



# Advancing Alternative Migration Governance

## EU Exit Regimes in Practice: Sustainable Return and Reintegration

Deliverable 2.4

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## List of acronyms

AVR	Assisted Voluntary Return
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
BAMF	German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CESS	Center for Economic and Social Studies
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSAEM	Senegalese-German Centre for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration
DIMAK	German Information Centre on Migration, Vocational Training and Career
EMN	European Migration Network
ETTC	European Technology and Training Centre
EU	European Union
EUTF	Emergency Trust Fund for Africa
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
GMAC	German Centre for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
UNNM	United Nations Network on Migration
VHR	Voluntary Humanitarian Return

## 1. Introduction

Sustainable reintegration is a new term within exit governance. It emerged in the mid-2010s as a progression from the criticised notion of sustainable return that became prominent in the 1990s. Between the 1990s and 2010s several conceptualisations of sustainable return were developed – however, no one definition was ever mainstreamed across different actors. Marino and Lietart (forthcoming) provide a systematic overview of the evolution of sustainable return to sustainable reintegration. The authors argue that as of 2017 there is a normalisation of the term ‘sustainable reintegration’, which is denoted by the use of sustainable reintegration in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (henceforth referred to as the Global Compact), signed in 2018. Despite this normalisation, a precise definition of sustainable reintegration that is mainstreamed across actors continues to be elusive. However, its importance and significance within global migration governance has never been more prominent than at the current time.

Sustainable Reintegration is a key term and goal of the Global Compact. Objective 21 is dedicated to *‘Cooperat[ion] in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration’*. Objective 21 commits to:

- ‘Promote gender-responsive and child-sensitive return and reintegration programmes that may include legal, social and financial support, guaranteeing that (...) returning migrants are assisted in their reintegration process through effective partnerships, including to avoid their becoming displaced in the country of origin upon return’ (Action B);
- ‘Facilitate the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants into community life by providing them with equal access to social protection and services, justice, psychosocial assistance, vocational training, employment opportunities and decent work, recognition of skills acquired abroad, and financial services, in order to fully build upon their entrepreneurship, skills and human capital as active members of society and contributors to sustainable development in the country of origin upon return’ (Action H);
- And ‘Identify and address the needs of the communities to which migrants return by including respective provisions in national and local development strategies, infrastructure planning, budget allocations and other relevant policy decisions and cooperating with local authorities and relevant stakeholders’ (Action I).

In the Global Compact, Objective 21 considers sustainable reintegration as *‘conducive conditions for personal safety, economic empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion in communities’*. However, the Global Compact offers no precise definition or measurement of sustainable reintegration. We return to the conceptual ambiguity and lack of a commonly accepted definition of sustainable reintegration in section 2 of this report.

This report provides a comparative analysis of experiences of sustainable reintegration post-Exit in Albania, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Senegal. Following from ADMIGOV Deliverable 2.1 (Oomkens and Kalir, 2020), in this report we refer to Exit (with a capital E) as:

*'...the policies and practices that are aimed at having irregular migrants leave the territory of Member States of the European Union (EU) and of the EU as a whole. [...] By Exit regimes we refer to both the legal and operational infrastructure that governs Exit. Legal infrastructure refers to the formal procedures (laws, regulations, directives, readmission agreements, etc.) that, firstly, determine the illegalization of status for irregular migrants, and, secondly, outline the process that should result in their voluntary/assisted return or forced removal from EU territories. Operational infrastructure refers to the work of, and the investment in, state and non-state agencies responsible for the implementation of the process that is put forward by the legal infrastructure. The operational infrastructure thus includes agencies and organizations in charge of pre-removal detention, forced deportation, assisted and voluntary return programs, and partnership programs (p.7).'*

Specifically, this report examines:

- return migrants' decision-making regarding the acceptance or refusal of assisted voluntary return packages (AVR);
- return migrants' experiences since their return. In this analysis we seek, in particular, to understand whether migrants who are returned to their countries of origin via assisted voluntary return or forced removal are being sustainably reintegrated;
- in what ways reintegration processes are impacted by EU Exit regimes;
- and the post-Exit monitoring process.

We first provide an overview of terminology and a discussion of the emergence of sustainable reintegration, the uses of this term and its application within this report. The third section of the report provides background information on the cases of Albania, Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal. The fourth section describes the methodology used in the report and its limitations. The findings are presented in the following three sections after this: the fifth section examines return decision-making; the sixth, reintegration experiences; and the seventh, the impacts of EU policies. Finally the report concludes with a short summary and reflection on sustainable reintegration and policy recommendations.



## 2. Sustainable Reintegration: Definitions and Approaches

The European Migration Network (EMN) lists ‘sustainable reintegration’ as a synonym of ‘sustainable return’, defined in Box 1 (below). The EMN glossary further notes that ‘There are many definitions and approaches to describe the concept of sustainable return migration / reintegration’ and that ‘There are many different definitions at the global level and equally, policies and approaches among EU Member States vary widely.’ The EMN itself offers two definitions – as below, one for the global context, and another for the EU context. The lack of consensus regarding the conceptualisation of sustainable reintegration undermines effective policy development. Since one of the broader objectives of ADMIGOV Work Package 2 is to contribute to the conceptualisation and understanding of what determines a sustainable reintegration, the following section provides a brief overview of the definitional issues that have characterised the development and use of the terms ‘sustainable return’ and ‘sustainable reintegration.’

Before discussing sustainable reintegration in depth, it is important to provide a short note regarding the use of the term ‘assisted voluntary return’ in this report. Following from the EMN definitions provided in Box 1 (below) we use the term assisted voluntary return to reflect compliance with a return order and the receipt of logistical assistance for return. It is widely recognised that assisted voluntary return is often not an actual voluntary decision (Webber, 2011; Oeppen and Erdal, forthcoming). In recognising this problematic label, we consider assisted voluntary return as a policy category, rather than an analytical category of voluntariness or a reflection of the degree of voluntariness in the respondent’s return decision. We use the term ‘voluntariness of return decisions’ when considering the context in which the returnee decided to return, and their individual desire and willingness to return. We do not theorise the voluntariness of return within this report, as it is not the intention of the report, but given the salience of the issue it is necessary to distinguish between assisted voluntary return as a policy category and the voluntariness of the return decision as a reflection of the individual’s self-expressed desire and willingness to return. As we will demonstrate within the report, accepting assisted voluntary return does not mean that an individual has chosen of their own volition to return, thus meaning that participation in assisted voluntary return is not an expression of the voluntariness of the return decision.

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**Box 1: Definitions<sup>1</sup>**

- **Third-country national:** any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).
- **Irregular migrant:** a third-country national present on the territory of a Schengen State who does not fulfil, or no longer fulfils, the conditions of Entry as set out in the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code) or other conditions for Entry, stay or residence in that EU Member State.
- **Return decision:** An administrative or judicial decision or act, stating or declaring the stay of a third-country national to be illegal and imposing or stating an obligation to return.
- **Entry ban:** An administrative or judicial decision or act prohibiting entry into and stay in the territory of the EU Member States for a specified period, accompanying a return decision.
- **Removal order:** An administrative or judicial decision or act ordering the removal of an irregular migrant.
- **Pre-removal detention:** administrative measure ordered by an administrative or judicial authority in order to restrict the liberty of a person to implement a removal procedure.
- **Forced removal:** the enforcement of a return decision (i.e. the obligation to return) through the physical removal of an irregular migrant out of an EU Member State.
- **Voluntary return:** compliance with the obligation to return within the time-limit fixed for that purpose in the return decision.
- **Voluntary humanitarian return (VHR):** evacuation assistance to stranded migrants in Libya. IOM deemed it necessary to adopt a new terminology from assisted voluntary

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<sup>1</sup> In line with our desk research into EU legislation, migration policies, and the implementation thereof, the terminology used in this report mostly draws on EU legislative sources. This approach also conforms to 'The EMN Glossary' defined by the European Migration Network to improve comparability between Member States.

return to voluntary humanitarian return to stress the humanitarian nature of this operation (see IOM, 2018).

- **Assisted voluntary return:** voluntary return supported by logistical, financial and/or other material assistance.
- **Sustainable return:** In the global context, policy which deters new irregular migration of returnees by reintegration of the returnees in the country of origin or return which aims to ensure them levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers; In the EU context, the absence of migration after return because the returnee is fully integrated socially and economically in the home community.
- **Reintegration:** Re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or a process, e.g. of a migrant into the society of their country of return.
- **Reintegration assistance:** Support either cash, in kind or combined, provided by a host country to a returnee, with the aim of helping the returnee to lead an independent life after return.

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Interest in the return of refugees and other migrants grew in the 1990s, when Western countries were concerned to manage the increasing flows of displaced people, and to re-establish stability in the post-conflict geographies from which many refugees had been displaced (Black and Gent, 2006). The notions of 'reintegration' and 'sustainability' quickly became central to these early discussions of migrant returns, due to concerns that the mass repatriation of refugees to post-conflict countries should contribute to, rather than undermine, the reconstruction and stability of these states. In the view of governmental and intergovernmental stakeholders, it was not enough simply to return refugees to their countries of origin; their return had to be 'sustainable', which, in turn, depended on their 'successful reintegration' (Black and Gent, 2006).

It was in this context that the term 'sustainable return' was used to conceptualise the desired outcome of AVR programmes (Black *et al.*, 2004). In their seminal study of assisted voluntary return from the UK to Bosnia and Kosovo, Black *et al.* (2004) define an individual's return as 'sustainable' if their 'socio-economic status and fear of violence or persecution is no worse, relative to the population in the place of origin, one year after their return' (p.39). The authors operationalise this concept as parity in terms of the conditions experienced by returnees and non-migrants in the country of origin, specifically as regards (re-)migration aspirations (what they call 'physical sustainability'), socio-economic wellbeing (socio-economic sustainability) and personal security ('political sustainability').

This emphasis on re-migration as a key indicator of (un)sustainable return has suited policymakers involved in migration management, who have tended to see 'sustainable return' as the returnee's

permanent stay in the country of origin (Kuschminder, 2017a; Scalettaris and Gubert, 2019). The non-occurrence of re-migration, or the lack of intentions to re-migrate, has therefore been interpreted in evaluations of AVR programmes as evidence of a sustainable return (Kuschminder, 2017a). However, more recent scholarship has demonstrated that re-migration (whether desired or actually realised) is an inappropriate indicator for the effectiveness of AVR policies, and that for sustainable return to be meaningful, it should be based on reintegration (Koser and Kuschminder, 2015; Strand *et al.*, 2016; Kuschminder, 2017a).

It should be noted that, within the return migration literature, the concept of ‘reintegration’ remains under-theorised, relying on broad definitions which have framed reintegration as a one-sided process requiring the returnee to re-assimilate to the society of origin, rather than mutual adaptation by both sides (Kuschminder, 2017b). Definitions of reintegration have tended to focus on the various domains in which reintegration is supposed to occur: for example, social, economic, cultural and – more recently – psychosocial, according to the IOM (2004, 2015), or, according to Cassarino (2008), social, cultural, economic, and political. There is broad agreement on the multi-dimensional nature of reintegration, which has been carried through into studies of ‘sustainable return’ or ‘sustainable reintegration’, although the exact choice of domains varies (Scalettaris and Gubert, 2019).

To illustrate the complex relationship between reintegration and re-migration, Strand *et al.* (2016) draw on Carling’s (2002) aspirations/ability model, thereby distinguishing between a returnee’s aspiration either to reintegrate or re-migrate, and their ability to do either of these. Recognising that migration depends on the individual having both the aspiration and the ability to migrate, it becomes clear that a returnee who has failed to reintegrate may nonetheless ‘stay put’ not because they do not want to re-migrate, but simply because they do not have the ability to migrate again (for example, they may lack the necessary financial resources, social capital, labour market skills or physical capabilities) (Strand *et al.*, 2016; Kuschminder, 2017a). Equally, a returnee may re-migrate, or aspire to re-migrate, not because they have failed to reintegrate, but because they wish to enrich their life in some way that can only (or can best) be achieved abroad – for example, through reunification with family members in another country or through the completion of a higher education degree at a foreign university (Kuschminder, 2017a). As the IOM has itself argued (2015), legal re-migration should therefore not be viewed negatively as a failed reintegration process – nonetheless, as cautioned by Kuschminder (2017a), neither is it necessarily the positive outcome of a successful reintegration process.

More recent conceptualisations have therefore re-framed sustainable return or reintegration as the absence of – or ability to withstand – conditions which might otherwise compel migration as a survival strategy. Koser and Kuschminder have argued that ‘*the returnee must perceive that they are in conditions of safety and security upon return, which should remove the impetus for re-migration at least in the foreseeable future*’ (2015, p. 49). Similarly, in 2017 the IOM adapted their definition to distinguish between migration as a choice and a necessity:

*Reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable*

*reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity (IOM, 2017).*

This definition continues to give a central role to the remigration aspirations as being linked to sustainable reintegration (Kuschminder, 2017a).

Most recently, the United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM) has released a position paper on *Ensuring Safe and Dignified Return and Sustainable Reintegration* wherein a new understanding of sustainable reintegration is put forth as:

*A process which enables individuals to secure and sustain the political, economic, social and psychosocial conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity in the country and community they return or are returned to, in full respect of their civil, political economic, social and cultural rights. This should include targeted measures that enable returning migrants to have access to justice, social protection, financial services, health care, education, family life, an adequate standard of living, decent work, and protection against discrimination, stigma, arbitrary detention and all forms of violence, and that allows returnees to consider that they are in an environment of personal safety, economic empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion upon return (United Nations Network on Migration, 2021, p. 2).*

This new definition makes several formidable shifts from the previous approaches. First, it removes entirely any discussion of remigration aspirations. Second, it is rooted in a legal and rights-based approach. Third, the definition moves significantly beyond preceding definitions in stating levels of access. For example, in considering the economic dimension, IOM's 2017 definition stated 'economic self-sufficiency' whereas the UNMN 2021 definition calls for 'economic conditions to maintain life, livelihood and dignity' as well as an 'environment of economic empowerment'.

Given the perplexity of sustainable reintegration we do not attempt to offer a new definition in this report, nor do we comply with a specific existing definition of sustainable reintegration. In this report we take the migrant perspective to examine how individuals have experienced reintegration across three different contexts in Albania, Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal. Within the scope of this report, we focus on the individual and their experience of reintegration – we were unable to include family and community perspectives. We focus on the perceptions of the respondents, how they view their situations and how this in turn influences their decision-making. Finally, we do not impose expectations that reintegration should happen within a fixed timeframe (for example, 12 months, according to Black et al., 2004). We recognise that reintegration is a highly individual process which can vary in length for different people (Rogge, 1994; Kuschminder, 2017b; Kleist, 2020).

### 3. Case countries

The countries selected for comparative analysis in this study are Albania, Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan), and Senegal. These countries were selected for comparison due to the relatively large number of migrant returns from the EU to these countries, both via assisted voluntary return and forced removal, as well as due to their different regional and structural contexts. Table 1 (below) provides a comparative overview of some of the key characteristics of relevance to these countries' migration and reintegration trends.

	Albania	Iraq	Senegal
World Bank country classification 2020-2021	Upper-middle income economy	Upper-middle income economy	Lower-middle income economy
GDP per capita PPP, 2020 (current international \$)*	13,817.80	9,763.50	3,481.30
Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population)*	14.3 (2012)	18.9 (2012)	46.7 (2011)
Unemployment, total, 2020 (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)*	11.7	13.7	7.1
Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above)*	98 (2018)	86 (2017)	52 (2017)
Corruption Perceptions Index 2020**	36	21	45
Total deaths from organised violence 2010-2020***	N/A†	62, 565	88
First instance asylum recognition rate in the EU (2015)****	3%	85%	28%
Entry into force of EU Readmission Agreement	2006	No EU Readmission Agreement	No EU Readmission Agreement
National Government Reintegration policy	Yes – included within 2019-2022 National Strategy and Action Plan on Migration	No (although some mention of the sustainable reintegration of the forcibly displaced in the Reconstruction	No (included within Senegal's National Migration Policy but this has not yet been adopted)

		and Development Framework)	
Active IOM return programme	Yes	Yes	Yes
GIZ advisory centres for jobs, migration and reintegration <sup>2</sup>	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Table 1. Comparative table of case country structural characteristics*

\* World Bank data (<https://data.worldbank.org/>)

\*\* Index by Transparency International. Countries are scored between 0 (highly corrupt) and 100 (very clean) (<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nzl>).

\*\*\* Data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (<https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/>)

\*\*\*\* Calculated based on Eurostat data: First instance decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data (rounded) [migr\_asydcfsta] (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/migration-asylum/asylum/database>).

†UCPD data is not available for Albania, likely due to the absence of organised violence in this country. Similarly, the most recent World Bank data for the number of battle-related deaths in Albania dates back to 1999, when six deaths were recorded (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.BTL.DETH>).

The rest of this section provides an overview of relevant migratory and return trends in each of the three case countries.

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<sup>2</sup> The GIZ advisory centres are part of the programme "Returning to New Opportunities", which is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH in a variety of countries, including Albania, Iraq and Senegal.

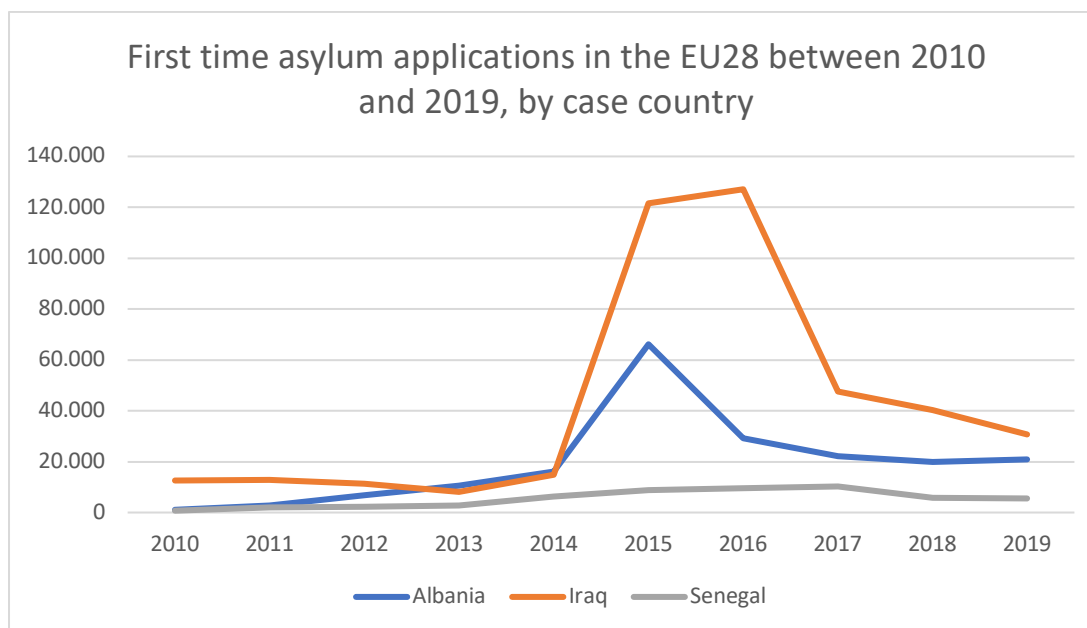


Figure 1. Asylum applications by Albanian, Iraqi and Senegalese nationals (Source: Eurostat, 2021a).

