

Experimentation and Extraction in Reintegration Governance: the case of Kosovo

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Abstract

This article focuses on the governance of reintegration in Kosovo. Drawing on qualitative empirical and desk research, we argue that Kosovo's reintegration governance landscape is a site of experimentation and extraction in relation to the policy objectives of destination countries prioritizing returns. Extraction occurs as the management of returnee reintegration becomes an opportunity for revenue generation for multiple state and non-state as well as transnational and local actors. Experimentation concerns innovations and testing mainly initiated by donors and international actors, then appropriated by local partners. The paper contributes to the understanding of specific mechanisms of reintegration governance, modes of practice and power relations between multiple actors operating at different scales.

Keywords: Reintegration, return, experimentation, extraction, local migration governance, Kosovo

Introduction

Reintegration used to be a growing policy area in the migration governance of the European Union (EU) and its Member States. The EU noted reintegration as "a key component of a common EU system for returns", stressing that "reintegration can help overcome some difficulties migrants face when returning to their communities and make their return more sustainable, as well as prevent irregular remigration" (European Commission 2023). Reintegration programmes designed and implemented by destination countries have a variety of objectives, mainly to encourage return especially of migrants without a legal residence perspective, to increase the acceptance of return policies, to ensure cost-effectiveness, to enhance cooperation on readmission and to improve post-return living conditions (von Arb 2001). As we discussed elsewhere (Sahin-Mencutek 2023), the standard approach to reintegration processes focuses on social, economic, and psychosocial dimensions. But reintegration processes also relate to returnees' access to livelihood options, their long-term aspirations and life plans, their sense of

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belonging to a place and community of return, as well as the political context and governance structures in the origin country. There is limited evidence that most standard types of return and reintegration assistance have a measurable impact on medium- to long-term reintegration, in other words on the policy objective of destination countries for "sustainability of reintegration" in the origin countries (EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub 2022; Marino/Lietaert 2022). Accordingly, similar to other scholars addressing reintegration (Koser / Kuschminder, 2015) we contest the interchangeable use of the notions of "sustainable return" and "sustainable reintegration". Long-term return occurs without any reintegration (cf Grawert 2018), while "sustainable reintegration" has been turned into a politically motivated and ambiguous expression (Marino/Lietaert 2022). Nonetheless, reintegration assistance continues to be a governance issue due to the proliferation of actors, practices, programmes and complex web of relationships in the migration field.

As a country of return, Kosovo exemplifies both context-specific and common features of reintegration governance. Over the past two decades, the country has experienced dynamic migration and return movements and dozens of reintegration projects and programmes initiated by a wide range of actors. Since 2012, Kosovo has been enmeshed in processes of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy and protracted accession to the EU³, where cooperation on readmission and reintegration is linked to progress on visa liberalisation and broader issues. Generally, Kosovo shares many of the characteristics of countries in the EU neighbourhood, such as high levels of emigration, high remittance dependency, and strong influence of EU accession perspective on policymaking.

The two periods with the highest number of returns are the post-war period starting in 1999 and the period after 2014-15. The post-war period was characterised by internationally administered programmes and institution-building for the return of displaced persons from the region, UN administration and internationally driven state-building. At the same time, several assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVR-R) programmes promoted the return, mainly of Kosovo Albanians from EU countries and Switzerland. After an unprecedented exodus in 2014/15, more than 50,000 rejected asylum seekers were returned, mainly through deportations and assisted returns. During this period, reintegration became even more instrumental in gaining visibility and access to funding for state and non-state, including private actors.

Against this background, this article aims to examine the governance of reintegration in Kosovo, focusing on different modes of interaction between actors. We adopt two concepts as analytical starting points: extraction and experimentation. These concepts are interrelated and complementary, hence they provide a lens through which to better understand reintegration governance in the countries of origin. We define reintegration governance as a set of policies, programmes and structures formulated and implemented by multiple transnational and local actors to manage or support the reintegration processes. The concepts of extraction and experimentation allow us to zoom in on institutional structures, actors, policies and programmes initiated by countries of return and countries of origin. The concepts also allow us to look at power configurations and relationships between actors. We use the concept of extraction to

³ Visa liberalisation dialogue between the EU and Kosovo began in February 2012 and took longer than for any other Western Balkan country, mainly because five EU member states do not recognise Kosovo as an independent state. For the same reason, Kosovo has only potential candidate status for EU membership.

identify reconfigurations of power relations between state and non-state actors (e.g., charities, NGOs) in a process of making financial gains. The notion of experimentation defines short-term policy attempts and practices aimed at creating 'quick fixes' to the policy 'problems' detected by return and reintegration policy makers and implementers. Drawing on qualitative data collection in Kosovo (2021-2023) as well as desk research on return programmes, particularly funded by Germany, we argue that Kosovo's fluctuating reintegration governance landscape is a site of experimentation and extraction.

The article is structured as follows: It begins with an introduction to the conceptual framework, briefly explaining different approaches to governance. It then moves on to discuss how the concepts of extraction and experimentation, as analytical starting points, pave the way for a better understanding of governance dynamics. The following section provides a brief overview of the return and reintegration landscape in Kosovo, roughly divided into two periods: post-1999 and post-2015. It then focuses on empirical evidence on extraction and experimentation. This part later discusses the common failures, shortcomings, and weaknesses in the field, from the perspective of practitioners and returned migrants. The article concludes with a summary of the potential contribution of the case to a better understanding of reintegration and future directions for research.

Data collection was carried out in the context of the research project "Trajectories of Reintegration. The impacts of displacement, migration and return on social change"⁴. The field research in Kosovo included qualitative interviews with 37 state and non-state actors involved in the field of reintegration governance during 2021-2022. Many actors were met more than once. During the research phase, participant observation took place, where the first author accompanied staff of reintegration organisations during their visit to beneficiaries of assistance programmes. Data collection also included interviews with 92 returned migrants in Kosovo and with return counsellors in Germany⁵. We adopted process tracing as a method in which detailed knowledge is gained through the collection of within-case, mechanistic evidence about how potential processes work. Also, the tracing draws on the systematic analysis of macro-level data - Kosovo migration and return statistics, strategies, and policy documents - and micro-level data - project reports and documentation, relevant calls for tenders issued by stakeholders, evaluations of reintegration programmes. Moreover, we applied process tracing at the individual level by conducting follow-up interviews with some assisted returned migrants and comparing their statements with those referred by reintegration assistance providers.

Conceptual framework: Extraction and experimentation as part of migration governance

Recent studies on governance have drawn our attention to the growing complexity of policies in all areas of migration. Attempts to manage migration take place at different levels, including global, transnational, regional, national, and local (Lavenex 2016). As Geddes underlines that "migration governance beyond the state is a densely populated field" (Geddes 2021:45). Within

⁴ For further information on the project see <https://www.bicc.de/Projects/Trajectories-of-reintegration>.

⁵ These qualitative interviews were based on semi-structured interview guidelines and conducted by the authors as well as students at the University of Pristina under the coordination of Dr Ardiana Gashi, Department of Economics.

the considerable disarray, enforcing the return of migrants from destination countries and their reintegration in countries of origin are increasingly becoming key components of migration governance (Fakhoury/Sahin Mencutek 2022; Triandafyllidou/Ricard-Guay 2019). They are even gradually becoming specific areas of governance (Fakhoury/Sahin-Mencutek 2023). Reintegration governance is marked by the patchwork of dynamic and interacting legal, discursive and institutional dimensions, but also by the highly politicised nature of migration policies and the social dynamics embedded in resettlement after return (Marino et al. 2023). Similar to other migration policies such as integration, there is a strong tendency for returning countries to localise reintegration policies by delegating reintegration support to the country of origin/return and its municipal authorities, NGOs and diaspora networks. At the same time, actors from destination countries set up their own physical representation on the ground in countries of origin to deal with reintegration, thereby adding to the complexity.

