

Working Paper
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Defining, Measuring and Influencing Sustainable Return:
The Case of the Balkans

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1 INTRODUCTION

The return of refugees and other migrants represents an issue of growing concern for governments and international organisations working in the refugee and migration fields. In the Balkans in particular, large-scale international returns of refugees to Bosnia and Kosovo have occurred alongside intense efforts to promote so-called 'minority return' of displaced people within the two territories. This interest in return comes from a number of directions, including domestic political concerns in countries and regions of origin, as well as a desire to promote 'durable solutions' for forced migrants. Yet return has also become a highly politically charged process in a number of contexts, both for returnees and those who did not migrate or flee, leading many observers to question the notion of an unproblematic return 'home'. Specifically, doubts remain both about the conditions and voluntariness of return, the ability of individual returnees to re-integrate in their home countries and regions, and the wider sustainability of the return process.

This paper seeks to provide an overview of recent policy interest in returns globally, as well as to and within the Balkans, before setting out a definition of what might be considered 'sustainable' return in the region. For example, it is possible to draw a distinction between narrow indicators of the 'sustainability' of return, such as whether returnees subsequently re-emigrate after their return, and wider definitions, which see 'sustainability' as including both the extent to which individual returnees are able to re-integrate in their home societies, and the wider impact of return on macro-economic and political indicators. It is argued that the development of robust indicators of the sustainability of return could assist in monitoring the impact of return programmes, providing valuable insight on return policies. Equally important, such indicators present one way in which return can be assessed against broader development objectives in countries of origin in general, and post-conflict countries in particular.

2 THE RETURN OF REFUGEES: THE PREFERRED DURABLE SOLUTION

Despite its categorisation as one of three 'durable solutions' by UNHCR, the return of refugees has not always been a high priority internationally. Indeed, between the end of the Second World War and the late 1980s, the main proponents of the international refugee regime rarely considered the return of refugees as important (Chimni 1999: 2). During this time, most refugees of concern to the West were from communist countries. In this context, the ideological interests of the West meant that local

integration in host countries in Europe, or resettlement to North America, were generally more attractive options. Labour shortages also influenced the attitudes of the receiving states (Chimni 1999), with the result that public policy tended to focus on integration or assimilation rather than promoting return.

It is since the end of the Cold War that international attention has been drawn more substantially to the return of refugees. As flows of refugees have come from a wider array of countries, and numbers appear to have increased, the West has become increasingly impatient with what it sees as its refugee burden. From the 1970s, changing attitudes towards asylum-seekers have also accompanied an increasingly restrictive attitude towards migration in general (Black and Koser 1999: 4), leading also to some return programmes for economic migrants. Tough measures have been introduced across a number of northern countries to stop asylum-seekers from reaching their borders, as well as to limit welfare benefits, remove rights of appeal against refusal of refugee status, and tackle 'illegal migration' and 'people trafficking'. One element of this changing policy has been to emphasise the importance of return, both as a deterrent to those who wish to come without documentation, and to affirm the control of receiving states over their borders.

However, although an emphasis on return can be seen as part of a restrictive attitude towards refugees and asylum-seekers in the north, this is far from being a complete explanation. For example, at the same time as attitudes towards refugees were hardening, the end of the Cold War also created a 'peace dividend', which opened up new opportunities for return. In the three years from 1989 to 1992, the UN launched more peacekeeping operations than in its previous 43 years. This led the UN High Commissioner for refugees, Sadako Ogata, to predict that from 1992 there would be a 'decade of repatriation' (Ogata 1992). Return was not only seen as a solution for individual refugees, but as a central pillar of peace processes as they evolved during this time. In time, substantial return movements have indeed occurred (Table 1). The majority of these return movements have been within and to Africa, with only Afghanistan and the former Yugoslavia as non-African countries featuring in this list of the largest movements. As a result of these return movements, protracted refugee situations in other parts of Africa, and the prospect of still more return movements, UNHCR has developed a 'Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration in Africa' and has run a number of pilot '4R's' programmes (UNHCR 2004b). However, an overview of Africa's refugee situation in the 1990s has pointed out that many returnees go back in conditions far from the voluntary, safe and dignified return established in legal principal (Crisp 2000).

