] Even though return migration to both countries enhances urbanisation, mainly enlarging the capitals and their surroundings (Hackaj & Shehaj, 2017; Kerpaçi, 2019), the majority of respondents returned to their previous place of residence (own data; cf García-Pereiro, 2019) and thus also into remote and rural municipalities. Providing reintegration assistance only in places with high numbers of returnees risks enforcing existing support gaps. Stakeholders confirm the underlying tension between the expectation to achieve high outreach in terms of numbers in a short timeframe and the aim to provide individualised and substantial support to the most vulnerable.

Low levels of trust in public sources of information, public institutions and in NGOs (more strongly found in Albania) need to be considered when designing outreach strategies. The following quote

29 \ PME is GIZ's Global Programme Migration for Development (Programm Migration für Entwicklung), through which GIZ implements the BMZ's Programme Returning to New Opportunities. Both will end in the summer of 2023.

30 \ Other service providers, especially in Kosovo, like the German charities AWO and Diakonie, are active country-wide and conduct home visits, but their beneficiaries are mainly referred to them and not identified locally.

exemplifies the challenge of gaining trust and providing reliable information:

> *I don't expect anything from a country like Albania. Normally, support should come from the government. But nothing works here. Everything is disorganised. Corruption everywhere. So, the chances of such programmes to exist are minimal. Even if, indeed, there is or was such a programme, I bet it would be non-functional […]. Even if it was a good programme, people wouldn't know about it. Albanian society doesn't function like other societies. In the West, to learn about any government programme or support scheme, you would simply google it. Here, you know about it only because you have a friend who knows about it. Even if they knew about it, people wouldn't trust it, because they know that nothing works here* (RA93, 20 November 2021, Tirana).

According to one respondent in Albania, the situation regarding access to information about reintegration assistance was better when the reintegration strategy was still in place. However, other stakeholders did not confirm this (RA97, 24 February 2022, Tirana). Partly due to the higher number of actors and more active involvement of municipalities, access to assistance was more common in Kosovo, but still with gaps regarding outreach to the target groups as well as linking beneficiaries to the type of support most effective for them (cf. Möllers, et al., 2017).

(Mis-)matching Needs and Support Capacities

> *I was helped by an association located in Tirana. Initially, they did a needs assessment of my family and provided us with support worth 3,000 Euros. For example, they bought us a washing machine, a refrigerator and a wood stove. I asked if the money could be used instead to build an extra room for our house, but that was not possible under this programme* (RA63, 9 September 2022, Levan).

> *I was supported by this organisation, I was really hoping they would help me to find a job. They gave me food in the beginning, I don't know the value. Now they are also helping me to start a business—it was my idea. They are providing some equipment. I asked them for scaffolding, but it was not granted; they only gave me some tools* (RK40, 20 November 2022, Podujeva).

Practitioners are regularly confronted with disappointed expectations. 'For the beneficiaries, it is never enough, don't forget that' (KP23, 9 February 2022), says one staff member of a reintegration project in Pristina. On top of the gaps in the referral systems outlined above, this study suggests that mainly two reasons can lead to a mismatch between needs and available assistance. One is that the extent of reintegration assistance may be exaggerated prior to departure to incentivise return. 'They told me that I would have everything here' (RK64, 12 February 2022, Gjilan), and 'To be honest, I expected more from reintegration assistance' (RK60, 7 February 2022, Fushë Kosovë) are just two statements by returnees who received pre-departure counselling. Providers of reintegration assistance emphasise that pre-departure counselling needs to be 'encouraging, but realistic' (KP4, 19 October 2022).

Second, the combination of low return preparedness, which is most common among assisted returnees, and the continued existence of multidimensional (re)integration barriers—often the same that motivated the decision to migrate—exceeds the capacities of supporting infrastructure, both of family networks and organisations assisting reintegration. Such returnees struggle with various challenges simultaneously, ranging from low skill levels and economic problems to insecure housing, health and mental health issues, which cannot be cared for adequately for lack of income and inability to garner the required support through network connections. They require holistic, flexible and individualised

reintegration assistance. Yet, even if provided, it does not commonly hold a solution to overcoming the structural reintegration barriers, thus providing immediate relief rather than a long-term perspective. An evaluation of a return assistance programme for rejected asylum seekers from Denmark (2006-09) confirms that those beneficiaries still in Kosovo three to four years after their assisted return, which were about half of those who initially returned, remained vulnerable despite having received rather generous assistance (Danish Refugee Council, 2011). Research also emphasises that forced return tends to exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities (Alpes & Majcher, 2020; Knoll et al., 2021) and that the adverse effects of premature and involuntary returns cannot be shouldered even with substantially more financial support and better counselling than is currently available (Olivier-Mensah et al., 2020). Some programmes include in their design that they cannot solve problems of social inequality and exclusion, e.g. by only accepting recent returnees: 'If they have not been integrated in five years, they will never be integrated', explains one stakeholder (KP23, 9 February 2022).

