

### The role of mobility, networks and reintegration assistance after return: insights from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia

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# The Role of Mobility, Networks and Reintegration Assistance after Return

Insights from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia

Clara Schmitz-Pranghe \ BICC

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## SUMMARY

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This *Working Paper* investigates the (re-)integration trajectories of returnees to the two Western Balkan countries Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. By applying a multidimensional and processual understanding of (re-)integration, it scrutinises how returnees' positionality as well as local context conditions influence returnees' experiences and livelihood strategies upon return. The study covers returnees with diverse backgrounds, ranging from self-organised early post-war returns of refugees and IDPs, forced returnees, returning “guest workers”, more recent irregular and regular labour migrants, pendular migrants, students, (rejected) asylum seekers, and returnees with diverging socio-economic and educational levels, age and ethnic and religious identities, different durations of stay abroad and a wide array of destination countries. By doing so, it finds—despite significant differences in the return contexts and the socio-economic status of returnees—similar patterns among the very diverse group of returnees covered in both countries, namely the main role of (trans)local networks and mobility for the adjustment processes in the course of migration, displacement and return.

By comparing trajectories of returnees who received different kinds of return and reintegration assistance with those who did not, the *Paper* also provides some insights into the opportunities and limits of reintegration assistance. The study's findings underline the relevance of individualised needs-based support measures in specific cases as well as approaches aiming to generally support inclusive societal structures.

The study is based on qualitative data collected among returnees, experts and stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia between 2019 and 2022 in the framework of the research project “Trajectories of reintegration. The impacts of displacement, migration and return on social change”.

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## Main findings

### **After return, (trans-local) connectedness and mobility remain an important livelihood strategy or aspiration**

Returnees' (trans)local connectedness and mobility are common and important factors in returnees' (re-)integration trajectories in both countries of study and among returnees of diverse socio-economic strata.

### **The availability of and access to networks are decisive for a returnee's preparedness and ability to (re-)adjust upon return**

The amount of support a returnee can expect from available networks and the ability to access new ones decisively depends on the social and economic positionality of the returnee within the origin, migration and receiving context. In addition, external factors shape the availability of networks, such as the employment and governance context as well as the (in)existence of integrative capacities/social capital of receiving communities.

### **The role of reintegration assistance is limited**

Reintegration assistance measures cannot compensate for the lack of return preparedness, supportive networks and conducive conditions at the place of return. However, when it comes to immediate assistance upon return, such as access to IDs and public services, the role of assistance programmes has proven indispensable.

### **Reintegration programming should complement individual support schemes with more community-based programmes**

In many cases, it is not the physical return itself that poses the main challenge to livelihoods and well-being of returnees. Instead, continuities of either integration, marginalisation or exclusion from livelihood options, rights and social participation shape individual trajectories before, during and after migration. Rights-based approaches and more community-based programmes can help to foster inclusive communal structures and expand possibilities for societal participation.

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## Introduction

Western Balkan societies are very much shaped by migration flows ranging from a decade-long tradition of labour migration, forced displacement in the course of the break-up of former Yugoslavia to more recent asylum migration and irregular migration. Accordingly, return movements of migrants and displaced persons have been and are diverse, posing individual-, group- and context-specific challenges and offering very different opportunities to returnees' trajectories of (re-)integration.

This *Working Paper* investigates (re-)integration trajectories of these very diverse groups of returnees in the two Western Balkan countries Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), based on qualitative data collected between 2019 and 2022<sup>1</sup>. It scrutinises the following questions: “How do social and biographical factors, as well as local context conditions, influence returnees' experiences upon return?” And “how do they shape returnees' livelihood strategies?” By doing so, it identifies specific patterns that are quite similar among the very diverse group of returnees in both countries, namely the main role of (trans)local networks and mobility for the adjustment processes in the course of migration, displacement and return. By comparing trajectories of returnees who received different kinds of return and reintegration assistance with those who did not, the *Paper* aims to provide some insights on in how far these respond to the dimensions of (re-)integration and about the opportunities and limits of reintegration assistance.

The study applies a multidimensional understanding of reintegration, distinguishing its social, economic, psychosocial and political dimensions. Second, it draws on an understanding of reintegration that contrasts with return policy-driven ideas of reintegration as a challenge, a desirable end or outcome of support—being interested in the de facto processes of reintegration described by the returnees themselves. In line with this, this *Paper* prefers the usage of the term (re-)integration or (re-)adjustment in the course of migration and return over the term

reintegration, since a large share of returnees interviewed in this study stated not being able to identify with the term reintegration.<sup>2</sup> I will still use the term when referring to reintegration programming and support measures. Third, the *Paper* adopts the concept of transnational return, which is often characterised by continued mobility and embeddedness in translocal networks (Eastmond, 2006; Anghel et al., 2019). Transnational return does not necessarily imply a particular physical space or community to (re-)adjust to but might also be present in translocal and even virtual spaces. (Re-)integration is understood as a non-linear process that stretches over time. This process is already shaped by the situation before migration, the reasons why people leave as well as individual migration aspirations. The experiences made in the migration country, the circumstances of return, context conditions upon return and own aspirations also play an important role.

Research on return and (re-)integration in the Western Balkan countries is very much driven by different policy agendas related to a) the international community's peacebuilding agenda in the aftermaths of the wars in Croatia, BiH and Kosovo, b) an interest in the topic of integration of former refugees and labour migrants in receiving contexts<sup>3</sup>, c) the policy discourse of a migration–development nexus<sup>4</sup> and d) and the European Union's policy to foster the readmission agreements. This *Working Paper* tries to connect these diverse strands by using a comprehensive approach to return and (re-)integration, including respondents from the different return contexts both geographically and temporally and diverse legal conditions of return.

<sup>1</sup> \ This research has been conducted in the framework of the four-year-long research project “Trajectories of Reintegration. The Impact of displacement, Migration and Return on Social Change,” which has been generously supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

<sup>2</sup> \ By drawing on returnees' own perceptions and assessments of what it means to live a good life and to feel part of a community, we found that the politically used concept of reintegration often does not correspond to returnees' own conceptualisations of what a returnee is or what the process they go through is like. While some were not aware of the concept of reintegration at all or did not see any need to reintegrate, for others, the term had a very negative connotation. Also, BiH and Serbian institutions and reintegration strategies most often associate return and reintegration either with returnees who had been deported (readmitted) or, in the case of BiH, with return movements after the war.

<sup>3</sup> \ Cf. Kostić, 2013; Valenta & Ramet, 2011; 2016. Other studies focus on transnational mobility and belonging among Bosnian communities abroad (e.g. Eastmond, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> \ See Halilovich et al., 2018; UNDP, 2019.



While academic writing has abundantly dealt with post-war return movements to BiH<sup>5</sup>, research on return to Serbia is much more scarce than on other countries of the region. Existing studies very much focus on either readmitted returnees (Cvejić, 2012; 2019; 2022) or a specific target group among the readmitted returnees (Vathi, 2019; World Bank Group, 2019; Müller, 2016; Müller et al., 2017; Jugović & Bogetić, 2019a) or highly skilled<sup>6</sup> return migration (e.g. UNDP, 2019). Self-organised returns of low-skilled returnees after relatively brief stays abroad or in the framework of pendular labour migration have not received any attention so far—neither in BiH nor in Serbia.

Our study thus responds to a) the scarcity of qualitative studies applying a long-term perspective on (re-)integration processes, b) the lack of comparative studies on assisted versus unassisted returnees' (re-)integration,<sup>7</sup> and c) the scarcity of studies on recent returns to BiH and Serbia that belong neither to the group of highly skilled returnees nor to vulnerable minorities such as the Roma or returnees who had returned in the framework of readmission agreements or AVVR (assisted voluntary return and reintegration) programmes.

5 \ Cf. Black et al., 2004; Black, 2002; Black et al., 2006; Tuathail & O'Loughlin, 2009; Haider, 2008; Koning, 2008.

6 \ This *Working Paper* uses the term “low educational status”/low-skilled” for returnees who did not attend school or only attended elementary school. A “medium educational status” refers to returnees who completed secondary school/ highschool, while a “high educational status”/highly skilled” refers to university education.

7 \ Comparative studies on minority returns in Western Balkan countries are rather scarce. Harvey (2006) compares factors affecting return processes in BiH and Croatia, referring to a) the very similar nature of local strategies obstructing ethnic minority returns, b) the conditions in places of refuge, having examined how particular circumstances of their displacement have had a different impact on questions of mobilisation and representation among displaced communities in exile, and c) the nature of international intervention, arguing that considerably more resources, attention and diplomatic pressure were focused on the question of minority return to Bosnia than to Croatia. Cittadini (2014) compares the impact of the interventions on minority returns in BiH and Kosovo, in particular the housing restitutions and reconstructions and the interventions for ensuring the perceived and actual security of the returnees. She concludes that the housing restitutions and reconstructions policies in Kosovo were ineffective due to a lack of proper interventions aimed at ensuring the perceived and actual security of the returnees..

## Data Collection and Methodology

This *Working Paper* is based on field research that the author conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina between July and August 2019 and in April 2022 and in Serbia between July and August 2001, in April and October 2022. In addition, local researchers and research assistants substantially contributed to the data collection in both countries and provided valuable feedback and input to this research.<sup>8</sup>

The research team identified respondents through systematic serendipity and snowballing. The team also approached international and local aid organisations and state institutions offering various forms of reintegration support who, in part, facilitated contacting their beneficiaries. In addition, we held background talks with representatives of international (aid) organisations and representatives of ministries and municipalities and local scholars and researchers. All interviews were complemented with on-the-spot observation, and the team triangulated information with academic and grey literature.

Though aid organisations and institutions usually pre-selected respondents, we tried to diversify as much as possible regarding age, gender, ethnic belonging and socio-economic status. This versatile access to the field allowed us to conduct interviews with respondents who had not received any kind of assistance before, during or after their return and those who had been supported. To account for changes and long-term developments in returnees' (re-)integration trajectories, the study included interviews with returnees who had returned several years or decades ago. Moreover, where possible, we interviewed returnees a second time after six to 18 months to follow up on changes during the project's duration.

8 \ In BiH, Dr Aida Ibričević, Tajra Hadžić, Haris Kalač and Melisa Mehmedović conducted the interviews. The team in Serbia consisted of Milica Todorović, Nevena Radić, Marko Petrović, Aleksa Krcum, Jovan Petronijević and Sandra Vukasinović under the supervision of Professor Danica Šantić.

**Table 1**  
**Number of interviews conducted in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Respondents	Serbia	Bosnia and Herzegovina
<i>Returnees – total number:</i>	83	83
Returnees - assisted	36	21
Returnees - unassisted	47	62
Returnees - deported (incl. unassisted and assisted)	9	4
(Returned) IDPs	-	6
Stayees	2	13
<i>Stakeholders and experts</i>	25	28
Total number of interviews	108	111

The very diverse sample of this study covers returnees with different reasons for migration and a different legal status abroad, including displaced persons (refugees, IDPs, asylum seekers), long-term labour migrants, (ir)regular, circular or pendular<sup>9</sup> migrants. Moreover, the study includes returnees with different reasons for and conditions of return, covering returnees who had to return for legal and other reasons (involuntary returns<sup>10</sup>) and those who returned of their own volition. We also included those who returned from abroad but did not return to their place of origin but elsewhere. This mainly applied to so-called majority returnees (mainly Bosniak refugees who originated from what is now the Republika Srpska but returned to what is now the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, returnees who had been born to parents originating from countries of the former Yugoslavia, for example, returnees originating from Kosovo, but returning to Serbia. The sample included a great share of returnees with multiple

migration experiences (including internal displacement) in one or various neighbouring countries, European and non-European ones. Countries of migration included Germany, Austria and a variety of other European Union countries, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, Turkey, the United States and Canada, Libya, Egypt, Qatar, Botswana, South Africa, Kuwait, Russia, Malaysia, China and New Zealand. To complement the picture, the team also conducted a limited number of interviews with persons without migration experience (stayees and potential labour migrants) as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in BiH (see [Annex](#)).

The sample included 88 male and 77 female respondents and included persons who had returned as children, adolescents, young adults and adults as well as persons who returned after being retired. Our respondents' ethno-religious/ethno-linguistic self-identification was diverse (for detailed demographic information about our respondents, see [Annex](#)). In addition, both samples included respondents who did not identify with any religious (n) or ethnic community, did not wish to reveal it or stated that they descended from ethnically mixed or mixed faith couples.

9 \ The term pendular migration is used here to refer to regular and rather short-term forth and back movements on a seasonal basis or based on the opportunity for visa-free three-month stays in the Schengen area.

10 \ In line with Rued et al. (2009), I conceive "any kind of return - other than a personal desire to do so - as involuntary", thus including migrants who do not have any opportunity to legally stay in the country of migration and those being forced by other than legal reasons to return (e.g. health- or family-related reasons).

## Map 1

## Research Locations in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina



Sources: Natural Earth Data, 2020, HOTOSM, 2020 Map layout: Jonas Spekker, June 2022

The study applied an intersectionality approach, as it investigated how individual and social factors such as age, gender, ethno-religious/ethnolinguistic ascriptions, and returnees' socio-economic and educational status intersect when affecting (re-)integration trajectories. While individual characteristics cannot be isolated from others, several characteristics always intersect with each other and the overall context conditions. By applying an intersectionality perspective, the study aimed to not attribute a certain kind of influence to a specific factor but instead focuses on each individual life story and the intersecting factors, including the context conditions and arbitrary events shaping trajectories of (re-) integration.

