INSTITUTIONALIZING ASSISTANCE TO RETURNING MIGRANTS LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ALBANIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract
Return migration is increasingly becoming important for Albania, because of its size and the socio-economic impact it has on the individual, the family, and the community of return. In particular, the successful reintegration of returnees represents a key aspect of the Albanian migration management policy, and hence, an important element of the Albania’s negotiation process for future membership in the European Union (EU). The latter is highly interested on sustainable return, in particular of those who have been irregularly entering and staying in the EU. The successful reintegration has two interrelated dimensions, the personal success, entailing social and economic security for the returnee as an individual, and the contribution of return to the economic and social development of the country of origin. If the return process contributes to both dimensions, it promotes further return in the future and hence more development for local communities. Yet, in practice return migration does not automatically translates into more personal and community prosperity. The paper argues that reintegration is a highly challenging process which requires strong national and local capacities to deliver services and to harness the development impact of return migration. It should consider satisfaction of migrants’ needs in each of the phases of their return process, as well as the needs and potentials of communities of return. This paper’s analysis is based on qualitative methods of research, consisting primarily of document reviews and content analysis of primary and secondary data in the area of return migration and reintegration in Albania.

Keywords: Return, reintegration, personal success, local development

I. Introduction
Emigration from Albania toward the European Union has been an important historical process of the post communism area of Albania, with a
strong impact on the Albanian demography, and the socio-economic development of the country. The results of the 2011’ Population CENSUS revealed that in the last decade the Albanian population has decreased by 7.7%, the main reason being emigration of population (INSTAT, 2011, p14). Along this historical movement of Albanian population in search of better life opportunities, return migration has emerged as a new form of migration. The reasons for return are diverse and include increased political and economic stability in the country as well as increased economic insecurity in destination countries, in particular those strongly hit by the world financial crises such as Greece. The crisis has severely reduced the work of migrants in Greece, hampered their chances to renew stay permits and lead toward their return to Albania. Another key reason for return are the stringent EU policies on return of irregular migrants. The EU considers return and readmission as a necessary component of a well-defined policy on migration and over the last decade has introduced this instrument as an element of the process of negotiations for EU membership with aspirant countries, including Albania. On the other hand, Albania has been very responsive in signing and implementing a readmission agreement with the European Community for the return of all Albanian citizens with an irregular status in the EU. The initial reluctance and scepticism on the agreement, was overcome by the hope of financial aid and the possibility of visa regime facilitation for Albanian citizens (IOM, 2006a). As of 2005, when Albania signed the Readmission Agreement and developed its first Strategy on Migration (2005-2010), the EU has constantly recommended Albania to undertake measures to develop and implement effective return and reintegration mechanisms in order to discourage further emigration from the country, and to ensure sustainability of return, while maximizing migratory experiences of returnees. Yet, the process of developing reintegration policies in Albania has not been very easy. It has built against the overall public perception that migrants do not need support, as “they are better off” compared to the non-migratory part of the population. In addition it has built on a vacuum of knowledge and expertise on return migration and reintegration, as well as in the presence of weak institutional capacities to deliver public services inherited from the previous system of welfare that aimed for basic but universal coverage.

Given the very limited scope and size of first reintegration policy provisions in the migration strategy, in 2010, the Government of Albania developed its first consolidated policy framework on return migration and reintegration, the Reintegration Strategy for Returning Albanian Citizens (2005-2010) and its Action Plan as a more concerted approach to providing support to returning migrants. The elaboration of this strategy was a direct response to the high propensity of emigration from the country, and
consequently returns, which only for 2009 amounted 47,239 forced returns, the majority of individuals having migrated to EU countries for employment purposes (Qeveria Shqiptare, 2010). The formulation of the strategy was also a pre-condition to Albania for obtaining the visa free regime with the EU in December of the same year. The EU was thus reflecting on the back falls of the experience of visa lifting regime with Serbia and Macedonia, which resulted in increased asylum applications in the EU. Consequently, the dilemma to have or not a policy framework on reintegration was finally resolved, as Albania could not say “no” to this very much desired process for its citizens, the free movement in the Schengen area.

