

RETURNING MIGRANTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: THE ISSUE OF REINTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT

Returning migrants in the republic of Macedonia: the Issue of Reintegration

The Republic of Macedonia has been facing increased flows of returnees following their legal or illegal emigration abroad. This has led to the recognition of the issue of their social, economic and cultural reintegration into society. In order to respond to the needs of the returnees, the Government has developed a Programme for Reintegration of Returnees in Accordance with the Readmission Agreements. It is expected that this programme will add to the activities of the non-governmental organisations in assisting returnees and their families upon their voluntary or forced return in a more organised and systemic way.

KEY WORDS: illegal migration, reintegration, voluntary and forced return, returning migrants, readmission agreements

IZVLEČEK

Migranti povratniki v republiki Makedoniji: Vprašanje reintegracije

Republika Makedonija se sooča s povečanim tokom povratnikov, ki so bili zakoniti ali nezakoniti migranti v tujini. Zato družba prepoznava vprašanja njihove socialne, ekonomske in kulturne reintegracije v družbo. Da bi se odzvali na potrebe povratnikov, je vlada pripravila *Program za reintegracijo povratnikov v skladu z dogovori o ponovnem prevzemu oseb*. Pričakujemo, da bo *Program* pripomogel k dejavnostim nevladnih organizacij pri bolj organizirani pomoči povratnikom in njihovim družinam pri njihovi prostovoljni ali prisilni vrnitvi.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: nezakonita migracija, reintegracija, prostovoljna in prisilna vrnitev, migranti povratniki, dogovori o ponovnem prevzemu oseb

INTRODUCTION

The article addresses a topic which is gaining increasing attention on the policy agenda in the Republic of Macedonia. With the intensified migratory movements of the Macedonian population, especially illegal migration, the return of Macedonian citizens into the country has also increased. Until recently the non-governmental sector has been the only major source of support for the returnees. Governmental involvement in migration issues in general began in 2009, while the issue of the reintegration of returnees

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was addressed for the first time in an organised manner only in 2010. A Programme for Reintegration of Returnees according to the Readmission Agreements signed between Macedonia and destination countries was drafted in 2010. Having been directly involved in the development of this Programme, in this article the author draws on experiences, information and qualitative data from interviews with returnees and relevant stakeholders (NGOs, ministries) carried out for the purposes of the programme.

The overall objective of this article is to depict the scope of migratory movements and returns to Macedonia and the challenges faced by the returning migrants and their families upon return (with a focus on children and the elderly), as well as the policy responses in place to facilitate their reintegration.

The article is structured so as to cover the above topics, starting with estimates on emigration and illegal migration in the first chapter. The second chapter presents the current situation of the returnees. It gives data on the scope of returns to Macedonia and the challenges returnees face upon return. Particular emphasis is placed on the most vulnerable groups of returnees: children and the elderly. The third chapter is devoted to the policy responses as a form of support for the reintegration of returnees into society. It first presents data on the signing of the Readmission Agreements with EU and non-member states. It then elaborates the planned public measures designed to facilitate the reintegration of Macedonian citizens upon their return to the country. The article concludes with a Ways Forward chapter which summarises the main achievements in the domain of reintegration of returnees and the challenges that remain to be addressed in future.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: ESTIMATES ON EMIGRATION AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION

The migration of citizens of Macedonia is not a recent phenomenon. Several events have caused large flows of migration over the years. The Balkan wars of 1912-1913, the First World War, the Second World War and the Greek Civil War (1945-1949) all led to mass emigration to the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In the sixties and seventies, Macedonian emigration was triggered mainly by poor economic conditions, and the main destinations were Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy and Sweden, while smaller numbers found their way to Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway (IOM 2007).

The transition period and poor economic performance following the 1990s triggered several different types of migratory movements. Unfavourable socio-economic conditions, deteriorating living standards, rising poverty and unemployment were the key push factors for a large part of the Macedonian population to search for ways out through economic migration, predominantly to the European countries.