Our interview guidelines covered questions about the living conditions of interviewees before migration as well as the migratory process(es), starting from the reasons to migrate to experiences in the country/region of migration/displacement, the return decision-making, return and (re-)integration processes and future aspirations. Using a deductive and inductive approach, the author coded the data according to the following four dimensions a) networks and translocality, b) livelihoods, c) belonging, and d) governance and access to rights. The author also included additional codes relating, among others, to notions of the concept of return and (re-)integration as well as the aspect of perceived social change.

## Methodological Challenges

Due to COVID-19-related restrictions and risks during the project's duration, the team was unable to conduct some interviews in 2020 and 2021 in person. Moreover, some respondents' onward mobility challenged follow-up interviews in person. In these cases, we conducted interviews virtually or via phone. By gathering additional data on returnees who had returned already some decades or years ago, we were still able to generate some findings regarding the long-term effects of aid and (re-)integration trajectories in the long run.

Another challenge was the accessibility of some of the most vulnerable groups among the returnees. Building up trust and relying on the cooperation of Roma mediators/coordinators thus was essential.

When researching the impacts of pre-departure return and reintegration assistance, respondents only very rarely stated that they had received this kind of assistance prior to their return and could explain in how far this was helpful to them or not. This *Paper* thus mainly focuses on post-return reintegration assistance.

## Migration History and Policy Landscape of Return

Migration from Western Balkan countries is shaped by labour migration flows since the 1960s, forced displacements during the wars in the context of the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, and continuous regular and irregular migration flows and asylum migration.

The number of Serbian citizens abroad and Serbs in the region<sup>11</sup> is estimated at around five million. Most emigrated to live and work in EU member states, particularly Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Switzerland and France (Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, 2019; Eurostat, 2022). Labour migrants in the 1970s mainly originated from the eastern parts of Serbia. Since the 1990s, considerable parts of the population, including, to a large extent, ethnic minorities, also left other parts of Serbia (SRB-EXP2, Belgrade, 28 July 2021).

For BiH, it is estimated that between two and 2.2 million people originating from BiH and their descendants live abroad, which places BiH in first place in Europe for the number of emigrants and diaspora members compared to its number of inhabitants. In addition to the traditional destination countries of Germany, Austria and Slovenia, Scandinavia—Sweden, Norway and Finland—has recently become an important destination. Moreover, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, Canada and Australia have become more and more attractive as destination countries (BiH Ministry of Security, 2021).

During the 1992–1995 war in BiH, over half of the 4.3 million population of Bosnia and Herzegovina was displaced. Violence, including systematic persecution and expulsions, left over 100,000 dead and one million internally displaced. 1.2 million sought refuge abroad, mainly in Germany, its neighbouring countries Austria and Switzerland and the United States, Canada and Australia, among many other countries.

The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), signed in 1995, put an end to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and divided the young state into the two entities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), and the Republika Srpska (RS). In 2000, the Brčko District—a local self-governement area and officially a condominium of the FBiH and RS was formed to settle territorial claims of both entities. The DPA introduced a complex and highly decentralized governmental structure with weak central institutions and strong cantons, which—until today—considerably impacts institutional functionality and governance efficiency.<sup>12</sup> In a, then, extraordinary regulation of a peace agreement, Annex VII of the DPA introduced the right of return and restitution of property by stating: ‘All refugees and displaced persons have the right freely to return to their homes of origin. They shall have the right to have restored to them property of which they were deprived in the course of hostilities since 1991 and to be compensated for any property that cannot be restored to them’ (United Nations Security Council, 1995). Article 2 of the DPA states the obligation of the parties (the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Republika Srpska) ‘to create in their territories the political, economic, and social conditions conducive to the voluntary return and harmonious reintegration of refugees and displaced persons, without preference for any particular group’ (United Nations Security Council, 1995).

In 1999, the Property Law Implementation Programme was established and strongly supported by the international community. By May 2005, 93 per cent of the property lost in the war was restituted and by 2006, over one million displaced could reclaim their property. But despite an unprecedented international effort to support restitution and enable the return of minorities, many studies have pointed to the disparity between return and restitution policies and local context conditions that returnees faced, e.g.

11 \ The Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the Region (2009) defines the latter as “the members of the Serbian people living in the Republic of Slovenia, Republic of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Republic of Albania and Republic of Hungary (Republika Srpska, 2009).

12 \ BiH has experienced continuing dysfunctionality regarding large parts of state and political institutions and a continuous undermining of democracy and the rule of law. Fundamental political disagreements among the main Serb, Croat and Bosniak parties at the state, entity and cantonal level have, on various occasions, prevented the formation of governments and stymied the appointment of key officials and directors of police (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022).

the lack of employment, education, and necessary infrastructure as well as security concerns and political obstruction from local officials (Phuong, 2000; Stefansson, 2006; Williams, 2006; Cukur et al., 2005; D’Onofrio, 2004). After property repossession, many returnees moved abroad again or to parts of the country where they formed part of the ethnic majority population, deepening ethnic segregation and fostering ethnically homogeneous regions within the country (Brubaker, 2013).<sup>13</sup> Our BiH case study confirms some of the challenges Bosniak minority returnees in RS still face, especially in the economic sphere. Moreover, the patterns of temporal or partial returns described for the post-war return movement could still be observed and were prevalent for minority returnees in RS. Moreover, even though many have returned to or integrated into the locations where they had fled to, the number of displaced people remains substantial in BiH.<sup>14</sup>

Serb minority returns have been much less frequent than the return of Bosniak refugees. This has been attributed to political context conditions, i.e. to the political rhetoric of the ruling Serb Democratic Party (SDS) in RS, which ‘centred on the claim that Serbs did not wish to return to the Bosniak/Croat Federation, and the implication that all Serbs should live in one state’ (Harvey, 2006, p. 96).

Porobić (2017) differentiates between three waves of returnees from exile abroad: a) Early repatriations from 1997 to 1999, assisted and not assisted (mainly from Germany, Croatia and Serbia); b) Voluntary assisted return, following property restitution from 1999 to 2002 (from EU- and other European countries, plus Serbia and Croatia)<sup>15</sup>; c) Recent and self-organised

return of refugee diasporas after 2005 (mainly from Scandinavia, the United States and other EU countries). The temporal differentiation is linked to the refugees’ status in recipient countries and the nature of their return and subsequent socio-economic differences in reintegration. In-between, we find mixed categories (Porobić, 2017, p. 111).

Serbia experienced forced displacement, especially as a destination for 550,000 Serb refugees from the former Yugoslav republics. In 1999, more than 200,000 internally displaced persons fled to Serbia from Kosovo. However, displacements from today’s Serbian territory also took place, though to a much smaller degree, e.g. of the Muslim population in southern Serbia fleeing discrimination and persecution as well as conscription during the war in BiH. Today, Serbia still counts a refugee population, originating from Croatia and BiH, of 26,000 and an IDP population of almost 200,000 (Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, 2019, p. 41).

Between 2009/10 and 2014, the number of asylum applicants from Western Balkan countries in the European Union had considerably increased, primarily as a result of the abolition of visa requirements for nationals of Serbia (December 2009) and BiH (December 2010).<sup>16</sup> Since 2014, when both BiH and Serbia were declared “safe countries of origin”, asylum migration from Serbia and BiH has significantly decreased, and the number of first-time asylum applicants in the European Union from Bosnia and Herzegovina fell by 80 per cent and from Serbia by 55 per cent (Eurostat, 2022). However, acceptance rates for asylum claims for BiH citizens had been very low even before. Western Balkan countries are a major source of irregular

13 \ Few studies describe examples of rather “successful” minority returns within BiH (successful in terms of re-establishing a post-war ethnic composition) (e.g. Sivic-Bryant, 2016; Porobić, 2016).

14 \ According to UNHCR (2022), 96,305 people still hold formal IDP status in BiH. UNHCR assesses that one-third of IDPs and some 47,000 minority returnees are still vulnerable and in need of comprehensive solutions. Since 2010, local integration has also been considered as a solution to protracted displacement (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, 2010).

15 \ While Germany pursued a relatively strict repatriation policy after the signing of the DPA, forcing and incentivising the return of hundreds of thousands of Bosnians, other receiving countries such as Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands and the United States applied collective repatriation schemes, pre-return assistance and post-return assistance (Porobić, 2017).

16 \ Holders of passports from the Western Balkans (except Kosovo) are granted visa-free travel within the Schengen area for 90 days in any 180-day period. In general, the asylum applications were rejected, but in many cases, Roma received a “*Duldung*” (temporary residence permission for rejected asylum seekers who are obliged to leave Germany but are allowed to stay in Germany on a temporary basis.)



migration to EU countries. Serbia and BiH are two of the main nationalities to be forcefully returned to their countries of origin from the European Union. BiH counts 310 readmitted returnees in 2020, more than half of them having been deported by Germany (Ministry of Security, 2021, p. 45). Between 2013 and 2022, the Bosnian Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) counted 11,000 readmitted Bosnian citizens. According to the records of the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs, 777 Serbia citizens were returned to Serbia under the readmission agreement in 2021. Almost 90 per cent of the returnees registered with the Readmission Office at the Belgrade airport Nikola Tesla came from Germany (KIRS, 2022, p. 51).

The numbers of returnees returning with IOM assistance programmes are comparatively low. From 2011 to 2020, only 1,661 BiH citizens returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina within the IOM assistance programmes with peaks in 2013, 2015 and 2017 (Ministry of Security, 2021). Concrete data for Serbia has not been available.

In BiH and Serbia, we also observe the return of short- and long-term labour migrants, students and irregular labour migrants, making use of visa-free travel opportunities to the Schengen area. In addition, there is a notable trend of return migration upon retirement to their origin countries. Data on these returnees are insufficient.

## Box 1

### Roma Returnees

*Though the population share of Roma in Serbia and Bosnia is low<sup>1</sup>, they represent an important share of the migrant and returnee population in both countries. This applies especially to those returnees who return in the framework of IOM's AVR(R) programme and those who have been deported following readmission agreements. Roma also may be overrepresented among those returnees who have migrated and returned without having registered with the authorities (World Bank Group, 2019, p. 2). In Serbia, for example, 63 per cent of the total number of returnees who returned under readmission agreements are Roma (KIRS, 2022, p. 34). In BiH, it is estimated that around 60 per cent of so-called readmission cases are Roma (BiHSTH78, Sarajevo, 14 April 2022). Estimates suggest that around 60 to 70 per cent of IOM AVRR cases in Serbia identify themselves as Roma (SRBSTH21, Belgrade, 4 November 2021). For BiH AVRR cases estimates are even higher (BiHIO11, Sarajevo, 14 August 2019). Also, among the beneficiaries of assistance provided by national or international aid organisations, a large minority is ascribed a Roma identity (SRBDA4, Belgrade, 24 June 2021).*

<sup>1</sup> According to the latest official data on the Roma population in Serbia, which is based on a 2011 census, the number of Roma in Serbia amounts to almost 150,000 (2.05% of the total population). Average estimates from unofficial sources however claim that there are 600,000 Roma in the country (8.35% of the total population). In BiH, according to the Needs Assessment conducted by the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees in 2010, the number of Roma amounts to almost 17,000 Roma (0.44 % of the total population).

## Adjusting to Life after Return

This section will analyse trajectories of (re-)integration distinguishing between the social, economic, psychosocial and political dimensions. Though all four dimensions are strongly interrelated, our study shows first that adjustment does not necessarily occur in all four dimensions at the same time or at the same pace. It can take place to different degrees in the different dimensions and thus can also be limited to only some dimensions. Feelings of belonging do not necessarily always correspond with political or economic integration. This is the case, for example, for some minority returnees in Republika Srpska who might emotionally be very attached to the place of return but show only weak social or economic inclusion. Highly skilled returnees may be well integrated economically but rely emotionally and socially on their transnational networks or rather segregated expat communities.

Second, this section illustrates the process-like character of (re-)integration spanning across time and localities, very much shaped by experiences, aspirations and decisions that happened long before return and experiences and conditions at different locations. Among those are the reasons for migration and/or forced displacement, which shape the emotional and social relation to the place and community of origin and the aspirations that shaped a person's decision to migrate and which shape the returnees' own assessment when migration-related goals have been achieved. Moreover, the length of stay and legal status and overall conditions abroad shape livelihood opportunities both abroad and return preparedness<sup>17</sup> as well as livelihoods upon return. Finally, the quality of the return decisions/obligation, aspirations and opportunities and the conditions confronted with after return have a decisive impact on the (re-)adjustment processes.

17 \ Return preparedness is conceptualised by Cassarino as composed by the willingness and readiness to return. He defines it as the ability '[...] to gather the tangible [i.e. financial capital] and intangible [i.e. contacts, relationships, skills, acquaintances] resources needed to secure one's return' (Cassarino, 2004, p. 159).

### The Social Dimension: Networks are a Lifeline

This study's data underline the essential role networks (e.g. family, peer, friends, neighbours, professional networks) play in migration and (re-)integration processes after return regardless of the type of migration or return. Existing networks in destination countries are an important factor in determining the choice of the destination country, facilitating socio-economic integration in the country of migration and contributing to emotional well-being, and they often enable circular migration.

They also seem to be the most important asset in adjustment processes after return among the assisted and unassisted returnees we interviewed. However, the quality, reach and resilience of existing networks and access to new ones strongly correlates with the returnee's positionality<sup>18</sup>. The lack of resilient networks can become a prevalent challenge to (re-)integration, both emotionally and economically. Notably, the challenges are observable when they return to a different location than they originated from, as in the case of returnees from Kosovo<sup>19</sup> or other parts of former Yugoslavia. Also, returnees who return to regions where there are no longer any family and business networks, e.g. due to forced displacement, or returnees whose previous networks become unavailable due to major changes in their life situation (e.g. divorce, being a victim of trafficking) often experience particularly challenging (re-)integration trajectories (BiHINGO75, Sarajevo, 11 March 2022).