One type of support that this group of returnees appreciated were social centres providing support for children and families. In Albania, the multifunctional family centres run by Terre des hommes provide an open space for families in the neighbourhood (mainly returnees, but also non-migrants). They offer reintegration assistance based on a case management approach and individual needs assessments, but also activities for children, including homework help and summer camps, which, many parents report, is a great relief for them as they are often worried about the educational prospects of their children but cannot support them at home. Despite the limitations outlined above, beneficiaries appreciate the open space, the possibility to build trustful relations and the perspectives provided for children. As one beneficiary reports:

> *From the government, we haven't received anything. From this centre, yes. They help us with the homework of our children, they organise activities to entertain and educate our children, it's like after-school activities. I work in this centre part-time as a cleaning lady, and I am very grateful to them* (RA85, 19 July 2021, Xhaf Zotaj).

As the centres are co-run with the municipalities and intended to be transferred into the ownership of the municipalities in the mid- to long run, they are designed to have a sustainable effect.

Returnees with a higher skill level, previous work experience and / or access to additional assets have better chances of integrating assistance into their livelihood strategies and are thus more likely to benefit from single offers like training or a grant. At the same time, they are less dependent on assistance. Commonly granted amounts of start-up support in reintegration assistance are insufficient to start a business, even with access to other resources (Newland & Salant, 2018). This is due to limited funding, and to keep the incentive for corruption low (AP7, 19 June 2019). The DIMAK advisors actively facilitate complementing different types of support depending on the individual needs. Across different projects and programmes, the lack of coordination and data sharing between providers also allows returnees to benefit from multiple programmes. However, for returnees who have completed a training, this means waiting for a call from a grants programme in the right municipality, applying for it, waiting for a response and often for the next call. Some beneficiaries (in both countries) have established successful businesses with the help of several different organisations and have become economically self-sufficient. A returnee

in Albania, who relied only on assistance as his family did not have assets for a business, explains proudly: 'I am the number one in Albania, no other start-up has received more support than me' (RA105, 5 March 2022, Peshkopi).

Others, however, find themselves in a constant cycle of applying and re-applying, as their business does not generate any investment capital, or they move from training to training without finding employment. A self-employed returnee in Pristina states:

> *We opened the restaurant in 2018 with a grant from XX and with a second one from YY [as well as with a loan from the bank, she had said earlier], which also provided training and some equipment through a subcontractor. Now, I need a new fridge, and I am waiting for the next grants programme for which I will apply* (RK71, 16 February 2022, Pristina).

Some respondents were even looking for grants to cover their rent.[31] Market analysis was sometimes skipped, possibly because the businesses were opened before applying for assistance, even though the problems of (assisted) businesses being opened in locations with low customer turn-up or outcompeting each other are well known. One programme that received unanimously positive ratings from all interviewed beneficiaries is the CEFE competition in Albania,[32] which includes several rounds of intense coaching, action-based learning and step-wise refinement of the business idea. Winners receive seed money to start their businesses, but the main benefit—according to participants—is the learning experience.

For the group of medium-skilled or more middle-class returnees, reintegration assistance often becomes one element in their strategies to diversify sources of income and spread risks, which may also include re-migration attempts. A returned migrant from Germany received a greenhouse from a reintegration project and is cultivating vegetables on his father's land. He explains his situation as follows:

> *I do not have support, neither here nor there. I plan to work for myself for a better life. Last year, when I saw an ad for a project, I went there and applied and was chosen for a grant (referring to the greenhouse). I'm doing ok, because I also work by putting tiles in people's bathrooms, I'm very good at that. At the moment, I am waiting for the visa to go to Germany* (RK65, 14 February 2022, Vushtrri).

Highly skilled migrants usually welcome and appreciate assistance for their return, such as brain-gain programmes. Their main challenge is that working in the origin country becomes less attractive once the support runs out:

> *This programme was good, but too short. Such policies and programmes must have continuity, otherwise, they risk failure. I have many friends who, after fulfilling the condition of five years of work in Albania, left again because the work as a lecturer and researcher in Albania is undervalued* (RA70, 12 September 2021, Tirana).

Respondents suggested communicating these opportunities more widely, also among institutions in origin countries, and promoting networking among the beneficiaries, also in the longer term, to unleash the potential of the return of highly skilled more effectively.

Labour migrants who returned without assistance pointed out that both counselling and orientation on where and how to invest and qualification offers would have been helpful for them. This draws attention to the fact that migrants with low

31 \ Measures to combat the global Covid-19 pandemic still had quite a strong impact on the timeframe of data collection, thus it would take longer than usual for most returnees until their businesses were able to generate revenues.

32 \ The business plan contests were organised as part of the bilateral development cooperation from 2017 to 2020 but included a quota for returnees: https://cefe.net/projects/elementor-13755/

qualification levels often do not get the chance to accumulate skills or qualifications abroad.

> *I think some support would be helpful—if they offered free courses for the unqualified category of returnees. Counselling and orientation on how to invest the money from immigration would also be a good idea because a lot of returnees come back with the idea of investing* (RA79, 24 July 2021, Himarë).

Training offered for returnees is mostly short-term and covers a limited number of standard profiles, which means they are limited in substance and often do not build on existing qualifications and skills. While, on the one hand, returnees feel under pressure to start earning quickly and appreciate the short duration of training activities, on the other hand—as in the quote above—they also state that they wish to receive proper vocational training that would allow them to find a more qualified job. In both countries, there is a recognised need to reform the public vocational training system, which is partly in progress. Therefore, the benefits of referrals to vocational trainings can be limited for the time being, as many qualifications offered there do not match the requirements of the labor market. Also, in the context of low meritocracy and high unemployment, qualification is not all it takes to find employment, especially for returnees who have lost the connection with the local networks. Some NGOs thus include help finding employment, more or less formally, in their assistance provision, and in Kosovo, the Active Labour Market Measures Programme (ALMP)[33] co-conducted by UNDP and the Kosovar government offers on-the-job training, wage subsidies and self-employment assistance to vulnerable groups, including repatriates.