Major Instances of Voluntary Return of Refugees 1992-2003 (in thousands)

Country of origin	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total*
Afghanistan	1,577	2	329	348	159	87	107	253	293	26	1,958	645	5,783
Rwanda	0	0	1,208	241	1,411	221	11	38	26	22	39	13	3,230
Mozambique	159	604	804	159	2	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	1,570
Somalia	5	667	61	43	2	52	52	26	46	51	32	10	1,046
FR Yugoslavia	4	-	0	0	4	2	0	807	125	26	14	7	988
Burundi	48	6	271	6	108	91	24	12	7	28	54	82	737
Liberia	81	16	6	10	1	15	240	104	42	3	22	21	561
Bosnia													
Herzegovina	10	0	0	1	101	121	129	32	19	19	42	11	484
Sierra Leone	13	3	0	-	1	2	195	4	41	92	76	33	459
Angola	85	1	0	13	1	54	22	20	9	13	88	132	437

Sources: UNHCR statistical yearbook, 2002 UNHCR population statistics (provisional), 2003 Global Refugee Trends.

Notes: *Total obtained by adding figures for each year from 1992-2003. However, it is likely that renewed flight has led to 'double counting' of returns in a number of countries. '-' = no data available

In general, the benefits of high profile return programmes for the international community are that they help to validate post-conflict regimes, which increasingly have been brought to power by an international coalition or international actors. Return thus aims to inspire public and donor confidence in the reconstruction and peace-building programme (UNHCR 1997:162), while also indicating the confidence of the returning population (Petrin 2002: 5). The return of refugees, and the success or otherwise of return, can also be an indicator of a range of other post-conflict issues, including progress towards development goals, and the 'extent to which civil-state relations will be repaired in the post-conflict period' (ibid.). In contrast, the continuing existence of a substantial refugee population represents a barrier to the legitimacy of post-conflict states (Black and Koser 1999: 5).

3 PROBLEMS OF RETURN

Support for the return of refugees has gained ground as an area of public policy intervention, with the number of voluntary assisted return schemes across 18 European countries increasing more than five-fold over the last 10 years, from four to more than 20 (IOM 2004: 7). Yet this advance has not

prevented return from remaining fiercely controversial. One reason for this is the practical difficulty of establishing the voluntariness of return. For example, it is often difficult to disentangle the voluntary return of refugees to promote post-conflict reconstruction, and the usually less-than-voluntary return of failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants by Western governments under political pressure to demonstrate the 'integrity' of their migration systems (Black 2004b). A blurring of boundaries is reinforced by the fact that the experience of returning refugees in the interests of state-building in the Balkans has indeed influenced return programmes for other categories of migrants. For example, Koser comments that lessons learned from the Bosnian and Kosovar return programmes in European countries have been applied to other categories of migrants, including rejected asylum-seekers and irregular migrants (Koser 2001: 12). Confusion can also be expected when, for example, the UK government seeks to promote voluntary return from the UK to Somaliland, but is simultaneously seeking to compulsorily repatriate failed asylum-seekers, with little or no support to their reintegration, and some ending up in camps on their return (International Development Committee 2004).

Meanwhile, even within voluntary programmes, different degrees of 'voluntariness' can be identified: the refugee may have a clear and open choice either to return or to stay permanently in the host country. It can also be a choice between returning voluntarily when asked to do so, perhaps gaining financial or other incentives as a result, or staying and risking forcible return at some date in the future (Morrison 2000). Worse, in some cases, 'voluntary' can be taken simply to mean an absence of force in removal, but where the refugee is effectively given no choice at all. In turn, governments' interest in voluntary return is not always motivated by lofty goals, and may simply reflect a lack of political will to enforce removal, and/or a preference for voluntary return prompted by an understanding that voluntary returns require 'less administrative effort than forced return' (European Commission 2002: 8). Yet, despite acknowledgements of the preference for voluntary return (IOM 2004: 7), only 23 per cent (or 87,628 individuals) of returns from EU countries in 2000 were facilitated by assisted voluntary return programmes, compared to 367,552 people who were removed during the same period (European Commission 2002:19).