18 \ Positionality refers to the fact that every individual is 'structurally situated or socially positioned' in a social context (Grawert & Mielke, 2018). The positionality of a returnee is informed by a myriad of social factors such as age, gender, socio-economic class, educational status, ethnic attribution, legal status and the conditions of return (cf. Anthias, 2008). The concept thus provides the opportunity to overcome the emphasis of just one specific factor as dominant factors shaping differences in (re-)integration trajectories, e.g., a shared ethnicity/nationality or the legal status abroad, but de-essentialises specific characteristics and emphasises the intersectionality of factors instead. Moreover, it does not come with 'an implicit assumption of a clear fixed collectivity' (Ryan, 2015) or given "groups" or "categories" of gender, ethnicity and class (Anthias, 2008) or legal status. Moreover, it accounts for the fact, that positionalities are not fixed, but might change over time and differ in origin, migration and return contexts.

19 \ A survey conducted among readmitted families in an informal settlement in Belgrade found that 33 per cent of the male and 28 per cent of the female adults originated from Kosovo and 29 per cent of the male and 33 per cent of the female adults originated from other regions in Serbia (Jugović & Bogetić, 2019a, p. 9).



The important role families play in the provision of accommodation, financial and emotional support and access to employment or other livelihood opportunities might explain why most of our respondents in Serbia returned to the region where their family lives rather than returning to the economically more promising regions within the country. Despite poor prospects of finding employment, e.g., in eastern Serbia, most respondents returned to their communities of origin. (Translocal) family networks might support returnees and family members who stayed in their place of origin with remittances and often are a prerequisite for following circular or onward mobility (see next sub-section on livelihoods). The relevance of family networks following return could be found among returnees of all socio-economic strata.

One highly skilled female unassisted returnee stressed the crucial role of family networks by stating: ‘Keep your families strong, as they are essential for survival’ (BiH56, Sarajevo, 14 December 2019).

Like family networks, respondents frequently reported about peers, friends or neighbours who were of great economic and emotional support upon return. Respondents of low socio-economic status stressed the material support of them providing a place to stay or water and electricity when utilities weren’t available at the place of return. One Roma deportee stated:

*The house we live in is located on the outskirts of the city of Kragujevac, the house has no water, no electricity. My neighbour, also of Roma nationality, lends me electricity, my neighbour helps me a lot, I don't know what would have happened without him (SRB63, phone, 6 August 2021).*

Respondents of medium-low or medium socio-economic status reported in addition how networks of family or friends would also tell them about jobs at the place of return or jobs abroad (often irregular though) and thus enable circular migration. Returnees of higher socio-economic status often relate their relative economic business success to their network of friends and professional networks in the first place. For example, a male interviewed transnational returnee reported to feel grateful to his friends and a

professional network who helped him ‘reach the right people and get connected to them.’ He had significant savings, which he mobilised upon return. Still, he repeated how his friends and associates were and still are the greatest sources of help and support for him (BiH60, online, 8 May 2020).

(Trans-)local professional networks<sup>20</sup> can not only foster socio-economic (re-)integration but might even influence return decision-making. Some of the respondents in Serbia returned only because they were able to continue their employment at a company abroad upon return and work remotely—an option that has become possible only since the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, in the Bosnian case, clientelism and patronage systems have often blocked even highly skilled returnees who were not able to or willing to join these from accessing local professional networks. In these cases, international professional networks based on migration experience remained extremely important upon return, just as the integration into social and professional networks of fellow highly skilled returnees and the expat community in Bosnia and Herzegovina (various interviews, Sarajevo, July 2019).

## The Economic Dimension: Challenges and Livelihood Strategies after Return

The economic dimension of (re-)integration is considerably shaped by a returnee’s return preparedness and positionality upon return and context conditions at the place of return.

Our research found that the legal status and the duration of stay abroad had a decisive impact on the (re-)integration process. Legal and long-term residence in the migration country and work permits are often the most important prerequisites for accumulating

20 \ In Serbia, the platform “Returning Point” provides information to potential returnees and supports ‘repatriates coming back to Serbia, help business ideas grow locally, assist scientific and academic exchange and projects while promoting better connections between Serbia and diaspora’. The initiative was founded by the Serbian City Club, Serbian Entrepreneurs and Science Technology Park Belgrade (<https://tackapovratka.rs/en/>). Another initiative is the Diaspora Business Hub (DBH) <https://linkupserbia.icmpd.org/en/diaspora-business-hub/>.

money and skills, which may positively impact (re-) adjustment processes upon return, as is the case, for example, for long-term labour migrants.

The levels of return preparedness also correlate with prospects for social mobility. Among labour migrant and refugee returnees of medium educational and socio-economic status, we found little to no social mobility based on their migration experience. This can be ascribed to widespread employment below qualification in the receiving country resulting in disruptions of their livelihood trajectories. We found a minimal effect of skills gathered during migration and little sustainable impact of savings on post-return livelihoods.

This contrasts with the (re-)integration trajectories of returnees who return after having spent more time abroad and/or who return upon retirement. These usually show high levels of return preparedness. Often, they have kept relations to their place of return while abroad, have maintained or built a house to live in upon retirement and considerably benefit from savings and pensions they receive from the country of migration. Retirement-related returns show a higher probability for upward social mobility, especially due to legal and longer stays in the migration countries. Moreover, regular visits in countries of origin often facilitate (re-)integration—such journeys are more affordable for upper class immigrants.

Highly educated and skilled returnees (who often obtained their degrees abroad) often showed considerable return motivation and preparedness. However, many reported not finding adequate or the aspired employment in BiH and thus felt they could not use their potential sufficiently. In these cases, a high level of return preparedness could hardly compensate for restraining context factors at the place of origin. Clientelism, reported distrust in highly skilled returnees and political-based discrimination in BiH considerably impeded adequate careers. For example, Sarah, a highly skilled returnee from New Zealand, said:

*I have experienced negative discrimination. I simply do not have the same rights as people who have studied in BiH. In hiring practices, particularly in the BiH public sector, there are no rewards given to internationally recognised qualifications. Also, as I*

*reject labelling myself into one ethnic group, I immediately get negatively discriminated against when applying for public sector jobs. Also, I want to point out that I am actively involved in trying to change this. I am trying to get rid of this discrimination. Gender-based negative discrimination was particularly present in earlier phases of my career. I was a young woman with short, bright red hair. I did not meet the expectations of people around me. To a large extent, this was also true of my colleagues in international organisations (59, Sarajevo, BiH, 14 May 2020).*

A successful returnee entrepreneur mentioned working attitudes among his staff in BiH compared to the business environment in Switzerland as preventing his company from making any progress. Six months later, in a follow-up interview with him, he expressed his deep disappointment with BiH and told us that he had decided to leave again to open a company in Switzerland instead (BiH102, Sarajevo, 12 May 2021).

In Serbia, employment options for highly skilled returnees seemed to be better (SRBSTH23, Belgrade, 4 November 2021), though regional differences were perceivable. Belgrade offers more opportunities specifically for highly skilled, while, for example, western Serbia, despite being relatively strong in economic terms, and more rural areas offered fewer job opportunities (interviews conducted in Požega/western Serbia). As the GIZ project Migration and Diaspora programme (see [Section Policies and Institutions of Reintegration Assistance](#)) shows, actors of development cooperation believe that incentives for highly skilled returnees are necessary to meet the salary expectations of returnees and institutions' interests.

Especially among relatively young and medium- to highly skilled /educated respondents, short-term labour migration often served to achieve specific goals such as the purchase of a car, financing a holiday, etc., with little effect on later livelihood options and their place of residence. In contrast, those who migrate for further education (students) more often return to where there are opportunities, e.g., to Belgrade, Sarajevo or who go abroad again after having worked there for a while.

In contrast, the main sources of income after return for returnees who show low levels of return preparedness, with little schooling and little or no savings, are (informal) seasonal work (e.g. construction work, cleaning, etc.) and state social benefits (e.g. social assistance, child benefits).

For Roma returnees, discrimination heavily impacts their access to the labour market besides lacking sought-after skills. For them, collecting and selling recyclables and other informal work, such as street performances and child labour in the streets, often represent indispensable sources of income.<sup>21</sup> Among returnees who were assisted by IOM, in particular, vulnerabilities regarding livelihoods have recently increased, especially since sending states have narrowed down the eligibility criteria for AVRR beneficiaries. Returnees who are part of multi-generational families or those with mental health issues and disabilities, traumata and experiences of violence are among those in greatest need of support (SRBSTH21, Belgrade, 4 November 2021). Unemployment in this group often couples with other challenges, such as returning to settlements with below-average infrastructure standards, characterised mainly by poor housing conditions and inadequate access to water and electricity. Moreover, deported and rejected asylum seekers who return with empty hands and weak connectedness to networks, single mothers, or the elderly often experience increased precarity upon return. Unemployment upon return does not solely affect the group of Roma returnees but was also found among those returning to regions that offer fewer livelihood opportunities, e.g., usually more peripheral parts of the countries such as eastern Serbia or Republika Srpska.

Additionally, among the deported and IOM-assisted returnees, the lack of birth certificates and identification documents remains a huge challenge. These documents are prerequisites for proper registration and, thus, entitlements to social benefits, housing assistance, etc. Also, the lack of access to schooling remains a considerable challenge.<sup>22</sup>

21 \ For an account of the livelihood situation of readmitted families see Jugović & Bogetić, 2019b.

22 \ For survey results on the socio-economic position and reintegration of Roma returning under the readmission agreement in Serbia, see Cvejić, 2022.

Except for the returnees with longer and legal stays abroad, we can conclude from all these observations that social mobility due to migration can only very rarely be observed. Another aspect which features prominently in the livelihood dimension of (re-)integration relates to onward mobility, re-emigration and translocal connectedness to employment options abroad. These constitute an important livelihood strategy—not only for low-skilled returnees but for returnees from all socio-economic strata.

This study thus confirms the findings of earlier studies, e.g. by Eastmond (2006), who identified return strategies that often take place outside of established policies and programmes and are based on the need to keep options open in different places.

It stands out in our sample that translocal practices often are not an individual but a joint family decision, e.g. the cases where one spouse earns money abroad to sustain the family “back home”. In some cases, family members or siblings took it in turns to go abroad for work. Large parts of the sample, including rejected asylum seekers, irregular and short-term regular labour migrants reported multiple migration experiences in either one country or in several countries. An essential prerequisite for translocal livelihood strategies is the existence of networks. While family networks play a role, especially for returnees of low and medium socio-economic strata, returnees of medium socio-economic status also report about peers facilitating work abroad or being recruited by companies directly.

Among low and medium-skilled returnees, in particular, irregular pendular labour migration (mostly in the construction and tourism sectors) represented an important livelihood strategy. Pendular irregular migration seems to play a role, mainly for low- and average-skilled workers of working age. They usually leave without their children and family. The length of stay in the origin country until they migrate again often depends on how long their savings last.

Particularly in Serbia, many of our female respondents chose migration as a strategy to maintain

their families back “home”. Savings gathered during these stays abroad in our sample had rarely been invested (e.g. in businesses) but rather immediately spent on everyday needs or to pay back loans, etc.

Pendular (sometimes seasonal) mobility can also be observed among rejected asylum seekers interviewed. Reportedly, people from substandard settlements decide to try to claim asylum in western European countries, especially during the winter hoping for a warm place during the hardest time of the year. Some report of 'asylum journeys' all over Europe (SRB23, 25, 26, Novi Pazar, 6 August 2021).

But also, migrants of higher socio-economic status and returnees of the “guest worker generation,” most of whom have spent several decades abroad and usually aspire to return for good when they reach retirement age, often maintain strong translocal ties. This includes visits, especially to family members (many have children who continue to stay in the migration country) and the reliance on foreign pension money and remittances.

Livelihoods for many families depend on onward mobility and pendular migration patterns. However, it must be stressed that despite being one essential livelihood strategy for many, the very mobility is often an additional challenge for many families. In many cases of our sample, the continued mobility of individuals led to alienation from family members due to changed mindsets, separation or divorce. Legal stay perspectives that allow for regular visits or family reunification might mitigate the strain that migration puts on families.

## The Psychosocial Dimension: Aspiring to Belong

The psychosocial dimension is closely related to all other dimensions and key for social, political and economic participation. In our study, the following factors are prominent in shaping feelings of belonging and emotional well-being as a proxy for psychosocial (re-)integration:

- 1\ biographical and individual circumstances, such as the causes of displacement/reasons for migration,

- experiences in the migration country and an ascribed or perceived majority or minority status;
- 2\ factors related to conditions at the place of return, such as the receiving communities' integrative capacities and socio-economic context of return;
- 3\ assessments of safety and security.

In all groups in both case studies—regardless of individual or contextual factors—family was considered the most important component of psychosocial adjustment and well-being upon return. In addition, having work and possessing and farming one's own land strongly correlated with feelings of belonging.

