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FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

“Strengthen national and local systems to support the effective socio-economic integration of returnees in the Western Balkans”

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Project/outcome Information		
Project/outcome title	Strengthen National and Local Systems for the Socio-Economic Integration of Returnees in the Western Balkans	
Project Number	IPA/2020/420-517	
Corporate outcome and output	Outcome: To enhance the capacity of Western Balkan authorities at central and local level to implement successful returnee reintegration policies and respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable returnees Outputs: Output 1. Local returnee reintegration strategies are developed with selected municipalities Output 2. Elements of local returnee reintegration strategies are implemented in selected municipalities, including innovative activities on livelihoods, skills building etc. Output 3. Significant number of urgent administrative issues faced by returnees are addressed	
Country	Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia	
Region	Western Balkans	
Date project document signed	September 12, 2020	
Project dates	Start	Planned end
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Evaluation information		
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Final/midterm review/ other	Final Evaluation	
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	October 15, 2020	December 31, 2024
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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACD	Active Community Development
ALB	Albania
ALMMs	Active Labour Market Measures
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CBO	Community -based organisation
COE	Council of Europe
CRM	Common Regional Market
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EC	European Commission
ESA	Employment Service Agency
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
EVLC	Empowering the Vulnerable Local Communities in Albania
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
LAPs	Local Action Plans
LSPPs	Local Social Protection Plans
LMCs	Local Migration Councils
MKD	North Macedonia
MNG	Montenegro
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MSPDY	Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth
NAES	National Agency for Employment and Skills
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NOEP	National Operational Employment Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ROMACTED	Joint program of the CoE and the EU, aimed at promoting the socio-economic inclusion of Roma communities through enhanced local governance
ROMALB	Monitoring and reporting electronic system to collect data related to the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians
RRC	Roma Resource Center
RRR Project	Regional Returnee Reintegration Project
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRB	Serbia
TACSO3	Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations Phase 3

ToR	Terms of Reference
TR	Türkiye
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBs	Western Balkans
WB	World Bank
XK	Kosovo

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This final evaluation examines the project "**Strengthen National and Local Systems to Support the Effective Socio-Economic Integration of Returnees in the Western Balkans**", implemented by UNDP and funded by the European Union and UNDP. The project aimed to address critical socio-economic challenges faced by returnees, particularly vulnerable Roma communities, in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. These challenges included unemployment, systemic exclusion, limited access to services, and lack of documentation.

Purpose and Objectives of the Evaluation

The evaluation was conducted to assess the project's performance, results, and sustainability, and to provide evidence-based recommendations for future programming. Its objectives include evaluating how effectively the project met the reintegration needs of returnees and its alignment with national and EU priorities. The evaluation also identifies lessons learned to inform the design of future interventions. The primary audience includes UNDP, the European Commission, national and local governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders involved in migration and inclusion policy and programming.

Evaluation Approach and Methods

The evaluation applied the OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability) improved by cross-cutting themes such as gender equality, human rights, and social inclusion. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating qualitative and quantitative analyses to ensure a comprehensive assessment:

- **Document Review:** Analysis of project documents, monitoring reports, and policy frameworks.
- **Stakeholder Consultations:** Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with over 100 stakeholders, including returnees, local authorities, EUDs, CoE, NGOs, and UNDP staff.
- **Case Studies and Field Observations:** Detailed case studies provided insights into project impacts at municipal and individual levels.
- **Triangulation:** Data from multiple sources was cross-referenced to enhance reliability and validity.

The evaluation focused on nine municipalities across the three countries, strategically selected for their concentration of returnees and their unique reintegration challenges.

Key Findings

1. Relevance:

The project effectively aligned with national and EU priorities for Roma inclusion and migration management. It addressed critical gaps in reintegration policies and provided targeted support to vulnerable groups, particularly Roma women and youth.

2. Effectiveness:

The project delivered key outputs as planned, including:

- Local Action Plans integrating reintegration strategies into municipal systems.
- Vocational training programs tailored to market needs, enabling participants to secure employment or start small businesses.
- Improved access to essential services, such as education, healthcare, and legal aid, particularly through partnerships with NGOs.

3. Efficiency:

Efficient resource utilization was demonstrated through multi-stakeholder collaboration. Despite challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, the project adapted with innovative solutions, such as online training and digital service provisions.

4. Impact:

The project significantly improved socio-economic outcomes for beneficiaries. Employment rates among returnees increased, and small business initiatives advanced economic independence. Community engagement campaigns reduced stigma and promoted inclusion for Roma returnees.

5. Sustainability:

Institutional capacity-building, such as integrated case management systems and the promotion of social contracting models, ensures the sustainability of project outcomes. Municipalities are better equipped to address the needs of returnees beyond the project's duration. Notably, the project has introduced systemic changes that address the specific challenges of Roma and returnees, whose successful activation in the labor market requires significant social investment in adult education and vocational training programs. These efforts, integrated into national education institutions and employment policies, help overcome critical barriers

Conclusions

The project successfully addressed systemic barriers faced by returnees, demonstrating a replicable model for socio-economic reintegration. However, challenges such as limited institutional capacity and systemic discrimination persist, requiring continued investment and coordination.

Recommendations

The UNDP Regional Office plays a critical role in advancing regional coherence and scalability while aligning interventions with socio-economic and migration priorities in the WB. Key recommendations for the next phase include developing a regional framework emphasizing economic inclusion in green and digital sectors, scaling successful models like multifunctional centers, strengthening digital literacy and inclusion, engaging diaspora networks for economic growth, and enhancing regional coordination and advocacy. Country-specific recommendations focus on integrating interventions into local governance frameworks to ensure sustainability: In Albania, efforts should prioritize strengthening

municipal capacities, expanding green and digital vocational training, and empowering marginalized entrepreneurs. In North Macedonia, building on systemic education reforms, establishing additional resource centers, and improving digital access are essential. In Serbia, securing sustainable funding for LAPs on migration, expanding social entrepreneurship, and promoting inclusive governance are key. Together, these actions will ensure sustained impact, scalability, and alignment with national and regional priorities.

2. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The evaluation of the *Strengthen National and Local Systems to Support the Effective Socio-Economic Integration of Returnees in the Western Balkans* (RRR Project) was conducted to assess its performance, outcomes, and sustainability. The primary purpose is to ensure accountability to

stakeholders, including the UNDP and the European Union (EU), by evaluating how well the project has achieved its stated objectives and contributed to the socio-economic reintegration of returnees, particularly Roma communities, in Albania (ALB), North Macedonia (MKD) and Serbia (SRB). The evaluation also aims to document lessons learned and provide actionable recommendations for refining reintegration programming and scaling successful practices. Conducted as the project approaches its conclusion, the evaluation provides a timely opportunity to reflect on achievements, address challenges, and inform future programming and policy reforms.

The Western Balkans (WBs) have experienced significant migration flows over recent decades, driven by economic instability, conflict, and political transitions. Many returnees face challenges reintegrating into their communities, including unemployment, social exclusion, and systemic barriers such as lack of documentation and access to services. This project was designed to address these challenges, with a specific focus on the needs of Roma communities, who are significantly affected by poverty, discrimination, and limited opportunities for socio-economic advancement.

As part of UNDP's broader commitment to sustainable development and inclusive governance, the RRR Project aligns with global and regional priorities, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the EU and Western Balkans Roma Inclusion Agenda. The project is an integral component of UNDP's inclusive growth portfolio, which seeks to enhance the socio-economic resilience of vulnerable populations, promote human rights, and strengthen institutional capacities for inclusive development across the region.

The evaluation addressed key questions based on the OECD-DAC criteria to provide a comprehensive assessment. These questions were designed to evaluate:

- The relevance of the project in addressing the socio-economic needs of returnees and its alignment with national and EU priorities.
- The effectiveness and efficiency of project activities, including reintegration strategies and vocational training programs.
- The impact of the project on returnees' access to services, employability, and social inclusion.
- The sustainability and adaptability of project outcomes, ensuring long-term benefits for returnees and their communities.

2.1. Primary Audience / Users of the Evaluation

The findings and recommendations of the evaluation are intended for the following stakeholders:

Users	Findings and recommendations of the evaluation are intended
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UNDP	To refine reintegration strategies, assess the quality of implementation, and guide future project design and programming.
European Union (EU)	To evaluate the alignment of the project with Roma inclusion and migration strategies, assess the return on its financial and strategic investment, and support future funding decisions.
National and Local Governments	To improve policy frameworks, strengthen institutional capacities, and enhance service delivery mechanisms for returnees and Roma communities.
Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	To strengthen their roles as implementation partners, improve collaboration with stakeholders, and address service delivery gaps.
Development Partners and Donors	To leverage the findings for coordinated actions and identify synergies in migration and reintegration efforts.
Returnees and Roma Communities	As indirect beneficiaries, their socio-economic conditions and access to services are expected to improve based on the evaluation's recommendations.

2.2. The Intervention Being Evaluated

The project addresses systemic socio-economic challenges faced by returnees, including unemployment, lack of access to services, limited documentation, and social exclusion. The project's objectives include:

- *Developing and implementing tailored local reintegration strategies in nine municipalities across ALB, MKD, and SRB.*
- *Providing vocational training, entrepreneurial support, and livelihood opportunities to improve employability.*
- *Facilitating access to healthcare, education and legal documentation for returnees.*
- *Strengthening the institutional capacities of local governments and service providers to ensure sustainable reintegration solutions.*

By integrating a gender-sensitive and inclusive approach, the project aims to promote equity and ensure that vulnerable groups, particularly Roma communities, benefit equitably from its interventions. The evaluation assesses how effectively these efforts addressed the needs of returnees while identifying best practices and lessons learned to inform future programs.

The evaluation assessed the project's ToC to determine the extent to which the assumed causal pathways between interventions and desired outcomes held true. The ToC was structured around the central premise that addressing systemic barriers through tailored reintegration strategies, and direct support for returnees would lead to increased employability, improved social integration, and strengthened institutional frameworks in partner municipalities.

The key assumptions underlying the ToC included:

1. **Institutional strengthening:** If local authorities and service providers receive adequate capacity-building and resources, they will be able to deliver integrated, effective reintegration services.
2. **Skills development:** If returnees gain vocational training and entrepreneurial support tailored to market demands, they will be more likely to secure sustainable employment or self-employment opportunities.
3. **Access to services:** If administrative barriers, such as lack of documentation, are addressed, returnees will have greater access to essential services, improving their social and economic well-being.
4. **Community integration:** If social cohesion initiatives are implemented, the stigma and discrimination faced by vulnerable groups, particularly Roma returnees, will diminish, thus encouraging inclusive community development.

The evaluation examined whether these causal pathways were validated by the project's implementation and outcomes.

Validation of the Theory of Change

The evaluation confirmed that many aspects of the ToC were successfully operationalized, with key interventions leading to measurable progress. For example:

- **Capability strengthening of local authorities:** Evidence shows that municipal-level capacity-building efforts, such as establishing migration support units and developing reintegration strategies, enhanced institutional readiness to address returnee needs. However, sustainability remains a challenge in municipalities with limited budgets and resources.
- **Vocational training and employment support:** Programs tailored to local market demands demonstrated a positive impact on employability, with returnees who completed training reporting higher rates of job placement. However, external factors like economic downturns and regional labour shortages influenced the success of these efforts.
- **Access to essential services:** Addressing documentation challenges significantly improved returnees' ability to access healthcare, education, and social protection services. This was especially impactful for Roma returnees, who faced combined barriers.

- **Social cohesion:** Community engagement initiatives reduced stigma and increased collaboration between returnees and host communities, promoting a more inclusive environment

Implications for Future Programming

The evaluation highlighted areas where the ToC could be refined for future interventions:

1. **Enhance contextual adaptation:** While the ToC assumed uniform pathways to success, varying socio-economic and political contexts across municipalities require more flexible, localized approaches.
2. **Strengthen feedback mechanisms:** Regular monitoring and adaptation of interventions based on real-time feedback from beneficiaries can improve outcomes and address emerging challenges.
3. **Address external factors:** Greater consideration should be given to external influences, such as labour market dynamics and political instability, which can affect the effectiveness of interventions.
4. **Scale successful models:** Proven interventions, such as one-stop-shop reintegration centres and targeted vocational training, should be scaled up and replicated in other regions, with adjustments based on local needs.

By evaluating the validity and outcomes of the ToC, this analysis provides critical insights to inform future project designs and enhance the sustainability and inclusivity of reintegration efforts.

3. EVALUATION SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

3.1. Evaluation scope

The evaluation covers the project duration from its inception in October 2020 until its anticipated conclusion in December 2024. It provides a comprehensive review of the project's implementation, results, and impact across ALB, MKD, and SRB. The evaluation focuses on nine municipalities: Berat, Devoll, and Fier in ALB; Prilep, Shuto Orizari, and Shtip in MKD; and Bujanovac, Novi Sad, and Valjevo in SRB. These locations were strategically selected based on the concentration of returnees and the unique reintegration challenges they face as well as taking into account the geographical, ethnic, social and gender-based criteria.

The evaluation is assessing the effectiveness of the socio-economic integration models developed by the project, analysing their impact on enhanced employability, skills development, and access to social services for returnees. It has examined the capacity-building efforts aimed at improving the ability of local governments to support returnees, as these represent the primary focus of the action. The evaluation is also considering the role of policy advocacy in influencing local migration and reintegration policies, particularly in ensuring that returnees are integrated into existing social safety nets and that systemic barriers, such as lack of documentation, are adequately addressed.

The evaluation examines the direct support provided to returnees, including access to vocational training, employment opportunities, and psycho-social counselling. Cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality, human rights, and social cohesion, have been evaluated to determine how effectively the project addressed the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including Roma returnees and women.

Stakeholder engagement is an important part of the evaluation process. Key stakeholders include national and local governments, service providers (e.g., employment agencies, social centres), CSOs, educational and training institutions, private sector partners, and returnees. Local authorities have provided insights into how the project supported reintegration policies, while CSOs will reflect on their role in supporting vulnerable groups like the Roma community. Educational and training institutions have shared their experiences in delivering skills programs, and private sector partners have provided perspectives on job placements, internships, and entrepreneurship support. Success stories have been shared anonymously, highlighting individuals who, with the support of the project, have successfully completed adult education programs and obtained certificates. These achievements have not only enabled the returnees to pursue employment and self-employment opportunities but also equipped them with valuable IT skills, communication, and technical expertise, which will be instrumental in shaping their future paths.

The evaluation has also explored how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the project's implementation, stakeholder collaboration, and service delivery. It has assessed the innovative measures adopted by the project to adapt to these challenges and their effectiveness in achieving project objectives.

The evaluation will not include explicitly the capacity building activities for central level institutions, as these were addressed through a separate initiative led by the World Bank (WB). However, indirect impacts on central-level policies and frameworks will be considered where relevant.

3.2. Evaluation objectives

The primary objective of this evaluation is to assess the performance, results, and overall impact of the RRR Project and generate actionable recommendations for future programming. Beyond evaluating the project's effectiveness and efficiency, the assessment seeks to provide evidence-based insights that enhance reintegration policies and services for vulnerable returnee populations, particularly Roma communities, across ALB, MKD and SRB.

The evaluation aims to equip stakeholders with knowledge and strategies that address systemic barriers and enhance institutional frameworks, by capturing lessons learned and identifying best practices. These recommendations will serve as a foundation for:

- *Strengthening the capacities of local governments and service providers to deliver effective reintegration support and more broadly inclusion of vulnerable groups.*
- *Advancing Roma inclusion policies and socio-economic empowerment initiatives across the WBs.*
- *Promoting scalable and sustainable reintegration models that align with EU strategic frameworks and UNDP's broader development goals.*

The evaluation has clearly directed its attention on improving UNDP's strategic orientation for reintegration programming by offering informed perspectives on the effectiveness of its implementation strategies, operational partnerships, and responsiveness to the dynamic needs of beneficiaries. Specific emphasis will be placed on understanding how the project:

- Enhanced socio-economic opportunities for returnees through skills development, entrepreneurship support, and employment initiatives.
- Contributed to social cohesion and human rights promotion, particularly addressing the vulnerabilities of vulnerable groups such as Roma women and youth.
- Adapted to unforeseen challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensured the continuity of essential services for returnees during periods of disruption.

At last, the evaluation aims to inform decision-making processes at national, regional, and international levels by offering insights into the long-term adaptability and resilience of reintegration frameworks. It will highlight how reintegration initiatives can contribute to broader regional goals, including poverty reduction, social inclusion, and sustainable development. The findings and recommendations will be shared with UNDP, the EU as the primary funder, to encourage collaborative efforts that advance inclusive growth and sustainable reintegration.

3.3. Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation applies the **OECD-DAC criteria**—relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, improved with cross-cutting themes and coherence to ensure a comprehensive

assessment of the RRR project's performance. These criteria provide a structured framework for evaluating the project's alignment with its objectives, the outcomes achieved, and its overall contribution to reintegration efforts in the WBs. Each criterion is tailored to reflect the project's context, challenges, and opportunities. The evaluation questions aim to examine the extent to which the project facilitated the socio-economic reintegration of vulnerable groups, particularly Roma communities, while also identifying policy and implementation challenges encountered.

Across the DAC criteria, a total of 13 evaluation questions (EQs) formed the foundation of the evaluation report. Additionally, the following questions have been incorporated under the respective EQ headings:

Relevance:

This criterion assessed how well the project's design, objectives, and activities align with the needs of returnees, national reintegration priorities, and broader EU strategies, particularly regarding Roma inclusion and migration policies. Key questions addressed include: To what extent are the project's objectives aligned with the reintegration needs of returnees, particularly vulnerable groups such as Roma communities? How effectively does the project's approach align with the national policy frameworks of ALB, MKD, and SRB, and their respective government priorities for reintegration? How well does the project align with EU policies and frameworks, such as the EU Strategy on Roma Inclusion and other EU migration strategies? Is the project appropriately tailored to the cultural, social, and economic contexts of the target regions and municipalities? To what extent were gender-specific and human rights considerations incorporated into the project's design and implementation, especially in addressing the needs of Roma and other vulnerable groups?

Effectiveness:

This criterion evaluated the project's success in achieving its intended outputs and outcomes, focusing on socio-economic reintegration, improved employability, and access to essential social services for returnees. Key questions examined include: To what extent have the project's specific outputs such as reintegration strategies, vocational training programs, and employment support been delivered as planned? How effective has the project been in improving the employability of returnees, including their participation in vocational training and access to job opportunities? Has the project contributed to enhancing returnees' access to essential services such as education and social protection? How well has the project addressed the specific challenges faced by Roma returnees and other vulnerable groups, ensuring they benefit from the services provided? How effectively has the project integrated cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, human rights, and social cohesion into its activities?

Efficiency:

This criterion assessed whether the project's financial, human, and operational resources were utilized to maximize the achievement of outcomes. Key questions included: Were the project's activities implemented in a timely manner, and were there any delays or bottlenecks that impacted project delivery? To what extent did the coordination between UNDP, local authorities, civil society organizations (CSOs), and private sector partners contribute to efficient project implementation? How

effectively was risk management applied to address operational or logistical challenges during the project? To what extent did the project adjust its objectives and interventions in response to emerging challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in meeting the urgent needs of returnees during this period?

Impact:

This criterion focused on the broader changes brought about by the project, both positive and negative, for returnees and their communities. Key questions investigated include: What significant changes in socio-economic conditions have been experienced by returnees as a direct result of the project's interventions, such as employment status, access to services, and social integration? How did the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic affect the project's ability to create positive changes for returnees, particularly in terms of employment and access to essential services? Were there any unintended outcomes of the project, either positive or negative, that were not anticipated during the planning stages? How has the project impacted local institutions and service providers' capacities to support returnees in the long term? Has the project contributed to broader reintegration policies at the national level? What role has the project played in advancing Roma inclusion efforts in partner countries, particularly in reducing discrimination and improving access to services?

Sustainability:

This criterion assessed the extent to which the benefits of the project are expected to endure beyond its completion and the degree to which national and local institutions are prepared to continue supporting returnees. Key questions included: Are the outcomes achieved by the project likely to be sustained after its conclusion, particularly regarding the institutional frameworks and support systems established for returnees? How well are the local governments equipped to continue delivering services and support for returnees, particularly in the absence of external funding? Have the capacity-building efforts for local authorities and service providers ensured a lasting improvement in implementing reintegration policies and services? To what extent have the social and economic benefits achieved by returnees, such as employment, access to services, and social integration, been sustainable, and what factors will influence the continuation of these benefits? How sustainable are the gender-inclusive practices and mechanisms for addressing cross-cutting issues such as human rights implemented by the project?