Previous work signals that the reintegration field is increasingly moving towards a multilevel governance field due to the proliferation of actors, but we have limited theorization about how multilevel governance affects reintegration processes (see exceptions Marino et al. 2023). Elsewhere we also argued that “the involvement of reintegration services by state and non-state agencies in the origin countries is driven by several motivations, such as supporting their returning citizens, easing their reintegration, extracting revenues from external funding, and maintaining good relations with the returning country” (Sahin-Mencütek 2023: 10). For this setting, findings in the international development literature (Eyben 2006; Banks et al. 2015) and multilevel governance in migration research can provide some insights about the role of power relations, issues in institutional cooperation(s) and organisation-related factors such as capabilities and trust (Caponio and Ponzo 2022; Sahin-Mencütek et al. 2022). To explore potential explanatory factors specific to the reintegration governance aspect, in depth case studies in countries of return are necessary. The concepts of extraction and experimentation can help to address the question of what kind of transnational and local relationships emerge in the reintegration field.

In recent years, the concept of extraction has found its way into migration and mobility studies. Extraction is a familiar concept in the study of neoliberalism and political economy. In its literal meaning, extraction refers to the 'process of taking or obtaining something from something else' (Longman 2023), as observed in a wide range of capitalist activities, from mining and agriculture to logistics and finance (Mezzadra/Neilson 2017). International development literature also engages with the concept of extraction when it critically examines characteristics of the international aid systems with a focus on diverse and complex relations (Eyben 2006). Eyben rightly points out how extraction is at the core of the mixture of relations in the development field because “most organizations are both receivers and givers of money designated as aid” (Eyben 2006: 2). Priorities, choices, and knowledge of givers of money are often taken into consideration in decision making, while others' opinions are not substantially included, raising dilemmas about aid effectiveness (Eyben 2006). NGOs of recipient country often stand at the lowest layers of power hierarchies as they depend on donors for survival (Elbers and Arts 2011), but still, they expand across the globe despite some transparency, legitimacy and efficiency issues (Banks et al. 2015).

Migration scholarship has found the extraction term to be a useful entry point for a more general conceptual as well as empirical examination of border controls, the use of data/surveillance technologies, humanitarian interventions and digital economies. These studies focus on the reconfiguration of power relations through the lens of biopolitics, neoliberal migration governmentality, as well as the migration industry and the commercialisation of international migration (Aradau/Tazzioli 2020; Martin 2021). For example, the concept enables researchers to show tangible and visible components of how different migration fields are working like an industry, even embedding postcolonial inequity as is examined in the case of relations between aid workers and their domestic employees (Hannaford 2023).

Few studies of migration explicitly conceptualise extraction. One exception is Aradau and Tazzioli, who propose 'to conceptualise two modes of biopolitical governance as extraction and subtraction' (2020: 3). Using the example of official 'hotspots' in Greece and informal 'hotspots' in France, Aradau and Tazzioli explain extraction as 'the imbrication of biopolitics and value through the 'external' creation of the economic conditions of data circulation' (2020:198). Migration scholars also use extraction as a concept to critically examine how economic/financial relations are at the heart of power (re)configurations between different sets of public/private and destination/origin/transit countries, while playing a role in the governance of migration, especially its control (curbing 'irregular migration') (Martin 2021). Expanding on studies that focus on the extraction activities embedded in border controls, scholars of asylum and the city argue that businesses and NGOs become increasingly active in the asylum sector because migrants' status as asylum seekers makes them a source of revenue for service providers, such as for accommodation (Martin 2021:747).

Empirical evidences on reintegration programmes (Dünnwald 2008; Sahin-Mencütek 2023) signal that extractive relations and power configurations between national/international, public/private actors can be experimental. Thus, a promising concept related to extraction is the notion of experimentation. Experimental governance is quite a topic in governance studies, especially those focusing on practices (Abbott/Faude 2021) and those trying to explain local governance attempts in Europe (Darling 2016; Sabel/Zeitlin 2011). As a concept, experimentation is often operationalised along with informality and policy entrepreneurship to show how actors fill policy gaps (Abbott/Faude 2020; Koinova 2021). Only a few studies use the concept to explain how migrant-receiving countries, such as Australia or Canada, try out new ways of managing specific areas, such as asylum, deportation appeals or skilled migration, through policy reforms (Hawthorne 2010; Elrick 2022).

Research and anecdotal evidence suggest that policymakers and implementers often believe that 'when normal politics and policies are no longer satisfactory, alternatives must be sought, not necessarily to reduce this instability, but rather to meet the demands for efficiency and effectiveness that have underpinned dispersal' (Darling 2016: 500). The still dominant crisis narrative on asylum and irregular migration motivates the plethora of new and old actors in migration governance to test new methods for 'quick fixes' through financial and political practices and techniques (Koinova et al. 2021; Sahin-Mencütek et al. 2022). For example, the EU member states are involved in experiments at the EU level, but also pilot their own initiatives, often with the aim of containing migration and externalising migration control. Countries are initially adopting low-risk, low-cost policy experiments at the practical level, with some imagining that

these new policies could point them in the direction of possible policy change in the medium or long term. According to Darling, experiments run the risk of being driven mainly by neoliberal governmentality (viewed mainly through an economic lens) and accordingly end up creating unstable assemblages/architectures of interests, authorities and priorities, as exemplified by the UK's pilot with the privatisation of asylum accommodation (2016: 500). Migration governance seems to emerge as a site of experimentation where different financial and policy techniques are implemented to pursue migration management objectives (Aradau/Tazzioli 2020: 4).

The notion of experimentation has also only been used to a limited extent in empirical research to understand the governance of reintegration. The comparative advantage of one EU return programme was mentioned in a stakeholder interview as being that it allows for 'trial-error' and 'testing new initiatives/programmes' while having the 'permission to fail'. Regarding the field of readmission, Trauner, and Wolff (2014) emphasise that when formal policy instruments such as laws, constitutions, regulations, and formal cooperation instruments such as agreements do not take into account the competing interests of destination states and migrants, policymakers and implementers look for improvisation or experimentation. Public-private cooperation is also intensifying for the implementation of returns (Walters 2018) and reintegration.

Multilevel governance of reintegration enables experimentation at regional, national, and local levels by different state and non-state actors. This is partially related to the fact that "diverse agendas of destination countries, origin countries, developmental and humanitarian organizations, and local implementing actors drive their institutional policies and programmes on return and reintegration" (Sahin-Mencütek 2023:10). As in other areas of migration, experimentation does not necessarily bring order to return and reintegration governance; it also raises serious normative questions about democratic and judicial accountability and compliance with international human rights standards (Slagter 2019). However, experimentation in the field of reintegration has not yet been comprehensively examined from a conceptual point of view, as this study aims to do.

Building on the previous work in extraction and experimentation in the international development literature and migration studies, it is possible to propose some hypotheses about the reintegration field. First, it can be hypothesised that not only actors (such as IOM) directly funded by returning countries, but also implementing state and non-state actors in countries of origin may be interested in extracting benefits from engaging in reintegration work. However, political and societal actors' intentions and capabilities about extraction may differ in relation to the power relations. Second, both the EU and destination countries may consider a need for experimentation about reintegration support to fulfil policy objectives, mainly increasing the number of returns and non-remigration. Third, the experiments, in the forms of policy techniques, financial instruments and programmes, may not be entirely conclusive and beneficial for returned migrants due to the competing interests of various stakeholders and extractive power relations. The following sections will revisit these hypotheses drawing on the case of Kosovo's reintegration field.

The Governance of Return and Reintegration in Kosovo

Circular labour migration, forced displacement and relocation have shaped life in the Balkans for centuries (Schmid 2019). In the 1960s, agreements and arrangements between Yugoslavia and Austria (1966), Germany (1968) and Switzerland formalised labour migration (at least until 1973), which also created conditions for some migrants to settle permanently and act as nodes for future chain migration. Migration and transnational networks played a crucial role for people in Kosovo when economic hardship mixed with political tensions in the 1980s and 1990s (Gashi/Haxhikadrija 2012; UNDP 2014). In 2017, approximately 870,000 people from Kosovo were living outside the country, representing 49% of the resident population (Republic of Kosovo 2017:8). Transnational support mechanisms for Kosovars are recognised for their significant economic (GERMIN 2023) and political (Koinova 2021) contributions to developments in Kosovo but are often maintained under great difficulty.