Doubts about the value of return also centre on its ideological significance. For example, Malkki (1992: 37) has challenged a number of assumptions that underpin the discourse of return, such as that it allows the re-establishment of a natural or 'national order' that is presumed to have existed prior to displacement. She critiques the notion that refugees, when displaced, are out of place or 'uprooted' (Malkki 1992: 25) and have to be put back in their right place. Similarly, Warner notes how 'concepts of

community and home... assume a world of order and stability' (Warner 1994: 160) which is not necessarily accurate or achievable. The pervasiveness of this view can be seen in a World Bank discussion paper that asserts that there can be no hope of normalcy until the majority of those displaced are able to reintegrate themselves into their societies' (UNHCR 1997:162). But for Malkki, the key issue is that the resulting focus on the importance of a delineated 'home' leads to an intrinsic rejection of refugees, making their status 'pathological' (1992: 31). Warner argues that the asymmetry and 'complexity' of experience make return, as encapsulated in the dominant discourse, impossible, as the 'durable solution of voluntary repatriation denies the temporal reality of our lives and the changes that take place over time' (Warner 1994: 171).

In a critical overview Hammond argues that the concern to 're-root' refugees assumes that the cycle will then be ended and that refugees will be morally, spiritually, culturally and economically better off. But this may not be the case -- return may not be a 're-' anything but the beginning of a new cycle (Black and Koser 1999). In this context, the discourse of return may be damaging in practical terms as well as theoretically questionable. Hammond reviews criticisms from a range of commentators to draw attention to one particularly problematic result of the dominant underlying conceptualisation of return: because return is assumed to be a good thing, and people are assumed to belong in a certain place, known in shorthand as 'home', attention to refugees may be abruptly and artificially ended at the point of repatriation. As a result, too little assistance is given to those who return and we know too little about the diverse experiences of returnees (Hammond 1999: 227). As Rogge (1994: 34) points out, migrants may take 10 to 15 years to establish themselves, whereas refugees who return are expected to establish or 're-establish' themselves, much more quickly. Yet in practice, the experience of return may be more, rather than less problematic than the experience of exile (UNHCR 1997: 153).

The notion of a fixed and clear 'home' is particularly problematic in this sense. For example, Allen and Morsink (1994: 7) have sought to unpick the concept of 'home' and an undifferentiated 'returnee', calling into question 'conceptions of a homeland and shared values within a population which may or may not exist', even though they accept that return may be the most favourable outcome for refugees. Other commentators have also critiqued the notion of 'home' (Black 2002), with questions raised on highly pragmatic issues such as where refugees should return to - their home or their homeland; who makes the decision on this -- refugees themselves, or governments or international organisations; what are the motivations behind the decision, as well as what is the deeper meaning of 'home'. For example, Black and Koser (1999) suggest that refugees can be more at 'home' in the country of

asylum, especially if they have lived there for a long time, or if economic or social opportunities are likely to be denied to them in their country of origin.

Related to the problematised notion of home is the issue of links maintained by returnees with their country of destination. These links vary from correspondence with friends made in the country of origin to lives lived half in one country and half in another. The emphasis on return as a 'durable solution' implies that return is, or should be, a permanent event, closing the door to further transnational links. However, a number of studies have shown the wide range of transnational activities that returnees can be involved with, linking their country of origin and destination. Stepputat (2004) outlines the benefits of 'mobile livelihoods' in making return sustainable, whether taking advantage of existing links or creating new ones through further migration, and Hansen (forthcoming 2005) outlines the role of 'circular migration' in conceptualising the relationship between migrants from Somaliland and their countries of destination. These approaches make return itself more of a grey area. If migrants spend only half of each year in their original country can they be said to have 'returned' in the way policy-makers may have envisaged?