The causes of displacement and migration strongly affected feelings of belonging. Among those respondents experiencing and fleeing the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we find a strong attachment to the geographies at the places of origin, though most returnees did only partially return to their places of origin or spend only their weekends and vacation there. Those who suffered war trauma and still have traumatic memories connected to the place of origin, either stated that they would never be able to live there again or expressed the strong wish to live on their native soil and in their houses despite the mostly unfavourable economic conditions and the challenges related to their minority status.<sup>23</sup>

Also, experiences made in the migration country shape feelings of belonging. Especially labour migrants to western European countries and the United States described poor social life and stress and exhaustive working conditions in the migration country, reinforcing their wish to return to the culture and society they felt they belonged to. Some Roma returnees described their experiences in the migration country as very positive. After returning to their communities of origin, their feeling of discrimination and social exclusion was even more pronounced. Feelings of belonging in our sample essentially depended on the returnee's ascribed ethnicity and the degree to which feelings of belonging were already (non-)existent before migration.

<sup>23</sup> \ In her qualitative study on voluntary returnees to BiH, Ibričević (2019) describes how fear constitutes a basis for emotional citizenship.

Those who migrated for mostly economic reasons, e.g., more recent returnees to the peripheries in BiH and Serbia, and Roma returnees showed less attachment to the place of origin and higher remigration aspirations.

We also find those who showed weak feelings of belonging despite economic success, mostly due to exclusion from existing networks or a change of mentality in the course of migration: 'In the United States, I was feeling like a Bosniak, but here, I am beginning to feel like an American' (BiH72, Sarajevo, 22 October 2019).

Age also played a role. Especially the elderly and retired returnees reported a strong attachment to and the wish to spend their retirement at their place of origin. In this group, hardly anyone voiced remigration aspirations, though translocal ties were usually upheld.

### Receiving Communities' Integrative Capital as a Prerequisite for Feelings of Belonging

Besides individual and biographical factors, the overall socio-political context conditions at the place of return and differences in the integrative social capital of receiving communities influence feelings of belonging decisively. These again have to do with majority-minority relations at the place of return and the existence or absence of return or other stigmata.

Regarding the integrative capacities of a society, one highly skilled returnee in Sarajevo stated:

*Reintegration would mean that there is an integrated society of which one could become part. Bosnia is not an integrated society and thus does not offer an entry point for reintegration. The only thing Bosnians might all agree to are coffee and perhaps a non-isolationist foreign policy, but not a single societal norm (BiH11, Sarajevo, 11 August 2019).*

Still, in our sample, Bosniak majority returnees and Serbian returnees often encountered rather integrative communities upon return. In contrast, minority returnees in the Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) lived rather enclaved with little everyday exchange to the

majority population.<sup>24</sup> Muslim-Slav communities in Serbia<sup>25</sup> are rather concentrated in the southern province Raška (also referred to as the historical region of Sandzak). In Novi Pazar, a city with a very high Muslim majority population, vibrant social life, big families with strong family ties and pendular migration as a very common livelihood strategy seem to promote returnees' social embeddedness. Feelings of belonging were much more pronounced within this group than among other minorities, i.e. the Roma population, in Serbia.

Conditions of return play a role, too. Several studies describe the stigmatisation of returnees who returned without having achieved the desired economic success or whose return had been involuntary. We cannot generalise the existence of a return stigma in our Bosnian and Serbian case studies as we only encountered it in parts of the sample. Stigma based on deportation was mentioned only rarely. In contrast, returnees often report on perceived pressure due to high expectations from family and peers—in particular, those with longer and legal stays in the migration country and less so rejected asylum seekers and deportees. In contrast, those whose migration-related aims had been rather modest and migration had been more of a means to sustain the family or to afford certain one-time purchases (e.g., among (irregular) pendular or short-term migrants) than to achieve socio-economic success were less stigmatised as "coming home" in itself had been taken for granted.

Nevertheless, returnees themselves often did not identify with the term "returnee", claiming it was just inadequate 'since it's just like coming home'. They associated forced returns/deportations rather than self-organised returns with it or rejected it because they felt this was reinforcing tendencies of othering towards returnees. A returnee to Banja Luka stated: 'For me, the term returnee is the same as when the Germans refer to me as an "Ausländer"' (BiH85, Banja Luka, 30 July 2021).

24 \ Segregation e.g. in schools remains prevalent in some places, despite a court ruling against 'two schools under one roof' (BiH56, Sarajevo, 28 August 2019).

25 \ These consider themselves mostly Bosniaks, partly Muslims and partly Serbs or Montenegrins of Islamic religious affiliation.



## The Political Dimension: Access to Rights and Political Participation

Our study revealed that issues around citizenship, access to rights and public services, the assessment of safety, political participation and engagement and the personal assessments of governance performance at the place of return were important to how returnees adjusted upon their return.

### Citizenship and Access to Rights and Services

The breakup of former Yugoslavia and new and (contested) border-making in the course of the Bosnian and Kosovo wars still has an impact on questions of citizenship in the Western Balkans, specifically citizenship rights of returnees.<sup>26</sup>

Our sample also included persons who failed to apply for citizenship of one of Yugoslavia's successor states and were stateless at the time of their deportation. A young stateless man who had been deported from Germany to Serbia reports:

*I was born in 1988 in Rijeka, Croatia. My mother has got Croatian citizenship, my grandparents are Kosovo Albanians. I don't know anything about my father, neither his name nor his whereabouts. In 1992, I fled with my grandparents and mother to Germany to escape the war. My mother applied for my Croatian citizenship, but we never picked up the documents, and after 10 years, the deadline expired (in 2006). When I was 18, my mother reminded me to apply for citizenship, but I did not bother. I didn't care; I had other things to do during that time. I remained without citizenship. With the papers from the Aliens' Registration Office, I got by in Germany perfectly<sup>27</sup> (SRB78, Belgrade, 5 April 2022).*

Besides those whose citizenship was influenced by the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, some were born abroad but lacked proper birth certificates and

IDs. One reason behind this is that identity papers got lost or destroyed or that the parents' identity could not be verified for children born abroad. Often, local NGOs provided extensive support to resolve such cases.

Large numbers of AVR-assisted and deported returnees return only with a *laissez-passer*, a travel document that is of no use in the origin country since it neither allows the holder to rent an apartment nor to open a bank account (SRBEXP20, Belgrade, 5 April 2022). In Serbia, it is estimated that around 50 per cent of AVR cases enter the country without an ID document (SRBIO21, Belgrade, 4 November 2021). In BiH, too, this has been mentioned as one decisive challenge many AVR-assisted and deported returnees face (BiHSTH11, Sarajevo, 14 August 2019, BiHEXP76, Sarajevo, 13 April 2022).

Also, in our sample, missing IDs remained a reason for difficulties in accessing public services such as public health care, public child support or services of employment agencies. However, findings from survey data from Serbia found that missing documents as a reason for not receiving social assistance only accounted for a small number of people (Cvejić, 2022, p. 31). In BiH, a further obstacle was the fact that migrants who did not de-register before emigration with the Bureau of Employment are not eligible for public health insurance. Upon return, a returnee has only 30 days to register with the Employment Bureau. Once this deadline is missed, there is no chance of being insured for a certain period (BiHSTH11, Sarajevo, 14 August 2019).

Moreover, the governmental set-up in BiH—a highly decentralised system leading to uneven levels of services and place-bound access to public services—still poses an additional challenge regarding access to public services for many IDPs or trans-local/partial returnees, with free public health care limited to the

<sup>26</sup> \ Returnees originating from the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, the official Serbian denomination of what is now Kosovo, have in principle Serbian citizenship rights, though the procedure to obtain official documents might be more challenging than for other returnees. There are specific municipalities in Serbia issuing ID and other official documents to citizens originating from Kosovo/the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.

<sup>27</sup> \ This is one reason why many in his situation do not apply for citizenship in time.

entity where the returnee is registered. A returnee to Janja reports:

*We were visiting my sister in Tuzla (FBiH), and my daughter had an asthma attack. She had to be admitted to hospital. Although our family had health insurance coverage in Republika Srpska, the costs of my daughter's stay in hospital were not reimbursed (BiH48, Janja, 17 August 2019).*

While access to rights and public services is directly related to questions of citizenship and the availability of identification documents, discriminatory behaviour and practices of public service providers—are foremostly directed against ethnolinguistic minorities, such as Roma. Widespread discrimination and ethnically based segregation in the Serbian and Bosnian societies persist in public institutions such as health care and education as well as the labour market and social life, impeding Roma's social and political participation. INGO staff in BiH reported that they need to negotiate with municipalities, pharmacies, doctors or landlords in person to facilitate access to social assistance, health care and medicine or housing for Roma returnees:

*Too often, medical treatment is being denied to them. Either the authorities had rejected the registration in social security/health security schemes for bureaucratic reasons or arbitrarily (BiHSTH11, Sarajevo, 14 August 2019).*

Cross-generational discrimination experiences and exclusion might also explain the reluctance and threshold fear of many of the interviewed Roma when it comes to enrolling their children in schools or approaching public municipal institutions, thus inhibiting them from claiming their rights.

There are policies and action plans for the inclusion of Roma in Serbia and BiH.<sup>28</sup> Many of our respondents, however, question their implementation. One Civil Society Organisation (CSO) representative in Serbia stated:

*The public campaign for social inclusion reinforces the public image of differences between the majority and the minority. In fact, the narrative of social*

*inclusion doubled the social distance. The term re-affirms ethnic segregation. Why is reintegration necessary at all in one's homeland? The term of reintegration separates people from their own community and their country (SRB17, Belgrade, 4 August 2021).*

### Political Participation and Engagement

In Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and within all educational strata, we found widespread feelings of not being heard or represented by political institutions and certain disenchantment with politics or even lethargy:

*There are those who are socially and financially at the top and only support each other, while the ordinary people wait for the opportunity to be heard (SRB56, Zaječar, 26 May 2021).*

Though at least those who had returned on their own account said that they would vote in elections, only in very exceptional cases did respondents report to be politically active. One Bosniak respondent founded a solidarity fund with three relatives. Returnees and diasporic individuals and organisations also engage with humanitarian organisations supporting victims and surviving dependents, and other vulnerable groups in Republika Srpska (RS).

Migration and recent return movements concern large parts of the Serbian and Bosnia-Herzegovinian societies and are perceived as commonplace. Except for minority returnees in RS, Bosnia and Herzegovina, hardly any returnee identity among returnees of our sample can be found. This might explain low levels of returnee-specific organisation. For highly skilled returnees, rather transnational and expat communities are of relevance.

In line with relatively low levels of general political engagement, we also find a low engagement for returnee-specific agendas among our respondents. Returnee associations that returnees themselves had formed in BiH during exile and upon return have been ascribed a prominent role for community construction and social capital facilitating return and (re-)integration after the war in terms of information

28 \ Both countries have elaborated strategies and action plans for the social inclusion of Roma in line with the Poznan Declaration, signed in July 2019 to link Roma integration with the EU enlargement process and the Berlin Process (see <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/>).

exchange, the promotion of returnees' rights and interests and as partners for the international communities' reintegration projects (Porobić, 2016). Today, they are less visible and appear to be short-lived groups of interest with more or less project-based agendas (BiH88, RS, 13 April 2022). Anecdotal evidence from our interviews in a municipality in RS also indicated that returnees (with their main residence at the place of return), feel hardly represented. A representative of one returnee association in RS lamented that FBiH (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) policy-makers would consult only with those returnees who have never really returned to their place of origin, but not with "true returnees" referring to those who fully resettled in their origin communities (BiH88, RS, 13 April 2022). Associations that seem to flourish are women's associations—possibly a consequence of the agendas of national and international development actors of women empowerment (BiHEXP22, Srebrenica, 19 August 2019).

Roma associations also flourish in both countries—allegedly also as a reaction to Roma-specific donor funding. Despite the considerable number of Roma associations—84 in 2013, according to OECD reports (Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina, n.d., p. 21)—these usually do not specifically target returnees. They fulfil social functions within the community in terms of access to health care and education or humanitarian aid and represent important gatekeepers for local, national and international stakeholders. However, they appear to be far less successful in connecting Roma communities to social or economic networks of the majority population. Reportedly and confirmed by anecdotal evidence, corruption triggered by donor money is a challenge for these organisations in Serbia and BiH (SRB17, municipality in eastern Serbia, 4 August 2021).

### **Governance Performance: Clientelism and Corruption**

Though governments in the Western Balkans and development actors have increasingly become aware of the potential highly skilled returnees could have, political stagnation and poor governance performance not only reinforces the emigration trend among well-educated and young persons but also impedes (re-)integration—especially in BiH. The younger generation with high academic degrees in particular reported high levels of corruption and clientelism that prevented them from finding adequate employment, especially in the public sector.

BiH, with position 35 in the Corruption Perception Index in 2021 (and also Serbia with position 38), indeed represent what Paasche (2015, p. 187) calls a 'corruption complex' in which 'corruption is ingrained into everyday life and the very fabric of society' and is 'integral to the framework for returnee's post-return lives'. In the BiH case study, corruption affects not only the livelihood dimension by obstructing entrepreneurship, determining employment and access to public services but also, and particularly, the psychosocial dimension. Highly educated returnees who aspired to contribute to the country's socio-economic and -political development when they decided to return, show high levels of frustration and disillusion and instead opt for integrating into transnational spaces. In this context, the study shows that (re-)integration should never be an end in itself but can be somewhat problematic from a human rights or governance perspective, e.g. in the case of (re-)integration into corrupt clientelist political systems, segregated school systems, exploitative family structures or precarious labour relations.