In 1996, Germany concluded a readmission agreement with the remnants of Yugoslavia, which allowed for the forced repatriation of migrants, including to Kosovo, despite confirmed reports of rising tensions. During the ensuing war between the Yugoslav army and the Kosovo Liberation Army (1998/99), which NATO interfered in with air strikes, some 90% of Kosovo's Albanian population was systematically displaced, mostly within the region (Reka 1999). In June 1999, UN Resolution 1244 placed Kosovo under the administration of UNMIK (United Nations Interim Administrative Mission Kosovo). The governance of reintegration in Kosovo was thus established in the context of internationally driven state-building, with significant elements of experimentation and unequal power relations. In the words of a Kosovar academic, since 1999, "Kosovo has been the pretext for the construction of a multi-ethnic and democratic society" and has "acted as a testing ground for new forms of liberal state-building, all without ever being fully recognised as a state by the EU itself" (Musliu 2021, n.p.). The examples of extraction are also extensively documented and discussed in the literature on peace- and state-building for the Kosovo case (Beha/Selaci 2018).

While reintegration has been enshrined in Kosovo's institutions, strategies, action plans and budgeting since its status as an international protectorate (1999-2008), the case also illustrates fractures and fragmentation in the governance of return, as the return agendas of destination countries collided with the norms put forward by international organisations, especially during the UN administration. Kosovo's geographical proximity to the EU and relatively low migration costs mean that most EU destination countries do not fund reintegration assistance as part of their standard Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programmes, to prevent a 'pull factor' (OECD 2020). This creates perceived gaps in assistance, which different organisations seek to fill, opening a space for policy level and institutional experimentation. In this context, Kosovo has become an 'experimental ground' for return and reintegration policy (Dünnwald 2013) unfold over time. A multiplication of transnational, national and local actors evolved that serve as implementers. This process is accompanied by a high degree of organisational and financial interactions that can be interpreted as value extraction.

Based on the historical-political context, Kosovar institutions distinguish between two groups of people⁶ who qualify as recipients of reintegration assistance. This categorisation is reflected in different legal and institutional frameworks and funding lines. The first type are people who were displaced during or shortly after the war and who return voluntarily from neighbouring countries (former Yugoslavia) until today; they are referred to as 'returnees' and are mainly from non-Albanian backgrounds (communities). The second type are those who return under legal return orders, mainly rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants from EU Member States and are referred to as 'repatriates'.⁷

Despite of extensive experience with different types of assistance provided to returnees and repatriates, little is known about the impact of this assistance on the reintegration process (Arënlju/Gashi 2019). Existing studies on reintegration in Kosovo show that reintegration trajectories are mainly shaped by economic opportunities and family support (local and transnational); that legal and living conditions in destination countries play a crucial role in enabling return preparedness (Sahin-Mencütek 2023). Legal insecurity and forced return are associated with high levels of psychological distress and reintegration barriers are multiplied in rural areas (Arënlju/Gashi 2019; Vollmer 2023). Against this backdrop, it is useful to zoom in on two periods of return and reintegration governance in Kosovo for better contextualisation: the post-war period and the post-2015 period.

The post-war period

The post-war return of Kosovo Albanians, especially from neighbouring Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, has been described as one of the fastest self-organised refugee returns in history (Hajdari/Krasniqi 2021). Some 850,000 refugees returned without much planning or preparation (Anderson/Molly 1999). There were also self-organised returns from EU countries, although many refugees, aware of the destruction of homes, food shortages and other problems, would have preferred to stay longer than their temporary protection status allowed. By the end of 1999, Germany was hosting an estimated 180,000 Kosovo Albanians⁸, who were obliged to leave and experienced strong pressure from the authorities to return 'voluntarily' (Vollmer 2023), while reintegration assistance (at least from Germany⁹) was almost non-existent. Reconstruction efforts were unable to keep up with the pace of returns and repatriations.

⁶ There is also a third group, i.e., a small number of Kosovar citizens returning from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, however, their reintegration assistance is beyond the scope of this article: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. Rehabilitation & Reintegration Support to the Kosovo Probation Service, <https://www.icct.nl/project/rehabilitation-reintegration-support-kosovo-probation-service>.

⁷ This distinction is relevant for international and national reintegration assistance and in terms of administrative division of responsibilities; This terminology does not play any self-referential role and even the government statistics list self-organized return under "immigration" (Kosovar Ministry of Internal Affairs n.d.).

⁸ This number was announced by the German Minister of Internal Affairs at that time, it is an estimate and may include a proportion of pre-war migrants, asylum seekers and the nearly 15 000 Kosovo refugees evacuated from Macedonia (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2000).

⁹ Switzerland set up an AVRR programme for Kosovo Albanian war refugees with substantially more assistance, including housing reconstruction (von Arb 2001).

The short period between the end of the war and the proper administrative establishment of UNMIK on the ground served as a window for forced returns. In 2000, 12,533 deportations were recorded by the UNMIK border police, mainly from Germany and Switzerland (Council of Europe 2001), including persons facing serious risks due to ethnic tensions, asylum seekers not originating from Kosovo and 1,500 ex-offenders (UNMIK 2000). In October 2000, UNMIK issued a statement calling on countries of destination to delay forced returns in view of ‘limited absorption capacity and destroyed infrastructure’, to avoid undermining reconstruction and transition efforts through ‘uncontrolled mass returns’, and generally to organise repatriation in a ‘co-ordinated, phased and orderly’ manner (UNMIK 2000: 2).

Institutionally, Kosovo’s post-war return and readmission governance landscape was populated by UNMIK, IOM and UNHCR. UNMIK established the Office for Communities, Returns and Minority Affairs (OCRM), and institution-building was also supported by the OSCE. The war had had an impact on the demarcation of ethnic boundaries, even for groups that were no major parties to the conflict¹⁰, and the displacement of certain communities continued until 2004. In this context, reintegration structures, including Municipal Offices for Communities and Returns (MOCRs), were established to support the – voluntary – return of displaced persons from neighbouring countries, not only to Kosovo, but also to their pre-war place of residence. For displaced persons settled in EU countries, UNMIK established criteria for readmission, to be assessed through a local screening of the situation prior to return (Lüthke 2007), which slowed down forced returns. On average over the years, UNMIK rejected about 50 per cent of Germany’s repatriation requests (Misselwitz 2010). Repatriations of Serbs and Roma were not allowed for years after the war¹¹.

However, the criteria established by the OCRM were constantly questioned, successively abolished, or simply ignored by the interior ministries of EU member states, and criminal offenders were always exempted (Dünnwald 2008; Misselwitz 2010). As the boundaries between communities, especially between Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, are not very clear to outsiders, basing a risk prognosis on this distinction is highly unreliable and led to Ashkali deported from Germany becoming victims of violent attacks and looting, as observed in 2004 (Dünnwald 2008; Misselwitz 2010). While repatriation remained controversial during the UN administration – at times entire planes were sent back from Pristina without disembarking (Dünnwald 2008) – UNMIK cooperated with over 20 countries on readmission (OSCE 2009). Agreements or MoUs were signed with Germany, Switzerland and Sweden (OSCE 2009). Both Germany (Dünnwald 2013) and Austria (IOM Hungary 2015) had police liaison officers on the ground in Pristina to process deportations and negotiate with UNMIK.

The transfer of authority from the UN administration to Kosovar institutions created a momentum for the countries of destination to lay the foundations for a more co-operative new government. In 2007, before independence, the reintegration strategy for repatriates was

¹⁰ Roma and to an extent Egyptians became perceived as collaborators of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army; Ashkali, despite of publicly advocating for an independent Albanian-led Kosovo since before the war, were often perceived as a subgroup of Roma (Lichnofsky 2013); Slavic Muslims like the Gorane did not see a place for themselves in society anymore (Schmidinger 2018), all these groups faced a lack of protection and were confronted with hostilities, especially during the first years after the war.