Figure 1 shows the number of first-time asylum applications in the EU, by Albanian, Iraqi and Senegalese nationals, between 2010 and 2019. The number of asylum applications is of key relevance to contemporary migration by both Albanian and Iraqi nationals.

In this study we focus on the return movements of Albanian nationals who have sought asylum in the EU in large numbers in recent years. The large increase in Albanian asylum seekers from 2014 onwards can be explained in part as a consequence of the 2008 global financial crisis. In the wake of the economic crisis, shrinking economic opportunities in Greece and Italy led to renewed pressure on the Albanian economy as remittances fell and migrants in Greece and Italy returned to the Albanian labour market (INSTAT/CESS, 2020). Given the extremely limited opportunities for legal labour migration, Albanians have used asylum-seeking to EU member states as an economic survival strategy (INSTAT/CESS, 2020). As Figure 1 shows, the number of first-time asylum applications by Albanian nationals in the EU-28 grew steadily from 1,075 to 16,145 between 2010 and 2014, before increasing dramatically to 66,145 in 2015 (Eurostat, 2021a). This figure fell to 29,145 in 2016 and has fluctuated around the 20,000 mark since 2017, although the number of total applications by Albanian nationals has remained somewhat higher due to repeat applications (Eurostat, 2021a). Germany and France have received the largest shares of these asylum flows from Albania. Germany was the most popular destination country for asylum seekers in the earlier years of the Albanian asylum outflows (particularly in 2015, when it received 54,760 first time applications) (Eurostat, 2021a). In more recent years, however, applications in Germany have fallen dramatically (to 2,565 in 2019), while France has become the more popular destination – although first-time applications in France have also decreased from a peak of 12,130 in 2017 to 9,235 in 2019 (Eurostat, 2021a).

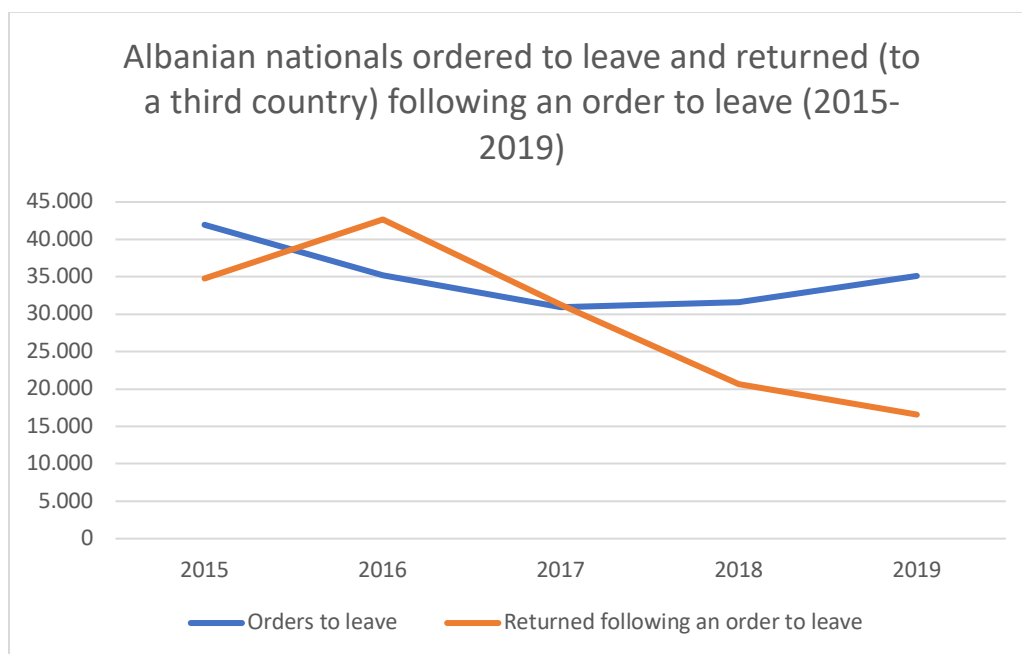


Asylum migration from Iraqi Kurdistan to the EU has been characterised as taking place in three waves – that of “elite pioneers” between 1974-1991; “second-wavers” between 1992-1998; and “third-wavers” between 1999-2014 (Paasche, 2020). This study focusses on the experiences of those who migrated during the late part of this third wave (from 2009 onwards), as well as during Europe’s so-called migration- or refugee “crisis” of 2015-2016, and later (until 2018). Paasche (2020) explains that this third wave of asylum migration from Iraqi Kurdistan took place during a period of relative stability and economic prosperity, when Kurds of lower socio-economic status were motivated by a “culture of migration” shaped by idealised collective imaginings of life in Europe. The context was very different from 2014 onwards when the so-called Islamic State occupied neighbouring provinces of Northern Iraq, the central Baghdad government ceased fiscal transfers to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and oil prices plummeted, resulting in a fiscal crisis and economic recession that continues until today (DeWeaver, 2015). Migrants who left from Iraqi Kurdistan between 2015 and 2016 cited a variety of reasons for their migration which included: fears regarding personal security and political instability; the lack of effective governance, state protection, and social justice; economic challenges; and poor quality of life and future prospects (IOM, 2016). Although it is not possible to distinguish the proportion of asylum applications made by migrants from Iraqi Kurdistan specifically, Eurostat data shows the overall trend in asylum-seeking by Iraqi nationals (see also Figure 1, above). Asylum applications by Iraqi nationals in the EU increased from 14, 845 in 2014 to a peak of 127,090 in 2016 (Eurostat, 2021). Germany has also received the largest share of asylum applications from Iraqi nationals in recent years: a total of 96,115 applications in 2016, which however fell to 21,930 by 2017 and have since further decreased (Eurostat, 2021a). Since 2016, Greece has received a much lower, but increased, number of Iraqi asylum applications (9,640 in 2018) (Eurostat, 2021a).

This study captures a longer history of migration from Senegal to the EU (from 1999 onwards). Irregular migration from Senegal to the EU developed in response to the restrictions imposed on legal migration channels by traditional countries of destination and transit from the 1980s and 1990s onwards (Beauchemin *et al.*, 2014). Although legal entry via air continued to be used by the majority of Senegalese arrivals, new forms of irregular migration via land and maritime routes became prevalent in the 2000s and 2010s (Beauchemin *et al.*, 2014; Sene *et al.*, 2019). The mid-2000s saw a peak in the number of crossings via the Atlantic maritime route: around 50,000 people were recorded leaving Senegal by boat for the Canary islands between 2006 and 2008 (Fargues, 2017, p. 10). As a result of increased maritime controls on this route from 2008, routes overland – including via Niger, Algeria, Libya and then across the Central Mediterranean, and from Morocco to Spain via the Western Mediterranean – have been increasingly used (Sene *et al.*, 2019). Nonetheless, the Atlantic route has seen a resurgence in more recent years (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021). The main EU destination countries for Senegalese migrants have been France, Italy and Spain (Sene *et al.*, 2019). Between 2015 and 2019 Italy received the largest share of asylum applications from Senegalese nationals: a peak of 8,295 applications in 2017, which had however fallen to 865 by 2019 (Eurostat, 2021a). Since 2017 France has also received an increasing share of asylum applications by Senegalese nationals – 3075 in 2019 (Eurostat, 2021a). However, many Senegalese nationals have not applied for asylum in the EU. Others have not reached the EU and many are returned to Senegal from various African countries through which they pass in order to reach the EU – particularly Libya and Niger (IOM/ANSD, 2019). It is predominantly young men who migrate irregularly from Senegal to the EU (or with the hope of reaching the EU) (Sene *et al.*,

2019). For example, the average age of migrants returned to Senegal by the IOM between 2017 and 2018 was 27 years old, and 97 percent of these returnees were men (IOM, 2018). Their motivations are predominantly economic, and are shaped by social pressures to provide for their families and thereby “prove themselves” to both their families and communities (Sene *et al.*, 2019).

It can be assumed that rejected asylum seekers will have been given an order to return to their country of origin. Other migrants without the legal right to stay in the EU may also be issued with a return order if they are identified as such. However, the rate of actual returns is difficult to assess because the official Eurostat returns rate is limited in its precision (Mananashvili, 2017; Oomkens and Kalir, 2020), and because data on returns is not systematically collected by countries of origin. Figures 2-4 (below) present the available Eurostat data on the numbers of nationals from each case country who have been issued with a return order from the EU, compared to the number of migrants actually returned (to a third country) following an order to leave. This includes both assisted voluntary returns and forced removals. It should be noted that only Albania has signed an EU Readmission Agreement, and is known for its strong cooperation on forced removals from EU member states (European Commission, 2018), which likely relates to its EU-accession incentives.



*Figure 2. The number of Albanian nationals ordered to leave the EU28 compared to the number of Albanian nationals returned from the EU28 following an order to leave (Source: Eurostat, 2021b, 2021c)*

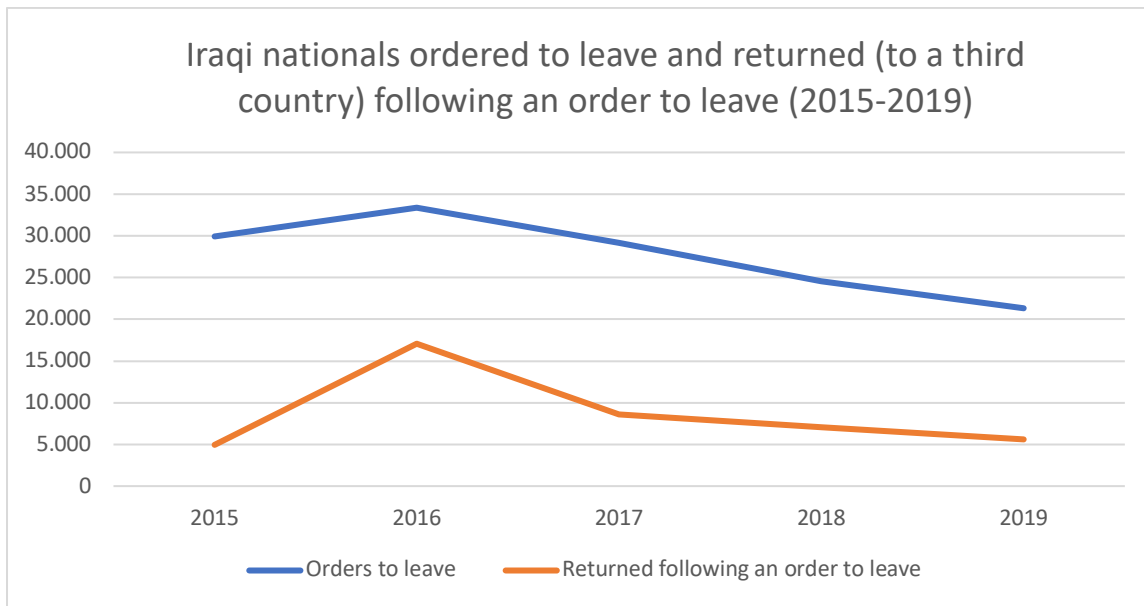


Figure 3. The number of Iraqi nationals ordered to leave the EU28 compared to the number of Iraqi nationals returned from the EU28 following an order to leave (Source: Eurostat, 2021b, 2021c)



Figure 4. The number of Senegalese nationals ordered to leave the EU28 compared to the number of Senegalese nationals returned from the EU28 following an order to leave (Source: Eurostat, 2021b, 2021c)

In gross numbers, Albania has the largest number of citizens returned in 2019, at 16,585 (Eurostat, 2021c). This is followed by Iraq to which 5,595 citizens returned in 2019 (Eurostat, 2021c). Senegal had the lowest number of returns from the EU (595 in 2019) (Eurostat, 2021c). It is important to note, as mentioned above, that migrants returned to Senegal are returned not only from the EU but also from Libya, Morocco, Niger, Tunisia and other African countries (which are not included in Figure 4). For example, in 2017 3,023 Senegalese nationals were assisted to return to Senegal by the IOM (IOM/ANSD, 2019, p. 54). Of these, 1,416 percent were returned from Niger (46.8 percent), 1,146 from Libya (37.9 percent), 194 from Morocco (6.4 percent) and 127 from Tunisia (4.3 percent) (IOM/ANSD, 2019, p. 53). IOM-facilitated returns from other countries were much lower but the highest number of returns from the EU were from: Italy (41 returns), Spain (21 returns) and Germany (19 returns) (IOM/ANSD, 2019, p. 53).

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research design

This study provides a cross-country comparative analysis of returnees' reintegration experiences in Albania, Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal, based on 30-50 semi-structured interviews with returned migrants in each country, as well as additional interviews with key stakeholders involved in local return and reintegration programming. Due to security considerations as well as the different structural contexts that characterise the Kurdish Region of Iraq and the rest of Iraq, a decision was made to limit the scope of analysis to reintegration experiences in the Kurdish Region of Iraq only.

Although 50 migrant interviews in each country were originally planned, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated changes to the original research design. Whereas the fieldwork in Albania was conducted in-person by one of the present co-authors in January 2020, travel restrictions introduced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that the co-author could no longer conduct fieldwork in-person in Iraq and Senegal, as initially planned. Instead, fieldwork was subcontracted to local partners.

In the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, all interviews were conducted by a local consultant, Botan Sharbazheri. However, these interviews had to be conducted by telephone due to the COVID-19 pandemic (except in a couple of cases where the interviewee preferred to meet in person). Accordingly, the interview guide had to be shortened in order not to fatigue interviewees with long telephone conversations that they might opt-out of or cut short. The migration and reintegration experiences communicated in these interviews are therefore captured in less detail and depth. In Senegal, where in-person data collection was still possible, a research team led by Professor Mamadou Dimé at the University Gaston-Berger of Saint Louis conducted semi-structured interviews, mostly in-person. The final sample includes 40 migrant interviews from Iraqi Kurdistan, and 30 from Senegal.

The semi-structured interviews with returnees took a life-cycle approach (i.e. starting with the respondent's life prior to migration, their reasons for migration, their experiences of migration, the decision-making or circumstances that led to their return, their experiences of return and reintegration, and their current situation and future aspirations). The interview guides used in all three countries were very similar but were somewhat modified for the different modes of implementation in Senegal and Iraqi Kurdistan. In Albania and Senegal these interviews generally took about an hour (ranging between approximately 30 and 90 minutes). The telephone interviews conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan were necessarily shorter (generally ranging between approximately 20 and 40 minutes, although longer in those cases where they were not audio-recorded and full notes were taken instead). The interviews with key stakeholders focused on their work with regards to return and reintegration, their conceptualisation of sustainable return/reintegration, their perceptions of reintegration outcomes among returnees, and their monitoring and evaluation practices and results.

### 4.2 Data collection and analysis

Fieldwork took place in Albania in January 2020, in Senegal in January and February 2021, and in Iraqi Kurdistan between December 2020 and March 2021. Additional key stakeholder interviews (conducted online by one of the present co-authors) took place between June 2020 and July 2021.

In all countries, the target population was defined as nationals of that country, who were over the age of 18 (at the time of interview), and who had returned from any EU country either via assisted voluntary return or deportation (or from a non-EU country of transit in the case of some Iraqi and Senegalese nationals who were returned before reaching their intended EU destinations). Recruitment focused on migrants who had returned to their country of origin in the last ten years, but at least 12 months prior to the interview, to allow for the observation of longer-term reintegration processes – although there were some exceptions to this. In all countries, the sampling strategy was necessarily based on a combination of purposive, convenience and snowball sampling, which made use of: contact lists provided by actors working on local reintegration programming (or research); the fieldwork teams' personal networks; snowballing via respondents' own networks; and intercept-point sampling in local areas where it was known that there were high rates of out-migration and return from the EU.

Every care and precaution was taken to adhere to the research ethics protocols and data management plan of the ADMIGOV project, including the imperative to obtain voluntary and informed consent, ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants (except in the case of key stakeholders who preferred not to remain anonymous), and to 'Do no harm'. Additional measures were taken to ensure the safety and privacy of respondents interviewed by telephone, whose body language and immediate environment (including any other people present) could not be directly observed. Interviews were voice-recorded, where consent for this was given. Interview audio files were later transcribed and simultaneously translated into English (or, into French and then English, in the case of some of the Senegalese interviews conducted in other local languages). Where consent was not given for audio-recording, the researcher took full notes of the interview discussion.

The returnee interview transcripts (and notes, where these were taken) were systematically coded using Atlas.Ti and Nvivo, using a coding tree based on the conceptual framework and life-cycle approach and revised inductively in an iterative process. For the purpose of creating comparative tables (presented in Sections 5-7), some of the qualitative data were retroactively coded into categorical variables. However, because the interviews were conducted by different people (resulting in some variation in interview style), and because of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, as well as the particularities of the individual interviewees and interview settings (i.e. some interviews had to be conducted more quickly, and some interviewees preferred not to answer some questions, or did not answer them clearly), not every interviewee provided a (sufficiently clear) answer to each of the questions that were subsequently transformed into indicators for the analysis. This is why, in the comparative tables presented in Sections 5-7, the total number of responses for each country does not always equal the total number of return migrants interviewed in each country. Where interview excerpts are directly quoted in the analysis, pseudonyms have been used to preserve the respondent's anonymity.

#### 4.3 Research participant characteristics

In Albania, recruitment focused on the most recent wave of Albanian returnees: those who had sought asylum – mainly in Germany and, to a lesser extent, in France – since 2014 and who had been returned via assisted voluntary return or forced removal (see Section 3 for an overview of these migratory trends). As Figure 5 shows, returns among the Albanian sample are more tightly clustered – starting in 2014 but with the majority (70 percent) returning in 2016 and 2017.