Generally, we find comparatively low levels of trust in political institutions, which includes the main parties, and the judiciary in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A highly skilled returnee to Sarajevo referred to the political establishment's unwillingness to



accept or even support the engagement of Bosnians abroad and educated returnees:

*Appointments at the university are not based on credits, but only on political connections. [...] 100% of the university staff is either officially or unofficially connected to political parties. [...] The government and its clientelist networks feel that the highly skilled diaspora returnees are rather a competitor than an asset for the country. They do not have an interest in their reintegration. [...] Diaspora investors are mostly individuals. And diaspora organisations are mostly folklore groups. In the US, there is the Bosnian--American Academia of Sciences that organises conferences and training activities in Bosnian hospitals, but generally, there is no willingness to accept diaspora engagement here, presumably because diaspora members mostly voted for opposition parties. The diaspora is not part of the political establishment. Though remote voting is possible in principle, procedures are complicated and rather discourage a political involvement of the diaspora (5, Sarajevo, 12 August 2019).*

### Notions of Safety

Safety is understood differently in the two countries. While in Serbia, the interviewed returnees understand safety and security mainly in economic terms, in BiH, they also, and much more, associated it with persisting ethnic division and tensions on the one hand and poor governance performance and corruption on the other. In BiH, minority returnees' (re-)integration has been and still is challenged by tensions and othering by respective dominant ethno-religious groups and even concrete harassment in some cases.<sup>29</sup> Continuous political tensions and nationalist hate speech, even in statements made by officials in power, such as the RS President, Milorad Dodik, uphold and revive security concerns not only among minority returnees but the overall society.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> \ A CSO reports various incidences of threats and physical violence against returnees (e.g., in Socolac, Mostar, Gasto, Visegrad, Srebrenica or Banja Luka). In some cases, the police ignore these incidents. Clients ask Vasa Prava for protection, but the organisation can only provide legal aid and does not have the financial means for individual field visits (BiHCSO76, Sarajevo, 13 April 2022).

<sup>30</sup> \ For fascist symbolism and imagery that fuel ethnicity-based fear in BiH see Ibričević, 2019, p. 180.

A Bosniak minority returnee to a village in RS reported that a few years ago, he was threatened by his Serb neighbours. They had built barricades on the hill above his property. He called the police, who imposed a fine on those responsible and forced them to remove the barricades. However, since then, the police have regularly stopped his car, which he considers harassment. Though he states that he is getting along with his Serb neighbours and feels safe now, he would never leave his female family members on their own at the farm. Moreover, respondents described how nationalist politics and hate speech and impunity of war criminals immediately affect returnees in RS (various interviews with Bosniak returnees, RS, July 2019 and April 2021)

Lacking economic perspectives coupled with a persisting sense of insecurity among some of the minority returnees interviewed in RS (BiH), continue to lead to spatially split and fragmentary (re-)integration processes: Many returnees maintain two residences (one in RS and one in the FBiH), economically re-establishing themselves at one place, while emotionally staying attached to the place of origin. Though this coping pattern is common among returnees, it needs to be stressed that in some cases, this kind of fragmented (re-)integration is rather a response to factors inhibiting onward migration (e.g. the inability to sell their property, remaining family members) than based on a deliberate decision. However, for those in our sample who returned to a place where they formed part of a Bosniak minority, lack of opportunities rather than feelings of insecurity fuelled remigration aspirations.

The findings on the political dimensions or (re-)integration underline the high relevance of options of societal participation and political context conditions for adjustment processes upon return. Development cooperation should further support origin countries with regard to the inclusive provision of public services and equal opportunities for social participation on all societal levels.

# The Role of Assistance: On the Indispensability of Informal and Formal Support

In the framework of this study, we interviewed 57 returnees who had received formal return assistance. Assistance ranged from pre-departure assistance, assistance covering transportation costs, provision of temporary shelter immediately upon return, cash assistance, in-kind assistance such as humanitarian packages, health care provision and various additional assistance measures such as legal, psychosocial, employment and business plan counselling, business support, job placement, support measures for children and youth, and finally housing and reconstruction assistance.<sup>31</sup>

The extent of reintegration assistance by government institutions and local or international NGOs differs considerably between the studied country cases of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with Serbia having developed a more comprehensive network of international and national NGOs supporting recent returnees.

## Policies and Institutions of Reintegration Assistance

In Bosnia, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina (MHRR) is responsible for policies regarding return human and minority rights, refugees and IDPs. Following the Dayton Agreement, the return and reintegration of conflict-related refugees and IDPs was one major focus of the MHRR's work. After the readmission agreements with the European Union were concluded, the return and reintegration of returnees under the readmission agreements were established as an additional area of engagement.

Primarily as part of their bid for EU membership, Serbia and BiH enacted migration and return management policies and established institutions at the central and local levels. In BiH, Swiss development

cooperation has supported the establishment of readmission-related structures since 2014. The project "Support to the system of reception and integration of citizens of BiH returning under readmission agreements", financed by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and implemented by MHRR and the NGO Hilfswerk International follows up on the Swiss engagement. The project forms local readmission teams and commissioners who are contact points in other local communities and provide direct advice and help to readmitted persons in selected local communities. Moreover, the project supports the renovation and disposal of residential units that can accommodate up to 300 readmitted persons and the development of local action plans for the socio-economic integration of readmitted persons at the municipal level with a special focus on marginalised groups (such as Roma). Additional project components deal with preventing the abuse of visa-free travelling through campaigns and awareness-raising activities (BiHSTH78, Sarajevo, 15 April 2022). MHRR also runs an emergency reception centre where readmitted persons can stay for up to one month.

In Serbia, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (KIRS) is the responsible institution for returnees at the central level. KIRS' primary engagement seems to be with (irregular) migration and return, while the Ministry of Labour has started developing strategies to attract highly skilled returnees (SRBEXP4, Belgrade, 5 April 2022).

In 2009, the government of the Republic of Serbia adopted a strategy of Returnees' Reintegration based on the Readmission Agreement, which defined the institutional framework, measures, activities and stakeholders for the sustainable reintegration of returnees. KIRS is in charge of the primary admission in the office for readmission at "Nikola Tesla" airport

<sup>31</sup> \ Unfortunately, this study was not able to include qualitative data on highly skilled returnees receiving assistance in the framework of the GIZ programme Migration and Diaspora. The numbers of those who benefitted from these support measures are rather small: Between 2016 and 2022, 19 returnee experts benefitted from salary top-ups (18 of them are still working in Serbia), 11 diaspora experts who returned for a period of up to three months, 13 individual business ideas by returning diaspora members and three projects initiated by diaspora organisations were supported in the framework of the programme (SRB24, Belgrade, 5 April 2022).

in Belgrade. According to its website, the office offers information on returnees' rights, obligations and opportunities, first guidance on how to obtain personal documents, referral to the centres for social welfare and the Councils for migration and other local government services of further assistance, and, if necessary, lodging in one of the three emergency admission centres of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration where returnees can stay for up to 14 days. Upon arrival at the place of future residence/ temporary residence, returnees are obliged to contact the local Trustee office/ Council for Migration.<sup>32</sup> After first admission, the reintegration policy's implementation, including financial responsibility, is delegated mainly to local authorities. However, due to a lack of financial resources and trained personnel, local implementation is still insufficient (stakeholder workshop, Belgrade, 3 November 2021).

Largely separate from origin countries' government and NGO structures, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) runs its AVRR<sup>33</sup> programme in Serbia and BiH, offering cash and in-kind assistance, financed by certain destination countries, to "voluntary returnees". Since 1979, AVRR from Germany has been financed by the REAG/GARP programme, which has been complemented by the StarthilfePlus (SHP) reintegration programme since 2017. To date, more than 725,000 people have been assisted in their return from Germany to their origin countries (<https://germany.iom.int/de/unterstuetzte-rueckkehr-und-reintegration>). However, the scale of assistance varies significantly and depends on the countries sending these returnees. It includes pre-departure information

and counselling, medical assistance, transport assistance arrangements including travel documentation and reception, inland transport upon return, health-related support, disbursement of return or reinstallation grants and reintegration assistance.

Besides the origin country's governmental institution and IOM, other actors have been engaged in supporting returnees in Serbia, such as UNDP with its regional project "Strengthening National and Local Systems to Support Effective Socio-Economic Integration of Returnees in the Western Balkans". In Serbia, GIZ runs a German Information Centre on Migration, Training and Employment (DIMAK), offering advice to returnees and locals about new career opportunities in their own country. DIMAK provides advice and support in vocational guidance and job hunting in Serbia, business start-ups, vocational qualifications and training and psychosocial support. DIMAK cooperates closely with a wide range of local and international NGOs that implement projects in reintegration assistance, building on and contributing to an elaborated assistance and referral system between the non-state actors of reintegration assistance. Moreover, GIZ offers assistance to diaspora members in the framework of the programme "Migration and Diaspora".<sup>34</sup> In BiH, IOM and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been implementing the Diaspora for Development programme (D4D) to encourage diaspora engagement.

Given the enormous financial commitment to return and reintegration assistance, our research aimed to identify and scrutinise possible contributions of reintegration assistance to facilitating and enabling returnees' (re-)integration.

32 \ The local trustees of the CRM are responsible for addressing the needs of returnees. They are in charge of communicating with national (CRM) and local authorities (LSG) to find solutions for the emergency care and basic needs of returnees, registering them, assisting them in accessing social security and healthcare (GIZ, 2016). Additionally, at a local level, several positions or mechanisms exist (Mobile Teams for Roma Inclusion, Coordinators for Roma Issues, Health Mediators, Pedagogical Assistants) which should facilitate a better inclusion of Roma.

33 \ IOM defines AVRR as the 'administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance, to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country who volunteer to return to their countries of origin.' (IOM Glossary on Migration, 2019).

34 \ The programme aims, among other things, to support the know-how transfer of returning experts by providing training and salary top-ups and supports the temporal assignments of returnees to local institutions as experts for a limited period. Moreover, it supports diaspora organisations which work with local partner organisations to implement their own projects and supports migrants in starting a business in their country of origin. The programme advises governments and international partners on policy, organisational and strategy development relating to migration.

## Insights on Reintegration Assistance from Comparative Empirical Research

A comparison of returnees who received reintegration assistance and those who did not receive any external assistance shows that a supportive and reliable personal network is indispensable for (re-)integration. In other words, reintegration assistance measures by no means replace the importance of informal support, but in the best case, complement it.

Returnees who do not have any kind of support through existing personal networks at the place of return, such as Roma returning to sub-standard settlements, elderly deportees and returnees with health issues, or unaccompanied children, are thus among the most vulnerable and depend extensively on external assistance. Also, deportees who were raised abroad and return to a place they might never have been before and might not even have citizenship or often lack networks at the place of return.

Only a small fraction of returnees benefit from official reintegration programmes and projects run by national and/or international institutions, organisations or NGOs. Most returnees remain under the radar as data on return migration flows are insufficient and, first and foremost, consider those returning in the framework of readmission agreements or those approaching assistance providers.

The following subsections provide some insights into some selected assistance measures. However, our data do not allow any conclusions about the long-term impact of pre-departure assistance, in particular.

### Pre-departure Counselling

Only a small number of returnees remembered pre-departure reintegration assistance received in the migration country. Those who did remember most frequently told us about individuals who supported them and mostly emphasised the emotional support they received. However, those who were especially vulnerable and came to the attention of counselling and civil society actors abroad reported how this kind of assistance was of (existential) help (e.g. referral to safe houses). When it comes to counselling

related to AVRR programmes, it is noticeable that a significant share of the respondents who had returned in the framework of AVRR reported that they expected more support/higher amounts of financial support upon return. Whether the mismatch of expectations and actual support was due to inaccurate information provided or poor expectation management could not be verified.

Another shortcoming concerned the timing of the pre-departure counselling. According to interviews, it often takes place immediately before departure and under high time pressure, affecting the quality and extent of the counselling (SRBSTH21, Belgrade, 4 November 2021). An additional challenge for service providers in the origin countries is the sometimes scarce and late information they receive from German counsellors on the respective returnee.

### Access to Assistance at the Place of Return

Despite the efforts of both countries under study to establish support structures for recent returnees (see Introduction), access to support is still challenging for many returnees.

Local NGOs play an indispensable role in creating the conditions for accessing public services and benefits, thus partly compensating for weak state support in this regard. As many of our respondents in Serbia who had not received any assistance reported, they either lacked information on official support programmes, did not have access to it, considered themselves not eligible as “voluntary returnees” or felt they did not need assistance. In BiH and Serbia, we observed a reluctance of many returnees to approach municipal institutions, especially when returnees belonged to certain minorities, such as Roma, who feared or had already experienced discrimination and rejection by public institutions. In such cases, psychosocial assistance, constant encouragement and accompanying returnees when public institutions needed to be approached proved helpful in many cases (SRBCSO16, Belgrade, 4 August 2021). Moreover, the lack of proper identity documents or property deeds, remains an important factor blocking access to public services and support.

Generally, we found in both country case studies that the continuity of personnel—in other words, low turnover—is critical for building trust with returnees and access to assistance programmes implemented by local or international NGOs.

Many beneficiaries reported that family members, neighbours and friends had referred them to the providers. Also, returnees mentioned public and media campaigns run by certain NGOs in Serbia when asked how they knew about reintegration assistance providers. In the case of Muslim returnees, cooperation with faith-based humanitarian organisations facilitated access to assistance. In Serbia, where there is a high degree of NGO cooperation with governmental institutions and among local and international NGOs, the well-established referral system between different providers often facilitates access to support schemes.

