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Suzana Bornarova

Institute for Social Work and Social Policy,

Faculty of Philosophy, University 'Ss Cyril and Methodius' – Skopje

Natasha Bogoevska

Institute for Social Work and Social Policy,

Faculty of Philosophy, University 'Ss Cyril and Methodius' – Skopje

RETURNING MIGRANTS IN MACEDONIA: THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATIONAL REINTEGRATION

Summary

The issue of reintegration of returning migrants in Macedonia gained increased attention with the rise in returns in the last several years, especially of Macedonian citizens – illegal migrants. It has been widely recognised that an organised and systematic state response to the return migration is a key for successful reintegration of returning migrants and prevention of re-emigration and social exclusion. The paper elaborates the legislative, policy-making and practical challenges of reintegration of returnees in the domain of education. The focus is on: access to education for returning children at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education; access to adult education for returning adults and older people; as well as obstacles for higher educational attainment and outcomes related to language barriers, extracurricular assistance and recognition of diplomas and qualifications.

Key words: education, return migration, reintegration, social inclusion

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION: MAIN EMIGRATION TRENDS

Republic of Macedonia gained independence from Former Yugoslavia in 1991. It's a small country with a total population of 2.022.547 according to 2002 population census and population estimate for 2011 of 2.058.539¹⁾. Macedonia is a multiethnic country with mixed ethnic structure: Macedonians-64.18%; Albanians-25,17%, Turks-3.85%, Roma-2.66%, Serbs-1.78%, Bosnians-0.84%, Vlahos-0.48%, other-1.04%²⁾. The long and painful process of transition from planned to market economy contributed to the poor socio-economic condition in the country, evidence of which are the high unemployment rate of 31.6% in 2012, poverty rate of 30.4% in 2011 and an average gross monthly salary of only 495 Euro.³⁾

There are some particularities that characterize the migration history of Macedonian citizens. While in some parts of the country permanent emigration predates the breakup of Yugoslavia, in others the migration is a more recent phenomenon, triggered mainly by the painful structural adjustments and chronic unemployment and poverty following the onset of transition to the market system⁴⁾. The period of transition and poor economic performance following the 1990s triggered several different types of migratory movements. The unfavorable socio-economic conditions and 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 in the economic migration, predominantly towards the European countries.

Macedonia is traditionally emigrational area for more than one hundred years. Although the most popular destinations are well known, today the total number of emigrants living abroad is unknown. The long history of emigration (which in some families perpetuated for several generations), has led to an absence of reliable data for "old" migrants and their descendants, as well as for those who returned home. Also, in the last decades, only a small number of citizens officially reported their stay abroad. Public statistics in the country are incomplete and only indirect estimations are available. In these circumstances the scope of

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- 1) State Statistical Office, *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia*, 2011, Skopje, 2011.
 - 2) State Statistical Office, *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia*, Skopje, 2003.
 - 3) State Statistical Office, *ibid.* 2003
 - 4) Abdul Ghaffar Mughal, Hristina Cipunseva, Hyrije Abazi, *Migration, Remittances and the Standards of Living in the Republic of Macedonia* (a Report based on the 2008 Quality of Life Survey), University of South East European University, Tetovo, 2008, pp. 12

emigration could be approximated only through the foreign data sources from international institutions and receiving countries.

Migration of the citizens of Macedonia is not a recent phenomenon. Several events have caused large flows of people migrating along years in history. The Balkans wars of 1912-1913, the First World War, the Second World War, the Civil war in Greece (1945 – 1949) have all led to massive emigration to USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In the sixties and seventies emigration of Macedonian was triggered mainly by the poor economic situation of the country and the main destinations were Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Sweden while smaller numbers found their way to Austria, Denmark, Netherlands, and Norway⁵⁾.

Most intensive emigration was observed in the 1960s and 1970s. The time interval from 1990 until today is a distinctive period in which the highest emigration wave was noticed since the beginning of the economic emigration. The latest relevant comprehensive data for the number of emigrants by particular countries are those from the World Bank. These data show that the number of Macedonian citizens in the receiving countries all over the world in 2010 amounts to 447,138 persons⁶⁾. According to this data the emigration rate is 21.8%. It means that a considerable share of the total population of the country lives abroad. There are no indications that this trend will be reduced in the following years. A survey commissioned by IOM Budapest in 2009 showed that 10.5% of the Macedonians declared certain emigration intention in the future⁷⁾.

