



Home Office

BUILDING A SAFE, JUST  
AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

# Understanding voluntary return

Richard Black  
Khalid Koser  
Karen Munk  
Gaby Atfield  
Lisa D'Onofrio  
Richmond Tiemoko

Home Office Online Report 50/04

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

# Understanding voluntary return

Richard Black  
Khalid Koser  
Karen Munk

with assistance from:

Gaby Atfield  
Lisa D'Onofrio  
Richmond Tiemoko

Sussex Centre for Migration Research

Online Report 50/04

# Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all the respondents who participated in this research.

We would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following organisations in the UK: Kosovan-Albanian Community Centre, Lisi Kosovan restaurant, IOM London, Fujian Community Centre, Central London Law Centre, Chinese Mental Health Association, Chinese National Healthy Living Centre in Manchester, Oxford House in Bethnal Green, Afghan Association of London, South London Tamil Welfare Group and the Tamil Information Centre.

In Kosovo we were assisted by IOM in Pristina and Peja, the Schweiz-Kosova Freundschaftverein, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the UNMIK administration in Skenderaj. In Bosnia, the Municipal Return Offices in Hadzici, Sarajevo, Bihać and Goražde, the Mayor's Offices in Centar, Sarajevo, the Cantonal Administration in Sarajevo, UNHCR in Goražde and Sarajevo, and IOM in Sarajevo all provided us with contacts for the interviews.

There are also a number of individuals who helped to facilitate, organise or translate interviews with the respondents: Kathryn Spellman, Talat Pllana, Genc Loxha, Arbresha Jaka, Ylber Alijaj, Quibri Demiri Frangu, Selim Reka, Armin Hoso, Aida Lakovic, Dino Sehic, Arijana Kaim, Sandra Spehar, Gail Hopkins, Hung-Tzu Lin, Hugh Baker, Philip Baker and Kumanan Nadarajasingham. In addition, we are grateful to Ceri Oepen for compiling information on assisted return schemes.

Finally we are grateful for the valuable insights of our Steering Committee and members of the Immigration Research and Statistics Service at the Home Office.

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Aims and objectives	1
Background and relevance	1
Structure	3
<b>2. Background and methodology</b>	<b>4</b>
Introduction	4
Methods of information collection and analysis	4
Profile of respondents	11
Conclusion	11
<b>3. Understanding the decision to return</b>	<b>12</b>
Introduction	12
A model for understanding the decision to return	12
Empirical evidence on factors affecting return	13
Information and the decision to return	21
Conclusion	23
<b>4. The sustainability of return</b>	<b>25</b>
Introduction	25
What constitutes a sustainable return?	25
Measuring sustainability in Bosnia and Kosovo	28
What influences sustainability?	36
Conclusion	38
<b>5. Conclusions</b>	<b>40</b>
Introduction	40
Policy implications	40
Further research	42
<b>Appendix 1: Focus group topics</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Appendix 2: UK interview schedule</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Key stakeholder interviews in the UK</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Interview schedule in Bosnia and Kosovo</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Stakeholder interviews in Bosnia and Kosovo</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Appendix 6: Key data on respondents</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>70</b>

## List of tables

3.1 Ranking of factors influencing the decision to return in focus groups	14
3.2 Factors influencing return motivations amongst individual interviewees	15
3.3 Policy interventions considered potentially useful	20
3.4 Sources of information about conditions at home	22
4.1 Elements and potential measures of the sustainability of return	25
4.2 Indicators of the sustainability of return	28
4.3 Variables that may influence the sustainability of return	37

## List of figures

2.1 Returns facilitated by IOM and enquiries about return made at Refugee Action, September 2001–February 2003	7
3.1 Factors determining the decision to return	13
4.1 Factors leading to the sustainability of return	36

# Executive summary

This report sets out the findings of a study commissioned by the Home Office to explore the factors influencing the decisions of refugees and asylum seekers to return voluntarily to their countries of origin, as well as to enhance understanding of the sustainability of this return. The study also sought to examine and assess the role of incentives and reintegration packages, and to develop a definition and indicators of sustainability to allow this to be measured in future assisted return programmes.

A number of Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) schemes exist in the UK for those who wish to return to their country of origin. The most important is the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP), which is open to all asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers, although other schemes exist for particular countries, notably Afghanistan.

Existing literature on the decision to return voluntarily suggests that non-economic factors generally weigh more heavily than economic factors, and that 'pull' factors in the country of origin are more important than 'push' factors in the country of destination. However, the literature also stresses how the decision to return is complex, and is likely to involve discussions at household and community level rather than simply reflecting individual 'rational' choice.

This study is based on a series of seven focus group and 43 individual interviews with potential returnees in the UK, interviews with key stakeholders, and 64 interviews with individuals who have already returned to Bosnia or Kosovo. Most respondents in the UK had secure status, and had lived in the UK for three or more years. The majority of respondents in all three countries were educated to at least high school level.

A model is presented that explores the decision-making process in relation to return. Elements of this model include both information about options and inputs that structure how these options are viewed. Relevant information includes knowledge of conditions in the country of origin and the host country, and of incentives and disincentives to return. Relevant inputs include a series of individual attributes, as well as social relations.

Findings from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the UK are consistent with existing research, in the sense that peace and security in home countries were cited as the key factors that would influence the decision to return, followed by family factors. In contrast, economic conditions or policy incentives were less frequently mentioned or actively discussed. However, it was clear that for most respondents, overlapping and multiple factors were considered relevant to their decisions, especially amongst those who were less inclined to return at present. No major differences were observed on the basis of age or gender, although some respondents did report fears of gender-based persecution if they were to return.

The study suggests the need for more work to be done to inform potential returnees about voluntary return schemes, but also a level of realism about the extent to which such schemes, or policy interventions more generally, can facilitate voluntary return in the absence of political and economic improvements in countries of origin. Once a return decision has been made, however, return assistance is generally viewed by returnees as useful and worthwhile.