Another field of concern is the reintegration of returning children:

> *I think that the ministry of education should develop some programmes to assist the children of returned migrants in the adaptation process within the school environment. At my school, I see that these children face difficulties with the school programme, the Albanian language, maths. Some of them don't know Albanian very well, and maybe some extra, free Albanian language courses would help or some extra courses in maths because our programme in maths it is more advanced* (RA84, 21 July 2021, Durrës).

Other studies confirm that children are often most strongly affected by involuntary return in multiple ways (in terms of psychosocial well-being, language barriers, bullying in school and the economic difficulties that their parents are facing). There is little support that is both child-specific and holistic enough to improve their well-being in the longer term (Vathi & Duci, 2016; Vathi & King, 2021; Vathi & Zajmi, 2017; Zevulun et al., 2018, 2021).

This research found many individuals and organisations who are going many extra miles and are highly committed to making a real difference in the lives of their beneficiaries, often under challenging circumstances. Individualised and flexible support, ideally coupled with long-term trustful relationships with case workers, the creation of open social spaces and programmes for the reintegration and further development of children was most appreciated, as well as training measures that really involve and challenge the participants, for example, action-based learning. Outreach and referral systems are currently insufficient to offer tailored reintegration support to

33 \ See https://www.undp.org/kosovo/projects/active-labour-markets-programme-3-%E2%80%93-almp-3. The evaluation of these measures for the years 2019-2020, which reflect the status quo at the end of 2020, i.e. no longer term trend, showed that 44 per cent of recipients of on-the-job-training continued to work in the same company, 75 per cent of beneficiaries of wage subsidies were employed at the time of data collection, and 95 per cent of supported businesses were 'active' (IESB, 2021).

all those in need. Also, the requirements often placed by donors, to reach pre-defined numbers of beneficiaries within short project durations, comes at the cost of individualisation and thus constrains the measures' effectiveness. Short project durations also limit the possibilities for meaningful follow-up.

Practitioners state that the main factor for the effectiveness of assistance is the mindset or attitude of the beneficiaries, who have often gone through series of setbacks and disappointments before, during and after their migration. Engaging returnees in their plans for the future, supporting them by strengthening their sense of agency is thus key (also cf. Olivier-Mensah et al., 2020). Reintegration assistance can play an important role here, if the support provided is flexible and holistic enough to empower returnees to achieve their aims through an individualised mix of counselling and practical support that really meets the expressed needs.

Institutional Return Preparedness and the Role of Development Cooperation

The governance of migration and return is very contested and involves an increasingly large number of stakeholders (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013), pursuing partially conflicting objectives (Newland & Salant, 2018). As reintegration assistance is situated within this field, the following section will draw on the findings presented so far and turn to the question of institutional return preparedness from the perspective of alignment and coordination. The legal and institutional frameworks for return, readmission and reintegration in both case study countries resulted from a need to align policies with EU and international standards (see e.g. Newland & Salant, 2018 on the tensions and trade-offs that characterise the negotiations of readmission agreements). According to some sources, EU governments applied outright pressure on the governments of Kosovo and Albania to set up readmission and reintegration strategies[34] (own interviews; Dhembo et al., 2019), thus raising questions about the degree of national ownership[35] (see Albanian Institute for International Studies, 2018 on the rather low commitment from the Albanian government regarding reintegration). Public representatives in the origin countries expressed concerns about return practices that do not take reintegration outcomes into consideration, disregard the rights and best interests of children, and place an increasingly large reintegration burden on origin country institutions:

> *The high numbers of returnees from 2015 have decreased, but now we are getting more special cases with difficult needs, people returning straight out of jail, which requires special reintegration measures; people who were born and brought up there and "return"; this is always hard for us to understand, they have their whole social life there! People who are abusing drugs, people with severe illnesses, elderly people with no networks here, sometimes divorced individuals; they are divorced, and the family remains there, and they return here individually, victims of trafficking and children who come in the middle of the school year with no prior notice and without the necessary documents. According to our laws, they are allowed to attend school here immediately, but in all meetings that we have bilaterally with EU member states, we always raise this concern* (KP5, 9 November 2021).

The staff of the organisations working on reintegration assistance are often not fully aware of the structures and decision-making processes in destination countries on return, which in some cases led to stigmatising perceptions on deported persons, such as the belief that to be deported one has to have committed a crime other than violating the residence law of the destination country. Very challenging situations

34 \ While Albania passed its first (and only) reintegration strategy in 2010 and received Schengen Visa Liberalisation in the same year, Kosovo established a comprehensive framework on readmission and reintegration, also in 2010 and in the context of the road map to visa liberalisation, but still has not received it.

35 \ See Dhembo et al. (2019 and Vathi & Zajmi (2017) on public support that should be provided to returning migrants in Albania and Regulation 22_2020 for Kosovo (see https://www.refworld.org/docid/5ddfcf8f4.html).

were reported when reintegration assisting organisations were mandated to assist all types of returnees but only received information about so-called voluntary returns.