Cross Cutting Themes:

Throughout the evaluation, cross-cutting themes including gender equality, human rights, social inclusion, and disability inclusion were critically examined to ensure they were appropriately integrated into the project's design and implementation. Key questions explored include: To what extent did the project address the specific needs of women returnees, particularly in accessing employment and social services? How well were human rights principles, particularly the rights of vulnerable groups such as Roma returnees, integrated into project activities? Did the project contribute to supporting social cohesion between returnees and host communities, reducing discrimination, and promoting a more inclusive social environment? While the RRR project did not

originally focus on disability inclusion, have there been any secondary impacts on disability inclusion? What lessons or recommendations can inform future integration of disability inclusion in similar initiatives?

Coherence:

This criterion assessed how well the project's design and implementation align with other ongoing or past initiatives, policies, and efforts related to reintegration, Roma inclusion, and migration in the WB. Key questions addressed include: How well does the project align with other national and regional reintegration initiatives, including those led by government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations? To what extent has the project coordinated effectively with other programs aimed at Roma inclusion and reintegration in the WBs, and how has this coordination influenced project outcomes? Did the project complement existing policies and frameworks, such as national Roma inclusion strategies, or did it duplicate efforts already underway by other actors? How has the project promoted synergies with other relevant UNDP initiatives or those funded by international donors to support sustainable reintegration and reduce overlapping activities?

4. EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODS

The evaluation integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the project's outcomes, processes, and impacts from multiple perspectives. This approach aligns with OECD-DAC criteria, ensuring relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability are thoroughly assessed. It integrates cross-cutting themes, most notably gender equality, social inclusion, and human rights, all of which adhering to UNEG Norms and Standards and the principle of "Leaving No One Behind" (LNOB). The selected methodology ensures inclusivity and responsiveness to the needs of vulnerable groups, particularly Roma populations, women, and youth.

4.1. Evaluation Approach

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the project's outcomes, processes, and impacts. This approach addressed the evaluation's objectives within time and resource constraints while enabling data triangulation to validate findings and enhance credibility. The ToC guided the evaluation, mapping the logical pathways between interventions and outcomes, with a specific focus on addressing the needs of vulnerable groups such as Roma populations, women, and youth.

4.2. Data Sources

The evaluation draws on a diverse range of data sources to ensure comprehensive analysis. These include:

- **Document Reviews:** Annual progress reports, reports and documents on the reintegration of Roma returnees in the WBs, project-specific monitoring data, progress updates, project timelines, activity logs and policy-related documents to establish a foundational understanding of the intervention.
- **Primary Data Collection:** Input from UNDP Country offices, EUD and CoE in all three countries, then stakeholders such as local and national government representatives, CSOs, and returnees, ensuring stakeholder perspectives directly inform findings.

4.3. Sampling and Sampling Frame

A purposive and stratified sampling strategy was used to ensure representation across diverse stakeholder groups. The sample included returnees (with a focus on Roma communities), local government officials, service providers, and other stakeholders from the nine target municipalities. This strategy ensured diversity by incorporating participants based on gender, socio-economic status, geographical location. To address logistical and situational challenges, most meetings were held in the municipalities, involving not only representatives from the municipality but also returnees, ensuring comprehensive engagement with all relevant stakeholders.

4.4. Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

Data collection methods were carefully tailored to the evaluation's objectives and stakeholder needs:

- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Capturing in-depth perspectives from stakeholders, including returnees, UNDP staff, and local authorities.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Facilitating dialogue among beneficiaries to explore shared experiences and collective insights.
- **Field Observations:** Providing contextual understanding of infrastructure quality, service delivery, and community dynamics.

4.5. Stakeholder Participation

Stakeholder participation was central to the evaluation, encouraging inclusivity and enhancing credibility. The evaluation included consultations with UNDP Country offices (ALB, MKD and SRB) and UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub, government officials, CSO representatives, educational and training institutions, and returnees. Local authorities provided insights into how the project supported reintegration policies, while CSOs shared their experiences as implementers, particularly in assisting vulnerable groups such as the Roma community. Educational and vocational training institutions offered perspectives on delivering skills programs to returnees. The number of women interviewed

was higher than men, reflecting their significant representation in the evaluation process and providing valuable insights into the project's impacts on gender dynamics.

4.6. Limitations and Mitigation Measures

Although the inception report identified potential challenges in data collection, such as difficulties in reaching vulnerable groups like Roma returnees and inconsistencies in local government capacities across ALB, MKD, and SRB, these risks did not occur during the evaluation. Instead, the process was marked by excellent cooperation with the UNDP country teams and the municipal representatives in all three countries. They have demonstrated a thorough understanding of the project activities and provided valuable insights that significantly contributed to the evaluation. Data collection from returnees was also conducted without difficulties. Interviews were held in various settings, including municipal offices, CSO premises and locations where returnees had successfully established their own businesses, offering a well-rounded view of the project's impact. Hybrid methods, such as online interviews, were effectively used to engage stakeholders facing logistical or scheduling constraints, ensuring inclusivity and comprehensive data collection. These factors facilitated a smooth evaluation process and produced reliable and insightful findings that reflect the project's achievements.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The evaluation of the RRR Project used a structured and systematic data analysis methodology, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive assessment. The analysis addressed the evaluation questions, ensuring alignment with the OECD-DAC criteria and incorporating cross-cutting themes such as gender equality, human rights, and social inclusion.

The analytical framework was guided by the ToC and OECD-DAC criteria. The ToC provided a conceptual roadmap for assessing the causal pathways between project activities and intended outcomes, particularly for vulnerable groups such as Roma returnees. The OECD-DAC criteria, including relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, provided a structured lens for assessing the project's performance.

Quantitative data were analysed using statistical methods to summarize and interpret key socio-economic indicators. Descriptive statistics summarized socio-economic indicators, including employment rates and access to services among returnees. Comparative analysis examined differences across demographic groups, including gender, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, as well as variations across municipalities. Trend analysis, where longitudinal data were available,

assessed progress toward achieving project objectives and highlighted disparities or improvements over time.

Qualitative data were collected from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and field observations. Case studies were developed to provide deeper insights into specific municipalities and returnee experiences, offering illustrative examples of localized impacts. Field observations enriched the analysis with real-time insights into service delivery, community dynamics, and infrastructure quality.

Triangulation was essential to ensuring reliability and validity. Data from interviews, document reviews, and field observations were cross-referenced to identify consistencies and discrepancies. Stakeholder consultations during field visits validated preliminary findings, allowing for refinements and minimizing potential biases. A data quality assurance process ensured completeness, consistency, and accuracy across all datasets.

Field visits contributed critical qualitative and contextual data. Observations were carefully documented to capture understandings on infrastructure quality, service delivery, and community dynamics, ensuring consistency and comprehensiveness in recording key findings. Semi-structured interviews with returnees, local authorities, and CSOs, as well as focus group discussions, captured diverse stakeholder perspectives. Field visit insights were triangulated with data provided from the interviews with the stakeholders and other sources, enriching the analysis and strengthening the reliability of the findings.

The analysis directly addressed the evaluation questions by linking findings to the OECD-DAC criteria. Quantitative data provided measurable outcomes such as employment improvements and access to services, while qualitative data contextualized these findings within broader systemic and institutional frameworks. Triangulation and validation ensured the credibility of answers to questions on sustainability, impact, and relevance.

6. FINDINGS

Relevance

EQ 1. To what extent are the project's objectives aligned with the reintegration needs of returnees, particularly vulnerable groups such as Roma communities?

Albania

By addressing economic, social, and systemic barriers, the project's objectives are strongly aligned with the reintegration needs of returnees, particularly vulnerable groups and the Roma communities. Roma returnees face combined challenges, including limited access to education, high unemployment rates,

housing insecurity, social exclusion, and difficulties in navigating bureaucratic systems. The project tackled these issues through an integrated approach that combined vocational training, employment facilitation, social service access, and community inclusion. To address the economic exclusion of Roma returnees, the project provided tailored vocational training in fields such as tailoring, cooking, and digital skills, aligned with local market demands. In partner municipalities these programs equipped Roma participants with practical skills that enhanced their employability and enabled them to secure jobs or start small businesses, such as soap production and food processing. Financial grants and mentorship for self-employment further empowered Roma returnees, thus advancing financial independence and promoting integration into the local economy.

Access to essential social services has been a critical focus of the project, given the significant barriers faced by Roma communities in obtaining healthcare, education, and legal documentation. The Project provided tailored support, addressed issues like access to health services. Partnerships with NGOs facilitated legal assistance for obtaining identification documents, enabling Roma returnees to access public services. These efforts were institutionalized through LAPs adopted by municipalities, ensuring sustained and structured support for Roma returnees within local governance frameworks. Social inclusion was another keystone of the project, as many Roma returnees face discrimination that hinders their community reintegration. The establishment of multifunctional community centers in areas like Devoll created safe spaces where Roma returnees could access training, participate in social activities, and build support networks. Community events and campaigns help reduce stigma, nurture a sense of belonging, and encouraged broader acceptance within their communities and this too has been prioritised.

Addressing education gaps among Roma returnees has been an integral to the project's approach. Adult education programs enabled Roma participants to complete basic schooling, as this is clearly a prerequisite for formal employment, while training in digital literacy prepares them for modern labour markets. These efforts tackled long-standing systemic barriers and empowered participants to start the process of easing poverty in which they have been stuck. The alignment of the project's objectives with Roma needs has been reinforced through collaboration with local governance structures and NGOs. LAPs institutionalized support mechanisms for Roma returnees, while partnerships with the NGOs ensured culturally sensitive and tailored interventions. These systemic and wholesome efforts embedded Roma-specific reintegration measures into local policies, potentially increasing the sustainability prospects. The project tackled economic exclusion, limited services, social stigma, and education gaps, equipping Roma returnees with tools and opportunities for reintegration and addressing both immediate needs and systemic barriers for long-term inclusion.

North Macedonia

The project effectively addressed the reintegration needs of returnees, focusing on vulnerable Roma groups in MKD. It tackled key challenges like economic marginalization, limited access to social services, and systemic exclusion through vocational training and education programs. Adult education initiatives in municipalities such as Prilep, Suto Orizari and Shtip enabled Roma participants to complete elementary schooling, a requirement for formal employment and government training opportunities. The project also removed barriers to healthcare and legal documentation, with NGO

partnerships providing administrative help and psycho-social support for accessing essential services like schooling. Social inclusion efforts have been well designed. A case in point is the multifunctional center in Shuto Orizari, which has promoted community engagement and helped reduce stigma, mostly by encouraging interaction with the other ethnic groups and the community at large, via acceptance through shared services and activities.

In addition to this, institutional collaboration was central to the project direction, as highlighted by the creation of LAPs that integrated reintegration measures into municipal systems. The Spanish Active Community Development ACCEDER methodology actively involved Roma communities in decision-making, ensuring culturally sensitive approaches that addressed their specific needs. These efforts strengthened the connection with the local governance systems and established sustainable support systems for Roma returnees, focusing on education, employment, and social inclusion. What's more, vocational training and small business initiatives provided opportunities for self-employment and skill development, supported by psychosocial assistance to sustain participation. Partnerships with local governments and CSOs in this respect was also important, as local platforms embedded in municipal structures ensuring Roma-specific concerns were included in the policymaking process.

Serbia

The project in SRB successfully addressed the reintegration needs of Roma returnees by tackling systemic challenges and socio-economic barriers through targeted, localized strategies. A key focus was providing tailored vocational training programs to overcome obstacles like limited education, unemployment, and discrimination.

In addition to employment support, the project focused on addressing critical gaps in accessing social services. Roma returnees often encounter challenges in acquiring essential documentation, such as personal identification and health insurance, which are prerequisites for accessing public services. Through the establishment of Local Migration Councils (LMCs), the project created platforms that streamlined service delivery and facilitated direct support to returnees. For instance, these councils, integrated into municipal frameworks, provided a means for addressing immediate needs in relation to legal aid, healthcare access, and education enrolment for children. In a wider framework, the involvement of NGOs ensured culturally sensitive outreach and support, making services more accessible and effective **institutional capacity building** has been another area where the project has made substantial progress. This has fostered better intersectoral collaboration, ensuring that a wide range of stakeholders work together to address the comprehensive needs of returnees and Roma communities.

Regional Dimension

The project effectively addressed the reintegration needs of returnees, particularly vulnerable Roma communities, through a coordinated regional approach across three countries. It tackled common challenges like unemployment, limited education, and restricted access to social services with a comprehensive framework tailored to the specific needs of Roma returnees while driving long-term systemic changes. Vocational training programs equipped participants with skills in IT, tailoring, and entrepreneurship, while adult education initiatives helped close education gaps that hindered

employability. Mentorship and financial support further enabled returnees to secure formal jobs or start small businesses, promoting economic independence and integration into their communities.

Access to social services was another key focus, with the project breaking down bureaucratic barriers for Roma returnees. Partnerships with NGOs and local governance structures, including LMCs and case management systems, provided critical support in securing legal documents, healthcare, and education for children. Community engagement initiatives, such as campaigns to reduce stigma and promote inclusion, strengthened the social integration of Roma returnees. The regional approach allowed successful practices to be adapted across countries, enhancing the overall impact and sustainability of reintegration efforts.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The added value for the EU in supporting the reintegration of returnees lies in its many-sided benefits. One of them is that the RRR project reduces migratory pressures on EU borders and economies by providing sustainable livelihoods and social inclusion opportunities in their home countries. This aligns with the EU's strategic goal of managing migration through external partnerships, reducing irregular migration, and ensuring that the rights of migrants are upheld in line with international standards. The project also fulfils the EU's human rights and equality commitments, addressing the socio-economic exclusion of Roma populations, this being a priority in the EU Roma Strategic Framework. It also strengthens institutional capacities in ALB, MKD, and SRB, embedding systemic reforms that align with EU accession requirements, including rule of law, human rights, and social policy chapters. Within the regional framework and cooperation mode, it ensures alignment with EU-aligned policies and governance practices, thus directly supporting the integration of WB countries into the EU, building their readiness to meet accession criteria and enhancing stability and cohesion in the region.

EQ 2. How well does the project align with national strategies in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia related to Roma inclusion and migration?

Albania

The UNDP project in ALB aligns closely with national policy frameworks, particularly the National Migration Strategy (2024) and the Strategy for the Integration of Roma and Egyptian Populations (2021). These strategies highlight reintegration and the socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable groups, with a particular focus on addressing systemic barriers faced by Roma communities.

By incorporating elements from these strategies, the project ensured that its interventions were both nationally relevant and locally driven and impactful at the same time. For example, the project supported municipalities in developing local action plans for reintegration, which were aligned with national strategies and included concrete measures for employment, and social services. Additionally, the project facilitated coordination between local authorities and national agencies, ensuring a unified implementation of reintegration policies. A case in point is the municipality of Devoll, where the

project supported the development of the LAP that integrated key aspects of the National Migration Strategy and the Strategy for the Integration of Roma and Egyptian Populations. This LAP included specific measures including targeted vocational training programs for Roma returnees, access to social services like healthcare and education, and initiatives for securing legal documentation. Besides, the project facilitated collaboration between the municipality and the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), which allowed returnees to enroll in job placement programs and participate in active labour market measures tailored to their needs. This collaborative approach ensured that national policies translated into tangible local actions, directly benefiting vulnerable populations.

Local adaptation was a critical component of the achievement. For instance, the multifunctional centers established in the municipalities of Devoll Berat and Fier not only addressed immediate needs pertaining to legal documentation but also provided long-term support through education and vocational training programs. These centers offered computer literacy courses certified by national authorities, tailoring skills training for women, and afterschool programs for children, creating a holistic support system. This is a good example of how the Albanian national framework influenced project implementation at the local level, ensuring tailored support for Roma communities while promoting sustainable socio-economic inclusion.

The project also collaborated with NGOs to assist Roma returnees in municipalities such as Devoll, Berat and Fier in obtaining essential personal identification documents, such as birth certificates and ID cards. These efforts were crucial for enabling access to healthcare, education, and social welfare programs. The NGOs also facilitated community outreach programs, ensuring that undocumented returnees were identified and supported in navigating complex administrative procedures. This approach aligned closely with ALB's National Migration Strategy, reinforcing the country's commitment to reintegration policies and enabling Roma returnees to rebuild their lives sustainably.

North Macedonia

The project's alignment with MKD's national frameworks, including the National Roma Integration Strategy (2014-2020) and subsequent policy updates, was evident throughout its implementation. These frameworks prioritize the socio-economic inclusion of Roma populations through targeted measures in education, employment, and housing, the last one not explicitly covered by the project.

The project adapted these strategic priorities to the local context by working closely with municipalities of Shuto Orizari, Prilep, and Stip. One example stands out and it concerns the establishment of the Returnee Resource Center (RRC) in Shuto Orizari, which has provided a centralized hub for reintegration services, reflecting the national strategy's emphasis on institutional support for Roma communities. The Shuto Orizari serves as a one-stop hub, offering comprehensive services, including legal aid, employment counselling, and education enrolment for Roma returnees. This has directly addressed priorities outlined in the National Roma Integration Strategy and ensured institutional support for reintegration. In addition, integrated case management services helped beneficiaries in Prilep and Stip navigate challenges like lack of healthcare access, and securing vocational training opportunities. These efforts ensured that local implementation aligned with national goals by providing comprehensive, sustainable solutions tailored to the unique needs of Roma

returnees. Also very relevant, by integrating elements from national strategies into its interventions, the project ensured that local action plans and initiatives were consistent with broader national and local policy goals. The ACD methodology showed this alignment, promoting community engagement and advancing pathways to employment and social inclusion. The ACCEDER methodology is quite important for ensuring project's success, as it helps align local initiatives with national strategies while involving communities in shaping solutions. This approach ensured that Roma returnees had a say in the design of programs, making them more relevant and culturally sensitive. The ACCEDER methodology also helped improve the relationships between Roma communities and local governments. In municipalities like Prilep and Stip, it supported dialogue sessions and community events that brought Roma and non-Roma residents together, reducing stigma and building trust. These efforts made reintegration services, such as legal aid and access to education, more accessible and effective.

Social services access was another critical area of alignment as stipulated in the country's policy framework. Through an integrated case management system, the project facilitated access to healthcare, and education for Roma returnees, addressing the systemic exclusion highlighted in the national strategy. LAPs developed in collaboration with municipalities such as the case of Suto Orizari, institutionalized these efforts, embedding Roma-specific measures into governance frameworks and ensuring long-term impact.

Serbia

In SRB, the project supported EU accession commitments and national priorities, particularly the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma (2016–2025), by turning these goals into practical local actions. The LMCs in the targeted municipalities was an important factor in bringing together local governments, NGOs, and community representatives to include Roma-specific measures in municipal governance. These councils help Roma returnees access essential services such as legal aid for documentation. For instance, they simplified the process of obtaining personal identification documents, a significant barrier for many returnees. Beyond project scope but worth noting, the housing programs also saw progress, with the number of supported housing solutions in Novi Sad increasing from 1 to 5 in the last two years due to cooperation between institutions within the LMC. Additionally, in Bujanovac, the municipality participated in a United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) EU-funded project to build social housing for internally displaced persons (mainly Roma), resettling them from the last collective IDP center. These beneficiaries also received capacity-building support through this UNDP project.

The project complemented its efforts with impactful community campaigns and other programs as the national policy framework clearly accentuates reducing systemic discrimination and promoting social inclusion as key pillars for improving the lives of Roma communities. The campaigns facilitate the process of achieving these objectives by directly addressing societal prejudices and advancing mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma populations. The strategy underlines the importance of changing public perceptions and reducing stigma, which are often significant barriers to Roma integration in areas such as education, employment, and access to services. For example, the LMC in Valjevo organized community events and informational campaigns to increase awareness of available

health, social care, and employment support systems. These events directly engaged 82 returnees through peer-to-peer education and practical support services. Additionally, the innovative campaigns “Move with a Message” had clearly empowered young Roma and returnees through art workshops, including acting and dance. This program engaged participants in sharing messages of inclusion and antidiscrimination, helping to reduce stigma and build community cohesion. Additionally, the establishment of a one-stop shop in Bujanovac, provided tailored employment services to 710 direct beneficiaries, demonstrating a sustainable approach to improving access to essential resources. These efforts reinforced the project’s broader objectives of nurturing social inclusion and empowering Roma communities, as prescribed in the policy framework.