The mentioned World Bank data for migrants stocks in 2010 are only rough approximations. In the case of Macedonian migrants, they are underestimated for the overseas countries. According to the census data and official statistics of the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the number of Macedonian citizens in these countries amounts to 173,795 persons, which means 96,119 persons more than the latest World Bank data. If we include these data, then the number of Macedonian citizens abroad reaches 543,257 persons, and the emigration rate is 26.5%. If we take Eurostat data for migration stocks according to citizenship in 2010 (or latest available data) for the European Union receiving countries, then the emigration rate is 26.0%. In our opinion this emigration rate can be considered as a roughly correct estimation

5) IOM, *Migration Profile: Macedonia*, MOI of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, 2007.

6) World Bank, *Bilateral Migration Matrix November 2010*, Brussels, 2011.

7) IOM, *Labour Migration Patterns. Policies and Migration Propensity in the Western Balkans*, Geneva, 2009.

of the current size of the Macedonian emigration. Having in mind all available data sources for the migration stocks according to citizenship, one can conclude that the five most receiving countries for Macedonian citizens all over the world are: Australia, Italy, Germany, USA and Switzerland. As for the European Union the top six receiving countries for Macedonian migrants are: Italy, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Belgium and Sweden⁸⁾.

2. AN ATTEMPT TO GRASP THE SCOPE OF RETURNS

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

The statistical evidence on returnees in Macedonia is scarce, particularly concerning voluntary returns. According to the Law on Registration of Residence and Temporary Residence of the Macedonian citizens they are obligated to report emigration abroad for a period longer than three months prior to the departure, and to report the return to the Macedonian place of residence within three days upon return⁹⁾. Despite this legislative obligation, in practice this does not take place commonly which contributes to the inaccuracy of the available data on returns. Data from a recent comparative research conducted in seven countries shows that 34 migrants return to Macedonia for every 100 who have departed¹⁰⁾.

Some data on voluntary returns can be obtained by IOM country office. IOM implements 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, namely, support in housing, health care, education, vocational training and establishment of small businesses. Furt-

8) Verica Janeska, Suzana Bornarova, *Social Impact of Emigration and Rural-Urban Migration in Central and Eastern Europe*, Macedonian Interim Report (draft). GVG. and European Commission, 2011, pp.12

9) Law on Registration of Residence and Temporary Residence of Citizens, *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, no. 36/92, 12/93, 43/2000,66/2007, 42/92.

10) Laura Chappell, Ramona Angelescu-Naqvi, George Mavrotas, Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, *Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts*, IPPR and GDN, London, 2010.

her, upon request by the host country, IOM provides information on the reintegration opportunities to those Macedonian migrants who wish to voluntarily return in Macedonia, with focus on employment, education, health, etc. According to the IOM's database, between 2002 and 2006, 142 individuals have returned to Macedonia through voluntary assisted return programmes. In the period from 2006 until August 2009 IOM has assisted 84 voluntary returnees¹¹⁾.

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) has evidence on the number of returnees in the country, in particular on the forced returns. According to existing data on the number of returnees in 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 slight increase: 582 (2007); 593 (2008); 682 (2009); 691 (until 30th of November 2010). The data refers to the number of entries in 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. 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)¹²⁾.

In the recent period there is also an increased number of Macedonian citizens - returnees (majority Roma and Albanian poorly informed asylum seekers) who immigrated mostly to European countries following the 2010 visa liberalisation. Visa liberalisation scheme decreased the numbers of irregular migrants, however at the same time it facilitated the increase in asylum applications lodged in the EU countries. According to UNHCR the number of asylum seekers from Macedonia has considerably increased after the visa liberalisation that entered into force in 2010. From 908 in 2009, the number of asylum applicants from Macedonia lodged in 44 industrialised countries increased to 6.351 of which 5.773 are lodged in EU27. Most of the applications submitted in 2010 are to Germany, Belgium and Sweden (Germany 2.466, Belgium 1.082, Sweden 908, France 590, Switzerland 403, Netherlands 389, Austria 194, and Norway 93)¹³⁾. Despite this trend, in 2010 only 161 Macedonians returned through the assisted voluntary return programmes, majority of them from Belgium (55 male, 41 female and 65 children). However, during the same year there was an increase in the forced returns. A total of 839 Macedonian citizens were forcefully re-

11) MLSP, *Programme for Reintegration of Macedonian Returnees under the Readmission Agreements*, 2010.

