

International Conference on Return and Minorities

Monday & Tuesday 29 - 30 November 2004
Grone-Schule Hamburg



Final Conference of the project “Proposals and Models to an Integrated Approach of reintegration of refugees of ethnic minorities, who are returning from EU Member States”, that was realised by AGEF, INDE and Flüchtlingshilfe Hamburg with means of the European Refugee Fund

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MINORITIES AND RETURN

Introduction by Dr. Karin Lutze, Association of Experts in the Fields of Migration and Development Cooperation

Dr. Karin Lutze is Deputy Director of the German NGO Association of Experts in the Fields of Migration and Development Cooperation



First of all I would like to thank Mr. Reinhard Stuth for his welcoming words from the side of the State of Hamburg.

The return of members of minority groups to their region of origin is a specific theme within the context of migratory movements that was investigated in our project funded by the European Refugee Fund. It covered an analysis of selected host countries in which members of a minority have found refuge as well as the equivalent target countries to which those refugees return to after completing their residency.

On one side, members and representatives of the target groups in all countries were asked about the living situation of minorities, and on the other, organisations and institutions that develop and implement the program appendages relating to the return of minority group members.

The project partners brought different expertise into the project respectively: AGEF specialised in projects on location within the countries of return, working towards reintegration within the economic framework of the country after the return of refugees.



Staatsrat Mr. Reinhard Stuth from the State of Hamburg inaugurating the conference.

The Flüchtlingshilfe Hamburg offered advice for returnees within Germany in order to discuss and develop living prospects in Germany or countries of origin.

INDE is likewise active in the area of development cooperation and has experience in the formation of local development strategies in numerous regions of the world.

The appraisal of the interviews reflected a wide range of answers: A residency in a host country is temporary in the majority of cases. On the political level one stands, in principal, open-minded to the return of minorities as long as there is no longer threatening danger in the host country. Admittedly the responsibility at a political level seems to end mostly with the border crossing back into the country of origin.

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The defining of minority group affiliation varies widely in the host countries. Every migrant in Germany is identified to some extent as a (ethnic) minority.

Altogether, there is a wide spectrum of opinions within the EU host countries and different perceptions of this problem, in turn leading to differing behaviour towards the refugee groups.

An interesting trend in the answers from official positions within the host countries was that institutionalised forms of refugee advice exist to all intents and purposes but not always the practical support for individual returnees.

Fact finding in the countries of return was mostly based upon post crisis regions in the Balkans, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, as well as East-Timor and Iraq. A minority mostly belongs to a very specific political, ethnic or religious minority in the country of return. In Iraq one had to deal with the specific problems that very few NGOs can develop their activities there and that, at least during the time frame of the project, contacts in official positions were not very accessible on this subject.

There are different views on the integration of minorities among the NGOs. It is often the case that the economic situation in the respective post conflict situations is not just precarious for ethnic minorities.

The NGOs are however as agreed as possible in the view that no special conditions should be created for returnees compared to the local population. Reintegration must be based more fully on the development of economic systems in the country of return. In this approach, returnees are always to be incorporated into this process. Due to

the problematic situation in the respective countries, the point is also to avoid additional conflicts, which can by all means arise from the return of refugees.



Yet, expert “know how” from returnees should be made better available for the country of return. Here better cooperation between both host and return country is necessary in order to build suitable structures for successful reintegration work. Both parties must be aware of their responsibility and also take the necessary steps to this end.

Approaches and ideas relating to the reintegration of minorities shall be discussed during the conference. First of all, experts will give lectures on the situation of minorities in selected developing countries. The accompanying discussion will be continued in study groups focused on specific problems or questions. On the second day the results of the study groups shall be put into a plan of action, which will be developed by newly formed work groups and which will contain concrete steps to put the suggestions for program planning and implementation into practice.

In how far such programs and projects for development are beneficial to the respective countries of return is the question that stands at the fore in each specific case.

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Reintegration and Development Cooperation – Statement by Reinhold Hemker / Member of the German Parliament

Reinhold Hemker is a Member of the German Parliament, as a representative of the SPD, involved with the topic of Reintegration and Development Cooperation.



The immigration commission had already ascertained in its final report that the promotion of voluntary departure is underdeveloped in Germany. It recommended that the German government define the total political significance attached to the return of migrants and the implementation of the respective measures. The commission referred mainly to the circle of foreigners who are required to leave, but also elsewhere, in relation to employment migration, it went into the return of employment migrants to their countries of return.

German returnees from seven countries from the south of Africa concluded this in the exemplary “Windhoek Declaration” in 2000. Within, it stressed that returnees from Germany could be the carriers and mediators of important German interests in their countries of return, but that this function was realised too little.

The Alumni Association of the DAAD have important personalities from the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America in their ranks under the stewardship of the foreign ministry. They are supporters of foreign cultural policy and back the foreign economic interests of Germany.