While projects and programmes in the development sector are usually designed in response to certain gaps and complement each other, there is limited coordination among the donors (except Germany and France to an extent). Austria and Switzerland, for instance, also fund development-related reintegration support in Kosovo. The scope of coordination among stakeholders and activities varies at the national level in the origin country. The Kosovar government plays a more active role in coordinating reintegration activities. Organisations working on transnational case management have developed electronic tools for data transfers and (anonymised) tracing of beneficiaries (IOM and GIZ, for example), but at the time of writing, the different programmes and service providers did not share data about beneficiaries. Finally, the question arises in how far reintegration assistance is aligned with other laws and policies in the origin countries and whether enough is done to avoid the duplication of structures. The relatively large number of service providers, especially in Kosovo, and the small state budget for social policies have contributed to the perception that one has to migrate at least once to receive any assistance at all, as several stakeholders pointed out with concern. Some also criticise reintegration assistance for setting the wrong incentives:

> *The question is whether a reintegration fund would be needed if labour agencies did their job properly. Under normal conditions, returning migrants could simply register with the labour agencies as unemployed like everyone else. There is a creation of dual structures in Kosovo, where every returnee who doesn't have an income receives state benefits simply for being a returnee* (KP3, 5 November, 2021).

Within and between destination countries, between destination and origin countries as well as within origin countries, there are various ruptures in the landscape of return and reintegration assistance that – for the time being – indicate limitations in institutional return preparedness. This study also highlighted, however, that the involvement of development cooperation in reintegration assistance has contributed to opening up the black box of what happens after migrants' return. to a larger diversity of stakeholders, including from civil society in countries of destination and return. This helps to form a better picture and evidence base regarding the diverse challenges of reintegration trajectories. Linking individual assistance and counselling to capacity-building measures, as done by PME, and more generally to bilateral cooperation, may well improve conditions for reintegration in the longer run. Alignment and harmonisation among donors from different countries will increase the benefits as well as broadening the scope of the programmes and supporting more inclusive social policies in origin countries.

Conclusion

Drawing on qualitative interviews with 221 returned individuals and families in Albania and Kosovo, this study has presented insights into their individual reintegration experiences and strategies across four dimensions of reintegration and discussed the needs for and role of assistance. For some, returning was a once-in-a-lifetime event, while others kept coming and going. For some, returning was one of the happiest, for others among the most difficult moments in life. Others, again, considered it the most normal thing in the world. The way individuals experience return and are able to re-establish their lives afterwards depends on their willingness and readiness to return. Conceptually, the study, therefore, applied the framework of return preparedness, defined by these two components, and draws attention to the elementary role of aspirations in shaping migration and reintegration trajectories. By virtue of its approach of maximising diversity during data collection, the analysis covered strongly varying levels of return preparedness.

Return preparedness is acquired in different ways. One is by capitalising on migration. Migrants who are planning to return aim to accumulate different types of capital, be it human, social or financial, during their migration. While respondents in this study reported a diversity of benefits from migration, ranging from life experience to savings, very few found the conditions abroad that allowed them to return with high levels of return preparedness. Another element of return preparedness is access to pre-migration networks and assets: Family relations are among the most important reasons for migration and return, and while most families do what they can to assist those who return without individual preparedness, there are cases where family-based support is insufficient, out of reach or non-existent. Also, family networks maintain their support capacities through a different set of principles and norms than formalised reintegration support, which is mainly based on mobility and reciprocity. This observation underlines the importance of considering migration and return in its social context.

Often, the two components of return preprared-ness, the willingness and readiness to return, do not converge. Family reasons or disappointment with conditions and opportunities during migration can create a willingness to return, without having acquired the readiness. Conversely, the support of (translocal) networks and human capital can smoothen reintegration after unplanned—unwilling—returns, sometimes even after deportation. Return decision-making is not only influenced by return preparedness but also, for example, by the possibility for legal re-migration. The analysis revealed a strong correlation between return aspirations at the point of departure and self-organised return as well as between low or no return aspirations and lacking return preparedness at the point of return. Recipients of official return and reintegration assistance are almost exclusively from this second group. Most of them did not plan to return, they did not (and often could not) acquire a meaningful amount of resources during their migration to prepare for return, and the most common reason for their return is the legal obligation to do so. About half of the respondents returned because they were legally bound to. Many of these migrants showed high levels of vulnerability already before their migration, had often migrated under unsafe circumstances, may have lost more to migration than they gained and lacked access to resourceful networks and institutions upon return. To effectively support their reintegration is thus a very challenging endeavour, as the lack of return preparedness combines with the returnees' marginalised position vis-à-vis structural and institutional barriers to (re)integration before and after migration.

This study indicates the need to consider the varying levels of return preparedness and the socio-economic inequalities in origin societies—including their diverse or intersectional effects on individuals—more systematically in the design and implementation of return and reintegration assistance. Pre-existing inequalities shape migrants' capability to capitalise on their migration and influence the transferability of migration-related resources after return, i.e. they

limit the possibility of generating return preparedness for people who migrate out of a socio-economically marginalised position. At the same time, the needs and vulnerabilities of these migrants upon return go beyond migration-related needs for reconnecting and often include diverse economic, social and health-related issues of different family members. If unaddressed, these situations easily become protracted, as families lack the means to invest in a better future for their children while dealing with multiple exclusions that condition each other. Difficult migration and return experiences and incompatibilities between aspirations and opportunities also harm psychosocial well-being.

