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Roma in Serbia and the Situation of Romani Returnees from Western Europe

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Abbreviations

AB	Administrative Bodies
AZR	Ausländerzentralregister
BAMF	Bundesamt für Flüchtlinge und Migration
BFPE	Belgrade Foundation for Political Excellence
BMZ	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit
CAHROM	Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues
CEPS	Centre for European Policy Studies
CoE	Council of Europe
CRM	Government of Serbia, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EHO	Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation
ESI	European Stability Initiative
ESRP	Employment and Social Reform Programme
EU	European Union
GARP	Government-Assisted Repatriation Programme
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
HEKS EPER	Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
LAP	Local Action Plan
LSG	Local Self-Government
MRC	Minority Rights Centre
NES	National Employment Service
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
REAG	Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum-Seekers in Germany
REC	Roma Education Centre Subotica
REF	Roma Education Fund
SHSE	Social Housing in Supportive Environment
SODI	Solidaritätsdienst International
STP	Society for Threatened People Switzerland
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Preface

The report “Roma in Serbia and the Situation of Romani Returnees from Western Europe” has been written as a background information study for the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) GmbH office in Serbia in order to inform GIZ on the planning and implementation of Roma-related and returnee-related interventions in Serbia.

The report made use of a variety of sources, but particularly the general description of the situation of the Roma was informed by the publication of *Civil Rights Defenders, The Wall of Antigypsyism – Roma in the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2018* which was written by the author of this report.

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of GIZ.

Kosovo: This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Introduction

Roma¹ had already arrived in Germany and other parts of Western Europe before the wars in the former Yugoslavia – either as asylum-seekers or as migrant workers.² With the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the number of asylum applications of Roma from Serbia (or Yugoslavia) increased. In general, the asylum applications were rejected, but in many cases Roma from Serbia received a “Duldung” (temporary residence permission for rejected asylum-seekers who are obliged to leave Germany, but are allowed to stay in Germany on a temporary basis) or could extend their stay due to other reasons before being deported back to their country of origin.

Romani asylum-seekers from Serbia and other countries in the Western Balkans constituted, for several years until 2015, the largest group of asylum-seekers in Germany and other parts of Western Europe. Based on the available data, one can assume that probably up to 140,000 asylum applications from Roma from Serbia were submitted in the years 2008-2017 in the European Union; of these around 80-90,000 in Germany (see *inter alia* Deutscher Bundestag, Unterrichtung, 2017; EUROSTAT and ESI, 2017) .

As a rule, Roma from the Western Balkans have been denied asylum in Western Europe. Most of the European Union Member States send Roma back to Serbia and other countries of origin in the Western Balkans – forcibly or they leave “voluntarily”.³ A return which poses challenges to the politics and society of the receiving countries such as Serbia.

On the other hand, the Council of Europe High Commissioner for Human Rights emphasised that, based on the European Convention on Human Rights, the cumulative discrimination of Roma in their countries of origin could justify a cessation of their deportation back to their country of origin (CoE, 2015b).

In 2014, the German authorities declared Serbia a safe country of origin.⁴ In autumn 2015, Germany adopted a new law on the asylum procedure (Asylverfahrensbeschleunigungsgesetz), aiming at an accelerated asylum procedure. In this context, the Federal Republic of Germany also committed itself to actively promoting the improvement of the economic and social situations of minorities, in particular the Roma, in the Western Balkans (“... sich der Bund (...) aktiv für die

¹ In line with the terminology of European institutions and international organisations the term ‘Roma’ is used here to refer to a number of different groups (e.g. Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichles, Bojash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, Abdal) and includes travellers, without denying the specificities of these groups.

² The wars in Slovenia in 1991, in Croatia 1991-1992, in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992–1995 and in Kosovo 1998–1999.

³ “De jure” many returnees leave Germany voluntarily, however, in many cases to avoid negative consequences such as not being allowed to participate in assistance programmes for returnees or facing travel limitations upon return. For more details on the differences between voluntary and assisted voluntary return see chapter 2.3.

⁴ The asylum application of persons from “safe countries of origin” are considered in an accelerated procedure and it is assumed that the asylum application is unfounded, since her or his country of origin is “safe”. The applicant also has a reduced period of time (one week) to appeal a negative decision and she or he can be deported back to the country of origin, even if there is no final decision on the appeal. Further persons from “safe countries of origin” are not allowed to work and must live in so-called “Erstaufnahmeeinrichtungen” which do not provide for privacy.

Verbesserung der wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Situation der Minderheiten, insbesondere Roma, im Westbalkan einsetzen (wird)” (Bundesregierung, 2015).

In 2016, Germany introduced the “Westbalkan-Regelung” (Western Balkans Regulation) which regulates the easier access of citizens of the Western Balkans to the labour market in Germany, if they fulfil certain criteria. The regulation was introduced in order to offer better options for legal migration and that people “do not have to rely on accessing the asylum system”.

Since 2016, one can observe a fall in the number of asylum applications which, however, is not the result of an improvement of the situation of the Roma in the country. Antigypsyism and discrimination and exclusion continue to exist and in consequence the deplorable living conditions of the majority of Roma or their limited access to the labour market. The change in asylum policy and practices in the host countries may have contributed more to this decrease in applications than a possible improvement of the situation in the home country.

Roma – as other citizens of Serbia – can make successful use of visa-free travel for up to three months and either work (informally or formally) in Western Europe or sell used products (clothes, cars, etc) bought in Western Europe in Serbia in order to make a living. Being aware of the negative consequences of a rejection of an asylum application and of a forced return, temporary travel to Western Europe seems to have replaced, to a considerable extent, applying for asylum. This coping mechanism allows them to make a living, but does not serve as a sustainable social and economic (re-)integration or perspective of those concerned.

In order to achieve a comprehensive overview, the report analyses the relevant policies in the Republic of Serbia and their actual implementation. Additionally, the report looks into existing approaches which could improve the reintegration of Romani returnees from Western Europe to Serbia and recommends specific fields of intervention.

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Chapter 1 contains a brief analysis of the socio-economic situation of the Roma in Serbia that demonstrates the impact of antigypsyism and cumulative discrimination of Roma in Serbia. The analysis is indispensable for gaining an understanding of the reasons why Roma have left Serbia and what the major challenges upon return for the returnees are. The analysis emphasises the need to recognise the existence of and to combat antigypsyism as the root cause of their discrimination and exclusion, since only if the root cause of their forced migration is recognised and addressed, can further migration be prevented and re-integration facilitated. This analysis also challenges the perception and public discourse on Roma from Serbia (and other countries) that they did not leave their country of origin due to discrimination and exclusion, but because the social welfare system in Germany is attractive.

Despite considerable investments, in particular in the field of education and partly in (self-) employment and housing, the overall socio-economic situation of the Roma has not improved. The most visible exceptions are the increased enrolment and attainment rates of Roma in the education system which create a challenge to find employment for qualified Roma.

Returnees face the same obstacles to generate sufficient income to survive and many returnees might have no accommodation upon return. The overall housing situation and the unsolved situation of the many informal settlements are not conducive to a sustainable return.

The report analyses the available data and information on returnees and in particular on Romani returnees who have been returned to Serbia under the Readmission Agreement, pointing also at the gap between the number of persons who left Serbia and were scheduled to return, on the one hand, and the number of persons who actually registered with authorities upon return. Obviously, many returnees do not register upon return due to the anticipated negative consequences of registration with the Serbian authorities. Others have left Western Europe without having received a deportation order to avoid possible negative consequences from authorities of Western European countries such as a temporary entry ban (Chapter 2).

Chapter 3 briefly analyses the political and legal framework of the reintegration of returnees under the Readmission Agreement at both national and local level, in the Republic of Serbia. At a local level, the report analysed the available policies (Local Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma, Local Action Plans for Refugees, IDPs and Returnees) which could be relevant for the reintegration of Roma returned from Western Europe.

Based on the brief analysis and general consideration with regard to Roma inclusion policies, whether they be for returnees or people who did not leave their home country, several conclusions and recommendations have been defined.