In Roma communities, the vital role of Roma mediators (BiH)/coordinators (Serbia) must also be emphasised. They usually enjoy the trust of their community and fulfil an important gatekeeper role for the municipal administration and (international) aid organisations. In Serbia, some Roma coordinators are embedded in municipal administrative structures, while some base their work primarily on personal commitment. In BiH, the engagement of Roma mediators is usually facilitated by NGOs and usually focuses on health care, law and education.<sup>35</sup>

### Assistance Upon Arrival

The Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina (MHRR) in BiH runs a reception centre in Mostar to accommodate deported returnees under the readmission agreement. This offer is used only by those desperately needing accommodation upon return (mostly elderly and returnees with health issues), while most deportees choose to move directly to their place of origin or travel to relatives

elsewhere. Roma so far have not used this option, reportedly because they directly move to their families. Whether this might also relate to a lack of trust in public institutions is unclear. Returnees stay at the reception centre for up to 30 days and are then referred to the municipalities of origin. While some are already able to provide accommodation, others are preparing accommodation for readmitted returnees. Especially in dealing with unaccompanied children (deported children whose parents have been arrested due to their criminal records), a referral to professional care institutions is indispensable (interview with MHRR representatives, Sarajevo, April 2022). In Serbia, too, there are similar reception centres. In 2020, 15 people stayed there (KIRS, 2022, p. 40). None of our respondents who needed accommodation reported having stayed in these centres but either stayed with relatives or, in one case, lived unsheltered on the street. Reasons for not staying in public accommodation were often a lack of information, trust and the wish to be close to family and friends. Further support for establishing public accommodation facilities and social housing schemes in the respective municipalities is thus an important and worthwhile endeavour.

### Legal Counselling

In the immediate aftermath of return, legal counselling and assistance with administrative procedures, such as applying for identity papers and birth certificates, are often essential. A considerable number of AVRR-assisted returnees and deportees, in particular, enter the countries with only *laissez-passer* travel papers, lacking IDs or passports, which leaves them excluded from vital social services such as health care and social benefits. In BiH, Vasa Prava plays an important role in this regard, offering legal aid free of charge. Founded in 1996, Vasa Prava also assists refugees, returnees, displaced persons, minority

35 \ Since 2006, UNDP has been supporting the establishment of Roma coordinators in Serbian municipalities. This has resulted in the creation of a network of 47 municipal Roma coordinators at the local level, hired as full-time staff in local self-governments, working on temporary contracts or as volunteers. However, Roma coordinators are still largely unofficial, and success still depends on their individual efforts and involvement.



groups and groups of vulnerable local populations in legal matters such as restitution of property, harassment, discrimination in access to employment, utilities, education and social assistance as well as other human rights. Ninety per cent of the Roma organisations cooperate with Vasa Prava (BiH15, Bijielina, 16 August 2019). Besides legal counselling through professional lawyers, other NGOs support returnees in obtaining birth certificates and ID documents, often struggling over longer periods of time with German and Serbian/Bosnian bureaucracy and heavily relying on the personal engagement of their staff.

### **Vocational Education and Training, Job Placement and Grants**

Vocational education and training, job placement measures and start-up assistance seem to contribute to a moderate improvement in living standards in many cases, but their long-term success seems to depend significantly on the beneficiaries' prior qualifications and motivation. In some cases, especially when returnees were pre-qualified and pre-equipped with some production means, such as land, machines, etc., before benefitting from support, grants to extend the business had a considerable impact on livelihoods. This could be observed in sewing and retail and agricultural businesses. Smaller grants had less impact. In some cases, granted tools increased the income of those who had already worked in construction, for instance. One challenge encountered in training activities is the lack of pre-qualification and self-confidence among the most vulnerable returnees. Training sessions also often do not put to use foreign language and other skills gathered abroad. As concerns short-term training activities, e.g. in the beauty business, respondents often reported a lack of customers/demand after completion of the training.

DIMAK in Serbia has introduced job placement measures, especially in the agricultural sector. The necessary commitment and relatively low wages, however, make it hard to compete with the irregular labour sector (several interviews with Roma returnees,

Belgrade, July 2022). On-the-job-training activities and internships for returnees financially incentivise the cooperation of local businesses, and the share of beneficiaries of this training who stay with the company afterwards is high, according to an INGO representative (SRB4, Belgrade, 24 June 2021).

### **Psychosocial Assistance**

According to a local NGO representative, in some cases, psychosocial mentoring for most vulnerable returnees proved to be a precondition for the success of any other support measures, facilitating access to papers and public services, school enrolment or employment measures, for instance. As reported by CSO assistance providers, continuous mentoring over longer periods of time pays off. Life-skills training strengthening self-esteem and sovereignty when dealing with institutions or employers might render positive effects in the long run (SRBCSO16, Belgrade, 4 August 2021).

Projects that specifically support children exist in both countries and mostly target (informal) Roma settlements, offering daycare for younger children and tutoring and provision of learning materials for school-age children. One even offers job training and support in finding employment for adolescents and young adults. They usually do not explicitly target returnees, but since many children in the Roma settlements belong to returnee families or families that originate from Kosovo, they can directly respond to these children's needs, for instance, by providing Serbian language classes.<sup>36</sup> Besides school-related support, social work with children sometimes makes a real difference. Since many of these children's parents and siblings are little educated and often work informally and under precarious conditions or are unemployed, individual, regular and reliable care of a street worker often seems essential to prevent school dropouts, which remain high among Roma children (Jugović & Bogetić, 2019b).

<sup>36</sup> \ A survey conducted with readmitted families and children who live in informal settlements in Belgrade found that almost half of surveyed households do not speak Serbian as their primary language, but Romani or Albanian instead (Jugović & Bogetić, 2019b, p. 9).

### Housing Assistance

Housing assistance has been provided to returning refugees and IDPs first and foremost in the framework of the comprehensive Regional Housing Programme<sup>37</sup> and has had a considerable share in helping to solve the housing situation of thousands of people after the war. Our study confirms the finding of many earlier studies on return in BiH that, more than 20 years after large-scale returns to post-war BiH, Bosniak minority returnees in particular, often maintain their main residence and thus their economic mainstay in the capital or nearby towns in the Federation (e.g. in Tuzla). And of those who had the opportunity, many returnees have opted to sell their regained property and settle elsewhere.

Housing assistance is also highly relevant for more recent non-refugee and IDP returnees, especially for the most vulnerable returnees.<sup>38</sup> In many cases, housing assistance has been considerably contributed to improved living conditions. In Serbia, it is estimated that around ten per cent of those returnees who register at the municipality level apply for housing assistance and receive either a village house or construction material (SRBSTH25, Belgrade, 5 April 2022). However, construction assistance is usually only provided for legal and registered housing and not for housing under informal or unsolved conditions. This poses a severe impediment to assistance for the many people who still live under informal conditions: Neither in BiH nor Serbia, the challenge of informal sub-standard settlements has yet been resolved.<sup>39</sup>

37 \ The Regional Housing Programme (RHP) is a joint initiative by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. RHP is part of the “Sarajevo Process on Refugees and Displaced Persons” initiated in 2005 at the Regional Ministerial Conference on Refugee Returns. It has been strongly endorsed by the international community. The aim of the RHP has been to contribute to the resolution of the protracted displacement situation of the most vulnerable refugees and displaced persons following the 1991-1995 conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia, including internally displaced persons in Montenegro from 1999. From 2014 to the end of July 2022, the Programme delivered more than 9,600 homes to more than 28,000 most-vulnerable persons. The Programme’s main funder is the European Commission. The Programme runs out in 2023.

38 \ In this *Paper*, vulnerability refers to low levels of coping capacities/resilience of individuals or communities to resist adverse impacts of stressors or shocks to which they are exposed (cf. Turner et al., 2003).

39 \ A recent mapping exercise for Serbia, including 172 substandard settlements, estimates the number of people living there at 167,975 (Government of the Republic of Serbia & OHCHR, 2020, p. 8)

Beneficiaries of official housing assistance reported a lack of electricity or water as an impediment to moving into the provided houses (SRB21, Novi Pazar, 5 August 2021). Besides, the indispensable role of close networks seems to be a reason for the fact that quite a number of beneficiaries do not accept houses provided far from their current place of residence. Generally, apartments/houses provided to returnees offer prospects of staying only with simultaneous access to income opportunities, which has often not been the case.

### Cash and In-kind Assistance

Financial support services are increasingly in demand among returnees of low socio-economic status, regardless of ethnic or other markers. However, they are rare and usually only provided to the most vulnerable of those eligible for such support and usually serve to satisfy the most urgent everyday needs. The AVR program by IOM includes cash assistance, the amount of which, however, depends on the funding country. While this money is mostly used for everyday needs, there are examples in our data where financial aid provided by IOM in the framework of AVR has been invested to generate extra income. Since cash assistance in most cases cannot and is likely not be intended to provide sustainable livelihood options to returnees, strong cooperation with other governmental and non-governmental actors is indispensable (SRBSTH21, Belgrade, 4 November 2021). Besides cash assistance, the AVR program also offers in-kind support for housing and medical treatment. In Serbia, 90 per cent of IOM’s AVR beneficiaries use this support, which shows the high relevance of this kind of assistance (SRB21, Belgrade, 4 November 2021).

When referring the findings on reintegration assistance to the empirics and dimensions of (re-)adjustment processes described in the Section "[Adjusting to Life after Return](#)" in this *Paper*, I would like to make the four following observations:

- 1\ Our findings from the Section mentioned above suggest that often, returnees face multiple challenges at the same time. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that responds to various dimensions simultaneously is often necessary. Cooperation and referral among the various actors is thus indispensable.
- 2\ We see that the various reintegration assistance measures offered by stakeholders, CSOs and NGOs respond to different extents to the different dimensions of (re-)integration. Most target the livelihood dimension of (re-)integration (housing, income-generation, access to public services) and some address the psychosocial dimension. Legal counselling responds to the political dimension. Though access to rights and services is one decisive aspect when it comes to (re-)adjustment, it is only one of many other aspects of the [political dimension](#) described in this *Paper*. Since these are politically very sensitive, most programmes (including those for highly skilled returnees) do not address the important aspects of governance, feelings of safety and lack of societal participation.
- 3\ Due to significant differences in the individual positionality and agency<sup>40</sup> of returnees, conclusions about the impact of assistance measures are not transferable to different groups of returnees.
- 4\ We found that assistance in most cases takes place on an individual basis or targets specific groups (e.g. Roma or other marginalised groups), while our findings suggest the important role of the receiving communities' integrative capital as a prerequisite for feelings of belonging. Existing programmes so far only very rarely take these

into account. An addition to client-based approaches that can respond to the very individual needs of returnees, reintegration assistance programmes should focus more on receiving communities and the institutional and societal capacities/social capital. More community-based programmes fostering inclusive communal structures, e.g. by targeting segregated living, schooling, working and recreation patterns and expanding possibilities for societal participation are one chance to fill the gap between lived (re)-integration experiences and assistance programming.

40 \ Agency defined as 'ability to act' or: 'The possible scope of action as a function of a person's own capacities vs. desires on the one hand and the external structural factors framing his or her everyday existence on the other' (Grawert & Mielke, 2018).



## Conclusions

The challenge to but also the asset of our research has been the wide variety of returnees covered in this study ranging from (self-organised early) post-war returns of refugees and IDPs, forced returnees, returning “Gastarbeiter” (“guest workers”), irregular and regular labour migrants, pendular migrants, students, (rejected) asylum seekers, returnees with diverging socio-economic and educational levels, age and ethnic and religious identities, different durations of stay abroad and a wide array of destination countries. Despite the highly diverse sample and considerable differences between the out-migration or displacement context and the socio-political and economic conditions of return and (re-)integration in both countries, the *Paper* first identified certain common patterns of returnees’ (re-)integration trajectories. These are, among others, the important role intimate networks and access to wider networks play in the returnees’ ability to re-establish their lives and opportunities for (translocal) adjustment processes upon return. While all groups, regardless of socio-economic strata, age and gender, with different reasons and motivations for migration and return, rely and often depend on personal networks to a similar degree, the strength and scope of these networks considerably differ according to a returnee’s positionality.

Second, the *Paper* has shown that the re-establishment of livelihoods upon return often depends on maintaining close translocal connections and continued mobility upon return. This lesson has been drawn from earlier return processes, e.g. following the war in BiH, where socio-economic conditions for return were lacking, and return and restitution policies did not lead to large-scale minority returns. We observed that minority return and (re-)integration processes of war refugees and IDPs were often rather translocal, temporary and partial, which contrasts with the ‘sedentary understanding of home and dwelling’ in different policy practices that govern refugees’ movements on a local and supra-local level on the other (Huttunen, 2010, p.57). Return was often neither a final stage of the migration process, nor did it encompass all aspects of life at the same time (family, family residence, livelihoods). The lack of economic

perspectives among some of the minority returnees interviewed in the Republika Srpska (BiH), continue to lead to spatially split and fragmented (re-)integration processes: Many returnees maintain two residences (one in RS and one in the FBiH). They re-establish themselves economically in one place while they stay emotionally attached to the place of origin. But also among more recent returnees, mobility represents an important livelihood strategy. The interviewed labour migrants often consider return as temporary, and many consider renewed migration a future option, which might well result in their full or partial re-establishment at the place of return or various places. Reintegration assistance needs to take the role of mobility more seriously and further shift its stance from a place- and return-bound understanding of (re-)integration towards an understanding that focuses on livelihoods in destination and return contexts.

Third, despite several similarities between the two countries under study—regarding the challenges to and opportunities for (re-)integration—this *Paper* has highlighted the relevance of context for the outcome of (re-)integration attempts. This became especially visible when comparing the livelihood dimension of returnees to rural and peripheric areas with those returning to the economic capitals. Besides the economic context conditions, the overall political and governance context is highly relevant for (re-)integration trajectories, corruption and patronage networks and discrimination impacting all four dimensions of (re-)adjustment upon return. Moreover, differences in the receiving communities’ capacities and their willingness to reintegrate returnees directly have an impact on the social and psychosocial dimensions of (re-)integration. Programmes aiming to facilitate the (re-)integration of returnees thus should factor in the social capital and integrative capacities of receiving communities more thoroughly. In addition to individual support measures for the most vulnerable, they should continue and strengthen community-based approaches fostering inclusive communal structures and expanding possibilities for societal participation.