When considering whether and in how far institutional return preparedness can offset lacking individual return preparedness, we realise that the diversity of and competition between actors, their aims and approaches pose a challenge in terms of coordination and alignment. The experiences of interviewed return migrants show that while some individuals and families received very substantial support through state- and non-state organisations, also transnationally, there is neither a system that guarantees access to assistance based on needs and vulnerabilities nor one that systematically matches individual needs of returnees with the most suitable type of reintegration assistance. Reintegration assistance is part of the contested field of migration management and governance of return. The aim to increase departures of persons without the legal right to stay often conflicts with the aim to provide returning migrants with a lasting perspective upon return and leads to returns that disproportionally burden the returnees, their social networks and formal institutions. With development cooperation becoming more engaged in this field, a new opportunity to systematically link the individual needs of returning migrants and non-migrants with structural-level interventions has emerged. Considering the high re-migration rates and intentions among returned migrants in both countries and the fact that neither migration itself nor support through social networks nor public (domestic or externally funded) reintegration assistance have been able to overcome structural barriers and socio-economic inequalities after their return, addressing the issue even more strongly from this perspective can be an added value. At the same time, the main responsibility in this regard lies with the national governments.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AP	*Expert / practitioner / decision-maker in Albania*	AP
AWO	*Arbeiterwohlfahrt (Workers' Welfare Association, Germany)*	AWO
AVR	*Assisted voluntary return*	AVR
AVRR	*Assisted voluntary return and reintegration*	AVRR
BAMF	*German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees*	BAMF
BICC	*Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies*	BICC
BMZ	*German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development*	BMZ
CEFE	*Competency-based Economies through Formation of Entrepreneurs*	CEFE
DIMAK	*German Information Centre for Migration, Training and Careers*	DIMAK
DRRPIF	*Department for the Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and the Integration of Foreigners (Kosovo)*	DRRPIF
EU	*European Union*	EU
GDP	*Gross domestic product*	GDP
GIZ	*German Agency for International Cooperation*	GIZ
IOM	*International Organization for Migration*	IOM
KP	*Expert / practitioner/ decision-maker in Kosovo*	KP
NELM	*New Economics of Labour Migration*	NELM
NGO	*Non-governmental Organisation*	NGO
PME	*Global Programme Migration for Development(GIZ)*	PME
RA	*Returnee in Albania*	RA
RK	*Returnee in Kosovo*	RK
UNDP	*United Nations Development Programme*	UNDP
UK	*United Kingdom*	UK
UNMIK	*United Nations Mission in Kosovo*	UNMIK
URA	*Albanian for 'bridge' - also refers to two reintegration projects funded by Germany*	URA

Annex

Table 1

Respondents in Albania

Code	Place and date of interview	Gender	Returned from	Formal assistance	Interviewer
RA1	Tirana, 19.06.19	f	Mozambique	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA2	Tirana, 21.06.19	m	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA3	Tirana, 21.06.19	f	Canada, Bangladesh	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA4	Tirana, 21.06.19	f	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA5	Shkodra, 23.06.19	f	Italy	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA6	Fushë-Arrëz, 25.06.19	f	Italy, Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA7	Fushë-Arrëz, 25.06.19	m	Greece, Italy	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA8	Shkodra, 27.06.19	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA9	Shkodra, 27.06.19	m	USA	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA10	Shkodra, 29.06.19	f	United Kingdom	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA11	Shkodra, 29.06.19	f	United Kingdom	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA12	Shkodra, 29.06.19	m	Italy	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA13	Tirana, 30.06.19	f	Spain, Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA14	Tirana, 01.07.19	m	Greece	yes	Ruth Vollmer & Elke Grawert
RA15	Tirana, 01.07.19	m	Greece, United Kingdom	yes	Elke Grawert & Ruth Vollmer
RA16	Tirana, 01.07.19	f	Italy, Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer & Elke Grawert
RA17	Tirana, 01.07.19	m	Germany	yes	Elke Grawert & Ruth Vollmer
RA18	Tirana, 02.07.19	m	United Kingdom	yes	Elke Grawert & Ruth Vollmer
RA19	Tirana, 02.07.19	f	Germany	none	Elke Grawert & Ruth Vollmer
RA20	Korça, 04.07.19	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA21	Korça, 04.07.19	m	Germany	yes	Elke Grawert & Ruth Vollmer
RA22	Roscovec, 05.07.19	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA23	Roscovec, 05.07.19	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA24	Roscovec, 05.07.19	m	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA25	Korça, 05.07.19	m	Germany	none	Elke Grawert
RA26	Korça, 05.07.19	m	Greece	none	Elke Grawert
RA27	Korça, 05.07.19	m	USA	none	Elke Grawert
RA28	Korça, 05.07.19	m	Greece	yes	Elke Grawert
RA29	Korça, 05.07.19	m	Greece, USA	none	Elke Grawert
RA30	Tirana, 07.07.19	f	Greece, Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA31	Tirana, 07.07.19	m	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA32	Kavajë, 02.06.21	f	Italy	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA33	Durrës, 18.07.21	f	Italy	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA34	Durrës, 18.07.21	f	Italy	none	Mirjam Reçi