At the core of the conclusions lies the need to recognise and combat antigypsyism, the specific form of racism towards Roma which constitutes the root cause for the discrimination and exclusion of Roma. In consequence, antigypsyism is also the root cause for migration and the major obstacle to the reintegration of returnees.

Further crucial conclusions are the need to apply comprehensive, long-term policies targeting and accounting for specific situations at a local level and to involve Roma or Romani civil society as well as their communities (community empowerment) in activities.

Access to the labour market is indispensable to improving the socio-economic position of individuals or families. However, inclusion into the labour market also promotes social inclusion, in general, through interacting with colleagues from other ethnicities and also contributes to

combatting prejudices towards Roma. In light of the current labour market situation in Serbia with a lack of work force in some professions and/or regions, particular emphasis should be placed on facilitating access to (quality) vocational training and skilled work places.

Further detailed conclusions and recommendations are provided in chapter 4.

Finally, the paper examines available project documents of reintegration projects in Serbia and of promising reintegration models in other countries (Chapter 5). The mentioned projects of returnees' reintegration in Serbia should serve as a source of ideas for new, follow-up or similar projects, however, the author is unable to provide serious evaluations of these projects.

1. Brief Introduction to the Situation of Roma in Serbia

The situation of Romani returnees cannot be understood without a grasp of the overall situation of Roma in Serbia and without analysing the causes for (forced) migration. Reintegration can only be successful if it takes into account and addresses the reasons for the migration.

1.1. Data

During the census taken in 2011 in Serbia, 147,604 persons registered as Roma. In addition, 997 persons registered as Ashkali and 1,834 registered as Egyptians. The municipalities with the largest share of Roma according to the census results are Kostolac (19.5%), Bojnik (14.9%) and Vranjska Banja (14.4%) (Government of Serbia, 2015). The census results, however, do not reflect the actual number of Roma living in Serbia which might amount to 600,000 persons (CoE website).

There are several reasons why it is difficult to determine the actual number of Roma in Serbia. Due to negative experiences, many Roma do not disclose their ethnicity in census-taking. In addition, tens of thousands of Roma have left Serbia in the last couple of years, asking for asylum in Western Europe while others might have been returned in the meantime. Furthermore, over 46,000 Roma from Kosovo found refuge in Serbia proper after the conflict in Kosovo (Basić and Jaksić, 2002).

Roma in Serbia are a diverse group and can be differentiated according to several lines: traditional group affiliations, religion (primarily Serbian Orthodox and Islam), (first) language (Romani, Serbian, Albanian, Hungarian, Beash, Romanian, etc), social and/or legal position (domicile, refugees, registered IDPs, non-registered IDPs, Repatriated Persons).

1.2. Antigypsyism and Cumulative Discrimination

Antigypsyism constitutes the root cause for the cumulative and systematic discrimination and the social exclusion of Roma. High unemployment rates, low education enrolment and attainment rates and the deplorable living conditions of the majority are the symptoms of their situation.

An indicator for the discrimination of Roma in Serbia is the data from the Commissioner for Protection of Equality. In 2014, 40% of the 124 complaints concerning discrimination on the basis of ethnicity submitted to the Commissioner for Protection of Equality referred to discrimination against Roma (National Roma Strategy). Though discrimination takes place in institutions, in public or private life, only a small number of court proceedings have been initiated. Not only does this lead to a sense of impunity, but also to the acceptance of the discrimination of Roma by Roma and non-Roma alike.

Education also demonstrates the consequences of cumulative discrimination in time and space. Discrimination contributed to the lower level of education of parents which is then repeated with their children. Poverty or unemployment – also reinforced by antigypsyism and discrimination – affects housing and studying conditions. The consequences of other forms of discrimination, e.g.,

in housing or employment, impact on performance and attainment in education or the right of Romani to an education in general.

Box 1: Antigypsyism and Cumulative Discrimination

Antigypsyism is the “historically constructed, persistent complex of customary racism against social groups identified under the stigma "gypsy" or other related terms” (Alliance, 2016).

The added value of the concept of antigypsyism “lies in a change of focus from the Roma communities’ obligation to ‘integrate’, to State institutions’ responsibility to effectively deliver equality, non-discrimination and fundamental rights to Roma individuals” (CEPS, 2017).

In the Western Balkans, at a political level, antigypsyism is primarily not expressed in the way that explicit anti-Roma laws or policies are adopted. Antigypsyism is primarily expressed in a manner that policies or laws that should promote equal opportunities or social inclusion **are not** implemented or that discrimination of Roma is denied, perpetuating and strengthening the exclusion of Roma (CRD, 2017).

Cumulative Discrimination “expands the potential impact of racial discrimination to include cumulative effects over time, as well as the interaction between the effects of discrimination experienced in one domain and at one point in time, and events that occur in other domains and at other points in time” (Blank, Dabady and Citro, 2004).

1.3. Socio-Economic Situation

The vast majority of the Roma in Serbia face difficult living conditions, in particular Romani IDPs who were expelled from Kosovo in the aftermath of the conflict in 1998-1999, and still live today in very vulnerable circumstances (IDP Report, 2018).

1.3.1. Labour Market

An assessment of the situation of Roma on the labour market must rely on surveys or local or regional researches. Official statistical data are not representative for several reasons (see above the non-declaration of ethnicity in census-taking), however, they can serve as indicators for the actual situation. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted regional research in 2017 and in 2011 on the socio-economic situation of the Roma, comparing their situation with the situation of the majority population in close proximity.

Table 1: Selected Data on the Employment Situation of Roma in Serbia (UNDP, 2017)

	National	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma Female	Roma Male	Non-Roma Female	Non-Roma Male
Employment rate (15-64)	55%	21%	40%	9%	32%	30%	50%
Labour force participation rate (15-64)	66%	33%	49%	18%	48%	37%	62%
Unemployment rate (15-64)	16%	37%	19%	50%	33%	18%	19%
Not in education, employment or training (18-24)	N/A	73%	42%	88%	59%	37%	49%

Table 2: Selected Data on the Employment Situation of Roma in Serbia (UNDP, 2011)

	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma-Female	Roma Male	Non-Roma Female	Non-Roma Male
Employment rate (15-64)	26%	43%	13%	40%	31%	55%
Activity rate/Labour force participation rate (15-64)	52%	60%	38%	66%	50%	69%
Unemployment rate (15-64)	49%	27%	67%	39%	37%	21%

The 2014 UNHCR Roma IDP Survey and Labour Force Survey produced the following data:

Table 3: Employment Indicators (UNHCR, 2014)

Indicator	Romani IDPs	domicile Roma	General population in Serbia
Employment rate	14%	17%	40%
Activity rate	52%	56%	49%
Unemployment rate	74%	70%	17%

The data demonstrate the disadvantaged position of Roma and in particular the difficult position of Romani women. The comparison of the data from 2011 with that from 2017 even demonstrates a deterioration in the situation. The employment rate of Roma decreased from 26% to 21% and the labour force participation rate from 52% to 33%. The unemployment rate among Roma, however, also decreased considerably from 49% to 37%. Of particular concern remains the situation of Romani women with an employment rate of 9% and a labour force participation rate of 18%.

The Government in Serbia has made some effort in recent years to improve the participation of Roma in the labour market, however with limited success. At least, an increasing number of Roma registered with the National Employment Service (NES) which constitutes a prerequisite to participating in active labour market measures. On 31 May, 2018, 27,108 Roma were registered with the NES, of which 12,799 were women. The vast majority of the Roma registered with the NES have no qualifications at all or only a low level of qualifications (89.33%).

In the context of labour market integration it is important to highlight the number of around 59,000 Roma who are beneficiaries of Centres for Social Work. Around 48,000 of them receive some kind of financial social assistance, constituting about 65% of the total number of all recipients (Government of Serbia, ESRP).

The prevalence of discrimination on the labour market is undisputed. The Strategy of Social Inclusion of Roma for the period 2016-2025 dedicates Operational Objective 2 “Prevent and reduce discrimination against Roma men and women in the labour market” solely to this issue.