However, it should also be noted that of the 50 Albanian respondents, eight subsequently re-migrated after this first return from Germany or France and were returned again to Albania via assisted voluntary return or forced removal. The data captures longer-term return trends among the Senegalese respondents (between 2006 and 2020), although 73 percent returned to Senegal in more recent years (since 2015, see Figure 5). The sample from Senegal therefore encompasses a broader timeline and patterns of migration and return migration, and including returns via assisted voluntary return from transit countries such as Libya and Niger. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the sample also captured broader patterns of migration and return migration, from a wide range of EU countries (and from Turkey, in the case of two discontinued journeys). The sample from Iraqi Kurdistan includes returns starting in 2012, but the large majority (85 percent) have returned since 2015. Figure 5 (below) compares the years in which the respondents from each of the case countries returned to their country of origin. Tables 2-4 (below) show the countries from which the respondents from each case country were returned.

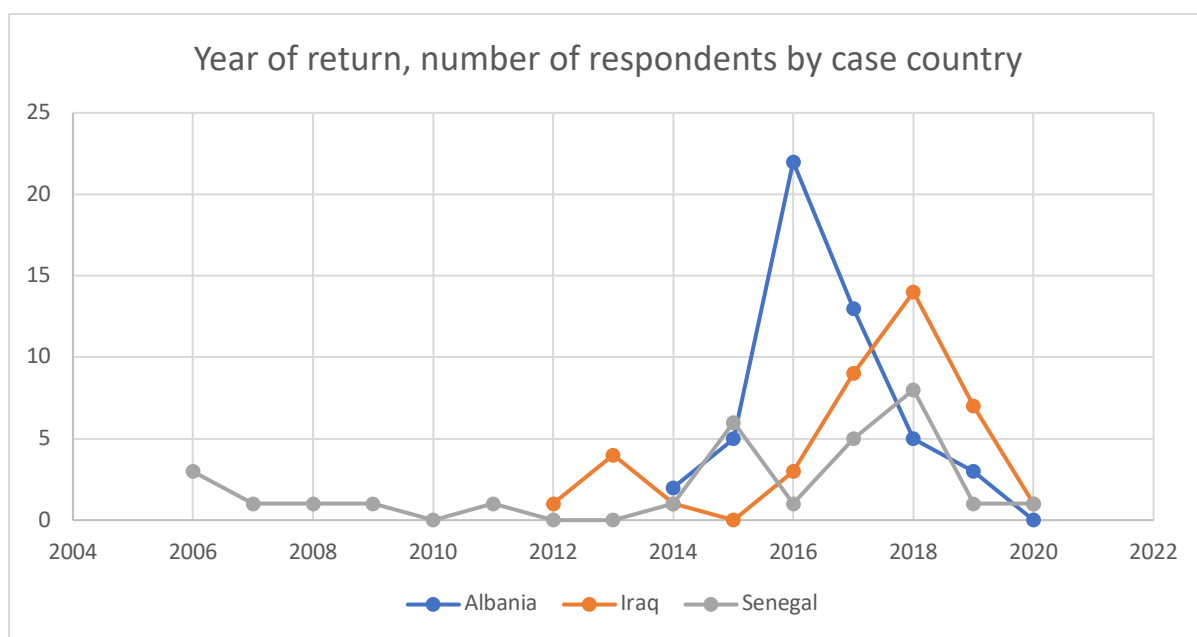


Figure 5. Respondents' year of return to country of origin.

Country from which returned to Albania	Instances of return
Germany	51
France	8

Table 2. Country from which the respondent was returned (Albania)

<b>Country from which returned to Iraqi Kurdistan</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Germany	16
United Kingdom	8
Sweden	4
Finland	2
France	2
Italy	2
Turkey	2
Denmark	1
Greece	1
Netherlands	1
Switzerland	1

*Table 3. Country from which the respondent was returned (Iraqi Kurdistan)*

<b>Country from which returned to Senegal</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Spain	12
Libya	7
Italy	3
Algeria	2
Germany	2
Morocco	2
France	1
Greece	1

*Table 4. Country from which the respondent was returned (Senegal)*

Table 5 (below) shows the number of returns via assisted voluntary return and forced removal captured in the dataset.



	Albania		Iraqi Kurdistan		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Assisted voluntary return*</b>	47	80%	26	65%	16	53%
<b>Forced removal</b>	12	20%	14	35%	14	47%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table 5. Policy category of return, per instance*

The unit of measurement in Tables 2 and 5 is the number of returns (rather than number of respondents) because, as mentioned, some of the Albanian respondents had already migrated to an EU country and been returned either via assisted voluntary return or forced removal more than once. In each of the three case countries, the research team sought to achieve a balance between respondents returned via assisted voluntary return and those returned by forced removal, in order to more easily compare their experiences. This was most easily achieved in Senegal, where there is a fairly even split in the sample. However, it should also be noted that (as discussed in section 5) some Senegalese respondents were both forcibly removed and returned via assisted voluntary return within a single return journey, because they were firstly forcibly removed to Niger, and then assisted to return to Senegal from Niger by the IOM's assisted voluntary return programme. It should also be noted that Table 5 includes instances of Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR; from Libya, assisted by the IOM) within the number of assisted voluntary returns to Senegal. In Iraqi Kurdistan there was a higher proportion of respondents returned via assisted voluntary return (65 percent). The balance between assisted voluntary returns and forced removals was most uneven in Albania, where the number of instances of forced removal (10) is much smaller than those returned via assisted voluntary return (40). However, this imbalance reflects the results of similar recent studies in Albania. For example, Hackaj & Shehaj's (2017) sample of 21 'migrant units' includes only two who were forcibly removed, while the rest returned by assisted voluntary return (p.19). Similarly, the interim findings of an unpublished survey conducted in 2019-2020 by the Center for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) found that, of the 605 respondents who received a negative decision on their asylum claim, 78 percent accepted assisted voluntary return compared to only 22 percent who were forcibly removed to Albania. It should finally be noted that in a few cases across the dataset it was difficult to classify the respondents as returned either via assisted voluntary return or forced removal because their accounts were somewhat unclear. This ambiguity highlights the grey area between lived experiences of assisted voluntary return and forced removal, in which assisted voluntary return is experienced and described as "deportation" by the return migrants themselves. For the purpose of the present analysis, in these more ambiguous cases the research team did their best to deduce from the respondents' accounts which categorisation fit best.

	Albania	Iraqi Kurdistan	Senegal
<b>Reasons for migrating</b>			
Economic	48	17	28
Children's education and future	16	2	0
Healthcare	13	3	0
Political/family/community problems	10	22	0
Other	6	3	2
<b>Migrant unit</b>			
Individual	5	21	30
Family unit	45	19	0
<b>Duration abroad</b>			
Less than one year	19	6	7
1-5 years	29	30	9
5-10 years	0	4	10
10-20 years	0	0	3

*Table 6. Respondents' migration experiences*

As Table 6 (above) illustrates, migration experiences across the three case countries differed substantially, with implications for respondents' reintegration experiences. Regarding respondents' reasons for migrating, economic motivations were common – most notably in Senegal, where every respondent asked this question highlighted the economic objectives that motivated their departure. Economic reasons were also relevant to the decision-making of almost all the Albanian respondents. However, the Albanian respondents most often had multiple reasons for migrating which also included: better opportunities for their children's education and future; access to healthcare (for themselves or a family member); and/or to escape from family or community tensions and insecurity. Reasons for migrating were most diverse among the respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan. While economic reasons were also cited by just under half the sample in Iraqi Kurdistan, a broad range of family, social and/or political problems were often more relevant, as well as, in some cases, access to healthcare and better opportunities for the respondents' children.

In Albania, respondents tended to migrate with their nuclear (and, in some cases, extended) family. The large majority of Albanian respondents hoped to stay permanently in their intended destination country. However, temporary migration was envisaged by a smaller number of respondents who wanted to migrate in order to achieve a set goal – such as medical treatment or

earning and saving some money – and then return to Albania. In contrast, all of the Senegalese respondents were men who migrated on their own, and who generally explained that they intended to return to Senegal once they had accumulated the economic resources to invest in making a better life for themselves and their families in Senegal. Again, the picture was more mixed for the respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan. Approximately half of these respondents migrated as family units, while the other half migrated on their own. The large majority of the respondents from Iraqi Kurdistan hoped to stay permanently in their intended destination.

Reflecting efforts by Germany to accelerate the return of asylum seekers from Albania, the Albanian respondents had spent the least amount of time abroad (under five years in all cases; and less than one year for almost 40 percent of the sample). The Senegalese respondents – who had often not claimed asylum but had rather lived and worked irregularly in one or more countries of migration – had spent the most time abroad: almost half the sample had spent between 5 and 20 years abroad before returning. Almost all of the respondents from Iraqi Kurdistan had claimed asylum in the EU, and the large majority spent between one and five years abroad.

In terms of their demographic characteristics, the samples of return migrants are not nationally representative but the research team sought to include balanced representation from respondents in terms of gender, geographic dispersion (i.e. urban vs. rural settings, and geographic regions), ethnicity and mode of return (assisted voluntary return vs. forced removal). This was largely achieved, although we discuss this further in the section on limitations below. Some key demographic characteristics of the research participants in each country are presented and discussed below.

	Albania		Iraq		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Female</b>	24	48%	11	28%	0	0%
<b>Male</b>	26	52%	29	73%	30	100%
<b>Total:</b>	50	100%	40	100%	30	100%

*Table 7. Gender of respondents, by country*

In Senegal, the non-representation of women in the sample reflects broader patterns in Senegal, where women make up only a very small proportion of return movements – three percent of all IOM AVR and VHR returns between 2017 and 2018 (IOM, 2018). In Iraq, it is also more commonly men who seek asylum in the EU, but women and family groups are also represented among these flows – for example, 91,490 Iraqi national men claimed asylum in the EU in 2015, compared to 29,980 women (Eurostat, 2021a). In Iraqi Kurdistan, the recruitment of interviewees focused on trying to capture the diversity of profiles and experiences, which is reflected in Table 7 (above). In Albania, where recent migration to seek asylum in the EU has been undertaken mostly by young families, there is a greater gender balance, as also reflected above. Despite these different profiles, the age range and average (mean) age of respondents interviewed in each country is broadly similar, as shown in Table 8 below.

	Age range	Average age
<b>Albania</b>	19-64	37
<b>Iraq</b>	20-69	36
<b>Senegal</b>	21-70	39

*Table 8. Respondents' age at the time of interview*

Lastly, Table 9 (below) shows the respondents' levels of education (highest completed at the time of interview). Education levels were mixed in each case country, but generally much lower among the Senegalese respondents, and much higher among the respondents from Iraqi Kurdistan.

	Albania		Iraq		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
None	3	6%	2	5%	5	17%
Koranic school <sup>3</sup>	-		-		5	17%
Less than Primary	8	16%	1	3%	5	17%
Primary	16	33%	10	25%	12	41%
Secondary / Vocational	19	39%	9	23%	2	7%
Tertiary	3	6%	18	45%	0	0%
Total:	49	100%	40	100%	29	100%

*Table 9. Respondents' highest level of education completed*

Regarding the key stakeholder interviewees, these were purposively sampled in order to capture the experiences of key governmental, intergovernmental, and NGO actors involved in return and reintegration programming in each country. An overview of the key stakeholder sample is

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<sup>3</sup> In Senegal, children commonly attend Koranic school – which offers a religious education – instead of, or alongside, formal education. Senegalese Koranic schools have an informal structure, no standardised curriculum, and represent a separate educational system. In this study, some respondents said that they went to Koranic school, generally without specifying the number of years attended, but it can be assumed that they did not study beyond the primary or secondary levels of Koranic education, where the focus is on learning the Koran by rote, and to read, write and translate passages, as well as on the transmission of religious values (see André and Demonsant, 2012).

provided in Table 10 below. A full list of key stakeholder interviewees (with respect to their preferences regarding anonymity) is presented in the Appendix.

<b>Stakeholder type</b>	<b>Albania</b>	<b>Iraqi Kurdistan</b>	<b>Senegal</b>
<i>Governmental</i>	3	2	2
<i>Inter-governmental</i>	1	0	3
<i>INGO</i>	3	0	2
<i>NGO and other civil society</i>	3	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>

*Table 10. Overview of key stakeholder interviewees*

#### 4.4 Limitations

Given the lack of comprehensive data on the size and characteristics of the returnee population in each of the case countries, it is not possible to accurately assess the extent to which our sample is representative of the broader returnee population, and our samples are clearly too small to be nationally representative. Based on the limited available data, it seems likely that, for example, the Albanian sample somewhat over-represents Roma and Egyptian return migrants (see Dubow, Tan and Kuschminder, 2021 for a more in-depth analysis of the Albanian sample and case study findings).

It must also be recognised that migration decision-making is a complex, and not necessarily rational, process, which can make it difficult to capture in data collection. Although the semi-structured interview is an appropriate tool with which to explore the complexity, nuance – and sometimes, inconsistencies – of individual decision-making, the retrospective nature of these narrative accounts makes them liable to recall and hindsight bias. In other words, respondents may not accurately remember their past decision-making processes, or may recall and describe past decisions in light of subsequent experiences or current knowledge, thereby mis-representing their past decision-making. We reflect on this in the discussion of research findings.

## 5. Return decision-making and experiences

This section examines respondents' decision-making regarding return to their country of origin, including their reasons for accepting or refusing assisted voluntary return. The analysis below discusses first the decision-making and experiences of migrants who were returned prior to reaching their intended destinations (or shortly upon arrival); and second, the decision-making and experiences of those who were returned from a country where they hoped to stay.

### 5.1 Returns prior to reaching the intended destination

In the context of long and fragmented irregular journeys from Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal to the EU, some respondents from these countries had been returned even before reaching their intended EU destinations. Two respondents interviewed in Iraqi Kurdistan returned from Turkey, where they had given up on their migration projects – due, in one case, to the tragic accident they had experienced during the sea crossing to Greece, and, in the other case, their disappointment that they could not move onwards from Greece.

Returns from a country that the migrant considered part of their journey rather than their destination were most common in the case of the Senegalese respondents. Half of the return migrants interviewed in Senegal (15) were returned to Senegal either before they had reached their intended EU destinations, or quickly following their arrival. Four interviewees who arrived in Spain were held in a reception facility for up to 40 days, before being forcibly removed (by air) back to Senegal. Another was held in a camp in the Spanish enclave of Melilla before being removed back to Morocco, and then transported onwards overland to Senegal (a stepwise removal process). A further 12 Senegalese respondents who did not manage to reach the EU were returned from Algeria, Libya, or Morocco. Some of these respondents were returned by air, via Voluntary Humanitarian Return from Libya or, in one case, assisted voluntary return from Morocco. However, others seemed to have been forcibly removed overland, which they often described as a distressing and dangerous journey, as also reported by Kleist (2020). In a few of these cases, it seems that the migrant therefore experienced both forced removal (to the border of Niger) and assisted voluntary return (from Niger, facilitated by the IOM).

In the case of return to Senegal, the distinction between forced removal and assisted voluntary return is therefore more difficult to make, as both can happen in the context of stepwise overland return journeys which, as Kleist (2020) discusses, have received little attention until now. It should also be noted that Voluntary Humanitarian Return from Libya, which is understood in policy terms as a form of voluntary return, was most often described by interviewees as forced, or as an outcome that they did not want and did not choose. For example, as one respondent who was returned in 2017 explained:

*I was forced to go back but I didn't want to come back. [...] My return is explained by the fact that I was detained in prison and the IOM came to offer us safe-passage to get us out of that misery, that's how they forced us to come back (Abdoulaye).*

This reflects long-standing criticisms of so-called voluntary return programmes that are not truly ‘voluntary’, and should therefore be understood as a policy category, rather than analytical concept.

These constraints on decision-making in the case of return from Libya were discussed by Michele Bombassei, Senior Regional Coordinator EUTF/DFID at the IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa. Although Bombassei emphasised that voluntary humanitarian return is voluntary in the sense that an individual migrant is free to opt-out of the return procedure at any point – which they sometimes do – he acknowledged that most often there is no viable alternative available to irregular migrants in Libya: *‘You have to remember that very often, the return for these people is the only option that is offered. Not because the IOM is offering only that, but because, you know, there is no one else offering anything else’* (Bombassei, pers. comm. 10.03.21). Nonetheless, Bombassei also suggested that, based on IOM’s field experience, return migrants may experience and conceptualise their return differently at different stages of their return and reintegration. He explained that the family and community expectations that return migrants in Senegal are often subject to (further discussed in Section 6) may mean that, post-return, some return migrants present their return as forced rather than voluntary in order to avoid stigmatization by their communities who see migrants who “chose” to return as too “weak” or “cowardly” to succeed in their migration endeavours. This observation points to the potential limitations of retrospective narrations of past decision-making, but also to the importance of understanding how return migrants conceive of and narrativize their own experiences, with implications for their psychosocial well-being and reintegration experiences.

## 5.2 Returns from the destination country

### Albania

Almost all the Albanian interviewees returned to Albania having received at least one negative decision on their asylum application. The exceptions were four people who decided to return to Albania (via assisted voluntary return) whilst their initial asylum applications were still in process (i.e. before receiving a decision on their case). When issued with a negative decision, Albanian asylum seekers were given a choice between accepting assisted voluntary return or risking forced removal. The large majority opted for assisted voluntary return. Respondents who did not accept assisted voluntary return, or who appealed their decision, were forcibly removed by police officers. Respondents who were forcibly removed to Albania were issued with an EU entry ban which prohibited their re-entry to the EU for a number of years (usually 2-3 years).