Table 1 - continued

Respondents in Albania

Code	Place and date of interview	Gender	Returned from	Formal assistance	Interviewer
RA35	Durrës, 19.07.21	m	Greece, Germany, Netherlands	yes	Mirjam Reçi
RA36	Durrës, 19.07.21	f	Greece	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA37	Durrës, 19.07.21	f	Germany	yes	Mirjam Reçi
RA38	zoom, 13.07.21	m	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA39	Tirana, 26.06.21	f	Italy	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA40	Durrës, 23.08.21	m	Italy	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA41	Durrës, 12.08. 21	f	Greece, Germany	yes	Mirjam Reçi
RA42	Durrës, 12.08. 21	f	Greece, Germany	yes	Mirjam Reçi
RA43	Durrës, 26.08.21	f	Belgium Switzerland, Italy	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA44	Durrës, 29.07.21	m	Germany, Turkey	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA45	Durrës, 03.08.21	f	Italy	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA46	Durrës, 23.07.21	m	Italy	yes	Mirjam Reçi
RA47	Durrës, 23.07.21	f	Italy	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA48	Durrës, 30.07.21	f	Greece	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA49	Durrës, 12.08.21	f	Sweden	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA50	Durrës, 01.09.21	m	Italy	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA51	Durrës, 04.09.21	m	Greece	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA52	Durrës, 03.09.21	m	Germany, Switzerland	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA53	Durrës, 04.09.21	m	Italy	none	Mirjam Reçi
RA54	Tirana, 21.07.21	f	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA55	Tirana, 30.4.21	m	Italy	none	Valdete Shehu
RA56	Tirana, 10.5.21	f	Germany	yes	Megi Stojku
RA57	Shkodra, phone, 07.21	f	Germany	yes	Megi Stojku
RA58	Shkodra, phone, 07.2021	m	Greece	yes	Valdete Shehu
RA59	Kukës, phone, 07.2021	f	Germany	yes	Megi Stojku
RA60	Kukës, phone, 07.2021	m	Germany	yes	Valdete Shehu
RA61	Tirana, 20.06.21	m	Greece	none	Valdete Shehu
RA62	Fier, phone, 6.10.21	m	Germany	yes	Amela Marku
RA63	Levan, 9.9.22	m	Germany, France, Germany	yes	Mirjam Reçi
RA64	Levan, 11.9.22	m	Italy, Germany	yes	Mirjam Reçi
RA65	Bulqizë, 12.2.22	m	Italy	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA66	Durrës, 17.2.22	f	Italy	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA67	Durrës, 10.2.22	m	Greece	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA68	Durrës, 10.7.21	m	Greece	none	Brunilda Zenelaga

Table 1 - continued
Respondents in Albania

Code	Place and date of interview	Gender	Returned from	Formal assistance	Interviewer
RA69	Tirana, 21.11.21	m	Italy	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA70	Tirana, 12.9.21	f	Italy	yes	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA71	Durrës, 14.5.21	f	Italy	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA72	Durrës, 11.6.21	m	Italy	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA73	Durrës, 11.11.21	m	Greece	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA74	Durrës, 12.4.22	f	Greece	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA75	Durrës, 3.4.22	f	Germany	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA76	Tirana, 3.3.22	f	Greece	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA77	Tirana, 10.2.22	m	Greece	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA78	Tirana, 30.3.21	m	Greece	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RA79	Himarë, 24.7.21	m	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA80	Xhaf Zotaj, 19.7.21	m	Italy, Sweden	yes	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA81	Tirana, 21.7.21	f	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA82	Tirana, 25.5.21	f	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA83	Tirana, 25.6.21	f	Italy	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA84	Durrës, 21.7.21	f	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA85	Xhaf Zotaj, 19.7.21	f	Germany	yes	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA86	Tirana, 6.12.21	f	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA87	Tirana, 9.11.21	m	Italy	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA88	Tirana, 30.10.21	m	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA89	Kavajë, 13.12.21	m	Italy	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA90	Tirana, 10.11.21	m	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA91	Nishtulla, 13.12.21	f	Turkey, Germany	yes	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA92	Tirana, 24.11.21	m	Italy, Qatar	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA93	Tirana, 20.9.21	m	Belgium	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA94	UK, messenger, 8.8.21	m	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA95	Borsh, 15.8.21	m	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA96	Corraj, Viber call, 5.11.21	m	Greece	none	Kalie Kerpaçi
RA97	Tirana, 24.2.22	f	Greece, Vietnam	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA98	Tirana, 6.3.22	f	Germany, Spain, Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA99	Kamëz, 25.2.22	f	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA100	Kamëz, 25.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA101	Kukës, 22.2.22	m	United Kingdom	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA102	Kukës, 23.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA103	Kukës, 23.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer

Table 1 - continued
Respondents in Albania

Code	Place and date of interview	Gender	Returned from	Formal assistance	Interviewer
RA104	Kukës, 23.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA105	Peshkopia, 5.3.22	m	Greece, Norway, Belgium	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA106	Korça, 27.2.22 (phone)	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA107	Korça, 28.2.22	f	Greece, Finland	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA108	Fushë-Krujë, 3.3.22	m	Greece, Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA109	Fushë-Krujë, 3.3.22	f	Germany, France	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA110	Peshkopi, 5.3.22	m	Germany, Greece	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA111	Selita, 4.3.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA112	Selita, 4.3.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA113	Selita, 4.3.22	f	Germany	unclear	Ruth Vollmer
RA114	Selita, 4.3.22	m	Germany, France	unclear	Ruth Vollmer
RA115	Tirana, 25.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RA116	Kukës, 14.6.21	m	Belgium	none	Ruth Vollmer
RA117	Shkodra, 17.10.22	m	Germany	yes	Mirjam Reçi
RA118	Shkodra, 21.10.22	f	Germany	yes	Mirjam Reçi
RA119	Tirana, 1.11.21	m	Germany	yes	Mariglend Pemarku
RA120	Tirana, 1.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Mariglend Pemarku
RA121	Tirana, 8.11.21	f	Germany	none	Mariglend Pemarku
RA122	Tirana, 30.10.21	m	Kuwait, Germany	none	Mariglend Pemarku
RA123	Tirana, 30.10.21	m	Germany	none	Mariglend Pemarku
RA124	Tirana, 31.10.21	m	Germany	none	Mariglend Pemarku
RA125	Tirana, 15.10.21	f	Germany	none	Mariglend Pemarku
RA126	Tirana, 18.11.21	f	Germany	none	Mariglend Pemarku
RA127	Tirana, 20.11.21	f	Germany	none	Mariglend Pemarku
RA128	Tirana, 21.11.21	f	Germany	none	Mariglend Pemarku
RA129	Tirana, 22.11.21	m	Germany	none	Mariglend Pemarku

Table 2

Respondents in Kosovo

Code	Place and date of interview	Gender	Returned from	Formal assistence	Interviewer
RK1	Pristina, 19.11.21	m	Germany	none	Adrian Xhemaili
RK2	Pristina, 20.11.21	m	Germany	none	Adrian Xhemaili
RK3	Pristina, 4.12.21	f	Germany	yes	Adrian Xhemaili
RK4	Pristina, 5.12.21	m	Germany	yes	Adrian Xhemaili
RK5	Fushë Kosovë, 6.12.21	f	Netherlands	yes	Adrian Xhemaili
RK6	Mitrovica, 26.2.22	f	Bosnia and Herzegovina	none	Ehljijana Zeka
RK7	Mitrovica, 28.2.11	f	Germany	none	Ehljijana Zeka
RK8	Fushë Kosovë, 23.3.22	m	Germany	none	Ehljijana Zeka
RK9	Mitrovica, 3.3.22	f	Bosnia and Herzegovina	none	Ehljijana Zeka
RK10	Fushë Kosovë, 17.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Arjeta Gashi
RK11	Pristina, 26.12.21	m	Germany	none	Arjeta Gashi
RK12	Cagllaviça, 11.12.21	m	United Kingdom	none	Arjeta Gashi
RK13	Komoran, 28.2.22	f	Spain	none	Arjeta Gashi
RK14	Vushtrri, 10.12.21	m	Germany	none	Arjeta Gashi
RK15	Vushtrri, 8.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Arjeta Gashi
RK16	Skënderaj, 12.12.21	m	Germany	yes	Arjeta Gashi
RK17	Pristina, 13.12.21	m	Germany	none	Arjeta Gashi
RK18	Pristina, 15.12.21	f	USA	none	Erisa Kallaba
RK19	Pristina, 11.3.22	f	Switzerland	yes	Erisa Kallaba
RK20	Pristina, 11.2.22	m	Switzerland	none	Erisa Kallaba
RK21	Pristina, 23.11.21	m	Germany	none	Erisa Kallaba
RK22	Pristina, 22.11.21	m	Switzerland, Sweden	yes	Erisa Kallaba
RK23	Pristina, 25. 11.21	f	Greece, United Kingdom	yes	Erisa Kallaba
RK24	Pristina, 30.12.21	m	USA	none	Erisa Kallaba
RK25	Pristina, 17.11.21	f	France	none	Luar Rrmoku
RK26	Fushë Kosovë, 20.1.22	f	Germany	yes	Luar Rrmoku
RK27	Peja, 28.11.21	m	Italy	none	Luar Rrmoku
RK28	Pristina, 13.12.21	m	France	none	Luar Rrmoku
RK29	Lipjan, 15.12.21	f	United Kingdom	none	Luar Rrmoku
RK30	Gjilan, 19.12.21	f	United Kingdom, France	yes	Luar Rrmoku
RK31	Podujeva, 25.12.21	f	Germany	yes	Luar Rrmoku
RK32	Pristina, 21.12.21	male	Italy	none	Mimoza Tafarshiku
RK33	Pristina, 27.11.21	f	USA	none	Mimoza Tafarshiku