Discrimination also exists in the public sector. Roma are an officially recognised national minority in Serbia and thus entitled to a proportional representation in public administration and public office (Constitution of Serbia, Art.77). According to available research, Roma are underrepresented in public administration.

Currently, according to unconfirmed data, there are ten (10) Roma employed in state, three (3) in Provincial institutions (Vojvodina) and two (2) within LSGs decision-making positions.

Other data from 2013 give the following picture:

Table: Romani Employees in Local Self-Government (LSG) and Administrative Bodies (AB) in 2013 (Joksic)

Municipality	Roma Population in Municipality (%)	Employed Roma in LSG and AB (%)
Bojnik	14.81	1.92
Bujanovac	25.33	4.76
Vladicin Han	7.20	0
Vranjska Banja	14.35	0
Leskovac	5.34	0
Kostolac	19.50	0
Presevo	8.80	2.86

According to other research, of 16,675 employees in 51 state institutions, only eight (8) persons declared themselves a member of the Roma national minority (0.04%) (MRC, 2013). Additional employees of Romani origin can be found among Roma Health Mediators, Pedagogical Assistants and Roma Coordinators, however, not all are employed by local or state administrations.

In the private sector Roma face similar difficulties. The participation of Roma in “subsidised employment schemes” illustrates their situation on the labour market and the discrimination they face from potential employers. According to the National Roma Strategy, only 2.8% of subsidised employments make up Roma (50 persons in total, of which 28 women) though Roma were one of the explicit target groups.

1.3.2. Education

Despite improvements, the situation in the education system is still characterised by low enrolment rates, high drop-out rates, low participation in secondary and tertiary education, (segregated) classes offering substandard education with misplacement of students in special schools (see tables below). Placement in special schools occurs also with Romani children who attended schools in Germany, lacking appropriate documents attesting their school record in Germany or due to a lack of knowledge of the Serbian language.

The persistence of segregated schooling with lower standards and the practice of sending a considerable portion of Romani children to “special schools” are the most obvious forms of ongoing discrimination of Romani children in the education system in Serbia (According to the National Roma Strategy, 30% of all children in “special schools” are of Romani ethnicity).

Table 4: Selected Data on the Situation in Education of Roma in Serbia (UNDP, 2017)

	National	Roma	Non-Roma*	Roma Female	Roma male	Non-Roma female	Non-Roma male
Adjusted net pre-primary enrolment rate (% of population, aged 3-6)		17	41	15	19	29	50
Adjusted net compulsory education enrolment rate (% of population, aged 7-15)		84	98	85	84	98	98
Completion rate in compulsory education (% of population, aged 18-21)		62	94	57	66	93	95
Completion rate in upper secondary education (% of population, aged 22-25)		14	89	8	18	93	84
Completion rate in tertiary education (% of population, aged 26-29)	26	1	23	2	0	35	7
Students attending segregated schools (% of students, aged 7-15)		9	12	9	8	8	15
Students attending special schools (% of students, aged 7-15)		2	0	2	3	0	0

*Data refers to members of the majority population living in close proximity to Romani neighbourhoods

Table 5: Selected Data on the Situation in Education of Roma in Serbia (UNDP, 2011)

	Roma	Non-Roma*	Roma female	Roma male	Non-Roma female	Non-Roma male
Literacy rate (16+)	85%	98%	79%	92%	97%	98%
Literacy rate (16-24)	90%	99%	87%	92%	100%	99%
Pre-school enrolment rate (3-6)	18%	48%	15%	20%	50%	45%
Gross enrolment rate in compulsory education (7-15)	80%	95%	80%	80%	95%	95%
Gross enrolment rate (upper-secondary education 16-19)	25%	71%	23%	27%	64%	78%
Average years of education (25-64)	5.8	10.8	4.9	6.7	10.6	11.0
Average years of education (16-24)	6.5	11.4	5.9	7.1	11.6	11.2

*Data refer to members of the majority population living in close proximity to Romani neighbourhoods

Serbia undertook efforts to improve the participation of Romani children in the education system, however, with limited impact yet. The Law on the Foundations of the Education System and the Regulations on additional educational, health and social assistance for children and school students allow for affirmative measures.

The National Roma Strategy notes a gender gap with 28% of Romani boys attending secondary education, but only 15% of Romani girls. Particularly worrying is the situation of children living in extreme poverty with only 5% being able to attend secondary schools.

1.3.3. Housing

Despite the existence of a legal and policy framework promoting access to quality housing, the housing situation has remained very tense due to non-implementation of this framework and a lack of financial resources.

Substandard dwellings with limited or no access to public infrastructure, in many cases informal settlements, are still widespread across Serbia. According to expert estimations, about 70% of Roma live in segregated settlements (CRD, 2017). Very often these settlements are characterised by spatial and social segregation of Roma and by their informal nature. The inhabitants are either not registered as owners of the property, or of the dwelling built on the property, or even neither of these.

In 2015, a database and a “Geographic Information System for substandard Roma settlements” (GIS) was established within the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, Department of Housing Law, which was to allow for monitoring of the situation of Romani settlements.

GIS mapped 583 "substandard" Roma settlements. About 290 (around 50%) of the settlements were included in the physical plans of municipalities, cities and city municipalities, however, only 19% were included in the general urban plan, 21% were included in the general regulation plan of the municipality, city or city municipality and 10% were included in plans of detailed regulation (OSCE, 2015). In recent years within the framework of EU assistance (IPA), some progress has been made: for a total of 60 substandard Roma settlements technical documentation, and for ten (10) substandard Roma settlements planning documents, were prepared. Ten (10) LSGs currently receive expert support in the legalisation process of housing units.

The implementation of social housing programmes for very vulnerable families, including Roma, is still very limited and depends on financial support from donors.

The Social Housing in a Supportive Environment (SHSE) programme (implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy) provides housing and social protection to the most vulnerable citizens of Serbia. By March 2018, a total of 1,282 housing had been constructed in 44 municipalities, accommodating 3,421 persons. An additional 417 units are in the construction or preparation for construction phase. Roma do also profit (partially) from this programme.

Specific social housing programmes for families who were forcibly evicted from the “Gazela” and “Belville” informal settlements were implemented in Belgrade with support from the European Union, however, some of them cannot afford the running costs of the new apartment (EU Delegation, 2016). While in recent years forced evictions on a larger scale have not taken place, it remains an issue of permanent threat to many people.

The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration is also implementing social housing programmes which also include (partially) returnees. In addition to the overall housing situation, returnees may face the situation that upon return, they will have no accommodation at all (GIZ, 2016).

Box 2: Housing Indicators for Serbia (UNDP 2011b, or other given source)

Housing Indicators for Serbia

40% of the buildings in Romani settlements are made of material unsuitable for construction.

39% of Roma households occupy poor housing and disorderly neighbourhoods: compared to 10% of households of the overall population.

37% of households in Roma settlements do not have adequate access to drinking water, compared to 8% of households of the overall population (Bodewig and Sethi, 2005).

About 67% of Roma households live in homes without connection to a sewerage system, compared to 37% of households of the overall population.

11% of Roma households do not have electricity in their homes, compared to 0.1% of the overall population.

79% of Roma households, compared with 61% of households of the overall population, are forced to reduce the heating in their apartments due to insufficient income.

73% of Romani IDPs have less than 10 m² per household member compared to about 26% of non-Roma.

54% of Romani IDP households do not have a bathroom in their house, compared to less than 10% of non-Romani households (UNHCHR, 2011).

1.3.4. Health

The health situation in Romani communities is poor and Roma experience unequal access to health care services due to a combination of ethnic discrimination, poverty and social exclusion though Roma have equal access to health insurance (European Commission, 2014; UNDP, 2011).

Despite the legal and policy obligations, Roma without personal documents (ID) often have difficulties in exercising their right to primary healthcare and emergency healthcare often due to a lack of knowledge by health professionals who request personal documentation though it is not required. The situation is particularly troublesome for Roma IDPs and to a certain extent for returnees.

The health status of Roma is very much determined by their housing situation and the environment of most of their neighbourhood problems (lack of sewerage system, solid waste disposal, air pollution, lack of open space, etc.) (CAHROM, 2013).

