

# HOW TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES?

The most important findings and guidelines from the comparative analysis of the surveys conducted in 2011, 2019 and 2021 on the reintegration of returnees under the Readmission Agreement.

PolicyBrief

## HOW MANY RETURNEES ARE THERE?

The issue of returnees under the Readmission Agreement and their reintegration has been on the political agenda in Serbia since the onset of the negotiations with the EU in 2007 on visa liberalization for Serbian citizens. Since 2016, the numbers of both asylum seekers from Serbia in EU member states and returnees to Serbia under the readmission agreements have been constantly declining. According to the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, 1,008 registered readmissions were realized in 2020. However, it is believed that there are approximately just as many unregistered returnees and that their actual number is twice as high.

## WHO MAKES UP THE RETURNEE POPULATION TODAY?

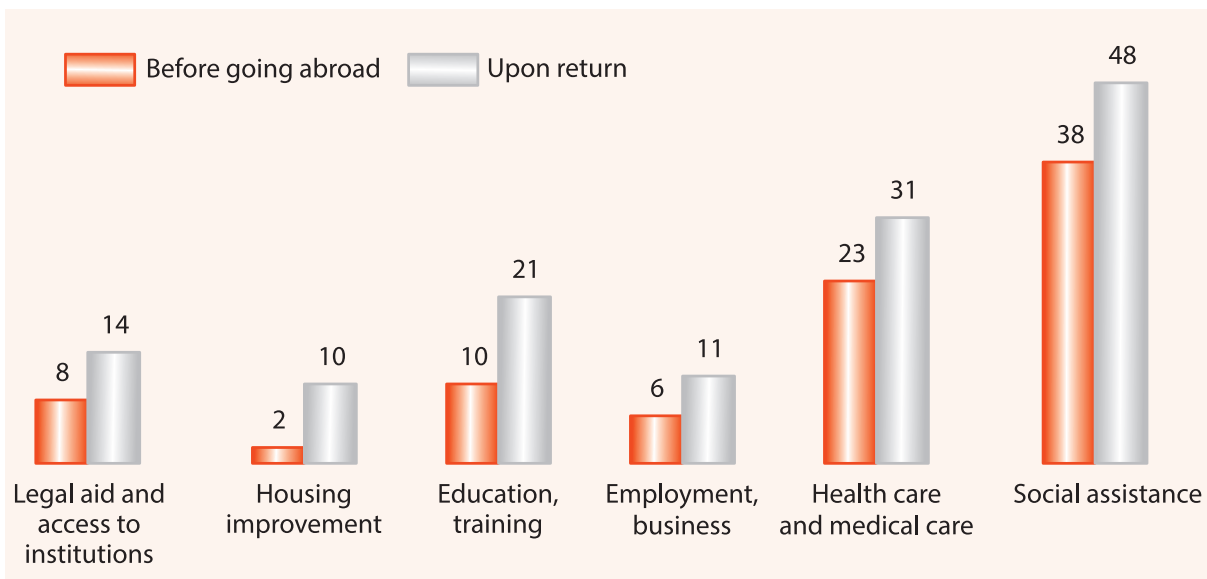
Since the start of the implementation process of the readmission agreement to date, the population of returnees has changed: they are younger, better educated and more active in the labour market, and at the same time there are fewer Roma among them as the most vulnerable social group in Serbia - although they still make up the majority (more than 60% in 2020). The experience of migration has empowered a significant number of returnees, predominantly men, as they have achieved significantly better access to socio-economic support measures upon their return. When it comes to women, the social exclusion of female returnees has increased compared to the period preceding their going abroad.

GIZ (2022). "Socio-economic position and reintegration of returnees to Serbia in 2021 under the Readmission Agreement: Report on the Survey on Returnees and Service Providers at the Local Level", the Global Programme "Migration for Development", Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), Belgrade.