The choice of assisted voluntary return versus forced removal was typically presented to respondents in Germany in the following way, as described by a young man who returned with his wife in 2018:

*In the last two months the social worker came and told us that we had a negative decision. She told us we could either sign and leave voluntarily or the police would come at 2am in the morning and take us by force. In this case we would be officially deported and have no right to enter the EU for 5 years (Genci).*

The above account highlights the main factors determining the Albanian respondents' uptake of assisted voluntary return. As shown in Table 11 (below), the Albanian migrants interviewed for this study commonly accepted assisted voluntary return because they felt that they had no other choice, or that the only other choice – to risk deportation and the imposition of an EU entry ban – was not a worthwhile risk to take. Assisted voluntary return was therefore perceived as the better of two bad options, given that these respondents would have strongly preferred to stay in the country of migration. As also emphasised by key stakeholder interviewees, the threat of an EU entry ban often had a determining influence on the decision to accept assisted voluntary return because migration to EU countries is such an important livelihood strategy in Albania. For example, fourteen of the respondents who participated in this study had prior experience of working in Greece. An EU entry ban would therefore constrain respondents' opportunities to support themselves upon their return through seasonal migration, as well as preventing them from taking advantage of future migration opportunities, including labour migration to Germany. As one Albanian woman explained:

*Why do that? [risk forced removal] We thought that if we go back voluntarily we could also have a second chance to go back with a work contract (Elvana).*

In addition to the wish to keep their (or their children's) mobility options open in the future, Albanian asylum seekers also chose assisted voluntary return over deportation because they wanted to avoid confrontation with the authorities, or the distress and indignity of a sudden forced removal (particularly given the potential distress for respondents' children), as well as, in a couple of cases, due to a perceived duty to respect the law and institutions of the state that had hosted them as asylum seekers. This latter concern was explicitly mentioned by three respondents, one of whom explained:

*If you go to somebody as a guest and you stay some months and then the owners of the house want you to leave, you cannot wait for them to take you away by force, instead you go yourself (Aurela).*

Less common reasons for accepting assisted voluntary return included dissatisfaction with the conditions and opportunities encountered in Germany, as well as family reasons. Family reasons often motivated the decision to return even before receiving a decision on an asylum application. Disappointed expectations related largely to respondents' realisation that they were unlikely to be given asylum and were not allowed to work as asylum seekers.

As for the role of reintegration assistance in the Albanian respondents' decision-making, it is first important to note that the large majority of respondents were not offered, or did not receive, any form of reintegration assistance prior to leaving Germany. It therefore does not seem that the offer of reintegration assistance was generally used to incentivise uptake of assisted voluntary return. Often, those respondents who did receive something reported that they did not know that they would receive it before they were actually leaving, as in the case of an Egyptian family who returned from Germany in 2015:



**Interviewer:** *Did the offer of money, of the 3000 Euros influence your decision to take voluntary return or had you already decided to take voluntary return?*

**Interviewee:** *When I signed I didn't know they would offer money (Edvina).*

In some cases, respondents did indicate that they were aware that cash assistance was offered as an incentive for accepting assisted voluntary return. For example, one respondent said that there were rumours that migrants who accept assisted voluntary return would receive 500 EUR as a 'reward' for returning (Alma). In other cases, they were told that the cash assistance was to help them reintegrate in Albania. Generally though, and as in the case of the family given 1200 EUR and cited above, rumours of reintegration assistance did not seem to impact respondents' decision-making. As discussed above, respondents were more concerned to comply with their return order and to avoid an EU entry ban, as similarly demonstrated in the following interview with an Albanian woman who returned from Germany with her husband and children in 2017:

**Interviewer:** *When they asked to sign to go voluntarily did they offer you any assistance for going back to Albania?*

**Interviewee:** *The tickets. We heard rumours that whoever signs the voluntary return would take 1000 Euro per person but that was not true.*

**Interviewer:** *Who did you hear that from?*

**Interviewee:** *From people. I signed because I didn't want to have the restriction in my passport.*

**Interviewer:** *Is that the only reason you went voluntarily, to avoid having the travel prohibition in your passport?*

**Interviewee:** *Yes (Lindita).*

Generally, the respondents who were forcibly returned to Albania did not consciously refuse assisted voluntary return and accept the risk of forced removal. Most of these respondents reported that they were either not aware that they had been issued with a negative decision and return order, or that they were in the process of appealing their negative asylum decision, or trying to defer their return order based on medical grounds, and did not understand that they could still be forcibly removed during this process. They often explained that, if they had known they were going to be forcibly removed at that point, they would have accepted assisted voluntary return instead, as in the following case of an ethnic Albanian woman:

*I asked my lawyer whether the police would come and take me by force but he told me not to worry about it because they would not come. If I had known that I would have returned voluntarily (Jorida).*

### Senegal

In addition to the migrants who were forcibly removed or returned via Voluntary Humanitarian Return before reaching the EU, or quickly upon their arrival in Spain, there were also three respondents who were forcibly removed from France, Germany and Spain after spending many years in the EU. One of these respondents was forcibly removed from Germany when he did not comply with his return order (following a rejected asylum application) – this respondent seemed not to understand, or trust, the offer of assisted voluntary return and reintegration assistance. The two others were returned when they were intercepted by police, identified as irregular migrants, and arrested.

The experiences of those interviewees who returned via assisted voluntary return were mixed. Two respondents experienced their return as forced because they had no other option (or the only other option was two years in detention, in the case of one interviewee returned from Greece). Generally though, most of the interviewees who returned from the EU via assisted voluntary return explained that they returned because they were tired of life as an irregular migrant. They were disappointed at their inability to achieve their aspirations (in terms of obtaining legal papers, and saving money) and/or could no longer tolerate the tough conditions they experienced as irregular migrants. For example, as the following respondent who returned from Spain explained:

*When I did seven years I thought about going back because I didn't get papers [...] and the work is not constant, you work today, you stay several days without working, you work two days, you stay four days without working. The way I get tired here is the same way I get tired there, so it's better to go home and get tired (Moussa).*

In two cases, the interviewee was fed up of life as an irregular migrant but nonetheless felt ready to return and invest in Senegal. One of these men had accumulated some savings in Senegal through remittances and so had achieved his migration aspirations to some extent, although remained overall disappointed by his migration experience. This interviewee explained:

*I accepted the AVRR programme because I was already thinking about returning for good in order to stay in the country to invest and work. So, this programme was a godsend for me and I had already taken the decision to return to Senegal permanently. I was even in the process of preparing for it because I had started to take care of my belongings left in the country and to prepare the ground for investing in real estate (Oumar).*

Both of these more prepared interviewees actively sought out the IOM to start their return procedure, as did six others who accepted assisted voluntary return because of their frustration with life as an irregular migrant. There were some additional motivating factors to accept assisted voluntary return in a couple of these cases. Two interviewees wanted to return to their families. One of these interviewees also explained that he would have returned anyway, but the offer of reintegration support for his tailoring business was a crucial determinant of his decision to return at that time. As the above accounts show, the offer of reintegration assistance was often an

important motivating but not determining factor in the decision to return, given that the large majority of Senegalese respondents who returned via assisted voluntary return proactively sought out the IOM themselves in order to benefit from the logistical as well as reintegration assistance.

### **Iraqi Kurdistan**

All of the respondents from Iraqi Kurdistan who had reached their EU destinations had applied for asylum. Similarly to the rejected Albanian asylum-seekers, the respondents from Iraqi Kurdistan who accepted assisted voluntary return most commonly explained that they had no other choice. Although these telephone interviews offered a less in-depth understanding of respondents' return decision-making, some respondents explained that they did not want to be forcibly removed and/or that, after two to three years in the asylum system, they had lost hope of being granted residence, and were fed up of the conditions they faced as asylum seekers. This loss of hope after many years of waiting was also discussed as a reason for return by Hajjaj Mustafa, the Programme Executive of ETTC's Reintegration Programme in Iraq (Mustafa, pers. comm., 22.12.2020). Indeed, another common – and often additional – reason for accepting assisted voluntary return was respondents' unhappiness, uncomfortable reception conditions, and disappointed expectations. Less common reasons for accepting assisted voluntary return were family reasons (in these cases, the death or illness of a parent), achievement of migration objectives (in these two cases, the respondents had managed to pay off their debts in Iraqi Kurdistan, and aid their son's post-surgery recovery, respectively). Seemingly more specific to the case of Iraqi Kurdistan was the decision-making of three respondents for whom changed conditions in Iraq inclined them towards return. In these cases, the respondents explained that they understood that the political environment had improved, or that the social or political problem that had motivated their departure was resolved. The broad range of reasons which can motivate return to Iraqi Kurdistan was emphasised by the key stakeholders interviewed, who explained that individual and family situations shape return decision-making. Michael Düker, director of a pre-return reintegration programme for Iraqi migrants in Germany pointed out that some Iraqi migrants who left Iraq due to insecurity always intended to return to Iraq, and therefore seek to return when the situation has improved (Düker, pers. comm., 10.06.2020). Botan Sharbazheri, a volunteer with a local NGO in Iraqi Kurdistan, similarly pointed out that return decisions among migrants from Iraqi Kurdistan often depend on the reasons why they left, as well as on the individual migrant's personality and preferences (Sharbazheri, pers. comm., 06.07.21). Hajjaj Mustafa (ETTC) also posited that families with children may be particularly inclined to return to Iraqi Kurdistan if their asylum application is rejected and they do not see a good future for themselves and their children in the EU host country, in which case *'for the future of the kids they go back to the home country'* (Mustafa, pers. comm., 22.12.2020).

As for the role of reintegration assistance in return decision-making, a majority of the respondents from Iraqi Kurdistan were given reintegration assistance (most often cash or in-kind support for business-start-up). Similarly to the Senegalese respondents, these interviewees often mentioned that the offer of reintegration assistance was helpful and gladly accepted, but that they had already decided to return and so it was not a determining factor in their decision-making. Where the offer of reintegration assistance was mentioned by one respondent as a motivating factor to return, it was in the context of forced removal being the alternative – as this respondent explained, returning with some money is better than being deported.

Due to the limited depth of the telephone interviews, the decision-making of those respondents who ended up being forcibly removed to Iraqi Kurdistan was not always clear. Some respondents whose asylum applications had been rejected seemed to consciously risk forced removal because they were unwilling to accept return to Iraq (and therefore refused to comply with their return order). As suggested above, whether or not the migrant unit includes children seems important in this decision-making process – of the respondents who seemed to risk forced removal based on their strong preference to stay in the country of migration, only two had children with them. These two were special cases – one of these respondents had a child who was benefitting from medical treatment in the country of migration, and the other refused to return to Iraq because that would mean leaving her son in the country of migration. A few other respondents from Iraqi Kurdistan were forcibly removed because they were charged with administrative or criminal offenses, such as illegal work.

### Summary

Table 11 (below) provides a comparative overview of the reasons given for accepting assisted voluntary return (or Voluntary Humanitarian Return in the case of returns from Libya to Senegal) by respondents from the three case countries. As this table illustrates, feelings of having no other choice were common among return migrants who accepted assisted voluntary return. This was the case for the large majority of the Albanian interviewees, and many of the interviewees from Iraqi Kurdistan, whose asylum applications had been rejected, and whose only other “choice” was therefore to risk forced removal. Feelings of choicelessness were also common among the Senegalese respondents who were returned from Libya via Voluntary Humanitarian Return. However, more active decisions to return were more frequently described by the Senegalese respondents, most of whom were not in the asylum system and many of whom actively sought out assisted voluntary return programmes (and who had always intended to return to Senegal anyway).

	Iraqi		
	Albania	Kurdistan	Senegal
<b>Total AVR (and VHR) returns</b>	40	26	16
<b>Rejected asylum claim/ no other option</b>	21	10	6
<b>Disappointed expectations/ intolerable conditions</b>	6	8	9
<b>Threat of EU entry ban</b>	17	0	0
<b>Family reasons</b>	4	3	2
<b>Changes in country of origin</b>	0	3	0
<b>Target achieved</b>	0	2	1
<b>Other</b>	0	2	1

*Table 11. Reasons for accepting AVR/VHR (number of respondents, by country of origin)*

The results of this study therefore demonstrate that, generally, uptake of assisted voluntary return is most often determined by the lack of alternatives that the migrant considers acceptable.

In the Albanian case, the lack of alternatives seems to be underpinned by the effective threat of forced removal, as well as the particularly undesirable consequences of forced removal in terms of constraining return migrants' future mobility to and within the EU (effected via an EU entry ban). In this sense, compliance with return orders is promoted by the availability of legal opportunities for entry to, and work in, the EU – which is not the case for Iraqi and Senegalese nationals. Migrants from Iraqi Kurdistan may be more likely to consider disappearing into irregularity as an alternative to accepting assisted voluntary return because they have a weaker incentive to comply with an EU mobility regime which offers only very limited opportunities for legal migration to the EU (see also ADMIGOV deliverable 1.1, Koopmans and Gonzales-Beilfuss, 2019) and perhaps because they more frequently migrated without children (and therefore did not need to consider the consequences of irregularity for their children).

The lack of acceptable alternatives is also experienced as intolerable conditions in the country of destination – most often for respondents from Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal who were very disappointed in the conditions they faced as asylum seekers or irregular migrants in the EU.

Finally, the above analysis finds that the offer of reintegration assistance is often considered helpful but is not a determining factor in return decisions. However, the prospect of reintegration assistance seems to have had more motivating power in the case of the Senegalese respondents. This seems to be due to the Senegalese respondents' original migration aspirations (to earn money in the country of migration, and then return to Senegal with capital and experience to invest). The availability of reintegration assistance may therefore motivate returns which are already decided – or at least strongly considered – but might not otherwise have taken place at that time.

## 6. Reintegration experiences

This section explores the reintegration experiences of the return migrants interviewed for this study. Rather than following a pre-established definition and operationalisation of the concept of sustainable reintegration, the analysis takes a more inductive approach, highlighting the challenges, concerns and priorities that respondents gave most weight to in their discussions of their post-return experiences and aspirations for the future.

### 6.1 Economic reintegration

This section first overviews the research participants' assessments of their own living conditions. Access to, and quality of, (self-) employment is then explored in more detail. Lastly, other factors contributing to economic (in)security are analysed.

#### Current living conditions

Table 12 (below) highlights considerable differences in respondents' perceptions of their economic conditions at the time of interview. Nearly all returnees in Albania considered their economic conditions as difficult or bad, compared to 47 percent in Senegal and 35 percent in Iraqi Kurdistan.

	Albania		Iraqi Kurdistan		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Difficult/bad</b>	45	92%	14	35%	14	47%
<b>Okay</b>	4	8%	12	30%	10	33%
<b>Comfortable/good</b>	0	0%	14	35%	6	20%
<b>Total:</b>	49	100%	40	100%	30	100%

*Table 12. Perceived economic conditions, number of respondents*

In Albania, many of the respondents who were in difficult or bad circumstances were unemployed and in debt (this included longstanding debts prior to migration, loans taken on to finance migration, as well as new debts incurred since return – often to finance day-to-day consumption). In some cases, respondents' post-return economic and living conditions had deteriorated over time for various reasons which included: the depletion of their return savings or cash-based reintegration assistance; the accumulation of further debt; loss of access to the economic aid they had received prior to migrating; as well as the cessation of medical treatment that they had been receiving abroad. Reflecting their pre-migration situations, poverty and vulnerability seemed particularly acute among the Roma and Egyptian respondents interviewed in Albania. Similarly, in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal there were respondents who returned to debts that they had used to finance their migration, and/or had incurred since their return. In Senegal, debt incurred to finance migration is considered a particularly significant problem and barrier to reintegration, as other research has noted (IOM, 2020) – and as further discussed in Section 6.2. In Iraqi Kurdistan, it was the loss of former assets that was discussed as particularly difficult for returnees. Just over half of the respondents interviewed in Iraqi Kurdistan had sold assets including their jewellery, cars,

furniture, land, and even houses in order to migrate – and those respondents who assessed their quality of life as worse upon return usually did so because they had given up stable employment, or sold their houses, cars, or other assets in order to migrate.

Nonetheless, in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal there were more respondents who described their economic conditions as okay, or even good. Economic conditions were overall most positive in Iraqi Kurdistan, where 35 percent of respondents considered their current economic situation as comfortable or good, compared to 20 percent in Senegal and no respondents in Albania. This likely reflects the fact that the reasons given for leaving Iraqi Kurdistan in the first place were not predominantly economic (see Table 6, Section 4), but it was also clear that some respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan had improved their economic conditions since return, by obtaining new or better employment, or the creation of profitable businesses.

### Employment

Unemployment levels were significantly different in Albania – where only 24 percent of respondents were in regular work or education – compared to Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal (see Table 13 below). Nonetheless, in all three case countries, many return migrants highlighted their need for employment – or for better employment, a better salary, or a (more) profitable business – as a key priority for improving their quality of life.

	Albania		Iraqi Kurdistan		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>In regular work or education</b>	12	24%	35	88%	27	90%
<b>No regular work</b>	38	76%	5	12%	3	10%
<b>Total:</b>	50	100%	40	100%	30	100%

*Table 13. Employment status at the time of interview, number of respondents*

The Albanian respondents tended to return to the same forms of economic activity (or lack thereof) that they had prior to migrating. The large majority of respondents (76 percent) had no regular work. The number of respondents without regular work remained very similar compared to their pre-migration situations – 38 compared to 39 prior to migrating. Many respondents therefore continued to rely on casual, irregular jobs that provide very little income and no income security: often, occasional day labour, seasonal work in Greece, trading used clothes or collecting scrap plastic or metal. Unemployment was often identified by the Albanian return migrants as their primary challenge and was discussed as the most significant barrier to reintegration by all the key stakeholders interviewed.

In contrast, the large majority of respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal had some form of regular work at the time of interview. However, these livelihood activities did not always meet the respondent's material needs, and their longer-term sustainability cannot be assumed. In Senegal, particularly, respondents were often informally self-employed in sectors and activities (e.g. trade, repairs, carpentry, tailoring, fishing or agriculture) which do not guarantee a year-round or stable income. As one Senegalese respondent explained:

*If I stay 4 months without working, the situation is going to be serious. For example, if there was a state of emergency for 2 months, I wouldn't have the means to cover the family's expenses [...] I am currently working, but that doesn't mean that if I was ill or other difficult situations happened to me, I wouldn't be able to get out of it (Assane).*

Similarly, in Iraqi Kurdistan many respondents also relied on self-employment or small businesses which do not necessarily offer a stable or sustainable income. However, in Iraqi Kurdistan there was also a sizeable number of respondents in formal employment (at least 25 percent of the sample).

In all three case countries, key stakeholders (and return migrants themselves) described the mismatch between return migrants' educational levels and local labour market needs as a key barrier to economic reintegration. In Iraqi Kurdistan key stakeholders pointed to the labour market's high requirements in terms of skills and qualifications that some return migrants cannot meet. A GIZ staff member at the German Centre for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq (GMAC) in Erbil explained that labour market reintegration is therefore easier for migrants with tertiary-level education, and who come from more privileged social backgrounds, whose social connections can facilitate access to employment opportunities (anonymous., pers. comm., 18.01.2021). As this interviewee and other key stakeholders pointed out, access to employment is a key challenge for some – but not all – return migrants to Iraqi Kurdistan. The very mixed economic conditions described by return migrants in Iraqi Kurdistan at the time of interview can therefore be seen as reflective of their more diverse (and often more comfortable) socio-economic backgrounds. Nonetheless, the key stakeholders interviewed also highlighted the impacts of the economic crisis on reducing job opportunities (and salaries) in Iraqi Kurdistan, as further discussed below.