Table 2 - continued
Respondents in Kosovo

Code	Place and date of interview	Gender	Returned from	Formal assistance	Interviewer
RK34	Pristina, 20.11.21	f	USA	none	Mimoza Tafarshiku
RK35	Pristina, 29.11.21	m	Belgium	none	Mimoza Tafarshiku
RK36	Pristina, 29.11.21	m	Sweden	none	Mimoza Tafarshiku
RK37	Pristina, 20.1.22	f	Germany, Canada	none	Mimoza Tafarshiku
RK38	Lipjan, 20.11.21	f	Germany	unclear	Ruth Vollmer
RK39	Podujeva, 20.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK40	Podujeva, 20.11.21	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK41	Pristina, 5.11.21	m	Albania, Ghana	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK42	Pristina, 5.11.21	m	Qatar	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK43	Fushë Kosovë, 10.11.21	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK44	Lipjan, 10.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK45	Pristina, 11.11.21	m	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK46	Prizren, 11.11.21	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK47	Pristina, 12.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK48	Pristina, 12.11.21	f	Belgium	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK49	Pristina, 14.11.21	f	Switzerland	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK50	Fushë Kosovë, 15.11.21	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK51	Obiliq, phone, 16.11.21	f	Germany, Austria, Serbia, Albania	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK52	Mitrovica, 18.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK53	Vushtrri, 18.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK54	Fushë Kosovë, 18.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK55	Vushtrri, 19.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK56	Pristina, 21.11.21	m	Sweden, Netherlands, Afghanistan	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK57	Fushë Kosovë, 22.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK58	Fushë Kosovë, 22.11.21	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK59	Obiliq, 22.11.21	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK60	Fushë Kosovë, 7.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK61	Pristina, 8.2.22	m	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK62	Gjakova, 11.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK63	Gjakova, 11.2.22	m	France, Switzerland	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK64	Gjilan, 12.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK65	Vushtrri, 14.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK66	Skënderaj, 14.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK67	Drenas, 14.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer

Table 2 - continued

Respondents in Kosovo

Code	Place and date of interview	Gender	Returned from	Formal assistance	Interviewer
RK68	Drenica, 14.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK69	Drenica, 14.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK70	Gracaniça, 15.2.22	m	Norway	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK71	Pristina, 16.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK72	Obiliq, 16.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK73	Pristina, 16.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK74	Vushtrri, 18.2.22	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK75	Plemetin, 18.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK76	Pristina, 18.2.22	f	Netherlands	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK77	Pristina, 18.2.22	m	Turkey, Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK78	Gjakova, 19.2.22	m	Austria, Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK79	Gjakova, 19.2.22	m	Austria	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK80	Mitrovica, 21.2.22	m	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK81	Mitrovica, 21.2.22	m	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK82	Mitrovica, 21.2.22	f	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK83	Mitrovica, 21.2.22	f	Serbia, Croatia, Netherlands, Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK84	Gjakova	m	Germany	yes	Ruth Vollmer
RK85	Peja, 5.6.21	m	Germany	no	Brunilda Zenelaga
RK86	Peja, 28.6.21	m	Belgium	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RK87	Peja, 29.6.21	f	Switzerland	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RK88	Peja, 17.6.21	f	Germany	none	Brunilda Zenelaga
RK89	Peja, 30.6.21	m	Germany	yes	Brunilda Zenelaga
RK90	Prizren, 15.10.22	m	Germany	yes	Zeynep Sahin Mencütek
RK91	Gjakova, 16.10.22	m	Germany	none	Ruth Vollmer
RK92	Gjakova, 16.10.22	f	Hungary	none	Ruth Vollmer

Table 3

Interviews with experts, stakeholders and practitioners

ALBANIA			KOSOVO		
Code	**Date of (first) interview**	**Type of actor**	**Code**	**Date of (first) interview**	**Type of actor**
AP1	07.05.2019	Expert	KP1	03.06.2021	International Organisation
AP2	10.05.2019	German DC project	KP2	05.11.2021	German charity
AP3	10.05.2019	international organisation	KP3	05.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
AP4	13.05.2019	international NGO	KP4	08.11.2021	German DC project
AP5	13.05.2019	Expert	KP5	09.11.2021	Kosovar State body
AP6	19.06.2019	German govt. representative	KP6	09.11.2021	German NGO
AP7	19.06.2019	Albanian NGO	KP7	09.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
AP8	19.06.2019	German-funded centre	KP8	10.11.2021	German government project
AP9	20.06.2019	German DC programme	KP9	10.11.2021	Municipal body
AP10	20.06.2019	German DC programme	KP10	11.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
AP11	21.06.2019	international NGO	KP11	11.11.2021	expert
AP12	22.06.2019	Expert	KP12	12.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
AP13	30.06.2019	Expert	KP13	15.11.2021	Kosovar branch of international NGO
AP14	02.07.2019	Expert	KP14	18.11.2021	German charity
AP15	02.07.2019	international NGO	KP15	19.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
AP16	03.07.2019	Albanian NGO	KP16	22.11.2021	German-funded DC programme
AP17	03.07.2019	municipal body	KP17	23.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
AP18	09.07.2019	German govt. representative	KP18	23.11.2021	Kosovar government body
AP19	23.02.2022	international NGO	KP19	07.02.2022	Municipal body
AP20	23.02.2022	Albanian NGO	KP20	07.02.2022	Municipal body
AP21	24.02.2022	German-funded project	KP21	07.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
AP22	25.02.2022	German-funded centre	KP22	08.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
AP23	01.03.2022	Albanian NGO	KP23	09.02.2022	International Programme
AP24	03.03.2022	international NGO	KP24	10.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
AP25	03.03.2022	Albanian NGO	KP25	11.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
AP26	03.03.2022	Albanian NGO	KP26	12.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
AP27	07.03.2022	municipal body	KP27	15.02.2022	Municipal body
			KP28	16.02.2022	Swiss charity
			KP29	17.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
			KP30	29.09.2022	international organisation
			KP31	21.10.2022	Kosovar NGO

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