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LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF RETURN OF REJECTED ASYLUM SEEKERS TO KOSOVO

Evaluation of the Kosovo Return Programme
implemented by Danish Refugee Council 2006-2009

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Executive summary

Since 2006, DRC has implemented a programme facilitating sustainable return to Kosovo and the reintegration of rejected asylum seekers. This report presents the findings of an internal evaluation. It focuses on rejected asylum seekers who were returned during 2006-2007 and assisted under the Kosovo Return Programme, which was funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ENR), the EC programme "Return Preparatory Actions", and the Danish Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs. The programme offered a comprehensive assistance package including legal and return counselling in Denmark, reception assistance, return packages with food, firewood, furniture, housing, income generation activities, medical and psychosocial assistance, language training for minors, and assistance accessing local authorities. A total of 89 rejected asylum seekers, comprising single-person cases as well as families, were assisted under the programme. Today, 57 of these returnees – 18 cases out of a total of 34 assisted cases – remain in Kosovo.

Methodology

As this evaluation was conducted 3-4 years after the actual return, it offers unique insights into the longer-term sustainability of the returns of rejected asylum seekers from Kosovo and the problems faced by returnees in Kosovo today. With the primary aim of learning how best to assist returnees in rebuilding their lives, this report explores the socio-economic, political and physical sustainability of return. It focuses on potential linkages between the current situation of the returnees and the assistance provided, identifying key drivers of and key obstacles to the reintegration process. On this basis, it provides recommendations for the creation of return programmes for Kosovo returnees residing in other European countries, and also to facilitate the return of other nationalities in similar situations.

The evaluation has as its main approach applied a qualitative research technique that is primarily occupied with the subjective perception of the returnees and their reflections on the reintegration process. Data was obtained from September 20th – October 29th 2010 by the consultant and an appointed assistant/interpreter; this included interviews with representatives of 16 out of the 18 cases presently in Kosovo, 2 focus group discussions and a number of background interviews with stakeholders and partners throughout Kosovo.

Key findings and recommendations

Difficult living conditions and lack of employment in Kosovo are among the most common problems faced both by returnees and by the population in general. Slow economic development, the poor standard of health care, unequal access to the public educational system, continued ethnic tensions in Kosovo, as well as returnees' experiences in the host country, are all factors that complicate the sustainability of return.

Due to restrictions regarding employment while in Denmark, none of the returnees had been able to make savings or gain work experience. Moreover, having been away for many years, the returnees had lost their social networks in Kosovo, and the long period of passive waiting in the host country is likely to have affected many of them significantly. Thus, for most of the returnees, the return to Kosovo meant starting from scratch.

While the programme managed to secure employment and income for the majority of returnees for a considerably period of time upon return, and provided housing solutions which for the majority constituted an improvement compared to their housing situation prior to leaving Kosovo, the findings generally indicate a low level of subjective socio-economic sustainability of return. The majority of the returnees assisted under the programme are today still highly vulnerable. Many are unemployed or rely for their livelihoods on short-term or occasional jobs, and more than half of the returnees perceive themselves as depending on relatives for accommodation. This constitutes a concern in terms of sustainability. Results indicate that the returnees generally perceive independent housing as a key precondition to their successful reintegration and that insecurity in terms of accommodation negatively influences their feelings of belonging.

A considerable number of returnees were greatly vulnerable upon return and in need of medical and psychiatric treatment, and they generally expressed satisfaction and appreciation of the medical and psychosocial support provided. However, given the poor standard of public healthcare services, the programme was not able to ensure continued treatment in all cases after programme support ended. Whereas the provision of medical treatment and psychosocial support upon return appears to have been of great importance for a “safe landing”, current and potential medical costs constitute a great concern for the majority of returnees interviewed. In addition to medical support, the programme encouraged a social network for returnees through various activities and social events. The findings indicate that although the feeling of community and support were initially helpful, it may also have contributed to prolonging the transition and adaptation period.

In terms of access to education, all respondents belonging to minority communities were concerned about the public educational system, and the findings point to various general shortcomings related to access to public education for minority communities. The returnees find the public primary schools to be of poor quality and there is a lack of proper language training. Particularly in rural areas, returnees reported that they had no access at all to a local public school due to the limited number of students at the relevant level. Regarding security and freedom of movement, the majority of returnees did not express any pronounced concerns. However, different ethnic groupings appear relatively confined to their own communities, and articulate uncertainty about what the future may bring.

Most of the problems experienced by returnees in terms of socio-economic reintegration, access to public services and freedom of movement are not specific to the returnee population. Nevertheless, the difficult economic situation in Kosovo, high unemployment and lack of access to public services are all factors that negatively influence the sustainability of the return, pointing to a need for comprehensive reintegration assistance as well as a general and longer-term institutional capacity building effort.

Among the returnees currently in Kosovo, there is a general desire to leave again, and a worrying tendency towards a lack of belonging, indicating a low level of subjective physical sustainability of return. However, taking into consideration that all cases were unwillingly returned, as well as high rates of people wanting to (re-)migrate in the population as a whole, these findings are not surprising. Predominant reasons for wanting to re-migrate are to improve their economic situation, followed by concern for their children, who are having serious difficulties readjusting to life in Kosovo. In particular, older children express frustration with their life in Kosovo and do not see their future there.

Based on this assessment of the longer-term impact of the provided assistance, the evaluation recommends the following:

- Applying a *holistic approach*, taking into account all phases and dimensions of return, is paramount to ensuring pre-conditions for sustainable return. This involves **pre-return counselling and preparation, actual return assistance as well as reintegration support.** Differentiation in the return assistance, between those accepting return and those being forcibly returned, is counterproductive in terms of facilitating the reintegration process and risks increasing the likeliness of re-migration for those receiving a less comprehensive return package.

- Combine individual reintegration support with **institutional capacity building and environment building** in the receiving country in order to enhance the viability of the return process for individual returnees and to alleviate the potential negative impact or destabilising effects of large numbers of returns from Western Europe on society as a whole.

- Apply a rights-based approach, with emphasis on **empowering rights-holders (returnees)** to take responsibility for their own lives and to proactively seek to improve their situation, with the aim of strengthening the sustainability of interventions and mitigating the negative consequences of restrictive and undignified living conditions in the host country.

- Emphasise interventions that may assist in **creating linkages between the returnee population and the receiving communities** – adults and children alike – and support engagement and social networking in the local surroundings to enhance the reintegration process and help increase the feeling of belonging.

- **Include older children/youth in training and income generation schemes** when possible, which will enhance their chances for employment and prospects for successful reintegration over the longer term.

Besides the above, programme-specific findings and recommendations, there are also a number of more general findings about conditions in the host country. The evaluation's findings suggest that the possibilities for sustainable return are highly dependent on the conditions offered in the host country. Besides being potentially harmful to asylum seekers' mental health and family life, current policies which allow only limited possibilities for independent living, work and education hamper prospects for reintegration and are likely to negatively influence the sustainability of return interventions. Particularly worrying are findings that indicate that the level of education offered to the children of asylum seekers during their stay in the host country causes problems upon return, and limits the opportunities for further education in the longer term. Based on these findings, the evaluation makes the following recommendations related to conditions in the host country:

- **Advocate for a fair and efficient asylum-seeking procedure** that reduces the period of uncertainty and ensures a prompt clarification and decision on the asylum case.

- **Advocate for temporary residence to rejected asylum seekers that cannot be returned.** Rejected asylum seekers must return home quickly whenever possible, reducing the damaging time they spend in asylum centres. If rejected asylum seekers cannot be returned due to various practical obstacles, they should quickly be granted a temporary residence permit.

- **Advocate for asylum seekers' right to work,** allowing them to improve their skills and gain work experience that can be utilised upon return.

- **Advocate for asylum seekers' right to independent living.** Asylum seekers should have control over their own daily lives, be as self-sufficient as possible, and their right to family life should be respected.

- **Advocate for access to public schools for the children of asylum seekers.**

- **Improve possibilities for language training for the children of asylum seekers** – this should include mother-tongue training as well as language training for minority children in potential official majority languages in their country of origin.

The evaluation finds that returnees generally lack understanding of the background to the rejection of their asylum claims. The findings confirm the importance of allocating time and resources to a thorough counselling process prior to return, ensuring that the potential possibilities for a legal stay in the host country are assessed and carefully communicated and that the return process allows for proper preparation. The evaluation recommends the following:

- Rejected asylum seekers and refugees whose residence permit has been withdrawn should be guaranteed the time and resources for a **thorough counselling process prior to return,** ensuring that the potential possibilities (or lack thereof) for a legal stay in the host country are assessed and carefully communicated, diminishing the risk of creating false expectations and misunderstandings regarding alternatives to return.

- **Improve the possibilities of the accepted return option** for rejected asylum seekers and refugees whose residence permit has been withdrawn. In comparison with forcible return, the accepted return option offers a less traumatic return experience and allows to a greater extent for both physical and psychological preparation for the return. It is important to recognise, however, that accepted return is nonetheless unwilling, and is experienced as such by returnees.

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Abbreviations

APPK	Agjensioni i Përkrahjes së Punësimit Kosovë (Employment Promotion Agency in Kosovo)
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
CMHC	Community-based Mental Health Clinics
DCAM	Department of Citizenship, Asylum and Migration (Kosovo Ministry of Internal Affairs)
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
ENR	Europæisk Naboskab og Rusland (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGA	Income Generation Activity
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
KRCT	Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
MCO	Municipal Community Officer
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIK	Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo

1. Introduction

Background and relevance

Since 2006, DRC has implemented a programme facilitating sustainable return to Kosovo and the reintegration of rejected asylum seekers. DRC has provided legal and return counselling in Denmark and has assisted the returnees upon arrival in Kosovo with activities such as: pick up at the airport, return packages with food, firewood, furniture, housing, income generation activities, medical and psychosocial assistance, language training for minors, and assistance accessing local authorities. Furthermore, DRC has monitored all returnees from Denmark for more than a year, ensuring that returnees had access to counselling through DRC.

DRC has cooperated with partners and stakeholders in both Denmark and Kosovo. Kosovan partners include the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT) and the employment promotion agency, APPK; stakeholders are the donors in Denmark and UNHCR, UNMIK, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (DCAM), and local authorities in Kosovo. The programme was funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ENR), the EC programme "Return Preparatory Actions", and the Danish Ministry of Integration.[1]

The programme is rather unique in nature, as it follows and assists the rejected asylum seeker prior to return, through the actual return and through the initial reintegration phase, and then monitors their situation for more than a year upon return. Furthermore, the same staff in Denmark and Kosovo have been involved in all phases of the process.

Aims and objectives

The overall purpose of the evaluation is to follow up on the situation of the returnees in order to learn how they are coping three to four years after their return to Kosovo and to assess the sustainability of the return. More specifically, this evaluation seeks to:

- identify key drivers to reintegration in Kosovo in individual cases and the key obstacles encountered
- assess the importance of the various elements of assistance provided to facilitate reintegration and the longer-term sustainability of the return
- discuss earlier/current considerations or plans for re-migration
- provide potential recommendations to future returnees and to authorities and NGOs facilitating return.

As facilitation of return remains a relevant issue in many European countries, an evaluation of the Danish programme will be useful to both authorities and NGOs that work on return. By June 2010, Kosovo had signed and ratified tailor-made readmission agreements with a number of countries (Albania, Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland), finalised negotiations with Austria and Norway, and was in the process of negotiating with a range of other countries. These readmission agreements will increase the number of future forced returns from Western European countries, and a considerable number of returns are expected in the coming period.

1 The Kosovo Return Programme refers in this evaluation to five projects implemented by DRC during the period of January 2006 – December 2009, and funded by the Danish Ministry for Integration (ref.: 2005/5067-35.; 2005/5067-36.), the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs/ENR (ref.: 403. Serbien.2-103.;403.Kosovo.1-04.) and the EC (JLS/2005/RETURN/006.)

This evaluation is not a traditional end-of-project evaluation; rather, it resembles a so-called impact assessment, which focuses on the positive or negative, direct or indirect, and intended or unintended effects and changes to the lives of individuals and communities attributable to the intervention (ALNAP 2009: p. 20-21).[2] Whereas many return assistance programmes have assessed the immediate outcome of interventions, this evaluation contributes necessary insights into the longer-term sustainability of return. To identify the most effective methods for assisting long-term sustainability of return, comparative research is needed which looks at the various national return assistance programmes, focusing on the experiences of returnees assisted in different ways.[3] This evaluation contributes one such analysis, and its conclusions could be utilised in more comprehensive, comparative research. In addition, it provides input into an ongoing internal discussion in DRC about engagement in assistance programmes targeting people who are forcibly returned, recently reflected in a revised position paper on "Returns from Denmark".[4]

Return assistance was assessed in 2007 in a survey that contributed to a publication summarising important lessons learned.[5] The design of this evaluation has been informed by the conclusions of that publication and aims to build upon the lessons learned at that time.