All in all, re-migrants achieve a decisive contribution to the development of the country through the knowledge acquired in Germany. In addition, they act as promoters of German economic interests as well as mediators between differing cultures. German politicians must continue to be interested in this subject for this reason alone. In the new Immigration Law however, the subject of reintegration is not included enough.

The promotion of return for migrants affects many players and influences different fields of politics. Currently in the worldwide endeavours of the fight against terrorism, returnees could start positive impulses in their countries of return and, in the sense of “Good Governance”, advance democratic conditions in their countries.

It is little known what high experience potential is available in the specialist ministries BMZ, BMI, BMWA and AA in the promotion of voluntary return, especially compared to the other member states of the European Union.

To be realised is admittedly that the program and the funding do not cover requirements. Also the coordination in the work between the respected specialist ministries as well as between central government and federal states and also with the existing national and international organisations is further developed. The balance between effective aid on the one hand and the avoidance from pull factors that the hitherto returnee promotion program combined should remain in place.

The work of local NGOs on the ground especially must, as previously, be supported materially and financially.

Indeed, a further development in the form of a political initiative requires a comprehensive coordinating body. Currently specialists work in the individual ministries on this theme, but a comprehensive coordination is missing. The proposed outline issued at this conference, in conjunction with the Immigration Law, should further anchor the issue of reintegration.

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The Roma National Minority Problem in Serbia – Statement by Damir Glavonjic

Damir Glavonjic was an officer in the municipality Palilula in Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro. This is the municipality with the highest amount of Roma inhabitants in Belgrade.



Overpopulated Roma settlements represent a complex problem in a broader community. The poor living conditions cause many problems, primarily in the spreading of infectious diseases, which appear as a result of the aforementioned conditions. The situations mentioned are just one part of problems caused by Roma settlements. Besides the overpopulation in settlements they have considerably grown in number due to the uncontrolled influx of refugees from the war-affected regions, mainly by the Roma from Kosovo.

The reasons for intolerance between the majority of the population and members of the Roma national minority can be found in the style of life and mutual intolerance of their differences.

Achieving the status of a national minority has not produced any crucial and fundamental changes. However, this status provides many opportunities for working on the ultimate aim of combating intolerance and bringing together the people. Moreover, it enables them to create a

more peaceful co-existence based on mutual tolerance and acceptance of cultural and traditional values.

The changed physical aspect and improvements in the conditions of life would become a basis for achieving better co-existence and easier acceptance of the process of integration on the part of the majority population.

Improvement and deterioration of the situation of minorities in recent years

A war-torn society, the totalitarian regime and unfavourable conditions of life have caused frequent immigration of the young and the educated (about 500,000) and also the influx of a great number of refugees. Among these, there were a great number of Roma refugees who were not registered because of their usual way of solving problems outside the official institutions. The incoming Roma were accepted and assisted by their compatriots settled in Belgrade. In these settlements, where Roma refugees found shelter, there have been many problems caused by aggressive imposing of “traditional values”. It has given rise to behaviour that is rather uncharacteristic for the long-established Roma population.

The long-established Roma population was largely integrated into regular processes of life in urban areas. As a result, the mutual growing tolerance has stopped, but was fostered again by the influx of Roma from Kosovo. At the moment, the new situation has doubled the number of problems.

One of the reasons for the worsening of the position of Roma in the community is a tendency of mass registration of Roma NGO who tried to design programmes for their own kind. They tried to implement many programmes, but obviously, the results are rather poor. Considerable financial resources by foreign donors, the

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governments of the countries from the European Union and their embassies were provided. Roma organizations, with few honourable exceptions, have misused the chance given to them and they personally made a profit out of it. As a consequence the donations were reduced or cancelled and the Roma problem is back to square one again.

Our idea is to create different programmes preparing the members of the Roma population to take over certain positions and obligations. It implies taking over the obligations and responsibility for their own life and the life of their families based on their own labour.

The aim of this kind of approach is not to exclude Roma NGO and decrease the influence of the Roma population over the process of solving their own problems. The aim of it is to prevent misuse by certain Roma NGO by establishing partnerships between NGO and members of the majority population. It would enable the process of solving problems mutually aiming at the fastest possible integration, tolerance and peaceful co-existence.



In the Municipality of Palilula in Belgrade, the first office for national minorities, based on a project of AGEF was founded, followed by three more municipalities in Serbia. After working with this

office for one year, I, being the person in charge of the founding and functioning of it, have enough information and ideas about how to organize operations in a new way.