## IS SERBIA READY TO MANAGE THE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES?

A general framework of public policies for managing the reintegration of returnees is in place in Serbia, however, it is not effective enough. Several strategies have been adopted in the area of migration, and returnees have been recognized as a vulnerable category in some sector strategies relevant for their reintegration (employment, non-discrimination, social inclusion of Roma, as part of action plans for the negotiation chapters 23 and 24). Public services are implementing specific measures that are important for the reintegration of returnees. All of the above can make an impression that the problem of reintegration of returnees is adequately covered by public policies. Still, a more detailed review shows that this problem is more complex and multidimensional, which calls for a multisectoral approach. A policy document in the form of a strategy or programme regulating the reintegration of returnees under the Readmission Agreement, would introduce coordination in this approach.

### Returnee families that received support in a certain area before going abroad and upon their return to Serbia, in %



There is still much room to improve the support for returnees - less than half of them have received some form of support.

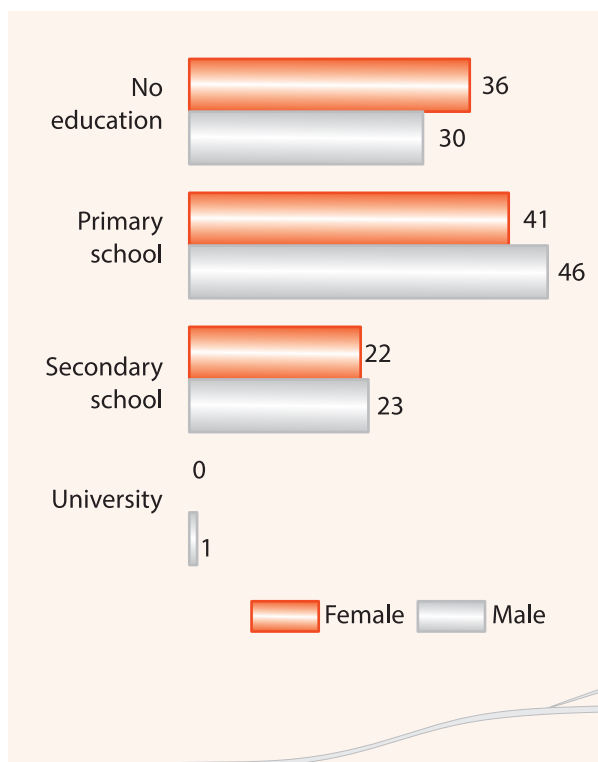
## WHAT ARE THE KEY PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN THE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES?

Upon returning to Serbia, returnees are faced with a number of problems making their reintegration more difficult. The key problems that have been building up for years are low educational achievement and school dropouts, high unemployment and poor-quality employment, low income, and low-quality housing. These were recognized as key challenges in 2021 both by returnees and social service providers at the local level.

### Low educational achievement and school non-attendance

Returnees are somewhat better educated than they were in 2019, but still, only 23% of them have completed secondary school and 1% hold a university degree. The results are very low given that they pertain to the young and middle-aged population. The education level identified in female returnees is even lower than that identified in men.

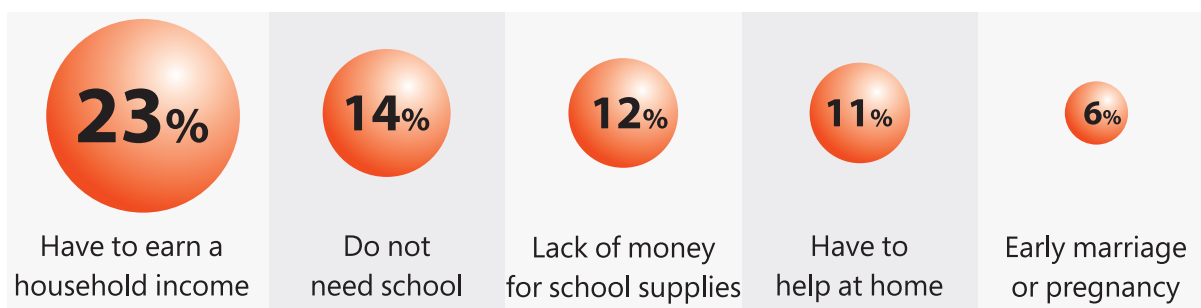
### Level of education of male and female returnees, in %



Low educational achievement is an intergenerational issue. As many as 31% of households are with children aged 3-14 who do not attend an educational institution suitable for their age (kindergarten, compulsory pre-school programme or primary school). The situation is similar with children aged 15-18 - i.e., there are 34% of households with children of this age who do not attend secondary school. The main reasons lie in the fact that they have to

earn household income and that the parents believe they do not need school: poverty as a reason why children do not use educational services is intertwined with low awareness among parents about the need to educate children. The issue with parents who believe that their children do not need school, or that their children should stay at home and help the family, is still significant and calls for an appropriate institutional response.