But is reintegration of returnees needed beyond political reasons? This paper seeks to argue that beyond political reasons, there is always a need to support migrants reintegrate in the communities of return, as to avoid their social and economic exclusion and to maximise their migratory experiences to the benefit of the society. The reintegration support should be considered as a multi-stage process that demands fulfilment of migrants’ needs in each of the phases of return and their demand for welfare and services. In addition, return migration and support to reintegration should be seen as a process benefiting the returnee but also the community of return and the country in general. If return migration is utilized to its best, the propensity of emigration will remain low and the development impact of migration will be maximised. This is valid argument for Albania, as well as for other countries facing similar situation.

II. Methodology

The analysis presented in this paper is the based on qualitative methods of research, consisting primarily of document reviews, in-depth interviews with stakeholders and returning migrants, observations and factual evidence collected during my ten years of experience in working closely with the migration authorities in Albania. Available statistics provided by public institutions and previous research work in the field of return migration were used as input to the analysis. Both, primary and secondary data were used; primary data was gathered through direct contact with various government entities at the central and local level responsible for the implementation of the Reintegration Action Plan and through the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The secondary data were collected from various public documents and archival records, formal studies and periodic reports related to the research topic. A “content analysis” of the data was then undertaken to examine the reasons for return migration in Albania, the response of government institutions to return migration (obligation/responsibility analysis); and challenges faced in delivering reintegration support (obstacles/gap analysis), as well as improvements
required (exploring and analysing new interventions, services, activities and cooperation). This content analysis was grounded in the overall theory of migration and practices of “successful return” as evidenced by experience across the world.

Definitions:

The analysis in this paper relies on a number of migration related definitions. In particular the definitions of returnee, return migration and reintegration applied as introduced by IOM (IOM, 2011) and applied also by the Government of Albania in the reintegration policy documents are the key definitions applied.

A returnee is any person returning to his/her country of origin, in the course of the last year, after having been an international migrant (for a minimum of one year) in another country. Return may be permanent or temporary. It may be independently decided by the migrant or forced by unexpected circumstances.

Reintegration represents re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a migrant into the society of his or her country of origin or habitual residence. Reintegration entails three aspects: cultural, economic and social.

II. Analysis:

a. Understanding what makes reintegration successful

In analysing the necessity of reintegration support to returning migrants, it is worth paying attention to the migration theory as to be able to portray and understand reintegration practices across the world. As of 2000, return migration has been on the raise towards the top of policy agendas because of its increasing scale worldwide and the challenges presented to both, countries of origin and host countries. However, as Koser. K highlights, measurement of return migration has traditionally not been a priority in either countries of origin or in host countries because it has not generally been considered “a problem” in the same way that the emigration of nationals or immigration of non-nationals often has (IOM, 2000). Return takes place in varying circumstances and under different policy frameworks and in all scenarios the primary goal of return is achieved. What is not certain is what Lazcko F. (2000) points out, the extent to which the reintegration is successful. The degree of success of reintegration is often measured through the sustainability of return, yet because of the difficulty to measure the objectiveness of this link, these two concepts must be treated separately. Nevertheless, it is important to explore the effect of reintegration on sustainability of return. There is a general consensus among scholars and practitioners in the area of return migration, that the successful reintegration has two interrelated dimensions: the first dimension relating to personal
success, entailing social and economic security for the migrant as an individual (including family members) in the local community of the country of origin. The second dimension relates to the contribution of return to the economic and social development of the community of return and to the country of origin. On the other hand, the IOM definition of reintegration as including three types of reintegration, calls our attention for assessing the social, economic and the cultural impact of reintegration. The cultural reintegration is seen as the process of re-integration of the returnee to the values, way of living, language, moral principles, and traditions of the country of origin’s society and the economic reintegration, as the reinsertion into the economic system of the country of origin, aiming the use of know-how gained in migration to promote the economic and social development of the country of origin. The social reintegration entails the development of a personal network and on the other hand the development of civil society structures such as associations, etc (IOM, 2011). When the return process contributes to both dimensions of successful reintegration and its typologies, the propensity of emigration from the country is certainly likely to remain low, and return migration will be utilized to its best. This is certainly a valid argument why it is worth focusing on reintegration support and its impact on sustainability of return.