12) MOI, *Data on Macedonian Returnees per Countries of Return*, 2010.

13) UNHCR, *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialised Countries 2010. Division of Programme Support and Management*, 2010.

turned by the end of the year, most of them from Germany, Switzerland and Norway¹⁴). To respond to this situation, which is unfavorable 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. Measures predominantly refer to delivery of information to citizens in cooperation with the local NGOs, through media campaigns, direct contacts, distribution of brochures and alike¹⁵.

The same trends continued in the course of 2011. According to the IOM data Macedonia is among the top ten countries of origin of returnees with around 2000 migrants assisted with return and 100 migrants provided with reintegration assistance, majority returning from Germany¹⁶).

3. POLICY RESPONSES TO EDUCATIONAL REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES

Until recently, there has been no official policy designed to regulate the migratory movements and assist returning migrants. Policy-making relative to migration in general intensified in the last several years. In 2009 the Resolution and the Action plan on Migration were adopted. The Agreement on the status and activities of the Migration, Asylum and Refugees Regional Initiative was also ratified and considerable number of readmission agreements signed¹⁷). Macedonia and the European Community signed an Agreement on the Readmission of Persons Residing Illegally ratified by Macedonia in 2007, and entered into force on 1 January 2008. In addition to the one with EC, Macedonia has signed readmission agreements with other countries as well. To date, Macedonia has signed 21 Readmission Agreements: with 14 EU member states 2 Schengen signatory countries and 5 non-member states¹⁸).

Bearing in mind the absence of 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

14) Government of the Republic of Macedonia, *Migration Profile for the Republic of Macedonia 2010*, Skopje, 2011.

15) Suzana Bornarova, *Returning Migrants in the Republic of Macedonia: The Issue of Reintegration*, Two Homelands. 34. Institute for Slovenian Emigration and Migration, 2011, pp. 127-137.

16) IOM, *Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration. Annual Report of Activities 2011*, Geneva, 2012.

17) MARRI, *Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative: Migration Paper*, 2007.

18) Government of the Republic of Macedonia, *Schengen Action Plan*, Skopje, 2009.

Returnees under the Readmission Agreements. Currently this Programme and the relevant educational legislation are the only policy instruments in place to support reintegration of Macedonian returnees.

3.1. Programme for reintegration of returnees under readmission agreements: education component focus

The purpose of the Programme for Reintegration of Returnees 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. The Programme offers wide-ranging forms of assistance and support to returnees in several domains¹⁹⁾:

- (1) Legal aid and personal documentation
- (2) Social protection
- (3) Economic support/employment
- (4) Health care
- (5) Education.

The measures envisaged under the education component are comprehensive and include not only facilitation of access to education, but also better integration and remaining within the same. Among the basic services the Programme anticipates:

- Integration in the system of upbringing and education, respecting the age, physical and intellectual capabilities and previous education of the returnees.
- Access to special schools or special classes within regular school programmes and projects for integrated education for returnees with special needs.
- Information about existing education opportunities in Macedonia and the possibilities to access the same.
- Information and referral for the purpose of recognition of foreign qualifications for returnees who have stopped their education to return to Macedonia and those who have completed formal education abroad.

Given the diverse educational challenges encountered by returnees of different age, specific set of measures is developed to support educational reintegration of minors, young adults, adults and older people.

19) MLSP, Programme for Reintegration of Macedonian Returnees under the Readmission Agreements, 2010.

Educational support to minors anticipates:

- Provision of free meals in the schools, for children returnees from socially vulnerable families.
- Inclusion in extended school stay, where children returnees will have more opportunities for learning, doing homework, participation in arts and cultural activities etc.
- Engagement with non-governmental organizations active in mentorship programmes, educational support and learning support for school age children.
- Links with relevant organizations that provide scholarships for secondary education of vulnerable groups.
- Mandatory registration of children returnees with the immunization teams in their local places of residence, which will provide the necessary immunization documentation and relevant certification required for school admission.