More specifically, the study does not support the notion that restricting employment of asylum seekers in the UK increases the likelihood of return, nor does it indicate that granting permanent status in the UK reduces the likelihood of return.

According to interviewees in the UK, Bosnia and Kosovo, the decision to return was informed primarily by contact with friends and family at home, and by the media, especially international media. Most of those interviewed in Bosnia and Kosovo had also benefited from assisted return programmes, although these were not cited as particularly important in the decision-making process. In contrast, respondents in the UK appeared to have relatively little knowledge about assisted return programmes. Those who did know about assisted return had primarily gained this information from friends, by word of mouth, or at community centres.

Turning to the sustainability of return, a series of definitions of 'sustainability' are explored, which take into account the physical, socio-economic and political security aspects of sustainability, as well as considering these from the subjective perception of the returnee, in terms of the objective condition of individual

returnees, and in terms of aggregate conditions in the home country. Of these, subjective perceptions of sustainability appear easiest to measure, although issues of aggregate sustainability may be of particular importance in terms of policy coherence

Findings from in-depth interviews in both Bosnia and Kosovo are consistent with the view that return to these two countries has not been 'sustainable', at least for individual returnees. Although the returnees interviewed do not constitute a representative sample, it is interesting to note that the majority held a firm desire to re-emigrate, whilst high levels of unemployment and poverty were reported. Many were relying on remittances from abroad, and yet the return process itself had reduced the availability of remittance income. However, the socio-economic status of returnees did not appear to be significantly worse than amongst those who had never left Bosnia or Kosovo, whilst fears over safety were not widely reported.

Interviews suggested some interesting associations between the characteristics of returnees, their experiences abroad and the nature of their return on the one hand, and sustainability on the other, although these associations should be viewed as the starting point for more detailed research, rather than robust findings. For example:

- young men, who had been employed abroad, and who reported that they had returned unwillingly because of the termination of their status abroad, were more likely to wish to re-emigrate;
- those who had learned the language of their country of asylum were less likely to wish to re-emigrate, and more likely to be working on their return;
- men were more likely to report security fears, as were those who had gained a more secure status abroad.

There were few associations between return assistance and individual sustainability outcomes. One exception was that those in receipt of assistance since they returned were less likely to be working – although the direction of causation here is unclear.

The study also suggests that the sustainability of return for individual returnees can be measured using a survey instrument administered to a sample of returnees, preferably around one year after their return. However, it is recommended that this is complemented by an assessment of the aggregate sustainability of return, based on a robust monitoring system that allows analysis of changes in income, employment, security and migration patterns both for returnees, and at a national or regional level.

Given current media attention, there is a need for greater investment in raising the level of debate on voluntary return, to ensure that there is a balanced understanding of the issue. In order to contribute to this debate, further research would be valuable, both to monitor ongoing assisted return schemes, and to explore in more depth the extent to which the nature of return policy influences the sustainability of return.

# 1. Introduction

Voluntary return of refugees and asylum seekers is seen as an increasingly important element of the UK policy agenda on immigration and asylum, consistent with proposals contained within the 2002 White Paper *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain*. Since 1999, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) of the UK Home Office has been funding programmes to assist failed asylum applicants, those awaiting a decision and those with time-limited exceptional leave to enter or remain, who wish to return to their country of origin.

In the context of increasing UK government interest in this area, this report describes the findings of a study commissioned by the Home Office to explore the factors influencing the decision to return, including the role played by incentives, as well as to enhance understanding of the concept of the 'sustainability' of return. The research was conducted by a team based at the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, and involved fieldwork both in the UK and in the Balkans. This chapter sets out the aims and objectives of the report, its background and relevance, and its structure.

## Aims and objectives

The overall objective of this report is to provide information relevant to the development of policy on voluntary return. The research aimed to collect baseline information on return decisions and experiences to inform the expansion of schemes for voluntary return, and to identify areas for policy and operational development that could improve uptake rates and the sustainability of return by the following means:

- *To develop current understanding of the factors influencing the decision to return voluntarily.* Key factors of interest could include changes in family circumstances, the security situation in the home country and the availability of suitable reintegration assistance. An additional concern is to understand how these factors vary between different groups, for example according to nationality, age, gender, length of stay in the UK and asylum status. Another is to examine the influence and role of community groups in the decision to return voluntarily.
- *To develop understanding of sustainability* including how sustained returns through return programmes have been, and the factors that influence this.
- *To examine and assess the role of incentives and reintegration packages* in encouraging return and assisting those who return after arrival in their home country, and ensuring those returns are sustainable. An additional concern is to identify which kinds of incentives and packages are most beneficial in line with these aims.
- *To develop a definition of sustainability* that will allow this concept to be measured, including identification of practical indicators.
- *To establish a process that will allow sustainability to be measured* according to the definition developed.

## Background and relevance

The main current scheme in the UK for those who wish to return to their country of origin is the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme. The VARRP scheme has been funded by the UK Home Office and the European Refugee Fund since February 1999, and is operated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), who contract Refugee Action to provide advice to individuals considering return through their *Choices* project. VARRP is available to all asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers. In addition to advice, applicants who chose to return are assisted in obtaining a travel document and booking their return journey home including flight and internal travel. IOM are also tasked to establish what the situation is like in a voluntary leaver's home country through their network of field missions and non-

governmental organisations (NGOs), in order to inform applicants about conditions in their country. An asylum seeker returning through VARRP can also apply for reintegration assistance on return, which is provided through IOM Missions, or through links with other organisations or NGOs in the return country. Reintegration assistance may include access to initial housing, facilitation of access to employment, training opportunities, education and health services, or help in setting up a small business.

In addition to VARRP, there are several country-specific schemes.