According to the 2002 population census, 35,000 Macedonians have gone abroad. However, this number appears improbably low. In 2007, the Government of Macedonia put the number as high as 400,000, or 20% of the population. There are no indications that this trend will be reduced in the coming years. A survey commissioned by IOM Budapest in 2009 showed that 10.5% of the Macedonians stated a definite intent to emigrate in the future (IOM 2009). The latest relevant comprehensive data for the number of emigrants by individual countries are those from the World Bank. These data show that the number of Macedonian citizens in receiving countries all over the world in 2010 amounts to 447,138 persons. According to this data the emigration rate is about 21.8%. This means that a considerable share of the total population of Macedonia is residing abroad (Janevska and Bornarova 2011).

In this process of increased emigration, illegal emigration has also been increasing. Due to the restrictive immigration policies of the European countries, the number of Macedonian illegal emigrants returning to Macedonia through voluntary and forced returns has increased.

Data on illegal migration as one of the key reasons for intensified flows of returns to Macedonia is scarce. From 2002 to 2006 (inclusive), the Ministry for Internal Affairs has apprehended 12,903 irregular

migrants, either intercepted at the Macedonian border or discovered at official border crossings (both exit and entry). The top countries are Albania and Serbia and Montenegro (including Kosovo). As shown in the table below, a large number of illegal migrants are Macedonians (811 in 2006 alone) (IOM 2007).

Table 1: Number of irregular migrants discovered at Macedonian border or on the territory of Macedonia in 2006 by nationality

NATIONALITY	Apprehended at official BORDER CROSSING	Apprehended after crossing BORDER	Total
Albania	1,529	2,623	4,152
Serbia and Montenegro (incl. Kosovo)	79	71	150
Macedonia	210	601	811
Greece	19	–	19
China	8	–	8
Bulgaria	6	–	6
India	4	–	4
Other	11	7	18
TOTAL Macedonia			1,270
TOTAL (2002-2006)	5,931	7,512	12,903

Source: MOI (2007). Official data from the Ministry of the Interior, Sector for Analytics, letter no.15.2-145; 01.02.2007

According to foreign data sources, in 2005, 2,050 Macedonian citizens were readmitted to Macedonia after failing to migrate illegally to Western Europe. Other sources (see the table below) offer additional figures.

Table 2: Irregular Migration of Macedonians to the EU

	Denmark	Greece	Italy	Slovenia	Bulgaria	Romania
Macedonian citizens apprehended within the EU 15 and in non-EU MS 2003		1,051		397		
Number of Macedonian citizens refused entry to the EU 15 and non-EU MS, 2003	1,466	1,019	599	2,031	303	246
Number of Macedonians Removed from the EU 15 and non-MS, 2003	1,117		307			

In the recent period there have also been an increased number of Macedonian citizen returnees (the majority are poorly informed Roma and Albanian asylum seekers) who immigrated mostly to European countries following the liberalisation of the visa issuing process. According to the UNHCR, the number of asylum seekers from Macedonia increased considerably after the visa liberalisation, which entered into force in 2010. The number of asylum applications from Macedonia submitted in 44 industrialised countries increased from 908 in 2009 to 6,351, of which 5,773 were submitted in the EU27. Most of the applications submitted in 2010 were to Germany, Belgium and Sweden (Germany 2,466, Belgium 1,082, Sweden 908, France 590, Switzerland 403, Netherlands 389, Austria 194, Norway 93) (UNHCR 2010). To respond to this situation, which is unfavourable for Macedonia, a Coordinative Body comprised of relevant institutions was established in 2011 to monitor the situation and undertake concrete measures for reducing this trend. The measures predominantly refer to the provision of information to citizens in cooperation with local NGOs, through media campaigns, direct contacts, distribution of brochures etc. However, given the short-term absence from the country of this category of returnees, the question of their reintegration cannot be considered an issue and thus will not be elaborated further in this article.

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF RETURNEES

The Scope of Returns

Several factors determine the intensity of the Macedonian emigration abroad and returns to Macedonia. Among them are the changes in the immigration policies of the receiving countries, as well as increased selectivity in accepting migrants, mainly in terms of age structure, educational level and occupation. No less important are visa policies and particularly asylum policies in destination countries, particularly in the last decade.