¹¹ Still, deportations of Roma and Gorane are documented (and criticized) by UNHCR even in the first few years after the war (Redmond 2000).

developed with OSCE support. The Independent Kosovar government (since 2008) sought to follow the agenda set by the EU Commission and Member States, which made Schengen visa liberalisation conditional on cooperation on readmission and reintegration.¹² In 2012, the Kosovar Ministry of the Interior established the Department for the Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and later for the Integration of Foreigner (DRRP(IF)) (interview KP5, 9.11.21). The Kosovar reintegration strategy had an allocated budget from the beginning (interview KP1, 03.06.21) and municipal authorities in charge of its implementation and was therefore perceived as successful (interview KP4, 06.11.21). The regulation on reintegration assistance had a cut-off date which is until June 2020. Only repatriates who had left Kosovo before 28 July 2010 and certain vulnerable groups were eligible for public assistance.

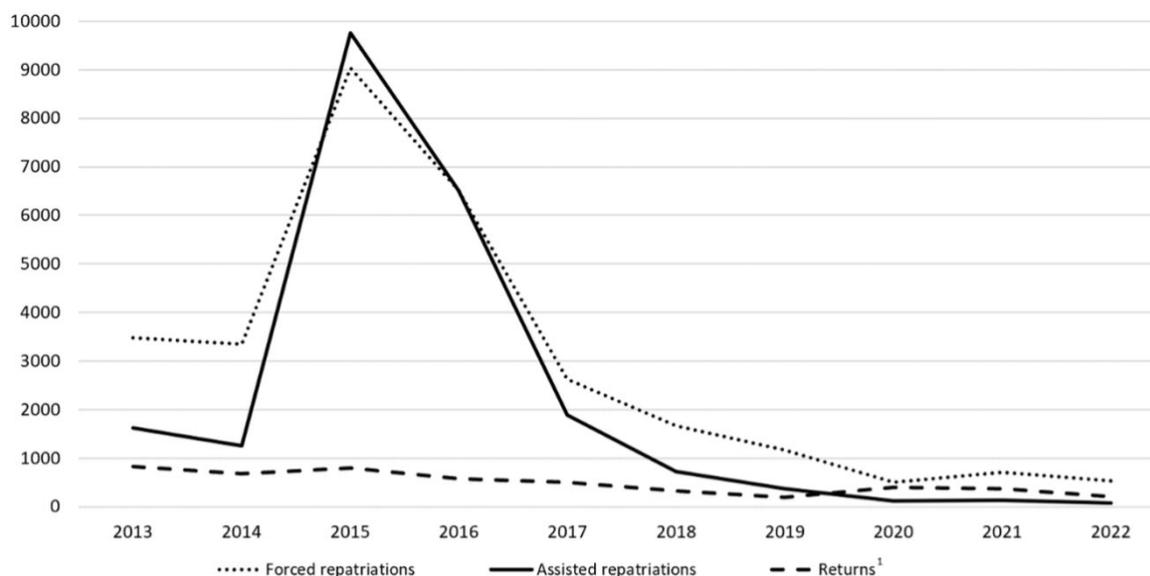
In parallel with the establishment of national reintegration structures, and at a time when repatriations from the EU were at their lowest level since the war, externally funded reintegration activities and actors multiplied. These include the URA project (ura is Albanian for bridge), initially an EU-funded multi-stakeholder consortium providing reintegration assistance. The German Ministry of Home Affairs established a presence in Kosovo along with two German charities AWO, (Workers Welfare) and Diakonie. EU civil society organisations and charities organised through the ERSO II network (ERSO stands for European Reintegration Support Organisations) started supporting local NGOs to provide reintegration assistance. Since 2010, Austrian-funded reintegration assistance implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) has supported returned migrants from Austria, for example with micro-credits.

The post-2015 period

Out-migration remained significant after independence: according to survey results from 2008, one third of Kosovo Albanians were taking concrete steps to prepare for emigration (Ivlevs/King 2015). In an unexpected exodus, more than five per cent of the population, an estimated 110,000 people (cf. Republic of Kosovo 2017: 8) left Kosovo within a few months, mainly through Serbia and Hungary in 2014 and early 2015, especially to Germany (Schmid 2019). Many of those who joined this movement were quickly returned through deportation or assisted return, especially after Kosovo was classified as a safe country of origin by Germany in 2015. The figure below provides an overview of the return trends.

¹² By June 2010, Kosovo's government had already signed readmission agreements with Albania, Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland, and negotiations with Austria and Norway had been finalised (Danish Refugee Council 2011).

Figure 1: return trends disaggregated by returnees, forced repatriations and assisted repatriations (2013-2022)



Sources:

Repatriations: Statistical Reports by the Kosovar Ministry of Home Affairs: <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/1/40/Publications>.
Returns: Statistical Overview by UNHCR Kosovo Office, August 2023.

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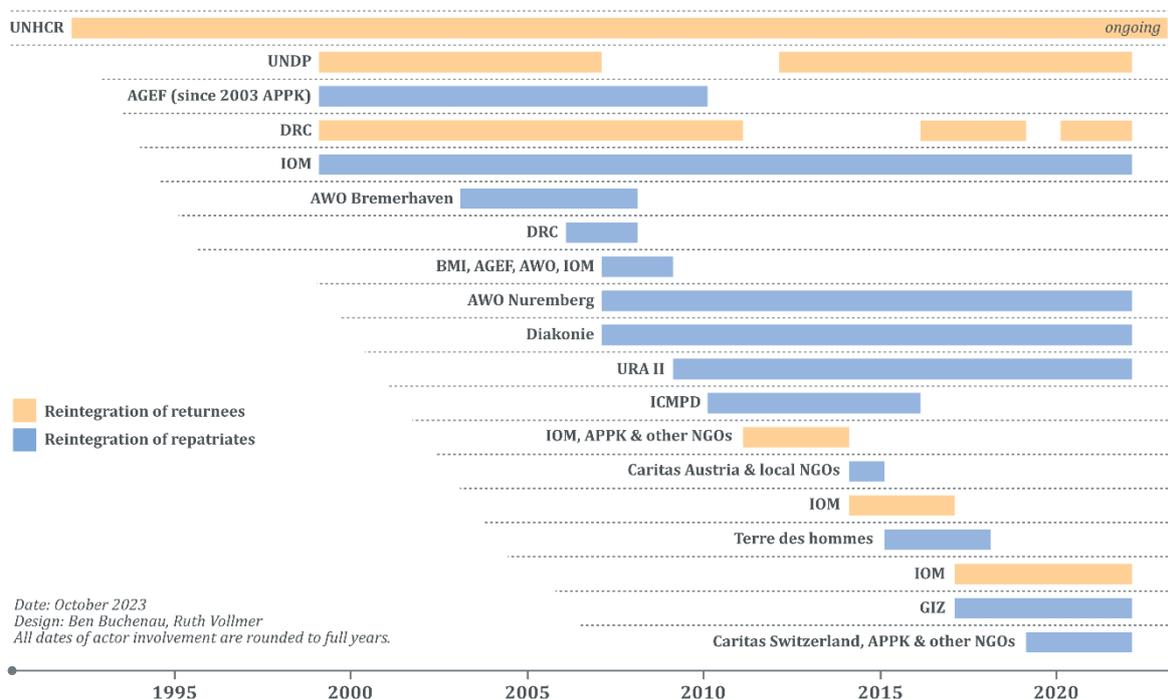
¹ Returns refers to voluntary non-majority returns (Ashkali, Bosniak, Croat, Egyptian, Gorani, Montenegrin, Roma, Serb, Turk and Albanian when returning into a minority situation) after displacement from Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia and within Kosovo.

The scale and visibility of the 2014/15 movement led to a multiplication of reintegration projects in Kosovo, and even humanitarian organisations resumed their activities. In this context, the BMZ (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), through its implementing agency, the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), opened the DIMAK centre in Pristina in 2015 to provide counselling and referrals to returned migrants, as well as capacity building for national and local institutions. This joined the existing projects run by two German charities (AWO and Diakonie) and URA run by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. With the start of the BMZ reintegration programme "Returning to new Opportunities" in 2017, the DIMAK model was scaled up to 12, and later 11 other countries. It was complemented by a civil society component in which several NGOs received funding channelled through GIZ to implement reintegration assistance. Moreover, the ICMPD expanded its activities in Kosovo through a series of projects providing capacity building for migration management to the Kosovar government with Swiss funding after 2014 (ICMPD n.d.). The following figure shows external actor engagement in providing direct reintegration assistance to returnees and repatriates in Kosovo over time¹³:

¹³ A list of these actors including full names and additional information is included in the Appendix to this article.