The majority of existing Roma NGOs do not understand the opportunity given to them to learn to solve their problems through the institutions; they see this opportunity as a threat to their own interests and integrity. The expressions of intense emotions, like murder threats, have given me a confirmation that they do not understand and are incapable of solving these problems personally. The office of the representative for national minorities exists and functions only within the limits of solving individual problems. Our idea is to bring the functioning of this office to the level of a global approach to solve these problems, by the implementation of concrete programmes and projects. The results achieved should be visible and accessible for evaluation. Small pilot projects implemented by certain non-governmental organizations have had a certain impact. This gave us an idea of how to construct separate programmes with clearly defined goals and with active cooperation of the office of the representative for national minorities. Institutionalized control of the functioning and implementation of programmes would be achieved by these kinds of operations.

The problems of returnees and their addition to the community

The difficult economic situation, the political and transitional problems which Serbia and Montenegro faces, affect the difficult position of returnees, both belonging to the majority as well as to the minority population.

Returnees belonging to the Roma nationality are in a particularly difficult situation, especially those from Kosovo. The

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reasons why their position is so difficult are manifold. Firstly, they do not speak the Serbian language and are completely uneducated.

Serbia and Montenegro is a country with a very low national revenue and very high rate of unemployment. Our system of helping the socially unprivileged has been operating with many difficulties and the influx of a great number of families with an unsolved social status would make an almost hopeless situation even worse.

When returnees from Germany come back to their country of origin they tend to have extremely high expectations. They expect the same living conditions as in Germany, primarily housing and material help. In Belgrade, the amount of money given as social benefits for a family of four is 4,750 Dinar (about 60 Euro), which is not enough for the elementary needs.

Bearing in mind the high rate of unemployment it is not recommendable for Serbia and Montenegro to primarily take care of the minority returnees rather than the local population. This would just accelerate the already existing intolerance of the majority population towards members of the Roma national minority.

The problems of Roma from Kosovo are the following:

- they do not speak Serbian
- they are not very well educated (unfinished primary school prevents them from finding a job)
- there is a lack of jobs for unqualified workers who have only finished primary school

- they do not accept the process of integration into normal life and taking responsibility towards the society

The most important aspects towards a peaceful coexistence in the future

It is essential to create social and economic conditions which would enable our citizen, mainly of Roma origin to return to Serbia and Montenegro.

The first thing is to provide housing by building cheap houses for the returnees. Also, the economic support is necessary for founding small enterprises for processing, recycling and collecting of secondary raw materials, which would employ poorly educated people.

Bearing in mind that most of the Roma population is involved in the process of collecting secondary raw materials, a misuse by other people would be prevented. At the same time we should prevent the abuse of children by their own families who force them to collect secondary raw material. In this way they seriously endanger the health of their own children, take them away from school and prevent them from getting the necessary education.

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Sustainable Return and Reintegration of Minority Groups in Dragash / Kosovo – Statement by Alma Koric / ICS



Alma Koric from Bosnia is working for the Italian Consortium of Solidarity (Consorzio Italiano di Solidarieta) in Dragash / Kosovo in order to help the victims of the war in the former Yugoslavia.

On February 2004 the ICS (Italian Consortium of Solidarity) started the project **“Sustainable Return and reintegration of Minority Groups in Dragash Municipality”**, managed by and funded by the Kosovo Consolidate Budget (KCB) in the Dragash region, in particular for two villages of the Gorani part of Vranishte / Vraniste and Radeshe/Radea.

In this area, very beautiful from an environmental point of view but very isolated from the rest of Kosovo, the Gorani and Bosniak minorities are living together with the Albanian majority.

However the population has also become aware of the needs of the minorities, returning after an absence of five years.

The villages where Gorani families return to are mostly ethnically mixed and the ICS project aims at creating condi-

tions for a sustainable return of minorities to this region, including measures for reconciliation and intercultural dialogue.

Since 2003 ICS has been working with potential IDP families living outside of Kosovo.

The region around Dragash generally suffers from a low level of economic development, where the agricultural sector is the main income source of many families. Yet, the Albanian language as well as the Serbian language is spoken.

The activities of the project cover “Go and See Visits”, a community centre, diverse activities aimed at children, interethnic dialogue, micro credits and the rehabilitation of the infrastructure.

In January this year an official list of 30 families was created, from a total of 110 persons who were identified in cooperation with local and international authorities (Dragash Municipality, UMNİK Dragash, UMNİK Prizren, OSCE, UNHCR Prizren, KFOR and KPS).

The project contains two principal components: firstly it aims at the relief of the IDP families and secondly at the development and improvement of the living conditions of both villages. After a careful assessment at the end of June 2004 ICS made a list of material necessary for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of 30 houses in collaboration with the technicians of the municipality.

Currently ICS is opening a warehouse in Dragash for the purchase and the distribution of material for the beneficiaries that will start the reconstruction and rehabilitation work together with the help of all inhabitants.

When all 30 families return ICS will provide the purchase and distribution of 30 cows that are very important for the people living in this area.