Finally, the study found that in many cases, neither the physical absence during migration nor the return itself posed the main challenge to livelihoods and well-being but rather returnees' low return preparedness and continuities of exclusion and marginalisation before, during and after migration, which blocked access to livelihood options, rights, social participation and a lack of perspectives. These findings stress the value of an approach to (re-)integration that places access to rights and societal participation (both in origin and migration contexts) in the centre. For this purpose, low-threshold institutional assistance is essential, as well as human rights-based and inclusive service provision through public institutions.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASB	<i>Worker's Samaritan Federation</i>	ASB
AVR	<i>Assisted voluntary return</i>	AVR
AVRR	<i>Assisted voluntary return and reintegration</i>	AVRR
BAMF	<i>German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees</i>	BAMF
BICC	<i>Bonn International Center for Conversion</i>	BICC
BiH	<i>Bosnia and Herzegovina</i>	BiH
BMZ	<i>German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development</i>	BMZ
BTI	<i>Bertelsmann Transformation Index</i>	BTI
CIM	<i>Center for International Migration and Development</i>	CIM
D4D	<i>Diaspora for Development</i>	D4D
DBH	<i>Diaspora Business Hub</i>	DBH
DIMAK	<i>German Information Centre for Migration, Training and Careers</i>	DIMAK
DPA	<i>Dayton Peace Agreement</i>	DPA
ECHIR	<i>European Court of Human Rights</i>	ECHIR
EU	<i>European Union</i>	EU
FBiH	<i>Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina</i>	FBIH
GIZ	<i>German Agency for International Cooperation</i>	GIZ
HOTOSM	<i>Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team</i>	HOTOSM
HRW	<i>Human Rights Watch</i>	HRW
IAN	<i>International Aid Network</i>	IAN
ICG	<i>International Crisis Group</i>	ICG
ID	<i>Identification document</i>	ID
IO	<i>International Organisation</i>	IO
IDP	<i>Internally displaced person</i>	IDP
INGO	<i>International Non-governmental Organisation</i>	INGO
IOM	<i>International Organization for Migration</i>	IOM
KIRS	<i>Commissariat for Refugees and Migration</i>	KIRS
MHRR	<i>Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees in BiH</i>	MHRR
NGO	<i>Non-governmental Organisation</i>	NGO
OECD	<i>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</i>	OECD
RHP	<i>Regional Housing Programme</i>	RHP
RS	<i>Republika Srpska</i>	RS
UNDP	<i>United Nations Development Programme</i>	UNDP
UNHCR	<i>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</i>	UNHCR

## Annex

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Demographics		Serbia	BiH
<i>Age</i>	0-19	4	0
	20-39	40	37
	40-59	31	36
	60+	9	10
<i>Gender identity</i>	female	38	39
	male	44	44
<i>Ethno-religious/ ethno-linguistic identification</i>	Orthodox/ Serb	47	8
	Orthodox/Bulgarian	1	-
	Muslim/Bosniak; Serb of Muslim faith	10	40
	Albanian	2	-
	Roman Catholic/Croat	1	3
	Evangelical	1	-
	Romani-speaking	24	7
	Vlach	1	-
	n.a.	3	19

**Table 2**  
**Respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina (returnees, migrants, stayees, IDPs)**

Pseudonym	Place and date of interview	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Place of migration / displacement	Place of current residence	Assistance received
BiH4	Sarajevo, 11.8.2019	m	30	Sarajevo	Stayee	Sarajevo	n.a.
BiH5	Sarajevo, 12.8.2019	m	20+	Sarajevo	United Kingdom (UK)	Sarajevo	n.a.
BiH9	Sarajevo, 13.8.2019	m	20+	Sarajevo	Stayee	Sarajevo	n.a.
BiH11	Sarajevo, 11.08.2019	m	42	Sarajevo	Poland; Slovenia, Czech Republic; Hungary, Belgium, Germany; Italy	Sarajevo	no
BiH13	Bijeljina, 15.08.2019	f	22	Janja	Migrant in Germany	n.a.	n.a.
BiH16	Bijeljina, 16.08.2019	f	20-39	Bijeljina	Migrant in Germany	Bijeljina	no
BiH17	Tuzla, 17.08.2019	f	20-39	Tešanj	Stayee	n.a.	n.a.
BiH18	Tuzla, 18.08.2019	m	20-39	Srebrenica	IDP	Srebrenica	no
BiH19	Srebrenica, 18./19.8.2019	m	20-39	Srebrenica	IDP	Srebrenica	no
BiH20	Srebrenica, 19.8.2019	m	20-39	Bihac	Austria, Switzerland and other European countries	Sarajevo/Bratunac	n.a.



Table 2 - continued

*Respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina (returnees, migrants, stayees, IDPs)*

Pseudonym	Place and date of interview	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Place of migration / displacement	Place of current residence	Assistance received
BiH21	Srebrenica, 19.8.2019	m	20-39	Srebrenica	Slovenia, Germany	Srebrenica	
BiH22	Srebrenica, 19.8.2019	m	40-59	Bratunac	Stayee	Bratunac	-
BiH23	Bratunac, 19.8.2019	f	40-59	Bratunac	Serbia	Bratunac	yes
BiH24	Bratunac, 19.8.2019	f	40-59	Sarajevo	IDP	Bratunac	yes
BiH25	Srebrenica, 19.8.2019	m	60-79	Srebrenica	Germany, Russia, USA	Srebrenica	no
BiH26	Bratunac, 20.8.2019	f	40-59	Sarajevo	IDP	Bratunac	yes
BiH27	Srebrenica, 20.8.2019	m	30	Srebrenica	Tuzla, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Croatia, Serbia	Srebrenica	yes
BiH28	Srebrenica, 20.8.2019	m	30-40	Tuzla	Migrant in Germany		n.a.
BiH29	Doboj, 21.8.2019	m	40-59	Doboj	Germany	Doboj	no
BiH30	Doboj, 22.8.2019	f	25	Doboj	Stayee	Doboj	n.a.
BiH31	Banja Luka, 22.8.2019	m	40-59	Banja Luka	Germany	Banja Luka	n.a.
BiH32	Banja Luka, 23.8.2019	m	40-59	Brčko	UK	Brčko / Banja Luka	n.a.
BiH33	Prijedor, 23.8.2019	f	20-39	Prijedor	Stayee	Prijedor	n.a.
BiH34	Prijedor, 23.8.2019	f	41	Klijuk	IDP	Prijedor	yes
BiH35	Prijedor, 23.8.2019	f	63	Sanski Most	IDP	Prijedor	yes
BiH36	Prijedor, 23.8.2019	f	60-79	Prijedor	Croatia	Prijedor	yes
BiH38	Mostar, 26.8.2019	f	22	Mostar	Stayee	Mostar	n.a.
BiH40	Mostar, 26.8.2019	f	30	Mostar (West)	Croatia, Germany	Mostar	no
BiH41	Sarajevo, 27./ 28.8.2019	m	49	Sarajevo	Germany	Sarajevo	no
BiH42	Sarajevo, 27.8.2019	f	22	Sarajevo	Stayee	Sarajevo	n.a.
BiH45	Sarajevo, 29.8.2019	f	31	Foča	Germany	Sarajevo	no
BiH48	Janja, 17.8.2019	f	52	Srebrenica, Janja	Lukavac	Janja	yes
BiH49	Janja, 17.8.2019	m	55	Janja	Lukavac	Janja	yes
BiH50	Sarajevo, 4.9.2019	f	66	Sarajevo	Croatia, Turkey	Sarajevo	no
BiH54	Sarajevo, 5.11.2019	f	55	Sarajevo	Yugoslavia (Serbia)	Sarajevo	
BiH55	Sarajevo, 17.11.2019	m	52	Sarajevo	Italy	Sarajevo, Italy	no
BiH56	Sarajevo, 14.12.2019	f	33	Banja Luka	Germany, Libya, Italy	Sarajevo	no
BiH57	Sarajevo, 21.12.2019	m	53	Banja Luka/ Sarajevo	USA	Sarajevo	no
BiH58	Sarajevo, 20.2.2020	f	45	Zenica	Germany	Sarajevo	yes
BiH59	online, Sarajevo, 14.5.2020	f	39	Sarajevo	New Zealand	Sarajevo	no
BiH60	online, Sarajevo and NYC, 8.5.2020	m	57	Montenegro	Denmark, USA	USA, Sarajevo	no

Table 2 - continued

*Respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina (returnees, migrants, stayees, IDPs)*

Pseudonym	Place and date of interview	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Place of migration / displacement	Place of current residence	Assistance received
BiH61	online, Sarajevo, 8.5.2020	m	48	Croatia/BiH	USA	USA	no
BiH62	online, Sarajevo, Gulf state, 1.6.2020	f	40	Sarajevo	Migrant in a Gulf State	Gulf State	n.a.
BiH65	phone, Cologne, Sauerland, 3.5.2020	m	30	Sarajevo	Migrant in Germany	Sauerland	-
BiH66	Sarajevo, 28.5.2020	f	39	Rogatica	Gorazde, Sarajevo, Germany	Sarajevo	yes
BiH67	Sarajevo	m	22	Tuzla	Stayee	n.a.	n.a.
BiH68	Sarajevo, July 2020	m	22	Sarajevo	Stayee	n.a.	n.a.
BiH69	online, Sarajevo, Banja Luka, 21.7.2020	f	40-59	Banja Luka	Stayee	n.a.	n.a.
BiH70	online, Sarajevo, 5.6.2020	f	54	Sarajevo	Stayee	n.a.	n.a.
BiH71	online, Sarajevo, 5.6.2020	f	40-59	Sarajevo	Stayee	n.a.	n.a.
BiH72	online, 3.7.2020	m	40-59	n.a.	Austria, Turkey	Tuzla	n.a.
BiH73	Srebrenica, 20.8.2019	f	72	Srebrenica	Slovenia	Srebrenica	no
BiH75	online, 30.1.21	m	23	Sarajevo, Vukosavlje	France, Belgium, Germany	Vukosavlje	no
BiH76	viber, Sarajevo, 19.3.2021	f	70+	Trebinje	Denmark	Sarajevo	yes
BiH77	viber, 10.5.21	f	60+	Višegrad	Montenegro, North Macedonia, Turkey, USA	Sarajevo	no
BiH78	viber, 7.5.2021	f	30+	Sarajevo	USA	Sarajevo	no
BiH79	Sarajevo, 5.5.21	m	60+	Vlasenica	Germany, USA	Sarajevo	no
BiH80	online, 26.7.21	m	57	Srebrenica	Netherlands	Srebrenik	yes
BiH81	online, 30.1.21	m	23	Sarajevo	France, Belgium, Germany	Sarajevo	no
BiH82	online, 28.7.21	m	35	Sarajevo	Germany	Sarajevo	yes
BiH83	online, 30.7.21	m	65	Janja	Austria, Switzerland	Bijeljina	yes
BiH84	online, 1.8.2021	m	57	Prijedor	Germany	Prijedor	yes
BiH85	online, 30.7.2021	m	45	Stuttgart	Germany	Banja Luka	yes
BiH86	online, 27.7.2021	f	24	Munich	Germany, Denmark	Modrica	yes
BiH87	online, 30.7.2021	f	33	Srebrenica, Tuzla	Germany	Tuzla	yes

Table 2 - continued

*Respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina (returnees, migrants, stayees, IDPs)*

Pseudonym	Place and date of interview	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Place of migration / displacement	Place of current residence	Assistance received
BiH88	Foča, 2022	m	54	Foča	Sarajevo, Germany	Foča	yes
BiH89	Zenica, 15.4.2022	f	34	Sarajevo (Fed)	Germany	Zenica	yes
BiH53	Sarajevo, 22.10.19	m	38	Sarajevo	Kuweit, Kosovo, USA	Sarajevo	no
BiH90	viber, 5.6.2021	m	40+	Sarajevo	Croatia, Germany	Sarajevo	no
BiH91	viber, 6.5.2021	m	40+	Sarajevo	South Africa, Canada, the Netherlands, Migrant in Libya	Sarajevo, Lybia	no
BiH92	Sarajevo, 20.6.2021	m	20+	Sarajevo	Germany	Sarajevo	no
BiH93	viber, 15.6.2021	m	50+	Butmir	Serbia, Germany	Butmir	yes
BiH94	viber, 15.6.21	f	50+	Višegrad	Germany	Sarajevo	yes
BiH95	viber, 15.6.21	m	50+	Sarajevo	Germany, Serbia	Sarajevo	no
BiH96	viber, 12.5.2021	m	30+	Sarajevo	Croatia, Austria, Germany	Sarajevo	no
BiH97	viber, 30.5.2021	f	30+	Višegrad	Austria, Germany	Sarajevo	no
BiH98	facebook messenger, 20.5.21	f	60+	Kozarac, RS	Switzerland	Kozarac	no
BiH99	viber, 24.5.21	f	30+	Sarajevo	Germany	Sarajevo	no
BiH100	viber, 15.5.2021	m	40+	Kozarac, RS	Malaysia	Sarajevo	no
BiH101	viber, 4.6.21	f	50+	Sarajevo	Montenegro, Germany	Sarajevo	yes
BiH102	viber, 12.5.21	m	30+	Banja Luka, Kozarac	Croatia, Switzerland	Kozarac	no
BiH103	Sarajevo, 19.6.2021	m	50+	Sarajevo	Germany	Sarajevo	no
BiH104	Sarajevo, 15.6.2021	m	40+	Foča	Germany, Denmark, Montenegro, United Kingdom	Sarajevo	no