The overall data on health status in comparison with the majority population reveals a bleak picture: significantly lower life expectancy, higher infant and child mortality rates and a higher share of experiencing anxiety and depression. Though a decrease in child mortality rate has been observed, the difference in the mortality rates of Romani children and “majority children” remains high. Both infant and under-five mortality rates in Romani settlements are double the national average; in particular among Romani children whose mothers have no formal education (infant mortality rate: 26 per thousand live births; under-five mortality rates: 29 per thousand live births).

More Roma than non-Roma experience anxiety and depression. In Serbia, a larger proportion of Romani women than men suffer from anxiety and depression. The proportion of Romani women suffering from anxiety and depression is significant (20%) even in the regional comparison (UNDP Health, 2012).

Returnees face the same situation which is often compounded by specific problems such as the non-continuation of treatments received in Western Europe.

1.3.5. Documents

In the past, a considerable number of Roma in Serbia did not obtain the necessary personal documents which left them, in many cases, stateless and created obstacles with regard to accessing public services, such as the labour market, education and healthcare and receiving social benefits. Of late, due to the advocacy of the Ombudsperson, civil society and international organisations, the situation has considerably improved. The government has amended laws and introduced measures which facilitate easier access to registration and documents, including affirmative actions for Roma. Up to 20,000 Roma have been registered in the last few years (Joksić, National Roma Strategy). According to UNHCR, the level of Roma without basic identity documents has dropped from 6.8% in 2010 to 3.9% in 2015 (Cvejić, 2016).

Legislative short-comings and discriminatory practices still exist such as that where every child is to be registered immediately at birth without discrimination and regardless of parental status (Kostić). These short-comings must be addressed, and while observers no longer identify structural discrimination of Roma with regard to registration or accessing documents (Praxis/ERRC, 2016), discriminatory practices, however, do occur in local administrations or within courts.

The exact number of Roma who are stateless, not registered at all or who do not possess some documents is difficult to determine. According to the Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe, in December 2014, there were 3,868 stateless persons or persons at risk of statelessness, who were mostly Roma without birth registration or personal identity documents (CoE, 2015). According to all estimates, Roma constitute the majority among the “legally invisible people” which could be attributed to their lifelong experience of different expressions of discrimination.

Returnees could face additional problems with regard to documents. Children who attended school in Western Europe often do not have the official documents confirming school attendance in Western Europe or returnees have no documents proving ownership of their (former) dwelling.

2. Asylum-Seekers, Returnees and Reintegration

2.1. General

Terminology

Several categories of persons who are considered “refugees” or “returnees” exist in Serbia. Since the wars in former Yugoslavia, Serbia has hosted a considerable number of refugees (according to the terminology adopted in Serbia, refugees are persons who fled other republics of the former Yugoslavia in the course of the dissolution of Yugoslavia), IDPs (persons who fled Kosovo), asylum-seekers (persons from other countries asking for asylum) and in addition returnees under the Readmission Agreements (returnees from Western Europe) who either returned voluntarily or by force.

In particular, many of the refugees (from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia) and IDPs (from Kosovo) who are of Serb ethnicity have, in the meantime, integrated into Serbian society. More difficult is the situation of Romani IDPs from Kosovo and Romani returnees from Western Europe.

According to the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, approximately 21,000 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian IDPs live in Serbia, of which 10,188 are considered to be IDPs in need (CRM, 2018). According to the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, in 2015, around 23,000 Romani IDPs from Kosovo were living in informal settlements without adequate housing, employment or access to water and sanitation, and with limited enjoyment of their social and economic rights (CoE, 2015). Further, in recent years, considerable numbers of Roma from Kosovo who were repatriated back to Kosovo, left Kosovo and went to Serbia due to the even worse conditions in Kosovo (STP, 2015).

2.2. Data on Asylum-Seekers from Serbia in Western Europe

EUROSTAT provides data on the number of asylum applications, of the number of persons ordered to leave the European Union and of the number of persons who actually returned under the readmission agreement.

Table 6: Overview of Asylum Applications of Serbian Citizens in an EU Member State and their Return

Asylum applications	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Serbian citizens' applications in EU and Germany (EUROSTAT)	13,725 (2,250)	5,460 (890)	17,740 (6,795)	14,105 (6,990)	19,055 (12,810)	22,360 (18,000)	30,840 (27,145)	30,065 (26,945)	13,185 (10,260)	8,065 (4,915)
Serbian citizens ordered to leave (EU and Germany) (EUROSTAT)	12,460 (1,465)	9,235 (1,260)	13,045 (2,410)	11,650 (2,885)	13,670 (4,615)	12,330 (4,400)	11,540 (6,690)	14,180 (8,300)	13,595 (7,560)	8,155 (3,505)
Serbian citizens actually returned (EU and Germany) (EUROSTAT)*	8,285 (2,150)	5,850 (1,390)	8,705 (1,705)	8,630 (2,490)	10,035 (3,185)	11,385 (5,530)	9,490 (6,345)	13,760 (10,305)	13,135 (9,995)	8,460 (5,410)
Registered returnees in Serbia (Migration Profiles)	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	5,398	4,974	7,484	3,933

*The data include forced and voluntary return. Third country nationals who have in fact left the territory of the Member State, following an administrative or judicial decision or act stating that their stay is illegal and imposing an obligation to leave the territory (see Art. 7.1 (b) of the [Council Regulation \(EC\) no 862/2007](#)). On a voluntary basis Member States provide Eurostat with a subcategory which relates to third country nationals returned to a third country only (EUROSTAT Website).

In total, **between 2008 and 2017, 174,600 persons from Serbia submitted an asylum application in the European Union.** The majority of these applications were submitted in Germany with 117,000 (EUROSTAT). In the years 2014 and 2015, the number of asylum applications of Serbian citizens in the European Union reached its peak with more than 30,000 asylum applications per year. However, in Germany alone, BAMF registered 14,000 follow-up asylum applications from Serb citizens in the years 2015 and 2016 (BAMF, 2016).

In 2017, the number of applicants within a Member State of the European Union dropped to 8,065; of these applications 4,915 were submitted in Germany.

Between 2008 and 2017, 119,860 citizens of Serbia were ordered to leave a EU Member State after their asylum application was rejected, with 97,090 actually returning (EUROSTAT website).

In general, a very small part of asylum applicants from Serbia are granted a positive decision. In Germany in 2015, 0.1% of the decisions for citizens of Serbia were positive. 22,341 decisions were taken by the German authorities and only 26 persons received the right to stay (0.1%) while 13,611 persons received a negative decision (60.92%) and for 8,704 persons (38.96%) other reasons were given for ending the application (withdrawal, responsibility of another country due to Dublin process, etc) (Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung, 2017).

In 2014, 21,878 decisions were taken and 43 persons received the right to stay while 13,714 persons received a negative decision and for 8,121 persons other reasons were given for ending the application (Bundesdrucksache 18/12725).

However, as the data below demonstrate not all persons who were obliged to leave Germany already had rejected asylum applications. **On 30 April, 2017, a total of 18,610 persons from Serbia were registered in the Central Registry for Foreigners (Ausländerzentralregister; AZR) with the obligation to leave the country.** The overwhelming majority (14,796) stayed less than 5 years in Germany (Bundesdrucksache 18/12725).

However, only 11,611 of those persons with the obligation to leave the country had a rejected asylum application registered, meaning that 7,000 persons with the obligation to leave the country either had not submitted an asylum application or their application had not yet been rejected. In the period January 2016 to April 2017, 6,234 persons from Serbia were, according to the AZR, no longer registered as living in Germany, though officially a decision on their asylum application had

not been registered and thus might have left Germany before a decision (Bundesdrucksache 18/12725).

