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Involuntary return migration to Kosovo: Tackling challenges for successful reintegration

IAMO Policy Brief 33 discusses opportunities and risks for successful reintegration

Halle (Saale), 22 December 2017 – Kosovo currently faces the challenge of reintegrating thousands of migrants returning from Western Europe. In addition to low educational levels and qualifications of the returnees, their reintegration is hindered above all by the generally poor job market. Some 180 interviews have been conducted in the scope of an empirical study to better understand the socio-economic situation of these returnees. The findings were published in December 2017 by IAMO researcher Dr. Judith Möllers, together with Dr. Diana Traikova, Professor Thomas Herzfeld and Egzon Bajrami, in IAMO Policy Brief 33 “Involuntary return migration to Kosovo: Tackling challenges for successful reintegration”. In the publication the opportunities and risks for successful integration are discussed, with policy recommendations presented.

The study that forms the basis for the IAMO Policy Brief highlights four key problems: the returnees’ economic vulnerability, their typically low level of qualification, their health status and their intention to leave again.

At the time of their departure the returnees already tended to be found in the lower income strata. In many cases, the cost incurred in migrating had resulted in additional downward mobility and indebtedness. Multiple household members are typically dependent on the income of one breadwinner, who is in turn often reliant on occasional work, not regular employment. Only a quarter of respondents were in paid employment at the time of interview, with 88 percent stating that they were looking for work.

Access to the labour market is rendered difficult by the fact that the majority had secondary school qualifications at best, but with little work experience or vocationally-relevant qualifications. Alongside qualifications, physical and psychological resilience is a key factor for successful integration in the labour

market. In addition to very low satisfaction regarding their circumstances, returnees were also characterised by increased physical and psychological stress. Health concerns were not only the second most important reason for the decision to leave the country, but were evidently exacerbated by the often traumatic experience of migration and involuntary return, also being explicitly named as a problem for reintegration. As a result, involuntary return is accompanied by failure to reintegrate and the desire to leave again. Over 40 percent of respondents reported the likelihood of them remaining in Kosovo as a maximum of 20 percent. For more than two thirds of respondents the likelihood of renewed migration was higher than that of remaining in Kosovo.

Breaking the vicious circle of failed reintegration and repeat migration requires measures in a range of different areas. Firstly, policy measures with a positive effect on the Kosovan employment market could also have a positive influence on the success of reintegration of migrants. In view of the often low level of qualification, the focus should be upon those sectors and jobs for which the barriers to entry are low. It is also important to create an environment in which entrepreneurial activity is encouraged and above all social security, education and a functioning healthcare system are ensured. Without such supportive infrastructural and institutional frameworks, high levels of repeat migration could undermine the success of the reintegration efforts. In addition to these no doubt medium-term objectives, Kosovo should also make efforts to identify and address target groups more effectively in the shorter term, in order to increase the currently low level of utilisation of existing reintegration measures and improve their targeting. The European destination countries could use agreements on circular migration, for example for seasonal work, to help ease the strain on the Kosovan labour market as well as the asylum systems in the destination countries. In addition, information on legal migration options and the prerequisites for these should be improved and painstaking bureaucratic processes shortened.

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Further information

IAMO Policy Brief 33 “Involuntary return migration to Kosovo: Tackling challenges for successful reintegration” has been published in German and English and can be downloaded free of charge at the following website: www.iamo.de/en/publications/iamo-policy-briefs. An Albanian language version is due to be published in the near term.

IAMO Policy Briefs

IAMO conducts research on important agricultural policies. In our IAMO Policy Briefs we share our take on the researched issues. In this series of publications, we elaborate briefly and in comprehensive language on various topics, which are relevant for today's society. We hope to involve the interested public in these

topics as well as decision makers in politics, the economy and the media. Since 2011, we publish IAMO Policy Briefs at irregular intervals.

About IAMO

The Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO) analyses economic, social and political processes of change in the agricultural and food sector, and in rural areas. The geographic focus covers the enlarging EU, transition regions of Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, as well as Central and Eastern Asia. IAMO works to enhance the understanding of institutional, structural and technological changes. Moreover, IAMO studies the resulting impacts on the agricultural and food sector as well as the living conditions of rural populations. The outcomes of our work are used to derive and analyse strategies and options for enterprises, agricultural markets and politics. Since its founding in 1994, IAMO has been part of the Leibniz Association, a German community of independent research institutes.

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