At the same time a big micro credit training programme is being implemented for all 30 families in collaboration with the local MFI (Micro Finance Institution) of Mesthekna for providing the necessary knowledge for managing the micro credit properly.

Furthermore, the Dragash Municipality has established an office dealing with environmental resources that is currently implementing a recovery programme. In cooperation with the municipality, ICS and "Eco-region" have supplied 35 containers for collecting the waste in 4 villages: Vranisthe / Vraniste, Radesha / Raäesa, Kukajan / Kukuljane and Lubivsthe / Ljuboviste. Additionally, ICS in collaboration with the technicians of the municipality has defined the relevant material necessary for the rehabilitation of the infrastructure of two villages.

Finally, but actually the most important aspect is the rehabilitation and the opening of two community centres in both villages that have become real meeting points for all the inhabitants not only of Vranisthe / Vraniste and Radesha / Radesa.

Many courses such as computer studies, English, child animation, sewing are offered there. The participation rate is very high; there are 2 coordinators, 28 facilitators and about 500 beneficiaries.

Prospects on Minority Returns

In the last year the kosovar government has subsidized the minority communities through 22 projects aiming at the return and reintegration of minorities. Due to the violent incidents in March the continuation of 20 projects were blocked, while only two projects were able to be implemented further.

However, the security situation in Kosovo is still complex. As a broad variety of minority groups are living in Kosovo, the principle of multi-ethnicity has to be anchored in the long term. For some of the minority groups it would be better to stay in the host country for a while under international protection.

The decision in favour of or against return always has to be made on a voluntary basis and has to be the individual decision of the potential returnee.

As a precondition for successful return projects the investment in infrastructure as well as in economic development and further education measures are indispensable. The resources, the potential and the capacity of the minority communities has to be estimated, and the (further) development of these regions has to be stimulated continuously. A lot of areas where minorities live are suited for unfolding agricultural activities. In this context the micro credit approach may promise help for families in order to expand their agricultural business.

It is always important not only to consider returnees, but also to involve the local population.

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Minorities in Iraq – Statement by Majid Salim-Taei / Chairperson of the “Irakische Kulturgemeinde Es- sen”



- In former times before the Hussein era nobody in Iraq wanted to leave the country. Since 1974 there have been continuous tensions between the Sunni and Shiite population as well as between Sunnis and Kurds.
- These tensions occurred and were fostered in the era of Saddam Hussein, when the Shia majority in Iraq was suppressed by the Sunni minority. In former times, ethnic affiliation was not of any importance. It became important with the regime of Saddam Hussein. For example officers in public services were asked whether a person was Shia or Sunni
- The importance of ethnic affiliation differs from region to region and from city to city. While Bagdad is a rather multicultural city, in western Iraq a lot of Christians are living, while in Kirkuk there are affiliates of the Turkmen ethnicity.

- In spite of the current unstable situation in Iraq a lot of people are interested in returning voluntarily. These numbers will increase when the situation has improved. The most important question for them is how to go back and in this context financial support, for example economic integration of returnees will become very important in the near future.

For a lot of Iraqi citizens return is still a viable option compared to integration in Germany, as some families have difficulties in adapting to the German way of living. A lot of people still fear return. The elections in January represent hope for the whole population in Iraq but in particular for the persons who are interested in returning home. An improvement in the security situation would increase the number of returnees.



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Repatriation of Roma from the city of Essen to Serbia - Statement by Christoph Grätz-Kraft / Caritas Essen

Christoph Grätz-Kraft is working for the Foreign Aid Department of Caritas Essen.



In 1991 the Auslandshilfe Essen began their activities in Skopje, Macedonia, to assist rejected asylum seekers from North Rhine-Westphalia on their return. Members of minority groups constituted a special target group for the activities of Caritas.

According to official statistics, approximately 14,000 Roma inhabit the Macedonian district of Shutka. Unofficial estimates put the figure much higher, at a level of about 40,000 Roma.

So far the focus of the activities has on the one hand been in social work, for example the supervision of a youth club, and on the other hand in the field of training and education. Extra help lessons for children, and foreign language or computer courses are offered, among other things.

There are currently approximately 700 people in Essen who are required to leave the country. Refugees from Serbia especially are standing on the verge of deportation. In this respect it is

worthwhile developing alternatives, in the form of reintegration programs that rely upon networks. Caritas Essen put the program into place with a total of 4 partners, among which was a Roma self help association, the Roma-Union Essen.

The program was initially advertised and made public through information presentations. The deadline for a decision on participation is the date of departure.

- The programme “Repatriation of Roma people from the city of Essen” to Serbia is subsidized by the social services department (Sozialamt) and covers a transport cost subsidy as well as a start subsidy. The most important aspect for returning people is housing.
- The money is provided as an account for each beneficiary.
- Language problems are a serious problem in particular for children – so they receive private lessons in order to cope with the demands of the education system.
- The programme is regarded as a first step for the initiation of further projects in Serbia considering not only returnees, but also the local population.