Table 7: Duration of Stay in Germany of Persons Obligated to Leave (30 April, 2017; Bundesdrucksache 18/12725)

Citizenship	Persons obliged to leave	Duration							
		Unknown	Under 5 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30 and over
Serbia	18,610	2	14,796	1,933	523	651	311	318	76
Kosovo	14,582	9	11,997	1,040	380	557	305	280	14

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In this context, it could prove to be important to complement the data with the data of persons from Kosovo. The data are from 2017 and Kosovo declared independence in 2008, i.e. nine years before. All Kosovars who have already spent more than 10 years in Germany must have arrived in Germany as citizens of Serbia, Serbia and Montenegro or Yugoslavia. This would refer to 1,496 persons.

Table 8: Further Data on Asylum Application from Serbian Citizens in Germany (Bundesdrucksache 18/12725)

	As of 30 April, 2017
Number of Serbian citizens with the obligation to leave the country	18,610
Number of Serbian citizens with the obligation to leave the country and a registered rejected asylum application	11,611
Number of Serbian citizens with the obligation to leave the country without a registered rejected asylum application	6,999
Number of Serbian citizens with the obligation to leave the country still in the asylum procedure	3,001
Number of Serbian citizens with the obligation to leave the country and whose Duldung expired more than a year ago	3,698

Roma Among Asylum-Seekers from Serbia in the European Union

Since the 1960s, Roma already constituted a considerable proportion of the migrant workers from Serbia in Western Europe (in particular in Austria). In general, these persons and their descendants have in the meantime become citizens of their new country of residence.

On the other hand, prior to the wars in the former Yugoslavia, Roma had already begun to leave in order to seek asylum in Western Europe. With the war in Kosovo and the expulsion of Roma, migration of Roma assumed a new dimension and became more complex. Roma continued to leave Serbia for Western Europe, but more than 40,000 Roma from Kosovo fled to Serbia proper in the aftermath of the conflict.

The exact number of Roma among asylum-seekers from Serbia in the European Union is difficult to determine, but according to the European Stability Initiative (ESI) 85-90% of applicants from Serbia are Roma (ESI, 2013; ESI, 2015).

A German Government report on safe countries of origin from December 2017 (Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung, 2017) provides data on Roma among asylum-seekers from Serbia in Germany based on the ethnic declaration of asylum-seekers during their hearings:

In 2015, 86.6% of asylum applicants from Serbia were Roma (23,338) and in 2016 82.6% (8,484). In the first 6 months of 2017, Roma constituted 83.2% (2,275) of applicants (Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung, 2017).

For the year 2014, the German Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that 92% of asylum-seekers (a total of 27,145 persons) from Serbia were Roma (German Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2015).

Overall, between 2014 and the first half of 2017, more than 59,000 applications for asylum from Roma from Serbia were registered in Germany.

Table 9: Asylum Applications by Roma from Serbia in Germany (sources see above)

	2014	2015	2016	1-6/2017	Overall
Number of Romani asylum applicants from Serbia	24,973	23,338	8,484	2,275	59,070
Percentage of overall asylum applications from Serbia	92%	86.6%	82.6%	83.2%	

Overall, based on these assessments, between 2008 and 2017, around 140,000 asylum applications by Roma from Serbia were submitted in a Member State of the European Union, more or less the official number of Roma (147,000) in Serbia. With regard to Germany, it would be reasonable to assume that 80–90,000 asylum applications were submitted by Roma from Serbia in this period.

However, already in the preceding years, Roma constituted a considerable part of asylum-seekers from Serbia. The Government Strategy for the Returnees’ Reintegration under the 2008 Readmission Agreement already highlights a large share of Roma among asylum-seekers and potential returnees.

2.3. Returnees from Western Europe

Different groups exist among the returnees from Western Europe. Their diverse and differing needs are not always recognised by reintegration policies. Among returnees from Western Europe we find persons who were forcibly repatriated, persons who returned “voluntarily” with assistance from the returning countries upon return and persons who returned voluntarily without assistance.

A further differentiation could be made according to duration of stay in Western Europe. Persons who were repatriated after a short period of time would still access a network in Serbia but could not accumulate financial resources and often sold their belongings to finance the trip to Western Europe. On the other hand, persons who might have lived fifteen-twenty years in Western Europe before being repatriated could have accumulated financial resources and learned new skills but might not have any accommodation and hardly any network they could rely on upon return.

Children born in Western Europe and attending school there for years, often do not speak the language of instruction and face different obstacles from those children who might have missed one school year during their stay in Western Europe.

REAG (Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum-Seekers in Germany) and GARP (Government Assisted Repatriation Programme) are the main assistance programmes for voluntary returnees. REAG supports travel while GARP provides start-up support for returnees. Starthilfe Plus is another programme available to voluntary returnees since 2017, providing one-off payments. However, REAG/GARP assistance is only available to persons who entered Germany before 19 December, 2009 (IOM). According to other sources, citizens of Serbia receive in general only travel costs within the framework of REAG/GARP (Merkblatt, 2018). Ethnically disaggregated data do not seem to be available.

The actual number of Serb citizens who returned to Serbia from Germany is difficult to determine and in consequence also the number of Romani returnees. The following data sets are available:

Table 10: Various Data on Returned Serbian Citizens Deported or who Voluntary Left Germany

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Serbian citizens actually returned from Germany (EUROSTAT)	2,150	1,390	1,705	2,490	3,185	5,530	6,345	10,305	9,995	5,410
Serbian citizens voluntarily returned from Germany (REAG/GARP)								6,155	6,166	1,847 (1-6/2017)
Serbian citizens deported from Germany (Unterrichtung)								3,627	3,781	1,335 (1-6/2017)
Registered returnees in Serbia (CRM)	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	5,398	4,974	7,484	3,933

Table 11: Serbian Citizens Deported or who voluntary left Germany (Unterrichtung durch Bundesregierung, 2017/GIZ)

	2015	2016	1-6/2017	1-8/2018 (GIZ)	Total
Serbian citizens deported back from Germany	3,627	3,781	1,335		8,743
Serbian citizens voluntarily returned with REAG/GARP programme (2018 incl. Starthilfe Plus)	6,155	6,166	1,847	1,004	15,172
Total	9,782	9,947	3,182	1,004	23,915

Only for those persons returning via Belgrade airport and who register at the airport Readmission Office can the authorities of Serbia provide disaggregated data. In 2017, 1,891 returnees were registered at Belgrade airport. In 2016, 3,655, in 2015, 3,174 and in 2014, 1,716 returnees were registered (respective Migration Profiles).

Table 13: Returnees Registered at the Belgrade Airport Readmission Office (CRM)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	Overall
Overall number of registered returnees at Belgrade airport Readmission Office	1,716	3,174	3,655	1,891	10,436

Overall number of registered returnees at Belgrade airport Readmission Office returned from Germany	1,350 (78.7%)	2,859 (89.0%)	3,458 (94.3%)	1,755 (92.8%)	9,422 (90.3%)
Number of Romani returnees registered at Belgrade airport Readmission Office	1,304	2,344	2,697	1,437	7,782
Percentage of Romani returnees at Belgrade airport Readmission Office	76%	82%	73.8%	76%	74.6%

The Migration Profiles of Serbia also provide information on the educational background and employment status of the returnees registered at Belgrade airport Readmission Office. There are not ethnically disaggregated data available, but they can provide indications on the educational background of the Romani returnees, as they represent the majority of registered returnees.

In 2017, only two persons out of 1,891 persons declared they were employed. 1,017 declared they were unemployed; the rest were students, children or pensioners.

In 2016, only eight persons out of 3,655 persons declared they were employed. 2,002 declared they were unemployed; the rest were students, children or pensioners.

In 2015, none of the 1,716 persons declared they were employed. 978 declared they were unemployed (57%); the rest were students, children or pensioners.

Table 14: Education Profile of Returnees Registered at Belgrade Airport Readmission Office (CRM)

	2014	2015	2016	2017
No education	11%	20.3%	16.6%	10%
Did not complete primary school	22%	31%	24.2%	15.6%
Completed primary school	22%	26.6%	19.6%	19.7%
Secondary school	9%	10.2%	8.4%	8.2%
College	1%	1%	0.25%	0.5%
University	0%	0.4%	0.3%	0.16%
Other	35%	10.5%	30.7%	45.85%

A survey of 500 returnees in 2012 found a similar educational level among returnees. Around half of them had completed primary school, one quarter had no formal education and another quarter had completed secondary school (Cvejić, 2012).