- The *Assisted Voluntary Return to Afghanistan Programme* (RAP) offers a cash grant of £600 for individuals and up to a maximum of £2,500 for families. It is restricted to those who as of 20 August 2002 were awaiting a decision on an asylum claim, or are appealing a refusal (including appealing against an extension of Exceptional Leave to Remain/Enter or are appealing on human rights grounds), or were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain/Enter.
- The *European Union Return of Qualified Afghans* (EU-RQA) assists Afghans to return by matching their relevant skills and qualifications to work placements in Afghanistan. Run by IOM with EU money, it offers assistance packages to qualified Afghans residing in the EU who wish to return to Afghanistan to work in the public and private sectors. The EU-RQA programme focuses on the development of critical sectors in Afghanistan including private businesses that provide goods and services in the domestic market, civil and social services, public infrastructure, and rural development. The scheme covers the cost of flights and supplements the salaries of Afghans returning to public sector employment by 300 Euros per month for a fixed period. It also provides a resettlement grant of 600 Euros. To encourage women to return under the EU-RQA scheme, they receive an extra supplement of 50 Euros per month.
- A scheme run by the NGO, *AGEF*, also seeks to identify returnees' skills and assess their training needs, but is available to all Afghans returning from the UK. Once back in Afghanistan, returnees are offered the option of skills-based training, participation in a business start-up programme or a job placement scheme. Participants receive a financial grant during the training and a subsequent wage for the initial period of employment. AGEF has previously worked in Bosnia, Kosovo and Vietnam.
- *Explore and Prepare*. This programme was launched on 28 October 2003, and allows Afghans with status in the UK such as Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR), Humanitarian Protection (HP) or Discretionary Leave (DL) a return flight to Afghanistan for up to a year, to assess the situation and explore the opportunity of making a permanent return. Returning temporarily to Afghanistan under this scheme does not affect the person's immigration status in the UK.
- The Home Office also supported a pilot programme for *Return, Reintegration and Development in the Somali Regions* run by IOM and Refugee Action between November 2001 and January 2003.

In addition, IOM London offers advice on the suitability of return to all applicants. Those considering return can obtain independent advice from a number of organisations including the Refugee Council and the Refugee Legal Centre. Similar schemes exist elsewhere in Europe (Koser, 2001).

There are a number of reasons why it is important to consider the factors that influence take-up of such voluntary assisted return schemes, as well as the sustainability of this return. First, as one of three durable solutions to refugee flight envisaged by UNHCR, voluntary return represents a potentially cost-effective and humane way of supporting refugees. Second, a number of asylum seekers as well as those with secure refugee or other humanitarian status also have a clear desire to return home, particularly after a change of government in their home country, or the end of violent conflict. Third, in such situations, their return can also be seen as potentially highly positive for the home country, especially where the individuals involved have skills as doctors, engineers, teachers or even politicians, or can contribute to the reconstruction of their home country in other ways.

Nonetheless, return has often been criticised as being unsustainable both for the individuals involved and for the country to which they return. In the case of Bosnia, for example, large-scale return was widely seen as contributing to the problem of internal displacement in the country, potentially undermining a key objective of the Dayton Peace Accord to promote the return of individuals and families to their original homes. In this sense, ensuring the sustainability of return represents an important issue of policy coherence between the UK's domestic, foreign and trade policies. The premature and unplanned return of large numbers of refugees could severely destabilise the fragile infrastructure of a country emerging from conflict. In some cases, it also appears that there is a reluctance amongst returnees to become involved in official schemes,

as witnessed by the fact that many of those who do eventually return chose to do so on their own, without government assistance.<sup>1</sup>

## Structure

The report is in five parts. After an initial introduction, Chapter 2 outlines the methodology used, and provides a short profile of the returnees and potential returnees interviewed during the research. Chapter 3 then considers the factors influencing the decision to return, based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with individuals from seven different refugee communities living in the UK, as well as with a number of key stakeholders. This chapter addresses the first and third objectives of the study outlined above. Chapter 4 turns attention to the sustainability of return, based on in-depth interviews with returnees in Bosnia and Kosovo. The aim of this chapter is both to understand the extent of sustainability of return to these two countries, and to set out a definition of sustainability and a mechanism for measuring and/or monitoring it in other return situations. In both these chapters, links between the decision to return and the ultimate sustainability of this return are explored, including an examination of whether the policy context and incentives for return provided by the UK or other host governments have an impact on sustainability. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes, and draws implications for government policy.

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, a recent survey of 600 return migrants to Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire conducted by the Sussex Centre for Migration Research found that only 12 per cent had taken up official return assistance.

## 2. Background and methodology

### Introduction

The two main objectives of this research were to identify factors influencing the decision to return and to develop a framework for understanding and measuring the sustainability of return. As a result, the study concentrates on asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, as well as on those who have returned to their country of origin. In the UK, the research encompassed seven national/ethnic groups of asylum seekers and refugees, in order to gain a broad overview of factors that influence the decision to return. In contrast, sustainability of return was examined through a more detailed examination of two countries – Bosnia and Kosovo.

### Methods of information collection and analysis

The complexity of the decision-making process and the variety of possible factors influencing the sustainability of return led to the adoption of a multi-method approach. By combining more than one means of gathering data, the aim was to generate complementary information that would assist in cross-checking insights from any one method used (Moser and McIlwaine 1999). The project has used both primary and secondary sources and quantitative and qualitative methods. Existing data on voluntary returns were reviewed, and an extensive literature review conducted. In the UK, eight focus group sessions with potential returnees were arranged, along with semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers and refugees from four national groups, and with key stakeholders. During field visits to Bosnia and Kosovo, both returnees and key stakeholders were also interviewed. Interviews started in October 2002 and were completed in March 2003.

### Literature review

The first stage of the research was to conduct a review of the existing literature, in order to place voluntary return within a wider context, and to identify key debates, issues and questions. The review covered published material (mainly in academic books and journals), identified through library catalogues and Internet search engines.<sup>2</sup> Particular attention was paid to literature covering migrant decision-making processes and concepts of sustainability. Unpublished reports and papers were also included in the review, mainly located through organisations involved in return (including Refugee Action and IOM). The principal method of analysis of this information was to produce brief syntheses of key points, which were then circulated among the research team. Data sets and other statistical sources were also reviewed, including those produced by national statistical bureaux across Europe, IOM and the Refugee Council. These data were often based on small-scale samples and on the whole were incomplete and incomparable, making detailed analysis impossible.