Scope and focus

This evaluation focuses on rejected asylum seekers who were returned during 2006-2007 and assisted under the Kosovo Return Programme, which was funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ENR), the EC programme "Return Preparatory Actions", and the Danish Ministry of Integration. A total of 89 rejected asylum seekers, comprising single-person cases as well as families, were assisted with return assistance under the programme. Today, 57 of these returnees – 18 cases out of a total of 34 assisted cases – are present in Kosovo.

A number of returnees have chosen to re-migrate. This evaluation touches only briefly upon these cases. However interesting and relevant an analysis of these cases would be in terms of gaining an insight into the factors influencing re-migration plans, it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to include them. The target group for this evaluation thus consists of 18 cases currently present in Kosovo, out of which six are single-person cases (four male and two female), two are cases comprising couples without children, and ten are couples with children.[6]

The evaluation is mostly concerned with assessing the assistance provided after return and its importance to the longer-term sustainability of the return. It pays less attention to the counselling and information provision provided prior to return. This course was taken because: (1) the importance of pre-return assistance was thoroughly evaluated as part of the programme and key lessons learned were summarised in the publication "Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of rejected Asylum Seekers"[7]; and (2) linkages between pre-return activities and longer-term sustainability will be difficult to establish at this later stage, whereas post-return support is expected to impact the reintegration process more directly and identifiably.

2 A more elaborate description of the methodology is given under the section "Methodology and Approach".
3 Koser, Khalid, 2001: "The Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants", IOM Migration Research Series, No. 4 (p. 41).
4 DRC, 2010: "Returns from Denmark." The Danish Refugee Council's position on the return of rejected asylum seekers and refugees whose residence permit has been withdrawn, May 18th 2010.
5 DRC, 2008: "Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of rejected Asylum Seekers", May 2008.
6 Size and composition of families reflects the situation at the time of return. The number of family members may have increased since return.
7 DRC, 2008: "Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of rejected Asylum Seekers", May 2008.

Structure of the report

The evaluation report consists of five main parts:

Part (1), the Introduction, clarifies the aims and objectives of the evaluation and briefly looks at the background and relevance of the report and its conclusions.

Based on a literature review, Part (2), Methodology and Approach, points to major discussions and dilemmas within return migration, goes through the applied methodology and tools and describes how information collection was carried out. In addition, the section identifies potential limitations and shortcomings related to the process.

Part (3), Returnee Profiles, gives a description of the cases, providing background for the analysis and looking into vulnerabilities and strengths in terms of achieving a successful reintegration in the home country.

Part (4), Analysis of the Reintegration Process, which constitutes the main part of the report, contains a thorough analysis of the different dimensions of sustainability and a presentation of key findings, substantiated by examples from interviews and focus groups and supported by relevant surveys and reports commenting on general trends and current developments in Kosovo.

Part (5), Conclusions and Recommendations, looks at the strengths and weaknesses of the assistance provided, sums up the key drivers of and key obstacles to the reintegration process that have been identified, and provides recommendations for future interventions.

2. Methodology & Approach

Defining voluntary, mandatory/accepted and forced return

The return of refugees and asylum seekers encompasses (1) **voluntary repatriation,** (2) **mandatory or accepted return** of rejected asylum seekers who are required by law to leave the host country, and (3) **forced return** of rejected asylum seekers.

DRC applies a definition of voluntary repatriation that is in line with the one used by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), which recommends that *"voluntary repatriation be used to describe the return of Convention refugees, other persons with a complementary or temporary protection status, or persons still in the asylum procedure who freely choose to exercise their right to return to their country of origin or habitual residence"*.[8]

DRC's recently revised position paper on "Returns from Denmark" focuses in particular on rejected asylum seekers. It describes individuals who voluntarily agree to return home, but where a legal order and a threat of possible sanctions may have influenced their decision, to **"accept return"**.[9] DRC's understanding of accepted return is compatible with ECRE's "mandatory return", which applies to individuals who, although not having consented freely to leave, have been induced to do so by means of incentives or threats of sanctions.[10] The return of individuals who do not agree to return home and where as a result the authorities may have to use physical force in conjunction with the departure, is defined as **"forcible return"**.[11]

The target group of this evaluation falls under the category of rejected asylum seekers, and in accordance with the above, in this evaluation their return is defined as either "accepted return" or "forced return".[12] While the majority of cases were forcible returns by the Danish authorities, their inclusion in the programme as accepted returnees solely depended on whether, prior to their departure from Denmark, they had agreed to receive reintegration assistance upon return to Kosovo.

The distinction between accepted and forced return is important for several reasons. First of all, the assistance offered differed between those who accepted return, and those who were forcibly returned. Accepting return allowed the offer of more comprehensive return assistance, including income generation activity (IGA) and rehabilitation or reconstruction of the pre-war home. Forced returnees who contacted DRC after arrival were offered assistance in finding temporary accommodation and received a return package similar to those accepting return. However, they were not offered reconstruction of houses, nor were they initially offered IGA support. From July 2007, returnees sent by force were also offered assistance with IGA and special language training for children, after an assessment revealed that these types of assistance are crucial for a successful reintegration process.

Secondly, for many returnees, return by force was a traumatic experience that greatly affected their perception of return and their approach to reintegration.[13] It is moreover emphasized by ECRE and others that accepted return is more supportive of sustainability (ECRE/The Way Forward, p. 29-33).

8 ECRE, 2003: Position on Return. By the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, October 2003.
9 DRC, 2010: "Returns from Denmark. The Danish Refugee Council's position on the return of rejected asylum seekers and refugees whose residence permit has been withdrawn", DRC May 18th 2010.
10 ECRE, 2003: Position on Return. By the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, October 2003.
11 DRC, 2010: "Returns from Denmark. The Danish Refugee Council's position on the return of rejected asylum seekers and refugees whose residence permit has been withdrawn", May 18th 2010.
12 Please note that at the time of implementation of the programme, the term "voluntary return" was applied to rejected asylum seekers required by law to leave who consented to return under threat of sanctions. In this evaluation, this category of return is referred to as "accepted return" in accordance with the revised DRC position paper on Returns from Denmark.
13 E.g. confirmed by the "Field Study" ("Sustainable Return of Rejected Asylum Seekers from Denmark to Kosovo", Field Study – August 2007, Danish Refugee Council) conducted by DRC as part of the program.

Methods and approach to information collection and analysis

A key problem when assessing impact is the determination of causality – commonly referred to as the attribution problem:[14] How can we determine that changes to people's lives are the effects of a particular intervention and are not caused by other, co-existing factors? Establishing relevant indicators and selecting methods and approaches that are most likely to produce information on the required level is the best way to accommodate the attribution problem.

This evaluation has attempted to combine methods of information collection in the best way possible to grasp the complexity of factors influencing sustainability of return. The methodology entails: a review of internal and external studies, research and lessons learned; background interviews with stakeholders and partners; and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with returnees. In addition, returnees were asked to fill in a short questionnaire with factual information about their situation prior to leaving Kosovo.

The evaluation design was inspired by Black, Koser & Munk (2004)[15] and their attempt to develop definition and indicators of sustainability that can be applied across programmes. Their recommendations about how to measure the longer-term sustainability of return fill a gap in the literature, which has largely focused on pre-return activities (legal counselling, information provision and travel arrangements), discussing at length the use of positive incentives for further return and the problematic distinction between consent and coercion.[16]

As this evaluation was conducted several years after the implementation of the programme, it is not a traditional end-of-project evaluation. Thus, rather than measuring outputs against pre-defined indicators presented in the various project LFAs, the evaluation operates with a set of indicators that focuses more broadly on the current situation of the returnees, the sustainability of their return and potential linkages to the assistance provided.

Assessing sustainability of return

Increased concern in recent years among scholars and policy makers with sustainability of return reflects a growing awareness that return does not necessarily represent "the end of the refugee cycle," but may in fact be the beginning of a new cycle that can lead to re-migration or secondary movements.[17] Several European states have established return assistance programs that include support to the reintegration process; there is thus a rising need for methods to measure the sustainability of these interventions.

Exploring the sustainability of return requires an agreed definition of what 'sustainability' means. A straightforward definition of sustainable return determines sustainability based on simple re-migration rates. However, most research operates with a more complex definition of sustainability, in recognition of the many factors influencing the reintegration process. The "Revised Manual for Sustainable Return" developed by the UN Mission in Kosovo,[18] which applies a more comprehensive definition of sustainability, argues that return can only be considered sustainable where freedom of movement, access to services and proper accommodation, as well as possibilities for economic viability, are secured (UNMIK, 2006: p. 8).

14 E.g. ALNAP, 2009: In "8th Review of Humanitarian Action", Chap. 2: "Improving humanitarian impact assessment: bridging theory and practice", by Karen Proudlock and Ben Ramalingam with Peta Sandison, July 2009.
15 Black, Richard; Koser, Khalid & Munk, Karen, 2004: "Understanding Voluntary Return", Home Office, Online Report 50/04.
16 E.g. European Migration Network (2007): "Return Migration – Synthesis Report"; and ECRE (2005): "The Way Forward. Europe's role in the global refugee protection system", June 2005.
17 Black, Richard & Koser, Khalid (ed.), 1999: "The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation & Reconstruction", Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, Vol 4.
18 UNMIK, 2006: "Revised Manual for Sustainable Return", July 2006, Prishtinë / Priština.

Black, Koser & Munk (2004) point to three dimensions of sustainability: (1) physical sustainability, (2) socio-economic sustainability and (3) political sustainability. To this they add three different perspectives of sustainability. Sustainability can be considered firstly from the subjective perception of the returnee, and secondly through objective measurements of their situation – not only objective indicators should be taken into account, but also the subjective importance that returnees attribute to these conditions and experiences. Subjective perception is influenced by a multitude of factors, including experiences prior to leaving, conditions in the host country, and return conditions and reception.

Thirdly, sustainability can be assessed in terms of aggregate conditions in the home country – for instance exploring the impact of return on the society as a whole. (Black, Koser & Munk, 2004: p. 25-39)

Further building on Black, Koser & Munk's (2004) three dimensions, Ruben et al. (2009) introduce the concept of 'embeddedness' to fully grasp the complex process of return migration. Ruben et al. emphasise the need for a framework for understanding and capturing the process of negotiating the changed identity and position of return migrants in their home country. Returnees whose return was not fully voluntary face especially severe obstacles upon return, they argue. Return is not – as it was previously perceived – a simple process of "going home", but a much more complex process where migrants have changed identities and there is a new reality in the home country (Ruben et al. 2009: p. 910-914). "Returning to a country where social relations, political structures, and economic conditions are not what they used to be may be equivalent to arriving in a new place" (Ruben et al. 2009:12).

This evaluation has as its main approach applied a qualitative research technique that is primarily occupied with the subjective perception of returnees and their self-evaluation and reflections on the reintegration process. However, the evaluation also looks into objective measurements to some extent, and also addresses issues of aggregate sustainability through background interviews with stakeholders and partners. The table below presents the three dimensions of sustainability and corresponding key indicators, and indicates sources of information.

Table 1: Indicators for sustainability of return[19]

Sources / Dimensions	Subjective perception	Objective measurement	Aggregate conditions
	• In-depth individual interviews with returnees; focus group discussions	• Baseline survey; fact sheet/questionnaire, interviews	• Background interviews with stakeholders (UNHCR/DCAM/local authorities) • Surveys and reports
Socio-economic sustainability	• Employment situation • Perceived living standard • Return to pre-war home or elsewhere	• Housing condition • Income sources	• Trends in levels of poverty and welfare (employment rates etc.)
Political sustainability	• General health and well being • Children's well being in school • Feeling of safety and security • Perceived discrimination	• Access to health care • Access to education • Freedom of movement • Social network • Actual experiences with discrimination	• Levels of reported conflict, ethnic violence and discrimination
Physical sustainability	• Desire to re-migrate • Actual plans to re-migrate • Psychosocial embeddedness/ reintegration	• Proportion of the returnees who have re-migrated/not re-migrated	• General trends in levels of migration in the country

For the purposes of this evaluation, sustainability of return will thus be assessed by looking at the described indicators within the three dimensions of sustainability. However, important benchmarks against which the sustainability should be assessed include (1) the situation of the returnees prior to their flight, and (2) the general conditions in Kosovo.

Factors influencing the reintegration process

Several studies and pieces of research within the field of return assistance have attempted to identify and investigate the factors influencing sustainability of return – particularly where these are open to policy influence. Important factors include returnees' characteristics (age, gender, family relations); their experiences before leaving (accommodation, education, employment); their experiences and conditions in the country of asylum; and conditions of return, including the decision-making process.

General features such as age, gender, family relations, education and previous employment experience influence the three dimensions of the reintegration process in a variety of ways. Results across studies indicate that returnees with children tend to manage better in terms of social networking and psycho-social well-being, whereas it appears more difficult for single return migrants and female returnees. In addition, families with children tend to manage better socio-economically. Unsurprisingly, level of education appears to influence the chances to find employment. Higher levels of education have also been seen to positively influence psychosocial embeddedness. Also unsurprisingly, young single men seem most prone to re-migrate. (E.g. Black et al. 2004: 36-39; Ruben et al. 2009: 925-31).