### Some of the main reasons why children aged 5 to 18 do not attend school

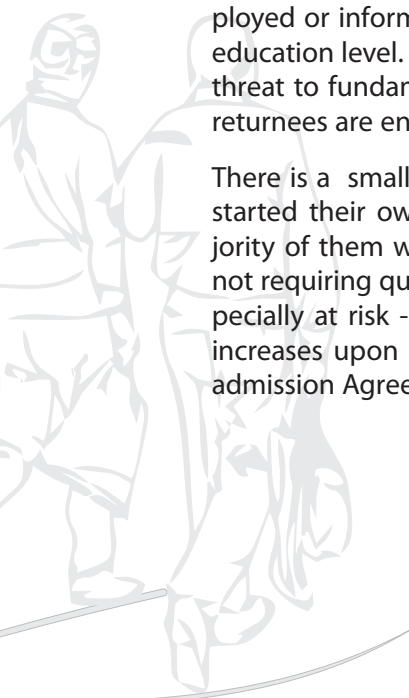
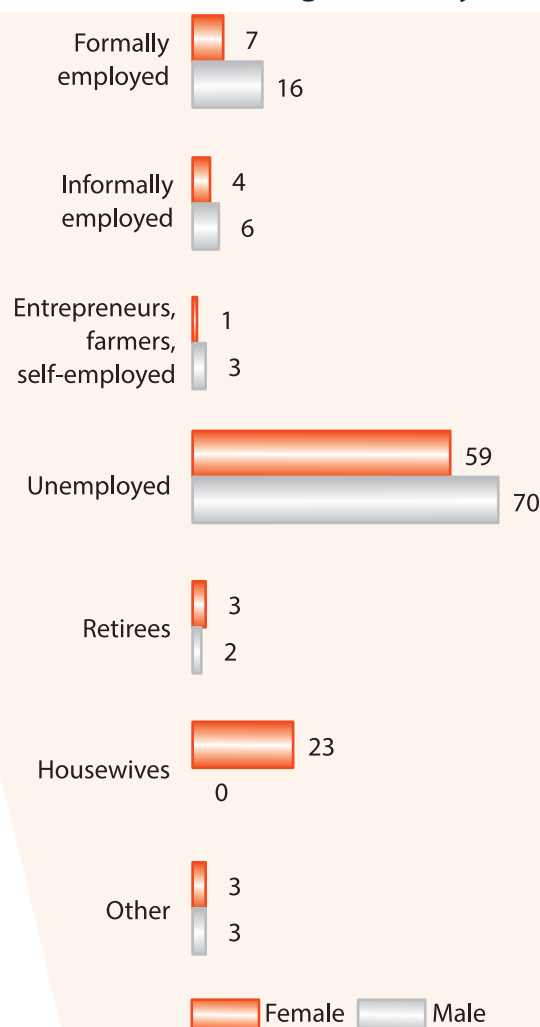


### Activity status in the week before conducting the survey, in %

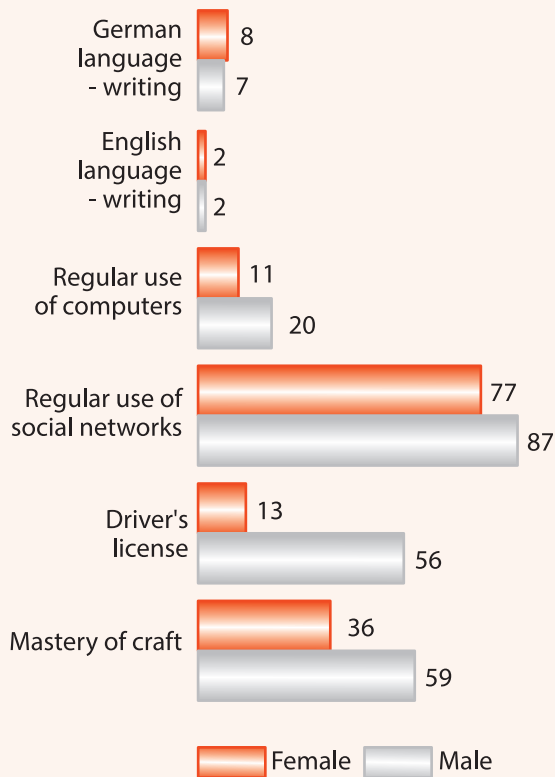
#### High unemployment and poor quality of employment