In Albania, return migrants' generally low educational levels were highlighted as a barrier to reintegration (or even integration in the first place, given the respondents' very low rates of labour market participation prior to migrating). In addition, key stakeholders and return migrants discussed the lack of job opportunities in the rural regions where return migrants usually come from and return to; the low salaries and poor working conditions for available jobs; a lack of access to transport (for commuting purposes) and to affordable childcare during working hours; and health problems.

Low educational levels were also discussed by key stakeholders as a key challenge for economic reintegration in the Senegalese context. As also reflected in the particularly low educational levels reported by the Senegalese return migrants interviewed for this study (see Table 9, Section 4), a GIZ staff member at the Senegalese-German Centre for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration (CSAEM) (anonymous, pers. comm., 23.03.21) explained that many return migrants to Senegal do not have the educational qualifications required of the available employment opportunities, which makes small business start-up a more viable pathway to economic reintegration. Indeed, it was clear from the interviews that many of the Senegalese return migrants were highly motivated to develop agricultural or other business activities, and many had already set up, resumed and/or expanded business activities since their return. Often this was with the help of formal



reintegration assistance and/or their own earnings from the country of migration (as further discussed in Section 7).

Valeria Falaschi, Project Manager for the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in Senegal, emphasised that a culture of entrepreneurialism in Senegal is one of the factors that supports good reintegration outcomes in Senegal (Falaschi, pers. comm., 30.03.21). Many of the return migrants interviewed were, however, frustrated that without start-up capital or additional investments (for example, productive land, equipment etc.) they were unable to carry out their envisaged projects. They explained that, with their existing livelihood activities, they were unable to save the necessary capital to invest in their business or business ideas and were therefore unable to meet their needs and achieve financial stability. As one respondent explained:

*It's all about means and money. For example, when you grow your crops you will make a profit and also when you trade, you will also make a profit, but basically you need to have financing and means. There is a huge potential for work but the means to implement it are lacking. For example, a henhouse with 10 chickens is not enough as an activity because it cannot satisfy me. If I had 200 chicks or four or five sheep, I could stay to manage them or I could have enough seeds and farming equipment to cultivate and avoid advances and debts because there are too many debts to the point that, in the end, everything that I earn after the harvest I use it to pay off my debts and so on, so it doesn't help me much (Assane).*

Nonetheless, there was a sense of optimism among many Senegalese returnees that, if they were able to invest in their business activities, they would be able to meet their needs and achieve satisfaction:

*What I see here is that, if there is help, it can go well, if there are means, the future can go well, here in our village, livestock and agriculture are doing well, if there are these things, life can go well (Souleymane).*

### **Economic (in)security**

#### *Household income*

A large proportion of households interviewed in each country relied on only one (or no) source of income at the household level. Although this proportion was highest in Iraqi Kurdistan (where only 46 percent of households had more than one source of income), where these households benefitted from multiple sources of income these tended to be stronger (i.e., other household members' regular work) compared to in Albania, where the only other source of income was often only what was known as 'economic aid' (a very small social assistance benefit).

	Albania		Iraqi Kurdistan		Senegal	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>One or no income source</b>	26	53%	21	54%	9	36%
<b>More than one income source</b>	23	47%	18	46%	16	64%
<b>Total:</b>	49	100%	39	100%	25	100%

*Table 14. Household income sources, number of respondents*

In Albania, without regular work, many households were relying on small monthly social security payments (their parents' pensions, disability allowances in some cases, and very low 'economic aid' payments) as their only, or only other, source of household income. 'Economic aid' was regarded by respondents as wholly deficient relative to their needs (those who received 'economic aid' prior to migrating said that they received between 15 to 81 EUR per month). Moreover, upon their return, a number of respondents lost access to the 'economic aid' or disability allowances that they had received prior to migrating, despite being in a similar situation as before. Limited social security provisions therefore left respondents feeling very vulnerable.

The number of households relying on more than one income source was highest in Senegal (64 percent). In these cases, the respondents' themselves sometimes earned money from different activities, or shared a household with family members who also worked. The Senegalese return migrants often explained that they lived in their family homes, which they shared between multiple generations and sometimes the different branches of a polygamous marriage (which seemed to introduce some tensions and precarity in a couple of cases, where economic resources were unevenly distributed).

#### *Housing quality and security*

Home ownership was an issue discussed as an important concern in all three countries. In Albania, some respondents had returned with savings which they invested in building homes, or additional rooms. This was particularly the case among Roma respondents, who reported that, before they migrated, they had lived in informal or temporary constructions, or shared only one or two-room dwellings between multiple-generation households. These material improvements were therefore particularly significant – however, the houses that some Roma families managed to build were visibly unfinished and lacking furniture or appliances. There were also other respondents (Roma and non-Roma) who did not have a home of their own, or whose homes were in a poor state of maintenance (in some cases worsened by the November 2019 earthquake that occurred shortly before these interviews took place) and who were very concerned about the security of their housing, and the prospect of homelessness. Likewise, access to housing was discussed by key stakeholders in Iraqi Kurdistan, who explained that some migrants do not have a home to return to (or the necessary social networks to accommodate them). Just over half the sample of return migrants in Iraqi Kurdistan did not own their own homes at the time of interview, and a few discussed this as a key priority for achieving a better quality of life. In Senegal, housing security was not generally discussed as a problem for return migrants, who mostly lived in their own homes

or in shared family homes (for example, with their siblings, and their siblings' families). However, it was clear that, for some respondents, building their own homes was considered a key accomplishment that they aimed for, and, in a few cases, were in the process of achieving – usually thanks to their earnings abroad.

### *Macroeconomic shocks*

Lastly, the interviews in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. The economic impacts of the pandemic – and of the economic crisis that has affected Iraqi Kurdistan since 2014 – was observed to produce further vulnerability for return migrants. A few return migrants in these countries commented on the negative effect that Covid-19 had had on their economic situation. For example, in Iraqi Kurdistan, one respondent explained:

*Our situation was economically better, but because of Covid-19, it slowly got worse. That is because I work as a taxi driver now. [...] If it were not for Covid-19, I could earn an amount that can cover my daily needs (Saman).*

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the economic situation was already very difficult due to the economic crisis that began in 2014, and which has resulted in ongoing cuts and delays to the payment of public sector salaries. Many return migrants commented on the hardships produced by the economic crisis and key stakeholders similarly discussed the negative impacts of these crises on return migrants' employment prospects and economic reintegration. Similarly, key stakeholders in Senegal reported that return migrants needed additional support during the pandemic because their business activities were disrupted and, in some cases, failed. Additional reintegration assistance to mitigate the effects of the pandemic was provided by IOM and by the BMZ programme "Returning to New Opportunities". For instance, the Senegalese-German Centre for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration in Dakar provided support for returning migrants who run start-ups in order to make their businesses more resilient to the impacts of COVID-19. These responses highlight the precarity of the livelihood activities developed by return migrants, which cannot be assumed to be sustainable, particularly in the context of economic shocks. As Badara Ndiaye, the president of a local migrant association (DIADEM) in Senegal commented: *'Covid and reintegration are going to be problematic. Already those who were stable are destabilised, let alone those who weren't there [i.e., stable]. Covid makes reintegration even more difficult, that's the conclusion'* (Ndiaye, pers. comm. 18.01.21).

### **Summary**

In this study, economic difficulties were seen to pose significant challenges to reintegration in all three countries, and often related to the conditions which motivated migration in the first place (particularly from Albania and Senegal). However, the picture is mixed within and between countries, reflecting the different profiles of the return migrants interviewed, as well as the different structural contexts in each case country. Economic challenges were most prevalent, and perceived most pessimistically, among Albanian returnees. In Senegal, the larger number of respondents were facing economic difficulties, but some were doing well for themselves, and there were stronger perceptions that, if they were able to access start-up financing and support, it would be possible to make a decent living in Senegal. Economic conditions were most varied among returnees to Iraqi Kurdistan, many of whom were feeling positive about their economic

conditions. Nonetheless, the hardships imposed by the economic crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan were often discussed, and the impacts of Covid-19, in particular, underline that, even for those return migrants who manage to attain self-sufficiency and a decent standard of living upon their return, these achievements may not be sustained.

## 6.2 Socio-cultural reintegration

This section first compares how return migrants were received by their families and communities upon return. The analysis then assesses the degree of social support that return migrants felt they had, as well as their psychosocial wellbeing.

### Family and community reception

Migrants returning to the three case countries faced very different receptions by their families and communities. In Albania, family and community responses to return were largely unproblematic. However, in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal family and community responses could be unsupportive or even hostile (coded as ‘problematic’ in Tables 15 and 16 below). In these countries, reintegration into the community was generally more problematic than reintegration into the family, although responses could be mixed at both levels.

	Albania		Iraqi Kurdistan		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Problematic</b>	2	4%	8	22%	11	38%
<b>Unproblematic</b>	43	96%	28	78%	18	62%
<b>Total:</b>	45	100%	36	100%	29	100%

Table 15. Family reception upon return, number of respondents

	Albania		Iraqi Kurdistan		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Problematic</b>	2	4%	16	44%	15	52%
<b>Unproblematic</b>	44	96%	20	56%	14	48%
<b>Total:</b>	46	100%	36	100%	29	100%

Table 16. Community reception upon return, number of respondents

The Albanian respondents generally indicated that they had not faced any problems returning to their families or communities. There seemed to be no stigma attached to the return of “failed” asylum seekers to Albania. This was also the perception among key stakeholder interviewees, who explained that return migrants did not tend to face prejudice within their communities. In contrast, reintegration into the family was experienced as problematic in some way by 22 percent of respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan, and by 38 percent of respondents in Senegal. These difficulties seemed to be more frequent at the community level, where 44 percent of respondents

experienced their reintegration as problematic in Iraqi Kurdistan, as did 52 percent of respondents in Senegal.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, many respondents enjoyed a very warm welcome from their families upon their return and, as discussed below, provided support for their reintegration. In Senegal, many families were relieved to see the return migrant alive and safe, often after many years of separation. Even if they were disappointed by the respondent's return and failure to achieve their migration objectives, Senegalese family members often showed compassion and provided the return migrant with emotional and financial support to help get them on their feet again. Some family members understood that the migrant's return was not their own fault or failure: *'They understood that it was God's will. They understood that I had done my best and that I had not lacked courage and also that it could be worse'* (Mbaye). Similarly, some Senegalese respondents explained that there were no difficulties reintegrating into their communities – they were accepted or welcomed back into their communities, and not treated or perceived differently.

However, in other cases, family and community members in Senegal were actively hostile to the return migrant. These attitudes often stemmed from expectations that a migrant should return to Senegal with wealth (to share). Respondents who returned without evidence of material success were therefore made to feel ashamed, and even taunted or derided. For example, one respondent who had been deported from France after spending approximately five years abroad (and in spite of remitting money and gifts during these years) was humiliated in his family home, where he found that he no longer had a place:

*You know in our house, when you come back from abroad with empty hands, you are not well received. I had to put a mosquito net in a corridor of the house to spend the night. You see, it was as if I was a stranger in my own home. It was really unfortunate, but that's what I experienced. I understood that this is why migrants in financial difficulty refuse to return home. They look at you badly and you are considered dirty, it was really too hard* (Aliou).

Key stakeholders described the family and community pressures on returned migrants as one of the biggest challenges for their reintegration in Senegal. This is because these negative or unsupportive attitudes can negatively affect return migrants' psychosocial health, as well as directly undermining processes of economic reintegration. As Valeria Falaschi (IOM) explained, this can happen where family members pressure the return migrant to sell their material assets (i.e., provided through in-kind reintegration assistance) in order to pay back their loans or contribute to the household finances (Falaschi, pers. comm., 30.03.21).

In Iraqi Kurdistan, negative family or community attitudes did not stem from the same expectations of migration, nor have the same impacts. Those respondents who reported experiencing more problematic familial and community relationships upon their return most commonly explained that this was because they faced negative judgements regarding their migration decisions. Most often, respondents were subject to criticism from their families and communities regarding their decisions to migrate and the resulting consequences (e.g., in terms of lost resources, unpaid debts and, in one case, fatalities). In contrast to Senegal, the same expectations of a return on investment or shared wealth did not seem to be present. Rather, and

as also emphasised by Botan Sharbazheri (local NGO volunteer), negative attitudes stem from family or community views that the migrant should not have migrated (Sharbazheri, pers. comm., 06.07.21). For example, one respondent explained: *‘Sometimes yes, they indirectly tell me that I was weak and I could not face my problem, that is why I left the country. But I ignore what they say because they haven’t walked in my shoes’* (Fadi). In another case a respondent explained: *‘People always judge me for leaving my wife and children alone in Kurdistan’* (Ibrahim).

However, it is also important to note that, in both Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal, even in cases coded “problematic”, an individual returnee’s experience may have been mixed. In other words, while some family or community members were unwelcoming or even hostile towards the return migrant, others in their social circle or family were sympathetic and supportive.

### Social support

Despite the more problematic nature of family and community reception in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal, respondents in these countries generally reported that they could rely on a strong support network (76 percent and 84 percent, respectively). In contrast, although family and community reintegration in Albania was generally described as unproblematic, only a minority of Albanian respondents (30 percent) felt that they could access the support they needed from their social networks (see Table 17 below).

	Albania		Iraq		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Does not have a strong support network (or ambivalent/unsure)</b>	28	70%	6	16%	6	24%
<b>Has a strong support network</b>	12	30%	32	84%	19	76%
<b>Total:</b>	40	100%	38	100%	25	100%

Table 17. Access to a strong support network, number of respondents

Support networks were commonly understood by Albanian respondents as a potential source of financial support (given that these respondents assessed their economic challenges as their greatest concern). Respondents therefore often explained that, although they had friends and family, they could not count on these people for support, as everyone else was facing similar economic pressures. An Albanian woman further explained that even those people with the resources to help were unlikely to do so:

*Today there are no friends that can help you really. Even your relatives, even when it comes to brothers and sisters. If they are doing well they are only going to mind their own business. But they don’t help. [...] People are afraid to give you money, to help you get your life together. [...] They are afraid, because they say “how are you going to pay me back? Even if I give to you, you have nothing”* (Alma).

In contrast, the majority of respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal reported that they did enjoy a network of support. Some of the Senegalese return migrants discussed the material and emotional support that they already received from their network, whilst others – as in Albania – emphasised that their friends or family did not have the financial ability to help them. In Iraqi Kurdistan, family relationships were often described by key stakeholders and by return migrants themselves as very strong, and as central to the support networks that most respondents enjoyed. For example, as one woman described: *‘We have a very strong connection with our families. they helped us through our hard times’* (Aala). Nonetheless, as a GIZ staff member (GMAC, Erbil) explained, family support is not available to all return migrants in Iraqi Kurdistan:

*we are very social as the Iraqi people. So, if I go to Germany for three years and I come back, my family will support me, my relatives, they wouldn't let me rent a house. They say, “come and live with us for six months and then you until you find a proper place”. They're supportive, but it doesn't apply for everybody. You might see a person comes back and he's totally alone and he has nobody, and he finds [it difficult] to reintegrate again into society (anonymous, pers. comm. 18.03.21).*

### **Psychosocial wellbeing**

An undesired return to their country of origin was experienced as (highly) distressing by many respondents across all three case countries. In all three case countries, key stakeholders emphasised the need for psychosocial support to help return migrants come to terms with their return and the perceived “failure” of their migration project – as well as to overcome any trauma that they may have experienced (particularly in the context of difficult and dangerous journeys and experiences in Libya).

Beyond the initial shock of return, feelings of frustration and despair were commonly expressed by respondents in Albania at the time of interview. This most often related to their continuing precarity, and to perceptions that they were unable to achieve anything better for themselves and their families in Albania. For example, as one father explained:

*The years are going by. The future of my kids is the most important. All over the world people have to work and if you work then you'll see the fruits of your work. Here you work as much as you can and still you cannot see anything good coming from it (Ermal).*

In Senegal, in addition to the stress and frustrations of poverty, acute psychosocial stress was observed to result from traumatic migration experiences and/or negative community or family receptions. An unsupportive social environment can make it even more difficult to overcome trauma. As Malamine Soly, present of a local NGO (Dunia Kato) commented, *‘our observation reveals that the majority of returning migrants hide and do not open up to people. They carry a heavy burden, grief’* (Soly, pers. comm., 12.01.21). However, it was also observed that the relationship between family or community receptions and the return migrant’s psychosocial health can be complex. For example, as one return migrant who experienced particular suffering in Libya and during his overland forced removal from Libya reflected: *‘I was not perceived*

*differently [by my community or family], it's just that I had psychological problems, that's what worries my family'* (Amadou). Hubert Demba Faye, Caritas project manager, also explained that in many cases return migrants do not face negative attitudes from their community upon their return, but that their own sense of failure can make them isolate themselves:

*It's true that sometimes the problem itself is at their [individual] level, but the communities welcome them. But sometimes they victimise themselves in some way. They think that they have failed, that it can no longer work, or that people look at them differently, etc. [...] And then psychologically, there is a need to provide them with support, with help' (Faye, pers. comm. 17.01.21).*

In contrast, some of the Senegalese return migrants interviewed explained that they had chosen not to care about what other people said or thought about them, or that they had learned to tolerate these attitudes or behaviours over time. Many respondents indicated that the stigma and/or sense of failure that they had experienced at first had declined over time, or that they'd managed to overcome it and to feel comfortable again and/or gain respect in their communities.

Similarly to both the Albanian and Senegalese contexts, migrants who returned to Iraqi Kurdistan and who perceived their return as a “failed” migration project described the huge disappointment and sadness that they felt. Also notable was the despair experienced by a few respondents whose migration or return experiences were shaped by very difficult family events (such as family separation, or fatalities). A GIZ staff member (GMAC, Erbil) observed similarly that, because of the generally welcoming and supportive social environment for return migrants to Iraqi Kurdistan, psychological problems are not common in Iraqi Kurdistan – however, where they exist, they are very important to address (anonymous, pers. comm. 18.03.21).