Educational support to young adults anticipates:

- Support in completing previous levels of education, for young adults with incomplete primary or secondary education.
- Information for young returnees, with completed secondary education, about the opportunities and higher educational institutions where they could continue their education.
- Referral to relevant organizations that provide higher education scholarships to vulnerable groups.
- Extending information to young returnees on the measures of affirmative action in the higher education and quotes for different ethnic groups, which helps lessening the financial burden for covering educational costs.
- Support in learning the native language.

Educational support to adults and older returnees anticipates:

- Information and support in acquiring formal education for returnees with incomplete primary and secondary education (inclusion in the educational system through special schools for adults).
- Information about opportunities for inclusion in the existing informal, continuous education for adults and elderly, and referral to organisations and institutions that provide services in the field of informal education with respect to the needs and interests of the returnees.

In cooperation with IOM a Guidebook was prepared and it was promoted before the relevant institutions with a purpose to introduce them with the forthcoming obligations coming from the Programme.

3.2. Education legislation

The provision of access to educational opportunities in Macedonia is considered an important element in the overall reintegration of returnees, both for children and adults. The educational system in Macedonia is not exclusive on any grounds. The Republic of Macedonia is taking measures which guarantee equal opportunities in education for every citizen regardless their age, sex, nationality or religious affiliation. The Macedonian Government and the Ministry of Education and Science are responsible for providing equal conditions for access to all levels of education for every citizen²⁰.

In addition to children, according to the Law on Primary Education, adults can also be included in the primary education in a manner determined by law. In line with Article 10 of the Law on Primary Education, the primary education for students with special educational needs could be organized in special primary schools and special classes within regular schools²¹.

The basic rights envisaged within the Law on Primary education, Law on Secondary Education and the Law on Textbook for Primary and Secondary Education, to which returning children are also entitled are:

- Free primary and secondary education in the public educational institutions.
- Right to education with prohibition of discrimination on any ground.
- Compulsory secondary education for all citizens of Macedonia
- Free of charge textbooks for all primary and secondary school students
- Free of charge bus transport for all primary and secondary school students.

The aforementioned laws also contain special provisions relevant for the returning children related to the unhindered access to schools.

20) Ministry of Education and Science, *National Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Macedonia, 2005-2015*, Skopje, 2004, http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/The%20former%20Yugoslav%20Republic%20of%20Macedonia/FYR_Macedonia_MoES_National_Strategy_Dev_Education.pdf

21) Law on Primary Education, *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No. 03/2008, 33/2010, 116/2010, 156/2010, 6/2011, 18/2011, 51/2011, 100/2012.

According to these provisions, all children, foreign nationals, or children without citizenship who reside in Macedonia, have the right to access primary education under same conditions with the other citizens of Macedonia, and teaching programme in their native language should be organized (in municipalities where an ethnic group is represented with over 20% of the total population). Also, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and in compliance with signed international conventions for recognition of studies, diplomas and qualifications, information and support to the process of recognition and issuance of foreign diplomas is available. For the purposes of extension of support in the process of issuing foreign diplomas, the Government enacted a resolution which authorizes the Ministry of Education and Science to determine the ways for provision of support to vulnerable groups of returnees with regard to recognition of their foreign diplomas.

Part of the special provisions relates to the support at school. Namely, the Law on Primary education obliges primary schools to provide support to children of Macedonian citizens who have returned from a foreign country where they have started their education, in learning the native language for the purpose of better integration in the educational process. This is done through complementary individual or group classes designed for language skills building and making up with the school programme. This type of teaching is conducted in the course of one year, according to a specially designed programme by the Bureau for Development of Education. Moreover, even when children attend school programme in language other than Macedonian, it includes compulsory learning of the Macedonian language, which is particularly important considering the fact that part of the returnees do not have knowledge of the Macedonian language.

4. CHALLENGES TO EDUCATIONAL REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES

The successful reintegration of returnees in the society is important not only for their personal well-being, but for Macedonia as a home country as well, considering its obligation to protect this category of population and ensure full respect of their human rights. In general, it should be taken into consideration that for most returnees this process is not only routine practice but the same implies major social and economic adjustments. This process is particularly problematic for returnees who have stayed in a foreign country for extended period of time, thereby have lost all linkages to Macedonia as their country of origin.

According to a recent empirical research which compares migrant and non-migrant households in Macedonia, the share of returned migrants that stayed abroad for more than 5 years is as high as 90%, which is an evidence of the tendency of Macedonian migrants to remain abroad for relatively long periods of time²²⁾. Without adequate admission and adjustment to the old-new environment, most of the returnees would be exposed to risk of social exclusion, marginalisation and poverty.