The fact that almost half of the returnees travelled abroad searching for jobs, presumably seasonal jobs, shows that they do not abstain from work. Moreover, a large number of them are active in the labour market in Serbia, but many are still unemployed or informally employed, with a low education level. Therefore, poverty and the threat to fundamental social rights among returnees are enormous.

There is a small number of returnees who started their own companies still the majority of them work for employers on jobs not requiring qualifications. Women are especially at risk - inactivity of women even increases upon their return under the Re-admission Agreement.



### Mastery of additional skills, in %

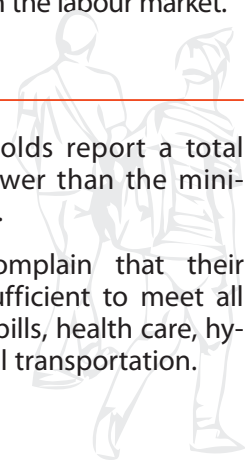


Given that returnees are rather willing to find a job, this is the main area in which they need support. More than half of the returnees master one or even two skills that can be used in the labour market (foreign language skills, computer skills, driver's license, etc.), and 35% of them are willing to attend training and improve their skills to become more competitive in the labour market. In this case, as well, there are noticeably fewer women than men among those who master some skills that are useful in the labour market.

### Low income

46% of returnee households report a total monthly consumption lower than the minimum net salary in Serbia.

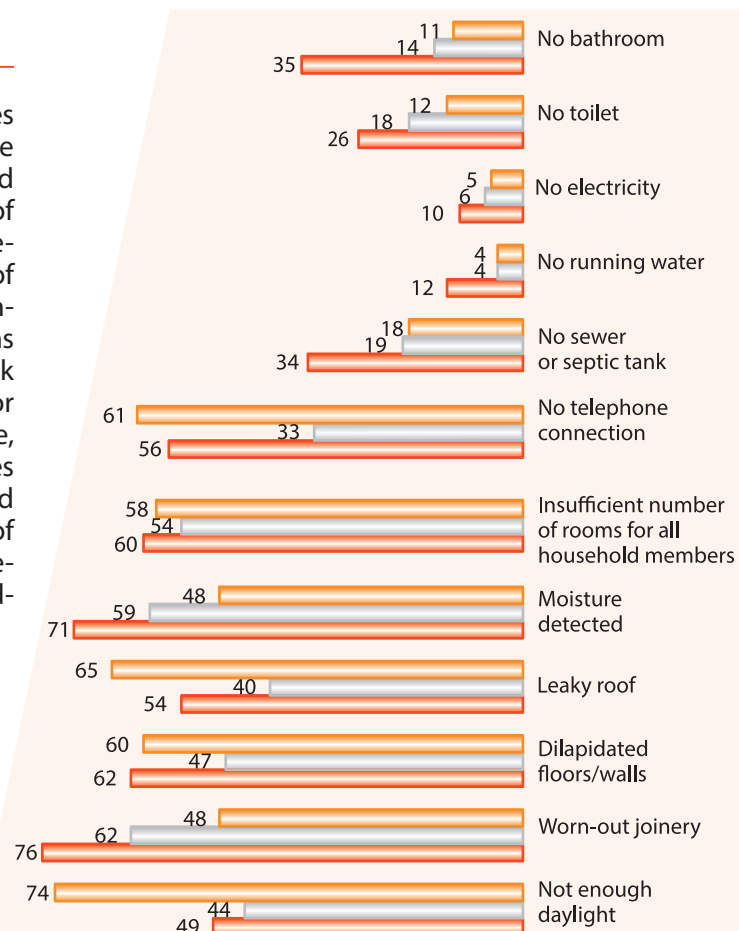
87% of respondents complain that their household income is insufficient to meet all their needs such as food, bills, health care, hygiene, education, and local transportation.