The *re-migration trends* since 1990 register a tendency of decline. Census data show that the number of returnees from abroad decreased from about 20,800 (1981) to 14,000 persons (1994). The statistical evidence on returnees in Macedonia is scarce, particularly concerning voluntary returns.

Some data on this category of returnees can be obtained by the IOM country office. Between 2002 and 2006, 142 individuals returned to Macedonia through IOM voluntary assisted return programmes. In the period from 2006 until August 2009 IOM assisted 84 voluntary returnees (MLSP 2010).

The Ministry of the Interior (MOI) has records on the number of returnees in the country, in particular on *forced returns*. According to existing data on the number of returnees to Macedonia pursuant to the Readmission Agreements, provided on the basis of the reports on deported persons from the border crossing points, the total number of returnees shows a slight increase: 582 (2007); 593 (2008); 682 (2009); 691 (up to 30 November 2010). The data refers to the number of entries into the country, which does not correspond with the number of returnees because there are returnees who enter the country several times in the course of the year. The majority of the returnees in the period from 2007-2010 were Macedonian citizens deported from Germany (766), Switzerland (524), Greece (194), Croatia (168), and Italy (139) (MOI, 2010).

Challenges upon Return for Returnees: Focus on Children and the Elderly

The successful reintegration of returnees into society is important not only for their personal well-being, but for Macedonia as a country as well, considering its obligation to protect this category of the population and ensure full respect of their human rights. In general, it should be noted that for most returnees this process is not a routine practice but implies major social and economic adjustments. This process is particularly problematic for returnees who have stayed in a foreign country for an extended period of time, thereby having lost all links to Macedonia as their country of origin. Without adequate readmission and adjustment to the old-new environment, most of the returnees would be exposed to the risk of social exclusion, marginalisation and poverty. This is especially true for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, single parents, children with special needs, and victims of human trafficking. From this perspective, it could be assumed that insufficient measures for facilitated readmission and societal reintegration and the increasing flow of incoming returnees (resulting from the readmission agreements and strict migration policies) could possibly result in the worsening of the socio-economic situation of this category of population, children and the elderly being at the greatest disadvantage.

For *returning children*, the process of integration is often quite demanding. Being born and raised in a different society and culture requires adaptation to the new environment. The process of socialisation is often disrupted as it requires the adoption of norms and values which are often different from those of the destination country where the children were born. Educational integration is of crucial importance for returning children. Despite the fact that Macedonian legislation prescribes unhindered access to the educational system for all children, returning children are at a disadvantage. This is due to an unequal start resulting from the need to adapt to the system and the educational environment,

as well as language barriers, which in turn affect the children's educational achievements. They have to adjust to the new educational system in which the content, teachers' attitudes and teaching methods differ from those they are used to. Learning the language in which the classes are taught is particularly problematic for foreign-born children who do not speak Macedonian. There are also significant problems regarding the recognition of prior educational qualifications (diplomas, certificates). This problem is most noticeable among forced returnees who often lose personal documentation in the process of deportation. Issuing a document from abroad is a complex and costly procedure which most of them cannot afford. Finally, the most disadvantaged are returning children who have never attended school due to their status of illegal residence abroad and who have the hardest time in beginning their delayed education and catching up with their peers.

For *elderly* returnees, the issue of social security and welfare is of key importance. Access to social security depends on the social security agreements between Macedonia as a country of origin and the destination countries. Macedonia has social security agreements with 15 countries¹ as an independent country and with 7 countries² through succession and taking over agreements from the former Yugoslavia. The agreement with Australia entered into force on 1 April 2011, while the one with Canada is still in the process of ratification. Social security agreements with the European countries refer to old age, family and disability pensions, health insurance, unemployment insurance and child protection (child care allowances) as well as rights relating to occupational illness and work-related injuries. With the overseas countries (such as Australia and Canada) the agreements refer only to pension insurance (PDIF 2010).

Social security is available for those older people who have been employed full time in some of the above destination countries. However, those returning from countries with which Macedonia has no social security agreement, those who worked in the informal economy (e.g. domestic workers) and those with illegal residence in the destination countries are excluded from the social security scheme. For the migrants not covered by social security, general social welfare measures designed to assist the most vulnerable and financially insecure are in place (i.e. social welfare benefits).