The national frameworks also influenced the project’s focus on social contracting models, which in due course should enable municipalities to engage CSOs in delivering tailored services to returnees and this model will ensure sustainability of services. Meanwhile, in the implementation phase, in Novi Sad, and in partnership with the local government (City of Novi Sad) and the local CSO, the project has supported an establishment of the Returnee Service Center in the Slana Bara Centre, that is providing advisory and mediation support to Roma and returnees. As a result, the project engagement and advocacy with partners, the City of Novi Sad has contributed the premises for work of the Centre as a contribution to sustainable service delivery. Agreements have been signed between CSOs and the City, so that CSOs can continue to use the space to provide services to Roma and returnees at the City's expense well after project end. In Bujanovac, the municipality partnered with a certified CSO to operate a one-stop shop for returnees, providing comprehensive employment services, including job counselling, resume writing assistance, and connections to job placement programs. This one-stop shop served over 710 direct beneficiaries and became a model for integrating local services with national reintegration goals.

Regional Dimension

A recurring theme and key commonality across the project components are its alignment with national strategies while maintaining a regional approach that affects shared priorities and challenges. The focus on Roma inclusion and migration, as outlined in national frameworks, highlights the integration of Roma-specific measures into governance frameworks. LAPs and other outputs were tailored to local contexts but consistently aligned with national goals for social inclusion, access to services, and systemic reform.

A central feature across the region is the use of community engagement and other efforts to address systemic exclusion and promote reintegration. Community campaigns, such as initiatives that used art and cultural events, contributed towards reducing stigma and spreading understanding, directly complementing national policy priorities. These efforts helped bridge the gap between Roma and non-Roma communities, encouraging dialogue and mutual respect while promoting access to essential services like education.

The project’s community campaigns played a contributed to reducing stigma and supporting the national strategy's focus on Roma inclusion. These campaigns used various platforms, including social media, cultural events, and dialogue forums, to challenge stereotypes and raise visibility for Roma and

returnee communities. For example, during the International Roma Day, events highlighted Roma culture and contributions while promoting messages of inclusion and combating discrimination. These messages were improved through UNDP's global social media account, followed by 1.8 million people globally, ensuring wide-reaching impact on Roma-related matters. Initiatives like "Move with a Message" further involved young Roma and returnees in sports, art workshops, such as dance and stage performances, to express themes of inclusion. Such activities provided a platform for self-expression and engaged broader audiences, thus advancing understanding and dialogue and complementing the project's goals by addressing prejudice and creating a more inclusive environment for vulnerable groups.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The EU's added value in supporting this project lies in its alignment with key policy frameworks such as the EU Roma Strategic Framework, the Agenda on Migration, and the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession. By addressing systemic barriers like discrimination, unemployment, and lack of access to services, the project operationalizes EU priorities on human rights, social inclusion, and sustainable reintegration. It advances migration management goals by reducing irregular migration through local reintegration, easing pressure on EU borders and economies. Additionally, it supports WB' alignment with the Acquis Communautaire, particularly Chapters 19 and 23, by advancing governance reforms, improving socio-economic policies, and promoting inclusive economic growth. Through regional cooperation and institutional capacity-building, the project strengthens stability and integration, advancing the EU's role in the accession process and its broader commitment to cohesion and equality.

Effectiveness

EQ3. To what extent have the project's specific outputs, such as reintegration strategies, vocational training programs, and employment support, been delivered as planned?

Albania

The project in ALB delivered its specific outputs largely as planned, focusing on reintegration strategies and economic empowerment for Roma and Egyptian returnees. LAPs were developed and implemented in municipalities such as Devoll, Fier and Berat, committing support mechanisms for employment, social services, and education. These plans were tailored to address the unique vulnerabilities of Roma and Egyptian communities and were supported by coordinated efforts involving NGOs and municipal authorities.

Vocational training programs aligned with local market demands provided participants with skills in cooking, plumbing, and tailoring, among others. For instance, in Devoll, computer training courses resulted in certifications recognized by the national authorities, which were significant for employment opportunities. Multifunctional centers established became hubs for unified services, offering legal aid, educational support, and vocational guidance. The project further supported small business ventures,

including soap production and food processing, enabling participants to transition into self-employment. Local NGOs played a critical role in outreach, helping beneficiaries navigate administrative barriers, such as obtaining identification documents, and advocating for community-driven development initiatives. Challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies and low participation rates among some Roma returnees were mitigated through proactive NGO involvement and municipal support systems. The collaboration between UNDP and municipal governments enhanced the capacity of local authorities to sustain and expand these interventions. The establishment of case management systems allowed for tailored responses to individual needs, contributing to a holistic approach to reintegration.

The quality of the outputs in ALB is notable for their focus on tailoring reintegration initiatives to the local context. The LAPs are seen as a project foundation, ensuring that the needs of returnees, particularly Roma and Egyptian communities, were addressed in a structured and collaborative manner. These plans brought together municipal authorities, NGOs, and other stakeholders to coordinate efforts. The LAPs served as blueprints for delivering reintegration support, such as vocational training, access to education, and social inclusion services. Economic empowerment added another dimension to the project's outputs. The support for small businesses, such as soap production and tourism-related ventures, reflected a deep understanding of the local economic environment.

North Macedonia

The project in MKD successfully delivered its specific outputs related to reintegration strategies, vocational training programs, and employment support, demonstrating alignment with national and local frameworks. The LAPs developed in partnership with municipalities of Shuto Orizari, Prilep, and Stip institutionalized support mechanisms for reintegration and embedded Roma-specific measures into local governance. They systematically addressed key vulnerabilities such as unemployment and lack of access to social services, ensuring Roma returnees were included in municipal policies. The integration of case management systems further streamlined access to essential services like healthcare, education, and legal documentation, which were critical reintegration needs identified for returnees.

Vocational training programs in MKD were well-designed to meet the needs of Roma returnees, particularly Roma women, who face intersecting barriers to employment and education. These programs focused on practical skills such as entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and business planning, which are highly adaptable to various sectors. The ACD methodology helped shape the community engagement and advocacy, addressing systemic discrimination, and creating pathways for long-term integration. Additionally, the flexibility of these programs and their inclusive approach to overcoming barriers, such as caregiving responsibilities, enhanced employability and supported the economic empowerment of Roma women. The establishment of community spaces and educational hubs in municipalities like Shuto Orizari provided unified access to services, thus reducing stigma and further supporting the social inclusion of returnees.

Partnerships with NGOs and local councils was essential in the project's success. NGOs facilitated connections between returnees and local institutions, acting as intermediaries to ensure access to

employment and training opportunities. The collaboration ensured that reintegration measures were embedded in local governance frameworks and were sustainable beyond the project's duration. Additionally, the project provided tailored legal and administrative assistance, helping Roma returnees navigate bureaucratic processes to obtain documentation, which is often a major barrier to accessing essential services. This comprehensive approach to reintegration not only met its immediate objectives but also laid the groundwork for long-term systemic change, creating a scalable model for broader adoption across the country.

Serbia

The project's outputs in SRB, including reintegration strategies, vocational training programs, and employment support, have been delivered effectively, accentuating strong local coordination and tailored interventions. The LMCs in municipalities of Novi Sad, Valjevo, and Bujanovac assisted in driving these efforts. These councils brought together local governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders, creating inclusive LAPs to address the needs of Roma returnees comprehensively. The councils facilitated systemic solutions, such as integrating legal aid and documentation services, which helped mitigate the bureaucratic challenges faced by returnees.

The project's vocational training programs in SRB have been designed to align with labour market demands, offering participants practical skills in fields like tailoring, mechanics, baking, IT, and waste management. Digital skills training proved particularly vigorous, equipping participants with competencies related to IT literacy and software testing, which enhanced employability in the growing digital economy. Training programs in mechanical engineering, catering, and other technical sectors also provided participants with valuable on-the-job experience. As a result of these efforts, numerous individuals secured employment, while others continue to receive job placement support. Clearly, the tailored training initiatives not only improved individual livelihoods but also addressed systemic unemployment challenges in vulnerable communities.

Employment support and entrepreneurial initiatives formed another pillar of the project's impact, with a strong focus on promoting economic independence among Roma returnees and women. Small business grants and mentorship programs enabled many participants to launch enterprises, such as waste management cooperatives, which transitioned informal Roma workers into formal employment. Roma women, in particular, benefitted from targeted entrepreneurship support, gaining tools and skills to overcome traditional barriers and achieve greater economic independence.

In addition to its economic impacts, the project advanced social cohesion through cultural and community initiatives aimed at combating stigma and discrimination against Roma communities. Events such as youth-led performances and awareness campaigns not only increased the visibility of marginalized groups but also created opportunities for dialogue and acceptance within broader society. They contributed to enhancing the social integration of Roma returnees while laying the groundwork for more inclusive local policies.

Regional Dimension

The project's specific outputs, such as reintegration strategies, vocational training programs, and employment support, have been delivered effectively across the region, demonstrating good quality and beneficiary satisfaction. Reintegration strategies were implemented through the development of the LAPs, which embedded Roma-specific measures into local governance structures. These plans addressed shared challenges like unemployment, limited access to services, and systemic exclusion, tailoring interventions to the unique needs of Roma returnees in each country. The regional approach ensured consistency in addressing these barriers while allowing for local adaptation.

Vocational training programs were a significant component of the project's regional impact. In each country, training was aligned with local labour market demands, equipping participants with practical skills in areas such as IT, tailoring, and waste management. These programs enhanced employability, particularly for marginalized groups like Roma women, by addressing education gaps and systemic barriers to employment. The regional context enabled the transfer of best practices, such as digital literacy and entrepreneurial training, which were adapted to meet the specific needs of different municipalities.

Employment support initiatives further reinforced these efforts by promoting economic independence. Small business grants and mentorship programs supported Roma returnees in establishing sustainable livelihoods, with examples such as waste management cooperatives transitioning informal workers into formal employment. Across the region, these outputs not only improved individual livelihoods but also contributed to broader economic inclusion and social cohesion goals.

Community engagement campaigns complemented these efforts, addressing stigma and promoting understanding between Roma and non-Roma populations. By using shared approaches, such as cultural events and informational campaigns, the project tackled prejudice and promoted dialogue, at the gratification of the returnees. This comprehensive delivery of outputs across multiple countries demonstrates the project's success in implementing effective reintegration strategies that are both regionally coherent and locally impactful, increasingly helping the returnees.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The EU's added value in supporting this project lies in its ability to ensure impactful and regionally aligned outputs like reintegration strategies, vocational training, and employment support. These efforts advance EU priorities for Roma inclusion, migration management, and social cohesion by embedding Roma-specific measures into local governance and addressing systemic barriers. Training aligned with local labor market needs, such as IT and waste management, helps create sustainable livelihoods and reduces reliance on EU migration systems. Cross-border sharing of best practices strengthens regional cooperation, supports social inclusion, and combats stigma, all of which align with EU goals. This approach builds long-term stability, supports the WB' alignment with EU standards, and helps their EU accession process.

EQ4. How effective has the project been in improving the employability of returnees, including their participation in vocational training and access to job opportunities?

Albania

In ALB, the project made significant progress in improving the employability of returnees by integrating them into the formal labor market through targeted training programs and tailored support. In collaboration with NAES and local NGOs, returnees were profiled to identify their training needs and employment aspirations. This profiling allowed the project to refer participants to specific vocational training programs and active labor market measures, ensuring alignment with their skills and the demands of the local economy. Participants gained practical skills in fields such as plumbing, tailoring, and carpentry, with many receiving certifications recognized by national authorities. Over 655 beneficiaries participated in training programs designed to match their skills with labor market needs. The acquired skills and qualifications directly improved their employability and enabled some participants to secure jobs in local industries. In addition, digital literacy training enhanced their ability to access modern job markets and manage business operations, which was particularly relevant for those pursuing entrepreneurship. For example, training centers in Berat were equipped with IT infrastructure to deliver high-quality digital courses, addressing a critical skill gap in the labor market. Training was another key component of the project. Returnees were provided with business planning, financial management, and marketing skills, enabling them to establish small enterprises. A total of 75 returnees received training on entrepreneurship, leading to the creation of 55 start-ups in sectors such as agriculture, hairdressing, and retail. The municipalities of Devoll offered incentives such as reduced taxes for new entrepreneurs during their initial two years (the municipality adopted a decision to reduce local taxes for new returnee entrepreneurs during the first two years of their business operations, as an initiative to support businesses during their initial growth period). This created a favourable environment for business growth and economic integration and has directly contributed towards improving employability.

North Macedonia

The RRR in MKD successfully addressed the employment challenges faced by returnees by combining education programs with measures to help them enter the labour market. Many returnees lacked formal education, which made it difficult for them to find jobs. To tackle this, the project introduced an adult education program that enabled 107 returnees to complete their primary education, a necessary step for joining government employment programs and securing formal jobs, while another 784 returnees were enrolled in the program to build foundational skills. The project also worked to integrate returnees into the labour market through targeted measures in the National Operational Employment Plan (NOEP). These measures included partnering with NGOs to extend the reach of the Employment Service Agency (ESA). The partnership between ESA and NGOs enhanced support for returnees by extending ESA's reach and addressing gaps in service delivery. The NGOs conducted outreach to identify unemployed returnees, assisted with registration for government employment programs, and provided personalized guidance to navigate administrative processes. They also

facilitated vocational training and job matching, such as linking returnees in Prilep with local manufacturing firms after training in assembly skills. Additionally, NGOs supported self-employment initiatives by helping participants develop business plans and access funding. In Prilep, the returnees who completed vocational training in basic assembly and production-line skills were hired by local manufacturing firms. Education and training transformed the prospects of many participants, providing them with the credentials and confidence needed to enter the workforce. For instance, a young returnee from Shuto Orizari who completed her primary education later joined a vocational program in retail management, which led to a permanent job at a regional supermarket chain. In addition to employment, the project supported entrepreneurship among returnees. Some participants established small businesses, such as a bakery in Shtip, which now provides a stable income for the returnee and their family. These efforts were complemented by digital and soft skills training, which further improved employability. Digital literacy enabled returnees to engage with the modern job market and explore entrepreneurial opportunities, while soft skills training helped them perform well in professional settings. The project also ensured psychosocial support was available to keep returnees motivated and help them overcome challenges.

Serbia

The project in SRB effectively addressed the employability challenges faced by returnees through a combination of vocational training, tailored employment support, and the establishment of local systems that facilitated socio-economic reintegration. Over 255 unique beneficiaries participated in training programs designed to match their skills with labour market needs, including soft skills, technical skills like automotive repair, construction, and mechanical engineering, and digital competencies such as IT literacy and WordPress development. Among these, 72 participants completed digital training, significantly improving their employability and access to online services. As a direct outcome, more than 40 individuals secured jobs, while others continued to receive support for placements. The establishment of LMCs was a key aspect of the project. Entrepreneurship support played a significant role in improving economic opportunities for returnees.. Additionally, the project piloted social enterprises, including a cooperative focused on recycling waste cables, which formalized the employment of previously informal Roma waste collectors. Through on-the-job training programs and the piloting of social enterprises, the project not only enhanced job readiness but also created sustainable frameworks for returnee integration. These efforts were embedded within municipal action plans to ensure continuity and relevance to local labour market demands.

Regional Dimension

Across ALB, MKD, and SRB, the RRR project shared several common denominators and recurring elements such as vocational training, entrepreneurship support, digital skills, institutional partnerships, psychosocial assistance, and systemic integration, all of which contributed to improving the employability of returnees within a regional context. One key similarity was the focus on vocational training aligned with labour market needs. All three countries and respective nine municipalities provided targeted skills development. Most of them were in areas such as carpentry, plumbing, tailoring, construction, and digital literacy. These programs were tailored to meet the demands of local economies and often included certifications recognized by national authorities, which significantly

enhanced participants' employability. Another commonality was the emphasis on entrepreneurship and business development. Returnees in all three countries were equipped with business planning, financial management, and marketing skills. Many received grants or support to establish small businesses, thus advancing self-employment opportunities. The use of digital skills training emerged as a vital component across the region. Digital literacy courses ranging from WordPress, Scrum, and QA software testing to modern digital tools enabled the beneficiaries to attempt to access modern job markets but also manage business operations, and utilize e-government services. These skills were particularly effective in connecting returnees to emerging economic opportunities and entrepreneurial ventures. In addition, the integration of returnees into local labour markets was facilitated through partnerships with local institutions and NGOs. This approach bridged gaps in service delivery, extended outreach, and ensured personalized support for returnees. The projects also incorporated psychosocial support to address the emotional challenges faced by returnees, ensuring their sustained motivation and engagement. These services turned out to be surprising important in building participants' confidence and resilience, enabling them to pursue training and employment opportunities.

EU Benefits and Added Value

Beyond national impact, the project's regional dimension strengthens cross-border mobility and aligns with EU accession priorities, particularly Chapters 19 and 23 of the EU Acquis, which focus on social inclusion, labor market integration, and the reduction of inequalities. This strategic alignment highlights the project's dual role in advancing both socio-economic development and regional cooperation in the WB, making it an important contributor to EU integration efforts.

EQ5. Has the intervention contributed to enhancing returnees' access to essential services such as education and social protection?

Albania

In ALB, the intervention supported efforts to improve returnees' access to vital services such as education and social protection. As diagnosed, a common challenge for returnee children was the lack of necessary documentation and recognition of prior education, which often delayed or hindered school enrolment. Through collaboration with municipalities and education offices, the program ensured these children could enrol in school, with tailored support to help them adapt. Many children returned without the necessary documentation, such as prior education certificates, or faced difficulties in steering the administrative processes required for enrolment. The project not only helped families gather and validate these documents but also worked closely with schools to ensure that returnee children were placed in age-appropriate classes. For starters, tailored support was provided to help children adapt to their new educational environments. This included language support for those who struggled with Albanian, particularly for children who had spent long periods abroad. Additionally, teachers were briefed on the challenges returnee children might face, such as adjusting to new curriculums or overcoming stigma from peers. In some cases, schools partnered with NGOs to

provide extracurricular activities and peer mentorship programs, creating a more inclusive and welcoming atmosphere. A case in point is the municipality of Berat, where the enrolment of over 75 children was facilitated by coordinating between families, local schools, and the education office. One specific success story involved a family that had recently returned from Germany and where the children initially struggled with language and cultural adjustment, but through additional tutoring and integration activities arranged by the program, they were able to settle quickly into their new school environment. This holistic approach ensured not only enrolment but also a smoother transition for the children into the education system, setting the foundation for better academic outcomes and social inclusion.

The project also improved access to social protection by linking returnees to local labour offices and registering them for unemployment benefits and welfare schemes. In doing so, NGOs were active in profiling returnees and helping them navigate complex processes. The returnees benefited from this assistance, enabling them to secure financial aid and healthcare services. These measures addressed institutional barriers, ensuring returnees could access the support they needed more efficiently. NGOs were essential to this effort, working directly with returnees to understand their specific needs and profiles. This included identifying returnees who were eligible for social protection schemes and helping them compile the required documentation. For instance, returnees often needed proof of residency or employment history to qualify for unemployment benefits or social welfare. NGOs stepped in to facilitate this process, liaising with municipal offices and government agencies to resolve any missing paperwork or discrepancies. An important aspect of the initiative was the partnership between NGOs and NAES. Through this collaboration, returnees were not only registered as active job seekers but also connected to government programs that provided financial aid, training opportunities, and healthcare services. For example, in the municipality of Fier, a returnee family that had been living in hazardous conditions benefited from NGO assistance in securing unemployment benefits and enrolling in a healthcare scheme. This marked a noteworthy improvement in their access to basic services, which had previously been impossible due to bureaucratic challenges. The project also introduced mechanisms to make these processes more efficient and less intimidating for returnees. NGOs provided step-by-step guidance to returnees, helping them complete applications and accompanying them to local labour offices when needed. This hands-on support eased many of the anxieties returnees felt about dealing with public institutions, especially for those who had been out of the system for extended periods or faced language barriers. In addition to immediate assistance, the intervention created long-term benefits by addressing institutional inefficiencies.

North Macedonia

In MKD, the RRR improved returnees' access to education and social protection through targeted initiatives. A key achievement was the introduction of adult education programs in Prilep, Shtip, and Shuto Orizari. These programs addressed the educational gaps faced by returnees, enabling them to complete elementary education, which is often a requirement for formal employment. For instance, 57 returnees in Shuto Orizari completed primary education, and an additional 76 individuals enrolled in follow-up programs. These efforts not only expanded educational opportunities but also enhanced participants' prospects for meaningful employment.