### Low-quality of housing

The housing situation of returnees has been constantly improving since 2011. However, it is still difficult and requires additional commitment of public administration, especially regarding the issue of legalization of buildings. Almost half of the returnees face more than two problems with housing conditions such as lack of space, dampness, a leaky roof or lack of daylight. In the meantime, both service providers and returnees as service beneficiaries have realised the benefits of different types of housing support, which has led to returnees accepting the different models of assistance offered.

### Places/situations in which returnees have experienced humiliation during the past year, in %



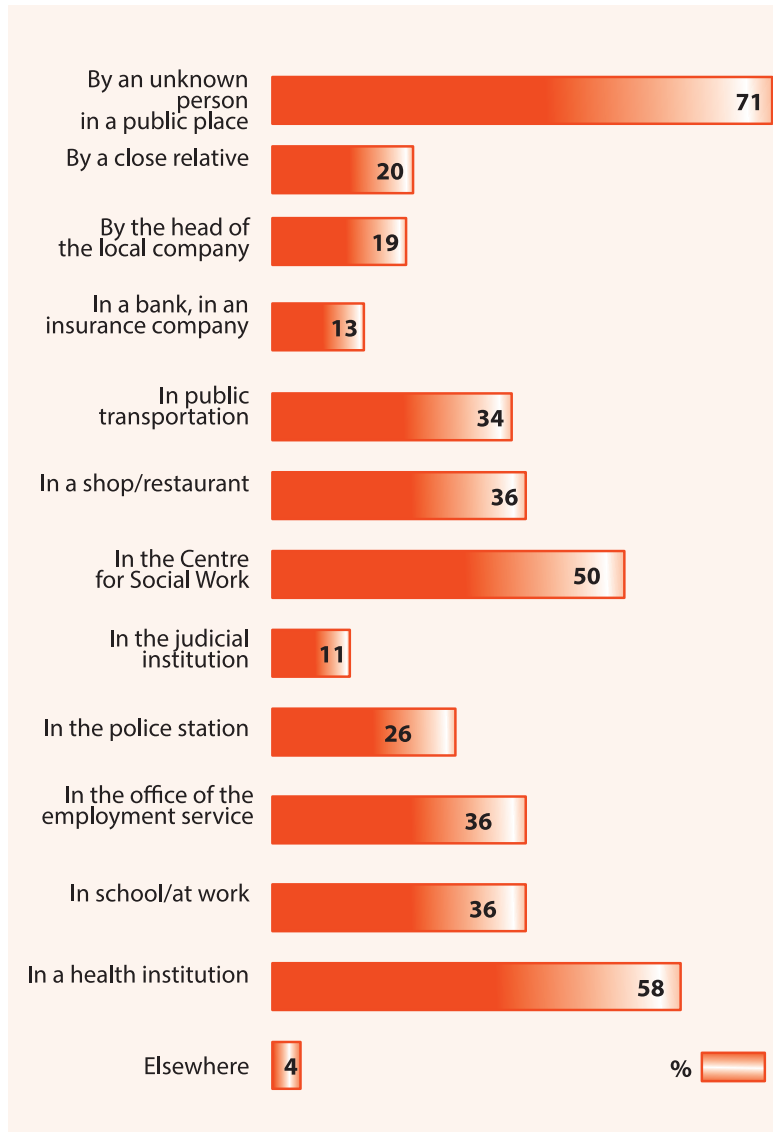
2021 2019 2011

## Discrimination against returnees

The humiliation of Roma returnees continues. The experience in which they feel most discriminated against has occurred in places where people spend the most time or where they most often engage in official communication: in public places, in social service institutions such as health facilities, schools, police stations, in public transportation and in shops/restaurants. This is concerning, but so is the fact that public institutions, which should be the guardians of individual rights and public morality, demonstrate a high level of discriminatory practices.