There are any number of different typologies of links between returned migrants and their destination countries. Nyborg Sorensen (2004) outlines two. 'Staggered repatriation' involves splitting of families such that one or two members, usually male, return, leaving women and children. This is partly a result of the life stage of some migrants, especially those with school-going children. This also allows them to reduce the risk of return economically and in terms of security. 'Revolving returnees' intend to return permanently but end up re-migrating for economic or security reasons, or after failing to get their family to join them. Most of these physical links require documentation to allow ease of movement, as reliance on undocumented movement would be too risky. Stepputat (2004: 5) points out that free mobility is a more efficient incentive for return than economic return packages. These links are, of course, unlikely to be applicable to failed asylum seekers, although as an extension of 'look and see' options, the ability to move more freely between countries of origin and destination could be applied to migrants with a range of different statuses.

4 THE 'RIGHT TO RETURN'

Notwithstanding the obstacles highlighted in the previous section, one reason why return is a popular 'durable solution' is that it is often a migrant's wish to return home. As Allen and Morsink (1994: 1)

observed a decade ago, '(I)t is generally assumed that most refugees will eventually want to go home' . But a longing for a land to return to can create unrealistic expectations (Markowitz 1995): the desire to return to an idealised 'home' can develop almost mythical status for a place that may no longer exist (Zetter 1999), or may never have existed (King 2000). Yet as well as often being an individual's wish, return is also asserted as a right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, Article 13(2), which states that: 'Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country'.

The right to leave and return to one's country is founded on 'natural law' (Rosand 1998: 1091). However, historically the right to leave has been focused on more than the right to return. For example, Rosand contrasts the international sanctioning of, and involvement with, mass population movements up to and including World War II (including the Treaty of Neuilly between Bulgaria and Greece, and the Treaty of Lausanne between Greece and Turkey) with the more recent belief that this sort of orchestrated population movement violates human rights and that international bodies must work to re-create multi-ethnic communities, not to separate them.

Since the end of the Second World War, the focus on the right to leave rather than the right to return was partly due to the nature of the Cold War, when refugees were practically unable to return. Host countries often considered the presence of refugees to be a sign of the failure of communist states, a sign they were happy to encourage and support. But recent interest in return as a 'right' has been not only due to the end of the Cold War and the role of return in internationally-led peace efforts. The emergence of a discourse on the 'right' to return in the Balkans has resulted from a context in which warring parties have been seen as directly pursuing displacement of particular groups of people as a principal war aim. Thus, although the existence of a right to return for displaced people was not new, it was new that the international community determined that they should be able to exercise the right, reflecting what were seen as new circumstances that led to displacement in the first place (Rosand 1998: 1104).

Return has emerged as a political 'righting of wrongs' in the Balkan wars (Black 2001), as the return of refugees and post-conflict reconstruction have become almost inseparable. In addition to attempting to make this right concrete, international organizations working in the Balkans since the mid-1990s have also specified the nature of this right much more closely than had been the case before, asserting that returnees have the right to return to their 'homes', not just to their country of origin (Phuong 2000: 166).

Thus, in Bosnia, the conflict was seen as a war of ethnic cleansing and as such, 'righting the wrong' of ethnic cleansing by promoting minority return, or the re-mixing of ethnic minorities, became a major aim of public policy (Bantekas 1998; Phuong 2000). This right to return was enshrined in policy and in law through Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Accord, which states:

All refugees and displaced persons have the right freely to return to their homes of origin. They shall have the right to have restored to them property of which they were deprived in the course of hostilities since 1991 and to be compensated for any property that cannot be restored to them. The early return of refugees and displaced persons is an important objective of the settlement of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (IFOR 1995).

In support of the central right of individuals to return to their 'homes', parties to the treaty are expected to 'ensure' that returnees do not face 'harassment, intimidation, persecution, or discrimination, particularly on account of their ethnic origin, religious belief, or political opinion'. In general they are asked to support 'human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons within their jurisdiction'. In turn, return was made a central element in resolving the conflict (Prettitore 2004: 4), with Annex 7 stating that the 'early return of refugees and displaced persons is an important objective of the settlement of the conflict' (IFOR 1995). If judged by numbers alone, the return process has been reasonably impressive (Table 2).