A number of key points emerge from this initial review. First, there is the issue of what constitutes 'voluntary return'. According to Morrison (2000), there is no single working definition that is accepted by all agencies, but three gradations of 'voluntariness' can be identified:

- a clear and open choice on the part of the refugee either to return to his or her country of origin or to stay permanently and integrate into the host society;

---

<sup>2</sup> The specific sources searched were: Bibliographic Service for Higher Education (BIDS); Social Science Information Gateway (SOSGIS); GeoBase, Forced Migration Online; British Library of Development Studies; British Library; Refugee Studies Centre Library (Oxford); Ercomer Virtual Library; PICarta (Dutch); and Ingenta. Search terms were as follows: Return & migration & decision & making; Asylum & return; Migration & decision-making; Migration & decision; Migration & refugees and decision; Migration & sustainability; Return & sustainability; Remigration & decision. The same terms were also searched in German and Dutch.

- a choice between returning to the country of origin now in a voluntary fashion (perhaps with financial or other incentives) or staying and risking forcible return later;
- an absence of force: the returnee does not manifest disagreement with removal.

In practice, NGOs working with voluntary return tend to prefer it when the first option – a clear and open choice on the part of a refugee or asylum-seeker – is available. However, the reality of ‘voluntary return’ in Europe over the last decade has often fallen short of this standard, with the most notable example being return to Bosnia after the Dayton Peace Accord of 1996, in which programmes such as the IOM-administered Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum Seekers in Germany (REAG) and German Assisted Return Programme (GARP), and a substantial return programme from Switzerland administered by the Swiss government were widely criticised for not always being completely ‘voluntary’ (Black 2002).

Second, various studies have considered the motivations people have to return to their countries of origin. In the context of return migration in general, King (2000) summarises these as encompassing economic, social, family/life cycle and political reasons, arguing that non-economic factors generally weigh more heavily than economic factors, and that ‘pull’ factors in the country of origin are more important than ‘push’ factors from the country of destination. Similarly, in a study of return of Ghanaian migrants from Canada, Manuh (2002) emphasises the importance of social ties that influence patterns of movement and settlement. In contrast, Dustmann and Kirchkamp (2001) take a more economic perspective, suggesting that return occurs sooner when host country wages and access to education for migrants are higher, although this conclusion is obviously more relevant to economic migrants who are seeking to complete a ‘migration project’ (and can therefore complete it sooner, the better access to income and education they have).

In the specific context of refugees and asylum seekers, the literature can be divided into general reviews and specific empirical case studies. Amongst the former, Eltink (1999) argues that the willingness of refugees and asylum seekers to return from the Netherlands depends on the physical and emotional attachments they make to the host country, as well as the fact that rejected asylum seekers continue to get assistance from the Dutch government, reducing the likelihood of them choosing to return. Similarly, Anel (1999) stresses how asylum seekers will stay in the Netherlands until it is clear that they will be deported, and only then do they participate in voluntary return schemes. In contrast, Simmons (2000) places more emphasis on the establishment of peace and democracy in the home country, as well as safeguards for personal security and access to jobs and housing back home.

Interestingly, some evidence for both positions is provided by a study of 200 Somali refugees in the UK by Bloch and Atfield (2000), who found political problems, uncertainty about the future of Somali regions, and the better standard of living in the UK as all major obstacles to return. Meanwhile, an evaluation of a voluntary return project implemented by the NGO Refugee Action found family reunion as the largest single motivation cited by those approaching the organisation for return assistance in 1998 (29 per cent of responses), but this was closely followed by ‘conditions in country of origin’ (23 per cent), and ‘unhappy in the UK’ (20 per cent) (Morrison, 2000). Similarly, although Al-Ali *et al.* (2001) stressed economic and social problems in the home country as reasons why Bosnians and Eritreans in Europe are not returning in large numbers, a desire to complete their children’s education first also featured highly.

Third, it is important to note that some of the literature consulted stresses how decisions to return are not simply made by a head of household on behalf of the family, but may involve complex negotiations within families and communities. For example, Bloch and Atfield (2000) found that Somali men were more likely to wish to return than women, but that this had not translated into large-scale return as yet. In situations as diverse as rural-urban migration in Kenya (Agesa and Kim, 2001) and return of refugees from Mexico to Guatemala (Rousseau *et al.*, 2002), it is stressed how some members of a household may return independently of others.

In relation to the sustainability of return, there is less existing literature, with very little indeed that seeks to define and measure sustainability, and most attention focused instead on the reintegration of individual returnees (Gmelch, 1980; see also Bovenkerk, 1974; King *et al.*, 1983; Lepore 1986; King 2000; Ammassari and Black, 2001). Perhaps the simplest measure of sustainability of return would be whether those who do return subsequently re-emigrate, although a *Manual for Sustainable Return* developed by the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK, 2003) goes further in stressing that return can only be considered sustainable where returnees are able to gain access to rights to services, shelter and freedom of movement. However, studies by Hammond (1999) and Kibreab (2000) of return in the Horn of Africa also stress how return can have wider

impacts on the economies and societies to which people return, whilst return is in any case very unlikely to be to the *status quo ex ante*. Such concerns are clearly relevant to an assessment of sustainability.

In this study, the widest definition of a voluntary return has been adopted – the absence of force in return – in order both to capture the range of voluntary return situations that exist. This allows consideration of large-scale return to Bosnia and Kosovo, which was thought to be voluntary by most northern European governments. These two countries involved the two largest voluntary returns of refugees or asylum seekers from European countries in the last decade, and have had an important influence on the way in which governments, international organisations and NGOs approach voluntary return. In addition, a wide view of the ‘sustainability’ of return has been adopted. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

## Fieldwork in the UK

Fieldwork in the UK was conducted between November 2002 and March 2003. This included both focus group and individual interviews with asylum seekers and refugees, as well as stakeholder interviews. The aim was to elucidate in more detail some of the key factors underlying the decision to return, or to stay in the UK.