19 The table is inspired by Black, Koser & Munk (2004) "Understanding Voluntary Return", Home Office, Online Report 50/04 supplemented with insights from Ruben, Ruerd et al. 2009: "What Determines the Embeddedness of Forced-Return Migrants? Rethinking the Role of Pre- and Post-Return Assistance" in IMR Volume 43 Number 4 (Winter 2009): 908–937.

As a general trend, being unwillingly returned appears to have a strong negative impact on sustainability. Findings indicate that it has considerable influence on socio-economic reintegration – those who return voluntarily being more likely to find employment and to find themselves in less poor conditions. Those who are forcibly returned are more likely to express fear about their security, and re-migration rates tend to be higher among those who have returned unwillingly. (E.g. Black et al. 2004: 36-39; Ruben et al. 2009: 925-31; DRC 2008: 77).

Likewise, conditions in the country of asylum appear to be a great influence on the success or otherwise of the reintegration process. Possibilities for active participation in terms of education, training, employment, self-reliance and independent living during the period of asylum considerably increase the prospects for sustainable return. (E.g. Black et al. 2004: 36-39; Ruben et al. 2009: 930)

Information collection and fieldwork in Kosovo

This evaluation employed a qualitative research approach, involving in-depth individual interviews with representatives of nearly all cases who were returned under the programme and are presently in Kosovo, as well as a number of partners and stakeholders.

The advantage of in-depth interviews is primarily that they provide more comprehensive and detailed information than what can be obtained through other data collection methods such as surveys, and that they allow for the interviewer to explore unexpected paths, issues and questions that may occur during the interview. This explorative approach provides an appropriate technique for mapping the post-return experiences of returnees and to investigate their personal perspectives on the impact of the received assistance and their current situation.

Individual in-depth interviews were supplemented with focus group discussions with children and youth (age 10-14) and youth (age 15-19). A focus group is a kind of group interview that capitalises on the interaction and dynamics between participants in order to generate the wanted information. The group is presented with overall themes and issues, and is encouraged to talk in an informal fashion to one another, exchange viewpoints and comment on each other's experiences. Through group discussion, the facilitator/interviewer not only learns what participants think about an issue, but also how and why they think as they do, as the participants challenge each other's viewpoints and ask questions.

During the period of September 20th – October 29th 2010, interviews were carried out throughout Kosovo by the consultant and an appointed assistant/interpreter with representatives of 16 cases, as were two focus group discussions. Individual interviews were conducted in Prishtina/Pristina, Peja/Pec, Prizren, Dragash/Dragas, Mitrovice/Mitrovica, Lipjan/ Lipljan, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Skenderaj/Srbica. These were supplemented with five partner and stakeholder interviews, which constitute contextual background information to the analysis below.

Out of the 18 cases supported by the programme where the returnees are currently present in Kosovo, one was temporarily out of the country for work, and one case was unwilling to participate. Interviews with people from the remaining 16 cases were conducted, with participation of a total of 27 persons. 13 of the interviewees were male and 14 female; however, interviews conducted with cases that comprised of couples were done with both of them jointly, and in several cases the male respondent dominated the interview. In addition to interviews with key persons, one individual interview was conducted with a youth of age 20+, and two focus groups were held with children and

youth.[20] Out of a target of 20 children and youth, a total of nine participated. With this background, the evaluation can contribute comprehensive information about the group in question.

Both individual interviews and focus groups resulted in primarily subjective accounts of the current situation and the lives of the returnees; they are thus presented below using qualitative descriptors rather than quantified/numerical results.

Further to individual interviews and focus groups with returnees, the evaluation team conducted five background interviews – with KRCT (Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims), APPK (Employment Promotion Agency), DCAM (Department of Citizenship, Asylum and Migration), UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and the local authorities in Prizren –in order to capitalise on the general expertise of these partners and stakeholders regarding return.

Throughout the fieldwork, informal information meetings were held with the responsible shelter engineer and the management of the programme to receive general contextual information about the implementation of the programme, as well as to clarify more specific technical standards and procedures.

Limitations

There are four main limitations to the evaluation that should be mentioned here:

First of all, it is important to note that the respondents do not comprise a representative sample of the wider returnee population in Kosovo. Conclusions drawn from this evaluation hold specific insights to the caseload covered and the return assistance programme relevant to this group. However, by assessing the longer-term impact of return assistance for the group in question, the evaluation hopes to be able to contribute general insights and recommendations regarding the facilitation of sustainable return for Kosovo returnees residing in other European countries, as well as other nationalities in similar situations.

Secondly, while a qualitative research approach offers a number of advantages in terms of gathering comprehensive information about the current state and situation of the returnees, reliance on subjective accounts risks presenting a picture which is thought by the returnees to be in their interest. Evaluations of this kind are often faced with respondents not revealing the full picture in terms of e.g. income and living conditions, in the hope that this will lead to resumed or additional assistance. This evaluation has attempted to counterbalance potential irregularities by complementing the collected data with information gathered prior to and upon return in various surveys and monitoring activities conducted by DRC staff, as well as by comparing the subjective accounts of the returnees with data describing general trends and developments in Kosovo.

Thirdly, using an interpreter in qualitative research carries the risk that nuances, accentuations, or the whole meaning of an expression or phrase can be lost in translation. Especially when doing focus groups with an interpreter, there is a risk of failing to follow the dynamics of the discussion, and of missing openings for interesting perspectives on the relevant issues. In this particular case, and because of the ethnic tensions in Kosovo, an additional risk is that the ethnicity of the interpreter can spark distrust and reluctance to participate among individuals of a different ethnic background. The evaluation did face problems in this regard on at least one occasion. The team was able to deal with that specific situation by continuing without the interpreter, because family members had sufficient

20 The evaluation design envisaged in-depth interviews with a key respondent from each of the cases, plus an additional individual interview in families with a youth of age 20+. However, interviews with the youth target group proved difficult to set up, and the evaluation team succeeded in carrying out only one of a potential six such interviews.

knowledge of Danish to make themselves understood. However, it is possible that other interviews have suffered in terms of withheld information or untruthful accounts, without the awareness of the evaluation team. This being said, the local interpreter most often proved an advantage and an entry point due to her cultural knowledge and know-how, and visibly contributed to creating a good and trusting atmosphere which was crucial to successful interviews.

Lastly, the evaluation touches only briefly upon cases of people assisted through the programme who have since re-migrated. An analysis of the factors leading to re-migration, and the current status and lives of these people, could potentially have added important insights into gaps in assistance and pointed to relevant intervention areas. It could be said that by only looking into the cases of people who are still present in Kosovo four years after return, this creates a bias in the evaluation that misses important insights into the obstacles to reintegration.

3. Returnee Profiles: A Brief Overview

Despite the tendency of policy makers to categorise migrants based on different push and pull factors, the decision to leave is often determined by a number of inter-related reasons and motives. The target group for this evaluation is not a homogeneous group; they have very different backgrounds and resources, family relations, motives for seeking asylum, experiences during their stay in Denmark and return conditions – all factors known to have a decisive influence on the sustainability of the return. This section deliberately does not offer much interpretation or analysis; rather, it provides an understanding of the diversity of the target group and their situation upon return, in order to support the analysis of the return and reintegration process that follows.

General profile of respondents

The target group for this evaluation consists of 18 cases currently present in Kosovo, out of which six are single person cases (four male and two female), two cases are couples without children, and ten cases are couples with children. All persons were returned during the implementation of the programme (January 2006-December 2009) after a period of between a few months to nine years in Denmark, the majority of the cases spending more than four years in asylum before returning to Kosovo.[21]

Out of the total of 18 cases, nine cases are ethnic Albanians and the others belong to various minority communities in Kosovo[22]: one case is Ashkali, six cases are Bosnians and two cases are Gorani. Almost all the minority cases have returned to minority communities corresponding to their respective ethnic background, whereas the majority cases have returned to areas inhabited mainly by Albanians. This is consistent with the general situation in Kosovo, where much of the population is segregated into more or less ethnically homogenous communities.

The returnees are generally not well educated. The majority of the adults either have no schooling or have completed only elementary school, whereas a comparative smaller group have completed secondary school. Only one of the adults has a university degree. Women are strongly over-represented among the lowest educated. This appears – most distinctively among the minority communities – to some degree to be due to cultural tradition. A lower level of education for women than men is a general feature of the Kosovo population (World Bank 2010: p. 57).

In addition to their different backgrounds, the cases vary in terms of reasons for having left Kosovo. Economic hardship, forced migration and security dominate the reasons given, but health concerns and reuniting with family members are also mentioned as reasons for seeking asylum.

Vulnerabilities

A considerable number of the returnees assisted were in need of medical and psychosocial support upon return, particularly related to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Several were diagnosed and in treatment in Denmark at the time of return.

As mentioned above, 10 of the 18 cases are families with children. Today, these children are between the ages of 8-23 years old. A number of them had no recollection of their life in Kosovo. A few of

21 A few spent up to several years in another Western European country before applying for asylum in Denmark. Since we do not have precise data on this, it will not be taken into account in the analysis. However, it should be noted that for a few of the returnees, the period abroad was considerably longer than indicated here. Thus, in one case a returnee was returned from Denmark after 16 years abroad (Case #10).

22 This paper uses the term “minority communities” to refer to Kosovo Serbs living south of the Ibar River, and Roma, Bosniaks, Turks, Gorani, Ashkali, Egyptians and Croats throughout Kosovo.

the youngest children were born in Denmark, and did not speak their mother tongue upon return to Kosovo.

Studies show that it is potentially harmful for children to live in asylum centres for longer periods of time. Much evidence points to the fact that the parents' ability to take care of their children deteriorates during their prolonged stay in uncertainty, and that the children suffer from this lack of attention. [23] Recent research among families in Danish asylum centres confirms that the uncertainty and stress characterising the asylum period constitutes a considerable burden for the children. A psychological screening among newly arrived families conducted by the Danish Red Cross concluded that 34% of the children were at high risk of developing psychological problems and that 56% were in need of extra psychosocial support – either due to their own psychological state or because they had traumatised parents.[24] Taking these results into account, it is fair to assume that the children were generally under a great deal of stress upon return to Kosovo.

Prospects for sustainability of return

A number of factors have been seen to positively influence the reintegration process and the sustainability of return, whereas other factors and characteristics appear to work against a successful reintegration. Looking at these general findings, the target group of this particular programme appears in some areas to be somewhat disadvantaged in terms of achieving sustainable return. As a key factor, the returnees have all been unwillingly[25] returned to Kosovo, which has proved to have a significant negative influence on the success of the reintegration process. In addition, they were generally not allowed to work during the asylum period and in the majority of cases they were living under restrictive conditions in asylum centres. Beyond these key factors which are believed to pose severe obstacles to the reintegration process, the returnees are in general not well educated, which decreases their chances of employment, and a considerable number of the returnees were in need of psychosocial or medical treatment at the time of return.

On the other hand, the return assistance provided to the group was designed to accommodate the specific needs of the group and was exceptionally comprehensive, targeting all phases and dimensions of return. Furthermore, security conditions have considerably improved in Kosovo for most groups, and the majority of the target group of this programme are not among those considered by UNHCR to be in continued need of international protection.

23 E.g. Nielsen, SS. et al. 2007: "Psykisk helbred blandt asylbørn i Danmark". Ugeskrift for læger 169/43; and Børn i risikozonen. Psykologisk screening i Dansk Røde Kors Asylafdeling. Dansk Røde Kors Asylafdeling 2010.

24 Dansk Røde Kors Asylafdeling 2010: "Børn i risikozonen. Psykologisk screening i Dansk Røde Kors Asylafdeling".

25 Unwillingly here refers to both accepted and forcibly returns.

4. Analysing the Return and Reintegration Process

Understanding the return context

In February 2008, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. The UN General Assembly subsequently voted in favour of referring the Unilateral Declaration of Independence to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion. The court delivered its advisory opinion in July 2010, declaring, "…the declaration of independence of Kosovo adopted on 17 February 2008 did not violate international law".[26] As of 18 November 2010, 72 states have formally recognised the Republic of Kosovo as an independent state. Serbia continues to regard Kosovo as an UN-governed entity within its territory.

The extensive political and constitutional changes that have occurred in Kosovo over recent years add to the complexity of the concept of "returning home". The Head of the UNHCR Protection Unit in Pristina, Christos Theodoropoulos, stresses that Kosovo is no longer the same political entity as it was when the majority of the caseload took refuge in Denmark:

> "It is not a simple return, like in the classical scenario where there is a civil war and when it has ended people come back to the same country. Here it is a new country; it is possibly a change of sovereignty, which means a change of loyalty. (…) They [minorities] now have to be loyal to an Albanian authority. And this has important ramifications, from schooling to social services, use of languages and the whole range of freedom of movement and of human rights…" Christos Theodoropoulos, Head of UNHCR Protection Unit, Pristina, 29 September 2010.