Figure 2

External stakeholders' engagement in reintegration assistance in Kosovo over time



It is important to note that readmission and reintegration remain key to demonstrating Kosovo's readiness to meet EU standards, which – after meeting the criteria for visa liberalisation from 2018 – could pave the way for candidate status, and it has signed 21 bilateral readmission agreements, mostly with EU countries (Republic of Kosovo 2017: 9)¹⁴. Although national structures for repatriates appear to meet EU standards and are more comprehensive than those of any other Western Balkan country, research has revealed access problems and limited effectiveness of assistance (Vollmer 2023). The return of displaced people from neighbouring countries remains low. Continuing institutional problems for the reintegration include "non-functioning" local mechanisms and unbudgeted municipal action plans (Advancing Together 2022).

As of mid-2023, externally funded support for reintegrating repatriated persons is about to be reduced. DIMAK, including the civil society component, has entered a phasing-out period of two years, the reintegration funding for the Diakonie project has run out in early 2023, other organisations have either completely shifted or added activities on the recruitment of skilled labour. This can be partly explained by the lower number of returned migrants and the increase in government services. However, stakeholders also reported that demand has recently increased due to the return of people with specific needs. All these changes also raise the question to what extent extraction and experimentation play a role in the reintegration governance of

¹⁴ With Albania, France, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Montenegro, Sweden, Finland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Malta, Estonia, Liechtenstein, Croatia, Italy, and Turkey.

Kosovo rather than the needs of the returned migrants in the reintegration process. This will be addressed in following section.

Insights into extraction and experimentation in reintegration governance in Kosovo

Based on our compilation and process tracing of over 20 years of reintegration assistance in Kosovo, we find ample of evidence for extraction and experimentation driving these activities at different levels and mutually reinforcing each other. While the following analysis will mainly draw on German-funded reintegration assistance. Austria and Switzerland as well as the EU are also important donors of reintegration assistance because Germany, Austria and Switzerland are almost consistently among the top five readmitting countries to Kosovo according to government statistics.

At the macro-level, reintegration assistance is still largely run in an experimental mode. Not so much in the sense of testing ‘innovative’ techniques, but more through replicating project designs with limited effectiveness, without a strategy towards upscaling or institutionalization (with few exceptions). There is limited coordination, both among donors and among implementers and a lack of clear standards or lack of learning from experiences. The topic of reintegration itself arise as a largely experimental scenario along with the vested interest of EU member states to promote returns. This has given rise to a dynamic and diverse landscape of reintegration providers, who operate along a spectrum of idealism versus extraction driven.

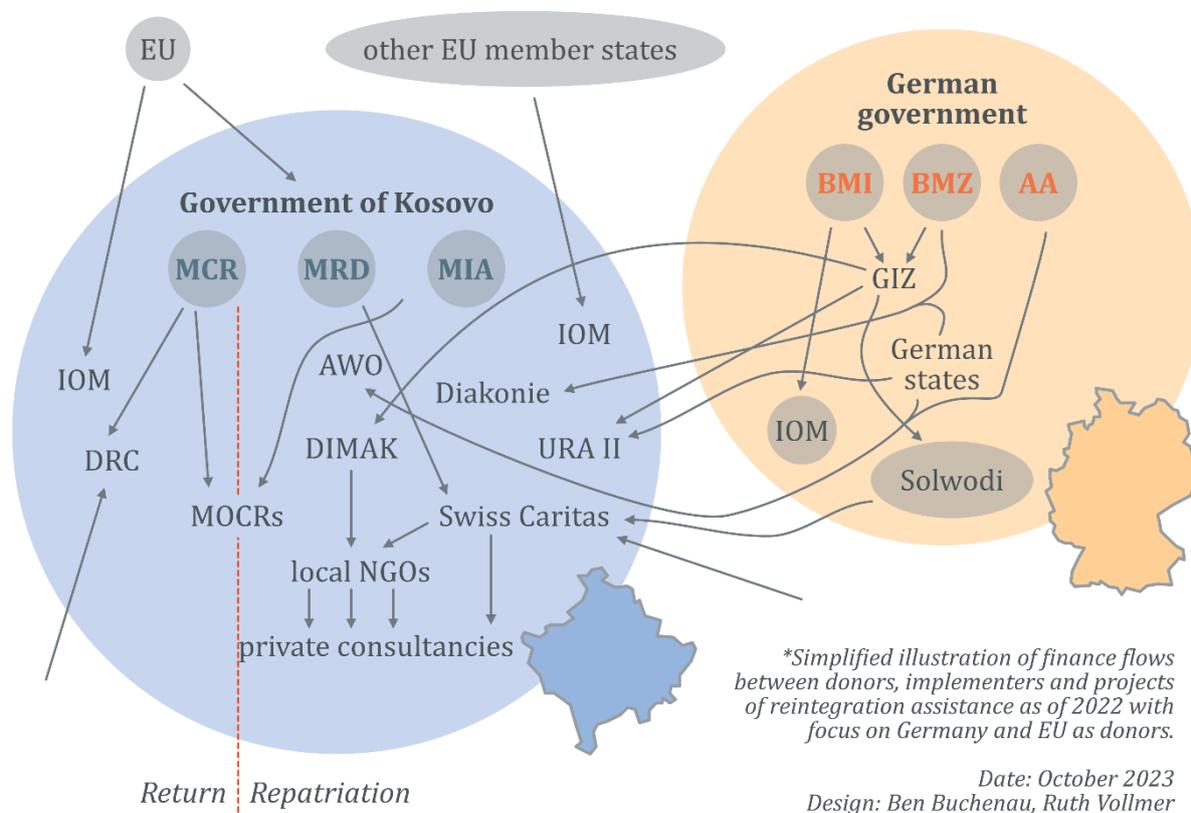
The projects implemented by civil society organisations are generally limited in time and space, usually targeting returnees / repatriates in a specified number of municipalities for the duration of the project and often with pre-defined types of services, often outsourced to sub-contracted consultancies. Charities and rights-based NGOs tend to offer more individualized and flexible support, operate country-wide and build on long-standing experience allowing them to include identified needs of repatriates into their programming. However, due to funding conditionalities and a division of labour between German Home Affairs funded URA and the German-funded charities (AWO and Diakonie), access to reintegration service providers is determined by location and type of return, neither by needs or choice (Vollmer 2023). The quantity and quality of services differ between providers, in a situation which they are not given a choice.

The following figure maps the finance flows mainly originating from Germany and the EU for reintegration support in Kosovo drawing on the research for this article in the year 2022.¹⁵

¹⁵ For a list of the relevant actors and explanation of acronyms see Table 1 of the Appendix.

Figure 3

Finance flows for return and reintegration assistance in Kosovo in 2022*



The extraction emerges because return and reintegration turn into a field, like a “migration industry” where various governmental and nongovernmental actors operating at different levels see opportunities to extract fundings. The situation is created by at least three decisive factors. 1) external political goals and agendas like the growing return agenda of EU, its member states and German ministries, which neither reflects domestic (Kosovar) policy interests nor matches aspirations and needs of the migrants; 2) highly visible events such as the exodus in 2014/15; 3) actor characteristics and relationships in the multilevel governance of reintegration field. These three factors will be further explained with some concrete examples below.

The first shaping factor, the influence of external political goals and agendas, can be traced in the reintegration assistance programmes specific to minority returnees from neighbouring countries as well as in the design of reintegration assistance for repatriates. Regarding the first, it was largely the goal of international peacebuilding to (re)construct a multi-ethnic society. As a result, seemingly unlimited resources were allocated to the reintegration of minority returnees and the related institution-building. Given the obstacles to their reintegration in post-war Kosovo, the aspiration of the displaced to return was and is relatively low (Özerdem/Payne 2019).