## Focus groups

Focus group discussions were used as a cost-effective way to examine in-depth the kinds of issues of concern to potential returnees. The social interaction within each group provides the possibility to facilitate wider discussion both of aspirations for return, and the perceived obstacles to return (Morgan 1997; Morgan and Krueger 1992). The target size for each session was six to eight, with the aim being to include individuals with some common experiences, but who did not necessarily know each other before the meeting. Participants in the focus groups were recruited through Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and other community organisations and usually carried out in their offices. At each session, refreshments were provided, and two researchers were present, one to facilitate discussion and the other to take notes.<sup>3</sup>

A total of seven national or ethnic groups were chosen for analysis. The initial aim was to identify a small number of ethnic/national groups of refugees and asylum-seekers in order to focus the enquiry and explore the decision to return in more depth within specific communities. However, refugees and asylum seekers in the UK are highly diverse, and this is true not only between but also within various ethnic and national groups. For example, in 2002, asylum seekers to the UK came from at least 50 different countries, with the top ten countries of origin of applicants accounting for only around a half of the total (Home Office, 2003). Meanwhile, both between and within ethnic and national groups, individuals differ in terms of experiences in and visions of the home and host country (Boyle *et al.* 1998; Ager 1999), and are thus also likely to vary in terms of return intentions.

In order to understand the different motives for people to decide whether or not to return to their country of origin, it was decided to concentrate on seven different groups: Somalis, Afghans, Tamils, Iranians, Kosovans, Turkish Kurds and people from mainland China. All of these cases involved countries amongst the top ten for asylum applications over the period 1998-2002 (Home Office: 2002, 2003).<sup>4</sup> Beyond this, they were selected on the pragmatic basis of anticipated ease of access through existing contacts. These groups each have a different pattern for take up of and/or interest in return programmes (see Figure 2.1). In addition, given the finding of Bloch and Atfield (2002), noted above, that among Somalis gender was a determinant in the wish to return to the country or origin, it was agreed to organise an all-female group with women from all nationalities participating.

In practice, separate focus group sessions were successfully held with six Iranian participants, eight Kosovans, eight Tamils and eight Kurdish participants from Turkey. In a focus group organised in the Somali community, ten participants turned up, and all were included; however, at the Afghan session, only four

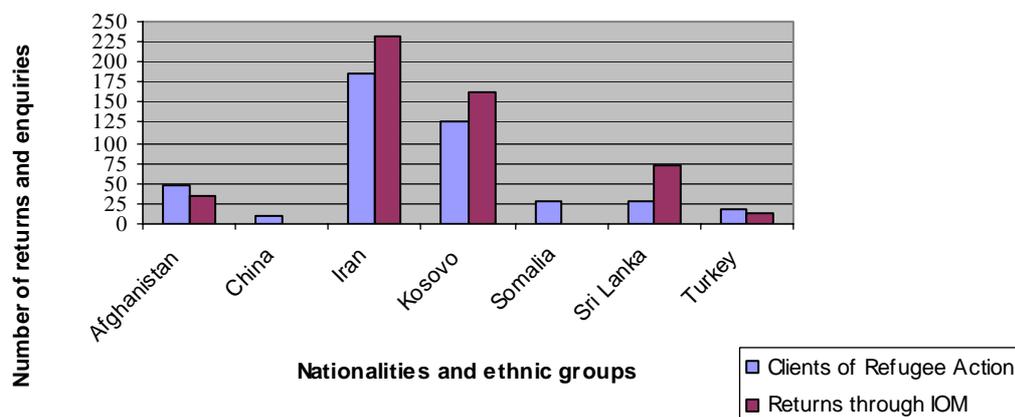
---

<sup>3</sup> Due to logistical problems, focus group sessions with Afghans and (Somali) women were attended by only one researcher. The Afghan session was also observed by a Home Office intern.

<sup>4</sup> The other countries in the top ten were Iraq, the former Soviet Union, and Zimbabwe.

participants were left after a delayed start. There was also a particular problem in organising a multi-nationality group of women, as a result of a reluctance to co-operate on the part both of women's organisations and also of individual women. The reasons for this reluctance were not clear. An all-female group was eventually convened, attended by 11 women, but dominated by Somali women (all but one participant was Somali, the other was Algerian). The Algerian woman, and two Somalis who declined to provide basic information about themselves were excluded from analysis. It was also not possible to arrange a Chinese focus group, due to resistance from the Chinese community associations contacted.

**Figure 2.1: Returns facilitated by IOM and enquiries about return made at Refugee Action, September 2001-February 2003**



Source: Compiled from Refugee Action (2002a, 2002b, 2003)

All the focus groups were held in English for the practical reason of avoiding the need for interpreters as well as in order to facilitate discussion and understanding between the interviewer and the interviewees. The focus group interviews were held on a semi-structured basis, and involved six main topics: general information both about the demographic characteristics of the participants as well as their visions about return; possible reasons for return both for the interviewee and his/her wider community; awareness of, need for and availability of information with respect to return programmes; potential reasons for return as well as possible factors influencing that decision; community and family issues; and expectations for return (see Appendix 1 for further details).

Most focus group sessions lasted between one-and-a-half and two hours. Priority was placed on the first three topics, and a range of techniques was used to stimulate discussion. This included a brainstorming on factors that might influence return, followed by an exercise in which participants were asked to place cards showing their answers in one of three concentric rings on a table to indicate their level of importance. This exercise worked well in promoting debate within the group. However, the level of debate over factors influencing return meant that for reasons of lack of time, it was often not possible to move on to broader family and community issues, or individuals' expectations for return. These are identified in the conclusion as potential areas for further research.

All the focus group discussions were recorded, with the prior agreement of all involved. Transcripts were produced, and anonymised to protect confidentiality. The researchers used these to identify key issues and supporting quotes for inclusion in this report, whilst copies of the transcript were provided to focus group participants on request.