The project also focused on labour market integration by incorporating specific measures into the NOEP. These measures included job mediation and skills training designed to align with returnees' needs. For example, a young returnee in Shtip participated in digital marketing training, which led to employment with a local company. This highlighted the potential of personalized training programs to improve employment outcomes.

To ensure better service delivery, the project partnered with NGOs to assist returnees in accessing social benefits and administrative services. NGOs facilitated outreach and provided support for registration processes, addressing systemic challenges that often-caused delays. This collaboration between NGOs and public institutions streamlined services and created a more inclusive environment for returnees across the country. The collaboration with NGOs pointedly enhanced the ability of returnees to access social benefits and administrative services, addressing systemic barriers that left vulnerable individuals excluded. Many returnees faced complex challenges, such as navigating bureaucratic systems, language barriers, and a lack of understanding of their rights and available services. The initiative worked with experienced NGOs to use their local knowledge and skills to connect returnees with public institutions. The NGOs were key in reaching out to returnees, especially those who were unaware of or unable to access available services. For example, in rural areas and marginalized communities, where trust in government institutions is often low, NGOs served as intermediaries, conducting awareness campaigns and personal consultations to inform returnees about their entitlements, such as social protection schemes, unemployment benefits, and healthcare services. Once returnees were identified, NGOs provided hands-on support in navigating administrative processes. This included helping individuals gather the necessary documentation, filling out forms, and accompanying them to local government offices to ensure successful registration. In cases where returnees lacked critical documents, such as birth certificates or residency papers, NGOs liaised directly with relevant authorities to expedite the process. This approach reduced delays and minimized the risk of returnees being turned away or discouraged by procedural hurdles. The partnership also facilitated better communication and cooperation between NGOs and public institutions, such as centers for social work and municipal offices. For example, in municipalities like Shuto Orizari and Prilep, NGOs worked closely with government agencies to streamline workflows and reduce administrative bottlenecks. This collaboration ensured that public institutions were more responsive to the unique needs of returnees, and that services were tailored to their circumstances. An illustrative case involved a returnee family in Shtip that had been struggling to access social welfare benefits due to incomplete documentation and repeated bureaucratic delays. Through the intervention, an NGO stepped in to guide the family through the registration process, mediating with municipal authorities to resolve outstanding issues. As a result, the family was successfully registered for social assistance and healthcare within weeks, significantly improving their quality of life.

Serbia

In SRB, the intervention introduced practical solutions to enhance returnees' access to education, social protection, and economic opportunities. One important initiative was the creation of specialized units for migrants within municipal structures in Bujanovac, Novi Sad, and Valjevo. These units functioned as one-stop shops, offering streamlined access to services such as legal aid, documentation

support, and job placement. For example, a returnee in Valjevo was able to obtain birth certificates for his children and enrol them in school within weeks, thanks to the efficient coordination provided by the local migrant unit. The intervention also explored new approaches to service delivery by piloting social contracting models with NGOs. Certified NGOs provided tailored services, such as case management and legal assistance, to fill gaps in institutional capacity. In Bujanovac, one returnee received help with accessing housing benefits and social welfare, overcoming significant administrative challenges. This model demonstrated how partnerships with civil society could strengthen service delivery mechanisms. In relation to this, another good example concerns the innovative approach to service delivery by piloting social contracting models with certified NGOs, an effort aimed at addressing gaps in institutional capacity and improving the responsiveness of services for returnees. The model involved municipalities contracting NGOs to provide specialized services tailored to the unique needs of returnees. The model of social contracting will allow for the possibility of local NGOs to receive funding from public sources for a continued provision of services, which are of interest to returnees. Social contracting is a process by which government resources are used to fund entities which are not part of government structure, such as CSO to provide services which the government has a responsibility to provide. This approach recognized the limitations of local institutions, particularly in rural or under-resourced areas, and applied the expertise of NGOs to deliver more effective and personalized support. Under this model, certified NGOs took on critical roles such as case management, legal assistance, and administrative support. They acted as intermediaries between returnees and public institutions, helping to simplify processes that were often overly bureaucratic and inaccessible for vulnerable individuals. For instance, returnees frequently struggled with incomplete or missing documentation, a major barrier to accessing social welfare, healthcare, or housing assistance. NGOs worked directly with returnees to compile the necessary paperwork, advocate on their behalf with local government offices, and guide them through the registration process. In Bujanovac, this model proved particularly effective. One returnee, who had been struggling to access housing benefits and social welfare due to multiple administrative challenges, received tailored assistance from an NGO. The NGO not only helped the individual gather the necessary documents but also liaised with local authorities to resolve issues related to eligibility and approval. As a result, the returnee was able to secure both housing support and financial aid, significantly improving their living conditions. This example highlights how NGOs, through their specialized knowledge and focus, could navigate complex systems more effectively than returnees could on their own. The success of this model stemmed from its emphasis on partnership and collaboration between civil society and public institutions. By outsourcing specific functions to NGOs, municipalities could address capacity shortages without overburdening their own limited resources. NGOs, in turn, benefited from the formal recognition and financial support provided by social contracting, which enabled them to expand their operations and reach more returnees. Moreover, this approach adopted a more integrated and comprehensive system of support for returnees. NGOs not only assisted with immediate needs such as housing and welfare but also provided follow-up services, ensuring that returnees remained connected to the system and received ongoing support. For example, NGOs often conducted home visits and maintained regular contact with returnees to monitor their progress and address any emerging challenges. This model demonstrated the potential for partnerships with civil society to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery. By integrating NGOs into

the system, the intervention not only filled existing gaps but also introduced a more agile and client-centred approach to addressing the needs of returnees. The success in Bujanovac and other pilot locations has set a precedent for scaling up similar initiatives across SRB and potentially other countries in the region.

Regional Dimension

A common theme across ALB, MKD, and SRB is the effort to overcome barriers to education and social protection by working closely with NGOs and public institutions. In all three countries, returnees struggled with issues like missing documents, slow bureaucratic processes, and navigating complex systems. The RRR addressed these challenges in different ways: social contracting with NGOs in SRB, NGO outreach and advocacy in ALB, and simplifying administrative processes in MKD. These efforts made it easier for returnees to access services like education, healthcare, and financial aid while creating a more supportive and efficient system for reintegration. The focus on tailored, localized solutions reflects a shared regional commitment to improving the lives of returnees.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The project contributes to the EU's goals by directly addressing barriers faced by Roma and returnees in accessing education and social protection, implementing targeted initiatives that promote inclusion, equality, and institutional capacity. By improving access to essential services, the project helps stabilize vulnerable communities, reduces social exclusion, and aligns policies with EU standards on social protection, fundamental rights, and governance. This approach supports the EU's broader strategy of advancing regional stability and managing migration effectively by addressing root causes of irregular migration, such as poverty and lack of opportunities. The EU benefits from these outcomes as they contribute to a more stable and cohesive region, reduce migration pressures on member states, and demonstrate the effectiveness of EU funding in driving meaningful reforms. The project's alignment with key EU acquis chapters ensures that WB countries advance their integration process while improving trust in EU values and governance principles, ultimately paving the way for a smoother accession path. The project supports key EU acquis chapters essential for the WB's accession process, particularly Chapters 19, 23, and 24. Chapter 19, on Social Policy and Employment, is addressed by improving access to education and social protection for vulnerable groups, aligning practices with EU standards on inclusion, anti-discrimination, and labour market participation. In the process of helping returnees access tailored education and integrate into employment measures, the project strengthens communities and tackles structural inequalities. Chapter 23, focused on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, is advanced through efforts to ensure equitable treatment for returnees, especially Roma, and their access to essential services. This inclusion shows the region's commitment to EU values such as minority rights and anti-discrimination, while also building more accountable and transparent institutions. Similarly, Chapter 24, covering Justice, Freedom, and Security, is relevant as the project addresses irregular migration by reintegrating returnees through streamlined processes, legal aid, and social protection. These efforts align with EU migration policies, helping to reduce migration pressures, enhance institutional capacity, and ensure compliance with EU standards. By encouragement of growth, improving governance, and protecting vulnerable groups, the project not only supports the region's EU integration but also promotes stability and prosperity, benefiting both the WB and the EU.

EQ6. How well has the project addressed the specific challenges faced by Roma returnees and other vulnerable groups, ensuring they benefit from the services provided?

Albania

In ALB, the project was able to tackle systemic challenges faced by Roma returnees, focusing on improving access to education, social protection, and economic opportunities. In many instances, Roma returnees struggled with missing documentation such as birth certificates, which limited their ability to access basic services. The project facilitated the acquisition of these documents, helping families register for social benefits and enrol children in schools. A significant focus was placed on digital literacy training, enabling 250 Roma and Egyptian returnees to navigate the e-Albania portal to access government services such as healthcare and financial assistance.

Tailored support was provided through free legal aid services, with 140 returnees benefiting from assistance in resolving administrative and legal issues. Social cohesion initiatives targeted young Roma and Egyptian returnees, offering vocational training in areas like tourism and guiding, in Devoll, and creating women-led social businesses in Berat to enhance economic empowerment.

The project also piloted innovative economic empowerment models. One of them was the agricultural social cooperatives, which expanded income-generating opportunities and created a sense of community cohesion. This was further complemented by capacity-building initiatives, where public service providers and NGO representatives received training in integrated case management and digital service provision, additionally consolidating support systems for Roma returnees.

North Macedonia

In MKD, the project helped Roma returnees overcome barriers to education and social services by providing targeted support and building trust with public institutions. One major success was an adult education program that enabled 107 Roma returnees without formal schooling to complete elementary education, a key requirement for accessing jobs and further training.

Roma returnees were prioritized through partnerships with local NGOs and community groups that identified their needs and ensured inclusive planning. These NGOs provided services such as legal aid, help with school enrolment, and support for accessing public services. This was done optimally.

The project offered tailored services like case management to help returnees obtain important documents, access healthcare, and enrol in education. Training programs in digital and vocational skills supported 784 returnees, improving their chances of finding jobs. In Shuto Orizari, where many Roma live, a Resource Centre was set up to provide integrated services and community-based support. This directly helped over 622 Roma children and families, improving their access to schools and social protection at the same time encouraging inclusion and empowerment.

Serbia

In SRB, the project effectively addressed the challenges faced by Roma returnees and related vulnerable groups by integrating tailored services with innovative models of service delivery. The emphasis was placed on overcoming problems related to legal documentation, education access, and socio-economic inclusion. For instance, Roma returnees struggled with incomplete documentation, such as birth certificates or school records, which limited their access to essential services. The project facilitated obtaining these documents through partnerships with local migration councils and NGOs, enabling 558 returnees to access critical services, including social welfare, healthcare, and education.

One of the standout initiatives was the introduction of social contracting models, where certified NGOs provided dedicated support such as legal assistance and case management. For example, in Bujanovac, a Roma women-led organization was accredited to deliver home care services, offering direct support to 60 Roma returnees while simultaneously providing employment opportunities. Additionally, the establishment of one-stop shops in municipalities like Novi Sad and Valjevo streamlined access to services, reducing bureaucratic problems for returnees.

Tailored education and training programs further addressed the needs of Roma youth. In Novi Sad, 272 Roma and returnee children received support related to school enrolment and daily learning, preventing dropouts and promoting educational inclusion. Vocational and digital training programs improved employability for Roma returnees, with numerous individuals participating in skills development.

Regional Dimension

The regional dimension of the project lies in its ability to address shared challenges faced by Roma returnees and other vulnerable groups across ALB, MKD, and SRB while tailoring interventions to each country's specific context. A common thread across the region is the systemic barriers Roma returnees face, including lack of documentation, limited access to education and social protection, and socio-economic exclusion. The project demonstrated a shared approach by enabling access to essential services through partnerships with NGOs and public institutions, building trust, and driving forward social inclusion.

A key added value of the project is its alignment with EU priorities for social cohesion, human rights, and governance in the WB, strengthening the region's integration into European frameworks. Across all three countries, the project built institutional capacity to deliver more inclusive services, whether through digital literacy programs in ALB, integrated service centres in SRB, or resource hubs in MKD. Through prioritizing Roma returnees through legal aid, vocational training, and education programs, the RRR ensured vulnerable groups were actively supported in their reintegration. The regional commonality lies in the focus on tailored and community-based solutions that bridge gaps in institutional support. In each country, NGOs played a critical role in reaching Roma returnees and delivering tailored services, from legal aid in ALB to adult education programs in MKD and social contracting models in SRB. These approaches jointly enhanced Roma inclusion, promoted to some extent trust in public institutions, and advanced economic opportunities. The project's success

highlights the importance of regional collaboration and shared strategies in tackling systemic inequalities and ensuring sustainable reintegration for vulnerable groups across the three countries.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The project's specific challenges faced by Roma returnees and other vulnerable groups, is pertinent to the EU accession process of the WB countries, as this aspect lies in its alignment with EU priorities on social inclusion, governance, and fundamental rights, as well as its ability to address critical gaps in the treatment of exposed groups. Through tackling systemic barriers to education, social protection, and economic opportunities, the project directly supports compliance with EU acquis chapters, especially Chapter 19 (Social Policy and Employment), Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights), and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom, and Security). For the EU, the project strengthens stability in the WB by reducing inequality and marginalization, critical factors in preventing social discontent and irregular migration. This is particularly important for the EU's migration and integration strategies, as addressing the root causes of socio-economic exclusion reduces migration pressures on EU member states. The EU added value is its ability to provide funding, expertise, and frameworks for regional cooperation, ensuring that the RRR aligns with broader European standards. The project illustrates how EU-supported efforts can build trust in institutions, empower marginalized communities, and create sustainable pathways for integration into the European community, directly contributing to the WB' readiness for accession.

Efficiency

EQ7. Were resources (funding, personnel, time) efficiently allocated to achieve outputs, considering the total project budget?

Albania

Despite staff changes, the project team in ALB remained dedicated and efficient in implementing activities that directly addressed the needs of Roma returnees and other vulnerable groups. Their ability to work closely with local authorities and NGOs ensured that services and aid reached those who needed them most. Despite noted challenges such as accessing marginalized communities and navigating bureaucratic processes, the team successfully supported returnees in gaining essential documentation and accessing social benefits. Focusing on practical solutions, like organizing vocational training programs and supporting local businesses, the team ensured that project activities were not only implemented but tailored to real community needs.

The budget for the Albanian country component reflects a well-structured approach to addressing the challenges faced by Roma returnees and other vulnerable groups. It was proportionate to the needs of the Albanian context and effectively balances resources between implementation, capacity building, and long-term integration efforts, increasing the likelihood of achieving impactful outcomes. A significant allocation to human resources, including project coordinator and assistants, guaranteed

strong implementation capacity and effective coordination. Activity-based costs are aligned with the project's objectives, concentrating on multi-stakeholder platforms, capacity-building initiatives, and economic empowerment programs to address systemic barriers like lack of documentation and socio-economic exclusion. Operational and logistical support, including transportation, office costs, and translation services, is adequately funded to ensure smooth project execution. Investments in training, digital tools, and partnerships with local NGOs validate a commitment to empowering both institutions and communities, at the same time promoting the very essence of the project theme which is inclusion and sustainability.

North Macedonia

In MKD, despite staff changes and reliance on in-house expertise, the project team demonstrated strong commitment and adaptability in delivering services to Roma returnees. The efforts made were particularly evident in establishing cooperation between Roma communities and public institutions, which was noted as important in the design phase in relation to addressing long-standing barriers like limited access to education. The team worked closely with local NGOs to provide adult education programs and create spaces where Roma families could access multiple services in one place.

The budget allocated for the country component of the project was well-structured to address the key activities aimed at supporting Roma returnees and vulnerable groups. Resources were directed towards enhancing capacities of public institutions and NGOs, developing tools for streamlining services, and implementing community cohesion programs. Specific allocations included support for adult education programs, tailored vocational training, and digital literacy initiatives that directly addressed barriers faced by Roma returnees, such as limited access to formal education and employment opportunities. The inclusion of external expertise ensured high-quality training curricula, while investments in community-based support programs adopted inclusivity and strengthened social cohesion.

Serbia

The project team in SRB showed innovation and determination in addressing the needs of Roma returnees. It introduced new models, such as working with certified NGOs to deliver dedicated support, which allowed for a more flexible and targeted approach. This included setting up community-focused services, such as one-stop centers and tailored vocational training, to help returnees reintegrate into their communities. The team's coordination with local authorities and CSOs helped simplify processes and ensured that project activities were aligned with the specific needs of returnees. The proactive approach to overcoming challenges linked to incomplete documentation and employment barriers was noteworthy.

In terms of structure, the project's budget for the SRB component effectively aligns resources with the activities designed to meet the needs of returnees, particularly Roma and other vulnerable groups. The allocated funds for innovative approaches like social contracting with certified NGOs were well placed ensuring that the project has tailored services, such as legal aid and case management, delivered to marginalized communities. Investments in local migration councils and one-stop

municipal center streamlined access to social welfare and administrative support, directly addressed the systemic barriers faced by returnees. Resources were directed toward capacity-building efforts for local authorities and NGOs, thus enhancing their ability to provide integrated and sustainable services. The budget's proportional allocation demonstrates a balance between administrative costs, direct service delivery, and innovative pilot programs, reflecting a strategic approach to achieving project goals.

Regional Dimension

The project's resources were efficiently allocated to achieve the outlined outputs. The total project cost stands at EUR 4,609,988, with EUR 4,500,000 provided by the EU and EUR 109,988 allocated by UNDP. The budget allocated for the project, demonstrates a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges faced by returnees across ALB, MKD, and SRB. The financial plan reflects a well-structured framework aimed at balancing regional consistency with country-specific interventions, ensuring that resources were efficiently distributed to achieve the project's objectives. The allocation of resources within the project reflects a well-adjusted approach to addressing both operational and programmatic needs, ensuring smooth execution and meaningful impact. A share of the budget was dedicated to project management and human resources, also highlighting the importance of effective coordination and oversight. This allocation supported salaries, operational expenses, and monitoring mechanisms, which were pertinent for maintaining momentum and addressing challenges as they arose. The prioritization of robust project management mechanisms indicates a commitment to delivering results efficiently and transparently.

Funding for the development of reintegration strategies focused on systemic improvements, such as establishing stakeholder platforms and conducting capacity-building assessments. This was important in order to strengthen the institutional framework and encourage collaboration among key actors involved in reintegration efforts. The focus on systemic change highlights the project's strategic objective to create long-term, sustainable solutions rather than merely addressing immediate needs. Resources allocated to innovative programs, such as employability training and entrepreneurship initiatives, highlight the project's forward-thinking approach. In doing so, it targeted economic empowerment, aiming to equip beneficiaries with the skills and tools necessary to achieve self-sufficiency and stability. The emphasis on innovation also demonstrates the project's adaptability in addressing evolving labour market demands and creating opportunities for returnees.

The implementation modality, executed by UNDP under the direct implementation approach, has proven to be effective, providing the necessary flexibility for activity execution, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The solid management capacities within UNDP have proved to be important in overcoming challenges, and endorsing and implementing a holistic approach to service delivery. The project has benefited from a flexible coordination mechanism, which allowed for quick adaptations during emergencies and ensured that the project teams in all three countries were able to continue delivering results under challenging circumstances.

The project scope falls into the area of expertise of UNDP. As the implementing party, its high-performance standards (including in IPA projects) have been well recognised within the donor

community. Its operational capacity and existing network give credibility to its actions in the field. Its programme and project portfolio and close cooperation with the state and non-state actors, has translated the project engagement into good working practices, and the project team aggregated value coming from previous project experience has been fully validated in the implementation phase. The project environment and the raging pandemic have highlighted the importance of having good planning and timing as a measure of success. The good match between the project team modus operandi and the beneficiary expectations were key for project success. An additional implementation strong point was that the UNDP has based its project strategy on solid institutional examination undertaken to identify and assess beneficiaries' needs and their absorption capacity. This has aided the country project teams to better understand the needs of the beneficiaries involved, the interplay between them, their roles, powers and authority, as well as key requirements. Central activities were mirrored in each of the three countries, demonstrating a standardised approach, to the extent possible.

The project team has demonstrated strong expertise, effectively using experience from previous initiatives to address the needs of vulnerable returnees. A key strength of this action is its ability to build on the ideas and lessons from past efforts, such as the UNDP and World Bank's 2017 Regional Roma Survey, which examined the socio-economic gaps between Roma and non-Roma populations in the WB. This survey highlighted critical issues like migration, employment, women's empowerment, and access to personal documentation, providing the foundation for the current project. Addressing the institutional and systemic weaknesses identified in the survey, the project has successfully implemented targeted solutions, ensuring regional support for the reintegration of vulnerable returnees from the EU.