Returnees can be found throughout Serbia, however, based on the available data of returnees registered at Belgrade airport, the following are the main places of origin (summary data from 2016-2018): Novi Sad: 297 persons; Niš: 284; Palilula (Belgrade): 283; Zemun (Belgrade): 279; Leskovac: 262; Bujanovac: 247; Smederevo: 230, Požarevac: 215; Vranje: 164; Subotica: 161; Kragujevac: 153; Novi Pazar: 148 (GIZ, Baza Podataka Romi Povratnici).

Romani Returnees

The exact number of Romani returnees is difficult to determine not least since ethnically disaggregated data are only available for those returnees registered upon arrival at Belgrade airport.

According to the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration in 2017, of the 1,891 returnees who were registered at Belgrade airport, 1,437 were Roma. In 2016, of 3,655 returnees, 2,697 were Roma. In 2015, of 3,174 returnees, 2,340 were Roma and in 2014, of 1,716 persons, among them 1,304 Roma were registered (respective Migration Profiles). **For the overall period 2014-2017, Roma constitute 74.6% of registered returnees (7,782 persons).** In 2018, up until June, 693 persons were registered (655 from Germany) of which 499 were Roma.

Taking into account that between 2014 and June 2017, more than 59,000 Roma applied for asylum in Germany alone, the number of 7,782 Roma who returned between 2014 and 2017 is very low, even in light of an assessment from UNDP research that around 40% of Romani returnees registered with the authorities in Serbia (UNDP Micronarratives, 2018).

Box 3: UNDP Micronarratives

UNDP Micronarratives of Romani Returnees

The UNDP collected micronarratives from Romani returnees in 2017 (Papa and Keskiné, 2017). According to the findings, 87% declared themselves unemployed, indicating access to employment as a major problem for returnees – which was already a consequence of discrimination, a major reason for leaving Serbia. State transfers (social welfare, children benefits, etc.) play an important role as a source of income in addition to (informal) jobs and remittances from abroad. Local self-government appears to be a non-relevant counterpart for the returnees, despite their importance to reintegration which could be understood as a lack of trust in the institutions.

The micronarrative research also demonstrates the impact of the economic situation on access to education, since economic difficulties upon return curtail the possibilities for children to attend schooling. In general, access to education seems to be less of a problem though some children may have spent years abroad and have no or limited command of Serbian language or have problems with the recognition and validation of their documents.

The micronarrative research demonstrates further that many repatriated persons are confronted with psychosocial problems upon return or at the least felt vulnerable, irrespective of whether they had experienced these problems before they left.

Overall, the micronarratives identified five major needs, however, for Romani returnees in all countries in the Western Balkans: (i) Better housing conditions; (ii) better healthcare; (iii) access to jobs in the public sector; (iv) help in applying for jobs; and (v) better access to social services/care.

3. Reintegration Policy in Serbia

3.1. General

Reintegration of Romani returnees requires the wide cooperation of different authorities (cross-sectoral cooperation) and the alignment of different policies in the field of return and reintegration, in the field of inclusion of Roma, in social inclusion in general (education, employment), in housing, and so on, in both a horizontal and a vertical way.

3.2. National Level

In January 2008, the readmission agreement between Serbia and the European Commission to facilitate the return of people residing irregularly in a Member State to their country of origin or to a country of transit, came into force. In addition, Serbia signed readmission agreements with individual Member States (Government of Serbia, 2007).

In 2008, Serbia adopted a Strategy for Returnees' Reintegration under the Readmission Agreement (Reintegration Strategy). The Reintegration Strategy emphasises the large proportion of Roma among those to be returned and identified the following priority areas for interventions: access to personal documents, access to adequate housing and education, social policy measures and creation of opportunities for the inclusion of returnees in the labour market.

The Reintegration Strategy mentions the (multiple) discrimination of Roma and the need to recognise returnees as especially vulnerable groups, e.g., also in the National Employment Strategy. The Reintegration Strategy does not refer to antigypsyism or discrimination as a reason for migration. If antigypsyism and discrimination is the root cause for migration, reintegration policies must provide for combatting these phenomena. The Reintegration Strategy however, emphasises that "the issue of Roma return (...), in the process of the future implementation of this strategy, cannot be seen separately from ameliorating their overall position in the Republic of Serbia".

It should be reiterated in this context that the Reintegration Strategy, already in 2008, indicated a large proportion of Roma as returnees; i.e., already before the approximate 140,000 Roma from Serbia had asked for asylum in the European Union between 2008–2017.

According to the Reintegration Strategy, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (CRM) has the task of coordinating and organising the primary reception and the operational implementation of the planned activities in the field. A Council for the Reintegration of Returnees consisting of representatives of several ministries and governmental institutions and within the Council a Team for the Monitoring of Strategy Implementation should have been established.

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In 2012, Serbia adopted a Law on Managing Migrations which proposed the creation of local councils of migrations and the adoption of a Local Action Plan for the Improvement of the Status of Refugees, IDP and Returnees under the Readmission Agreement.

Additional policy documents such as the National Roma Strategy, but also the National Employment Strategy 2011-2020, refer to returnees under Readmission Agreements. Regarding specific fields such as education and employment, the respective policies must also be taken into account.

As part of the framework of accession to the European Union, Serbia was obliged to develop indicators for monitoring the reintegration of returnees. However, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration was aware of the limitations of the monitoring activities and stated that "... a lack of comprehensive records on this population turned out to be one of the greatest problems for adequate planning of assistance and all future activities. This problem is primarily caused by lack of any legal obligation to register returnees, and lack of systemic monitoring of voluntary returns. A part of this category of persons eludes official statistics, and dedicated research done by some organisations and competent government institutions uncovers only parts of the problem" (Migration Profile, 2017).

The available data of the Migration Profile 2017 indicated limited outreach, e.g., 65 persons who declared themselves as returnees were registered with the National Employment Service (NES) while for 83 persons individual employment plans were developed. 378 returnee students were enrolled at school (194 female and 184 male students), based on data submitted by twelve school administrations. However, the Migration Profile does not state how many of these beneficiaries were Roma.

3.3. Local Level

156 municipalities in Serbia adopted local action plans (LAP) for internally displaced persons, migrants, refugees, and/or returnees and formed municipal migration councils. 104 of them revised and extended LAP to include returnees (Migration Profile, 2017).

In 2017 most of the local action plans were due to expire and it is not clear if all of them have been reviewed (BFPE, 2017). According to a GIZ database, nearly two thirds of existing local action plans have expired (GIZ, Baza Podataka Romi Povratnici). Not provided is information on how

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many action plans overall are still valid and refer to Romani returnees in particular and whether all of them now include returnees under the Readmission Agreement as a target group.

According to the Law on Managing Migrations, local self-government units must establish Migration Councils which implement local policies with regard to migration. The Migration Councils should also include Roma Coordinators in their work. In 2017, 43 Roma Coordinators were involved in their work or in other return-related activities (Migration Profile, 2017).

The main responsibility for the implementation of the reintegration policy, including financial responsibility, has been largely delegated to local authorities. Due to a lack of financial resources, they are hardly able to implement active reintegration measures.

The local trustees of the CRM are responsible for addressing the needs of returnees. They would be in charge of communicating with national (CRM) and local authorities (LSG) in order to find solutions for the emergency care and basic needs of returnees, registering them, assisting them in accessing social security and healthcare (GIZ, 2016).

Additionally, at a local level several positions or mechanisms exist (Mobile Teams for Roma Inclusion, Coordinators for Roma Issues, Health Mediators, Pedagogical Assistants) which should facilitate a better inclusion of Roma. All three individual positions are also members of the Mobile Teams. Though they work with Roma in general, they could also be involved in outreach activities to returnees (identification of returnees, identification of their needs, etc).

Mobile Teams for Roma Inclusion: consisting of representatives of local authorities and civil society, including Roma Coordinators, Health Mediators and Pedagogical Assistants, which regularly monitor the situation of Roma at a local level.