### Individual interviews

In addition to the focus groups, it was planned to carry out ten individual interviews with each of four of the selected groups – Chinese, Kosovans, Somalis and Tamils – in order to probe in more detail the reasons behind individual decisions to return or stay. These four groups were chosen because of their different levels of engagement with return (Figure 2.1). Thus, Chinese refugees and asylum seekers have generally

not sought advice or shown interest in return programmes, whilst Somalis have shown interest in the programmes but not returned in large numbers. In contrast, there have been relatively high take-up rates among Kosovans, while rates were reported to have increased recently for Tamils.

In total 43 in-depth interviews were completed with these groups: 14 with Somalis, ten with Kosovans, ten with Tamils, and nine with Chinese respondents. The extra interviews with four Somalis, and four further unplanned interviews with Turkish Kurds, were all with women and were used to focus attention further on the significance of gender. Unlike the focus groups, around half the interviews were conducted using interpreters, who were identified with the assistance of the community organisations. It was decided from the outset that these interviews should be qualitative and in-depth, as the factors influencing return are often hidden or at least unclear, even to those making the decision. However, to provide a clear guide for discussion and to ensure that key information for each respondent was collected, an interview schedule was prepared (see Appendix 2), which included questions about the respondents' personal circumstances, their own intentions with respect to return, their views on the obstacles to return, and their views on the role that could be played by government policy.

Various methods were used to ensure a broad range of respondents, including people who did not have close links with established refugee or community organisations. Posters were translated with information about the research asking individuals interested to contact the research team or their centre. Numerous organisations were contacted and asked to display the poster in their centre, or distribute it among potential returnees. A total of 294 posters were circulated among community and refugee organisations; further education (FE), higher education (HE), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) establishments; training organisations; legal advice bureaux; health care organisations and others. One advertisement was placed in a Chinese newspaper. These strategies however, did not yield any interviews at all, reflecting, perhaps, a general lack of confidence in official initiatives on voluntary return.

Instead, interviews were requested on an *ad hoc* basis at drop-in advice sessions at the IOM office in London, a law centre, a Chinese community centre and a Kosovan restaurant. A Tamil interpreter provided useful contact details, as did some Kosovans in Kosovo about friends and family residing in London. Two health care centres were contacted after tips provided by well-established people in the Chinese community about Chinese clients willing to return. Both individuals as well as the centres agreed to carry out interviews. Finally, by using the extensive well-established networks among Somalis, it was possible to contact further respondents. Due to time and money constraints, only people in London and the South East were recruited, and in practice all but one of the interviews were conducted in London. The other was carried out by telephone with a respondent living in Manchester.

All interviews were conducted under strict conditions of confidentiality, and interviewees were assured that information about individuals would not be passed to the authorities. Interviews were taped where permission was granted, and transcripts for all the individual interviews were produced by the researchers who conducted them.<sup>5</sup> Interviewees were offered a transcript of the taped interview or interview notes, which was supplied on request in an anonymised form. Original tapes and transcripts were retained by the study team, and key issues and supporting excerpts identified for inclusion in this report.

The fact that these focus group sessions and individual interviews were set up in different ways amongst the different communities places some limitations on the extent to which comparisons can be drawn between groups, although in any case none of the interviews can be considered 'representative' of a particular group (see *Limitations* below). Rather, the views expressed during these interviews are illustrative of the different ways in which individuals and groups articulate their decisions to return in different contexts. Similarly, the focus on interviewees living in London means that it is not possible to comment on whether the place of residence within the UK influences the decision to return.

### Stakeholder interviews

In addition, interviews in the UK were also carried out with key stakeholders who have experience in and/or a vision of voluntary assisted return (see Appendix 3). A total of 16 people representing 12 different organisations were interviewed. This included governmental bodies, as well as refugee organisations and

---

<sup>5</sup> Thirteen respondents declined permission to tape the interview. In these cases, detailed notes were made by the interviewer.

non-governmental agencies. Topics of discussion included their experience with and vision about return of asylum seekers and refugees, the role of information in the return process as well as possible reasons for return. In addition, the extent to which incentives could possibly influence the decision to return as well as links between return and sustainability were discussed. Finally, their advice was solicited with respect to governmental assistance provided to potential returnees.

In general, these discussions provided little specific data or information that could be analysed and included in the final report. However, they were helpful in providing a wider policy context for the research; identifying potential respondents; and uncovering issues to be pursued during focus groups and individual interviews. They also provided a useful sounding board for some of the policy recommendations made later in this report.

## Fieldwork in Bosnia and Kosovo

Whilst interviews and focus group discussions in the UK were used to explore the decision to return, and the expectations of potential returnees, it was felt that the issue of the sustainability of return could only be adequately explored by conducting field research in countries to which individuals had recently returned. The intention was not to draw direct links with communities in the UK who are considering return at present, but rather to look independently at two cases where significant return had already occurred. To link cases in the UK and country of origin would have been both logistically complex, and could have raised the sensitivity of the research for the populations concerned.

Bosnia and Kosovo were chosen as locations for this fieldwork on the basis that in each case, sufficient time had lapsed since large-scale return took place to allow a preliminary assessment of the sustainability of that return. Most Bosnians returned after 1995<sup>6</sup>, while Kosovans started to return after 1999<sup>7</sup>, and therefore in both countries the direct benefits derived from return programmes have largely ceased. This allows for a clearer measurement of sustainability issues, approximately five to seven and two to three years after return respectively. The research also built on the authors' previous experience of research on return to the region (Black *et al.*, 1997). The majority of those interviewed had returned from countries other than the UK.

Field visits to Bosnia and Kosovo were carried out between 18 October and 16 November 2002, and 15 November and 11 December 2002 respectively. Interviews were conducted in both countries with returnees, as well as with key stakeholders. The principal objective was to explore in more depth the extent to which return could be considered 'sustainable', and to field test and refine a survey instrument that could be used more widely in measuring the sustainability of return.