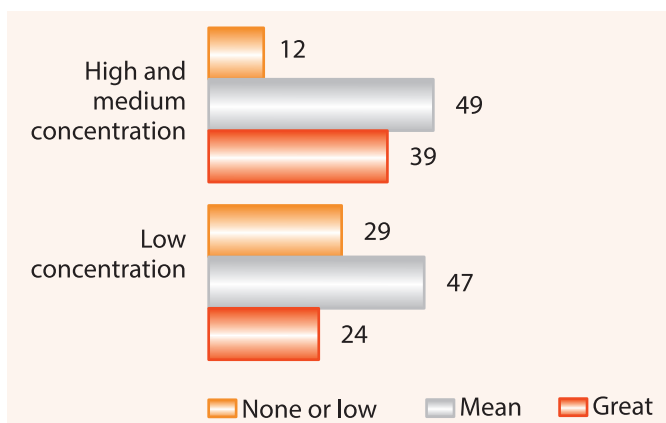


### Places/situations in which returnees have experienced humiliation during the past year, in %



## Local service providers' perception of the key issues regarding the integration of returnees

### Perception of the importance of problems with the reintegration of returnees as per the concentration of returnees according to the official records, in %



Local service providers' perception of the key issues regarding the integration of returnees is quite realistic. Weaker perception of the key problems occurs in municipalities where the concentration of returnees is low. The respondents emphasize the great importance of the CSRM trustees in addressing these issues.

## TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO THE ISSUES WITH REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES

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### How to support the economic empowerment of returnees?

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- ▶ Build the competencies of returnees via life-long learning and/or training.
  - Functional basic education of adults would improve the general literacy of returnees and pave the way for higher levels of education, thus improving their prospects when it comes to social inclusion.
  - Training in various areas would improve the employability of returnees. Returnees should also be informed about the deficient occupations, and assisted via career guidance and counselling.
- ▶ Another direction in support in the area of employment of returnees is the employment support, in accordance with their expressed interest. The greatest interest is registered for 2 types of employment – self-employment and public employer.
- ▶ Strengthen the programmes for economic empowerment of returnees, especially targeting Roma women. Further work is needed to inform them about different occupations, in order to diversify the offer of training programmes and employment support and to avoid stereotypes (hairdressers, manicurists, pedicurists, etc.).

### How to improve the housing situation of returnees?

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- ▶ The main forms of support should be social housing, construction material – for the improvement of basic sanitation, and houses with a rural estate.
- ▶ Mediation with competent institutions in order to resolve legal title issues that make a prerequisite for obtaining a building permit.
- ▶ Free legal aid for resolving legal title status.
- ▶ At the systemic level, consider easing the criteria for receiving the support and enable the improvement of housing conditions during tenancy status that often lasts for decades.

### How to prevent discrimination against returnees?

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- ▶ Continuous public campaign against discrimination and antigypsyism. The campaign for male and female citizens (returnees and Roma) should be aimed at recognizing discrimination and addressing potential discrimination.
- ▶ Special focus on improving the employee sensitization and the procedures in public institutions the returnees address and need the most.

### How to strengthen the local institutional framework to support the integration of returnees?

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- ▶ Involve all relevant local stakeholders from the public and civil sectors in the process of developing public policy documents and regularly inform them about all aspects of public policies relevant for the integration of returnees (Action plan on migration, budget and other sources of funding, projects, other relevant strategic documents). A special focus needs to be placed on informing relevant stakeholders in municipalities where the concentration of returnees is low.
- ▶ Through the CSRM trustees, and where possible through their cooperation with Roma Coordinators, emphasize the issue of integration of returnees in the local migration councils and in relevant action plans. The involvement of trustees in Mobile Teams for Roma Inclusion is an example of good practice.
- ▶ The issue of reintegration of returnees should also be highlighted in other relevant local documents and administrative bodies (regarding employment, social protection, education, housing, etc.).
- ▶ The more successful inter-sector cooperation requires developing communication mechanisms and protocols and referral of beneficiaries to other sectors.
- ▶ A special attention needs to be paid to additional work concerning breaking the stereotype about the passivity of returnees.