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Repatriation of Roma from the city of Essen to Serbia – Statement by Aleksandar Pilic / Caritas Belgrade

Aleksandar Pilic is working as a Programme Assistant for Caritas Belgrade. He is the counterpart in Serbia for the repatriation project of Roma returning from Essen.



The Project “Repatriation of Roma people from the city of Essen”, included 200 Roma people returning from Essen, Germany to Serbia is designed to assist in the following ways:

1. Transport Assistance
2. Financial assistance for their start (getting the documents)
3. Assistance in resolving housing problems and housing costs
4. Language problems (especially for children)
5. Health Care
6. Assistance relating to livelihood / helping people in finding jobs

Recently, we have had several meetings with the Ministry for National Minorities and Human Rights. During these meetings we have discussed projects in the fields of pre-education and health insurance. Moreover, meetings with the Labour office were held. 90% of the Roma have acquired a health insurance through the Labour office.

Caritas Belgrade closely cooperates with other organizations like “Care” and numerous Roma organisations (i.e. “Dur”, “Central Roma Council”). Currently we are working

on the problem of education. Contacts with schools were initiated, (“Dusan Dugalic school in Belgrade”, “House for education of youth” in Knjazevac) that are willing to teach Roma children the Serbian language and help them in other school subjects.

We have realized good cooperation with the Roma Union in Essen / Germany and it's Vice-president Ajvaz Ajvazi who has provided a lot of useful additional information concerning the return of Roma people from Essen. So far, 100% of returned people could be helped with housing problems.

Current problems:

Documents – with the help of the Ministry for National Minorities and Human Rights, the labour office, the police, the municipality, Roma people receive basic documents to prove their identity.

Housing – this problem has many aspects, because every individual case is different and requires additional examination – step by step.

Health – a lot of the medication is not covered by social security. In special cases they can be bought in the context of this program. The cost of surgeries and other serious procedures are not covered by social security. This problem is recognized, and there are proposals to solve it, at least to organize basic examinations of Roma people in their local places.

Job – the Roma people usually get jobs from local authorities like street cleaners or maintainers of green spaces in the city. There is no job guarantee for them, so we are trying to offer them education measures like courses. After finishing it, they can also work on their own houses.

Language – The development of this component is in progress. Negotiations between schools and Caritas Belgrade Archdiocese take place.

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Socio-Economic Integration of Minorities in Kosovo – Statement by Dr. Karin Lutze / Association of Experts in the Fields of Migration and Development Cooperation

Dr. Karin Lutze is Deputy Director of the German NGO Association of Experts in the Fields of Migration and Development Cooperation



Subsequently I would like to refer to the following question: What is the relationship between a democratic participation of minorities in matters of social life and the access to employment and income?

I would like to present to you a few experiences AGEF has made with respect to this subject during the last years in Kosovo and present new insights we have gained through the project we have implemented with means of the European Refugee Fund.

Implementing rights for minorities does not only mean basic legal principles and democratic representation for minorities and on the other hand to establish criteria for a progressive social integration.

In most of the analysed countries there are still issues to be clarified beyond equal access for minorities in comparison to the majority population. These are for example issues related to safety, freedom of movement and language skills.

Progress for the integration of minorities can be measured in those countries as a percentage for example by looking at the involvement of minorities at different levels of education from primary school through occupational training to study at a university.

Moreover, the health situation of this group of people or their general living situation, the possibilities to maintain cultural traditions, language and craft provides information on the progress of social integration.

Employment, income and property this means all factors related to the integration into economic processes, are part of human rights and therefore of the rights of minorities.

While the access to the public sector may be formally ensured by means of quota or an affirmative act for minorities, the possibilities to influence the private sector are much more limited.

The disadvantaged group of the black population in South Africa gained access when public orders or tenders were open only to private companies when the conditions for the affirmative act were kept. At the same time the private sector in South Africa needs to contribute to the occupational training to be organised.

In particular in post-crisis situations the political management in these countries faces difficulties in exerting pressure adequately on a growing private economy with regard to considering specific vulnerable groups.

So the question remains: Which means are effective in order to motivate the private sector to employ people from a minority?

We will take a closer look at the example of Kosovo, a country that was analysed by AGEF in the course of this project.

Currently – in case of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (RAE) living in Kosovo

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there are no special problems referring to the language or freedom of movement compared with the Serbian minority. The settlement of the RAE is quicker in urban and suburban areas where the access to employment is easier to organise.

The possibilities for a placement into dependent employment in private companies are limited for RAE. There are a number of reasons for this:

Firstly there is a limited job offer, also for the majority of the Albanian population, especially since the jobs in state-run companies have ceased, the restructuring process of the economy and since investing in the private or public sector is too little.