In terms of personnel, the project's team setup has been effective, with the Team Leader providing strategic guidance and coordinating efforts with the country offices. On the regional level, the Regional Project Manager has overseen the overall execution of tasks, ensuring that deliverables met quality standards and that the project was on track. In each of the three countries, the project teams have demonstrated both technical expertise and solid management skills. The team setup in each of the country offices, Skopje, Belgrade, and Tirana, was tailored to local needs, with a management team in each office to oversee day-to-day activities.

The project engaged consultants across ALB, MKD, and SRB to provide specialized expertise and support in implementing key activities. In ALB, consultants were hired to assess local economic development potentials and inclusive growth opportunities for Roma returnees, contributing to capacity assessments in municipalities like Berat and Fier. In MKD, experts facilitated workshops in Prilep, Shtip, and Shuto Orizari and conducted assessments on social and economic vulnerabilities, ensuring targeted interventions. In SRB, consultants supported institutional capacity-building and conducted evaluations to address gaps in social and economic services for returnees. The strategic use of consultants improved the project's ability to address complex challenges, deliver tailored solutions, and ensure effective implementation across all three countries.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The EU's added value in investing in a well-performing project such as this lies in its ability to advance critical priorities for the WB' accession process. Through effective resource allocation and strong implementation by well-established project teams, the RRR reveals the importance of aligning financial support with clear outcomes, like improved access to education and social protection for vulnerable groups. This approach not only ensures compliance with EU *acquis* chapters, such as Social Policy and Employment (Chapter 19), Judiciary and Fundamental Rights (Chapter 23), and Justice, Freedom, and Security (Chapter 24), but also reinforces institutional capacity and public trust, which is key criteria for accession.

The reliance on experienced teams that understand local dynamics underlines the strategic value of IPA funding. Focusing on projects that deliver measurable results, the EU maximizes value for money while addressing regional inequalities and advancing stability. Such investments build the governance, inclusion, and capacity foundations necessary for long-term integration into the EU. A well-managed and impactful project serves as a blueprint for future IPA interventions, reinforcing the importance of targeted, results-driven funding to accelerate the WB' accession process.

EQ8. Were activities implemented on time, and were there delays?

Sub-questions: What caused delays, and how were they mitigated?

Albania

In ALB, the implementation of project activities encountered initial delays primarily due to recruitment challenges for key staff, including a Project Coordinator and a Project Assistant, as well as local coordinators and technical experts. These delays stemmed from the limited pool of qualified candidates in the local market and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which introduced further disruptions. The Project Coordinator was eventually hired on August 1, 2021, followed by the Project Assistant on August 30, 2021. However, the delays affected the timeline for local activity implementation, including field-based activities such as community cohesion programs and municipal capacity-building workshops.

The project engaged local coordinators, often drawn from Roma communities, in key municipalities to facilitate reintegration efforts and ensure marginalized groups were represented in decision-making processes. Despite these measures, the recruitment process faced challenges in attracting candidates with expertise in social protection, economic development, and community engagement. To address these gaps, the project employed adaptive management strategies, such as temporarily hiring consultants to ensure continuity and leveraging digital platforms to conduct virtual training and stakeholder consultations. The granted no-cost extension allowed sufficient time to recalibrate timelines, enabling the project to meet its planned outcomes without requiring additional financial resources.

North Macedonia

In MKD, the implementation of project activities was similarly hindered by recruitment delays and the pandemic. Key positions included a Project Coordinator and a Project Associate, both of whom started on April 1, 2021, after procedural inefficiencies caused delays in the hiring process. However, the Project Assistant role became vacant again in 2022 and had to be re-advertised, with recruitment eventually replaced with in-house expertise.

During the pandemic, activities requiring physical presence, such as community engagement initiatives and workshops, were postponed or transitioned to virtual formats. Technical assistance for strategy development and training programs was also conducted remotely to minimize disruptions. Despite these efforts, the diversion of local government counterparts' attention to pandemic-related priorities caused slower decision-making processes. The no-cost extension was necessary in addressing these delays, allowing the completion of all planned activities, including skill-building and employment support for returnees.

Serbia

In SRB, the project faced disruptions due to the widespread effects of the pandemic, particularly on activities requiring in-person interaction, such as training sessions and multi-stakeholder dialogues. These challenges affected the timeline for some activities.

To mitigate these issues, the project adopted a flexible approach, shifting training programs and consultations to online formats where feasible. For activities requiring physical presence, such as on-the-ground assessments and direct reintegration services, strict health protocols were implemented to ensure safety. The no-cost extension provided additional time to address the delays, ensuring that the project's strategic goals were met without compromising quality or stakeholder engagement.

Regional Dimension

Regionally, the project experienced delays primarily due to the pandemic, which affected the pace of implementation across ALB, MKD, and SRB. However, the projects flexibility and adaptive planning ensured that the delays were managed effectively. Reported interruptions were attributed to the recruitment of project teams in ALB and MKD, which were accordingly addressed. Additionally, the shift to remote operations during the height of the pandemic allowed for continued progress, although some local and central government partners had to prioritize pandemic-related responses. Throughout these challenges, the project maintained strong coordination across country offices and partners, ensuring that key activities and deadlines were met. The project's hands-on oversight and consistent consultations with stakeholders played a critical role in mitigating delays and maintaining progress. The no-cost extension was secured to adapt timelines and accommodate the challenges presented. This extension, as documented in the agreement addenda, allowed for the continuation of activities without additional financial input, demonstrating an efficient use of the existing budget. The flexibility in planning and execution, supported by UNDP's direct implementation approach, mitigated the risks posed by the delays. Adjusting activities, such as transitioning to remote setups and reprioritizing resources, the project was able to maintain its commitment to achieving its objectives within the

extended implementation period. This adaptation highlights the capacity to navigate unforeseen disruptions while ensuring the effective use of resources.

Impact

EQ9. What significant changes in socio-economic conditions have occurred for returnees as a result of the project e.g., employment, access to services?

Albania

In ALB, the project has significantly transformed the socio-economic conditions of returnees by focusing on tailored economic empowerment initiatives and improving access to critical services. Vocational training programs provided returnees with skills tailored to the demands of the local economy, including in high-potential sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and digital literacy. This has enabled returnees to enhance their employability and participate meaningfully in the labour market. One of the project's greatest successes in ALB has been helping returnees start 55 small businesses, giving them a chance to rebuild their lives and become financially independent. These businesses, ranging from farming and tourism to digital services, were supported through funding, training, and expert advice, ensuring they could succeed. Many returnees who once relied on social assistance now earn their own income and even create jobs for others in their communities. For women, especially those from Roma and Egyptian groups, this has been a powerful way to gain independence and respect within their families and neighbourhoods. These efforts have not only improved individual lives but also strengthened trust in local authorities and brought positive changes to the communities where they live. Particularly noteworthy was the focus on women's empowerment. Many Roma and Egyptian women were integrated into agricultural social cooperatives and other income-generating activities. These programs supported their financial independence while advancing stronger community ties. This contributed to the socio-economic upliftment of these women and also improved their role within their households and communities.

In terms of access to essential services, the project addressed critical gaps by assisting returnees in obtaining missing documentation, a key barrier to accessing healthcare, social protection, and education services. For many returnees, this served as the first step toward reintegration, ensuring they could rebuild their lives with the necessary support systems in place. Qualitative improvements in the quality of life were also evident. Greater trust in public institutions was noted mostly by bridging the gap between returnees and local authorities, creating a more supportive environment for reintegration. Social cohesion activities further strengthened these efforts by addressing stigma and promoting the culture of acceptance within communities.

North Macedonia

In MKD, the project has brought significant socio-economic improvements for returnees. This was achieved by addressing systemic barriers and executing tailored interventions. Returnees have seen

enhanced employability through training programs designed to align with their skills, education levels, and professional aspirations. These programs equipped them with technical, soft, and digital skills, enabling many to secure sustainable employment in local markets. A key milestone was the inclusion of targeted measures for returnees in the National Employment Plan, which opened pathways for their participation in active labour market measures and entrepreneurship programs. For those without formal education, the establishment of adult education programs allowed returnees to complete primary schooling, a prerequisite for accessing government employment initiatives. Access to essential services has also significantly improved. The project facilitated processes for returnees to obtain personal identification documents, enrol children in schools, certify prior education, and register for social protection schemes. These efforts laid a foundation for long-term socio-economic stability. Social cohesion initiatives, including community engagement activities, have further improved the quality of life for returnees, thus creating a sense of belonging and starting to reduce stigma within local communities. The integration of innovative service delivery models, such as one-stop-shops in municipal structures, streamlined the provision of social and administrative support, ensuring that returnees could navigate these systems more efficiently. A case in point is the establishment of the Resource Centre in Shuto-Orizari which is perceived as a noteworthy social cohesion initiative, designed to function as an integrated one-stop-shop for returnees and other vulnerable groups. This center focuses on delivering a comprehensive range of services, including healthcare, social protection, employment mediation services provided by the public employment office, enrollment in preschool and primary education, access to legal services, and other support mechanisms. It aims to address both immediate and long-term needs of the community, making services more accessible to over 3,000 citizens, including 1,000 returnees.

Serbia

In SRB, the project has made a big difference in the lives of returnees by helping them rebuild and settle back into their communities. One of the key successes has been the setup of LMCs, which help returnees get important services like ID cards, healthcare, social protection, and school enrolment for their children. This has made it easier for returnees to access the support they need to start over. The project also focused on helping returnees find work and become financially stable. Training programs taught them new skills in areas like construction, farming, and hospitality, making it easier to get jobs. For those who wanted to start their own businesses, the project provided guidance, funding, and tools to help them succeed. Many returnees have been able to earn a living and become independent. The project also helped improve the way communities' welcome returnees. By reducing paperwork and offering multiple services in one place, it became less stressful for returnees to access what they needed. Community activities also helped reduce stigma, making returnees feel more accepted and supported. These efforts have given many returnees the chance to start fresh and build better lives for themselves and their families.

A key improvement has been the introduction of one-stop-shop service centers, where returnees can access multiple services in one place. These centers save time and cut through complicated processes, making it much easier for returnees to get the help they need. This approach has built trust in local systems, helped returnees feel more supported, and allowed them to focus on improving their lives.

These efforts have not only changed individual lives but also brought communities closer together, showing that returnees can thrive when given the right support.

Regional Dimension

The RRR project has made a big difference in improving the lives of returnees, especially vulnerable groups like Roma, in ALB, MKD, and SRB. It worked to reduce barriers to jobs, education, and public services, helping to close the socio-economic gap between Roma and non-Roma populations. Through these efforts, many returnees gained skills, jobs, and better access to essential services, leading to an overall improvement in their quality of life. This aligns with broader goals like EU accession priorities and Roma inclusion agendas, showing progress in reducing discrimination and inequality.

Employment opportunities grew significantly, with over 1,694 returnees trained in skills like farming, construction, and digital work. This training led to the creation of 197 jobs across the region. At the same time, over 2,340 returnees accessed vital services like healthcare, legal aid, social benefits, and education, thanks to streamlined systems like one-stop-shop service centers. These centers helped returnees navigate processes more easily, reduced stress, and built trust in local authorities. Local governments in nine municipalities adopted strategies to keep these programs running, ensuring long-term support for returnees.

Another key focus was helping returnees start their own businesses. Across the three countries, 102 new businesses were launched with financial support and guidance from the project, giving returnees financial independence and helping their communities grow. Special attention was also given to women and marginalized groups, such as Roma and Egyptians. Programs empowered them to gain jobs, start businesses, and feel more included in their communities. Social activities brought people together, reduced stigma, and made returnees feel welcome and supported.

Sharing ideas and successes across the region, the project made sure that good practices in one country, like North Macedonia's job programs, SRB's one-stop-shops, and Albania's farming cooperatives, could inspire similar solutions elsewhere. This collaboration showed how working together can rebuild lives and create stronger, more supportive communities across the WB. Through these combined efforts, returnees have not only found better opportunities but have also gained confidence, self-sufficiency, and a sense of belonging in their communities.

Regional Impact

The RRR project has genuinely contributed towards reducing the socio-economic gap between Roma and non-Roma populations by focusing on jobs, education, and access to essential services. By offering training programs and support for small businesses, the project has helped many returnees find work, earn an income, and become less reliant on social support. Across nine municipalities in ALB, MKD, and SRB, returnees have gained better access to healthcare, education, and other public services, giving them the tools to rebuild their lives. The project also worked closely with local and national policies, like employment and action plans, to ensure these improvements were long-lasting and integrated into government systems. So far, the results have been promising. More than 2,340 returnees have accessed public services, 1,694 have improved their job prospects through training,

and new systems like adult education programs and migration councils are helping close the socio-economic gap. However, challenges remain. Many Roma families still face poverty, poor education access, and discrimination. In ALB, the informal economy makes it hard for Roma communities to find stable jobs. In MKD, high emigration rates and low workforce participation, especially among marginalized groups, limit progress. SRB continues to struggle with ensuring fair access to services and matching skills training to job market needs. To fully address these challenges, a more comprehensive approach is needed. This includes offering more practical training that matches market demands, expanding social protections to support informal workers and marginalized groups, and strengthening anti-discrimination efforts to promote inclusion. Engaging Roma communities in decisions that affect them and making sure their voices are heard in policies will also help create lasting change. The RRR project has laid a strong foundation, but continued efforts and teamwork will be needed to create a fairer and more inclusive future for vulnerable groups in these three countries and across the WB. The RRR project has made significant progress in helping local authorities improve how they support returnees, especially vulnerable groups like Roma communities. In nine target municipalities across ALB, MKD, and SRB, the project introduced strategies and plans that make reintegration smoother and more effective. For example, ALB and SRB finalized six local action plans, while MKD developed three Local Economic Development strategies that focus on inclusion, all of which have been adopted.

While progress has been substantial, challenges like poverty, discrimination, and limited resources at the local level remain. Securing consistent funding, tailoring job training to local market needs, and strengthening community-level anti-discrimination efforts are key for long-term success. Despite these difficulties, the RRR project has laid a strong foundation to help local governments better support returnees and create sustainable reintegration pathways that align with EU goals for the region.

The RRR project has made notable progress in achieving Specific Objective 2: enhancing the capacity of WB authorities to implement successful returnee reintegration policies and address the needs of vulnerable returnees. A key achievement has been the development and adoption of local-level action plans in all nine target municipalities across ALB, MKD, and SRB, with significant steps taken toward integrating these plans into local governance systems. The project has ensured that the adopted strategies are not merely formal documents but are supported by budget commitments and mechanisms for implementation. This is reflected in the annual reviews and budget allocations for reintegration activities, ensuring that the plans remain actionable and relevant. Data collection and monitoring processes, including independent assessments by civil society and international organizations, have provided accountability and transparency. These reviews confirm that the project has not only achieved its targets for developing and adopting local reintegration strategies but has also created a solid foundation for their successful implementation. While challenges remain, such as securing consistent funding and addressing systemic discrimination, the progress made under Specific Objective 2 demonstrates the project's impact in building stronger, more responsive systems for returnee reintegration in the WB.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The EU's support for the RRR project has brought clear benefits to everyone involved. Returnees, especially vulnerable groups like Roma, have gained better access to jobs, education, and essential

services, helping them rebuild their lives and become more independent. Local governments now have better tools and strategies to address the needs of returnees, making reintegration efforts more effective and sustainable. Communities have grown stronger and more inclusive, with returnees contributing to local economies and reducing stigma through greater engagement. The regional focus has allowed ALB, MKD, and SRB to learn from each other and adopt shared solutions to common challenges. For the EU, the project demonstrates a commitment to stability and inclusion in the Western Balkans, supporting social and economic growth while strengthening ties with its neighbours.

Sustainability

EQ10. Are the outcomes achieved by the project likely to be sustained post-project, especially regarding institutional frameworks for returnees?

Albania

In ALB, the RRR project has created a strong foundation to ensure returnees continue receiving support after the project ends. A key success has been the creation of LAPs in partner municipalities. These plans guide local governments on how to assist returnees and make reintegration a long-term priority. Because these plans are part of local government responsibilities and included in broader municipal strategies under the Law on Social Care Services, municipalities are now better prepared to provide consistent support. Importantly, all partner municipalities have adopted these plans and included budgets for implementation, making them more sustainable. The project also made it easier for returnees to access essential services by simplifying processes for obtaining documents like IDs and signing up for healthcare, education, and social benefits. These changes have removed barriers for returnees while making things more manageable for local authorities. Another important step is the introduction of the ROMALB system, which helps track how well returnees, especially Roma, are being supported. This tool gives local governments valuable data to understand what's working and where improvements are needed. To strengthen service delivery, the project improved the partnerships between municipalities and CSOs, with licensed service providers addressing returnee needs effectively. Two partner municipalities have even integrated "returnee" criteria into their eligibility standards for social protection, showing their commitment to keeping these services running. Local platforms set up for LAP implementation and case management are now fully operational, with protocols endorsed and institutionalized by local authorities.

However, financial sustainability remains a challenge. While some municipalities have started setting aside money for returnee reintegration, the long-term success of these efforts will depend on securing more consistent funding and expanding support at the national level. Partnerships with international donors and continued commitment from local governments will be essential to sustaining these systems.

The project has also encouraged teamwork by bringing together local governments, civil society groups, community leaders, and international partners. Keeping these partnerships active will be key

to ensuring the progress made so far continues to benefit returnees and their communities in the long run.

North Macedonia

In MKD, the RRR project has created a strong foundation to support returnees even after the project ends. A key achievement is the development of three LED strategies in target municipalities, aimed at helping returnees find jobs and access essential services while also benefiting the wider community. The project has focused on tackling the lack of formal education among working-age Roma, which is a major barrier to employment and inclusion. Through adult education programs and vocational training, returnees without formal schooling were able to complete primary education, improving their chances of finding stable jobs. These initiatives were included in local social support plans and backed by Active Labour Market Measures (ALMMs). For the first time, the 2022 NOEP introduced a pilot program specifically for returnees, embedding these efforts into national employment strategies. To make these programs sustainable, the project supported a funding model where municipalities work with licensed organizations, funded by the central government through the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth (MSPDY). This ensures that returnees' needs are included in the LSPPs and have long-term financial support. A new law under review is expected to formalize this system, allowing the ESA to partner with NGOs and other providers to offer standardized services for returnees and Roma. The project also set up municipality local platforms to coordinate services for returnees and monitor their progress. These councils ensure returnees get the help they need while providing local governments with tools to assess and improve their efforts. Although some budgets have been allocated, securing steady funding remains a challenge for keeping these programs running. Working closely with local governments, NGOs, and other partners, the RRR project has ensured its initiatives are part of broader employment and social support reforms. While challenges remain, these efforts lay a strong foundation for providing ongoing support to returnees in MKD.

Serbia

In SRB, the RRR project has built strong systems to ensure support for returnees continues after the project ends. A key achievement is the re-establishment, operational revival and strengthening of LMCs in three target municipalities. This is indeed a documented achievement of the RRR project. These councils were created or reactivated to support the reintegration of returnees in the target municipalities. They function as key platforms for coordinating services such as healthcare, education, employment, and legal aid for returnees, aligning with the broader goals of the project. These councils bring together representatives from local governments, social work centers, police, employment services, health and education institutions, Roma coordinators, and CSOs. Including a wide range of stakeholders, the councils ensure returnee reintegration is comprehensive and addresses important issues like healthcare, education, employment, and legal aid. They also align reintegration efforts with broader Roma inclusion initiatives, making sure strategies meet the needs of the most vulnerable

groups. The councils play a critical role in monitoring the needs of returnees, identifying gaps in services, and providing feedback to policymakers. This collective approach strengthens local ownership of reintegration efforts and helps create solutions that are sustainable and adaptable to changing needs. The LAPs for reintegration have also been adopted in target municipalities, ensuring that returnees remain a priority in local governance.

The project similarly tackled challenges like high unemployment and reliance on low-paid informal work, which especially affect Roma returnees. Promoting targeted employment programs and encouraging social entrepreneurship, the project has created opportunities for economic inclusion and self-sufficiency. However, funding remains a key challenge. While some municipalities have allocated budgets for reintegration, more consistent and long-term financial support is needed to sustain these efforts. Partnerships with the central government and international donors will be essential for maintaining these programs.