Finally, a few post-return sources of support for psychosocial wellbeing and reintegration were also discussed by the return migrants interviewed. As indicated above, migrants who returned to Iraqi Kurdistan were often particularly happy to be reunited with their families. Similarly, there were many Senegalese respondents who highlighted the joy and satisfaction they experienced in being close to, and sharing life, with their family and friends. Additionally, the Senegalese respondents often pointed to the relative peace of mind and freedoms that they enjoyed in Senegal, compared to the stresses of life as an irregular migrant in Europe. They often also emphasised the experience they felt they had gained through their migration, which also seemed to serve as a source of psychosocial strength. For example, as one respondent explained:

*I am 100 percent optimistic that I will achieve great things. My travel experiences have served me well. What I experienced in [a third country] and Italy gives me strength and fortifies me to give as much as I can (Lamine).*

The benefits of migration experience were also discussed to a more limited extent by respondents in Albania. In these cases, respondents discussed the ways in which their migration experience had given them greater resilience and motivation to succeed, broadened horizons and a different way of thinking.



### Summary

Across the three case countries, very different situations regarding socio-cultural reintegration were observed. These processes are therefore highly context and culturally specific, but also specific to the individual return migrant and their family. Family and community responses were discussed as playing a key role in supporting or inhibiting reintegration in both Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal. Nonetheless, key stakeholders in all three countries highlighted the need for psychosocial support for return migrants, and often emphasised that this support should be seen as an important pre-condition to successful economic reintegration.

### 6.3 Personal safety and other threats to life, livelihood, and dignity

This section first focusses on personal safety, before reflecting on the broader threats and vulnerabilities that interviewees discussed as concerns, and which they related largely to a lack of good governance and state protection.

#### Personal safety

As overviewed in Tables 19 and 20, most respondents across the three case countries felt safe in their homes and – to a slightly lesser extent – in their communities. Fears regarding safety were highest in Albania, where 32 percent of respondents said that they felt unsafe (or were unsure about their safety) in their homes, and 39 percent felt unsafe in their communities. Fears regarding safety in the community were also particularly high in Iraqi Kurdistan (reported by 23 percent of respondents), which often related to the threats or persecution that had motivated their migration in the first place.

	Albania		Iraqi Kurdistan		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Safe in home	30	68%	34	92%	21	88%
Unsafe in home	14	32%	3	8%	3	12%
Total:	44	100%	37	100%	24	100%

Table 18. Feelings of safety in the home, number of respondents

	Albania		Iraqi Kurdistan		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Safe in community	28	61%	30	77%	18	86%
Unsafe in community	18	39%	9	23%	3	14%
Total:	46	100%	39	100%	21	100%

Table 19. Feelings of safety in the community, number of respondents

In Albania, concerns regarding safety often related to perceptions of high levels of criminality, combined with low trust in the justice system – only 11 percent of respondents asked whether they trust the justice system reported that they did. The situation was quite different in Iraqi

Kurdistan, where fears regarding personal safety were particularly acute, based on the political or social persecution that they had faced prior to migration, and which had motivated their departure. This was also suggested by Hajjaj Mustafa (ETTC), who described the current security situation in Iraqi Kurdistan as okay, except for those return migrants with family or social problems (Mustafa, pers. comm., 22.12.2020). In Iraqi Kurdistan, twelve respondents had experienced persecution and/or threats to their physical safety which had motivated their departure from Iraq. Of these, seven had relocated within Iraqi Kurdistan upon their return, in order to avoid further problems or threats. Two respondents explained that they continued to change their location because they felt too unsafe to settle down in one place: *'I have to keep changing my location fearing that they might one day come and arrest me'* (Saman). Of the thirteen respondents who left due to threats or persecution, at the time of interview, four continued to feel unsafe. However, for others, their problems had been resolved through migration, and/or had diminished with the passing of time, such that they were able to feel safe again upon return. Others achieved safety by migrating internally and felt comfortable in their new communities. For example, as one respondent explained: *'I was very worried and scared about our safety, but when we went to [new location], I got comfortable'* (Rebaz). Botan Sharbazheri (volunteer at a local NGO) identified these social or political problems as a very significant barrier to reintegration for these people, and called for more psychological and legal support for the resolution of these problems, which, he argued, are likely to be most effectively provided through local NGOs as they have a better understanding of local social and political dynamics (Sharbazheri, pers. comm., 06.07.21).

In contrast, Senegalese return migrants often emphasised that they lived in communities where everyone knew each other and there were therefore no fears in this regard: *'Yes, I'm perfectly safe here. We live in a family, in a community, we know each other as much as we are and there is no insecurity in our lives'* (Magatte).

#### **Lack of state protection**

Safety and security were often conceptualised broadly by respondents in Albania, among whom feelings of insecurity were high, even in cases where respondents said that they felt physically safe in their homes and communities. Return migrants in Albania were often highly anxious about their futures given the challenges they faced in finding work and earning a living, and in accessing healthcare where necessary. This was a source of particular anxiety for respondents who had already suffered a loss of income due to illness, and who had therefore migrated in order to address their economic and healthcare needs. For example, a man whose health problems prevented him from working for six months prior to his migration to Germany, and whose resulting financial difficulties largely motivated his family's decision to seek asylum, expressed his acute concern that he simply could not afford to fall ill again: *'If we are sick only one month we cannot work and the bank will take the house'* (Ervis).

Vulnerability produced by a lack of access to affordable or quality healthcare was also discussed in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal. Within the sample of return migrants interviewed in Iraqi Kurdistan, access to healthcare was not often discussed as an ongoing challenge. However, it was identified by a GIZ staff member (GMAC, Erbil) as an acute need in some cases, which current models of reintegration support struggle to address. As also reflected in the reasons for migration among migrants from Iraqi Kurdistan (see Table 6, Section 4), this interviewee explained that there are many migrants who migrate for medical treatment, and who return to Iraqi Kurdistan without

having resolved their health problems in the country of migration. The interviewee explained that, although NGOs or other actors supporting reintegration may be able to facilitate access to some simpler forms of healthcare (for example, medication or diagnostic tests), more complex problems, such as large surgical interventions, are unlikely to be covered (anonymous, pers. comm. 18.03.21). In Senegal, access to healthcare was not commonly discussed as a primary challenge for return migrants, although several respondents reflected on their frustrations that access to and the quality of healthcare and other public services in Senegal was much worse than in the EU countries in which they had lived.

In Albania, frustrations regarding the lack of access to quality healthcare tied into broader anxieties that there was no safety net to catch them, and to generally low levels of trust in the government and justice system. As one ethnic Albanian woman expressed: *'there is no state here'* (Ermal). A lack of trust in state support therefore exacerbated widespread feelings of hopelessness, and of vulnerability to accidents or injustices that might have catastrophic impacts on their lives. For example, as one respondent explained:

*We are not safe here. Let me give you an example. Crossing in the street with a green light, the car might crash you and the driver is still out there. The police do not intervene. A week ago, a pregnant woman went to the hospital to bring the child to the world and she died. No-one was held responsible. Everyday there are many accidents (Ensi).*

Frustrations regarding poor governance were also expressed by respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal. In Senegal, return migrants often expressed their frustrations that the Senegalese state did little or nothing to help returned migrants and other young people, and a few who had experienced forced removal from EU countries were very disappointed in their government's collaboration in this process.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, levels of trust in the government were particularly low, and concerns regarding the protection of rights seemed to be a particular barrier to reintegration for a couple of respondents. One of these respondents explained:

*I need my basic rights. I want to live like a human being. As a person, I do not have basic rights. Here you have no rights, no electricity, no education, etc. The irony here is that I believe that on the passports of most countries, it is written that it is the duty of the state to protect you and things like this. But on Iraqi passport, it is written "if you lose your passport, you will face legal punishments" How can one be happy in such a country? (Jalal).*

Fears regarding the country's economic and political stability were also emphasised in Iraqi Kurdistan. Although many respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan were optimistic about their futures (or explained that they had to maintain optimism), there were also respondents who viewed their future prospects very negatively, and some who did not trust the state or the country's political situation to protect them. As one respondent explained: *'I am not an optimist. This is the land of surprises: mostly awful ones. One day you may wake up and see Turkish or Iranian soldiers in front*

of your house' (Ahmad). Similarly, Hajjaj Mustafa (ETTC) emphasised the unpredictability of the situation in Iraq, which makes it very difficult to assess the sustainability of reintegration:

*[...] the problem is that in our country you cannot depend on something that is sustainable. Some years the economic and the security situation is very good, but after a few years you will see the situation has changed. [...] I hope [...] we will control the Covid-19, but still the economic and political issues are still not sustainable. It is not easy to guarantee anyone that it will be okay (Mustafa, pers. comm., 22.12.2020).*

### Summary

Overall, the return migrants interviewed described very mixed experiences in terms of their feelings of safety and security across and within the case countries. The case of some respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan underlines a key concern in the existing literature: that migrants who migrated due to safety or security concerns (e.g. conflict or persecution) are often returned to these same situations (Riiskjaer and Nielsson, 2008; Koser and Kuschminder, 2015; Seefar/MMC, 2019). Where these fears and initial motivations for migration are not resolved, sustainable reintegration will be very difficult. More broadly, the interviews emphasise that feelings of safety and security hinge not only on freedom from violence or conflict, but also depend on economic security, and on trust in the state to meet basic needs and rights, including access to justice, social protection, and healthcare.

### 6.4 Overall life satisfaction and re-migration intentions

This section discusses respondents' overall satisfaction with their quality of life, as well as their aspirations to stay in the country of origin, or to re-migrate. Re-migration aspirations can be seen to relate to how return migrants assess their current quality of life, including in relation to their situations prior to migrating and in the country of migration.

#### Overall satisfaction and re-migration attempts

As discussed above, the Albanian respondents usually returned to broadly the same conditions that had motivated their out-migration. The large majority of respondents remained dissatisfied with their overall quality of life in Albania. In Senegal, feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction were very mixed. In Iraqi Kurdistan, feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction were also mixed, but at least 40 percent of the sample reported overall satisfaction with their quality of life, and approximately half reported that their quality of life at the time of interview was better compared to their pre-migration situations, and/or better than their quality of life in the country of migration.

After a period of time back in Albania, eight respondents left Albania in order to seek asylum again. The reasons they gave for their re-migration were similar to those that had motivated their initial asylum migration, which highlights that these challenges remained unaddressed and acted as barriers to their sustainable reintegration. These respondents were very despondent about their prospects in Albania, stating that they had '*nothing to do here*' (Emin) or '*no reason to stay*' (Dafina). Seven other respondents who had returned to Albania via assisted voluntary return had subsequently tried to migrate again but were stopped at the borders. Other respondents who had

been forcibly removed to Albania reported the strong desire to migrate again but knew that they were unable to due to the EU entry bans in their passports.

Re-migration attempts were much less commonly observed among the (smaller) samples of returnees in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal. Only one Senegalese interviewee discussed a further two (unsuccessful) attempts to reach Europe since he first returned from Spain in 2007. However, two other Senegalese respondents also discussed earlier unsuccessful attempts to reach Europe prior to their most recent migratory experience which was the focus of their interviews. None of the respondents interviewed in Iraqi Kurdistan reported having tried to migrate from Iraq again, although this does not necessarily reflect broader trends – key stakeholders observed that many return migrants do re-migrate back to the EU from Iraqi Kurdistan.

### **Re-migration aspirations**

In this study, different questions were asked in order to better understand the nature of respondents' (im)mobility aspirations (whether they thought about migrating again, whether they wanted to, whether they'd ever attempted or made plans to, and where they would ideally like to reside if they had the legal right to live anywhere) (for further discussion of conceptualising and measuring migration aspirations, see Carling, 2019). In the following analysis, (im)mobility aspirations are classified according to what the respondent's intention seemed to be – in terms of both what they were planning, as well as the opportunities that they wanted to pursue if and when possible (i.e. in cases where the feasibility of their migration aspirations seemed low). This understanding of intentions does not, however, include the preferences that respondents expressed when asked where they would ideally like to live if they had the legal right to live anywhere, as these did not seem to necessarily closely relate to respondents' life aspirations and decision-making processes. However, disentangling concrete plans from strong desires and from ideal preferences remains difficult, and the following analysis acknowledges these ambiguities and qualifications as much as possible.

As overviewed in Table 20 (below), re-migration aspirations were common among the return migrants interviewed in all three case countries. Re-migration aspirations were highest in Albania, where 82 percent of respondents said that they wanted to migrate again. In contrast, approximately half the respondents interviewed in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal wanted to stay in their respective countries of origin (55 percent and 47 percent, respectively). In these two countries – and particularly in Senegal – there were also a number of respondents who reported that they still thought about migrating, but were ambivalent or undecided as to whether they actually wanted to.

	Albania		Iraq		Senegal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Stay</b>	7	14%	22	55%	14	47%
<b>Re-migrate</b>	41	82%	11	28%	8	27%
<b>Uncertain/ambivalent</b>	2	4%	7	18%	8	27%
<b>Total:</b>	50	100%	40	100%	30	100%

*Table 20. Respondents' aspirations to stay or re-migrate*

The widespread re-migration aspirations among return migrants in Albania relates to these respondents' generally low levels of satisfaction with their quality of life in Albania, and their lack of hope for the future in Albania. The large majority of Albanian respondents (93 percent) assessed their quality of life as having been better in the countries in which they sought asylum. Similarly, in Iraqi Kurdistan those respondents with strong re-migration intentions were generally dissatisfied with their current quality of life and assessed their current conditions as worse than they had been in the countries where they had sought asylum. In contrast, most of the respondents with firm intentions to stay in Iraqi Kurdistan were satisfied with their current quality of life, and most assessed their current quality of life as better than in the country of migration and, often, better than before they migrated. However, the relationship between self-assessed quality of life and mobility aspirations seemed more complex where respondents who reported dissatisfaction with their current quality of life did not aspire to re-migrate, or were unsure or ambivalent. As discussed further below, this reluctance or unwillingness to re-migrate relates to the costs, risks, and difficulties of irregular migration to the EU.

#### *Aspirations to stay*

In Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal intentions to stay hinged largely on: the respondents' unwillingness to take the same risks and experience the same difficulties as their previous migration attempts; their positive reintegration experiences and/or perceptions of a better future in their respective countries of origin; and/or family responsibilities and relationships that they did not want to leave behind. A GIZ staff member (GMAC, Erbil) emphasised that some migrants return to Iraqi Kurdistan with a very different impression of life abroad compared to their pre-migration expectations, in light of which they evaluate their prospects in their country of origin more favourably (particularly given the costs and risks of migrating). This shift in orientation was also described by some Senegalese interviewees, who expressed a sense of optimism and determination to succeed in Senegal: *'my wish is to stay here because most of the time what is there is here. You can stay in Senegal and work and succeed in Senegal'* (Cheikh). The subjective nature of these assessments and perceptions is, however, important to highlight. As Pirce Altinok, IOM Dakar Reintegration Officer, explained, even if a return migrant's reintegration process is going well from an external perspective, individual subjective perceptions and life aspirations may still mean that a returnee wishes to re-migrate. Reflecting on her own casual conversations with returnee beneficiaries of reintegration assistance in the context of her field visits, Altinok reflected that, even when their businesses and broader reintegration processes seem to be going relatively well, some returnees nonetheless express the desire to re-migrate. (Altinok, pers. comm., 18.03.21).

### *Aspirations to re-migrate*

Respondents who still aspired to re-migrate discussed the barriers preventing them from doing so. Often this was due to their lack of financial resources to fund new migration attempts. However, across the three case countries there were also many respondents who explained that they were disinclined or unwilling to take irregular or unsafe migration routes again.

In Senegal, a few respondents explained that they did not have the money to finance another migration attempt. Others explained that they did not want to take the irregular route and were therefore hoping for an opportunity to migrate legally. It was not clear whether this meant legal migration in the strict sense (i.e., obtaining a valid work visa for the duration of the migratory stay) or simply obtaining the necessary documents (whether valid or fraudulent) to travel safely via air and enter the destination country legally (with the possibility of irregular work or overstay). Similarly, in Iraqi Kurdistan some specified that it was their lack of financial resources, family responsibilities, a travel ban, or Covid-19 that was preventing them from acting on their re-migration aspirations. Two respondents said that they would only consider legal or safe routes.

Similar reasons were given by the respondents in Albania, who generally explained that, due to financial or bureaucratic barriers (e.g., an EU entry ban or lack of access to legal migration channels), they were not able to migrate again at the time of interview. These respondents therefore seemed to be waiting and hoping for something to change, or for some labour migration opportunity to come their way. However, there were also a number of respondents in Albania who reported making concrete plans to re-migrate. A key difference for return migrants in Albania is that legal labour migration opportunities are relatively more accessible for Western Balkan nationals. The opening up of low-skilled labour migration opportunities to Germany since 2016 (under the Western Balkan Regulation) clearly featured in the Albanian respondents' decision-making processes, some of whom were taking steps to find a job or work contract in Germany. This interest in labour migration opportunities was reiterated by key stakeholder interviewees who reported that many return (and potential) migrants were making investments in language learning and vocational training in order to best position themselves to meet labour market demands in Germany.

Aspirations for future migration among Albanian respondents therefore centred on labour migration opportunities. The majority of respondents preferred not, or were unwilling, to migrate again as asylum seekers. Reasons for this included their understanding that they were unlikely to be granted asylum, and were frustrated that they could not work as asylum seekers. Respondents often pointed to the boredom and indignity of life as an asylum seeker:

*We don't want to experience the same thing. Just staying home and not being allowed to work (Ervis);*

*I cannot go through what I experienced the first time. I would like to live there but not in asylum. [...] [Because of] stress and you don't feel well or free there. They see you as an asylum seeker (Eleni).*

This change in perception or attitude was also discussed by key stakeholder interviewees who suggested that many return migrants in Albania have adopted the idea that asylum-seeking was the “wrong” way to achieve their migration objectives.