In recent years, countries which have accommodated displaced persons from Kosovo have increasingly sought to return them to their place of origin. According to UNHCR statistics, a total of 1,923 persons were forcibly returned to Kosovo between January and September 2010.[27]

The majority of the returnees are Kosovo Albanians, but forced returns increasingly include individuals belonging to minority communities, including Kosovo Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Kosovo Serbs, and Kosovo Albanians from the northern parts of Kosovo. Of a total number of 1,923 who were forcibly returned, 367 individuals belong to communities that are considered at risk by UNHCR.[28] Since the refugee status determination process in Western Europe in theory ensures that no individual in need of international protection is returned, rejected asylum seekers do not belong under the UNCHR mandate. However, in recognition of the potential risks some of the repatriated persons may face upon return, UNHCR is currently putting in place measures to more closely monitor the human rights situation of these groups (Interview UNHCR, Sep. 2010).

> "(I)n principle these [forced returns] are cases that have been finally determined in Western Europe, following an efficient refugees status determination process. Many of these cases have gone through the first instance RSD, the second instance, third instance, so when the deportation comes from Western European countries by definition there is no special concern. (…) But in practice, we find that there are issues here and there." Christos Theodoropoulos, Head of UNHCR Protection Unit, Pristina, 29 September 2010.

26 International Court of Justice. Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 22 July 2010 (http://www.icl-cij.org/docket/files/141/16010.pdf).
27 UNHCR Statistical Overview – updated as of end of August 2010.
28 Ibid.

Legal framework on return from Western Europe

As of January 2008, Kosovo institutions gradually took over readmission and repatriation activities from UNMIK, which had been in charge of managing the readmission and repatriation since 1999. As part of the transition process, a strategy to facilitate the reintegration of repatriated persons had been developed and approved by the Kosovo Government in October 2007, supplemented by an action plan in April 2008 (OSCE 2009: p. 3-4). The strategy outlines comprehensive measures in the areas of legal reintegration, health, education, employment, social welfare, housing and property, aiming at ensuring the sustainability of return of repatriated persons from Western Europe.[29] On 1 November 2008, the Kosovo government started communicating directly with host countries on readmission requests and other repatriation-related issues and entered into bilateral negotiations on readmission agreements with several Western European countries (OSCE 2009: p. 1-2). However, the reintegration measures outlined in the strategy are far from being turned into reality.

In a recently published, critical assessment of the implementation of the strategy, the Kosovo Ministry for Internal Affairs takes stock of the various shortcomings, outlines the need for improvements and the steps to be taken.[30] Key problems with implementation of the action plan include a lack of awareness of the strategy at the local level and the absence of allocated funds for the reintegration of repatriated persons in municipal budgets. Measures to facilitate and support reintegration in the key areas of health, education, employment and housing are lacking. In practice, repatriated persons are often left without assistance, such as information on access to services and reintegration opportunities, upon their return to Kosovo. The assessment identifies the lack of financial means to implement the strategy as the main challenge. Thus, despite efforts by the Kosovo Government to take ownership of the reintegration process there is still a great need for international funding and partnership with local and international NGOs to ensure durable returns. The importance of a comprehensive reintegration support is underlined by the Head of the UNHCR Protection Unit in Pristina, Christos Theodoropoulos, who believes that reintegration measures are paramount to ensuring sustainability of return:

> “So in conclusion, what is being done now as outlined in the reintegration strategy – is in the right direction, but needs to be funded. Otherwise this ”revolving door phenomenon” in the Balkans will increase in dimensions and many of these people – as our monitoring already shows – go back to the former country of asylum.” Head of UNHCR Protection Unit, Pristina, Christos Theodoropoulos, September 29th 2010.

Based on readmission requests from Western European states, the Kosovo Ministry for Internal Affairs expects the repatriation of approximately 5000 persons during the year of 2010, and the same in 2011 (Interview DCAM, September 2010).

Creating preconditions for sustainable return

The lack of funding for the reintegration of repatriated persons mirrors the general economic situation in Kosovo. Kosovo currently faces a difficult economic situation in all spheres of society. In addition, Kosovo is struggling with unresolved tension vis-à-vis minority communities, tense political relations with neighbouring Serbia, and still has 20,000 displaced people within its territory.

29 UNMIK/PISG 2007: “Strategy for the reintegration of repatriated persons”, approved by the Government of Kosovo on 10 October 2007, Prishtinë / Priština.

30 Government of Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2010: ”Assessment of the Mechanism for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons”, April 2010.

To ensure the preconditions exist for a sustainable return under the given circumstances, the DRC return assistance programme drew on experiences from other return programmes in the Balkans and worldwide. In accordance with these lessons learned, the Kosovo Return programme applied a **holistic approach** providing comprehensive measures to assist the reintegration process, and taking into account all phases and dimensions of return to facilitate sustainability of the returns (DRC 2008: 23). The programme included pre-return counselling and an all-inclusive reintegration package, as well as general capacity building efforts (see Table 2). Generally, the stakeholders and partners who were interviewed for this evaluation agreed that the return package was not only among the most comprehensive they had seen, but was also very effective, and a model for a future programmes.

Table 2: Kosovo Returns Programme – overview of provided assistance

Return and reintegration assistance	
Pre-return assistance	– Legal and return counselling* – Country of origin information*
Return and reintegration assistance	– Reception and transport to final destination* – Return package – incl. cash compensation for fresh food – Temporary accommodation and rehabilitation of housing* – Income generation activities (IGA) and distribution of tools for business start up – Language training for minors – Support to access local authorities – Psychosocial and medical support
General capacity building	– Support of local capacities for treatment of traumatised persons

*Not available to forcibly returned.

Another guiding principle for sustainable return that DRC has had success applying to its programmes is a thorough decision-making process, ensuring that return is based on an actual and informed choice (DRC 2008: 23). However, in stark contrast to other return programmes – such as organised returns of IDPs and voluntary repatriation – and specific to programmes assisting rejected asylum seekers is the fact that the beneficiaries do not have the legal right to make an informed decision to return. Under these conditions, the Kosovo Return programme emphasised a combined effort of facilitating the return process both in Denmark and in Kosovo, and aimed, through impartial and individual pre-return legal counselling and positive incentives, to **improve possibilities for the accepted return option,** which allowed for an assisted return process with comprehensive reintegration support and was perceived as more conducive to sustainability (DRC 2008: 23). It is however important to note that whereas the accepted return option may provide for a less traumatic return process, and in some cases for a longer preparation time, the return is – despite some measure of cooperation – nonetheless unwilling. In retrospect, none of the respondents in this evaluation perceive their return to Kosovo to be based on an actual choice, regardless of whether the return is categorised as accepted or forced. Those who did consent prior to return explain that they did so due to sanctions and fear of the otherwise traumatic and stressful experience of forcible return (e.g. Case #2, Case #14). No obvious difference was detected in this evaluation between those that accepted return and those who were forcibly returned in regard to their perception of return and approach to reintegration.

Thirdly, and in line with DRC principles and standards, the programme was based on a **rights-based approach**, aimed at ensuring that the dignity and rights of returnees were respected in the post-return process. One of the key features of the rights-based approach is capacity building to

strengthen the ability of duty bearers to meet the needs, demands and rights of stakeholders.[31] Applying this to the programme, DRC co-operated with local partners on various aspects of planning and implementation, and through this co-operation helped to build up sustainable and much-needed local capacity, while at the same time utilising local knowledge and expertise for the good of the programme. In addition to cooperation with local partner organisations, the programme supported institutional capacity building of the health sector in Kosovo, primarily through capacity building of medical staff in the mental health sector, and worked with the Kosovo Ministry of Health to contribute to a longer-term process for bringing the public health care system up to the required standards.

Following these general remarks on the approach and principles underlying the programme design, and based on the collected data, the evaluation focuses on the current situation of the returnees, the sustainability of their return and potential linkages to the provided assistance. It does this through an analysis of the three dimensions of sustainability: (1) socio-economic sustainability, (2) political sustainability, and (3) physical sustainability.

Socio-economic sustainability

Assessing the socio-economic sustainability of the returns implies looking at the individual returnee's current level of well-being in terms of housing, employment and income, and how this links to the assistance provided. With regard to socio-economic reintegration, the programme provided reintegration support in terms of housing solutions and income generation activities. Because of restrictions regarding employment while in Denmark, none of the returnees had been able to make savings or gain work experience. In addition, the majority of returnees did not bring many belongings back to Kosovo apart from clothing and personal items. For most returnees, the return to Kosovo meant starting from scratch in a material sense.

Difficult living conditions and poor employment prospects in Kosovo are among the most common problems faced by returnees and the population in general. Kosovo's slow and constrained economic development makes it difficult for families to find a way out of poverty. Many are unemployed or rely on short-term or occasional jobs for their livelihoods.[32] These general conditions in Kosovo must be taken into account when assessing the current situation of the returnees and the socio-economic sustainability of return.

Living conditions

The returnees received varying degree of support in terms of accommodation upon return. In cases where reconstructions of damaged houses were possible, the rehabilitation followed UNMIK's Housing Reconstruction Guidelines and Standards as described in the Revised Manual for Sustainable Return.[33]

Respondents voiced several problems regarding the longer-term sustainability of their housing assistance. Relatively rapid dilapidation of the houses appears to be a general problem. Common complaints included leaking ceilings and draughty windows. Building the houses in accordance with the standard outlined in the Manual for Sustainable Return implied among other things that the houses were not plastered externally – which, if not done, will cause damage to the window frames after a while. Due to the condition of the houses, a few of the returnees that were assisted with reconstruction claim that they are no longer able to live there today, and are instead depending on accommodation with relatives (e.g. Case #6; Case #10).[34]

31 DRC, 2008: DRC Programme Handbook, June 2008.
32 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2010 – Kosovo Country Report. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2009; Statistical Office of Kosovo, Ministry of Public Services 2009: Series 5: Social Statistics "Results of the Labour Force Survey 2009", July 2010.
33 UNMIK, 2006: "Revised Manual for Sustainable Return", July 2006, Prishtinë / Priština.
34 The evaluation team were not in a position to validate information on the condition of the houses; they must thus rely on the accounts of the respondents.

A discussion on revising the standards outlined in the Revised Manual for Sustainable Return is ongoing. Realising that many of the returnees are not able to plaster their houses after the handover due to their age or lack of financial means, engineers have started using plastic window frames instead of wood as an intermediate solution, because they tend to be more durable than wood if not plastered. In addition, implementers such as DRC now require contractors to apply a layer of plastering on the walls immediately surrounding windows and doors with a minimum width of 10 cm.

The possibility to construct a house was contingent first of all upon valid property documentation. Furthermore, repair and reconstruction of houses was only available through the programme for those consenting to return.[35] For cases where rehabilitation of houses was not an option, other solutions were sought. A number of returnees currently depend on relatives for accommodation, which is not uncommon in Kosovo, but was nevertheless voiced as a concern in terms of sustainability (e.g. Case #3; Case #6; Case #10; Case #11). These returnees vary in their housing arrangements, from being accommodated by relatives through to more formal agreements and contracts for using relatives' property. Common to the cases is that they feel insecure about the durability of this solution (e.g. Case #16; Case #7). Secondly, depending on relatives for something as basic and essential as accommodation can be hard on relationships. However, it is important to note in this connection that returnees in a majority of the cases relevant to the evaluation did not possess own housing prior to leaving Kosovo, but most relied on relatives for accommodation.

Respondents mention independent housing as a key precondition for their reintegration in Kosovo (e.g. Case #12; Case #3). For returnees, having their own place represents security and provides the basic feeling of having a home. For those still in need of a durable housing solution, this constitutes a major concern and negatively influences the feeling of belonging. However, looking at the housing situation of these returnees prior to leaving Kosovo, as well as the general conditions in Kosovo today, the housing support provided by the programme constituted an improvement in accommodation conditions for many of the returnees compared to their situation before leaving Kosovo. Secondly, observations on the general standard of housing in Kosovo indicate that the group of returnees are not at a significant disadvantage in terms of accommodation.

Income generation activities

As well as independent housing, establishing and sustaining a livelihood is crucial to achieving a durable solution upon return. According to the latest Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate in Kosovo is currently as high as 45%.[36] Poverty in Kosovo is widespread, and studies estimate that about 45% of the population are under the national poverty line, while 17% of the population is considered "extremely poor" (World Bank 2010: p. V). The average monthly wage was estimated at EUR 262 in 2009,[37] and nearly one out of ten households in Kosovo rely on remittances from abroad.[38] Aggregate data on unemployment in Kosovo minority communities confirms that minorities make up a disproportional percentage of the unemployed, as do women and youth. Minority communities continue to face problems in access to employment resulting from their limited freedom of movement, direct and indirect discrimination and language barriers for non-Albanian speaking minorities, as only few Bosniak, Gorani, Serbian and Roma citizens of Kosovo speak Albanian. (IDMC 2010: p. 4-5). Current trends of unemployment and widespread poverty in Kosovo pose a considerable challenge to the reintegration process and must be taken into account when assessing the impact of employment assistance.