Regional Dimension

A sustainability strong point is that the issue of socio-economic integration of returnees has come to the fore. Prior to project start, it was somehow invisible for most of the municipalities and the issue of migration and vulnerable groups had low priority. At this point in time, a number of mayors (across all three countries) realise that the returnees are in fact their citizens and that this issue is now carrying some weight. As a result, the prospects for creating a regional/country platform for networking among mayors, policy-makers and service providers is growing. Having a community of practice ensures greater engagement for sustainability.

The project effectively balances policy-level changes at the central level with practical, replicable models at the municipal and country levels, creating a framework that can be extended to other WB countries. As envisaged, economies such as Kosovo¹, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina may well be included in the regional model through index studies, peer reviews, and best practice exchanges. This regional integration is exemplified by the project's focus on the nexus of social inclusion, Roma integration, and migration, such as the intersectoral cooperation model piloted in SRB, which serves as a blueprint for replication.

Financial sustainability is a key priority, with the project actively promoting innovative mechanisms and advocating for systemic financing from municipal and national budgets. EU funds, often used to finance strategic initiatives for Roma inclusion and reducing socioeconomic disparities, have been used to “incentivize” and demonstrate the case and need for municipalities to increase funding for integration services for returnees, including those provided by CSOs. The integration of returnee needs into LSPPs and the incorporation of employment measures into national programs, such as ALMMs, demonstrate the project's focus on inserting its strategy into existing systems for long-term sustainability.

¹ References to Kosovo in this document shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

The project's focus is on employment as a core pillar addresses intersecting vulnerabilities across ALB, MKD, and SRB, particularly among returnees and Roma populations. With the incorporation of strategies for re-skilling and up-skilling, the project aligns its actions with labor market dynamics influenced by a number of factors. The pandemic-induced restructuring of companies has created skills gaps but also opportunities for the reintegration of skilled labor, which the project leverages by engaging with the private sector. Measures such as vocational training and targeted ALMMs are designed to improve employability, while systemic efforts address broader structural issues such as informal employment and low education levels. Across the region, the integration of returnee-focused employment strategies into local and national plans demonstrates a commitment to sustainability, complemented by ongoing advocacy for Roma-sensitive budgeting and social inclusion policies.

Addressing the vulnerabilities faced by Roma and returnees, the project feeds directly into regional human capital development while supporting sustainable growth through targeted actions. It bridges foundational barriers such as legal documentation, education access, and employability, particularly among Roma population groups. These efforts are well-aligned with the growing need to address systemic gaps that hamper productivity and intensify socio-economic disparities. Implicitly, the project addresses reversing brain drain by reintegrating skilled workers and promoting re-skilling and up-skilling programs to meet the demands of the emerging green and digital economies but also the deficit artisan jobs, which are in high demand. In the entire WB region, numerous professions face significant deficits, including electricians, plumbers, water supply and gas fitters, as well as construction workers. This shortage is compounded by the professional workforce's migration to Western Europe, driven by low salaries and limited career opportunities in their home countries. The geographical proximity of WB region to the EU, coupled with strong pull factors, makes Western European countries the most desirable destination for emigration, hosting half of the WB diaspora. Recent migration trends from the region underline an increasing movement to the EU, motivated by better employment prospects, and to a lesser extent for the purpose of family reunification or education. Increasing migration trends from the WB are also reflected in the rising number of permits issued by the EU.

Additionally, the misalignment between education systems and labour market demands has resulted in a surplus of workers in some professions while leaving high-demand sectors under-resourced. The lack of skilled workers extends to specialized roles such as butchers, machine maintainers for the textile industry, painters, assemblers, bakers, and leather industry specialists. These shortages are not isolated to a single country but are a pervasive challenge across the Balkans. Addressing these gaps requires comprehensive solutions, including aligning education curricula with labour market demands, introducing targeted vocational training programs, and providing incentives to retain skilled professionals within the region. Through its integrated approach, the RRR project demonstrates how targeted reintegration interventions can address these challenges by equipping returnees with market-relevant skills, advancing entrepreneurship, and creating sustainable employment opportunities. These actions support the long-term socio-economic stability of the region, helping the WB economies not only to meet current labour demands but also position themselves competitively in emerging economic sectors.

Economic integration remains an important aspect of the project's strategy, reflected in its incorporation of vocational training and entrepreneurship support to create pathways for sustainable livelihoods. This aspect complements the efforts on promoting regional labour market mobility. Integrating skill recognition mechanisms and encouraging intra-regional collaboration through initiatives like the Common Regional Market (CRM), the project mirrors the broader objectives of strengthening regional economic cohesion. Policy and institutional development are also critical areas of alignment. The establishment of mechanisms such as LAPs and LMCs provides a replicable governance framework that reflects the need for governance reforms and data-driven policymaking.

Future initiatives and donor assistance should build on these foundations by addressing several key components to maximize impact and ensure alignment with the programming document's objectives. Human capital development must remain a core pillar, with a focus on expanding skill-building initiatives to include green and digital competencies while addressing educational deficits through scaled-up adult education programs. Governance and institutional strengthening efforts should institutionalize one-stop centres for reintegration services to provide streamlined access to health, education, legal aid, and employment resources. Developing municipal platforms for inter-institutional collaboration, with Roma representatives and mediators included, will ensure inclusive decision-making and more robust local governance mechanisms. Economic empowerment strategies should include promoting entrepreneurship through targeted grants and partnerships with local businesses, particularly in sectors such as crafts, agriculture, and green technologies. Wage subsidies and incentives for private sector employers to hire returnees will further support labour market activation strategies. Social inclusion and cohesion initiatives must address stigma and build trust between Roma, returnees, and local populations through community engagement programs, while tailoring interventions to support vulnerable groups such as Roma women and youth. Access to health and psychosocial support services should be enhanced through mobile outreach units for remote communities and mental health services to address trauma associated with migration and exclusion. Regional integration and diaspora engagement will be critical to sustaining the project's outcomes. Engaging diaspora networks for skill transfer, mentorship, and investment will boost local capacities and support regional economic integration. Regional initiatives like the CRM can improve cross-border employability through skill recognition and promote mobility within the region.

To ensure long-term sustainability, the multi-sectoral approach that integrates these strategies while focusing on resilience to future shocks such as economic disruptions, is key. Developing robust databases to track returnee and Roma needs, outcomes, and systemic bottlenecks will allow for adaptive programming and continuous improvement. Securing long-term funding commitments from municipal and national budgets, while exploring private sector partnerships, will be essential for sustainability. Strengthening alignment with EU labour and social standards will also facilitate economic integration and enhance inclusivity. In its ability to prioritise human capital development, enhance governance structures, and promote economic empowerment, the project has set the basis and provided potential to transform the socio-economic landscape for Roma and returnees, driving inclusive growth and human capital development across the three countries and WB as a whole.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The EU's support for the RRR project has brought clear benefits to both the WB and the EU itself. By helping address socio-economic gaps and supporting the reintegration of returnees, especially vulnerable groups like Roma, the EU has contributed to making the region more stable. Improving reintegration systems reduces the reasons people feel forced to migrate, creating a more balanced relationship between the WB and the EU. These efforts also ease migration pressures on EU member states while strengthening regional ties. Through projects like RRR, the EU has helped WB countries align with EU labour, social, and inclusion standards, preparing them for eventual EU membership and reinforcing the EU's role as a trusted partner in promoting growth and inclusion. In view of this, the project shows how targeted investments in reintegration can create opportunities for returnees at home, reducing emigration by providing access to essential services, job training, and support for small businesses. This approach not only helps returnees rebuild their lives but also allows the region to retain its skilled workforce, laying the foundation for long-term social and economic stability.

Moving forward, the EU has an important role to play in ensuring these efforts last. A key challenge is financial sustainability, as many municipalities lack consistent funding for reintegration programs. The EU can encourage national governments to allocate reliable budgets for these initiatives and provide grants or co-financing to fill funding gaps. Regional collaboration is also vital. Creating platforms where municipalities, policymakers, and service providers can share ideas and strategies will strengthen these efforts across the WB.

The EU can further support human capital development by investing in skills training, particularly in green and digital sectors, to prepare returnees for future job markets. Collaborating with businesses to offer job placements, wage subsidies, and entrepreneurial opportunities can also help returnees build stable livelihoods. One-stop centres' for reintegration services should be strengthened to simplify access to healthcare, education, and employment support. Tools like the ROMALB system, which tracks progress, should also be enhanced to improve planning and decision-making. Promoting social inclusion is just as important. Programs that build trust between returnees, Roma, and local communities can reduce stigma and advance better relationships. The EU's focus on vulnerable groups, such as women and youth, can ensure that reintegration efforts are inclusive and meaningful. Engaging diaspora networks for skills development, mentorship, and investment can also help strengthen local economies and sustain progress.

The EU can align these actions with broader goals, such as those in the UNDP's framework and area of expertise, relating to human mobility and growth in the WB. Integrating reintegration measures into national employment and social protection plans ensures they are embedded in long-term governance strategies. Regional initiatives like the Open Balkans and the CRM can help improve mobility and create opportunities for returnees across borders. With this and by addressing systemic issues like skills mismatches and labor shortages, the EU supports sustainable growth in the region. What's more, continued investment in reintegration programs will help the EU achieve its broader goals of advancing inclusive growth, stability, and deeper ties with the WB. Strengthening local governance, creating economic opportunities, and promoting regional cooperation, the EU can ensure the progress made under the RRR project leads to lasting benefits for returnees and the communities they rejoin. These

efforts will not only improve the socio-economic landscape of the WBs but also reinforce the EU's leadership as a force for positive change in the region.

Cross-cutting Themes

EQ11. To what extent did the project integrate gender equality, human rights, social inclusion and disability inclusion in its design and implementation?

Albania

In ALB, the project strongly integrated gender-sensitive approaches and human rights into its activities. Vocational training programs targeted vulnerable groups, including Roma women and single mothers, by addressing specific barriers such as childcare and limited access to resources. Tailored entrepreneurship training resulted in improved economic outcomes, with many women establishing small businesses. The NAES contributed towards connecting returnees with formal labour market opportunities, ensuring alignment with ALB's National Employment Plan. Social inclusion efforts included the implementation of local action plans in municipalities like Berat, Fier and Devoll, which prioritized equitable access to services such as legal aid, healthcare, and education. The ROMALB system enhanced accountability and real-time monitoring of Roma inclusion initiatives, further embedding human rights into institutional frameworks. However, the inclusion of disability-focused initiatives was less evident, indicating a gap in addressing the needs of returnees with disabilities.

North Macedonia

In MKD, gender-sensitive and rights-based approaches were integral to vocational training and employment programs. An adult education program, piloted in three municipalities, enabled 107 returnees to complete primary education and provided 784 others with access to ongoing education. This initiative directly supported marginalized groups, including women, by reducing systemic educational barriers. LED strategies adopted included specific measures to promote gender equality and social cohesion. Social inclusion was further enhanced through community engagement activities, addressing stigma and promoting the integration of Roma returnees. Despite these achievements, there was limited evidence of disability-specific interventions in the MKD's context.

Serbia

SRB's implementation of gender-sensitive and rights-based initiatives was evident in its innovative approaches to service delivery. LMCs in Novi Sad, Valjevo, and Bujanovac provided platforms for multi-stakeholder collaboration, ensuring that gender and human rights considerations were central to reintegration efforts. Vocational training and entrepreneurship support empowered returnees, with many women establishing businesses through small grants. Social cohesion initiatives, including cultural events and community dialogue programs, engaged over 1478 participants and adopted greater understanding between Roma and non-Roma communities. The adoption of SRB's National

Strategy for Roma Inclusion further emphasized the country's commitment to human rights. However, the lack of targeted efforts for disability inclusion remains a notable gap.

Regional Dimension

At the regional level, the project demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing systemic challenges faced by vulnerable groups, particularly Roma and women, by promotion of collaboration across ALB, MKD, and SRB. Through peer exchanges, policy dialogues, and regional workshops, the project facilitated the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, contributing to the development of rights-based policies and gender-sensitive approaches. These activities emphasized the integration of marginalized groups into vocational training and community initiatives, reinforcing social cohesion and reducing stigma across borders. The project's alignment with regional frameworks, such as the EU's Roma inclusion agenda, further accentuated its impact on advancing gender equality, human rights, and social inclusion. While notable progress was made in addressing these cross-cutting themes, disability inclusion remained a weaker aspect throughout the region, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach in future programming to ensure all marginalized groups are fully supported.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The EU benefits from this project by tackling migration challenges and supporting its key goals in the WB, such as making the region more stable, reducing irregular migration, and encouraging progress toward EU standards in areas like social inclusion, human rights, and fair labor practices. By helping vulnerable groups like Roma, returnees, and women find jobs and build better lives in their home countries, the project eases migration pressures on EU countries. It also improves how local governments work, builds stronger institutions, and helps these countries move closer to joining the EU. The RRR promotes lasting stability, economic growth, and social harmony, which align with the EU's aim to create a fairer and more united region close to its borders.

EQ12. Did the project address specific needs of women returnees in employment and social services?

Albania

The project in ALB focused on helping women returnees, especially from vulnerable Roma and Egyptian communities, by providing practical job training, improving access to social services, and promoting community inclusion. Women in areas like Devoll and Berat were trained in skills such as cooking, computer use, and soap making, which helped them find jobs or start small businesses. For example, in Devoll, women were supported to launch small food production businesses, with the project offering spaces and resources to get started.

In Berat, the project set up a system to give women personalized support, helping them with legal paperwork, housing, education, and jobs. Working with local organizations, it made it easier for

women to access these services and build trust within the community. Social programs, like group activities and summer camps, also helped women reduce isolation and gain confidence.

The project worked to reduce stigma by involving Roma and Egyptian organizations in its activities, boosting their role in the community. It also encouraged women to move beyond relying on support to becoming active contributors through small business ventures. Focusing on job skills, social services, and community inclusion, the project provided women with tools to build better lives and support their families.

North Macedonia

The project in MKD focused on helping women returnees, to overcome challenges like unemployment, lack of education, and difficulty accessing services. It provided adult education programs to help women complete elementary school, which was essential for accessing formal jobs and government programs. Flexible vocational training in areas like tailoring, food processing, and business skills was offered, with childcare support to accommodate women's family responsibilities. Some women also received grants to start small businesses, helping them achieve financial independence.

The project worked closely with families to address poverty as a whole, with NGOs supporting women in finding jobs and connecting with training programs. Community campaigns helped challenge harmful stereotypes, encouraging acceptance of women in education and the workforce. Social services were improved, with NGOs assisting women in getting health insurance, registering children in schools, and accessing emotional support through social workers and psychologists. Schools and community spaces with modern resources were created to reduce stigma and create a supportive environment.

Strong partnerships between local councils, NGOs, and state agencies ensured the project's success by embedding support for women into local plans, building new community centers, and addressing systemic barriers. This holistic approach not only helped women returnees rebuild their lives but also promoted long-term social and economic inclusion.

Serbia

The project in SRB focused on helping women returnees, especially those from Roma communities, by providing job training, promoting local cooperation, and creating opportunities for economic independence. The project worked to ensure that women's specific needs were addressed through local policies and action plans, aiming to improve their social and economic status.

Job training was a major part of the project, offering courses in areas like IT skills, tailoring, healthcare, and food production. Over 151 women participated, with some going on to secure jobs or start their own businesses. For example, in Bujanovac, Roma women became certified home-care providers, and in Novi Sad, training programs helped women find jobs in emerging industries. Entrepreneurship support, including grants and business mentoring, enabled beneficiaries to start ventures in waste management and food production, which boosted both individual incomes and local communities.

LMCs were set up and strengthened to coordinate support for returnees, helping returnees and their families access housing, healthcare, and education more easily. In Novi Sad, for instance, the council arranged social housing and streamlined access to services. Community activities like workshops and events helped reduce stigma and build support networks for returnees, while local organizations, particularly Roma-focused groups, played a key role in making these programs effective.

The project also encouraged social enterprises, such as cooperatives in waste recycling and farming, which provided beneficiaries with stable jobs and helped their communities develop. This approach gave women returnees the tools to rebuild their lives while contributing to their local economies in a meaningful way.

Regional Dimension

The project supported women returnees across the three countries by providing job training, business support, and access to tailored social services. Women were trained in skills that matched local job markets, received grants and mentoring to start small businesses, and got help navigating bureaucratic challenges to access healthcare, education, and social benefits. These efforts not only improved their economic independence but also helped reduce stigma and strengthen their connection to their communities.

The project also brought together local governments, NGOs, and community groups to create lasting support systems, such as LMCs and gender-focused action plans. These collaborations made services more accessible and sustainable. Regional workshops helped share ideas and improve approaches across borders. Focusing on gender equality and addressing barriers, the project built a solid base for long-term reintegration, though its success will depend on ongoing support and funding.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The RRR added significant value to this element by addressing the challenges faced by women returnees and advancing key priorities like gender equality, human rights, and socio-economic inclusion. From the EU's perspective, the project aligns with its broader goals of promoting stability and equality in the WB while supporting the region's path to EU membership. By empowering vulnerable women, particularly from marginalized Roma and Egyptian communities, the project reinforced EU values of gender equality, helped reduce irregular migration pressures, and strengthened governance systems in partner countries.

For the WB, the project created tangible benefits by improving women's access to jobs, education, and essential services, addressing systemic barriers, and reducing stigma. These efforts not only uplifted individuals but also contributed to stronger, more inclusive communities. The focus on gender-sensitive local policies and partnerships between governments, NGOs, and community groups demonstrated how EU-backed projects can advance sustainable change at both local and regional levels.

Coherence

EQ13. How well does the project align with other national/regional reintegration initiatives and Roma inclusion projects at the local level?

Albania

The project worked closely with the CoE, the World Bank, and the EUD to ensure its efforts complemented other programs aimed at helping Roma and returnees. These partnerships were relevant for making the most of available resources, avoiding overlaps, and addressing gaps in support. For example, the RRR partnered with the CoE's ROMACTED program, which focused on helping local governments and Roma-focused organizations. ROMACTED provided small grants to municipalities to fund community-specific projects like building kindergartens, constructing bridges, and offering training in digital skills and job coaching. These initiatives complemented the project's work by improving both infrastructure and practical services for Roma and Egyptian communities. For instance, in Korça, the CoE funded cultural preservation activities and localized grants, while the RRR addressed broader issues like jobs and reintegration. By regularly sharing information and coordinating plans, the CoE and the RRR project teams avoided duplication and strengthened trust between local authorities and the Roma communities. This collaboration ensured that both immediate needs and long-term inclusion goals were addressed effectively. The WB focused on challenges like public services for Roma communities, creating a foundation for the project's more localized efforts. While the World Bank Action was focused on national policies, the RRR helped communities directly by offering skills training, supporting small businesses, and addressing returnee needs in areas like Berat and Devoll, for example, the project provided practical job training for Roma women and helped them start businesses. Meetings between the project team and the WB ensured that their efforts worked together, with the project filling gaps in direct community support that the WB's broader initiatives couldn't cover.

The partnerships with the CoE and the WB made the project stronger and more effective. The CoE's focus on community-driven projects complemented the project's work on economic independence and social reintegration, while the WB's national-level initiatives provided the framework for local actions. Together, these collaborations ensured the project met the specific needs of Roma and returnees while making the most of resources and avoiding redundancy.

North Macedonia

The project in MKD worked closely with key donors like the CoE, the WB, and the EUD to make sure its efforts fit well with other programs helping Roma and returnees. These partnerships helped address local needs, avoided duplication, and built on existing efforts. The CoE's ROMACTED program supported local governments and Roma communities with grants and training. While ROMACTED focused on projects like preserving culture and improving community infrastructure, the project worked on education and jobs for Roma returnees. For example, in Shuto Orizari and Prilep, ROMACTED ran cultural activities, and the project provided adult education and job training. The

teams coordinated regularly to make sure their work complemented each other, building trust among local communities and improving the help provided to marginalized groups. The WB worked on issues like public services for Roma communities, while the project focused on direct support for Roma returnees. The RRR project helped families with documentation, school enrolment, and job training. In Skopje, the RRR project worked alongside the WB to make sure national-level policies and local support worked together. Coordination meetings allowed both teams to share ideas and fill gaps. Working with the CoE and the WB, the project was able to tackle challenges at both the community and national levels. The CoE's focus on community projects complemented the project's efforts to improve education and jobs, while the WB's broader initiatives provided a strong foundation for local actions. These partnerships made sure resources were used wisely and improved the lives of Roma and returnees.