In an effort to elaborate further the reintegration concept and its first dimension of personal success, King. R (2000) proposes to examine the evidence of reintegration difficulties for returnees under two perspectives, etic and emic (IOM, 2000). The first examines the objective criteria of reintegration, the extent to which the migrants have found their path back home, including jobs and satisfactory accommodation, developed personal relationships, participated in community organizations and so forth. The emic perspective focuses on migrants’ own perceptions of their adjustment and to the extent to which they feel the homeland satisfied self-defined needs. He further argues that in reality migrants’ return is often accompanied by considerable ambivalence because upon return migrants are expected to behave as “migrants” and not to revert to former roles because they must display their “success” and are virtually forced to do so. Return however may challenge the returnee capacities for reintegration, due to changes in the social economic status and hence the social class position. It is because of such perspectives, about the culture, the expectations of care and their evolution with the migratory process, that Piperno F. (2013) suggests to be careful when planning services and social policies on migration, including return, as they are elements often undervalued but with a strong influence on the demand and the modalities of access to certain services, and this is certainly valid in the case of return and reintegration (CESPI, 2013).
As regards the second dimension, that of contribution of return to community and country development, reintegration entails a chain of affects associated with return migration such as human development, labour market changes (wages, employment), saving and investment. Again here the etic and emic perspectives help us analysing the degree of success of reintegration. King R. quoting Ghosh (2000) calls our attention on a useful distinction between the economic welfare of the individual returning migrant or family and the aggregate contribution that return migration makes to the country, region and community of origin. According to him the number of returnees, duration of absence from the country, destination of the return, social class, and nature of the training received abroad, how the return is organized, may all adversely influence reintegration home. The economic situation of the returnee (employment or unemployment) and his social and family situation have an important impact on the reintegration capacity and on the decision whether to make the best out of the circumstances or turn to the alternative of re-migrating (IOM, 2000). Beside this situation, the circumstances may also not permit the returnee to valorise skills developed during the migration or to maintain social links, influencing in this way the decision to re-migrate and undermine the return scheme. Therefore, the broad success of the reintegration plan is very much dependant on the personal success of the returnee. On a positive angle, return migration can be a real stimulus to the development of local communities where returnees settle. Migrants may invest their savings on productive activities, utilize their skills and know how gained in migration, and hence can generate employment for their family members and their communities. Migrants may give a new impetus to the labour market development and technology advancement in the countries of origin. Having concluded that reintegration is desirable and needed, the remaining question then becomes “How can we practice successful reintegration? I tend to believe that there are no recipes for successful reintegration, but only positive practices of reintegration with limitations in focus and time. Practice shows that reintegration is likely to be successful if elaborated into different stages, and according to returnees needs as to ensure the sustainability of return. On the other hand, migrants themselves need to realize that they are the primary actors of their reintegration in the local communities and act under this role. The reintegration assistance provided in some European countries and Russia provides valuable insights on what has proved to be successful in terms of direct service provision to returnees with the aim of fostering their reintegration. Early in 2000, Koser K. presented a very useful summary of reintegration practices across Europe. In terms of housing assistance, he brought the experience of Greek emigrants, who were provided with easy access to mortgages and housing allowances. As
evidenced by IOM, in the majority of European countries, access to labour market for returnees is on-going and facilitated through training, initial support during a period of unemployment and assistance in finding employment. A number of countries offer vocational training (such as Albania, Russia, Georgia), including language training, in particular for children brought up abroad. While the primary focus of reintegration assistance programmes is on the migrants themselves, countries of origin often attempt to gear the potential of returnees toward the wider needs of the national economy, for example through distribution of returnees in less developed areas of the country. Koser K. (2000) noted that in the case of Greece a lump sum was paid to those returnees that settled in the rural areas. Another method applied in Germany was to concentrate returnees in particular sectors of the economy, for example incentives to encourage self-employment in agriculture, trade and research. A third element of reintegration assistance commonly referred to returnees by countries of origin covers social welfare-including health, counselling, social security and education. Germany and Russia offered psychological support to returnees or a health check-up and free insurance to ethnic returnees. A specific aspect of social welfare concerns the pension and social security rights of returnees. In most countries, returnees enjoy the same social rights as other citizens, but an issue which is of outmost importance to returnees is the extent to which their social security and pension payments in the host country are transferable. The Albania-Turkey agreement in this respect, operational as of 2003, is a positive example of how transfer of payments can work in reality. Most countries offer educational services to returnees in particular to children and students, such as language courses, etc (IOM, 2000).