As part of the programme, heads of families were offered the opportunity to participate in job orientation training in order to identify the best employment solution for the individual returnee. The

35 See DRC, 2008: "Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of rejected Asylum Seekers", May 2008 for details).
36 Statistical Office of Kosovo, Labour Force Survey (2009).
37 Source: Investment Promotion Agency of Kosovo (http://www.invest-ks.org/).
38 Statistical Office of Kosovo, Household Budget Survey (2009).

returnees were subsequently assisted with job placements or job training positions within companies or small businesses around Kosovo or offered business start-up grants.

In comparison with returnees from other Western European countries, returnees from Denmark did not have the advantage of having acquired skills and work experience during their period of asylum, but had rather watched them deteriorate. The Co-ordinator for Job Placement in APPK, Arsim Blaku, describes the significant difference between those who have been allowed to work and those who were held in passivity during their asylum:

> "Most returnees from Western countries have the right to work during the period that they are staying there. So they are working and always looking for something to do. To have new ideas, to create income, to have a job. Others got everything for free. It was difficult to work with them, because during their stay in the host country they were used to just eating and not working". APPK, Arsim Blaku, Coordinator for Job Placement

Having spent years in Denmark without being allowed to work, the returnees were characterised by a lack of initiative and a general lack of understanding of the "new" context upon return. APPK attempted to accommodate this by working individually with the returnees, determining through individual screenings/interviews whether they had entrepreneurial skills or would be better off in a paid job.

Some of the returnees explain that they later regretted the decision they took when choosing employment, saying that in retrospect they felt that the process of clarifying and identifying the right solution was too short and did not leave time for viable business ideas to be developed.

> An Albanian man in his mid-forties, returning to Kosovo after seven years in Germany and nine years in Denmark, was supported with business start-up through APPK upon his return. He opened an Amusement Arcade, renting out play stations in the nearby town. The business was going well for a while, but as the equipment got older it became increasingly difficult to attract customers, and he is no longer making an income. The business has been closed since the end of the summer 2010, but made no income over the past year.
>
> The returnee explains that after 16 years abroad he could not even recognise his own family and that the village had changed completely. He felt that he did not have enough time to properly assess his situation, let alone develop a business plan. He makes the following comment on the employment assistance, "…the procedure with APPK was very fast. It all went very fast – and it was of course 16 years that I was not in Kosovo."
>
> (Case #10)
>
> Another Albanian returnee, who was assisted in finding work in a restaurant through the job placement scheme, lost his job after only six months and has not had a steady job since. He regrets choosing job placement over business start-up, thinking that starting his own business might have "lasted a little longer", but explains that there was no time to come up with a good idea for a viable business.
>
> (Case #13)

The above examples suggest that some returnees may have benefitted if the process of clarifying and identifying possible livelihood strategies had a longer duration, allowing the returnees to adjust to their new environment. However, given that in the majority of the cases, individual screening and

employment counselling took place several months after return and were, according to APPK, both thorough and lengthy, this may rather reflect the difficult economic context and the unfavourable conditions for income generation in general.

The business start-up option was the most popular form of employment support among the group of assisted returnees. Based on a business plan showing the viability of the investment, grants were provided up to a certain limit, and efforts were made by APPK to assist the returnees in identifying business fields where they had relevant skills. In spite of this, the longer-term sustainability of the businesses 3-4 years after start-up appears questionable. However, taking into account the general economic crisis and low consumption, this is not surprising. A number of the businesses have been closed or sold due to lack of revenue, such as an amusement arcade and a restaurant; others occasionally still make a small income, but respondents claim that the revenue is nowhere near enough to sustain a living. This is the case for e.g. a transportation business and auto repairs.

A few of the businesses have – despite the difficult economic context – proved to be sustainable over the longer term and are still making a good income, providing a sustainable livelihood.

> A young woman, provider for a family of five, was assisted in starting up her own hairdressing salon in Prishtina/Pristina. She had some training from her period in Denmark and knew what she wanted to do. There is a lot of competition in the area, and she says that "there are periods where I don't have anything to do – it goes up and down", but she is managing well, and has been able to employ another woman in the salon.
>
> (Case #3)

As an alternative option, returnees were offered job placement. This consisted of contracts made with private companies, usually for a 12 months period. The returnees received a subsidy paid through APPK for the first 6 months, while the employer agreed to pay the salary for the remaining period of the contract. Whether employment continued beyond the agreed period depended on the mutual satisfaction of both employer and employee. One of the advantages of co-operation with a local partner such as APPK is their extensive network of private companies throughout Kosovo, and APPK made promising results within a relatively short period of time facilitating employment for the returnees. However, looking beyond the initial agreements with the companies, some returnees were faced with problems vis-à-vis the employer.

> A young man who was assisted in finding work in a restaurant through the job placement scheme was let go without apparent reason after the initial six months' employment subsidised by APPK, despite an agreement with the restaurant to the contrary.
>
> (Case #13)
>
> A father, provider for a family of four, was employed in a meat production company with the support of APPK. He later lost the job due to general reductions in staff, though he did manage to keep it for almost three years, which must be considered rather successful given the high unemployment in Kosovo. After the initial six months, where his salary was paid through APPK, the company started paying him with sausages and other meat products instead of the agreed salary.
>
> (Case #1)

The two cases above illustrate some of the problems that returnees have encountered under the job placement scheme. It is however important to understand that employment assistance can – rather

than securing a job for the returnee – only be expected to provide opportunities for income generation depending on the abilities, approach and personal connections of the respective returnee. The longer-term impact and success of the intervention is therefore highly dependent on the individual's ability to seize the opportunity.

> After initial discussions with APPK, a young woman who was living with her parents was offered a job placement in a store. She has been working there since her return, and is very grateful for the assistance. "If it was not for them, I would still be without a job. It is very difficult to get a job here when you don't know anyone." Besides the job, she is just about to finish secondary school, and has plans to continue her studies at the university. Her manager at the store encourages her studies, and has indicated that they will be willing to help her to a better position once she has completed them.
>
> (Case #15)

> Another example of successful job placement is a Bosnian man, provider for a family of five. With the support of APPK he was able to get his former job back at a Water Supply company, where he is still working. The returnee explains that his former employer knew him as a good worker, and that he was able to get the job back "mostly because his boss knew him." He believes that he might have gotten the job back even without the support of APPK, but that the support and subsidies definitely helped the process.
>
> (Case #2)

Against a background of very high unemployment in Kosovo, the two returnees above both express great appreciation for the support provided, which has secured them a stable income since their return to Kosovo, apparently with a good chance that it will continue to do so in the future.

A third option offered under the programme in terms of income generation targeted returnees that were unable to generate an income due to illness or old age. These cases were offered livestock or similar as livelihood support, such as cows or support to grow vegetables. In some cases, the items provided were subsequently sold to meet more urgent needs such as the costs of necessary medication (e.g. Case #8; Case #16, Case #12). In others – primarily returnees in a better situation due to support from family members – the items provided continue to contribute to the household budget (e.g. Case #14; Case #4).

With the exception of a few returnees who have been able to successfully build on and benefit from the employment assistance over the longer term, the returnees generally share a negative perception of their capacity to sustain a livelihood under the current circumstances. The majority are still highly vulnerable and generally lack prospects for the future. A number of them report that they have no income whatsoever and that they are living from occasional support from relatives abroad and temporary jobs. Others depend entirely on relatives in Kosovo. The findings generally indicate a low level of subjective economic sustainability of return.[39] In assessing the importance and effect of the assistance, it is however important to note that when looking at the durability of the employment support provided by the programme, many of the cases did manage to generate an income for a considerable period of time after returning. An assessment done in May 2009, which followed up on all the cases, shows that several returnees were at that time still earning an income based on either IG-grants, job placements secured through the programme or the business start-up scheme.

39 In this connection, it should be noted that a common problem in these types of studies is that respondents report a lower income than is actually the case. The evaluation is not able to obtain objective information of the actual income of the returnees, so it must rely on the accounts of the respondents.

Though concerning, considering contextual factors such as the extremely high degree of unemployment and levels of poverty in Kosovo it is not surprising that a substantial number of the returnees today find themselves in unemployment. Whereas the accounts of the returnees indicate a low level of subjective socio-economic sustainability, their position may not be objectively unsustainable in comparison with the general population. The majority of returnees are of the impression that they have not been disadvantaged in terms of finding employment in comparison to other people. Most point to the general economic crisis and unemployment as the primary reasons for their situation. However, a number of the minority returnees mentioned their inability to speak the majority language as an additional obstacle to finding employment.

Political sustainability

Assessing the political sustainability of the returns involves looking at access to public services, such as health care and education, and links to the provided assistance, as well as evaluating the perceived and actual level of security and freedom of movement. Programme support regarding access to public services included post-return medical support and mainstreaming into public health services, psychosocial reintegration support, catch-up classes and language training for minors, as well as social activities and networking. The poor standard of the health care sector in Kosovo, inequality in access to the public educational system, continued ethnic tensions, and also experiences in the host country all contribute to the difficulties of ensuring preconditions for reintegration and the political sustainability of returns. Subjective accounts on the part of the returnees are supplemented with background interviews with stakeholders, recent surveys and reports, as well as relevant laws regulating the respective areas of concern.

Access to health care: Sustainability of medical assistance

Despite investments to renovate facilities and the capacity building of medical staff, the public health care system in Kosovo remains one of the most pressing challenges in Kosovo. The health care sector is unable to meet the required standards and is characterised by a lack of adequate pharmacies, limited and poorly maintained medical equipment, low quality service, and the widespread engagement of medical staff in both public and private institutions in various forms of corruption.[40] In recognition of the poor standard of the public health care system in Kosovo and the overarching medical and psychosocial needs of the returnees from Denmark, medical and psychosocial support were provided alongside general capacity building of the health sector in Kosovo as part of the programme in mid-2007.

In general, the findings indicate that many of the returnees were grateful for the medical support provided by KRCT upon return. Several were diagnosed and in treatment in Denmark at the time of return, and supplying the returnees with continued treatment for a period of time appears to have been of great importance for a "safe landing" in Kosovo. A number of the returnees explain that by the end of the programme, they were no longer in need of medical support – their main problems having been related to the stress connected with return and the challenges of adjusting to the new environment and reality (e.g. Case #9, Case #10). In these cases, the careful follow-up and availability of KRCT staff was both helpful and appreciated.

Others however are still affected by traumatic experiences from wartime as well as experiences related to the asylum period, and some suffer from serious psychiatric conditions. Though appreciative of the initial support from KRCT, they expressed frustration with the interruption of the treatment (e.g. Case #12; Case #7). In one particular case, the end of the programme and the end of medical support from KRCT was itself a shock:

40 BIRN (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network) 2009: "Report on Kosovo's Health Care System", Pristina, November 2009.

A returnee expresses his disappointment with the interruption of medical support to his wife by comparing it to "…cutting a patient open, and then just leaving".

The family is at a loss with regard to her continued treatment. They are worried about deviating from the medical treatment initiated by KRCT, fearing that her condition will become worse, but they are not in a position to have her condition reassessed due to the economic costs involved.

(Case #12)

Generally, the respondents feel that they cannot rely on the public health care system for their medical needs. They complain that they have to pay for everything; that when they show up for an appointment they are sometimes redirected to private clinics without any apparent reason; and that the necessary medication is not available in the public system despite the commitments that have been made. Current and potential future medical costs constitute a great concern for the majority of returnees.

The programme made great efforts to ensure the sustainability of its interventions by mainstreaming the cases into the existing public health care system. However, public health care institutions in Kosovo are currently unable to meet the required standards. The problems described by the respondents are generally confirmed by a study conducted by BIRN investigating standards at primary, secondary and tertiary health institutions across the country in 2009 (BIRN 2009), indicating that the issues described by the returnees are problems faced by the population as a whole. Efforts to mainstream the returnees into the public system and to ensure continued access to the needed medical assistance and treatment were contingent on available public services. The Executive Director of KRCT, Feride Rushiti, explains that despite considerable efforts to ensure continued treatment after the end of the programme, it was difficult to achieve sustainability for the interventions given the state of the public health care system:

"(W)e were trying to refer them to relevant doctors in the public system, but how many of the doctors ensured proper treatment is another question (…) since we know that the health care system is now suffering a lot…" Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims, MD Executive Director, Feride Rushiti, 24 September 2010

In recognition of the general state of the health care system, the programme sought to contribute to much-needed, longer-term institutional capacity building of the public health care system. The programme provided substantial improvements to health institutions in Kosovo primarily through capacity building of medical staff in the mental health sector. However, ensuring a commitment by the Ministry of Health beyond the duration of the programme was a challenge. While the centres faced challenges for a period of time due to budget constraints, the Ministry of Health has since allocated funding for the continued support of the Community Mental Health Clinics.

Securing the longer-term sustainability of capacity-building efforts is inherently difficult. The capacity-building interventions were based on a predominantly functional approach, focusing on skills training and technical assistance to medical staff in the mental health sector. While this was much-needed assistance, it can be argued that to ensure sustainability and lasting impact, the intervention may need to better integrate a political approach aimed at improving the institutional and political environment.