Coordinators for Roma Issues: Currently, there are 68 coordinators of which 34 are of Romani ethnicity. Most of these coordinators are temporarily employed while the 34 coordinators who are not of Romani ethnicity carry out the tasks of Roma Coordinators in addition to other job obligations.

Health Mediators: 85 Health Mediators currently exist. They are the link between the communities and health centres, facilitating the inclusion of Roma in the healthcare.

Pedagogical Assistants: currently 191 Pedagogical Assistants are employed by the Ministry of Education. According to the final operational conclusions from the seminar “Social inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2017”, an additional 50 assistants will be employed between 2017 and 2019. They will assist with the enrolment of children, monitor school progress and generally work with families.

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From a policy perspective, both the Local Action Plans for internally displaced persons, migrants, refugees, and/or returnees and the Local Action Plans for the inclusion of Roma are relevant as well as local policies in the field of social inclusion (education, employment).

For the implementation of action plans, one portion of the funds of local self-government units is planned within their budgets, while the other is planned through donations from international organisations.

Research on the situation in Vojvodina demonstrates a lack of implementation of the Law on Management of Migration. This research analysed in detail the application of the policies for returnees at a local level. 44 municipalities participated in a survey, of which 31 municipalities adopted local action plans for the integration of returnees, but only thirteen (13) provided funds from the municipal budget (Ćurčić/EHO, 2015).

Research by the author in 2017 demonstrates that of 22 analysed LAP for the integration of internally displaced persons, migrants, refugees, and/or returnees, none contained measures which target Roma explicitly. On the other hand, twelve (12) define Roma as a target (sub-) group of the LAP, another five (5) LAP provide a discussion as well as figures on Roma, but stop short of defining Roma as a target group. Three (3) local action plans make casual mention of Roma and/or provide a figure without discussion. Two (2) local action plans do not contain any mention of Roma, however, they are predominantly inhabited by ethnic Serbs (Arije and Čičevac).

54 municipalities in Serbia adopted LAP for the social inclusion of Roma, however, some of them have already expired. This 2017 research demonstrates that only one (Kragujevac) of the 16 valid LAP reviewed in the process of the research contains a section on migration and return. The local action plans for Roma adopted by four other municipalities contain individual measures which explicitly target returnees, with measures related to education (Aleksinac, Ruma, Subotica) and a measure on housing (Kraljevo).

Similar to the LAP for internally displaced persons, migrants, refugees, and/or returnees, LAP for the social inclusion of Roma have been implemented partly with funds from local self-government and partly through donations from international organisations.

4. Conclusions

General

1. The support to Roma and Romani returnees in Serbia from German institutions must respond to the actual situation. The successful reintegration of returnees and prevention of new migration requires acceptance of the existence of antigypsyism and discrimination and the dedication to combat both. Interventions in this context are necessary and indispensable.
2. The overall improvement of the situation of the Roma is also a prerequisite for the sustainable reintegration of returnees and for decreasing the drivers for migration. Furthermore, considering the fact that the vast majority of asylum applicants from Serbia were and are Roma, it is deemed appropriate that assistance from Germany for returnees should also focus on Roma.
3. Measures to support reintegration must be embedded in the respective state policies – insofar as they exist. In this case, it means that measures must accord with migration (readmission) policy and the social inclusion policy of the Republic of Serbia, including the inclusion policy for Roma. These policies should serve as guidelines to develop a comprehensive approach that should be jointly developed with the Government of Serbia and the Romani civil society.
4. Within a nation-wide framework, tailor-made interventions should be developed at a local level, involving local authorities and local civil society.
5. In order to achieve more sustainability, the overall ambition should be to institutionalise measures and approaches. Thus, the ownership and contribution of the authorities would be further strengthened. This reflects one of the major lessons learnt with regard to social inclusion policies that only a comprehensive and programme-based approach can lead to a sustainable change.
6. In order to achieve such a common approach with government and the civil society, a strong advocacy component is indispensable, thereby also strengthening the respective capacity of the Romani civil society.
7. Interventions at a local level should be strengthened by a community development/community empowerment approach involving local Romani communities.
8. Develop long-term approaches which are indispensable for a sustainable and systemic change.

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9. Identify possibilities, to extend the foreseen activities in the Action Plan for Chapter 23 (within the framework of the accession process to the European Union) to enable access to housing and employment for returnees from Western Europe. However, it foresees only activities in the field of education for children who were returned.

Socio-Economic situation

There are several factors determining the situation of Roma and Romani returnees in the socio-economic sphere of Serbia. Antigypsyism and discrimination prevents them from participating equally on the labour market which is compounded by other factors such as the lack of formal education of many Roma. On the other hand, two phenomena could provide space for “positive developments”: The number of Roma attending and completing secondary school and university education is increasing and in a number of occupations, Serbia faces a labour force shortage.

1. The discrimination of Roma and the underlying antigypsyism must be recognised and combatted, if a systemic change is to be achieved. Well-intended employment and self-employment initiatives will continue to show only limited results or non-sustainable results as long as the major obstacle of equal participation on the labour market is not addressed.
2. In light of the effects of cumulative discrimination, a comprehensive approach is necessary, if the overall situation of Roma in the socio-economic sphere is to improve. Local Romani communities’ capacity to absorb must be strengthened in order to enable them to receive and include returnees.
3. In light of the intersectional discrimination of Romani women, particular attention should be paid to improving equal access for Romani women in all spheres of socio-economic life.
4. Tailor-made training for Roma, including returnees in craft skills or other occupations where a labour force shortage prevails, should be promoted.
5. Strengthen activities promoting sustainable employment possibilities for Roma through identification of niches in the labour market.
6. Members of the Roma community who completed secondary school and university education must be supported in finding work, since they also have an important function as role models for both the majority and Roma.
7. Support the establishment of local coalitions, promoting the sustainable employment of Roma. These local coalitions should include public authorities, private local companies, civil society or representatives of Roma in general.

Returnees and Reintegration Policy

Only a small part of returnees registered with the relevant authorities in Serbia which has also created challenges in identifying the whereabouts and the needs of the returnees, in particular of Romani returnees.

The Strategy for the Returnees' Reintegration under the Readmission Agreement is not only outdated, but also neglects crucial issues (in particular antigypsyism and discrimination) which contributed to (forced) migration while constituting serious obstacles to sustainable reintegration.

1. A better registration system with ethnically disaggregated data and needs identification at a local level would help in shaping locally-based reintegration measures and could contribute to creating "early warning" mechanisms.
2. The transfer of responsibilities to local self-government units often exceeds their financial and staffing capacities and is a serious obstacle to reintegration as long as finances and capacity are not available. In light of widespread poverty in Serbia and the current prevailing needs of refugees and IDPs, it is difficult for the Serbian authorities to justify substantial financial expenditure on returnees from Western Europe.
3. A further analysis would be necessary to assess the collaboration structures at a local level which should facilitate the reintegration. It would be important to establish how various offices at a local level cooperate and which office should be the lead regarding reintegration.
4. The available data on education status and position on the labour market serve as indicators for the vulnerable position of many of the returnees. The low level of education – and very likely also permanent work experience – should be taken into account when designing reintegration policies or measures.

5. Possible Interventions

This report can neither provide for a detailed assessment of already ongoing projects which could serve as an example for repetition or extension nor can it propose or even draft individual projects. The report can, however, outline specific fields of intervention and approaches of interventions. Within these fields, projects could be developed which, in a follow-up ex-ante assessment, involving government and civil society, should be verified and further fine-tuned. The projects mentioned below could serve as guides for the development of new measures.

With regard to the fields of interventions, the “reintegration process” has been deconstructed in order to identify steps within the process of reintegration which could be given priority or where needs were identified based on existing information. Of particular importance seems to be the fight against antigypsyism as the root cause of the discrimination and exclusion of Roma.

With regard to approaches, the report highlights experiences from the overall development cooperation (e.g., the importance of a programme-based approach and that government takes the lead or provides the frame), policy development in general (evidence-based policy), inclusion policies for Roma (strong participation of civil society, comprehensive approach, combatting antigypsyism) and reintegration policies (cross-sector collaboration, comprehensive approach).