However, three respondents said that they would consider migrating as asylum seekers again only if they were unable to secure a work contract. A further six considered asylum-seeking as their primary strategy for future migration – these were all of Roma or Egyptian ethnicity. The greater willingness of Roma and Egyptian return migrants to migrate again likely relates to these groups’ poorer economic conditions and experiences of marginalisation and discrimination in Albania, and perhaps to the greater barriers to their integration into the labour market of either Albania or Germany. This suggests that, in the face of such conditions in Albania, asylum-seeking (even if it results only in a temporary stay) may still be considered worthwhile by Roma and Egyptian return migrants. This is also suggested by Vitjona Beyeja, team leader at a local NGO (Diakonia Agapes) who reported that, most often, those return migrants who want to re-migrate as asylum seekers cannot clearly explain what they expect to achieve through asylum migration, but simply explain *‘I don’t know, but I just want a way to escape’* (Beyeja, pers. comm., 24.01.20). It therefore seems that re-migration through asylum-seeking is perceived as the only available migration option open to severely vulnerable families who may lack the human and social capital necessary for labour migration.

#### *Uncertain and changeable (im)mobility aspirations*

As the above analysis suggests, aspirations to stay or re-migrate were not necessarily fixed, but rather subject to change based on the conditions, opportunities and constraints that return migrants were faced with. As described above, aspirations to leave were sometimes qualified by assertions that the respondent would only consider legal and/or safe routes, the opportunities for which are very limited for return migrants in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal. Some return migrants also expressed ambivalence or uncertainty as to whether re-migration was actually a desirable or necessary option for them. For many respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal, re-migration therefore seemed to remain a possibility that they would consider if conditions deteriorated in their country of origin – or if a safe or legal opportunity arose.

This uncertainty was particularly evident among the Senegalese return migrants, many of whom explained that they still considered migrating (or did not rule it out for the future) but first wanted to see whether they could achieve their objectives in Senegal. In this sense, migration was not desired, but considered a potentially necessary strategy for the future. For example, as one man explained:

*I would prefer to stay in Senegal, it's my first option. But I told you my two plans – I have to stay here in Senegal, each of them can come true. And if necessary, that is where I will resort to migration. But if I manage to realise one of my plans, I won't even leave Senegal to go to Mali (Samba).*

The tentative and changeable nature of return migrants’ (im)mobility aspirations therefore relates to the challenging structural environments to which migrants often return, and to the resulting fragility of their reintegration projects.



*Return migrants' often strong will to reintegrate*

As indicated above, a number of return migrants emphasised that they would strongly prefer to stay in their respective countries of origin, but considered that re-migration was or might be necessary for living a secure, dignified and meaningful life. This was the case in all three countries but was discussed most often in Albania and Senegal. In Senegal, as discussed above, return migrants wished to stay in Senegal if they could meet their economic needs and objectives. In Albania, a number of respondents who wanted to re-migrate stated that their first wish would be to be able to stay in Albania, but that this would depend on the creation of economic opportunities, as well as a stronger social security net, better education for their children, and better healthcare. In both of these country cases, the conditions for being able to stay reflect the respondents' reasons for migrating in the first place. Poverty and precarity can therefore be seen to drive the re-migration of return migrants who would otherwise prefer to stay, and who consider their (potential) re-migration to be compelled by their circumstances. In light of analyses that focus on return migrants' remigration aspirations or behaviour, it is important to understand that some return migrants have a strong will to reintegrate, but consider re-migration a necessity given their perceived prospects in their countries of origin.

**Summary**

In conclusion, re-migration aspirations were common across all three case countries, and could be seen to relate to respondents' overall satisfaction with their quality of life, and perceptions of their future prospects in their country of origin. In Albania, widespread re-migration aspirations related to respondents' feelings of hopelessness and sense that there was no future for them in Albania. In Senegal and Iraqi Kurdistan, aspirations were more mixed, and return migrants more often expressed satisfaction or hope that they could make things work in their respective countries. In all three case countries, some respondents expressed a strong will to stay if they could achieve a better quality of life there but perceived that their opportunities to do so were (very) limited. The interviews also highlight that, even where respondents express hopes or intentions to stay in their country of origin, the continuing strength of this commitment to staying cannot be assumed. Whilst some return migrants seemed firm in their desire to stay in Iraq or Senegal and seemed to have turned the page on their migration aspirations, others remained ambivalent or undecided, or acknowledged that, were their projects to fail, or their conditions to decline in the country of origin – or if they were in the future able to access a legal migration opportunity – they would likely consider migrating again.

## 7. The Effects of EU Exit policy on sustainable reintegration

### 7.1 Exit policy: Return

#### **Factors shaping the acceptance of assisted voluntary return**

In terms of return decision-making processes, uptake of assisted voluntary return was driven largely by the lack of acceptable alternatives. There was no evidence that expectations of reintegration assistance had a significant influence on the acceptance of assisted voluntary return – except in the case of Senegalese respondents who were considering return anyway, for whom the offer of reintegration assistance was therefore an important additional motivation. This has been noted in previous studies which find that reintegration assistance is not a central driver of decisions to accept assisted voluntary return (Koser and Kuschminder, 2015; Strand *et al.*, 2016).

The perceived lack of acceptable alternatives refers to the difficulties or risks of staying in the country of migration -- whether that was due to the insecurity and dangers of staying in Libya, the hardship of life as an irregular migrant in the EU, and/or the threat of forced removal. The decision-making of Albanian migrants is particularly interesting in terms of what it reveals about the relationship between the EU mobility regime and third country nationals' migration decision-making. Albanian migrants were particularly concerned to avoid forced removal and an EU entry ban. It would therefore seem that acceptance of assisted voluntary return in this case relies largely on the real prospect of legal re-entry and, in particular, legal labour migration opportunities for these same migrants. Albanian migrants are thereby incentivised to comply with a return order in order to be able to take advantage of future legal labour migration opportunities in the EU, which are much less available to migrants from Senegal and Iraqi Kurdistan.

#### **The impacts of forced removal on motivations to reintegrate or re-migrate**

In terms of the impacts that EU Exit policy has on migrants' return and reintegration experiences, various implications can be observed. The first is the relationship between the voluntariness of return, and the migrant's psychological preparedness and willingness to reintegrate. Key stakeholders emphasised that reintegration is much easier for those return migrants who have made a more active decision to return, because they are psychologically more prepared. As Malamine Soly (Dunia Kato, Senegal) observed:

*Those who returned of their own free will [find it easier to reintegrate]. Because they have an idea in mind. Otherwise, they would have preferred to stay there tired and suffering until they died. That's how the migrant works. [...] That's why I find that those who return voluntarily have a thousand chances to integrate quickly. But the one who has been forced, he has been surprised. He is overwhelmed by the situation (Soly, pers. comm.12.01.2021).*

These key stakeholders explained that, in cases where the migrant is more psychologically prepared and willing to return, it is easier to provide effective reintegration assistance because the returnee is already motivated to reintegrate. In this sense, reintegration assistance is of secondary importance relative to the return migrant's own willingness to return and reintegrate. This was also observed by a Senegalese return migrant who explained:

*[...] the success of a migrant's definitive return depends mainly on him, his will, and his commitment. [...] Even if IOM's financial support is not huge, the question of definitive return is first of all voluntary and personal. It is up to the emigrant himself who must be aware and make the firm intention to return home for good, invest and manage his business. But without the will and the awareness, even if the IOM gave us tens of millions, the migrant returned for good may fail in their final return project (Oumar).*

The voluntariness of return decisions also seems to impact re-migration aspirations. In Iraqi Kurdistan, a GIZ staff member (GMAC, Erbil) reported that, in their experience, those migrants who wish to migrate back to the EU are usually forcibly returned, as opposed to having taken assisted voluntary return (anonymous, pers. comm. 18.03.21). This was also to some extent reflected in the migrant interviewee data, where a higher proportion of those forcibly returned to Iraqi Kurdistan aspired to leave again, as compared to those who returned via assisted voluntary return. In Senegal the picture was less clear, but it is notable that, of the eight respondents who strongly wished to re-migrate, six had been returned to Senegal before reaching their EU destinations (or shortly upon arrival), which underlines their lack of preparedness for return.

#### **Other impacts of forced removal on wellbeing and reintegration processes**

Studies of deportation have highlighted the wide range of negative impacts on return migrants' reintegration processes (see, for example, Khosravi, 2018). Particularly notable in this study were the dangers that Senegalese migrants were exposed to when they were forcibly removed overland. One Senegalese respondent who had been returned from the Spanish enclave of Melilla explained that:

*[...] it was the Spaniards who handed us over to the Moroccans and the Moroccans handed us over to the Algerians at the border in a town called Ouzda and the Algerians put us in trucks with other migrants we found there. And in these trucks, there was no stop because they said that otherwise we would escape so they gave us bottles for our natural needs and for food they gave us various sweets that give diarrhoea. It is difficult to explain. They took us to Tamanrasset, a city in the desert of Algeria. Over there the heat is something else, you leave a bucket of water for a few moments and you can no longer drink it. We brought a lot of bottles of water to drink. We stayed there for almost two weeks. Then they took all our luggage, mobile phones, clothes, money, everything. They say it's their law that allows them to do that. [...] That's what hurt me the most, not the fact of going back to Senegal, but what they did was not normal. It was afterwards that we took the destination of Niger and there too they left us almost 12km from the border with Niger in the desert with each of us with a bottle of water (Abdou).*

Another Senegalese respondent similarly returned overland from Algeria mentioned that many people had died during this return journey. These highly abusive overland return practices have been observed by scholars and INGOs operating in the region (ECRE, 2020; Kleist, 2020; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2021).

Practices of forced removal to Albania and Iraqi Kurdistan were not observed to be dangerous in the same way. However it was clear that forced removal can nonetheless have a variety of more negative impacts in these contexts, compared to assisted voluntary return. The Albanian interviews, which captured these return processes in more detail, highlighted a number of issues. First, forcibly removed families experienced distress, shock and frustration at their sudden forced removal by police. Second, whereas migrants who accepted assisted voluntary return had time to prepare for their departure and organise in-country transportation back to their homes in Albania, usually with the help of friends or family, forcibly removed persons were unable to make these preparations. This is also emphasised by INSTAT/CESS (2020) who highlight that families who are forcibly returned are unable to bring with them the school documents necessary to facilitate their children's reintegration into the educational system.

Third, whereas migrants who returned via assisted voluntary return often returned with either their own savings or with some cash assistance to help meet their immediate needs upon return to Albania (or even to invest in housing, as previously discussed), forcibly removed persons sometimes had their savings confiscated from them, thereby making their return and reintegration experiences more difficult. It is unclear what the policy rationale is for the confiscation of migrants' cash savings, and this practice would seem unnecessarily punitive. Fourth, forcibly removed respondents were subject to an EU entry ban prohibiting them from migrating to the EU again for usually two to three years. As mentioned, this barrier to their re-migration is particularly significant given the importance of migration as a livelihood strategy in Albania, whether circular or permanent. For example, this frustration was expressed by a single mother who had been actively researching labour migration opportunities in Germany, who understood that with a work contract she could migrate legally in Germany, but who was prevented from doing so by her entry ban. When asked '*What kind of assistance do you think you would need in order to be more comfortable here?*' she responded, '*To remove the entry ban in my passport and to migrate and work abroad*' (Jorida). However, migrants who accepted assisted voluntary return to Albania also seemed, in some cases, to be disadvantaged by a re-entry ban imposed by Germany – although, according to Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2018), these bans tend to be shorter in duration where a migrant complies with a return order.

Given the multiple and, often, sustained challenges caused by forced removal, it seems particularly unfortunate that, in many of the cases of forced removal to Albania captured in this study, the migrants did not consciously risk forced removal. Rather, they would have strongly preferred to accept assisted voluntary return if they had understood that they were subject to forced removal at that point. From the accounts given, it therefore seems that there is substantial scope to improve the communication of information regarding forced removal, with likely benefits for both the migrants themselves as well as destination countries, which could thereby avoid the need for forced removal in these cases.

## 7.2 Post-Exit Policy: Reintegration

In Albania, few respondents had benefitted from any reintegration assistance. In Senegal, the majority of respondents (60 percent) had received reintegration assistance upon their return (most commonly a combination of cash or material assistance for business start-up, vocational and business skills training). Eleven reported that they had received no assistance for their reintegration – almost all of these respondents had been forcibly removed to Senegal. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the majority of respondents (65 percent) had also received reintegration assistance. Similarly to Senegal, most of this assistance had been provided as cash or material assistance for business start-up and training – although a few had also received other forms of assistance which included assistance for re-furnishing their home, rental accommodation, or an internship. Botan Sharbazheri (volunteer at a local NGO) discussed this assistance for housing or furniture as very important as many return migrants sell their homes or belongings in order to migrate (Sharbazheri, pers. comm. 06.07.2021). Fourteen respondents in Iraqi Kurdistan reported that they had not received any reintegration assistance – again, with one exception, these respondents had all been forcibly removed. The following section explores the impacts of reintegration assistance on respondents' reintegration experiences, and takes into account both the reintegration assistance that might be offered to return migrants at the point that they decide to accept an assisted voluntary return package, as well as any reintegration assistance that might be offered to return migrants in their country of origin (often provided through local NGOs or INGOs, regardless of the mode of return).

In Senegal and Iraqi Kurdistan, where many more respondents had received reintegration assistance, respondents' assessment of this assistance was often very positive. These return migrants often explained that this assistance had helped them to solve some of the problems they faced upon their return and/or had allowed them to develop a livelihood activity that was supporting them at the time of interview. For example, one Senegalese interviewee who had himself sought out assisted voluntary return when he decided to return from Spain, and who had benefitted from preparatory training both in Senegal and Spain, as well as cash and in-kind material support upon his return, explained: *'I am currently feeling good economically, the AVRR programme has enabled me to live a decent life thanks to my income generating activity which is gradually expanding'* (Oumar).

However, another common theme amongst the return migrants and key stakeholders interviewed was that, although helpful, reintegration assistance is not sufficient to ensure a sustainable reintegration. The major frustration was that the amount of cash or in-kind material assistance is too low to allow the creation of a profitable and sustainable business. For example, a Senegalese respondent explained: *'[...] my nephews and older brothers have helped me to equip the shop. If it was only the reintegration aid and the money I had saved, I would have gone bankrupt'* (Badou). Key stakeholders in Albania and Iraqi Kurdistan similarly emphasised that the amount of funding typically allocated to business start-up in these countries makes it difficult to develop a profitable business. For example, Altin Kurdari, Reintegration Counsellor for IOM Tirana, cautioned that the amount of assistance offered to help business start-up – typically 1000 or 1500 Euros – does not go far in the Albanian context, although it may be more profitable in a rural context where it can be spent on livestock or other agricultural inputs: *'with 1000, to be realistic, you can't really do much. In the village, you can do something. You can buy sheep or one cow, maybe'* (Kurdari, pers. comm., 13.01.2020).

Particularly in the Senegalese context, the return migrants and local key stakeholders emphasised that if more financing were made available to return migrants, this would have a very positive impact on supporting Senegalese return migrants' reintegration aspirations and the sustainability of their economic reintegration, by allowing them to establish more secure and profitable business activities. However, the local key stakeholders interviewed in Senegal also emphasised that, although there are success stories where return migrants have been supported to develop profitable businesses that generate a decent livelihood and may even employ others, currently, reintegration assistance falls substantially short of the scale of need in terms of the number of return migrants needing support. As Hamidou Diallo, president and coordinator of the Association of Return Migrants for Kolda Region put it: *'It's like a drop in a pool of water'* (Diallo, pers. comm. 11.01.2021)

Nonetheless, interviewees in all three countries discussed limitations to current models of reintegration assistance. It was clear that the effectiveness of support for small businesses could be undermined by a lack of skills or knowledge, or simply bad luck. One Senegalese respondent explained that his livelihood options were already limited by his lack of skills or qualifications, and that his business activity then failed due to the death of half the livestock provided to him: *'It's only agriculture and breeding that I can do because I'm not educated. [...] But I had some difficulties with the sheep. They died; only five of them are left. Things didn't go as expected'* (Papa).

Many of the key stakeholders interviewed similarly emphasised that business start-up cannot be seen as a solution for all return migrants. They highlighted that small business start-up is often the most viable path to economic reintegration given that many return migrants lack the education or skills to find employment in the labour market. And in Iraqi Kurdistan and Senegal, key stakeholders also observed that small business start-up is facilitated by a culture of entrepreneurship in these two countries. However, it was also acknowledged that successful entrepreneurship relies on skills (including basic literacy or numeracy) which return migrants may not have (and which may be difficult to teach in a short period of time). Additional barriers identified to the effective use of assistance for business start-up were a lack of personal financial resources or access to credit for additional investments in a business activity; a lack of social capital; as well as structural factors such as market competition and also security issues. The need for sufficient time and human resources to invest in market research, in order to support the development of potentially more profitable and sustainable business models, was highlighted as a particularly significant opportunity for improving the effectiveness of support. Support for business start-up was therefore discussed as needing significant support and investment, and as not suitable for, or desired by, all return migrants. Key stakeholders called for more vocational training and careful collaboration with the private sector to facilitate pathways to employment in sectors where jobs are available.

Other improvements to the overall design of reintegration assistance were also discussed as necessary by key stakeholders. Across all the case countries key stakeholders discussed the importance of making assistance available over longer timeframes, acknowledging the fact that sustainable reintegration may not be achieved quickly (if at all) and that return migrants may need ongoing support, or at least the opportunity to access further support when faced with new challenges. This was emphasised particularly by key stakeholders at IOM Dakar, who pointed to

the need for regular field visits and continuous technical support and mentoring – as well as flexible funds to meet additional needs, for example if a returnee’s business equipment breaks and needs to be repaired or replaced. The positive impact of such a close supportive relationship was also indicated by a couple of the Senegalese return migrants interviewed: *‘I benefited from their follow-up and here too they keep calling me and checking up on me all the time’* (Sékou). In Iraqi Kurdistan, key stakeholders emphasised that local NGOs on the ground should be more involved in the design and implementation of reintegration programmes, such that these programmes are shaped by local experience, and benefit from local partners’ better understanding of local social, economic, and political realities.

Other frustrations regarding bureaucratic processes and obstacles to the effective use of reintegration assistance were also discussed by both return migrants and key stakeholders. A few respondents seemed to have been misinformed about the reintegration assistance they were due to receive and therefore experienced frustration and disappointment. Opportunities and support to facilitate contact between (potential) return migrants and service providers responsible for implementing reintegration assistance in the country of origin whilst the migrant is still in the country of origin could help to reduce such misunderstandings and, as key stakeholders emphasised, allow migrants to better prepare for their reintegration. Other respondents had faced difficulties and/or long delays in accessing the reintegration assistance they had been promised. A few others were frustrated that there was not greater flexibility to allow them to use the funds as they thought most important and useful. Key stakeholders in Albania similarly discussed the difficulties of disbursing funding where the high degree of informality in local markets make it difficult to comply with donor requirements.