Psychosocial support

Kosovo has undergone a rapid cultural transition in recent years that has caused the disintegration of social support networks. Both refugees returning from asylum countries in Western Europe and the wider population generally experience a changed society, and find it difficult to adjust. In addition, the Kosovo population – including many returnees – is still struggling with the effects of wartime. A study conducted by KRCT in collaboration with Kosovo's Ministry of Health, DRC and the World Psychiatric Association reveals that the occurrence of PTSD, depression and emotional distress in post-war Kosovo remains high. In addition to these difficulties, many returnees are negatively affected by their experiences in asylum countries. [41]

In recognition of the difficult transition process, apart from medical and psychiatric assistance, the programme also provided extensive psychosocial support through KRCT, including family therapy and re-adaptation and reintegration support for children (such as catch-up classes, language training and social activities). According to KRCT, and as also observed by APPK, the restrictive living conditions in asylum centres had resulted in a passive attitude among returnees, further complicating the challenging reintegration process. Feride Rushiti explains how she sees the consequences of the conditions during the asylum period:

> "(T)he internally displaced in Kosovo had to be creative, they developed coping mechanisms to overcome the challenges. For those who lived in Western Europe, they had shelter, they had water…(…) They had a lack of capacity, because they had stayed for period of time in a place where everything was provided for them." Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims, MD Executive Director, Feride Rushiti, 24 September 2010

Having been held for several years in passivity in asylum centres, many returnees were initially incapable of taking responsibility for their situation. They were unwilling to accept the new situation, and were hoping – and in some cases expecting, supported by continued contact with lawyers in Denmark – to return. The shock of being unwillingly returned to Kosovo after many years in Denmark contributed to the state of paralysis in which many returnees found themselves during the first period.

> A returnee and father of three describes how the whole family felt bewildered and lost after returning to Kosovo. They were surprised and shocked about being returned, and the children worried about their parents, who are both suffering from serious illnesses. He explains that in the beginning they felt paralysed and "did not have the energy to go to school or to find a job…"
>
> (Case #14)

Thus, a main challenge for DRC's partner organization KRCT was to help the returnees come to terms with the new reality and to take responsibility for their situation. To help facilitate reintegration, the programme supported networking among returnees from Denmark through social activities gathering the group. Many of the returnees had lost their social networks while in the host country, and having been away for many years also meant having missed out on the extensive changes the society had gone through. Experiences from repatriation programmes and earlier findings from evaluating this programme suggest that encouraging a social network between returnees can help them to find their feet in the new reality (DRC 2008: 34; DFID / Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2009: 33). Equally important, however, is the process of establishing new social contacts and networks in the

41 KRCT, Ministry of Health, Danish Refugee Council, WPA, "Long-Term Sequels of War, Social Functioning and Mental Health in Kosovo", Pristina, 2005.

local environment. Whereas a network of returnees in the same situation can undoubtedly help to create a feeling of community and support at the beginning, it can also be said to risk prolonging the transition and adaptation period.

The network of returnees encouraged by the programme appears to have played a positive role in the sense that it provided a feeling of security and community to the group of returnees – children and adults – upon return. On the negative side, KRCT staff mention that the close-knit network of returnees helped to sustain the hope and expectation that they might be able to return to Denmark. Many returnees kept contacts with lawyers and acquaintances in Denmark who in KRCT's opinion were *"creating false expectations"* (Interview KRCT, Sep. 2010). Sharing the information flow from Denmark, the network of returnees fed each other's hopes of return, and together created a space were they could hold on to their experience of being different from their surrounding community. Today, only a few of the returnees have regular contact since the group is spread across Kosovo.

Judging from the subjective accounts of the returnees, many still feel lost in a changed Kosovo society. A common experience is that people have changed, that they are absorbed with their own problems and do not have the energy to help each other (e.g. Case #2; Case #11; Case #16). Even though many returnees have established social relationships, these often do not appear to extend beyond family relations. However, it is worth mentioning that whereas the period in the asylum country undoubtedly adds to the difficulties of adjusting to a changed Kosovo society, the results of a study of social functioning and mental health in Kosovo suggest that the traumatic events during wartime, combined with a severe economic situation, high rates of unemployment and poverty and the rapid cultural transition have affected the social functioning of the population as a whole (KRCT et al. 2005: 48).

Access to education: Politics and tradition

In principle, legislation in the area of education[42] provides comprehensive rights for minority communities in Kosovo. These rights include the right to public education at all levels in either Albanian or Serbian, which are the two official languages in Kosovo, as well as public education – pre-school, primary and secondary – in their own language for students belonging to communities whose mother tongue is not an official language, and living in areas predominantly inhabited by their community. According to the legislation applied, minority students are obliged to study one of the two official languages to ensure preconditions for integration. In practice, however, public education in Kosovo suffers from a conflict over authority and physical separation of the educational system, as well as the unavailability of primary and lack of secondary education textbooks in minority languages. In addition, the possibilities for Albanian language training for non-Albanian communities appear to be both insufficient and inadequate.

All respondents belonging to minority communities reported problems with the public educational system as a major concern. In line with the general problems described above, respondents experience poor quality public primary schools, and particularly in rural areas reported no access at all to a local public school due to the limited number of students at the relevant level.

42 Government of Kosovo 2008: "Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and their Members in Kosovo" adopted on March 13th 2008.

A returnee from a remote village complains that the school where his children are attending is of very bad quality. The children only attend 3 hours per day and never have any homework. Currently, his older daughter is not attending school, since there are not enough children at her level in the area. The small village school has three different directors, representing the Albanians, Serbs and Bosniaks respectively, and he feels that political problems are negatively affecting the quality and management of the school.

(Case #11)

Several respondents belonging to minority communities report that the level of Albanian language training in the public school, if it exists at all, is not sufficient to equip students with adequate language skills. With the population segregated into more or less ethnically homogenous communities, sustained by both perceived and actual lack of freedom of movement, the children have little opportunity to practice their language skills.

A returnee, mother of two school-aged children, explains that her children attend the local school in the Bosnian language. They have some Albanian language training in the school, but having spent five years in Denmark, where the children were learning Danish rather than Albanian, they do not communicate well in the majority language. The village is predominantly Bosnian, and the returnee explains that “the whole village speaks Bosnian and contact with other kids is also in Bosnian, so they don’t learn.”

(Case #1)

Inadequate Albanian language training and opportunities to practice, coupled with the years spent in Denmark where for many of the children learning Danish took priority over maintaining or learning a majority language, means that many children belonging to minority communities are not able to communicate in languages other than their respective mother tongue. For a number of them, the inability to master the majority language means that opportunities for secondary and tertiary education are limited.

Adding to the complexity, the public educational system is the scene of ethno-political battles that affect both the quality of and actual options for education, which contributes to the limited access to secondary education for minority children. Over the longer term, their lack of language skills and limited access to further education places minority students at a competitive disadvantage compared with majority students, adding to the isolation of minority communities and hampering the longer-term chances of employment and integration.

A family belonging to the Gorani community describes how the only option for the older daughter to continue school is a Serbian curriculum secondary school primarily attended by Gorani children. The daughter does not speak Albanian, and therefore cannot go to the closer secondary school in the nearby town. However, the father worries about sending her to the Serbian-curriculum school, since they prefer not to be affiliated with Serbs due to the political situation.

(Case #11)

Another Gorani family living in an ethnically-mixed area explains that they would prefer to send their children to the public school in a nearby town, where they can attend classes in their own language. However, they are reluctant to do so since they fear making enemies in their community by not prioritising the majority language.

(Case #12)

The above cases illustrate the sensitive political environment in which the returnees are manoeuvring. Although the respondents gave relatively few accounts of restrictions on freedom of movement or fear of ethnic-substantiated discrimination and persecution, ethnicity remains a critical factor in all areas of society.

All of the abovementioned concerns are confirmed in a study conducted by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo in 2009, indicating that the challenges and problems faced by the respondents are not specific to the return population.[43] The problems experienced in terms of access to public services nevertheless negatively influence political sustainability and point to a need for a general and longer-term institutional capacity building effort. Respondents belonging to the Albanian majority did not mention problems related to primary and secondary schooling.

More closely related to the asylum period in Denmark, and a problem experienced by most families with school-age children, was the insufficient documentation about school attendance during the years of asylum. DRC assisted the families by providing documentation from the Red Cross School, which in most cases initially helped the children to be allowed to attend school in Kosovo and place them at the right level. However, the problems stemming from the years of Red Cross school attendance extend beyond lack of proper documentation for the school years attended in Denmark, and appear to have a longer-term effect on the available opportunities and (re)-integration of the children.

The test allowing students to continue in high school builds on the curriculum from the Fifth Class upwards. Missing out on some of these years therefore means that pupils have difficulties passing the test that allows further education. Since the diploma from the Red Cross school does not indicate grades or proof of test results but merely summarises which subjects were attended, it is not accepted as alternative and legitimate documentation.

43 OSCE 2009: "Kosovo non-majority communities within the primary and secondary educational system", April 2009.

> The oldest daughter in a Bosniak family explains that she has always been a very good student, but having been away for a period of five years meant that she was not able to pass the test for entering nursing school after finishing primary school. At the moment, she sees no prospects for further education.
>
> (Case #2)

> Another young woman from a Bosniak family, who was 17 years old upon return and had finished primary school in Denmark during the period of asylum, was not able to continue in high school in Kosovo due to lack of proper documentation and test results from primary school. She is now married.
>
> (Case #14)

Many of the families describe a range of obstacles to further education for their children. However, the low number of (especially) girls from minority communities who continue in secondary schooling seems also to be influenced by the traditions in the respective communities. In some minority communities, women traditionally do not to attend schooling beyond primary school, and are not expected to work outside the home.

This evaluation is not in a position to assess to what extent tradition is really the key reason for the low number of girls continuing in secondary schooling. Interestingly, most respondents were not ready to openly attribute lack of further education to tradition, rather explaining things – in some cases in somewhat contradictory terms – with the list of obstacles described above. A reasonable explanation for this could be that the respondents – with their knowledge of Danish culture and norms – seek to present to the Danish interviewer what they believe to be socially acceptable reasons for the lack of their daughters' continued education. This consideration mirrors well the clash between the Danish educational system that the girls have been exposed to while in Denmark, and the reality upon return in close-knit minority communities. The case below represents one example of this clash between self-image constructed while in Denmark and expectations and traditional values in the return community:

> After completing the interview, a Bosniak returnee and father of three explains that his oldest daughter, who had started high school in Denmark before they returned, had dreamed of becoming a hairdresser. She pursued it for a little while after returning, but gave up since none of the other girls in the village were working. She now lives with her parents in the village and helps out with the housework.
>
> (Case #14)

Freedom of movement: Safety and security issues

Kosovo Albanians make up the overwhelming majority of the population of Kosovo[44] but are a minority in the northern part of Kosovo. The main minority groups are Kosovo Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks, Turks, Gorani, Ashkali, Egyptians, and Croats. Serbs are concentrated in northern areas of the northern district of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, where they constitute the majority. Despite concerns about a deterioration of the situation for minorities in Kosovo following the declaration of independence in February 2008, there have been no major incidents targeting minority communities and no further large-scale displacement. With much of the population segregated into more or less ethnically homogenous communities, reports of targeted ethnic violence have generally decreased.

44 UK Home Office, Country of Origin Information Key Documents: Kosovo, 27 October 2009, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ae801732.html.

However, based on reports on restrictions to freedom of movement and to the exercise of fundamental human rights, as well as on threats and physical violence, UNHCR continues to consider Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians who inhabit areas where they are in the minority, and Kosovo Roma inhabiting any part of Kosovo groups at risk of persecution. In addition, due to their ethnic characteristics, the Ashkali and Egyptian minority communities risk being confused with Kosovo Roma and should have their asylum claim evaluated carefully (UNHCR 2009: p. 17-18).

In this evaluation, a few minority (Bosniak and Ashkali) cases mention safety and freedom of movement as an issue of concern.[45]

> A Bosniak woman says that she is fearful of speaking her own language outside their community. She says she realises that "probably nothing would happen" but she cannot let go of her fear.
>
> (Case #1)
>
> The oldest daughter in an Ashkali family explains that while relations with the Albanian majority have improved, they still do not feel welcome, and are not convinced that things will not change for the worse. They feel confined to their community, and do not move around much.
>
> (Case #5)

In most cases, safety concerns do not appear to be an issue. Most respondents have returned to well-known communities and do not report considerable changes in their immediate environment. However, most of the minority cases do not appear to move much beyond their own communities. Regardless of a general opinion that there are no safety and security issues, the various communities seem relatively confined to their own communities and do not move about much. It is also worth mentioning that though they expressed no fear about the current situation, several respondents articulated uncertainty and insecurity regarding the future (e.g. Case #12; Case #7).

Physical sustainability

Assessing the physical sustainability of the returns implies looking at the level of actual re-migration, as well as subjective accounts of desires and plans for re-migration. In addition, this section looks at the level of psychosocial embeddedness and reintegration as an indicator for physical sustainability.