Table 2: Statistical Summary of Returns to/within Bosnia and Herzegovina, 31 May 2004

Category of return	Number
Returns from abroad	439,631
Returns of displaced persons	555,644
Total returnees	995,275
Total number of minority returns	441,970
Remaining displaced persons	318,132

Source: UNHCR Sarajevo (www.unhcr.ba)

In Kosovo, UNMIK has also stressed the right to return home and the rights of property that are associated with this return. However UNMIK has also gone further, describing the right to return as a 'right to sustainable return'. In a *Manual on Sustainable Return*, this is defined specifically as encompassing four areas: security and freedom of movement, access to public services (public utilities,

social services, education and health care), access to shelter (i.e. through effective property repossession or housing reconstruction assistance) and fair and equal access to employment opportunities. The evolving 'right' to return is beginning to require attention to many more issues than simply the logistics of moving across borders.

5 MAKING RETURN 'SUSTAINABLE'

There has been strong and growing engagement with the concept of return by governments and refugee and migration policy-makers over the 1990s, with return increasingly seen as having implications not just for individuals, but also for communities of origin and the wider process of development. Macrae (1999) and others have outlined a pattern constructed by the international community for the implementation of peace, consisting of peace accords, peace keeping and interim administration, then elections carried out in peaceful conditions. She cites a report to UNHCR's Executive Committee in 1992 which claimed that 'successful reintegration is critical to any national reconciliation and reconstruction process', noting that 'international security is at stake' (Macrae 1999: 11). This concern with refugees' role in peace building has been retained, from the complexities of the wars and reconstruction efforts in the Balkans, to recent projects trialled by UNHCR in Africa (UNHCR 2004b). However, experience has shown that return itself is not enough to promote peace; rather, this return needs to be 'successful'. Thus, UNHCR (2004b:1) states in its *Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration in Africa* that: 'experience shows that if the issue of sustainability or reintegration of refugee and displaced populations is not addressed properly, the countries concerned will almost inevitably slide back into conflict'. A range of assisted voluntary return programmes, Quick Impact Projects (QIPS) and other programmes have attempted to influence the success of returns (UNHCR 1997) and so to promote peace.

Ghosh identifies how the harmonious combination of beneficial effects for migrants themselves and economic and social development of the country of origin can 'set into motion a virtuous circle' of development (Ghosh 2000: 185). In countries such as the UK, where new opportunities for legal (or 'managed') temporary migration have opened up since the late 1990s, there is perhaps even opportunity to design temporary work programmes in such a way that positive impacts on development and poverty reduction are maximised (Black 2004a). Yet such benefits of migration followed by return remain an elusive outcome in most situations, and critical voices continue to be heard. Reflecting these criticisms, Noll (2000: 101) has argued that 'to strive for efficiency of return means also to strive for its

acceptability', suggesting that protection of the individual must be at the heart of deliberations on the issue.

Clearly, return itself is not enough; return needs to be 'successful' and 'sustainable'. Yet a key question remains as to the best benchmark of success and sustainability, and specifically whether what is important is the outcome for individual returnees, or collective outcomes for people in the regions or countries of origin. For example, UNHCR is concerned that unsustainable return of refugees could lead to renewed conflict and further displacement. This is true not only in terms of the large numbers of returnees but also in terms of the disproportionate number of political positions occupied by returnees, and this surely is a matter of concern to donor governments as well. Governments who are returning irregular migrants are also aware that if return is not sustainable, the same migrants might once more attempt to travel to the same destinations (Koser 2001: 5). A similar point has been made in a recent report by a House of Commons select committee in the UK that if conditions for return are not right, return can put pressures on developing countries that could raise 'the potential for instability, conflict and renewed out-migration' (International Development Committee 2004: 47). What emerges is a shared interest in examining how to 'assist' return in order to make it more sustainable, yet some potential divergence over how that sustainability might be measured.

6 MEASURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF RETURN

In thinking about how sustainability might best be defined -- and ultimately measured -- there are both advantages and disadvantages to conceptualising outcomes at the level of individual returnees. A definition at the individual level has the benefit of simplicity; most obviously, if a returnee subsequently re-emigrates, is displaced a second time, or remains at home only because they are forced to do so against their will, that return could quite easily be viewed as unsustainable. In principle, it should also be relatively simple to monitor whether returns are sustainable in this sense, tracking a sample of returnees and measuring actual levels of re-emigration, onward displacement, and/or desire to leave. Alternatively, given that socio-economic factors such as the availability of employment, or access to shelter or basic services (including water, education and health care), along with fear of persecution and violence, are likely to underpin any decision to re-migrate, the sustainability of individual returns could be conceptualised more broadly to include these factors. Such a conceptualisation lies at the heart of UNMIK's definition of a sustainable return, and again could, in principle, be monitored through follow-up of individual returnees.