### 7.3 The post-Exit monitoring process

Current discussions of the state of return and reintegration policy have called for the need for greater monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in this field (Paasche, 2014; Kuschminder, 2017c). Le Coz (2021) reports that recent years have seen progress towards the more robust M&E of assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes, but that these practices remain ‘rudimentary’ for many projects (p.18). In this section we provide an overview of the M&E practices described by the key stakeholders interviewed.

First, key stakeholders in Albania and Senegal, particularly, discussed the need for systematic data collection to map and profile the returnee population in each of these countries, in order to support needs assessment, and the effective design and provision of reintegration assistance.

Second, the key stakeholders interviewed generally emphasised the importance of M&E for their work, but practices were nonetheless highly variable and there was very little evidence of a both systematic and long-term approach. Even for large implementing organisations such as IOM and GIZ, M&E practices seemed to be project-dependent and largely limited to shorter-term timeframes. For example, although there are various levels of M&E – including systematic cross-country data collection – within the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration funded by the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), the reintegration assistance that IOM provides on behalf of other EU sending missions (i.e., the EU country from which the migrant is returned) is determined by the particular funder, and therefore not evaluated in a systematic way. Reporting for these sending missions varies. For example, as Altin Kurdari (IOM Tirana) explained, monitoring of the return migrants’ reintegration happens at three, six, or nine months, up to a maximum of 12 months – as required by the sending country mission (Kurdari, pers. comm., 13.01.2020). Reporting to the sending country focusses on whether or not the return migrant has achieved economic self-sufficiency, given the predominance of economic factors both as motivations for migration and as barriers to sustainable reintegration in Albania. Such monitoring seems to involve qualitative reports, rather than systematic data collection. As Kurdari also noted, it can be difficult to determine whether someone’s reintegration has been successful within a timeframe of a year – particularly if they used their reintegration grant to open a business, in which case profitability and sustainability may take longer to achieve. Sending missions may also conduct their own monitoring activities – for example by coming to Albania to visit beneficiaries. These visits can take place two to five years after the beneficiary has returned to Albania, thus yielding insights into longer-term reintegration outcomes, but typically only involve visits to a handful of people.

Similarly, a GIZ staff member at the German Information Centre on Migration, Vocational Training and Career (DIMAK) in Albania explained that M&E practices are built into project proposals and budgets. The particular approach taken is determined within the framework of each project, and generally ends at the end of the project lifecycle.

Local NGOs relying on short-term project cycles for funding seemed to find it particularly difficult to develop systematic and longitudinal M&E practices. For example, these constraints were highlighted by Mame Thierno Aidara, regional representative of La Lumière (a Senegalese NGO), who nonetheless described efforts to overcome these challenges:



*Now, the difficulty we have is that you don't have the resources for five years, four years, ten years later. You go back to all the follow-up benchmarks because that's where we still need resources, especially for follow-up, because... In general, the resources that are allocated for follow-up are really insignificant. This is why we, having understood this situation, we have tried to involve the services at the local level, with the sub-prefects, the committees, the services at the communal level so that this monitoring can be done. Even if La Lumière is not there (Aidara, pers. comm.26.01.2021).*

Other challenges for the systematic and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of reintegration assistance are discussed in a recent OECD (2020) report.

In the rarer cases where projects take a longer-term, more flexible approach to reintegration support, M&E can be built into this approach. For example, a Terre des Hommes staff member explained that the IRMA project implemented in Albania has a dedicated staff member for monitoring and evaluation, the results of which are shared with project donors (anonymous, pers.comm., 27.01.20). Moreover, this project takes a case management approach, and therefore conducts periodic assessments of each beneficiary family (every six months) in order to monitor their progress and assess current needs (anonymous, pers.comm., 27.01.20). Cases are only closed when it is deemed that the family's needs have been met (anonymous, pers.comm., 27.01.20). Somewhat similarly, other stakeholders explained that, even if they don't have a formal protocol for ongoing M&E, they maintain close relationships with (former) programme beneficiaries, which allows them to informally monitor ongoing reintegration processes.

Overall then, M&E practices vary substantially, and are typically determined on a project by project basis, often for different funders, which hinders systematic, longitudinal and comparative approaches. The nature of data collection for M&E across the organisations interviewed remained somewhat unclear, but seemed to variously include the logging of output indicators, follow-up surveys, qualitative field assessments, and the use of more systematic baseline and endline assessments. Mostly, evaluations were conducted internally (external evaluations were mentioned by IOM). The need for systematic and longitudinal M&E practices, supported by a common approach to defining and measuring sustainable reintegration, as well as appropriate resources, therefore remains a priority.

## 8. Conclusion

This deliverable provides an exploration of sustainable reintegration in Albania, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Senegal. Our objectives were to explore:

- return migrants' decision-making regarding the acceptance or refusal of assisted voluntary return packages;
- return migrants' experiences since their return;
- in what ways reintegration processes are impacted by EU Exit regimes;
- and the post-Exit monitoring process.

Through an in-depth analysis of 120 interviews with return migrants and 26 key stakeholder interviews this deliverable has examined reintegration experiences across the three case studies. In addition, Section 7 of this report has provided an analysis of each of the points noted above. In this final section we provide a summary and conclusion regarding the impact of EU policy on return decision-making, sustainable reintegration processes, and policy recommendations.

### 8.1 Impacts of EU policy on return decision-making

In this report we have made a distinction between assisted voluntary return as a policy category and the voluntariness of returnees' decision making in practice. It is evident that although the majority of respondents interviewed participated in an assisted voluntary return programme, they felt heavily constrained within the context of their return decision and most often did not consider their return a voluntary choice. Amongst the respondents, uptake into assisted voluntary and humanitarian return programmes was driven largely by the lack of any viable or acceptable alternatives – which included, in the Albanian case, the threat of an EU entry ban alongside forced removal.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that a lack of preparedness for return makes reintegration particularly difficult. Several stakeholders discussed the shock of an unprepared return as a central challenge for supporting reintegration, regardless of whether the migrant returned via assisted voluntary return or forced removal.

#### Policy Recommendations:

- **Implement 'Assisted Return' that acknowledges the lack of voluntariness in many cases and focuses on supporting 'preparedness' for return:** In Norway, it is recognised that assisted return is not voluntary (Kuschminder, 2017c). The focus of Norwegian return counsellors is for migrants to accept their return and prepare for it in order to make their reintegration process less difficult. The EU should consider changing return programming to focus on 'assisted return' processes that support migrants to accept their return and prepare for their return through pre-departure support which could include: informing their family of their return, and helping the family to understand the return policy and

procedure, where this might be necessary and beneficial; developing skills to support the individual's reintegration; facilitating contact with reintegration service providers in the country of origin in order to support the development of a shared plan for their reintegration; and further work with the migrant to build psychological preparedness for their return. Nonetheless, acknowledging 'assisted return' as a form of forced return which requires further support to enable a sustainable reintegration should not reduce the support available to migrants who do make a more active and voluntary choice to return to their countries of origin rather than continue their migration projects – these migrants also need assistance to ensure their safe, dignified and orderly return journeys and to support their sustainable reintegration (and, often, wishes to invest and contribute to their country's future).

- **Create accessible pathways for legal labour migration:** The Albanian case study indicates that acceptance of assisted voluntary return seems to be driven in large part by the opportunities that Albanians have for legal re-entry to and labour migration opportunities in EU member states, due to their access to visa-free travel since 2010, and – since 2016 – to low-skilled labour migration opportunities through Germany's Western Balkan Regulation. Policymakers interested in encouraging compliance with return orders should therefore consider creating legal labour migration opportunities with relatively low barriers to access (i.e., in terms of skills, administrative procedures and financial resources) that would offer a better alternative to staying on irregularly in the EU. As highlighted in ADMIGOV deliverable 1.1, these legal pathways to the EU for low-skilled or low-wage workers are lacking (Koopmans and Gonzales-Beilfuss, 2019). Opportunities for legal labour migration would also provide a much-needed alternative for return migrants who are unwilling or unable to reintegrate sustainably, as further discussed below.

## 8.2 Sustainable reintegration processes

The comparative analysis of reintegration across the three diverse contexts of Albania, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Senegal corroborates previous research that has highlighted the importance of both structural context and individual characteristics in shaping reintegration processes. The oft-stated conclusions that “not all returnees are entrepreneurs” and “there is no one size fits all approach” are reiterated in this report. Reintegration is a complex process and there are a multiplicity of factors that can impact the reintegration of an individual (Koser and Kuschminder, 2015; Vathi and King, 2019; Lietaert and Kuschminder, 2021). We have not attempted to systematically review these variables in this report – this has been done recently (see Koser and Kuschminder, 2015, for a systematic literature review; or Lietaert and Kuschminder, 2021, for a

conceptual summary) – but rather focus on the aspects that respondents themselves highlighted as important to their reintegration.

The multi-dimensional and, often, interacting nature of the challenges that return migrants face in their reintegration process is highlighted in this study. The key variables of importance vary by country context. In Albania, unemployment; a lack of access to public services – particularly healthcare –; family and community tensions, insecurity, and marginalisation; and a lack of perceived future prospects in the country were key drivers of migration that are experienced again upon return. These are systemic barriers which inhibit reintegration upon return. In Senegal, economic challenges are similarly experienced prior to migrating and upon return, when reintegration is further undermined by difficult family and community receptions, and by the lasting effects of traumatic migration experiences. Further, debts incurred from the migration have been demonstrated to be a hindrance in reintegration in Senegal (IOM, 2020). In Iraqi Kurdistan, some respondents similarly returned to the same economic, family, social or political problems which had motivated their departure, although their reintegration processes were mixed and other respondents reported the resolution of these problems and/or the achievement of wellbeing and security.

Two further points emerge from across the case countries. First, as illustrated above, it is evident that the main barriers to reintegration are often the same issues that motivated migration in the first place. Second, and relatedly, respondents who were more integrated into their communities prior to migrating (for example, in terms of their labour market participation and economic opportunities, and the strength of their family and community relationships) were better able to reintegrate upon their return. This calls into question the concept of reintegration when individuals were not integrated in the first place (see Lietaert and Kuschminder, 2021). Can reintegration be considered a useful concept or policy goal in these cases? These challenges to both integration and reintegration were particularly evident in the case of some of the Roma and Egyptian return migrants interviewed in Albania, who faced extreme economic precarity, social exclusion and discrimination both before and after migrating. As an example, one single mother had no secure housing, and was unable to provide for her children’s material needs, or to secure their access to healthcare or education. This is an extreme example, but illustrates the acute vulnerability experienced by some migrants both before and after migrating, and highlights how, in this and other cases, “reintegration” seems an elusive concept which will be unachievable without significant structural changes within the wider country context.

#### **Policy Recommendation:**

- **Reintegration assistance must focus not only on providing economic support – and not only via assistance for business start-up – but must identify and respond to returnees’ individual situations and their multi-dimensional, and often interacting, needs.** Assistance for economic reintegration must offer a broader range of options than only business start-up – pathways to employment must also be supported. Moreover, reintegration assistance should address other types of challenges: in this study, good

psychosocial and physical health was highlighted as critical within the reintegration process, and as an urgent need.

- **Align reintegration assistance with broader development processes and interventions in the country of origin:** Return and reintegration should be considered within EU-origin country development policy frameworks from early stages, within which the conditions driving migration and the specific vulnerabilities of return migrants must be acknowledged. Specific country provisions should then be added to address the needs of vulnerable return migrants through longer-term development funds that aim to improve structural conditions and thereby support reintegration. Development assistance should not, however, be conditional upon bilateral cooperation on return and readmission.

### 8.3 Conceptualising sustainable reintegration

In returning to the beginning of this report, conceptualising sustainable reintegration is an ongoing challenge for policy and academic communities, where multiple definitions have been put forth but lack any consolidation within the field. In this report we chose not to use a specific definition of sustainable reintegration and have instead focused on bringing to light the respondents' own experiences of reintegration in each case country.

In this final section we reflect on the conceptualisation of sustainable reintegration, and what this should mean for programming and evaluation. The most recent definition proposed for sustainable reintegration is:

*A process which enables individuals to secure and sustain the political, economic, social, and psychosocial conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity in the country and community they return or are returned to, in full respect of their civil, political economic, social and cultural rights. This should include targeted measures that enable returning migrants to have access to justice, social protection, financial services, health care, education, family life, an adequate standard of living, decent work, and protection against discrimination, stigma, arbitrary detention and all forms of violence, and that allows returnees to consider that they are in an environment of personal safety, economic empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion upon return (United Nations Network on Migration, 2021).*

This UNNM definition, developed through an inter-agency approach, is intended to provide a new guiding definition for sustainable reintegration across all UN agencies. Clearly, this definition is highly aspirational. It sets a very high bar for the conditions of sustainable reintegration to be achieved. Of the 120 returnees in this analysis, few (if any) would likely be sustainably reintegrated according to this definition. Returnees themselves highlighted a lack of dignity and rights in their

lives post-return: *'I need my basic rights. I want to live like a human-being'* (Jalal). Few returnees felt that they had an adequate standard of living, and economic empowerment (although not an explicit question in the interviews) was arguably also low. Returnees also expressed their anxieties and frustrations regarding their personal safety, feelings of social inclusion and stigma, and access to social protection, healthcare, education, and justice. It is clear that significant changes are necessary to achieve all of these elements for return migrants' reintegration.

At the conclusion of this analysis, the challenges of defining sustainable reintegration remain unresolved. What is clear from key stakeholders, returnees, and the existing literature, is that sustainable reintegration requires further attention. Supporting sustainable reintegration requires a more ambitious, longer-term, and flexible approach. Sustainable reintegration is unlikely to be achieved in twelve months – it takes time. Sustainable reintegration programmes need to be adaptable to changing conditions, and funding requirements need to allow these adaptations. If a business start-up fails, the returnee should not be abandoned because their reintegration package has simply already been disbursed – flexible and ongoing support is needed to help the return migrant to adapt their strategy and achieve a more secure livelihood.

In terms of measurement, it is clear that sustainable reintegration must be measured from the perspectives of return migrants themselves. Evaluations of return and reintegration programmes must therefore be fundamentally based on returnee perspectives. Both objective and subjective variables must be included in measuring sustainable reintegration as it is these subjective perceptions that shape individual life satisfaction and migration decision-making. Secondly, process indicators cannot assess sustainable reintegration, and a wide range of impact indicators are necessary to assess the complexity of sustainable reintegration. These indicators also need to be contextualised within country contexts: some variables may have greater weight in shaping feelings of satisfaction and wellbeing in certain countries and less in others. Third, determining a threshold against which to measure successful sustainable reintegration is important. As shown from our analysis above, the UNMN definition of sustainable reintegration is possibly not achievable in certain country contexts. What then determines a successful sustainable reintegration? Is sustainable reintegration achievable in all countries to which migrants are returned?

#### **Policy Recommendations:**

- **Sustainable reintegration must be understood as a long-term process:** Sustainability takes time and simply cannot be achieved within one year. Sustainable reintegration should therefore only be discussed after a period of at least two years.
- **An adaptable approach is required:** Policies and programmes need to be adaptable to changing conditions and set backs. It must be recognised that businesses can and do fail, but this may not be the fault of the returnee. Programmes should provide opportunities and space for returnees to pivot and undertake fresh attempts to sustainably reintegrate.

- **Reintegration must be measured from returnees' perspectives:** Returnees must be heard within the reintegration process and be able to express their experiences and concerns within the monitoring and evaluation of return and reintegration processes.

## Appendix

Stakeholder type	Organisation	Position	Name	Date of interview
<b>Governmental</b>	Albanian government	Anonymous	Anonymous	24/01/2020
	GIZ Albania	Anonymous	Anonymous	27/01/2020
	Shkodra Employment Office	Director	Rozafa Zmijanej	28/01/2020
<b>Inter-governmental</b>	IOM Tirana	Reintegration counsellor	Altin Kurdari	13/01/2020
<b>INGO</b>	Terre des Hommes	Anonymous	Anonymous	27/01/2020
	World Vision	Project Manager	Sonila Pema	21/01/2020
	World Vision	Project Coordinator	Vasiona Koco	22/01/2020
<b>NGO</b>	Diakonia Agapes	Team Leader	Vitjona Beyeja	24/01/2020
	Roma community leader		Anonymous	30/01/2020
	Shkej	Team Leader	Erion Prendi	27/01/2020

Table 21. List of key stakeholder interviewees for Albania case study

Stakeholder type	Organisation	Position	Name	Date of interview
<b>Governmental</b>	GIZ Iraq	Anonymous	Anonymous	18/03/2021
	GIZ Iraq	Anonymous	Anonymous	18/03/2021
<b>NGO</b>	ETTC	Programme Executive - Reintegration Programme	Hajjaj Mustafa	22/12/2020
	TRIAS Society for Technology and Coordination mbH (Germany)	Director	Michael Düker	10/06/2020
	Anonymous	Volunteer at local NGO	Botan Sharbazheri	06/07/2021

Table 22. List of key stakeholder interviewees for Iraqi Kurdistan case study



Stakeholder type	Organisation	Position	Name	Date of interview
Governmental	General Directorate of Support to Senegalese Abroad	Technical Counsellor	El Hadji Abdou Karim Cissé	14/01/2021
	GIZ Senegal	Anonymous	Anonymous	23/03/2021
Inter-governmental	IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa	Senior Regional Coordinator EUTF/DFID	Michele Bombassei	10/03/2021
	IOM Dakar	Project Manager (EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration)	Valeria Falaschi	30/03/2021
	IOM Dakar	Reintegration Officer	Pırce Altinok	18/03/2021
IGO	Caritas	Project Manager (APIMA)	Hubert Demba Faye	17/01/2021
	Dunia Kato	President	Malamine Soly	12/01/2021
NGO	Association des migrants de retour de la région de Kolda (Association of Return Migrants for Kolda Region)	President and Coordinator	Hamidou Diallo	11/01/2021
	Diaspora Développement Education et Migration (DIADEM; Diaspora Development Education and Migration)	President	Badara Ndiaye	18/01/2021
	Fédération des Associations des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur et de Retour (FASER; Federation of Associations of Senegalese Diaspora and Return Migrants)	President	Youssef Mbingue	13/01/2021
	La Lumière	Representative of Kolda	Mame Thierno Aidara	16/01/2021

Table 23. List of key stakeholder interviewees for Senegal case study

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