**Table 3****Expert and Stakeholder Interviews in BiH**

Pseudonym	Place, date	Institutional affiliation
BiHINGO1	Sarajevo, 9.8.2019	INGO
BiHDA2	Sarajevo, 9.8.2019	Development Agency
BiHINGO3	Sarajevo, 9.8.2019	INGO
BiHIO6	Sarajevo, 13.8.2019	IO
BiHIO7	Sarajevo, 13.8.2019	IO
BiHIO8	Sarajevo, 13.8.2019	IO
BiHINGO10	Sarajevo, 14.8.2019	INGO
BiHINGO1	Sarajevo, 9.8.2019	INGO
BiHDA2	Sarajevo, 9.8.2019	Development Agency
BiHINGO3	Sarajevo, 9.8.2019	INGO
BiHIO6	Sarajevo, 13.8.2019	IO
BiHIO7	Sarajevo, 13.8.2019	IO
BiHIO8	Sarajevo, 13.8.2019	IO
BiHINGO10	Sarajevo, 14.8.2019	INGO
BiHIO11	Sarajevo, 14.8.2019	IO
BiHCSO14	Bijeljina, 16.8.2019	CSO
BiHCA15	Bijeljina, 16.8.2019	Community activist
BiHSTH37	Prijedor, 23.8.2019	Local government representative
BiHCSO39	Mostar, 26.8.2019	CSO
BiHS43	Sarajevo, 28.8.2019	Scholar
BiHDA44	Sarajevo, 29.8.2019	Development Agency
BiHINGO46	Sarajevo, 29.8.2019	INGO
BiHDA47	Sarajevo, 29.3.2019	Development Agency
BiHCSO56	Sarajevo, 28.8.2019	CSO
BiHSTH63	Sarajevo, 15.5.2020	State officer
BiHSTH64	Sarajevo	State officer
BiHSTH74	Sarajevo, 8.3.2021	State officer
BiHINGO75	Sarajevo, 11.3.2022	INGO
BiHCSO76	13.04.2022	CSO
BiHSTH77	Republika Srpska, 13.4.2022	Local government representative
BiHSTH78	Sarajevo, 14/15.4.2022,	State officer
BiHSTH79	Sarajevo, 14.04.2022	State officer
BiHCSO80	Sarajevo, 14.4.2022	CSO
BiHSTH81	Sarajevo, 15.04.2022	State officer
BiHSTH104	Banja Luka, 22.8.2019	State officer

**Table 4****Expert and Stakeholder Interviews in Serbia**

Pseudonym	Place, date	Institutional affiliation
SRBSTH1	Online, June 2021	Development Agency
SRBS2	Online, March 2021; Belgrade, 28.7.2021	Scholar
SRBINGO3	Online, May 2021	INGO
SRBDA4	Belgrade, 24.6.21	Development Agency
SRBR5	Belgrade, 25.7.21	Researcher
SRBR6	Belgrade, 26.7.2021	Researcher
SRBSTH1	Online, June 2021	Development Agency
SRBS2	Online, March 2021; Belgrade, 28.7.2021	Scholar
SRBINGO3	Online, May 2021	INGO
SRBDA4	Belgrade, 24.6.21	Development Agency
SRBR5	Belgrade, 25.7.21	Researcher
SRBR6	Belgrade, 26.7.2021	Researcher
SRBCSO7	Obranovac, 27.7.2021	CSO
SRBINGO9	Belgrade, 28.7.2021	INGO
SRBINGO10	Belgrade, 29.7.2021	INGO
SRBINGO11	Belgrade, 29.7.2021	Development Agency
SRBINGO12	Belgrade, 30.7.2021	Scholar
SRBIO13	Belgrade, 31.7.2021	IO
SRBCSO14	Belgrade, 31.7.2021	CSO
SRBCSOP15	Novi Sad, 31.7.2021	CSO
SRBCSO16	Belgrade, 4.8.2021	CSO
SRBCSO17	Belgrade, 4.8.2021	CSO
SRBINGO18	Novi Pazar, 5.8.2021	INGO/CSO
SRBCSO19	Belgrade, 4.4.2022	CSO
SRBCSO20	Belgrade, 5.4.2022	CSO
SRBIO21	Belgrade, 4.11.2021	IO
SRBIO22	Belgrade, April 2022	IO
SRBSTH23	Belgrade, 4.11.2021	State Officer
SRBDA24	Belgrade, 5.4.2022	Development Agency
SRBSTH25	Belgrade, 5.4.2022	State Officer

**Table 5**  
**Respondents in Serbia (returnees, stayees)**

Pseudonym	Place and date of interview	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Place of migration / displacement	Place of current residence	Assistance received
SRB1	phone, 02.06.2121	male	50	Zrejanin	Germany	Zrejanin	yes
SRB2	Obranovac, 27.07.2021	male	<30	Obranovac	Germany	Obranovac	yes
SRB3	Obranovac, 27.07.2021	female	39	Obranovac	France, Germany	Obranovac	yes
SRB4	Obranovac, 27.07.2021	male	< 50	Obranovac	Germany	Obranovac	yes
SRB5	Belgrade, 31.07.2021	male	15	Belgrade	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB6	Belgrade, 31.07.2021	female	17	Kosovo	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB7	Belgrade, 31.07.2021	male	12	Serbia	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB8	Belgrade, 31.07.2021	trans-gender	27	Leskovac	Germany	Belgrade	no
SRB9	Belgrade, 31.07.2021	female	33	Belgrade	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB10	Novi Sad, 2.8.2021	female	43	Sremska Mitrovica	Germany	Sremska Mitrovica	yes
SRB11	Novi Sad, 2.8.2021	male	40	Sremska Mitrovica	Germany	Sremska Mitrovica	yes
SRB12	Novi Sad, 2.8.2021	male	49	Sremska Mitrovica	no	Sremska Mitrovica	yes
SRB13	Novi Sad, 2.8.2021	male	<30	Sremska Mitrovica	Germany	Sremska Mitrovica	yes
SRB14	Novi Sad, 2.8.2021	female	43	Novi Sad	Kuweit	Novi Sad	no
SRB15	Belgrade, 3.8.2021	female	40	Belgrade	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB16	Belgrade, 3.8.2021	male	49	Belgrade	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB17	Belgrade, 3.8.2021	male	<30	Belgrade	no	Belgrade	yes
SRB18	Belgrade, 3.8.2021	male	36	Belgrade	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB19	Belgrade, 4.8.2021	female	43	Kosovo	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB20	Novi Pazar, 5.8.2021	female	42	Novi Pazar	Germany	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB21	Novi Pazar, 5.8.2021	female	38	Novi Pazar	Germany	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB22	Novi Pazar, 5.8.2021	female	30	Novi Pazar	Germany	Novi Pazar	no
SRB23	Novi Pazar, 5.8.2021	male	45	Novi Pazar	Sweden, Germany	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB24	Novi Pazar, 5.8.2021	male	39	Pristina	Germany	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB25	Novi Pazar, 5.8.2021	couple	35, 32	Novi Pazar	Finland, Germany	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB26	Novi Pazar, 6.8.2021	male	39	Novi Pazar	Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB27	Novi Pazar, 6.8.2021	male	27	Novi Pazar	Germany	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB28	Novi Pazar, 6.8.2021	male	35	Novi Pazar	Germany	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB29	Novi Pazar, 6.8.2021	male	57	Novi Pazar	Germany	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB30	Novi Pazar, 6.8.2021	male	28	Novi Pazar	Germany	Novi Pazar	yes
SRB31	Belgrade, 7.8.2021	male	72	Kosovo	Germany	Belgrade	no

Table 5 - continued

Respondents in Serbia (returnees, stayees)

Pseudonym	Place and date of interview	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Place of migration / displacement	Place of current residence	Assistance received
SRB32	Phone, 21.4.2021	male	34	Leskovaz	Monenegro, Slovenia	Leskovaz	no
SRB33	Phone, 29.4.2021	male	25	Leskovaz	Luxembourg	Leskovaz	no
SRB34	Phone, 1.5.2021	male	52	Leskovaz	Slovenia, Italy, Germany	Leskovaz	no
SRB35	Leskovaz, 1.5.2021	female	76	Leskovaz	Switzerland	Leskovaz	no
SRB36	Viber, 6.5.2021	female	40	Leskovaz	Switzerland	Leskovaz	no
SRB37	Phone 16.5.2021	male	31	Leskovaz	Slovakia	Leskovaz	no
SRB38	Phone, 18.5.2021	male	49	Prijepolje	Russia	Prijepolje	no
SRB39	Phone, 22.05.2021	male	31	Prijepolje	France	Prijepolje	no
SRB40	Phone, 23.05.2021	female	25	Smederevo	Montenegro, Albania, Croatia	Novi Belgrade	no
SRB41	Phone, 24.5.21	female	41	Smederevska Palanka	Malta	Aleksinac	no
SRB42	Dudovica, 1.5.2021	female	50	Lijg	USA	Lazarevac	no
SRB43	Dudovica, 10.5.2021	female	62	Lijk	France	Lazarevac	no
SRB44	Lazarevac, 12.5.2021	male	71	Lijk	Germany	Lazarevac	no
SRB45	Lazarevac, 15.5.2021	male	73	Lazarevac	Austria	Lazarevac	no
SRB46	Phone, 15.5.2021	female	67	Lazarevac	Egypt	Lazarevac	no
SRB47	Lazarevac, 16.5.2021	female	69	Lazarevac	France	Lazarevac	no
SRB48	Lazarevac, 18.5.2021	male	23	Lazarevac	Russia	Lazarevac	no
SRB49	Požega, 25.5.2021	male	50	Požega	Germany	Požega	no
SRB50	Požega, 25.5.2021	male	29	Požega	China	Požega	no
SRB51	Požega, 25.5.2021	male	48	Požega	Italy	Požega	
SRB52	Pozega, 12.5.2021	female	43	Požega	Italy	Požega	no
SRB53	Pozega, 12.5.2021	female	32	Požega	Netherlands	Požega	no
SRB54	Pozega, 5.5.2021	male	57	Požega	United Kingdom	Požega	no
SRB56	Belgrade, 25.4.2021	female	25	Nis/Bor	Slovenia, Austria	Bor	no
SRB55	phone, 27.4.2021	female	50	Zaječar	Montenegro, Germany	Zaječar	no
SRB57	Bor, 7.5.2021	male	70	Negotin	Slovenia, Germany	Bor	no
SRB58	Zajecar, 26.5.2021	female	42	Zajecar	Czech	Zajecar	no
SRB59	Bor, 21.5.2021	female	24	Bor	Austria	Bor	no
SRB60	Bor, 21.5.2021	female	56	Bor	Slovakia, Hungary	Bor	no
SRB61	Zajecar, 20.5.2021	female	48	Zajecar	Switzerland, Greece	Zajecar	no
SRB62	phone, 3.8.2021	male	48	Prokublje	Germany, Luxembourg, Lichtenstein, Switzerland, Slovakia	Pirot	yes



Table 5 - continued

*Respondents in Serbia (returnees, stayees)*

Pseudonym	Place and date of interview	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Place of migration / displacement	Place of current residence	Assistance received
SRB63	Phone, 6.8.2021	male	31	Pristina	Germany	Kragujevac	yes
SRB64	Online, 21.4.2021	male	40	Belgrade	China	Belgrade	no
SRB65	Online, 24.4.2021	female	38	Belgrade	Canada	Belgrade	no
SRB66	Online, 30.4.2021	female	37	Belgrade	USA	Belgrade	no
SRB67	Phone, 1.6.2021	male	39	Belgrade	NL, Germany	Belgrade	no
SRB68	Belgrade, 25.4.2021	female	63	Belgrade	Kuwait, Botswana	Belgrade	no
SRB69	Belgrade, 12.5.2021	male	29	Subotica	Montenegro	Belgrade	no
SRB70	Smederevo, 3.5.2021	male	30	Smederevo	Malta	Smederevo	no
SRB71	Smederevo, 8.5.2021	male	58	Smederevo	Canada	Smederevo	no
SRB72	Smederevo, 9.5.2021	female	48	Germany, Smederevo	Germany	Smederevo	no
SRB73	phone, 10.5.2021	female	48	Smederevska Palanka	Switzerland	Smederevo	no
SRB74	Smederevo, 12.5.2021	female	57	Smederevo	Italy	Smederevo	no
SRB75	Belgrade, 15.5.2021	female	25	Belgrade	Qatar, USA	Belgrade	no
SRB76	phone, 16.5.2021	male	37	Smederevo	USA	Belgrade	no
SRB77	Belgrade, 4.4.2022	male	17	Pristina	Sweden, Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB78	Belgrade, 5.4.2022	male	34	Croatia	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB79	Belgrade, 6.4.2022	female	29	Sweden	Germany	Belgrade	yes
SRB80	Belgrade, 8.4.2022	male	31	Orcha	Germany	Belgrade, Pozarevaz	yes
SRB81	Online, Belgrade, Bor, 21.5.2022	female	27	Bor	Slovakia	Bor	yes
SRB82	phone, Belgrade, 13.4.2022	female	31	Belgrade	Slovakia	Belgrade	yes
SRB83	Požega, 8.5.2021	male	35	Požega	Canada	Požega	yes



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