5.1. Recommended Approaches of Interventions

- Follow a programme-based approach and aim for institutionalisation of assistance structures in order to increase the responsibility and ownership of authorities and to create more sustainable structures after the departure of GIZ.
- Irrespective of field of interventions, which field an intervention focuses on or whether it should be implemented at national or local level, the activities within these interventions must be embedded in a comprehensive approach.
- At a local level, a comprehensive approach should, on the one hand, include combatting antigypsyism as the root cause of their discrimination and exclusion, should, if possible, focus on more than one field, e.g., education or employment and involve communities in the identification of needs and in the implementation of measures (community empowerment). On the other hand, a comprehensive approach should also include the involvement and coordination of all relevant structures at a local level (cross-sector collaboration).

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- At national level, a comprehensive approach would require addressing not only one field of intervention, e.g., education, but several fields in parallel.
- Horizontal coordination at national level needs to be enhanced.
- Any measures should consider a “do no harm” approach and involve community members who did not leave Serbia. In light of the vulnerable situation of the vast majority of Roma, focuses solely on returnees could create tensions and problems in settlements. Planned measures should consider including other marginalised groups.
- In order to better identify or plan interventions targeting a sustainable reintegration, the major locations of returnees must be identified and profiles of returnees established. An alternative would be to identify municipalities with a positive attitude to integration and participation of Roma and jointly develop measures.
- Consideration of focusing on several municipalities to create model municipalities. Based on indicators such as the commitment of municipal authorities, local action plans, the capacity of local Romani civil society, number of returnees or the commitment of local companies and other stakeholders, these model municipalities could be supported.
- An overall assessment to identify local and regional market niches should be conducted. It would be important to see if a sustainable and long-term matching of the skills of the returnees and the needs of the markets could be achieved or which targeted training programmes should be initiated for Romani women and men.

Box 4: Danish Refugee Council – Best Practices (DRC 2008)

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) - Best practices for the design and implementation of return and reintegration assistance projects (excerpt)

Arrival and initial reintegration support: Information and advice on how to access legal, health, and educational services must be available upon return. Initial basic humanitarian support should be provided to returnees, taking into consideration the specific needs and vulnerability of different groups of returnees.

Housing and accommodation: Returnees with no immediate housing solution should be assisted in finding permanent affordable accommodation – either through housing reconstruction or through e.g. subsidised social housing for those who do not own property or land.

Income generation activities and employment: Preparing potential returnees for economic reintegration begins in the host country by allowing asylum seekers to maintain or develop vocational skills. Return-related vocational training must be based on information about the social and economic situation in the country of origin, and should preferably take place in cooperation with local partners.

Children, youth and schooling: Ensuring a successful reintegration of children may imply offering native language training to the children of returnees to ease reintegration into the school system upon return. Social activities should also be facilitated, where young returnees can socialise with other young local residents to facilitate reintegration and reconciliation.

Health issues and medical services: Returnees must bring with them their translated medical records from the host country, as this serves as a solid base for continued treatment upon return. Returnees should also receive financial support for medicine and care for a certain period of time upon return.

Re-acceptance and reconciliation: Activities for and support to returnees must not create a gap between returnees and the existing local community. Return assistance programmes should therefore support community activities and support vulnerable members of the receiving community as well.

Monitoring and follow-up: Cooperation with local partners or implementing organisations is essential to assist in safe, dignified and sustainable returns. It allows adjustments to unforeseen problems.

Cooperation and coordination between sending and receiving ends: Programmes should build on increased cooperation between organisations and authorities in host countries and countries of origin. This is imperative to avoid duplication of services as well as positive discrimination between different groups of returnees. Cooperation between sending and receiving ends will also facilitate the capacity building of local institutions, and is vital to a holistic approach to return and reintegration assistance.

5.2. Recommended Fields of Intervention

5.2.1. Combatting Root Cause of Migration

Antigypsyism constitutes the root cause of the discrimination and exclusion of Roma and as a consequence of their forced migration. Antigypsyism and discrimination are obvious reasons for the exclusion of many Roma from the labour market; therefore, policies and/or measures promoting inclusion on the labour market must include anti-discrimination components.

Yet, tackling the root cause is neglected in reintegration (or general inclusion) measures which also contributes to the limited impact of the programmes and projects.

Possible interventions:

- Stand-alone projects with awareness-raising and training programmes on antigypsyism and its consequences (e.g., for employees in administration, teachers, employers, Roma (as multipliers also)
- Include combatting antigypsyism and anti-discrimination components as a cross-cutting issue in other projects

5.2.2. Facilitate Assistance to Individuals upon Actual Return

Only (forced) returnees arriving at Belgrade airport are systematically registered. The other returnees are not registered. At a local level, the authorities have not established a country-wide registration structure.

Institutions or organisations could be created or existing ones (Migration Councils, local trustees, local Roma Coordinators or the Joint Mobile Teams for Roma Inclusion) assisted with the

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registration of returnees and identification of short-term and long-term needs as well as potential skills.

Concrete assistance could be provided for primary needs upon return (information on responsibilities of institutions and organisations; legal advice, psychosocial assistance, registration at municipality, access to accommodation, education and official labour market, retrieving missing documents from Serbia and/or Western European country).

Possible interventions:

- Assistance, including legal assistance to returnees (legal advice, registration at municipality, access to accommodation, education and official labour market, retrieving missing documents from Serbia and/or Western European country, etc): see different already existing projects:
- Establish local centres, including community empowerment and also working with returnees:
- Provide structures for psychosocial assistance for returnees:
- Make use of or strengthen existing structures such as Mobile Teams for Roma Inclusion, Roma Coordinators or local trustees
- Identify needs, where assistance to municipalities for creating effective and efficient cross-sector collaboration among all involved structures is necessary

5.2.3. Facilitate Detailed Assistance in Social Inclusion (education, employment, housing, access to documents)

Several projects are working on social inclusion issues. However, further activities targeting the enrolment of children at schools, evening classes, Serbian language courses, recognition and validation of school documents and diplomas, or with access to the labour market, recognition and validation of vocational training or training courses documents, etc. might be necessary. How to make better use of skills acquired in Western Europe is also an issue to be explored and promoted. Improving housing situations, since returnees often have no accommodation. Regarding integration in the labour market, transfer to the labour market from secondary schools or university could be of relevance.

Most of the interventions focus on specific issues without following a more comprehensive approach which, however, would be necessary to achieve more sustainability.

Possible interventions:

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- More comprehensive projects addressing multiple obstacles in socio-economic sphere
- Establish local centres working also with returnees, providing psychosocial assistance, legal assistance and help with accessing documents, recognition and validation of documents, etc.

Analyse whether the projects below could provide a more comprehensive approach

- Project combining economic support with psychosocial assistance and other relevant components
- Following a market needs assessment, tailor-made training programmes and (self-) employment programmes for Roma and Romani returnees, including social enterprises and cooperatives:
 - Analyse DIMAK activities as to how far they could or actually do include Roma:
- Include the situation of Romani women in market needs assessments and in follow-up programmes
- Improve housing situations through a participatory approach involving beneficiaries
- Improve performance in education
- Create local and/or regional coalitions, including companies in need of a qualified workforce to promote employment of Roma in the private and public sectors
- Provide structures for psychosocial assistance for returnees (see also assistance upon return) either through making use of or strengthening existing structures such as Mobile Teams for Roma Inclusion, Roma Coordinators, local trustees or through the creation of new ones. Experts could be included in these structures to identify needs for psychosocial assistance and providing psychosocial assistance.
- Facilitate inclusion into legal labour migration programmes

5.2.4. Strengthen Community Empowerment:

Tailor-made and sustainable programmes and projects require the strong participation and empowerment of the communities concerned. The participation of communities in the identification of needs at a local level and in the implementation of measures is indispensable. More empowerment activities should strengthen their participation.

Possible interventions (either in stand-alone projects or cross-cutting):

- Involve local communities in the identification of measures and involve them in implementation

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- Strengthen communities through the training of community members
- Facilitate cooperation communities and local authorities

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