b. Reflecting on the experience of Albania in institutionalizing assistance to returnees

Turning back to the argument of Khoser. K on the success of reintegration support, many practitioners believe that provision of reintegration support to returnees in every country should be considered within the context of the “care regime” of the country and availability of services. Piperno F. (2013), referring to Eleonore Kofman and Parvati Raghuram, highlights that the various care regimes differ in the relation between the main welfare sources: State, Family, Market and Community. She argues that international migration creates new spheres of need for care services and impacts on all these levels (family, private sector, non-profit and public sector). She outlines that in the case of the Albanian family, it is its members who spontaneously rearrange the offer of care at transnational level; the private sector is the most prone to hear the migrants families’ demand for care services intercepting the flux of remittances and it is also
the most ready to attract the competences of the returning migrants; the trans-nationalisation of the *non-profit sector* is strongly supported by the cooperation to development and tends towards answering needs identified by the main donors. At *public level*, the process in the case of Albania is driven mostly by the dialogue with the European Union. Consequently, there is scope and space to engage all the welfare sources in providing care to returnees. If the projections for increase of returns to Albania because of the economic crisis in Greece\textsuperscript{31} continue, the argument for the provision of reintegration support is even more justified. However she also notes that in terms of care, a key element remains the predisposition of the country to issue care. For countries such as Albania, which is facing important changes to the welfare system from a basic and universal into a mix welfare system, the predisposition of the country to issue care is therefore conditioned by the progress of this process which is still not very clear (CESPI, 2013). She further recommends that *transparency, accessibility and quality* are the aspects on which to invest more strongly when planning services to migrants (CESPI, 2013). In addition, the success of the reintegration support demands that migration and mobility are mainstreamed into national polies as to oversee success of the return process for the whole society.

The provision of the reintegration services in Albania is sanctioned in the Reintegration Strategy for Returning Citizens (2010-2015) and its corresponding action plan. The overall aim of the strategy is to ensure a sustainable return for Albanian migrants through support to the reintegration process in the country, despite of the form of return, voluntary or involuntary (Qeveria Shqiptare, 2010). It is important to underline that a major concern during preliminary discussions on the draft strategy was consideration of the principle of non-discrimination of other citizens that receive public services and who may have not necessarily migrated. Because the Strategy was developed to assist primarily those who have been forcibly returned to Albania in the framework of readmission agreements, the authorities considered as inappropriate to foresee greater access of the returnees to existing public services as compared to other parts of the population in Albania who did not opt for irregular migration or stay in the EU. Consequently, the guiding principle of the reintegration strategy became “the avoidance of positive discrimination for the non-emigrant population, implying that “reintegration support” should consist mainly of information provision to returnees on existing public services accessible to all Albanian citizens under the Albanian legal framework. The other basic principles of the strategy include the free will of the returnees to be included in the public