POLICY RESPONSES TO SUPPORT REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES

Until recently, there has been no official policy designed to regulate migratory movements and assist returning migrants. Policymaking relative to migration in general has intensified in the last several years. The Resolution and the Action Plan on Migration were adopted in 2009. The Agreement on the Status and Activities of the Migration, Asylum and Refugees Regional Initiative was also ratified and considerable number of readmission agreements have been signed (MARRI 2007). Overall, a number of policy documents, strategies, action plans, and programmes related to migration have been officially adopted. However, their implementation is either held back as a result of the lack of financial resources or is lagging behind.

Readmission Agreements with EU and non-Member States

The Readmission Agreements concentrate on issues relating to the procedure for the return of illegal migrants, those whose temporary protection period has expired or rejected asylum seekers, from the beginning of the return procedure until their return to the country of origin. In accordance with the As-

1 Croatia, Turkey, Slovenia, Switzerland, Denmark, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Romania, Poland, Luxemburg and Belgium.

2 France, Hungary, Slovakia, Italy, Sweden, Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

sociation and Stabilization Agreement, which implies responsibility for readmission of persons residing illegally abroad, Macedonia and the European Community signed an Agreement on the Readmission of Persons Residing Illegally (hereinafter Readmission Agreement), which was ratified by Macedonia in 2007 and entered into force on 1 January 2008. The Readmission Agreement aims at establishing rapid and effective procedures for the identification and safe and orderly return of persons who do not, or no longer, satisfy the conditions for entry to, presence in, or residence in the territories of Macedonia or one of the Member States of the European Union, (with the exception of Denmark, and with a recommendation for signing Readmission Agreements with Switzerland, Iceland and Norway, according to the same criteria set forth in the Readmission Agreement and in compliance with the Agreements for accession of the above countries in the EU toward the implementation, application and development of the Schengen Acquis), and to facilitate the transit of such persons. According to this Readmission Agreement, Macedonia is obliged to readmit both own nationals, third country nationals and stateless persons. The Readmission Agreement regulates the reciprocal obligations of the EC for readmission of own nationals, third country nationals and stateless persons, as well as the readmission procedure, transit operations, costs, data protection and implementation and application provisions. In accordance with the provisions for implementation and application, the Readmission Agreement foresees the establishment of a Joint Readmission Committee, charged with the task of monitoring the application of the Agreement, deciding on implementing arrangements, regular exchanges of information on the implementing Protocols drawn up by individual Member States and Macedonia and recommending amendments to the Agreement and its Annexes (Official Gazette No. 141/07).

The Joint Committee was established pursuant to the provisions of the Readmission Agreement. The first meeting was held in June 2008, when the Macedonian delegation was represented by representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, MFA and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, while the European Community was represented by officials from the Department for Borders and Visas, the Joint Committee of the EC, other representatives from the European Commission and the EU Delegation in Skopje. A second meeting, with similar delegations, was held in November 2008 in Brussels.

In addition to the one with EC, Macedonia has also signed readmission agreements with other countries. To date, Macedonia has signed 21 Readmission Agreements: with 14 EU member states, 2 Schengen signatory countries and 5 non-member states. There are ongoing negotiations for signing agreements with Iceland and Ukraine, and readmission agreements are planned to be signed with other countries (Russian Federation, Turkey). A draft text has been drawn up for introducing a Protocol for the Implementation of the Readmission Agreement between Macedonia and the European Community, to be delivered to all EU member states, with exception of Estonia because the procedure for unification of the text with this country has already been initiated (Government of Macedonia, 2009).³ Negotiations have started for signing Readmission Agreement with Montenegro, and in the meantime the Ministry of the Interior has received recommendations and a draft text for signing Implementation Protocols on the Readmission Agreement between Macedonia and the EC concerning the readmission of persons residing illegally from Hungary and Netherlands. The Ministry of the Interior has already submitted its views on the draft texts in this regard.