Secondly there is a preferred treatment of family members in small private companies. Last but not least, the level of preparatory training as well as the work experience of the members of the RAE is limited.

All in all it is not to be underestimated that for a sustainable social integration it is necessary to improve the standard of education of minorities in Kosovo. Deficiencies at the education level lead to an exclusion from the employment market today and maybe even more in the future. As far as we noticed during our experience in Kosovo and again during the expert journeys not only the possibilities but also the willingness of the minorities to prepare for a longer period of training is still little developed in order to fulfil the future demands of the employment market.

In the initial period arrangements are necessary for disadvantaged groups like minorities for accessing the employment market and comprehensive criteria for promotion have to be developed. Therefore these people should get extra support in order to have a chance to access the

employment market at all, but this should always be done in conjunction with the needs of the economy and the individual's willingness to perform.

Training and employment promotion specifically involving minorities in post war and post crisis situations also play a role in creating and maintaining peace.

The higher the rate of employment and income in a given place, the more it is likely to secure internal stabilisation and to solve the problems concerning the equality of ethnic groups within the population. Employment promotion can be an essential factor for the process of reconciliation within the society.

Supporting the integration process of ethnic minorities and their involvement in economic development and work can as well lead to a revaluation of the relationship between different population groups and the public consciousness.

However, we also have to be aware that employment promotion is not an instrument to create a permanent social justice. Social centres of conflict can be limited and mitigated by supporting measures in transitional situations. Therefore the promotion itself should only occur for limited time periods. A permanent granting of more favourable conditions for ethnic minorities in comparison to the average population leads to a new disparity and social tensions and has a contra productive effect to the aspired integration.

An improvement of the economical situation of minorities can only be achieved in a country seen as a whole. This is why each member of the community, also the minorities, are challenged to actively participate and fulfil the duties with respect to the community. Doing so they will no longer be the object of changes within the society.

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Prospects for sustainable return and reintegration: the case of East Timor – Statement by Uli Lauerhass / INDE

Uli Lauerhass is working as a Project Assistant in the Portuguese NGO INDE and has conducted the expert journey to East Timor within the project.



East Timor, the first member of the United Nations in the new millennium, is a small country situated in the Sonda Archipelago, just a few kilometers north of Australia. The island was divided for centuries, the western part belonging to Indonesia. East Timor includes the eastern half, the enclave “Oe Cusse” on the north coast of West Timor, and the two islands Ataúro and Jaco.

Its young democracy initiated with a referendum in September 1999, when 78% of the population voted for independence. This put an end to Indonesian rule, which had invaded the country in 1975 after the Portuguese colonisers had left. Indonesia ruled with great oppression, disrespecting human rights, which in turn provoked a broad independence movement and prolonged guerrilla resistance fighting the Indone-

sian army and militia. Due to the referendum result, a wave of violence destroyed the country: 70% of the infrastructure was destroyed, around 90% of the houses burned and there was sacking, injury and murder. Already during the two previous decades, but especially during the riots and massacres of 1999, the majority of the people were forced to flee their villages, which resulted in internal displacement and escape to Indonesia, Australia and Europe, especially Portugal.

In 1999, according to UNHCR estimations, around 250,000 refugees lived in West Timor alone, others were in exile in Australia and Europe. This figure taken as a proportion of the total East Timorese population of around 800,000 individuals shows the dramatic significance of these movements. Since the violence only lasted some weeks, the refugees began returning soon after, protected by a UN mission. On 20th of May 2002, the restoration of independence was declared and a new parliament and president were elected. By then, around 222,000 refugees had already returned, including 178,000 who were assisted by the UNHCR and IOM return programme. Today, there are still 28,000 refugees in camps in West Timor. Since 2003, they do not have refugee status anymore, so that only IOM has a mandate.

These events threw the level of national development even further back and worsened poverty and the lack of access to health, education and other social services, as the following figures show: In 2001, life expectancy was 57 years, birth mortality 86 / 1,000 and under 5 years mortality 144 / 1,000; the unemployment rate was over 50% and

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the illiteracy rate over 70%; 20% of the population had less than 1 USD a day to live on, 63% had less than 2 USD.

Starting with this background information, we can take a closer look at the situation of minorities and return in East Timor. First of all, there is no official definition of the term “minority” neither in the constitution nor in any other legislation. In general, the Timorese society is quite homogeneous, consisting of more than 95% catholic Christians. In terms of linguistics, there are so many languages (7) and dialects (35) that everybody belongs to one or more linguistic group. Nevertheless, if we take a sociological approach, we can distinguish the following minorities:

Religious minorities. There are some 5–6,000 Muslims living in East Timor (0.7%) and also 2-3% protestant Christians. There is no significant discrimination against them: The Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri is Muslim and was elected by the majority. Also the religious leaders of the different confessions meet and participate in national celebrations.