\textsuperscript{31} The Albanian Center for Competitiveness and International Trade has estimated that in the period 2007-2012, approximately 180,000 Albanians have returned from Greece.
information and reintegration support mechanism; the use and enhancement of existing institutional structures, the promotion of public services through enhanced institutional communication and continuous information of returnees and the population in general. The strategy also foresees that provision of specific services should be provided to certain vulnerable categories of returnees, however in compliance with existing policy provisions (such as the Anti-Trafficking Strategy), the legal provisions (such as for those for victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors, Roma, migrants with economic problems, etc) or through tailor-made projects/programmes designed and implemented with the support of different donors (Qeveria Shqiptare, 2010). It should be noted that main source of reintegration support service provision (and therefore care) remains the state, and responsible government institutions. The core element of the reintegration mechanism are the Migration Counters located at 36 regional and local employment offices throughout the country, which assess the reintegration needs of returning migrants and refer them to existing public services, such as health, education employment and so forth. The establishment of such mechanism illustrates the efforts of the country to consolidate institutions that deliver services and social support and to increase the overall access of population to public services. Yet, it is difficult to ascertain whether the institutionalization of reintegration support to returnees has achieved its aim and whether reintegration of returnees is successful and sustainable.

An analysis of the cases assisted by the Migration Counters as of 2012, shows that the majority of those approaching Migration Counters belongs to two categories: forced returnees, and voluntary returnees with economic problems. The so-called successful emigrants who have accomplished their migration plan and have now returned to the country of origin to pursue life opportunities in Albania ‘do not seem to need” the help of Migration Counters. A factor which has strongly influenced such approach of returnees is what Danaj, S (2006) highlights as the “scepticism” of returnees for services delivered by employment offices. The scepticisms is also reflected into an overall lack of trust on public institutions, inherited from the long transitory period of consolidation of democratic institutions in Albania after the fall of communisms in early ‘90s (IOM, 2006). Consequently, it can be argued that Migration Counters are reaching a very small number of returnees, those most in need and in a more vulnerable position. In an effort to profile the returnees and assess their needs I analysed all statistics of the Migration Counters collected as of July 2010 when
the units started operating at their full capacity. On this basis, it was possible to build a generic profile of returnees, during 2012, most of the returns took place from Greece (86%); the majority of returnees have returned with their families (74%) and 79.1% admit to have the intention of staying long in Albania. The main reasons for return include lack of employment in the destination country (88%), followed by lack of documentation and the desire to invest at home (SHKP, 2013). A total of 1,752 returnees are now registered as unemployed job seekers against 912 that were registered in 2011, and at least 15% of returnees have benefited of economic aid. The majority of returned emigrants come from sectors such as construction, agriculture, services, domestic services, tourism, mechanic and electric services etc and seek to get a job in these sectors where they feel they have sufficient knowledge and skills.

Earlier in this paper, I highlighted the necessity for delivering reintegration support at stages and according to returnee’s needs. In general, Migration Counters come to contact with the returnee only once, when the returnee approaches the office and seeks reintegration support. Follow up support and monitoring of the case is not generally performed as this service doesn’t fall under the classical model of “case management”. The registration at Migration Counters is conducted on a voluntary basis. An interview is conducted from the Migration Specialist if the Counter to assess the needs of the returnee, in particular those immediate as to be able to refer the returnee to other available public services. Against all expectations of the returnees that Migration Counters will deliver direct reintegration services to returnees, this is not possible, because of the various components that reintegration entails, and which require the intervention of various service providers as early mentioned in the paper (family, private sector, no profit and public sector) and not simply that of the Migration Counter. The latter are generally administered by employees of the Employment Offices trained on migration issues, yet the only direct reintegration services that these Counters deliver are job brokering and intermediation for vocational training. In principle the registration at the Migration Counter should automatically translate into the obtainment of the “Migrant Status” as established in Law No. 10389/2011 and therefore grant free access to the public vocational training centres to the returnee, as well as easy access to other public services. Having said this, it cannot be concluded that returnees have better access to the labour market, because once they try to access the market, they face all problems and challenges as other Albanian citizens do, which include, the inability to match the offer and demand for labour market, high

32 Before 2010 Migration Counters were established through the support of IOM in a few selected Regional Employment Offices, however with limited functions.
informality, lack of recognitions of qualifications and skills obtained in migration, etc. It is also important to highlight that in terms of employment services the Migration Counters largely fail to assist returnees in rural areas. In national statistics returnees in rural areas are considered as fully employed by reason of the family having a plot of land. Once they are considered as self-employed in agriculture, they cannot claim unemployment benefits or economic aid, or other job brokering services, unless they declare as not living in rural areas any longer. As part of career guidance services, returnees are also referred to vocational training (16% of the returnees for 2012), however the public vocational training centres lack courses, modules and capacities to address the specific needs of the returning migrants in enhancing their entrepreneurial skills, or applying the knowledge which they received abroad to the particular regional or national context. The Vocational and Education Training system in general is still slow in adapting the existing training methodologies, programmes and curricula to reflect current labour market demand.