Traditionally, migration has been high in Kosovo, and many Kosovans have family and relatives abroad. Economic crisis, high unemployment and widespread poverty currently influences the migration rate in Kosovo, and recent studies reveals that more than 16% of households in Kosovo plan to migrate in the near future.[46] When looking at re-migration rates as an indicator for the success of return assistance, one must therefore also take into account the general situation in the receiving country.

Actual re-migration[47]

A number of the cases returned under the programme have chosen to re-migrate (16 cases out of a total of 34 assisted cases) to neighbouring countries or to Western Europe, some having succeeded in obtaining family reunification or humanitarian permits either in Denmark or elsewhere. These cases were offered the same comprehensive re-integration assistance as the remaining caseload.

45 A reasonable assumption could be that those most in fear of persecution may tend to be over-represented among those who have chosen to re-migrate. However, based on regular monitoring and follow-up on all cases assisted under the programme, DRC has knowledge of only a few cases where security was an underlying reason for re-migration.

46 USAID/UNDP 2010: "Kosovo Remittance Study"

47 The following section will only offer a brief description of the characteristics of the cases, based on the information provided in relation to their return. No additional interviews have been conducted for this evaluation.

The re-migration cases are comprised of predominantly single person cases. 11 out of a total of 16 re-migrated cases are single person cases (two female and nine male), whereas four cases are couples with children and one case a couple without children. Compared to the assessment done in relation to the publication "Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of rejected Asylum Seekers" (DRC 2008: p.36-37) published in May 2008, when 23 individuals had re-migrated, an additional nine individuals have since chosen to re-migrate, bringing the total number of re-migrated individuals up from 23 to 32 by October 2010 out of the total of 89 assisted individuals.

The high number of re-migrated single person cases tentatively suggests that the decision to move on is easier when there are fewer considerations about family members. This is somewhat unsurprising and is in line with findings from other studies (e.g. Black 2004: 37). Such a thesis is also backed by the reflections of families interviewed, many of whom express concern about the potential stress and pressure related to re-migration and the impact on the well-being of their children or spouse and on their family life (e.g. Case #12; Case #2).

At the same time, the predominance of single persons among the re-migrated cases may also indicate that it is more difficult to complete the reintegration process and achieve a feeling of belonging without the support of a family – and conversely that the process is positively influenced by the joint effort of a family to ensure socio-economic and psycho-social well-being upon return. As summarised above, a recent study that examines factors determining the embeddedness of forced-return migrants concludes that as a general feature, families with children (along with middle-aged migrants and people with higher education) are better able to establish themselves upon return (Ruben et al. 2009: 930).

As described in the above-mentioned publication, the reasons for re-migration are manifold: family reunification; seeking employment opportunities abroad; health concerns; or mere unwillingness to remain in Kosovo (DRC 2008). Indicatively, returnees remaining in Kosovo generally speak of those who have re-migrated as having 'succeeded' rather than saying that they failed to reintegrate. This gives a clear picture of the challenges to a return assistance programme targeting returnees who had no intention to return in the first place and therefore cannot be expected to want to remain.

Re-migration: Aspirations and plans

Looking at the subjective physical sustainability of return in the remaining cases, findings reveal a general desire to leave the country. The majority state that if they had the opportunity to do so, they would go abroad again. The reason for wanting to go abroad is predominantly to improve their economic situation (e.g. Case #16; Case #5), followed by concern for children who are having problems adjusting to their life in Kosovo (e.g. Case #14; Case #7). Other reasons include better education opportunities for the children, security in terms of health care, and in a few cases safety and freedom of movement. In addition, some cases mention that they did not willingly return to Kosovo, and that they have no intention of staying if it is at all possible to leave.

However, only a few of the cases appear to be making concrete plans to re-migrate. Several returnees mention that they will not once again expose their family to the stressful and emotionally difficult process of seeking asylum, but will await a situation where Kosovans can travel freely in Europe. Others claim that financial limitations are the only thing keeping them in Kosovo.

A returnee explains that he would leave again without thinking twice, but not for procedures such as they experienced in Denmark. Emotionally it was too hard on them, and he would not expose his family to that again.

(Case #12)

Another returnee says that he plans to move to Denmark again in the future, but that he will wait till it is possible to move freely and obtain a work permit. He explains that after nine years in Denmark, he knows the Danish people and the Danish language, and he feels confident that it would be easy for him to find a job there.

(Case #13)

A young man states that "I would not stay even an hour, if I could leave", and elaborates by explaining that "it [Kosovo] is a place where I don't want to stay (…) You can only be damaged if you stay". However, he does not have the means to leave, and does not think that is likely to change in the near future.

(Case #9)

Only a few cases claim to be content living in Kosovo (e.g. Case #3). Not surprisingly, those who say they are content to stay in Kosovo are predominantly those who have succeeded in sustaining a livelihood and are therefore in a better economic situation. In some of those cases, however, the children were not necessarily of the same opinion, and the evaluation team met several examples of children intending to re-migrate as soon as they are old enough to make the decision on their own. Among those who are not intending to re-migrate are also elderly people without the resources or strength to make another attempt (e.g. Case #8).

Many respondents did not understand the decision to return them, and some believe they have been unjustly returned. Continued contact with Danish lawyers after return seems in some cases to have reinforced their conviction that return to Denmark is a possibility. A common belief expressed by the respondents is that they somehow failed to prove worthy, and the findings indicate that they generally lack an understanding of the background for the rejection of asylum.

A Bosnian man, father of three children, describes how he and his friend – another returnee from Denmark – often discuss what they were doing wrong when in Denmark. They feel that they made great effort to integrate. They never did anything wrong and find the decision to return them unfair. "We are always analysing and thinking: "What went wrong? Since Denmark returned us, what did we do wrong?"

(Case #2)

The above example points to the need for a thorough counselling process prior to return, diminishing the risk of creating false expectations and misunderstandings regarding alternatives to return. The intended counselling and preparation process under this programme was cut short by a revision of UNHCR's position on return to Kosovo, which accelerated the return of rejected cases.

Psychosocial embeddedness and (re)-integration

Apart from explicit statements on the desire to re-migrate, many returnees express varying degrees of lack of belonging. A general picture is that even though many of the returnees have established social relationships, often these do not extend beyond family relations, and their participation in the community appears limited at best.

Particularly pronounced for children and youth, the change in geographic and cultural setting has resulted in a feeling of being 'in between' and of not belonging anywhere. Many respondents say that their children are still having problems adjusting to their lives in Kosovo (e.g. Case #2; Case #7; Case #11). For some, the hope of returning to Denmark is still very present, kept alive in part by parents who have not given up the idea of being allowed back. The children do not feel at home in Kosovo: they feel different from the other children, they have difficulties communicating, and they compare their conditions, situations and experiences in Kosovo against a Danish context. All the indications are that after a period of approximately four years, they have still not managed to properly adjust to and integrate into their new environment.

A returnee and father explains that his two children, who are now 13 and 17 years old, have found it difficult to adjust to village life and find new friends. He says: "They do not communicate so well. They do not communicate with the other children here in the village – they prefer to have contact with other children from Denmark on the Internet." The children keep comparing their life with how things were in Denmark, and still have one foot there. The younger of the two – a son – has proclaimed that he will leave Kosovo as soon as he turns 18.

(Case #2)

The results of the evaluation indicate that whereas it was initially very difficult for the youngest children to adjust to their new environment – often due to language problems – it is today generally the older children that experience the most serious adaptation problems.

The older children experienced the Danish educational system during their stay in Denmark; some made plans for their future career and are now faced with a very different reality. As illustrated, several of the girls – primarily from minority communities – do not have opportunities to attend schooling beyond primary school, and are faced with the expectations and requirements dictated by tradition and culture in their community in Kosovo. In some cases, these expectations clash with the young people's "hybrid identities" and self-image established during the years they spent in Denmark, which contributes to frustration and the feeling of not belonging. Some of these older children have maintained their Danish language, hoping that they will one day return.

A father of three describes how his two older children speak Danish among themselves, as well as regularly writing emails to friends in Denmark to maintain the language. They had more friends in Denmark than they have in Kosovo, and they often talk about the time they spent there. The family does not have much of a social network in the village apart from relatives who live nearby.

(Case #11)

The above findings were generally confirmed by the focus groups with children and youth. The group of younger children (10-14 years old) remembers the time upon return as difficult. They did not have any friends and had problems with the language. Today they generally seem more integrated, do not have any contact with friends in Denmark and are happy with school. Due to their young age upon return, most have also forgotten the Danish language.[48] By contrast, the older children (15-19 years old) express a great deal of frustration with their lives in Kosovo. They feel that their opportunities are limited, and complain that the social life in Kosovo is not good. Many of them do not see their future in Kosovo, but hope to be able to go abroad for studies and work.[49]

48 Focus group 10-14 years old, October 23rd 2010.
49 Focus group 15-19 years old, October 23rd 2010.

Whereas the group of older children seem to be facing the most serious obstacles adjusting to life in Kosovo, the findings suggest that reintegration comes more easily to elderly returnees. This is not surprising, since compared to the children they have spent by far the larger part of their lives in Kosovo, and they generally have a stronger belonging and attachment to the locality. Apart from having been accustomed to a certain living standard and in particular to the level and quality of health care in Denmark, they have generally not found it a difficult adjustment to return. Their social network and neighbours are more or less the same as before the left, and they have grown children nearby who are supporting them (e.g. Case #4; Case #6; Case #8).

Looking both at actual re-migration, the desire to re-migrate and belonging, the findings of the evaluation generally point to a low subjective physical sustainability of return. Taking into account the fact that all of the cases were unwillingly returned, as well as the high percentage of people wanting to re-migrate in the population as a whole, these findings are not surprising. However, more worrying is the apparent consequences of the period in the host country to the group of older children, and their pronounced lack of belonging in Kosovo.

5. Conclusions & Recommendations

As this evaluation was conducted 3-4 years after the actual return, it offers unique insights into the longer-term sustainability of the returns of rejected asylum seekers from Kosovo, and the problems faced by returnees in Kosovo today. With the primary aim of learning how best to assist the returnees in the difficult re-adaptation and reintegration process and to provide recommendations to future return assistance programmes for rejected asylum seekers, this evaluation has focused on establishing potential linkages between the current situation of the returnees and the assistance provided, identifying key drivers and key obstacles to the reintegration process, and providing recommendations for future interventions.

Longer-term impact of returns assistance

Social-economic sustainability

Looking first at the general living conditions of the returnees, more than half of the cases today perceive themselves as depending on relatives for accommodation. Despite formal agreements and contracts for the usage of a relative's property, a number of returnees express insecurity about the durability of this solution. A few who were provided with independent housing by the programme claim that the current standard of the house does not allow them to live there, due to rapid dilapidation. To ensure the sustainability of housing interventions, these findings emphasise the need for a revision of the standards outlined in the Manual for Sustainable Return. Results indicate that the returnees generally perceive independent housing as a key precondition to their successful reintegration, and that insecurity in terms of accommodation negatively influences feelings of belonging.

When assessing the impact of the return assistance and the sustainability of the interventions, it is however important to note that for a majority of the cases, the housing support provided by the programme did – as well as securing housing solutions upon return – constitute an improvement compared to their housing situation prior to leaving Kosovo. Furthermore, when seen in the context of general housing conditions in Kosovo, the group of returnees do not appear to be significantly disadvantaged.

Turning to employment and income generation, the majority of returnees are still highly vulnerable and generally share a negative perception of their capacity to sustain a livelihood. Many are partly reliant on occasional support from relatives abroad and temporary employment, and some depend entirely on relatives in Kosovo. Others have managed to benefit or build on the employment support provided and are able to provide for themselves. Despite the general negative perception of economic sustainability, the programme did manage to secure employment and income for the majority of returnees for a considerably period of time upon return. Though the evaluation did not find significant links between the employment assistance and the current situation of the returnees in the majority of cases in the sense that the assistance provided has led to a stable and continued income, the assistance has without doubt played an important role in the difficult transition period and has helped them to restart life in Kosovo.

The lack of employment among the group of returnees must also be seen in the context of general unemployment amongst the Kosovan population as a whole. Whereas the accounts of the returnees indicate a low level of subjective socio-economic sustainability, their position may not be objectively unsustainable in comparison with the general population. This is supported by the fact that the majority of the returnees point to economic crisis and unemployment as the primary reason for their situation. In other words, they do not feel disadvantaged or in a worse position than the general population in Kosovo. However, the difficult economic situation in Kosovo, high unemployment and

widespread poverty are all factors that emphasise the importance and relevance of comprehensive socio-economic reintegration support.

Political sustainability

The poor standard of the health care sector in Kosovo, shortcomings within the public educational school system in accommodating minority rights, and continued ethnic tensions all add to the challenges of ensuring preconditions for the political sustainability of returns. The returnees' general access to public services upon return – such as health care and education – as well as the perceived and actual level of security and freedom of movement must be seen in this light.