Ethnic minorities. There is a handful of Chinese living in East Timor (1%), who enjoy a good image because of their economic success and job creation.

Minority in terms of nationality. Most foreigners who have settled in East Timor are Indonesians married to Timorese and returnees who do not want to give up their 2nd passport. There is a foreigner tax of 1 USD a day.

Political minorities. Those who voted against the independence, but for auto-

nomy inside Indonesia (so-called “pro-autonomists”), are confronted with some difficulties reintegrating into community life. Often, they feel ashamed and regretful, therefore reconciliation on a local level is very important.

Minority in terms of residence. Sometimes, returnees are treated as “the others”.

But neither of these groups see themselves nor do they feel treated as a minority. Taking a closer look on the organisations facilitating return, there are various parties to mention. The return project of INDE prioritises the preparation process in Portugal, where the project participants receive intensive mentoring, counselling and orientation on the present situation in East Timor and possible support for their reintegration (e.g. micro credit schemes). Furthermore, INDE realises vocational and business start-up training with certification, with the aim of facilitating the creation of an individual life project. The programme also includes travel costs and mentoring in East Timor after return. Apart from INDE, IOM and UNHCR were involved in facilitating return. There was a huge return programme from 1999 until 2003. Besides these, UNHCR was involved in a shelter programme that provided construction material, food, medicines and utensils to both returnees and non-returnees. Now, only IOM is involved in return accompaniment, and also implements a project for the building of basic infrastructure in the very east of the country. Since UNHCR has a protection mandate strictly for refugees, there is no further justification for its involvement

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in East Timor, therefore the teams are leaving in 2005.



In the peak return time, shortly after 1999, a lot more organisations were involved in accompaniment of returnees, like OXFAM, CONCERN, CAVR – Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation, JRS – Jesuit Refugee Service, UNMISSET Human Rights Section, UNICEF, IRC – International Red Cross Red Crescent (International and East Timorese sections), Yayasan Hak Human Rights NGO, CJP AV – Padre António Vieira Youth Centre. Now, only the IRC is still active in tracing back lost family members and displaced children.

In the following, the findings of the interviews are summarised. The gathered perceptions and expectations among minority groups show some interesting ideas. In general, the return programmes were judged as successful in protecting and bringing back refugee families. The preparatory training was identified as being especially helpful. Most interviewed partners pointed out that integrated programmes for returnees, IDPs and non-migrants are necessary. As well as economic reintegration social reintegration was found to be essential, therefore underlining the reconciliation process and a community participation approach in resolving the

conflicts between old and new village neighbours. All those interviewed stressed that a thorough preparation in the host country determines to a large degree the success in reintegrating and earning their living in the country of origin. Nevertheless post-arrival support is necessary, representing the other side of the same coin. The critics focused on the lack of post-arrival help like continuing mentoring, financial start-up help, credit schemes, etc.

Secondly, the perceptions and expectations among officials and NGOs show little concern for refugees returning as minorities. The explanations for this fact were that, first of all, the modern constitution of East Timor fully guarantees human rights (but without specific minority rights), and second, very little discrimination exists within society. Apart from this point, the interviewed partners showed consensus on the importance of a reconciliation process at a national and local level, and on criminal justice. The majority mentioned legal changes as decisive, especially relating to property rights, and identified agricultural activities as a priority, in order to improve food security, health, employment and the environment. Also the officials and NGOs pointed out the close relationship between the preparation process in the host country and a successful, sustainable reintegration in the country of origin. Finally, the access to information was found to be essential.

These statements correspond to the following collection of recommendations for future return programmes, which are divided into the preparation phase and the post arrival-phase, and furthermore subdivided into recommendations

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relating, on one hand, to the individual, and on the other at the organisation level.

Concerning the preparation phase with respect to the individual, it was found important to take the following points into account:

- education and training
- language courses, especially for children
- development of an individualised life project
- mentoring and counselling
- information on the current situation in the country of origin.

On the other side, at an organisation level the following concerns should not be forgotten:

- both social and economical reintegration programmes are necessary
- community-based, participatory, integrated approach
- linking reintegration with development, social inclusion, fighting against poverty, and empowerment projects
- networking and partnership with local authorities and the civil society.

Then, in relation to the post-arrival phase, the collected recommendations at the individual level were:

- individualised approach
- gender issues to be taken into account
- recognition that it is never easy to go back
- monitoring the implementation of the life project
- continuing mentoring

Finally, at the organisation level, the interview partners proposed:

- concerted action with all involved players
- identification of reliable information sources and checking received information
- promoting income-generating activities, vocational and on-the-job-training

As a conclusion, further return and reintegration projects should focus strongly on sustainable income-generating activities, but at the same time be aware of the social setting, therefore follow an integrated approach aiming at a widespread development and equal access to improved living conditions in all spheres of society.