A good part of returnees require support to access health services (32.29 % during 2012), yet the public health system in Albania suffers from poor quality of service, poor infrastructure and high corruption of services, which certainly has an impact on reintegration of returnees, who return from countries where health services are guaranteed at high standards. The Migration Counters have also indicated that often returnees who approach the Migration Counter do so only in order to get registered as unemployed job seeker at this office and therefore to seek free medical service in the public system. The Specialists of the Counters have alerted that the number of unemployed job seekers is increasing artificially, because what the returnees demand is just the medical service and not employment (IOM, 2013).

As previously highlighted a specific aspect of social welfare concerns the pension and social security rights of returnees. Despite the good will of the Government to negotiate with the main destination countries on transfer of social security and pension payments for Albanian citizens upon return to Albania, no progress has been made beside Turkey, which a bilateral agreement is on-going as of 2003 (Law 9066/2003). Yet, Turkey is not a major destination country for Albanian emigrants.

Other referral services with a more visible impact on community and country development are the orientation to business start-up and growth (3% of returnees during 2012); however the SM specialists themselves have limited information on legal and regulatory frameworks of SMEs in Albania, which limits their support and orientation to business set up for returnees. On the other hand, returnees, who come back with the intention to invest in a productive activity, may not be able to correctly study the local market and
define a business plan valid on the medium term; evaluate their own entrepreneurial skills, evaluate the real possibility for the local context to absorb innovative ideas or the profitability of the properties accumulated over the years. Migration Counters cannot meet these needs. In addition, there is a need for additional financial resources to enable the increase of institutional capacities and development of human resources particularly during the political changes (S. Banushi, personal communication, March 2013).

Field evidence shows that returnees demand specific support to access labour market in Albania, public education, vocational training, health and housing services, along entrepreneurship support services, which in turn questions the value of the current reintegration support mechanism in the country. The discrepancies between services offered and those demanded point to the need for a thorough analysis of the reintegration support mechanism in Albania. Without appropriate reintegration services in place, the SMs may soon lose their credibility, returnees may again tend to re-emigrate, and the development impact of return migration may remain largely unexploited. Three years from the start of implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan there is still confusion among returnees as well as among public institutions as to what should reintegration support entail, and who should benefit from it. Such confusion is clearly reflected in the legal framework that regulates return and reintegration in Albania. Beside the establishment of Migration Counters throughout the country, the wish of the Government to ‘materialise” the reintegration support was also made possible through the amendment of the legal framework on reintegration, namely the Law Nr.9668, dated 18.12.2006 "On the immigration of Albanian citizens for employment purposes" as the key legal act that regulates the migration of Albanian citizens. The law is meant to regulate the regular process of emigration of Albanian citizens for employment or vocational training purposes abroad, and their return and reintegration in the country. On 3 March 2011, the Law no. 9668 was amended by Law No. 10389 in compliance with the provisions of the Reintegration Action Plan and in an attempt to legitimize reintegration services for all categories of returnees. In order to provide reintegration services two orders of the Minister of Labour were approved on the content and procedure of obtaining the Emigrant Status and the form and content of the Register of Emigrants. In fact, the 2011 amendments have remained largely unimplemented and failed to address the real problems of this law that of a lack of clear scope, and subjects which should also reflect the national policy on migration management in the country (IOM, 2013).

As concerns other specific reintegration services delivered in the framework of projects/programmes implemented together with donors (as
referred to in the Reintegration Action Plan), there is very little to report so far. Few return and reintegration schemes for voluntary returnees are implemented by the International Organization for Migration, yet, in the framework of return and reintegration programmes initiated and funded by the governments in destination countries. Some limited interventions in terms of support to re-insertion in the labour market mainly in north Albania have been implemented by a few Italian and Italian Albanian non-profitable organizations, assisting primarily returnees from Italy and ex-prisoners, returning to Albania.