However, the provisions and obligations of the Readmission Agreement signed with the EC have priority over the provisions of any other bilateral agreement or arrangement on the readmission of persons residing illegally abroad signed between Macedonia and any other Member State, if the provisions of the bilateral agreement are incompatible with the Readmission Agreement (Official Gazette of Macedonia No. 141/07).

³ Macedonia has signed bilateral readmission agreements with the following countries: Italy, Slovenia, Switzerland, France, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Romania, Albania, Spain, Poland, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Public Measures to Facilitate Reintegration

Bearing in mind the absence of a systematic and organised state response to the reintegration problems of the returnees, in 2010 the Government of Macedonia adopted a Programme for Reintegration of the Returnees under the Readmission Agreements. The purpose of the programme is to support the implementation of the Agreement with the EC on the readmission of illegal migrants, as well the implementation of other readmission agreements with third countries. In addition to this overall objective, the programme's specific objectives are:

- Establishment of necessary technical, human and institutional capacities at national and local level for readmission, protection and sustainable integration of returnees;
- Provision of an institutional and systematic framework for support and assistance by the relevant institutions;⁴
- Facilitation of sustainable reintegration of returnees, thereby preventing reoccurrence of irregular migration;
- Enabling and accelerating access to existing rights within the protection system;
- Offering support for the social and economic independence of returnees, and preventing dependency on the system (particularly from a social point of view);
- Provision of opportunities not only for passive reintegration, but also for active contribution of the returnees in the local community and use of the human capital in the long term;
- Serving as a starting point for designing different information-sharing modalities for provision of information to the returnees on the services offered by the programme;
- Contributing to enhancement of the data collection system through the establishment of a database for forced and voluntary returned migrants (MLSP 2010).

The beneficiaries of the programme are returnees who are nationals of Macedonia and who do not, or no longer, satisfy the conditions for entry into, presence in, or residence in another country, and who are undergoing the readmission process in compliance with the readmission agreements, as well as voluntary returnees.

The programme offers wide-ranging forms of assistance and support to returnees in several areas:

1) *Legal aid and personal documentation*: provision of legal aid and support in obtaining personal documents (registering place of residence, birth certificates, citizenship etc.), personal ID card with temporary place of residence; support in issuance and recognition of foreign diplomas; accelerated procedures for issuing documentation in a period of 30 days.

2) *Social protection*: establishment of a Reception Centre; provision of social support services in the Reception Centre for returnees; information and facilitation of access to available types of social support for returnees.

3) *Economic support/employment*: referral for the purpose of registering with the State Employment Agency and local employment centres; informing returnees about their rights and obligations, employment opportunities, occupations in deficit; preparation of individual employment plans; inclusion in existing active labour market measures; organisation of workshops for active job seeking and adopting techniques for successful job placement and labour market adjustments; inclusion in training and lectures (computer skills, foreign languages).

4) *Health care*: screening of the general health condition of returnees and members of their families and entering of the assessment results in a database; referral to competent institutions for additional treatment or information; provision of basic health protection package immediately upon readmission

⁴ Establishment of a Coordinative Body for Returnees, a National Centre for Reintegration of Returnees and two additional Local Centres for Reintegration of Returnees is anticipated.

of the returnees, for a period of maximum 60 days; informing returnees on the possibilities for obtaining health insurance.

5) *Education*: assessment and registering of the returnees' educational status in a database; provision of information about existing educational opportunities, scholarships/mentorship, educational programmes, quotes etc. with an aim to provide access to educational institutions and services for minors, young adults, adults and older people; provision of access and integration of returnees in educational institutions, according to their age, physical and intellectual abilities, as well as previous educational background; provision of free school meals for children of returnees in social risk; supporting the process of obtaining and recognising foreign diplomas and certificates; provision of free textbooks for primary and secondary school students; organisation of lectures in the respective languages of the returnees; inclusion of returnee children in extended school programmes; assistance in obtaining immunisation documentation required for school enrolment etc. (MLSP 2010).