The value of monitoring the sustainability of return at an individual level in either of these ways is open to debate. Although straightforward in principle, the costs of on-going monitoring of returnees -- even to determine whether they have remained in their place of origin -- might be prohibitive. This is especially so where a return flow is made up of refugees or migrants who do not all originate from the same area, or where onward movement is relatively easy. There are also benchmarks to be set, even when the definition of sustainability chosen is the narrow one of whether people remain 'home' after return. For example, most countries in the world -- and almost all to which voluntary return is likely to be promoted -- allow their citizens to leave their home village or town for another village, town or indeed country. Given this, there is likely to be a residual level of out-migration amongst the general population in any place to which refugees or migrants return, which should in principle be used as a benchmark against which to measure levels of re-migration amongst returnees. Although, as we have seen, levels of out-migration or 'circulation' may be higher where returnees maintain links with their countries of destination or where levels of migration amongst the rest of the population were suppressed during conflict.

Similarly, questions arise as to whether the provision of shelter, access to basic services, or levels of employment or income should be measured against some absolute standard, or relative to the general population in the place of origin (or indeed in the migrant's place of destination -- a comparison that might more readily be made by returnees themselves). In practice, attempts to monitor the experience of returnees in this way are limited, as are benchmark surveys that would allow comparison between returnees and general populations in the country of origin. In Bosnia, the Swiss government was able to monitor the experience of returnees by making return assistance payments in two instalments, one at the time of return, and one six months later, although this might be considered quite a short period over which to monitor re-integration and sustainability. Yet there are no benchmark surveys against which returnee experience could be measured: indeed, plans to hold a census in Bosnia have arguably been stalled precisely because it is believed by some that it would reveal the extent to which return policy has failed, and/or been unsustainable. Meanwhile, in Kosovo, a benchmark survey of a kind does exist -- a Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) conducted in 2000 with World Bank funding. However, even here there have been no systematic attempts by those organising return to monitor the experience of returnees.

One advantage of defining and measuring the sustainability of individual return is that there is the potential to use such a study to explore factors that influence return outcomes. Thus a pilot study

conducted by the University of Sussex for the UK Home Office on return to Bosnia and Kosovo explored the different factors that influenced the physical sustainability of return (whether or not returnees expressed a firm intention to re-emigrate), as well as its socio-economic and political sustainability (for instance, whether returnees had found a job and whether they expressed fear over security) (Black, Koser and Munk 2004: 38).

In addition to the cost of measuring the sustainability of the return of individuals in this way, and definitional difficulties, there is also a more fundamental problem to this approach, since it effectively prioritises outcomes for returnees, rather than for the countries and regions to which they return. For example, where returnees go or are sent to a desperately poor country or region with return assistance, whether this is cash, support to rebuild their house, or a job, their relative wealth could, at least in principle, contribute to a process of further impoverishment of the population already living in the home country. UNHCR (2004a) has drawn attention to this risk in a paper reviewing return in South Eastern Europe, pointing out that returnees are competing for (often scarce) resources with local populations. The organisation argues that return of those who enjoyed temporary protection in Western Europe, whether failed asylum seekers or irregular migrants, could put 'additional pressure on [countries] already facing the difficult challenge of integrating refugees in a context of very limited absorption capacities' (UNHCR 2004a: 7). At the very least, the tensions that arise when returnees come back to an area with accumulated wealth and/or public assistance are tangible enough, and may do little to reduce tension and promote reconciliation.