Another weaknesses of the mechanism is the failure to address the needs of the vulnerable categories which at present remain disadvantaged (such as Roma, minors, etc). On the assumption that vulnerable categories are treated through specific programmatic interventions, very often vulnerable categories such as Roma in migration or unaccompanied minors find themselves as not receiving any protection or care service. The continuous presence of this category in the neighbouring countries, Greece and Italy shows for a steady migration trend which requires a careful analysis of the push and pull factors. During his last visit in Albania, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants was deeply concerned about the situation of unaccompanied Albanian children returned to the borders by the authorities of neighbouring countries outside the framework of readmission agreements. He recommended to take urgent measures to ensure that the return of Albanian unaccompanied children from neighbouring countries only takes place pursuant to an analysis of the best interests of the child and is properly followed-up on an individual basis by national authorities (UN, 2012).

The last issue to tackle, is the lack of an appraisal system for satisfaction of returnees from such services it is difficult to assess whether such support may have helped migrants reintegrate back home. The Reintegration Action Plan does not have indicators to measure performance and the only indicator therefore remains the declaration by relevant responsible authorities as having fulfilled the envisioned actions. A paradox here is that in July 2013 the responsible authorities reported as having implemented the Reintegration Action Plan at the level of 95%, (IOM, 2013b), yet returnees demand reintegration support. In its last progress report the EU also recommended Albania to continue with the implementation of the reintegration strategy and action plan for returned migrants since preparations in this area are at an early stage (EC, 2013a).

As a final remark on this analysis it should be emphasized that the Albania has not gone as far as to assess the needs of the communities where migrants return and settle, nor has it designed reintegration policies and measures that take into account the needs of the migrants versus community
needs. As such, the nexus between migration and local development remains yet unexplored.

Conclusion

There is a need to guarantee reintegration services for returnees in Albania, in order to facilitate their reinsertion in their communities of return, as to avoid social and economic exclusion and to support their sustainable return. This should happen for utility reasons rather than for political reasons. All this process is certainly expected to have its positive influence in the process of Albania’ integration in the EU; yet the driving force of progress should be found in the need to progress care and welfare in Albania for all categories of population that demand it, including her returning migrants.

The Albanian experience of setting up a reintegration referral mechanism is certainly a positive step as it improves access of returnees to care services. There is also a growing consensus among stakeholders in Albania that migrants need orientation to public services in order to facilitate their reintegration and consequently to a sustainable return, as well as in maximisation of migratory experiences to the benefit of the society. Yet, as Pirperno F. (2013) points out, there is an evident decrease in the confidence in the possibility, in general, to receive social support in the moment of need. The lack of confidence in public structures is a rooted tendency also because of their actual weakness. On the other hand, she argues that the economic crisis lowers, to date, also the confidence in the perspectives and the reliability of the private sector (CESPI, 2013).

To conclude, I would like to go back to the initial argument that reintegration has to be elaborated into different stages and according to individual needs of returnees. It is evident that there is a political commitment to reintegrate returning migrants, however there is a lack of clear vision as to where should reintegration of returnees lead to. The Migration Counters remain an important hub for information and orientation to public services for returnees, yet they are a tool for facilitating reintegration only.

From another angle, the importance of return migration has increasingly been recognized by countries of origin seeking to tap the potential of their overseas nationals. The return migration should not viewed as a “a problem of the individual who returns” but as an opportunity for the receiving country to maximise their potential in the country they decide to return.

In addition, successful reintegration of returnees must be part of the overall policies on migration in order to work out an effective articulation between return, reception, integration, migration and development. The
efforts made by Albania to consolidate reintegration support to returnees, as part of the overall migration management efforts of the country, reinforce also the on-going world debate for ensuring quality on migration management as part of the United Nations post-2015 agenda, and hence the recommendation for “treating” migration and mobility as enabling factors to development (EC, 2013b).

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