However, despite the comprehensiveness and potential benefits of the programme, its actual implementation is in the initial phase due to budget constraints. In cooperation with IOM a Guidebook was prepared and it was promoted before the relevant institutions in order to familiarise them with the forthcoming obligations arising from the programme. The interested returnees with problematic housing conditions are not yet accommodated in a separate Centre for Reintegration of Returnees, but within the existing Centre for Asylum seekers, as the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has concluded agreement with this Centre to cover this category of persons as well due to unused capacity. The current gap in the provision of public measures of support to the returnees is filled in by the activities of the non-governmental organisations.

The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in the Reintegration of Returnees

The first organisation involved in the provision of support to illegal migrants returning to Macedonia after its independence was the Caritas office in Skopje (Caritas foreign projects department in Essen, Germany). In 1990 the Government of Macedonia signed an agreement with the Government of Nordrhein-Westfalen for organised return of illegal Roma migrants in this part of Germany. In 1990 the Government of NRW established the Bureau for Management, Mediation and Economic Development in the largest Roma settlement in Macedonia — Shuto Orizari, to be in charge of the return of migrants. After a preparatory period in 1991, during 1992 and the beginning of 1993 a total of 126 Roma families returned to Macedonia and were accommodated in apartments (fully equipped prefabricated houses) with the right to live in them for 10 years free of charge and purchase them afterwards. In the period up to 1997 a comprehensive support programme was in place (assistance in employment, job skills acquisition, pre-school and school enrolment of children etc). However, despite the enormous efforts invested in facilitating the integration of these Roma families into the society, over time the houses were ruined, the household appliances and furniture sold, and most of the Roma families re-emigrated and left Macedonia again. Following the completion of this project, Caritas has continued to work on assisting returnees, but on a smaller scale and with a reduced intensity.

Since 2006, Macedonian emigrants who wish to return on a voluntary basis have been assisted by the IOM office established in Skopje in 2004. IOM implements the Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes (increasingly promoted by the host countries as a response to tackling illegal immigration) through which voluntary returnees receive return and reintegration support, i.e. support for housing, health care, education, vocational training and establishment of small businesses. Further, upon the request of the host country, IOM provides information on reintegration opportunities to Macedonian migrants who wish to return to Macedonia voluntarily, with a focus on employment, education, health etc. (MLSP 2010).

WAYS FORWARD

Given the current unfavourable socio-economic conditions in the country, the emigration of Macedonian citizens will undoubtedly continue in future, with illegal migration following this trend. In parallel, as a result of the increasingly restrictive immigration policies of the destination countries, the flows of illegal migrants returning to Macedonia are also expected to rise in future.

In such a situation, Macedonia has to find an adequate response to these challenges. The returnees left without proper support and assistance are at risk of becoming dependent on social welfare schemes. Therefore, specific policy measures are required to organise, facilitate and support their return and reintegration. Such measures have already been designed, but their implementation is lagging behind, while their contents may be further improved. In order to be effective, return and readmission must fit smoothly into a comprehensive and sustainable migration policy based on a common understanding of the principles and key issues concerning the readmission and return process. Consequently, common standards should be established in order to facilitate the further development of measures and regulations which can strengthen the activities, co-operation and coordination of the authorities involved, and to allow enhanced regional co-operation as well as co-operation with other countries, the EU and international and non-governmental organisations. Moreover, the return and reintegration measures at national level should be extended to cover all phases of the return process, starting with pre-departure measures and return measures (pre-return advice and counselling, safeguards for a safe and non-violent return with respect of human rights) and particularly with reception and reintegration in cases of re-admittance (training/employment assistance; follow-up assistance and post-return counselling).

In addition, the return and reintegration agenda Macedonia has been pursuing in the last several years obviously requires joint co-operation among the labour, finance, education and other relevant ministries, in co-operation with social partners and civil society. In this regard, co-ordination at the central level as a prerequisite for effectiveness in policymaking, implementation and evaluation of the programme outcomes, requires upgrading. As a lack of relevant data on illegal migration and returns is hampering endeavours to effect change in this area, efforts should be invested to support empirical research and establish a statistical database on migration flows which would considerably improve policymaking and the targeting of population groups affected by return migration.