Major challenges may be situated at three levels:

(1) At policy level:

- Held back implementation of officially adopted strategies and programmes as a result of the lack of financial resources and poor budget planning.
- Insufficient fund-raising capacities at national level, given the fact that the usage of EU and other foreign funds available to Macedonia is negligible.
- Lack of empirical research on the problems related to the educational reintegration of returning migrants which would facilitate and inform policy-making and protection.

(2) At institutional level:

- Insufficient capacities (budget, staff, infrastructure) of the educational institutions to provide additional support to returning children
- Unsatisfactory inter-institutional coordination and cooperation at central and local level as a prerequisite for effectiveness in policy making, implementation and evaluation of the programme outcomes.

(3) At individual level:

- Cultural differences, tradition and nutrition habits call for adaptation to the new environment.
- The process of socialisation is often disrupted as it requires adoption of norms and values often different from the country of destination where children were born.
- Children have to adjust to the new educational system in which educational contents, teachers' attitudes and teaching methods differ from those they've been used to.
- Language barriers, which in turn affect children's educational achievements (learning the language in which lectures are

22) Zoran Nikolovski, Vanco Uzunov, Maja Micevska Scharf, Suncica Szadovska, *Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising the Economic and Social Impacts of Migration in the Republic of Macedonia*, GDN, Skopje, 2009, pp. 68.

- held is particularly problematic for foreign born children who do not speak Macedonian).
- Problems regarding recognition of prior educational qualifications (diplomas, certificates) are also not to be disregarded. This problem is most noticeable among forced returnees who often lose personal documentation in the process of deportation. Issuing a document from abroad is complex and costly procedure most of them can not afford.
 - Finally, most disadvantaged are returning children who have never attended school due to the status of illegal residence abroad and who have the hardest time to begin their delayed education and catch up with their peers²³⁾.

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23) Suzana Bornarova, Ibidem.

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Сузана Борнарова, Наташа Богоевска

ПОВРАТАК МИГРАНАТА У МАКЕДОНИЈУ: ИЗАЗОВИ ОБРАЗОВНЕ ИНТЕГРАЦИЈЕ

Резиме

С обзиром на садашњу неповољну ситуацију у заемљи, несумњиво је да ће се миграције Македонских грађана наставити и у будућности, са израженим трендом нелегалних миграција. Паралелно, као резултат рестриктивне имиграционе политике у земљама дестинације, очекује се и повећан повратак илегалних емиграната у Македонију.

Држава мора да има адекватне одговоре на ове изазове. Повратници, посебно они који су дуго боравили ван земље, суочавају се различитим проблемима и осујећењима. Приступ системима социјалне заштите, тржишту рада и образовања често им није доступан. У одсуству адекватних механизма подршке за њихову интеграцију у заједницу, повратници и њихове породице су у ризику

од сиромаштва, социјалне искључености, ре-емиграције. Инклузија у образовању је само део целокупног процеса реинтеграције, који не може бити успешан ако се посматра независно од других механизма (социјална заштита, становање, здравствена заштита, запошљавање).

Холистички приступ је неопходан у развоју адекватне политике, која на одговоран начин организује, омогућава и подржава целокупни процес реинтеграције. Одређене мере су већ дефинисане, али нису реализоване у пракси, тако да је дошло време да се унапреде. Успешан прихват повратника захтева партнерску међуминистарску сарадњу у области социјалне заштите, запошљавања, финансија, образовања, као и организација цивилног друштва. У том смислу, координација, буџетско планирање и fund-raising на централном нивоу, предуслови су за ефикасно доношење одлука, имплементацију и евалуацију постигнутих исхода. Недостатак поузданих података о илегалним миграцијама, може се умањити емпиријским истраживањима и успостављањем базе статистичких података о миграторним кретањима, што треба да допринесе побољшању просеца доношења одлука и бољем таргетирању циљних група.

На крају, али не и мање битно, службе за спровођење политике прихвата, морају бити оснажене. Да би биле у могућности да у пуној мери пружају образовну подршку повратницима, школе морају да имају адекватне инфраструктурне, кадровске, програмске ресурсе и капацитете.

Кључне речи: образовање, повратак, миграција, реинтеграција, социјална инклузија

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