IOM estimates that fewer than 20,000 people have returned since 1999, while nearly 200,000 remain in Serbia alone (IOM 2022).

Between 1999 and 2007, 40 million euro was spent by UNMIK and the Provisional Institutions on 47 returnee reintegration projects (i.e., excluding additional donor funding) (UNMIK 2007). Particularly in the early years, when Serbs hardly returned for fear of reprisals, funding for minority returns was easily granted, even though, according to former staff working on some of these projects, the outcome in terms of return numbers was close to zero. An instance of an international NGO whose project budget for minority return simply disappeared was also reported. While a diversity of actors is providing support to returnee families including local charities (Advancing Together 2022), extraction opportunities were most consistently available for large international organisations including for IOM, UNHCR, UNDP, Danish Refugee Council. These organisation often subcontracted local NGOs, and most of the funding came from the EU (IOM 2022).

The reintegration assistance offered to the returnees in Kosovo was not only in stark contrast to the situation of Albanian refugees, who were often forced to return to destroyed homes and had only (migrant) family members to rely on. Minority refugees in the EU, especially Roma, who are still being forcibly returned, are also ineligible. As one report aptly put it, 'persons who fled to Montenegro, Serbia or Macedonia are considered refugees and can usually receive comprehensive reintegration assistance (including housing reconstruction) upon return, while persons who fled on the same day from the same village for the same reasons, but instead made it to Western Europe, are not considered refugees and cannot benefit from comprehensive integration assistance' (Society for Threatened Peoples 2015: 9). The fact that eligibility for assistance depends on returning country and type of return rather than needs for assistance or prospect for reintegration is an indication of the fragmented and experimental nature of reintegration governance. By dividing the target group into returnees and repatriates and creating two separate reintegration schemes, extraction opportunities have also become duplicated. At the same time, forced returns can continue inhibited only through an annual quota despite of minimal assistance and lack of reintegration perspectives for deported members of minority groups.

Despite of international state-building and large amounts of attention dedicated to the establishment of reintegration structures in this context, shortly before independence Kosovo was perceived to lack the capacity and / or willingness to guarantee for the readmission of displaced persons residing in Germany. In 2007, Germany was still hosting around 50,000 Kosovars, mostly from minority groups (Dünnwald 2013), and many return orders could not be implemented because German courts considered the lack of services for sick and vulnerable people to be too severe. In response, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) applied for EU funding and launched the URA project in 2007. Initially it consisted of the German AGEF (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Entwicklung und Fachkräfte im Bereich der Migration), the AWO Nuremberg (a German charity, Workers Welfare), the Munich Centre for Trauma Therapy, the IOM, the state of Slovenia and the German states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg. The EU funding covered two thirds of the project costs, while the co-funding provided by the BAMF consisted entirely of costs that would have been incurred by the

BAMF anyway, such as salaries for civil servants who were less in demand in Germany at the time, as well as REAG/GARP and deportation costs (Dünnwald 2008: 69).

After the EU funding ran out, the URA consortium split. AWO Nuremberg and APPK continued to work independently. Since 2009, URA has been continued as URA II – with a new donor and therefore new ‘clients’ – and has been extended as a project of the Federal Ministry of the Interior on an annual basis with co-financing from several federal states (initially three, currently nine). Regarding its institutional set-up and its implementation, URA was highly experimental at least for the first few years. The perceived lack of reintegration capacity of the not-yet independent Kosovo was the frame to apply for EU and later German *lander* funding. This can be interpreted as local level experimentation from the destination country in response to policy gaps at the central level. Extraction also occurred through the use of already allocated but not needed funds and staff from BAMF, i.e. extracting through reallocating surplus value. Although there is no evidence that the presence of the URA has increased return rates (Feneberg n.d.), and without ever having been evaluated, the URA, which is implemented by GIZ since 2016, is now one of the longest-running reintegration projects in Kosovo. A second URA was opened in Albania in 2021.

The second condition inviting extraction are highly visible episodes in relation to shortcomings in the return programmes, while some echo governance failures. In early 2014 and into 2015, Kosovo – with a population of just 1.8 million – became the third largest source of irregular migrants to the EU, pioneering the Balkan route. Although mainly seeking employment, they added to the immense workload caused by the high number of asylum seekers at the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Subsequent measures – safe country of origin status, increased local reintegration support, Western Balkan regulation to facilitate legal labour migration – were insufficient to counter the impression that German return policy was stuck in a permanent crisis (Rietig/Günnewig 2020). Based on the DIMAK pilot programme in Pristina, the German BMZ launched the "Returning to New Opportunities" programme in 2017. Within Germany, it was controversial from the start and criticised as misappropriation of development funds for migration management purposes (Zapf 2018).

Internal budget reallocations mobilised € 150 million for the 2017-2020 programme period (Zapf 2018), while the media quoted BMZ staff describing the programme as 'rushed and without a thought-out concept'. The programme provided additional funding to ongoing bilateral development cooperation projects and programmes, opened one or more designated counselling centres in 12 countries and provided financial support to non-governmental organisations to implement reintegration assistance on a project-by-project basis. For the implementation in Kosovo, € 1.8 - 1.9 million per year have been made available (Deutscher Bundestag 2018). In contrast to standard reintegration assistance, DIMAK support is available to everyone, including non-migrants, and does not have criteria regarding the time or place of return, but mainly offers counselling and referrals.

Finally, the characteristics and relations of the actors have an influence on the possibility of extraction. The German non-profit organisation AGEF is a case in point. AGEF was active in Kosovo in the post-war period and had a convincing programme focus, essentially acting as a transnational labour agency, mainly for highly skilled refugees returning from Germany, but also offering training and start-up support (Schneider/Kreienbrink 2009). The founder made

extensive use of his professional network and human capital and within a few years, AGEF acquired several multi-million-euro projects from the BMZ, the German Foreign Office, and later, in cooperation with the BAMF, also from EU funds and several other EU governments and Switzerland (Presseportal 2001), mainly for economic reintegration, in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. AGEF was closed down in 2011 due to allegations of misappropriation and embezzlement of funds, although not in Kosovo, but organisations founded by it are still active in Germany, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Along with AGEF, German charities were pioneers in establishing a physical presence to support reintegration in Kosovo. The Heimatgarten project, initiated by the Bremerhaven-based non-governmental organisation AWO, was already active in several countries when it opened an office with two staff members in Prizren in 2003 (Schneider & Kreienbrink, 2009). It used the EU Return Fund on a project-by-project basis to cover running costs, but reintegration assistance was provided based on a commitment by the returning municipalities (usually social welfare offices, sometimes church congregations) to pay for it. While certainly innovative, this funding approach was always a balancing act and became completely unviable when the number of returnees declined (Dünnwald 2008). For charities such as AWO and Diakonie, involvement in reintegration assistance is generally a difficult balancing act, as they risk losing their credibility as advocates of refugee rights if they work closely with, or are funded by, migration management authorities. At the same time, they are more likely to adopt approaches to reintegration assistance which are known to have at least some positive effects (Olivier-Mensah et al. 2020), i.e., individual, needs-based approaches and holistic and long-term support, while also being more open to critically reflecting on limitations and pitfalls of the field (Rom e.V. 2009; Dünnwald 2008).

Experimentation also occurs in response to gaps that arise during programme implementation because of a lack of planning and preparation or high pressure to deliver results, also referred to as 'quick fix' practices in the experimentation literature. One example is the civil society component of Perspektive Heimat. It was initially envisaged to involve civil society actors from Germany but was restructured at a short notice and for intra-ministerial reasons to accompany the centres in the origin countries. After this shift, experimentation did not stop as the mandate and concrete role for the civil society organisations in the origin countries was not clearly specified: initially meant to be in charge of implementing individual reintegration plans after referrals through the centres, the project-based funding was distributed to support – on a project basis – a portfolio of services complementary to each other and to already existing public services. Few NGOs supported in this context had prior experience with reintegration and even those that did subcontracted private consultancies for the provision of trainings, mentoring, documentation and advertisements. This is in a wider context, where an imported NGO culture has mushroomed after the war in response to UN and donor driven priorities resulting – at least to an extent – in a “bureaucratic and elitist ‘project culture’” rather than a voice for local concerns (Schwandner-Sievers 2013).