Last but not least, as many policy documents are still only paper-based due to continuing budget constraints, Macedonia has to improve budget planning to ensure timely and purposeful allocation of the anticipated budget resources for the implementation of the strategic documents. Fund-raising capacities at national level should be strengthened, given the fact that the utilisation of foreign funds available to Macedonia is negligible. In this respect, EU Funds could be increasingly used to support the implementation of the policies, measures and activities envisaged within the already adopted strategic documents.

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POVZETEK

MIGRANTI POV RATNIKI V REPUBLIKI MAKEDONIJI: VPRAŠANJE REINTEGRACIJE

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Makedonija je tradicionalno država emigracije in procesi emigracije v njej kontinuirano potekajo zadnjih pet desetletij. Najintenzivnejša emigracija je bila opažena v šestdesetih in sedemdesetih letih 20. stoletja. Časovni interval od leta 1990 do danes pa je značilno obdobje, v katerem je bil zaznan najmočnejši emigracijski val od začetka ekonomske emigracije. Obdobje tranzicije, zniževanje življenjskega standarda, visoka stopnja nezaposlenosti in naraščajoča revščina so potisnili velik del makedonskega prebivalstva v iskanje nezakonitih poti za izseljevanje v tujino, pretežno proti bolj razvitim evropskim državam. Zaradi restriktivnih politik priseljevanja v teh državah se je velik del makedonskih državljanov, ki so protizakonito bivali v tujini, vrnil v Makedonijo, bodisi zaradi pomoči pri prostovoljnem vračanju bodisi zaradi postopkov prisilnega vračanja.

Povratniki, posebej tisti, ki se vrnejo po dolgem obdobju bivanja v tujini, se ob vrnitvi soočajo s številnimi težavami, s katerimi se ni nihče primerno ukvarjal. Dostop do sistemov socialnega varstva, zdravstvenega varstva, trga dela in izobrazbe je pogosto otežen. V položaju, ko nimajo podpornih mehanizmov, ki bi jim olajšali reintegracijo v družbo, so povratniki in njihove družine izpostavljeni tveganju, da zdrsnejo v revščino, družbeno izključenost in ponovno emigracijo. Še posebej ranljivi so otroci in starejši. Integracija v izobraževalni sistem je eden izmed ključnih izzivov, s katerimi se ob vrnitvi srečajo otroci. Do tega pride zaradi neenakega začetnega položaja, ki je posledica potrebe po prilagoditvi sistemu in izobraževalnemu okolju, pa tudi jezikovnim pregradam, ki vplivajo na izobraževalne dosežke otrok. Za starejše povratnike pa je ključno zagotavljanje socialne varnosti (torej pokojnine) in socialnega skrbstva.

Kljub temu v Makedoniji do nedavnega ni bilo uradne politike, oblikovane za reguliranje migracijskih gibanj in za pomoč vračajočim se migrantom. Ob odsotnosti sistematičnega in organiziranega odziva države na reintegracijske probleme povratnikov to vrzel trenutno premošča angažiranost različnih nevladnih organizacij. CARITAS in IOM sta pri zagotavljanju podpore za makedonske državljane – povratnike najbolj dejavni.

Leta 2010 je Vlada republike Makedonije sprejela *Program za reintegracijo povratnikov v skladu s sporazumi o ponovnem prevzetju oseb*. Namen programa je podpora uvajanju sporazuma z EU o ponovnem prevzetju nezakonitih migrantov, pa tudi uvajanje drugih sporazumov o prevzetju oseb s tretjimi državami. Upravičenci *Programa* so povratniki, državljani Makedonije, ki ne – ali ne več – izpolnjujejo pogojev za vstop, navzočnost ali bivanje v drugi državi in so v postopku ponovnega prevzetja v skladu s dogovori o ponovnem prevzetju, pa tudi prostovoljni povratniki. Program nudi najrazličnejše oblike pomoči in podpore povratnikom na različnih področjih: zagotavljanje pravne pomoči in podpore pri pridobivanju osebnih dokumentov, socialna zaščita, ekonomska podpora/zaposlitev, zdravstvena oskrba in izobraževanje.