Yet, monitoring the aggregate impact of return on home societies and economies, let alone defining whether this process is 'sustainable', is far from straightforward. One way to think about this is to adapt an understanding of sustainability from DFID's 'sustainable livelihoods' framework, in which livelihoods are considered 'sustainable' if they can be maintained without external inputs, and are sufficiently robust to withstand external shocks. Applying this understanding to contexts of refugee or migrant return, we could reasonably ask whether return increases or decreases reliance on external inputs, principally humanitarian and development aid, in the medium term, and whether it makes economic, social and political systems more or less vulnerable to shocks.

If such a framework is adopted, a number of new questions arise, several of which are quite pertinent in the context of post-conflict reconstruction. First, large-scale return of refugees may bring with it additional external inputs, in the form of reconstruction aid, risking an increase in dependency on such

inputs. However, it may also cut off financial inputs from other sources, notably the remittances sent by refugees to their families from overseas. Here, there is a difficult definitional point, since such remittances could be considered an 'external input', and hence something which is inherently 'unsustainable' -- although increasingly migration, and the remittances sent by migrants, are coming to be regarded as a fairly 'normal' livelihood strategy for many poorer households in the developing world.¹ For example, in countries of emigration, remittances can provide substantial contributions to GDP; more than one and a half times the value of exports in Albania, for example, or 2.5 times the sum of the average wages of all members of a family (King and Vullnetari 2003: 47-48). Twelve countries in the World Bank's top 20 recipients of worker's remittances receive remittances worth over 10 percent of GDP (Ratha 2003a). In addition, we might usefully consider the extent to which the return of refugees either diversifies livelihood options for the population as a whole, or makes them more narrow and vulnerable to shocks. For example, we have seen how refugee return could be particularly valuable in terms of promoting sustainability by opening up economic, social or cultural linkages with former countries of asylum that could help the home country to withstand shocks. However, for such linkages to be effective, a measure of 're-migration' of returnees is necessary -- something that is conspicuously absent in most voluntary return programmes.

7 INFLUENCING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF RETURN

The study conducted on voluntary return in Bosnia and Kosovo by the University of Sussex was based on an extremely small sample of around 30 returnees to each country, and included Bosnians, in particular, who had returned up to five years previously. However, some interesting associations emerged (Table 3). Although these do not show what causes sustainability, they do point to areas worth researching.

¹ Ratha (2003) describes workers' remittances as a 'stable form of development finance'. See Ratha, D. 2003.

Table 3: Variables that May Influence the Sustainability of Return

Factors that Influence Sustainability	Key Variables from Survey
Characteristics of returnees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Gender
Experiences before exile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-war accommodation • Pre-war education • Pre-war employment status • Pre-war job • Previous migration history • Received remittances pre-war
Experiences in country of asylum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether exile was alone or with family • Whether language learned in asylum country • Whether educated in country asylum • Whether children at school in asylum country • Income in asylum country • Employment in asylum country • Discrimination in asylum country • Feelings in asylum country • Perceived value of experience abroad
Public policy on asylum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal status in asylum country • Accommodation in asylum country
Conditions of return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether return was to pre-war place of residence • Whether return was alone or with family • Ability to bring back assets and belongings • Receipt of return assistance • Receipt of reconstruction assistance • Follow-up from return organisation • Whether assets (i.e. house, land) regained on return
The decision to return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to return • Reasons for return • Sources of information about return

Source: (Black, Koser and Munk 2004) Field data.

For example, voluntary return, employment, training or education in the country of destination and return and reintegration assistance all contribute to sustainability. Voluntary return is found to be more sustainable than involuntary in that those who returned voluntarily were less likely to want to leave again and had higher income levels. Similarly, those who had received training or education had higher income levels, while those who had been employed were less likely to wish to re-emigrate. Amongst those who had received assistance, reported feelings of security were higher. In contrast, those with weaker language skills (i.e. English, German) were more likely to wish to re-emigrate, whilst those who

had gained a secure status abroad were less likely to wish to re-emigrate, but more likely to express fears about their security (Black, Koser and Munk 2004: 38).