The following chapter highlights some of the implications of extraction and experimentation for reintegration assistance and governance in Kosovo.

Impact of extraction and experimentation on reintegration governance in a context of divergent interests

Our interviews and desk research suggest that implementation is burdened with challenges and failed initiatives at all levels. It turns out that conditions for extraction can be maintained or replicated even if the related experimental or standard implementing practice or technique has already been shown to fail. For example, although it was already clear in 1999 that the approach to minority return chosen in Bosnia and Herzegovina had many shortcomings (Brubaker 2013), as it did not sufficiently consider the interests of the displaced minorities and faced many obstacles at the potential return location, the same approach was adopted in Kosovo, while reintegration assistance for returnees was tied to return to the pre-war place of residence (Lüthke 2007). It was also known from Bosnia that most who did return did to sell or sublet their houses and move to a place with better economic opportunities or safety. Despite this, it was only in 2006 that returnees were allowed free choice of residence within Kosovo and eligibility for assistance (UNMIK 2006). Other shortcomings of these early reintegration programmes include supporting businesses for which there was no demand and more generally failing to deliver on livelihoods (Özerdem/Payne 2019). Research in 2021 and 22 revealed a similar picture: businesses of repatriates were supported without market analysis and economic reintegration was referred to as the most crucial and yet the most challenging dimension of reintegration (Vollmer 2023). Attempts to link reintegration and income-generation more systematically show limitations particularly regarding long-term effects: the experience of “Beautiful Kosovo” which was a large EU funded project, implemented by IOM, shows that infrastructure projects only generate temporary employment (Newland/Salant 2018). The Active Labour Market Measures project for repatriates conducted by UNDP equally struggles with creating a longer-term impact (IESB 2020). For returnees, the focus of assistance is on housing reconstruction while economic reintegration has recently been granted in the form of “livelihood packages” that provides a set of tools rather than support in accessing long-term income (IOM 2022).

Prior to the start of URA, there were some practical experiences with reintegration assistance in Kosovo that were by and large disregarded. When the German BMZ launched its programme in 2017, extensive evaluations of reintegration assistance had demonstrated the limitations and lack of long-term effects of even much more substantial support than the BMZ programme envisaged (Chu et al. 2008; Danish Refugee Council 2011). During their implementation, neither the project by German Home Affairs nor the programme by German development cooperation underwent any systematic monitoring or reporting of the impacts of their measures on the reintegration of the “beneficiaries” beyond individual stories¹⁶. The reporting mechanisms put in place – also for all CSO projects - track the number of beneficiaries and the types of assistance, without being able to provide information on the impact of the assistance. Most of the CSOs implement a standardised project design with a predefined number of 'beneficiaries' recruited through social media advertisements, municipal offices, referrals and personal connections. Commonly, they subcontract private consultancies to provide group

¹⁶ The BMZ reintegration programme is currently being evaluated, after it was officially completed in June 2023.

training, start-up support and psychological services to the returned migrants and documentation or advertising to the ‘implementing’ organisations.

Like in the case study on asylum and extraction (Martin 2021 above), in this scenario it is the status as returned / repatriated migrant (possibly complemented by additional characteristics such as female or minority) rather than a need for assistance or a real prospect for reintegration that render persons potential beneficiaries, i.e., the basis for extraction. This is because repatriations are implemented based only on the legal status and regardless of whether or not a person has an actual prospect to reintegrate. Repatriates had participated in multiple reintegration activities without necessarily being able to generate their own income afterwards; others were running businesses drawing on the support from various reintegration and grant programmes without being able to generate even minimal investment capital from their own income. Only few organisations know their ‘beneficiaries’ well enough to provide more or less tailored and individualized support and such models are perceived to lack the potential for up-scaling.

The lack of real monitoring and the short-term interest of donors in visible results also create incentives to support returnees who are less in need of assistance than others. People with high levels of motivation, a certain level of education or training and access to additional resources are much more likely to become the ‘success stories’ that are widely used to ‘document’ success. Similarly, ‘successes’ in capacity building are documented through tangible outputs such as manuals and handbooks, and outreach through extensive photo documentation of activities and the use of social media. Initiatives to set up mechanisms for greater coordination between implementing organisations have never materialised, and interviews with stakeholders revealed a certain reluctance towards ‘more coordination’. At least three actors, the Kosovo government, IOM and GIZ, have electronic case management systems, which – at the point of data collection – were not linked with each other. ‘Beneficiaries’ of the various CSO projects and grant schemes may not be registered in any of these systems unless referred directly, e.g. by the DIMAK centre or the municipality office.

As Kosovo is considered a ‘small market’ with many organisations, competition for funding does play a role. To maintain extractive relations, implementing organisations tend to overstate their own ability to make a real contribution to the reintegration of their ‘beneficiaries’ and gloss over the very substantial, often structural, obstacles to reintegration in assisted return/repatriation contexts. This is riskier for charities and CSOs who draw on their reputation as voice of marginalized groups (Weber 2009). For many organisations, especially local CSOs, catering to the interests of donors is considered a “survival strategy” according to our background talks and thus rated higher than meeting or communicating about the needs of returned migrants. Especially failures and obstacles are rarely documented or reported. When returned migrants express disappointment and criticism about the limitations of assistance, these are attributed to deficits or lack of motivation on the part of the ‘beneficiaries’, rather than to the programmes. Reintegration project staff mentioned that “for the beneficiaries, it is never enough” and that “repatriates are a difficult group to work with”.

It should be also added that remigration during the support phase was commonly ignored, perceived as a nuisance or lack of appreciation because of the focus on sustainable return. Though not quantifiable, anecdotal evidence supports the assumption that remigration is

common among assisted returnees and repatriates. Several research projects were only able to find about half of the assisted returnees / repatriates initially identified after a period of few years (Arënliu/Gashi 2019; Danish Refugee Council 2011).

Staff are also often ill-prepared to deal with destitute and desperate persons / families who did not have any alternative to return, and the rhetoric of “voluntary return” in this context is misleading. Lastly, the shifting donor priorities require flexibility from the non-state implementing organisations: while some have been able to link their established profile (e.g., women empowerment) with reintegration assistance, others seem used to re-inventing themselves. However, they voice regret about not being able to address the topics which they think are important, such as building structures for elderly people’s care in Kosovo. Recently, there has been an increased emphasis on capacity building for municipal offices to enable them to also apply for and manage donor-funded projects (Republic of Kosovo 2019), which would allow for some more extraction opportunities in a shrinking market.

Due to the diversity of providers and services, returnees / repatriates reported mixed experiences with assistance. Some appreciate the effort, even if struggles remain. The A-GEF-project after the war was rated very positively by interviewed beneficiaries. Some repatriates have incorporated reintegration assistance into a diverse portfolio of livelihood strategies and are doing well, while for those who face multi-layered and complex challenges of reintegration the benefits are often limited. Many respondents who had received assistance voiced the opinion that the real problems are politics and lack of jobs, which reintegration assistance cannot address.

Commonly reported was a mismatch between needs and types of support that were provided, because these depend on the project / provider however, not consistently. Some respondents raised concerns over extraction or even embezzlement, indicating that subcontracted organisations are keeping donor money and providing second hand equipment, which breaks very easily or that the low quality of certain trainings requires much closer monitoring, also “on behalf of German taxpayers”. In instances when ‘beneficiaries’ suspect cases of fraud or corruption that limit the quality or even the availability of the support to which they are entitled, there are no complaint mechanisms and a clear tendency to give more credibility to information coming from organisations than from returnees/repatriates.