## Individual interviews

In Bosnia semi-structured interviews were carried out with 31 returnees, one of which was not included in further analysis as the person had only returned temporarily to sell his/her house. In the case of Kosovo, 36 interviews with returnees were conducted, of which two were excluded as they were deported from Germany rather than having returned voluntarily.

Returnees were initially identified through organisations in various regions, and a 'snowballing' sampling technique was then used to identify further respondents. In Bosnia, out of 54 families contacted through information provided by organisations involved in return, two-thirds could not be located at the address given, of whom four, all in Sarajevo, were confirmed to have re-emigrated. In contrast, in Kosovo, most respondents were found at the addresses provided by the organisations. One reason is that the organisations were able to provide current addresses rather than those to which returnees went immediately upon their return, which for many was a temporary address whilst they either waited for their own pre-war property to be vacated or found some other durable solution. The samples in Bosnia and Kosovo included

---

<sup>6</sup> After the General Framework Agreement for Peace (the Dayton Agreement) was signed.

<sup>7</sup> At the end of the conflict, after the interim international administration had been installed.

individuals who had lived in a variety of countries as well as a mix of age groups and both sexes (see *Profile of respondents* below).

In Bosnia, a total of 18 interviews were completed through introductions provided by the Municipal Return Offices in Hadzici, Sarajevo (5), Bihać (2) and Goražde (1), NGOs in Bihać (2) and Sanski Most (1), the Mayor's Office in Centar, Sarajevo (1), the Cantonal administration in Sarajevo (4), and IOM in Sarajevo (2), whilst the remaining 12 respondents were found through snowball sampling. In Kosovo, a total of 11 respondents were identified through IOM in Pristina and Peja, eight through a Swiss NGO, three through the Norwegian Refugee Council, three through the UNMIK administrator of Skenderaj, and nine through snowball sampling. The majority of those interviewed in both countries had received assistance to return, although three interviews in Kosovo were with individuals who were aware of assisted return programmes, but had chosen to return independently. In Bosnia, 17 interviews were in the capital, Sarajevo, whilst a further eight interviews were conducted in Bihać and five in Goražde. In Kosovo, 12 interviews were in the capital Pristina, of which one was with a respondent from the Suhareka region, whilst a further 11 were conducted in the north-west, in Istog (5), Decan (2), Peja (2) and Gakova (2), since this was the main area of expulsion of Albanians both before and during the war. However, additional interviews were conducted in Kacanik (5), Obiliq (3), Skenderaj (2) and Lipljan (1).

To gain a better understanding of the reintegration of returned asylum seekers and refugees, semi-structured interviews were conducted, using the interview schedule included as Appendix 4. The schedule is divided into five sections, relating to: general information about the interviewee, experiences in the country of asylum and visions of return, the type of return assistance received and finally reintegration and the sustainability of their return. Most interviews were taped, although some interviewees declined<sup>8</sup>. Transcripts were produced for all individual interviews and these were analysed by focusing on key issues.

### Stakeholder interviews

Stakeholder interviews in Bosnia and Kosovo were also conducted with two key groups of respondents: those who had had direct involvement in the return process, and those who could provide a more general overview on the process of return. Interviewees included representatives of both international organisations and local government in Bosnia and Kosovo. The interviews were used both to identify individual returnees as well as to provide an institutional perspective on the sustainability of returns. The motives for return and effectiveness of particular assisted return programmes were also discussed. In total 22 interviews were carried out in Kosovo with representatives of 15 different organisations. In Bosnia, 24 people from 19 different organisations were interviewed (see Appendix 5). As with stakeholder interviews in the UK, those in Bosnia and Kosovo were most useful for providing context and contacts rather than information for direct inclusion in the final report.

### Limitations

Before moving to a description of the characteristics of those interviewed, three main limitations need to be acknowledged. The first relates to sampling. It is important to state that in all three countries where interviews were undertaken – the UK, Bosnia and Kosovo – respondents in no way comprised a representative sample of the study populations. Due to the small and sometimes unbalanced samples, this study does not yield conclusions that could be considered valid for each respondent group. However, as for Koser and Pinkerton (2002), the study was explorative and the aim was to obtain a broad range of different kind of motives and various possible trigger factors that may influence return.

Another limitation related to the sample concerns bias. While every effort was made to interview as wide a range of people as possible within each study population (covering age range, both sexes, a variety of statuses and so on), it is probable that use of the 'snowball' method of identifying respondents produced a bias. This method relies on personal recommendations from one respondent of another who is willing to be interviewed, and means that only a certain segment of any population is accessed. A similar problem arises from depending on community organisations to identify respondents, in that the membership of organisations

---

<sup>8</sup> Reasons for refusal to allow taping of the interview centred around lack of trust in the use to which the tape would be put. In particular, some respondents in north-east Bosnia cited bad experiences with journalists.

is not always fully representative of the community as a whole. Given time limitations on the research, however, these were decided upon as the most efficient methods for identifying respondents.

A further limitation arises from the use of interpreters – in Bosnia and Kosovo and for some of the individual interviews in the UK. A disadvantage of using interpreters – especially for more qualitative research – is that nuances and sometimes the overall meaning of a response can be lost through translation. However, interpreters – especially as in this study where they are drawn from within the study populations – can at times provide an entry into more sensitive discussions as they may be trusted by and even sometimes known to the respondents.

## Profile of respondents

In Appendix 6, a number of tables provide data on the demographic profile, occupation status and asylum history of the respondents interviewed for this study. In the UK, taking focus group participants and individual interviewees together, more men were interviewed than women, reflecting the pattern of applications for return assistance from Refugee Action's *Choices* programme, and the take-up of returns facilitated by IOM. Respondents in the UK were also predominantly young, with two-thirds in the 20 to 39 age bracket. The majority (80 per cent) of those interviewed in the UK had secure status, perhaps reflecting reluctance on the part of those with insecure status to come forward for interview. Just over half the respondents were single, whilst the same proportion did not have children. About one-third reported not having close family members in the UK. About two-thirds of the respondents still had family members in their country of origin, and most of the rest were unsure.