Serbia

The project in SRB worked well with key donors, including the WB, and the EUD, to complement other programs aimed at Roma inclusion and reintegration. These partnerships allowed the project to address local needs while aligning with broader strategies, avoiding overlaps, and making the best use of resources. The WB worked on broader issues like public services for Roma communities on country-wide level, while the RRR focused on local challenges like jobs and education for returnees. When it comes to synergies between the RRR project and WB, cooperation within WB PI trainings is notable. WB experts collaborated with the UNDP project team and local partners. Some trainers who participated in WB PI trainings were recommended by UNDP and were also beneficiaries of the UNDP RRR project. The EUD emphasized the need to expand the project to more municipalities to increase its impact. The EUD also worked with other UN agencies like UNOPS to align job creation, and capacity-building efforts with the project's activities. Ongoing communication between the EUD and the project team helped ensure smooth coordination and complementary efforts. Working with the WB, and the EUD, the project was able to use each donor's strengths. The EUD ensured alignment with EU priorities and highlighted the need for broader coverage. These partnerships helped the project create meaningful change while avoiding redundancies and inefficiencies.

Regional Dimension

The project has focused on designing activities that meet the needs of returnees, using lessons learned from past projects centred on Roma inclusion and reintegration. This approach is a key strength of the initiative. The project built a network of partners dedicated to supporting returnees effectively. Its collaboration with the WB is a great example of using each donor's strengths. The WB focuses on policy and institutional reforms across the WBs, while the RRR works on local-level reintegration strategies in three countries. These efforts are closely connected, with each influencing and strengthening the other. Together, they aim to address reintegration challenges and feed into broader reforms, like improving social protection and public services. The RRR also complements other regional efforts and EU-funded initiatives, such as TACSO3 and ROMACTED II. For example, in ALB, the project coordinated closely with ROMACTED in Fier to ensure efforts aligned. In North Macedonia, regular meetings with the ROMACTED team helped keep activities consistent. Additionally, a national platform for returnees is being developed by UNDP, the World Bank, and CoE under the MSPDY. In SRB, the project worked

alongside initiatives like those led by EUD, UNHCR, the Roma Education Fund, TACSO3, and GIZ, holding regular meetings to ensure efforts were coordinated and complementary.

EU Benefits and Added Value

The EU added value to this project by promoting strong collaboration between donors, ensuring resources were used efficiently, duplication was avoided, and impact was maximized. Partnerships with the CoE and the WB, and other donors show how coordinated efforts can save EU taxpayers money while achieving important results for Roma inclusion and returnee reintegration. The RRR worked closely with the CoE's ROMACTED program to ensure efforts complemented, rather than duplicated, each other. For example, while ROMACTED funded local grants for projects like building kindergartens and running training programs, the RRR focused on broader goals like employment and reintegration. This ensured funds were directed to address different but connected needs, making the most of available resources. In ALB, the partnership aligned projects in Fier, with ROMACTED improving local infrastructure while the RRR supported job training and community services. In MKD, regular coordination ensured cultural activities and vocational training worked together. In SRB, ROMACTED and the RRR focused on different municipalities, further expanding their combined reach.

Working with the WB allowed the project to use each donor's strengths effectively. The WB tackled issues like and institutional reforms, while the RRR focused on community-level actions like job training and supporting small businesses..

The EUD's in all three countries ensured that the project aligned with EU priorities, pushing for the inclusion of more municipalities to increase impact. The respective EUD contact points were part of the coordination process and they have complimented the action as a step forward in respect to taking advantage of the available expertise.

By coordinating with programs like ROMACTED and TACSO3, the project avoided starting duplicate initiatives. Instead, it built on the work of other donors like the CoE and the WB, ensuring funds were spent where they were most needed. This approach saved budgets further and delivered better outcomes for Roma and returnees but it also pooled resources and expertise, reducing the need for duplicate staffing, planning, and implementation structures. This strategy not only saved time and money but also increased the sustainability and reach of the project's outcomes.

The RRR shows how partnerships can create bigger impacts than working alone. The CoE's focus on community projects, the WB's work on national reforms, and the RRR's local actions combined to address challenges at every level. This collaboration made the best use of EU funds while advancing key goals like social inclusion, equality, and reintegration. It stands as an excellent example of how donor partnerships can achieve meaningful results and respect taxpayers' contributions.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Relevance

EQ1 Conclusion

The UNDP project in ALB, SRB and MKD successfully met the reintegration needs of returnees, especially Roma communities, by tackling systemic barriers through job training, social services, and gender-focused initiatives. The project adapted well to challenges and supported national and regional goals for Roma inclusion and reintegration. For the EU, supporting this project brings multiple benefits, including reducing migration pressures, promoting equality, and strengthening regional stability.

EQ2 Conclusion

The RRR project aligns well with national strategies in each country, showing a strong regional focus on Roma inclusion and migration policies. By integrating Roma-specific measures into local governance, it tackled key barriers like access to education, healthcare, and legal documentation. LAPs and community initiatives were tailored to local needs while supporting national goals. Programs like vocational training, case management, and community campaigns helped reduce stigma, advance inclusion, and build understanding between Roma and non-Roma communities. These efforts supported local reintegration while advancing broader regional policies. The EU's support for the project reinforces its goals of Roma inclusion, migration management, and alignment with accession criteria, while promoting regional stability and inclusive growth in the WBs.

Effectiveness

EQ3 Conclusion

The project effectively delivered its outputs across the region, addressing systemic challenges in reintegration, employment, and social inclusion through LAPs that institutionalized support mechanisms and encouraged collaboration among municipalities, NGOs, and stakeholders. Vocational training programs tailored to local market demands equipped participants with practical skills and competencies, enhancing employability and economic independence. Employment support initiatives, including entrepreneurship and social enterprises, provided sustainable pathways for livelihoods while overcoming systemic barriers, particularly for women, and social cohesion activities addressed stigma and encouraged dialogue, creating scalable models for inclusion and reintegration. The EU's added value lies in supporting the effective delivery of outputs like reintegration strategies, vocational training, and employment support, which advance Roma inclusion, migration management, and regional cooperation while aligning with EU standards to strengthen the WB's accession process.

EQ4 Conclusion

The RRR project effectively improved returnee employability in ALB, MKD, and SRB through vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and digital skills development, aligned with labour market needs. Partnerships with local institutions ensured tailored support, while psychosocial assistance boosted confidence and sustained engagement. These efforts resulted in job placements, business creation, and systemic integration, thus advancing long-term socio-economic reintegration across the region. Beyond national impact, the project's regional dimension strengthens cross-border mobility and aligns with EU accession priorities, particularly Chapters 19 and 23 of the EU Acquis, which focus on social inclusion, labour market integration, and the reduction of inequalities.

EQ5 Conclusion

The RRR has pointedly improved returnees' access to education and social protection by addressing systemic barriers through tailored approaches in the three countries. These efforts not only improved individual outcomes for returnees but also strengthened institutional frameworks, aligning them with EU standards on social inclusion, governance, and migration management. Through the integration of marginalized groups, especially Roma, the project supports key EU acquis chapters, including Social Policy and Employment (Chapter 19), Judiciary and Fundamental Rights (Chapter 23), and Justice, Freedom, and Security (Chapter 24), advancing the region's EU accession process and promoting stability and cohesion for the benefit of both the Western Balkans and the EU.

EQ6 Conclusion

The project has made strong progress in addressing the challenges faced by Roma returnees and other vulnerable groups across ALB, MKD, and SRB. Helping to remove barriers like missing documentation, limited access to education, and a lack of trust in institutions, the project ensured that Roma returnees could benefit from tailored support such as legal aid, vocational training, and case management. Building trust in public services and encouraging inclusion, the project contributed to improving the lives of vulnerable groups and also aligning with EU values of equality and inclusion, thus supporting the WBs on their path toward EU membership. Through these efforts, the project contributed to stronger regional cooperation and created a foundation for long-term reintegration and stability.

Efficiency

EQ7 Conclusion

The project demonstrated efficient use of resources, with funding, personnel, and time effectively allocated to produce good-quality outputs across ALB, MKD, and SRB. In each country, project teams adapted to local challenges, ensuring that activities such as education support, vocational training, and access to social protection met the needs of vulnerable groups. The focus on tailored

community interventions highlights a strategic approach to maximizing impact and sustainability. The EU's investment in this project stresses the importance of targeted support for advancing the WB' EU accession process, aligning with key acquis chapters and strengthening governance, inclusion, and regional stability. Supporting experienced teams that deliver measurable results, the EU ensures value for money and sets a standard for future IPA interventions.

EQ8 Conclusion

The project experienced delays in ALB, MKD, and SRB, primarily due to recruitment challenges and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The interruptions were mitigated through adaptive measures, such as shifting to virtual formats and temporarily hiring consultants. The no-cost extension allowed for recalibrated timelines, ensuring that planned activities were completed and project goals achieved without compromising quality or requiring additional financial resources. Strong coordination and flexibility across country offices enabled the project to maintain progress despite the disruptions.

Impact

EQ9 Conclusion

The RRR project has greatly improved the lives of returnees in ALB, MKD, and SRB by helping them access jobs, education, and essential services. Through training programs, support for small businesses, and one-stop-shop service centers, returnees have been able to rebuild their lives and become more independent. The project also focused on supporting vulnerable groups, particularly Roma, helping them feel included and reducing stigma. Working with local governments and sharing ideas across the region, the project has created lasting solutions that benefit returnees and their communities, making a positive impact across the WBs.

Sustainability

EQ10 Conclusion

The RRR project has taken important steps to ensure the sustainability of its outcomes, particularly through institutional frameworks that support returnees. In ALB, MKD, and SRB, the creation of LAPs, LMCs and partnerships with municipalities and civil society have embedded returnee support into local governance structures, ensuring these efforts continue beyond the project's duration. Aligning with national policies and securing some municipal funding, the project has strengthened local ownership and accountability. However, long-term sustainability depends on addressing funding gaps, expanding local and central government support, and maintaining donor partnerships. Regionally, the project has raised awareness among policymakers and service

providers about the importance of returnee reintegration, advancing collaboration and creating a platform for scaling successful practices across the WBs. These efforts position the project as a foundation for sustainable social and economic inclusion, with potential to transform reintegration efforts into a regional model for long-term endurance and sustainability.

Cross-Cutting Themes

EQ11 Conclusion

The project effectively integrated gender-sensitive and human rights-based approaches across ALB, MKD, and SRB, focusing on empowering vulnerable groups such as Roma, women, and returnees. Vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and social inclusion initiatives addressed systemic barriers while promoting equitable access to services like education, legal aid, and healthcare. Regional collaboration and alignment with the EU's and national Roma inclusion agenda strengthened the project's impact, advancing social cohesion and reducing stigma. While the project made important steps in promoting gender equality and human rights, limited focus on disability inclusion remains an area and need to be addressed in future programming. The EU benefits from this initiative by supporting migration management, regional stability, and alignment with EU standards, reinforcing its role in promotion of inclusive growth and cohesion in the WBs.

EQ12 Conclusion

The project effectively addressed the specific needs of women returnees in employment and social services by providing tailored job training, business support, and access to essential services. Across ALB, MKD, and SRB, women gained practical skills, started small businesses, and overcame barriers to education, healthcare, and social benefits. These efforts improved their economic independence, reduced stigma, and strengthened their reintegration into communities, supported by strong local and regional collaboration.

Coherence

EQ13 Preliminary Conclusion

The project effectively aligned with national and regional Roma and reintegration initiatives by collaborating with key donors like the CoE, WB, and the respective EUDs, ensuring efforts complemented rather than duplicated existing programs. This coordination maximized resources, avoided inefficiencies, and delivered sustainable outcomes for Roma and returnees, showcasing the impact of strong donor partnerships.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1.

9.2. To be implemented by the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub

Recommendations for the UNDP Regional Office (Istanbul Regional Hub)

Rationale:

The UNDP Regional Office plays a key role in advancing regional coherence, scalability, and alignment with the broader socio-economic and migration priorities of the WB. Building on the lessons and successes of the project, the following recommendations outline a strategic approach for a next phase while including immediate, actionable steps that can be implemented to enhance the project's outcomes in the short term.

Key actions for the next project phase:

1. Develop a regional framework for socio-economic integration:

- Design a cohesive framework that emphasizes economic inclusion, focusing on green and digital sectors, regional labour mobility, and the integration of returnees into local economies.
- Promote cross-country exchanges and best practices to address common challenges in reintegration, particularly for vulnerable groups like Roma and returnees with disabilities.

2. Scale-up key project components for sustainability:

- Scale and adapt successful models such as multifunctional centers, one-stop shops, and vocational training programs across the region.
- Collaborate with local governments and CSOs to embed reintegration services into governance frameworks, supported by reliable funding mechanisms.

3. Enhance digital inclusion and literacy initiatives:

- Partner with the private sector to provide access to affordable digital tools and internet connectivity.
- Integrate digital literacy training into adult education and vocational programs to align with labour market demands.

4. Leverage diaspora networks for economic growth:

- Engage diaspora networks to promote investment, knowledge sharing, and skills transfer, enhancing local economies and creating sustainable livelihoods.

5. Strengthen regional coordination and advocacy:

- Establish platforms for dialogue and knowledge-sharing across the WB to ensure policy coherence and alignment with EU accession priorities.
- Advocate for multi-year funding commitments to ensure continuity and scale of interventions.

Recommendations for the next phase of the project

Rationale:

The next phase should prioritize integrating successful interventions into local systems, ensuring scalability, sustainability, and alignment with regional and national strategies. Tailored approaches for each country should address specific gaps and build on the progress achieved during the current phase.

Country-specific recommendations:

UNDP Albania:

1. Strengthen local governance and institutional capacity:

- Train municipal staff on case management, data collection, and monitoring to ensure effective implementation of LAPs.
- Establish local support funds to finance reintegration services, embedding these into municipal budgets.

2. Expand vocational training in green and digital sectors:

- Introduce training in renewable energy, IT, and e-commerce to align with emerging labour market demands.
- Partner with private sector actors for internships and wage subsidies, targeting marginalized groups like Roma and Egyptians.

3. Promote economic empowerment:

- Scale-up financial support and mentorship for Roma and Egyptian entrepreneurs.
- Advance partnerships between municipalities and CSOs to address administrative barriers and promote inclusive economic growth.

UNDP North Macedonia:

- 1. Continue building on the systemic changes achieved through the adoption of the Adult Education Concept by the MoES**

- Vocational training programs should be expanded to align with labor market demands, particularly in the green and digital sector
- Strengthening partnerships between MES, municipalities, and the private sector will ensure these educational and vocational initiatives remain impactful, inclusive, and fully integrated into the national framework

2. Establish additional resource centers:

- Expand community-based resource centers modelled on the RRC in Shuto Orizari to other municipalities, offering integrated services such as legal aid, vocational training, and psychosocial support.

3. Enhance digital inclusion:

- Integrate digital literacy training into adult education programs.
- Collaborate with the private sector to provide affordable access to digital tools and connectivity.

UNDP Serbia:

1. Ensure sustainable funding for LAPs on migration

- Advocate for securing long-term financial resources to support the implementation of LAPs on migration, ensuring their continued impact in reintegrating returnees.
- Advocacy efforts should focus on encouraging Serbian local governments to allocate sufficient funding within municipal budgets and seek complementary support from international donors.

2. Expand social entrepreneurship initiatives:

- Scale successful social enterprise models, providing targeted grants and mentorship to returnees.
- Strengthen partnerships with local governments and CSOs to integrate these models into municipal strategies.

3. Promote inclusive governance:

- Ensure returnee-specific measures are included in municipal budgets and national reintegration strategies.
 - Engage Roma voices in policymaking to create inclusive policies and institutional frameworks.
-

Short-term actions to enhance project impact.

The short-term actions to enhance project impact can be implemented in partnership between the UNDP Regional Office and the respective UNDP Country Offices based on their localized needs and existing capacities.

1. Expand immediate training opportunities:

- Partner with local CSOs and private sector actors to provide quick-start vocational training in high-demand areas, such as IT and construction, with a focus on marginalized groups.

2. Launch digital literacy programs:

- Launch short-term initiatives to provide basic digital literacy training, enabling returnees to access e-services and remote work opportunities.

3. Enhance awareness campaigns:

- Conduct community outreach initiatives to reduce stigma and promote inclusion for Roma and returnees, focusing on positive success stories from the project.

4. Advance quick public-private partnerships:

- Collaborate with local businesses to offer apprenticeships and short-term job placement programs for returnees.

10. LESSONS LEARNED

The evaluation of the intervention highlighted several important lessons applicable to similar frameworks and interventions, particularly in addressing the socio-economic reintegration of returnees in the three countries and WBs as a whole.

1. Tailored reintegration strategies are key to success

Reintegration efforts that incorporate local context, cultural sensitivity, and specific vulnerabilities of returnees, most notably Roma populations, demonstrated greater success in achieving long-term socio-economic inclusion. A case in point are the multifunctional centers in MKD and tailored vocational training in ALB, both very effective in addressing systemic barriers and improving employability.

2. Institutional coordination is vital but challenging

A significant challenge noted across the three WBs countries was the lack of strong coordination mechanisms between central and local governments and among various service providers. Where local action plans were effectively integrated into municipal systems, such as in SRB's local migration councils, outcomes were more sustainable.

3. Sustainability depends on institutional capacity and ownership

While the project successfully piloted reintegration models, long-term sustainability requires stronger institutional capacities at the local level and committed ownership by local and national authorities. This was evident in cases where municipalities lacked resources or technical skills to continue implementing action plans independently.

4. Addressing gender-specific needs enhances impact

The inclusion of gender-specific approaches, such as measures tailored to support Roma women in entering the labour market, demonstrated the importance of addressing intersectional vulnerabilities. These measures need to be expanded and systematized to ensure equitable access to opportunities and services for women returnees.

5. Integrated service delivery models produce better outcomes

Innovations such as "one-stop shop" models for reintegration services proved effective in streamlining access to documentation, healthcare, and employment services. These models demonstrated potential for replication in other settings, particularly where service fragmentation poses a challenge.

6. Returnees require holistic and non-linear support

Reintegration is often a non-linear process, requiring ongoing support that addresses both immediate needs and long-term socio-economic stability. Key barriers included bureaucratic obstacles, limited

access to information, and social alienation. Providing holistic support, as seen in the case of the skill-building initiatives, was crucial to addressing these challenges.

7. Cross-sector partnerships enhance effectiveness

Partnerships with NGOs, private sector actors, and local governments were instrumental in delivering targeted interventions, such as financial grants for self-employment and community engagement initiatives. These collaborations enhanced the reach and cultural relevance of the interventions.

8. Monitoring and feedback loops improve policy and practice

Continuous engagement with returnees during implementation provided valuable feedback on systemic gaps, enabling adjustments to interventions. These feedback mechanisms highlighted the importance of real-time monitoring to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of reintegration measures.

9. Economic empowerment drives sustainable reintegration

Programs that focus on vocational training, entrepreneurship, and job placement proved highly effective in improving returnees' economic independence. However, aligning these efforts with market demands and ensuring ongoing mentorship and support are crucial for sustaining these outcomes.

10. Dissemination of best practices strengthens regional impact

The regional approach enabled the sharing of successful practices among the three countries, enhancing the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the interventions. For instance, models piloted in one locality, such as SRB's specialized units for migrants, were explored for replication in North Macedonia, thus advancing cross-border learning.

11. A key lesson learned from the EU's engagement in reintegration programming in the WB is the importance of adopting an integrated, multi-level approach that combines capacity-building, systemic reforms, and localized implementation. Successful models such as multifunctional centers, one-stop shops, and tailored employment and education programs demonstrate the potential for scalability and cross-country adaptation, while emphasizing cross-cutting themes like addressing intersectional vulnerabilities, social cohesion, and the inclusion of people with disabilities. Aligning interventions with local development agendas enhances ownership and sustainability by embedding goals into municipal plans and securing local budget allocations. Robust monitoring frameworks that track outcomes and capture beneficiary feedback ensure adaptive programming and accountability. Regional collaboration across the six WB countries promotes policy coherence, reduces duplication, and advances shared progress. Engaging the private sector to expand economic opportunities through public-private partnerships and multi-year funding commitments further strengthens the resilience and sustainability of interventions, enabling flexibility to adapt to emerging challenges while maintaining long-term impact.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 Terms of Reference (ToR)



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Annex 2 Evaluation mission itinerary

The evaluation mission for the RRR Project was conducted across three countries, MKD, ALB, and SRB, over a three-week period in November. The field visits aimed to gather qualitative and quantitative data from a diverse set of stakeholders. These visits were instrumental in assessing the project's implementation, outcomes, and alignment with its objectives.