A considerable number of returnees were highly vulnerable and in need of treatment upon return, and returnees generally expressed great satisfaction and appreciation of the medical and psychosocial support provided. However, given the poor standard of the public healthcare services, despite efforts the programme was not able in all cases to ensure continued treatment after phasing out the programme support. For serious medical cases, the interruption in treatment was stressful, and medical care and costs continue to be a major concern for many returnees. In recognition of the poor standard of the public health care system in Kosovo – and in line with DRC programming recommendations – the programme combined support for returnees from Denmark with a general rebuilding effort contributing to much-needed, longer-term institutional capacity building of the health sector.

In addition to medical support, the programme encouraged a social network among returnees through various activities and social events. The findings indicate that whereas the feeling of community and support were initially helpful, it may also have helped to prolong the transition and adaptation period, leading returnees to hold on to the expectation and desire to return to Denmark and to insist on their common experience rather than re-establishing social relations in their respective communities.

Moving to access to education, all respondents belonging to minority communities reported that problems related to the public educational system are a major concern, and findings point to various general shortcomings in terms of access to public education for minority communities. Problems directly related to the stay in Denmark include the poor level of education in the Red Cross schools, a lack of proper documentation for education received, and specifically for minority children a gap in the mandatory language training in a majority language. These are all factors that complicate the reintegration process, limit access to further education, and hamper longer-term chances for employment and integration.

In terms of security and freedom of movement, the majority of the returnees did not express any pronounced concerns. However, the different ethnic groupings appear relatively confined to their own communities, and articulate insecurity about what the future may bring.

Most of the problems experienced by the returnees in terms of access to public services and freedom of movement are not specific to the returnee population. Nevertheless, lack of access to public services influences the sustainability of the return negatively, and points to a need for a general and longer-term institutional capacity building effort.

Physical sustainability

The evaluation offers a rare opportunity to assess the physical sustainability of return over the longer term. Out of 34 assisted cases, 16 cases have re-migrated at the time of writing. Those who have re-migrated are predominantly single person cases, on the one hand suggesting that the decision to move again is easier when there are no considerations about family members, and on the other hand that the reintegration process may be more difficult to achieve without the support of a family.

Reasons to re-migrate include family reunification, seeking employment opportunities and health concerns. DRC only has knowledge of a few cases where safety concerns appeared to be the main driving factor.

Among returnees currently in Kosovo, the findings point to a general desire to leave again, and a worrying tendency towards lack of belonging, indicating a low level of subjective physical sustainability of return. However, taking into consideration that all cases were unwillingly returned, as well as the high rates of people wanting to re-migrate in the population as a whole, these findings are not surprising. The predominant reasons for wanting to re-migrate are to improve the economic situation, followed by concern for children who are having serious difficulties readjusting to life in Kosovo. Older children in particular express frustration with their life in Kosovo and do not see their future there. Due to their lack of financial means and their unwillingness to expose their family again to the stressful experience of seeking asylum, not many of those who have not yet re-migrated appear to have concrete plans to re-migrate in future.

The findings suggest that the returnees generally lack understanding of the background to the rejection of their asylum claims, and some are convinced that the procedure in their case was subject to flaws. Seeing others in the same situation who have succeeded in re-migrating reinforces their conviction that return to Denmark would not be impossible. The findings of this evaluation underline the importance of allocating time and resources for a thorough counselling process prior to return, ensuring that the potential possibilities of a legal stay in the host country are assessed and carefully communicated.

Key drivers of and key obstacles to the reintegration process

Apart from the basic and necessary material support to restart life in Kosovo, successful return assistance provides opportunities that – depending on the abilities, resources and approach of the respective returnee – can be utilised and built upon. In other words, the reintegration process is strongly dependent on personal and contextual factors. The following section attempts to identify some of the factors that may lie behind trends in sustainability.

The evaluation finds that a key obstacle to the reintegration process is the lack of initiative and confidence that appears to characterise many of the returnees. The analysis above described how upon return, the returnees were perceived by partner organisations to be passive, dependent and incapable of taking responsibility for their situation. The restrictive living conditions in the asylum centres, coupled with the lack of opportunities to work, develop their skills and provide for their families had – according to KRCT and APPK – resulted in passivity and a pronounced lack of confidence and self-esteem. The findings of this evaluation suggest that for part of the group of returnees, this may still be the case even after a period of 3-4 years in Kosovo. They do not feel that the assistance was sufficient; they appear to be without perspectives or plans for the future; they are passive in terms of employment and income generation; and they feel that the municipality is not paying enough attention to their needs. The evaluation suggests that living conditions provided in the host country may have serious implications and could potentially damage the prospects for reintegration and embeddedness over the longer term.

An additional major obstacle to the reintegration process that contributes to this passive approach seems to be returnees' continued expectations that they will return to Denmark or re-migrate to another destination in Western Europe. Expectations and desires to re-migrate were pronounced among the group of returnees shortly after return, and this has been reaffirmed with this evaluation. Such expectations are strongly counterproductive to the reintegration process and contribute to a negative spiral of frustration and discontent.

By contrast, those returnees who are managing best display characteristics that are also key drivers for the reintegration process: pro-activeness and initiative. They have accepted that their lives are now in Kosovo, and have successfully utilised and built upon the reintegration assistance and the opportunities it provided. They have adapted their businesses to changes in the market; they seek further education and training to improve their skills and advance their employment opportunities; and they have proactively improved their living conditions, building upon the housing assistance provided.

One of the main challenges to return assistance programmes is to support the transition from waiting passively in the host country and to help facilitate the returnees to come to terms with the new reality, take responsibility for their situation and pro-actively respond to the challenges of re-adaptation and reintegration in Kosovo.

Most returnees appear to have strong family bonds, and for many of them, assistance and support from relatives in terms of for instance accommodation and financial support has been vital to the reintegration process. Family is not only crucial in terms of practical support to restart life in Kosovo, but is also key to feelings of belonging. Reunion with family members were mentioned in the baseline study conducted upon return as the main positive factor for those having returned to Kosovo.[50] However, many returnees' social relationships and networks do not appear to extend beyond family relations. Many display little engagement in the local community and do not seem able to rely on a social network to improve their life situation. The lack of a social network beyond family hampers their chances for a positive reintegration process and adds to the feeling of not belonging. In addition, the heavy reliance on family puts relationships under strain.

Whereas elderly returnees express the most pronounced feeling of belonging and engagement in their community, the findings of the evaluation point to a worrying tendency among returnee children and youth to display an obvious lack of integration and psychosocial embeddedness. For youth especially, the experiences they have had and the cultural influence they have been under during their stay in Denmark appear to be a serious obstacle to their successful reintegration in Kosovo. The clash between the self-image constructed while in Denmark and the expectations and traditional values in the return community constitutes a serious obstacle to the reintegration process.

The above findings point to a need for return assistance that focuses on recreating linkages between the returnee population and the receiving communities, and supports engagement and social networking in the local surroundings, leading to a greater feeling of belonging.

Recommendations for future programming

In sum, the findings of the evaluation illustrate the many challenges with which rejected asylum seekers are faced upon return and underline the importance of comprehensive return and reintegration measures in ensuring preconditions for sustainable return. While housing solutions, income generation and employment assistance and reintegration support for children are highlighted by many returnees as essential to their successful reintegration, the results also point to the importance of thorough counselling and preparation in the pre-return phase. They also emphasise the need to facilitate a re-adaptation process through psychosocial support and through interventions that accommodate social networking and engagement in local communities in order to increase feelings of belonging.

In addition to individual reintegration assistance, the findings point to a much-needed general institutional capacity building effort. Kosovo's economic difficulties, the poor standard of the health care sector, unequal access to the public educational system and continued ethnic tensions constitute

50 DRC, 2007: "Sustainable Return of Rejected Asylum Seekers from Denmark to Kosovo", Field Study – August 2007, Danish Refugee Council.

severe obstacles to the reintegration of the current and future caseload of rejected asylum seekers being returned to Kosovo from Western European host countries. In other words, there is still a great need for international funding and partnership with local and international NGOs to ensure sustainable return.

The findings of the evaluation confirm and substantiate the relevance of a number of general recommendations previously identified by a publication summarising lessons learned from Returns to Kosovo[51] as well as the guiding principles elaborated in the DRC position paper on "Returns from Denmark"[52], while at the same time pointing to more programme-specific recommendations and assistance gaps. The following briefly summarises recommendations for future programming.

General recommendations:

- **Advocate for a fair and efficient asylum-seeking procedure** that reduces the period of uncertainty and ensures a prompt clarification and decision on the asylum case. The findings of the evaluation suggest that a long period of passive waiting in the asylum centres hampers the chances for successful reintegration and sustainability of return.

- **Advocate for temporary residence for rejected asylum seekers that cannot be returned.** Rejected asylum seekers must return home quickly whenever possible, reducing the damaging time they spend in asylum centres. If rejected asylum seekers cannot be returned due to various practical obstacles, they should be granted a temporary residence permit quickly so that they can live normal daily lives, educate themselves and contribute to Danish society through work and self-support.

- Rejected asylum seekers and refugees whose residence permit has been withdrawn should be guaranteed the time and resources for a **thorough counselling process prior to return**, ensuring that the possibilities (or lack thereof) for a legal stay in the host country are assessed and carefully communicated, diminishing the risk of creating false expectations and misunderstandings regarding alternatives to return.

- In line with the recently revised DRC position paper "Returns from Denmark",[53] the evaluation supports the recommendation to **improve the possibilities for the accepted return option** for rejected asylum seekers and refugees whose residence permit has been withdrawn. In comparison with forcible return, the accepted return option offers a less traumatic return experience and allows for greater physical and psychological preparation for the return. It is important to recognise, however, that accepted return is nonetheless unwilling, and is experienced as such by returnees.

- **Advocate for asylum seekers' right to work**.[54] Results suggest that being held in passivity without the possibility to improve one's skills or gain work experience damages the prospects for socio-economic reintegration upon return, and decreases the chances for the sustainability of interventions.

- **Advocate for asylum seekers' right to independent living**. Asylum seekers should have control over their own daily lives, be as self-sufficient as possible, and their right to family life should be respected.

51 DRC, 2008: "Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of rejected Asylum Seekers", May 2008.
52 DRC, 2010: "Returns from Denmark. The Danish Refugee Council's position on the return of rejected asylum seekers and refugees whose residence permit has been withdrawn", May 18th 2010.
53 DRC, 2010: "Returns from Denmark. The Danish Refugee Council's position on the return of rejected asylum seekers and refugees whose residence permit has been withdrawn", May 18th 2010.
54 This is in line with DRC's general position and recommendations on asylum policy (http://flygtning.dk/om-dfh/det-mener-dfh/om-asylpolitikken/).

- **Advocate for access to public schools for children of asylum seekers**.[55] The findings point to a worrying tendency where the level of education offered to the children of asylum seekers causes problems upon return and limits opportunities for further education over the longer term.

- **Improve possibilities for language training for the children of asylum seekers**. This goes both for mother-tongue training and language training for minority children in potential majority languages in their country of origin. The lack of language skills and consequently their limited access to further education places minority children at a competitive disadvantage upon return in comparison with majority students, adds to the isolation of minority communities and hampers their longer-term chances for employment and integration.

Programme specific recommendations:

- Applying a **holistic approach**, taking into account all phases and dimensions of return, is paramount to ensuring pre-conditions for sustainable return. This involves **pre-return counselling and preparation, actual return assistance as well as reintegration support**. Differentiation in the return assistance, between those accepting return and those being forcibly returned, is counterproductive in terms of facilitating the reintegration process and risks increasing the likeliness of re-migration for those receiving a less comprehensive return package.

- Combine individual reintegration support with **institutional capacity building and environment building** in the receiving country in order to enhance the viability of the return process for individual returnees, and to alleviate the potential negative impact or destabilising effects of large numbers of returns from Western Europe on society as a whole.

- Apply a rights-based approach with emphasis on **empowering rights-holders (returnees)** to take responsibility for their own lives and to proactively seek to improve their situation, with the aim of strengthening the sustainability of interventions and mitigating the negative consequences of restrictive and undignified living conditions in the host country.

- Emphasise interventions that may assist in **creating linkages between the returnee population and the receiving communities**, and support engagement and social networking in the local surroundings to enhance the reintegration process and help increase the feeling of belonging.

- **Include older children/youth in training and income generation schemes** when possible, which will enhance their chances for employment and prospects for successful reintegration over the longer term.

As emphasised by a number of the above recommendations, the findings generally suggest that the possibilities for sustainable return are highly dependent on the conditions offered in the host country. Besides being potentially harmful to the asylum seekers' mental health and family life – as substantiated by recent research[56] - current restrictive policies that allow only for limited possibilities for independent living, work and education hamper prospects for reintegration and are likely to negatively influence the sustainability of return interventions.

55 This is in line with DRC's general position and recommendations on asylum policy (http://flygtning.dk/om-dfh/det-mener-dfh/om-asylpolitikken/)
56 Nielsen, S.S. et al, 2007: "Psykisk helbred blandt asylbørn i Danmark", Ugeskrift for Læger 169/43.

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