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Summary of the Discussions in the Working Groups



The core question consists of what has to be done in order to plan return projects successfully. In former times return counselling consisted of filling in the respective forms. Later on it was recognized that there is more to return counselling than this.

The discussion on return is very interesting with regard to the need of human resources.

In addition to the intensive subsidies for Afghanistan the return to Iraq will become a big issue in the near future. In this context the reconstruction and, respectively, the need for qualified personnel will be a crucial question.

One suggestion was to create a profile of returnees in order to gather information on their qualifications.

One problem associated with the profiling of qualifications is that refugees are not able to work or have faced difficulties in finding work in Germany. Mostly, if they found work, the job does not suit to their former work experience and therefore does not improve their skills significantly. Lack of work experience is one reason the qualification of returnees is mostly not up to date and does not meet the requirements of the labour market in the Countries of Origin.

In this context a strength and weakness analysis suits the idea of implementing profiling well.

This is why the education market in the country of origin should be observed by counsellors regularly in order to be able to offer a so called perspective counselling.



Language courses should be offered in most cases especially for minorities.

A further hint was made that not only the financial side should be stressed, but also the situation of the family.

Strengthening one's own initiative is important in order to have personal successes.

The readiness to receive help from authorities in the Countries of Origin to acquire documents is reported to be low. This is why support with the interaction with authorities has to be provided. In this context it is important to highlight that return counselling has to begin at an early stage, considering various aspects for example how many persons of the affected (minority) group are living in the host country and how many are living in the country of origin. However, it is also important to avoid giving the returnee the impression that a permanent stay is possible.

Planning Return and Reintegration Projects

Organisations offering return counselling often face the problem that reasonable planning is impossible. How is it possible for them to become more active and how do they get better access to potential returnees? Intensive public relation work has to be done.

Furthermore, building a dense network with all parties dealing with return is essential. In Hamburg such a network between governmental and non-governmental structures has been successfully established.



But implementing organisations also need intermediaries between the host country and the CoO, not only as a contact point for follow-up activities. Foreign associations in the host country on the one hand can be appropriate and helpful partners. On the other hand they possess their own interests that are possibly differing from the point of view of the partner organizations. An intensive partner analysis has to be done before planning activities with associations and the partner have to be chosen according to comprehensive criteria.

Successful examples of reintegration could be invited to the host countries to speak about their experiences.

Although reintegration is a part of the migration process like integration the aspect of reintegration is not sufficiently considered. When interior ministries decide on stay and return they no longer seem to feel responsible.

The lack of readiness by interior ministries to support reintegration measures seem to stem from the fact that they appear to be very expensive at first glance. In Germany the communities have to pay for repatriation measures. As soon as the communal level is confronted with reintegration measures they seem to be afraid of the apparently immense costs.



Afghanistan and Iraq as recent and upcoming examples

The working group has agreed on discussing Afghanistan and Iraq as an example to create the plan of action.

At the beginning the question arose how the ambitious aims can be transformed into concrete programmes when governments do not regard themselves

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as responsible? One participant stated that responsibility seems to be ended once the national border of the host country is crossed. Therefore politicians have to be convinced that reintegration always has to be part of return.

The level of political actors is relevant as from the side of the EU only partial-financing is available.

The new German “Zuwanderungsgesetz” does not cover the subject of return and reintegration. Mentioning only the fact that repatriation takes place is a rather narrow minded view as return and reintegration should be put in the context of reconstructing the country of origin.

The Target group

The situation for example in Afghanistan is still complex as there are problems with property claims and the security situation. The main aim should be security and securing the livelihood of the returnees family.

Nevertheless in Afghanistan the question arises who will rebuild the country if not highly qualified returnees. The reconstruction process for example in the afghan administration is rather slow due to the lack of qualified personnel participating in the reconstruction of the country.

Obviously there are still certain difficulties in motivating people in host countries to return to Afghanistan.

In this context it was acknowledged that people who have to return due to an uncertain residence permit are not necessarily the same as the people who have to be motivated to return in order to rebuild the country. Thus, incentives to return should also be created for people possessing a residence permit

for a certain time frame, but who do not possess a German passport.



Actors and Networks

Creating a board of coordination as suggested by Mr. Hemker in his statement at the beginning of this conference was generally acknowledged as a good idea by the participants of the workshop. Coordinated management of return and reintegration promoting a more intensive exchange of information and ideas is principally desirable. The new German database ZIRF (Zentrale Rückkehrförderung) was mentioned as a good and helpful idea in this context.

Institutions and organisations that have to be involved are:

- Public authorities responsible for foreigners
- Counselling and information centers
- Foreign associations / NGOs

Moreover it was generally acknowledged that actors should be included who have a strong interest in investing in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries of return. This will be indispensable in the near future.