North Macedonia (the week of 11th November 2024)

The first week of the mission started in the municipalities of **Prilep, Shuto Orizari, and Shtip**, focusing on evaluating reintegration efforts within these municipalities. Meetings were held with local authorities, representatives from UNDP Country Office, the MSPDY, CSOs involved in project implementation. The evaluator also engaged with returnees to understand their experiences and challenges in socio-economic reintegration. The field visits were successfully conducted, providing a platform for a fruitful exchange of information.

Albania (week of 18th November 2024)

The second week of the mission involved field visits to **Berat, Devoll**, and online meeting with the representatives from **Fier**, focusing on assessing the effectiveness of local reintegration strategies. Meetings were held with local government officials, representatives from the EUD, the CoE, UNDP Country office in ALB, and CSOs actively engaged in reintegration initiatives. These discussions evaluated the roles and contributions of these stakeholders in implementing project activities and addressing the needs of returnees. Returnees shared successes in vocational training and entrepreneurial support, highlighting improved employment prospects and small business opportunities.

Serbia (week of 25th November 2024)

The third week of the mission involved field visits to **Bujanovac and Novi Sad** where the evaluator met with the representatives from the Municipalities and NGOs/CSOs working with returnees. Online consultations with the representatives from the EUD and CoE provided insights into the project's alignment with national migration and reintegration strategies. Returnees shared their experiences with vocational training programs, access to social services, and persistent challenges such as obtaining legal documentation and navigating administrative processes. Vocational training initiatives in IT, tailoring, and business management were particularly impactful, equipping participants with skills that significantly improved their employment prospects. Many returnees expressed appreciation for these programs, which provided practical tools for securing jobs or starting small businesses. LMCs in Novi Sad and Bujanovac were contributory in coordinating support, bringing together local governments, NGOs, and service providers to address returnees' needs comprehensively and ensure alignment with national reintegration strategies. The evaluator also assessed the capacity of local service providers to sustain project outcomes.

Evaluation debriefing – 3rd December 2024

Online briefing and debriefing sessions were held with UNDP management and representatives to summarize preliminary findings. The session facilitated feedback on key observations and outlined next steps for finalizing the evaluation report. This engagement ensured alignment with UNDP management's expectations and provided an opportunity to validate initial insights from the field visits.

Annex 3 List of persons interviewed

NORTH MACEDONIA

PRILEP				
No.	Name	Position	Institution	Date
1	Ms. Vineta Ivanoska	Head of LED department	Municipality of Prilep	14.11.2024
2	Ms. Pande Nikoloska	Director	Elementary School Dobre Jovanovski-Prilep	14.11.2024
3	Ms. Sofija Dimovska Bosheska	Psychologist	Elementary School Dobre Jovanovski-Prilep	14.11.2024
4	Ms. Verica Dumbaleska	Teacher	Elementary School Dobre Jovanovski-Prilep	14.11.2024

5	Ms. Metula Ismailoska	Returnee-beneficiary from adult education and VET training	N/A	14.11.2024
6	Ms. Elvan Alioska	Returnee-beneficiary from adult education and VET training	N/A	14.11.2024
7	Mr. Djengis Berisha	Representative	NGO Stanica 5	14.11.2024
8	Ms. Maja Petancheska	Representative	NGO Stanica 5	14.11.2024
9	Mr. Sami Ajdini	Representative	NGO Roma Perspektiv	14.11.2024
10	Ms. Mariche Treneska	Representative	NGO Koalicija SEGA – Prilep	14.11.2024
11	Ms. Vesna Konevska Stojanoska	Representative	NGO Koalicija SEGA –Prilep	14.11.2024
12	Ms. Rahela Jasaroska	beneficiary from adult education and VET training	N/A	14.11.2024
13	Ms. Sanela Djemaljoska	returnee-beneficiary, owner start-up company	N/A	14.11.2024
14	Mr. Doan Uzeiroski,	returnee – beneficiary, adult education and advanced IT training	N/A	14.11.2024
SKOPJE/SHUTO ORIZARI				
15	Ms. Mabera Kamberi	Head of Sector	MSPDY	15/11/2024
16	Mr. Elvis Memeti	Adviser	MSPDY	
17	Mr. Kurto Dudus	Mayor of Suto Orizari	Municipality of Suto Orizari	15/11/2024
18	Ms. Fatima Osmanovska		Municipality of Suto Orizari	15/11/2024
19	Mr. Amet Jasar	Representative	NGO IRIZ	15/11/2024
20	Ms. Sarita Ilijaz	Representative	NGO IRIZ	15/11/2024
21	Ms. Merlina Miftarova	Representative	NGO Romanocacipe	15/11/2024
22	Mr. Izet Bajram	returnee-beneficiary, owner start-up company	N/A	15/11/2024
22	Mr. Almir Dudis,	returnee-beneficiary, owner start-up company	N/A	15/11/2024
23	Mr. Nafi Sarachini	N/A	EUD MKD	15/11/2024

SHTIP				
24	Mr. Erol Ademov	Representative	NVO Association of Multiethnic Society for Human Rights Shtip	15/11/2024
25	Mr. Nikola Iliev	Representative	Foundation for the Development of Information Technology Solidarity Fund Shtip	15/11/2024
26	Mr. Beami Sakirov	Representative	Municipality of Shtip	15/11/2024
27	Ms. Aleksandra Dimova	Representative	NVO Fondacija za razvoj na lokalnata zaednica Shtip	15/11/2024
28	Ms. Vishna Shorova Angelova	Secretary	Municipality of Shtip	15/11/2024
29	Mr. Zoran Mitev	Principal	Elementary School Goce Delcev Shtip	15/11/2024
30	Mr. Goran Kostov	Teacher	Elementary School Goce Delcev Shtip	15/11/2024

ALBANIA

TIRANA				
No.	Name	Position	Institution	Date
1	Ms. Entela Lako	Programme Specialist	UNDP	18/11/2024
2	Ms. Mirjeta Ramizi	Project Coordinator	UNDP	18/11/2024
3	Ms. Alba Rexhollari	Project Finance Admin Assistant	UNDP	18/11/2024
4	Ms. Ina Kokedhima	Project Officer Roma Integration	CoE	18/11/2024
5	Ms. Adela Kula	Project Officer, ROMACTED	CoE	18/11/2024
6	Ms. Valérie Covic	Programme Manager	EUD	18/11/2024
7	Mr. Bledar Taho	Representative	IRCA (Institute of Romani Culture in Albania)	

8	Mr. Eduart Koci	Representative	Te gjithë se bashku per integrimin e Romeve (TIRC)	Focus group discussion with CSOs implementing economic empowerment programmes, start-ups and social cohesion programmes in Fier municipality
9	Mr. Ervis Cota	Representative	Levizja Rinore Egjiptiane Rome	
10	Mr. Elvi Daka	Representative	Qendra Murialdo and ENGEM	
11	Ms. Romina Sefa	Representative	Qendra per Advokim Social	
BERAT				
12	Mr. Pirro Xheblati	Director of Social Service Sector	Berat Municipality	19/11/2024
13	Ms. Juvina Qevani	Chief of social services	Berat municipality	19/11/2024
14	Ms. Migena Toto	Employment office	Berat	19/11/2024
15	Ms. Mimoza Bujaraj,	N/A	Qendra Mjedisidhe Komuniteti	19/11/2024
16	Mr. Besmir Dalipi	community leader	N/A	19/11/2024
17	Mr. Genti Serjani	community leader	Social Justice	19/11/2024
18	Mr. Shefqet Boboci,	N/A	Shoqata Egjiptiane Ndhime per te Varferit	19/11/2024
19	Mr. Arben Gega	community leader	N/A	19/11/2024

20	Mr. Vilson Sheshu	N/A	Youth of URA	19/11/2024
21	Ms. Erina Alla	N/A	Kreo	19/11/2024
DEVOLL				
22	Ms. Zerina Sinani	General Director of Social Care Services	Devoll municipality	20/11/2024
23	Ms. Etleva Tare	Qendistaret	Devoll municipality	20/11/2024
24	Mr. Eris Rusi	Aktivizmi Letrar dhe Kulturor	Devoll municipality	20/11/2024
25	Ms. Anila Zariq	Beneficiary	N/A	20/11/2024
26	Ms. Dorina Trendafil	Beneficiary	N/A	20/11/2024
27	Ms. Teuta Qatipi	Beneficiary	N/A	
28	Ms. Marina Xhambazi	Beneficiary	N/A	
29	Ms. Marjana Kapshtica	Beneficiary	N/A	
30	Ms. Lindita Hashimi	Beneficiary	N/A	
31	Ms. Irena Corika	Beneficiary	N/A	
32	Vergjinush Trendafil	Beneficiary	N/A	
33	Jelldes Xhambazi	Beneficiary	N/A	

SERBIA

NOVI SAD				
No.	Name	Position	Institution	Date
1	Ms. Ljiljana Mihajlovic	Director	Roma inclusion Office, Provincial Government	27/11/2024
2	Ms. Dragana Ciric	Roma and returnee women	Bakery in Novi Sad	29/11/2024
3	Ms. Anna Brtko	President	Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization - NGO/CSO working on Roma and returnees' projects	29/11/2024

4	Ms. Milana Markovic	Department for children and social protection	City of Novi Sad	29/11/2024
5	Ms. Vesna Cvjetanovic	City of Novi Sad, Roma Inclusion office	City of Novi Sad	29/11/2024
6	Ms. Anastasija Sulejmanovic	Beneficiary of trainings	employed in Roma Inclusion Office with support within project	29/11/2024
7	Ms. Sanida Samardizc	returnee - beneficiary	supported in make up and hairdressing business - trainings and start up equipment	29/11/2024
8	Ms. Dzeljan Maroli	returnee - beneficiary	supported in make up and hairdressing business - trainings and start up equipment	29/11/2024
9	Mr. Adnan Krasnici	returnee	trainings and hairdressing saloon establishment	29/11/2024
BUJANOVAC				
10	Mr. Kenan Rasitovic	Representative	Roma NGO - OFER	04/12/2024
11	Mr. Seljami Bektasi	Head of Municipal Administration	Municipality of Bujanovac	04/12/2024
12	Mr. Kastriot Jakupi	head of social services department	Municipality of Bujanovac	
13	Mr. Zvezdan Ramic	Representative	Roma NGO	04/12/2024
14	Ms. Asima Ismaili	Representative	Roma women NGO - social services establishment, social contracting for service home care	04/12/2024
15	Mr. Jeton Ismaili	Representative	NGO dealing with hard to employ	04/12/2024

			persons - small grants	
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Name	Institution	Date
Ms. Mirjana Maksimovic	Delegation of European Union- EUD SRB	03/12/2024
Ms. Clara Sanchez Pastor	European Commission - EC	04/12/2024
Mr. Caslav Ninkovic	Council of Europe – CoE SRB	04/12/2024
Ms. Mersiha Usein	Council of Europe -CoE MKD	05/12/2024

Name	Institution	Date
Ms. Vesna Djuteska Bisheva	UNDP IRH	
Ms. Amira Vejzagic Ramhorst	UNDP IRH	

Annex 4 List of documents reviewed

No	Name of the document
1	Terms of Reference (ToR) for the final project evaluation “ Strengthen national and local systems to support the effective socio-economic integration of returnees in the Western Balkans ”
2	Annex 1 – Project document - Description of the Action IPA/2020/420-517
3	Annual report – First progress report/ October 15, 2020 to October 15, 2021
4	Annual report – Second progress report/ October 15, 2021 - August 15, 2022
5	Annual report – Third progress report/August 16, 2022- June 30, 2023
6	Annual report – Fourth progress report/July 1, 2023 – May 15, 2024
7	DG NEAR Guidelines on linking planning/programming, Monitoring and Evaluation - European Commission (europa.eu)
8	Guidance on Integrating Disability Inclusion in Evaluations and Reporting on the UNDIS Entity Accountability Framework Evaluation Indicator
9	Supporting the Effective Reintegration of Roma Returnees in the Western Balkans- document from World Bank
10	Final Inception report - Supporting municipalities of Devoll, Berat and Fier in developing the Local Reintegration Action Plan for Roma Returnees, December 2, 2021
11	Local action plan for improving the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons, returnees under the readmission agreement, migrants without established status and asylum seekers in the City of Novi Sad for the period of 2022-2025

12	Local action plan for improving the position of returnees under the readmission agreement, migrants without established status and asylum seekers in the Municipality of Bujanovac for the period 2022-2025
13	Evaluation RRR Log Frame results 2024
14	Report on the progress of the implementation of the local action plans for returnees with a focus on Roma in the Municipalities of Prilep, Shtip and Suto Orizari for 2023 for their reintegration into the local community and entry into the labor market
15	Assessment reports in Albania
16	Assessment reports in North Macedonia
17	Assessment reports in Serbia
18	Assessment of policy, institutional and service gaps related to sustainable socio-economic reintegration of returnees in Bosnia and Herzegovina
19	Assessment of policy, institutional and service gaps related to sustainable socio-economic reintegration of returnees in Montenegro
20	Assessment of policy, institutional and service gaps related to sustainable socio-economic reintegration of returnees in Kosovo ²
21	Situation Analysis Capacity assessment for providing support to returnees focused on Roma men and women in 14 local self-governments in Serbia
22	THE CHALLENGES FACED BY ROMA - RETURNEES IN NORTH MACEDONIA
23	Handbook for reintegration of Roma returnees
24	Challenges facing Roma during the crisis caused by COVID 19
25	Shadow report for Chapter 23 for the period October 2021 to September 2022 ³

Online web pages/successful stories

<https://www.undp.org/albania/projects/strengthening-national-and-local-systems-support-effective-socio-economic-integration-returnees-western-balkans#:~:text=%E2%80%9CStrengthening%20national%20and%20local%20systems,other%20vulnerable%20returnees%2C%20in%20three>

<https://webalkans.eu/en/stories/enhancing-collaboration-to-tackle-challenges-faced-by-vulnerable-returnees-in-serbia/>

<https://webalkans.eu/en/stories/the-journey-of-a-hard-working-roma-woman-providing-for-her-disabled-son/>

² References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

³ Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, "Roma Inclusion Strategy for 2022-2030"

Annex 5 Evaluation Matrix

Relevant Evaluation Criteria	Key Questions	Specific Sub-Questions	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools	Indicators/Success Standard	Methods for Data Analysis
Relevance	To what extent are the project's objectives aligned with the reintegration needs of returnees, particularly vulnerable groups such as Roma communities?	-What are the specific reintegration needs of Roma returnees that the project aimed to address? - Did the project adapt to evolving needs over time, including new challenges?	Project reports, monitoring data, national policy documents, interviews with local authorities	Document review, interviews	Evidence of alignment with national reintegration policies and IPA beneficiary strategies (ALB, SRB, MKD) strategies, number of returnees accessing services	Policy alignment analysis, thematic analysis of stakeholder feedback
	How well does the project align with national strategies in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia related to Roma inclusion and migration?	-To what extent did the project incorporate elements from the national strategies of Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia? -How did these national frameworks influence the project's implementation and adaptation to local needs?	National policy updates, interviews with policymakers	Document review, semi-structured interviews	Evidence of alignment with national strategies, degree of adaptation to local contexts	Analysis of policy alignment over time, thematic analysis of national alignment; Analysis of policy alignment over time
Effectiveness	To what extent have the project's specific outputs, such as reintegration strategies, vocational training programs, and employment support, been delivered as planned?	- Were reintegration strategies, training programs, and support implemented to meet standards and objectives? - Did the project address barriers like location and language to ensure accessibility for all beneficiaries? - How satisfied were beneficiaries with the quality and relevance of the services they received?	Monitoring reports, training logs, interviews	Interviews with beneficiaries, Document review	Beneficiary satisfaction ratings, relevance of services to participants' needs	Descriptive statistics on satisfaction, thematic analysis of feedback on service relevance
	How effective has the project been in improving the	- What proportion of returnees gained employment post-	Feedback forms, training	Semi-structured interviews,	Number of returnees employed,	Content analysis of stakeholder

Relevant Evaluation Criteria	Key Questions	Specific Sub-Questions	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools	Indicators/Success Standard	Methods for Data Analysis
	employability of returnees, including their participation in vocational training and access to job opportunities?	training? - What skills learned in training led to job placements?	session records	training evaluations	relevance of training skills to job placement	feedback, comparison with baseline data
	Has the intervention contributed to enhancing returnees' access to essential services such as education, and social protection?	- What barriers to access were removed for returnees? - How satisfied were returnees with their access to these services?	interviews with community leaders and returnees, CSO reports	Document review, interviews	Reports of reduced discrimination, increased social interaction	Thematic analysis of social cohesion-related feedback, comparative pre/post intervention data
	How well has the project addressed the specific challenges faced by Roma returnees and other vulnerable groups, ensuring they benefit from the services provided?	- How did the project prioritize Roma returnees in the provision of services? - What specific services were tailored for Roma and other vulnerable groups?	Gender-disaggregated data, interviews with female returnees	Document review, interviews	Percentage of vulnerable groups accessing services; differences in service satisfaction by group	Disaggregated data analysis, comparison by demographics
Efficiency	Were resources (funding, personnel, time) efficiently allocated to achieve outputs, considering the total project budget?	- Were resources proportionally allocated to needs? - Were financial resources sufficient for project goals	Financial records, budget breakdowns, expenditure reports	, interviews with financial officers	Ratio of budget spent vs. outcomes achieved; cost per beneficiary	Cost-benefit and trend analysis
	Were activities implemented on time, and were there delays?	- What caused delays, and how were they mitigated?	Project timelines, activity logs	Document review, management interviews	Percentage of activities completed on schedule	Timeline analysis, delay impact analysis
Impact	What significant changes in socio-economic conditions have occurred for returnees as a result of the project (e.g., employment, access to services)?	- What are the biggest socio-economic gains observed? - What qualitative improvements in quality of life were reported?	Authority records, returnee interviews; CSOs feedback	Document review, interviews,	Increase in employment and service access	Comparative analysis, case studies

Relevant Evaluation Criteria	Key Questions	Specific Sub-Questions	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools	Indicators/Success Standard	Methods for Data Analysis
Sustainability	Are the outcomes achieved by the project likely to be sustained post-project, especially regarding institutional frameworks for returnees?	- What institutional mechanisms were created for service continuity? - Are long-term funding strategies in place?	Interviews with authorities, CSO and returnees; policy documents	Interviews, document review	Policy integration, long-term support for reintegration services	Policy and institutional sustainability analysis
	Have capacity-building efforts ensured lasting improvement in reintegration policy implementation?	- How much has local institutional capacity improved? - What challenges remain in implementing policies?	Interviews with authorities, CSOs	Interviews with stakeholders	Evidence of local ownership and stakeholder involvement	Thematic analysis of capacity outcomes
Cross-Cutting Themes	To what extent did the project integrate gender equality, human rights, social inclusion and disability inclusion in its design and implementation?	- How were gender-sensitive approaches applied in vocational training and support? - Were human rights and social cohesion effectively promoted, particularly for Roma and women?	Project reports, stakeholder interviews	Document review, interviews	Presence of gender-sensitive, rights-based initiatives	Thematic analysis of inclusion and rights practices
	Did the project address specific needs of women returnees in employment and social services?	- What targeted support was provided for women and individuals with disabilities in job access? - How did the project manage pandemic-related challenges affecting women?	Monitoring data	Document review, interviews with women returnees	Percentage of women in employment programs, feedback on access	Gender-disaggregated data analysis
Coherence	How well does the project align with other national/regional reintegration initiatives and Roma inclusion projects at the local level?	- To what extent did the project coordinate with government, NGO, and international programs for Roma inclusion? - Did the project complement existing policies without duplicating efforts?	Policy documents, NGO and international program reports	Document review, stakeholder interviews	Consistency with national and regional initiatives	Policy coherence analysis, synergy assessment
	How effectively has the project leveraged partnerships to address support gaps for returnees?	- What partnerships helped reduce socio-economic support gaps? - Did the project align with or enhance other UNDP or donor-funded initiatives?	Partner reports, UNDP documentation, local authority interviews	Interviews, document review	Improved coordination with partner initiatives	Partnership impact analysis, qualitative review of collaboration

Annex 6 Pledge of Ethical Conduct in Evaluation signed by the evaluator



Annex 9 - Ethical
Guidelines for Evaluat