The research also found that returnees take the sustainability of their return into consideration when assessing whether to return. The provision of information about the country of origin in decision making about return is complex and 'should not be overstated' (Koser 1998). But the University of Sussex research found that respondents had a 'staged' approach to decision making with one or more issues (usually security) being of prime importance, with other issues (such as the economic situation or incentives to return) gaining importance only where the initial concern was resolved. Koser's earlier research has also identified concerns by returnees for sustainability, with a distinction being drawn between 'reactive' and 'proactive' return. The former is seen as a response to a crisis or problem with conditions in the country of destination and does not rely on information about the country of origin. In contrast, the gathering of information is seen as facilitating 'proactive' return, and aids sustainability as it 'underpins maintenance of household strategy' (Koser 1998).

Amongst key conditions for sustainability, returning migrants arguably need employment, housing, access to public and social services, education, public utilities and security (UNMIK and UNHCR 2003: 3). If access to basic necessities is not available, the failings of reintegration can have ramifications for the wider society. A further risk to already vulnerable communities is that emphasising return can put at risk livelihoods that have come to depend on migrant remittances. UNHCR emphasises its concern with the permanence of return in its review of return to South Eastern Europe. It states that 'greater efforts will have to be made to successfully anchor returnees in their original places of residence, if they are to regain productive livelihoods again' (UNHCR 2004a: 9). This emphasis on 'anchoring' returnees ignores the possibility of further transnational links. Yet in reality, it appears that returnees are interested in maintaining links with countries that hosted them during conflict. Such links may be critical in maintaining the livelihoods of returnees and their families, whilst return may also provide new opportunities for the establishment of transnational ties in countries that were isolated during conflict.

8 CONCLUSION

As return has risen up the international policy agenda, academics and policy observers have reacted with a mixture of enthusiasm, caution, and alarm. Whilst the motives for enthusiasm about return might be questioned in many instances, it remains a powerful symbol of the end of conflict and a return to

normalcy. Yet what happens to returnees, whether return is sustainable, and what contributes to the sustainability of return remain under-explored areas. Although this paper has argued that monitoring sustainability is fraught with difficulties, there remains a case for some effort to be made to follow up on returnees to understand more clearly what influences patterns of re-integration and the broader sustainability of the return process. This might be more feasible in the context of specific and especially small-scale return schemes that are well-resourced, and where such follow-up can fulfil additional functions.

However, it is also important to look beyond the effect of return on individual returnees, to the effects on the wider community and to the longer-term experience of returnees. Not only is it difficult for refugees and other migrants as individuals to simply go 'home', but return to countries of origin can contribute to a spiral of decline, whether through re-igniting conflict, through perpetuating inequality or abuses of rights or through economic hardship, which could stimulate greater levels of forced displacement in the future. In this sense, it is not only a question of how to make return sustainable, but how to make it sustainable on a community-wide basis and not just for individuals.

While it is generally acknowledged that the return of migrants can be beneficial for the development of countries of origins (International Development Committee 2004: 45) it is likely to be so only under specific circumstances. Often return can cause problems for countries of origin, problems which may not be helped by the attitudes and policies of returning countries. Whilst 'returning states tend to frame return as an isolated problem, the solution of which is to be found in international law, countries of origin tend to put it in a wider perspective, involving elements of internal stability, development policies, access to foreign work markets and distributive justice' (Noll 1998: 3). In addition to the potential problems of mass return, it can also be difficult to identify the positive benefits individual migrants can take home (Ghosh 2000). Most programmes designed to encourage return of skilled migrants have had little impact, and more recently flexible programmes for accessing the positive contributions that can be made by diasporas have emerged, such as UNDP's TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals) initiative and IOM's MIDA (Migration for Development in Africa) programme. What these have in common is that they aim to use the skills and financial capacity of the diaspora, and do not require the systematic and permanent return of migrants.

In the end, there remains something of a Catch 22 situation, as one of the most likely ways to encourage return is to ensure that a range of factors in the home country are positive, including

economic factors. Yet returning migrants may have a role to play in creating those positive conditions, given a certain level of permanence in the countries they are returning to. Whether the notion of the 'sustainability' of return represents the best way of conceptualising the success of a return process for individuals or communities remains open to debate. However, this represents an important starting point for dialogue between donors and migrants' countries of origin, and between interior and cooperation/development ministries, each with different perspectives on how 'success' can best be judged.

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