As discussed in the conceptual framework, extraction and experimentation in reintegration governance point to larger questions of accountability. Even though Kosovo's reintegration scheme is presented as a role model for the entire region, externally imposed conditionalities and funding should not be mistaken with real ownership. An initial assessment of the reintegration strategy by the OSCE in 2009 found a lack of implementation: neither the staff in the municipal offices nor the repatriated persons were aware of their rights and responsibilities under the strategy, i.e., it existed mainly on paper (OSCE 2009). Most of the money allocated to the national strategy for the reintegration of repatriated persons got only spent after the EU Commission's 2013 progress report on fulfilling the requirements of the visa liberalisation roadmap pointed this out as an unfulfilled requirement (Republic of Kosovo 2017). In response, the budget got pre-allocated for the upcoming years without factoring in that return numbers might vary strongly. As a result, the proportion of repatriates assisted with government support ranged from 43-51 per cent in 2013, 2014 and 2016, but dropped to 15 per cent in 2015, which was the year with the highest number of readmissions since the war (Arënliu/ Gashi 2019). As

one expert pointed out, locals are aware of experimentation after that "in the beginning, a lot of aid was given in the form of food and shelter, because the administration lacked the expertise and know-how on how to provide aid based on individual needs; giving food aid to everyone was the easiest way. With international organisations came programmes for sustainable reintegration and these kinds of programmes started to be implemented' (interview KP1, 03.06.2021).

Other impacts of the extraction and experimentation mode – which are however beyond the scope of this paper – relate to institution and state-building in Kosovo. As public institutions are reportedly often ineffective and the uptake of capacity building is perceived to be slow, reintegration providers recreate and duplicate public services. This has given rise to the perception that a person needs to leave Kosovo at least once in order to receive assistance and is in contrast to the declared aim of sustainability. A second impact relates to the practice of asking for co-funding from Kosovar ministries or municipalities for reintegration assistance: while this may be seen as strengthening local ownership, it implies that public funds are diverted into programmes which have no accountability towards Kosovar citizens. Lastly, the division of the target group according to returning country, type of return and partly ethnicity into subgroups with different eligibilities for assistance is problematic as it goes against attempts of fostering social cohesion (Calu 2019).

Conclusion

This article has addressed the governance of reintegration in Kosovo, which is an important case to capture the nuances in this field, given that reintegration has been an issue since 1999 in the context of internationally-led post-war state-building, and again quite prominently in the post-2015 period. The analysis of the governance of return and reintegration in Kosovo clearly shows a high degree of fragmentation. In terms of power relations between actors, the analysis shows that the return agenda of destination countries, like Germany, generally overrides any reintegration concerns, whether at the level of individual reintegration prospects, the absorption capacity, or the impact of return policies on informal transnational support systems in the origin country like Kosovo. Providers of reintegration assistance position themselves differently and sometimes quite critically towards the return agenda. However, the need for reintegration assistance is usually identified when, for various reasons, return does not take place as smoothly as expected.

The findings also signal the relevance of two mechanisms: extraction and experimentation in the governance of reintegration in Kosovo. We identified several forms of extractive relationships between donors and implementing agencies, including private service providers, civil society organisations, the Kosovo government and the EU. The continued and rapidly expanding funding of reintegration assistance appears to be experimental, as programmes are rarely evidence-based, short-term and designed to provide quick fixes. Despite experimentation being a characterising feature of two decades of reintegration assistance in Kosovo, there is little indication that practices, or donor priorities integrate previous lessons learned, which seems to be an impact of extraction.

The case of Kosovo also illustrates gaps in the broader international governance system for reintegration. Growing extraction and experimentation imply that governance is far from

meeting the needs of returned migrants in the long term. To change this, sound monitoring and evaluation of reintegration assistance during running measures and systematic stock-taking existing experiences before the initiation of new ones would be recommendable. Among the returning countries and international organisations, strong donor coordination would not only facilitate the stocktaking, it would also prevent duplications of structures and measures, be it in terms of capacity-building measures or individualized reintegration support. Policy coherence within the returning countries would be needed to solve the inherent conflict between return and reintegration agendas and include the actual prospects for reintegration into the return decision, e.g., through pre-departure vulnerability assessments.

From an analytical point of view, some context-specific findings from the experiments and the extraction mechanisms require further research for generalisation. Despite the experimental nature of their support, actors take different positions on extractive relations. International organisations (especially UN agencies such as the IOM), institutions of returning countries such as those of Germany, manage to extend projects over several phases, sometimes institutionalising them to last much longer than planned. In this landscape, local CSOs are often able to be more flexible and find new donors. This seems to perpetuate hierarchical power relations between host and home countries on the one hand, and between donors and recipients on the other. It is important to test these assumptions in comparative cases. Moreover, the Kosovo case shows us that experimentation can lead to different outcomes: failure to terminate on the one hand, replication, modification or scaling up on the other. The results of experiments for the institutionalisation of the reintegration field require extensive research on their drivers. Some experiments are not scaled up, even though they are successful, because of financial costs or the end of authorisation. There is therefore still a need for systematic analysis of failures and working models to inform policy makers and academic research.

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Appendix

<i>International Organizations</i>	
UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)	UN Organisation
IOM (International Organisation for Migration)	UN Organisation
UNDP (United Nations Development Program)	UN Organisation
ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development)	International Organisation
<i>External State Institutions</i>	
BMI (Bundesministerium des Innern/ German Federal Ministry of the Interior)	German Federal Ministry
BMZ (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung / German	German Federal Ministry

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)	
AA (Auswärtiges Amt/ German Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs)	German Federal Ministry
GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit/ German Agency for International Cooperation)	International Enterprise Owned by the German Federal Government
URA II (<i>ura</i> is Albanian for bridge)	A reintegration project co-funded by BMI and 9 German states and implemented by GIZ, annually extended but quasi-institutionalised
DIMAK (Deutsches Informationszentrum für Migration, Ausbildung und Karriere/ German Information centre on Migration, Vocational Training and Career)	Counselling centre for repatriated persons and potential migrants funded by the BMZ and implemented by GIZ
<i>External non-state organisations and charities</i>	
DRC (Danish Refugee Council)	Denmark-Based NGO
Caritas	Umbrella Organization of Catholic Charities (165 member organisations)
Terre des hommes	Switzerland-Based NGO
AGEF (Arbeitsgruppe Entwicklung und Fachkräfte im Bereich der Migration und der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit/ Association of Experts in the field of migration and development cooperation)	German-Based NGO (1992-2011)
APPK (Employment Promotion Agency of Kosovo)	Kosovar NGO founded by AGEF
AWO (Arbeiterwohlfahrt/ Workers welfare)	Confessionally Independent German Charity
Diakonie	Umbrella Organization of Protestant Charities
Solwodi (Solidarity with Women in Distress)	International Women's Rights NGO
<i>Kosovar State Institutions</i>	
MCR (Ministry for Communities and Returns)	Kosovar State Ministry
MIA (Ministry of Internal Affairs)	Kosovar State Ministry
MRD (Ministry of Regional Development)	Kosovar State Ministry

MOCRs (Municipal Offices for Communities and Returns)	Kosovar Municipal Offices
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Table 1: Organizations involved in reintegration assistance in Kosovo by type.

Code	Date	Type of actor
KP1	03.06.2021	International Organisation
KP2	05.11.2021	German Charity
KP3	05.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
KP4	08.11.2021	German DC Project
KP5	09.11.2021	Kosovar State body
KP6	09.11.2021	German NGO
KP7	09.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
KP8	10.11.2021	German Government Project
KP9	10.11.2021	Municipal Body
KP10	11.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
KP11	11.11.2021	Expert
KP12	12.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
KP13	15.11.2021	Kosovar Branch of International NGO
KP14	18.11.2021	German Charity
KP15	19.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
KP16	22.11.2021	German-Funded DC Programme
KP17	23.11.2021	Kosovar NGO
KP18	23.11.2021	Kosovar Government Body
KP19	07.02.2022	Municipal Body
KP20	07.02.2022	Municipal Body
KP21	07.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
KP22	08.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
KP23	09.02.2022	International Program
KP24	10.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
KP25	11.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
KP26	12.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
KP27	15.02.2022	Municipal Body
KP28	16.02.2022	Swiss Charity
KP29	17.02.2022	Kosovar NGO
KP30	29.09.2022	International Organisation
KP31	21.10.2022	Kosovar NGO

Table 2.: List of interviews