There was wide variation amongst the respondents in their time of arrival in the UK. The majority had lived in the UK for three or more years. One was born in the UK of asylum seeking parents – he was a participant in a focus group and his contributions are excluded from the analysis for this report. On the whole, those interviewed in the UK were relatively well educated, with only seven respondents reporting no formal education. However, one third of the respondents did not have a job at the time of the interview. Those who were working mainly had jobs in the service sector.

There are many similarities in terms of those interviewed in Bosnia and Kosovo, and those interviewed in the UK, but also some differences. In the case of Kosovo, once again more men than women were interviewed, but in Bosnia the numbers of men and women were roughly equal. Respondents in Kosovo were also young, but less so in Bosnia, reflecting the fact that flight and return occurred earlier in Bosnia than in Kosovo. In Bosnia, meanwhile, more people were reported to have fled as a family unit, whereas many Kosovan men left the country before the war broke out, trying to avoid serving in the army. This was reflected in a higher proportion of (single) male returnees interviewed in Kosovo.

The majority of respondents in both Bosnia and Kosovo had completed secondary school education before leaving, while four in Bosnia had graduated from university. Nevertheless, two-thirds of the respondents in Kosovo reported being unemployed when they fled – in contrast most in Bosnia had been employed. In the case of Bosnia, all the interviewees left between 1992 and 1994 and returned between 1996 and 2001. The vast majority stayed in a host country for between three and six years. In contrast, in Kosovo, although some of the interviewees sought asylum as early as the beginning of the 1990s, most people left in 1999. As a result most people had spent less than three years abroad.

## Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the background and methodology of this study, and provided a brief demographic profile of those individuals who participated as respondents in either focus group sessions or individual interviews. Whilst it is important to bear in mind that in neither the UK, Bosnia or Kosovo were those interviewed a representative sample of all returnees or potential returnees, the diversity of interviewees and of methods is designed to provide insight into both the decisions people make about return, and the consequences for themselves and for the countries that they move back to. The next chapter moves on to consider these decisions in more detail.

### 3. Understanding the decision to return

#### Introduction

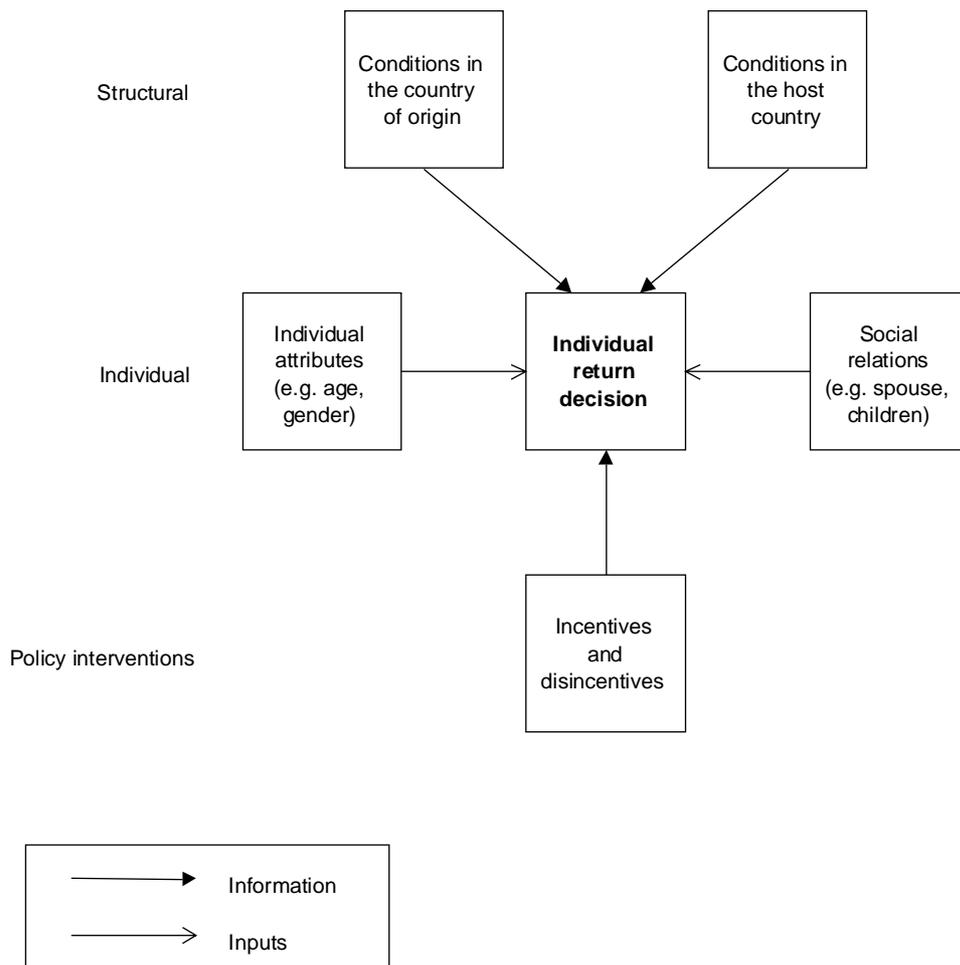
It is impossible to predict accurately whether or not any individual will return voluntarily to their country of origin. The return decision is always complex. It is often made on the basis of multiple factors that are hard to disentangle even for the person making the decision. It can depend on individual experiences and propensities that are virtually impossible to measure. It can also be 'irrational', or better highly personal (Janis and Mann, 1997). This chapter draws on individual interviews and focus group sessions with respondents in the UK to try to identify key return motivations and to try to explain those motivations. Where appropriate the chapter also incorporates information from interviews with returnees in Bosnia and Kosovo. An important caveat is that even where respondents in the UK stated that they had thought about returning or even that they intended to return, they may not actually end up leaving.

The exploration of the return decision-making process followed an iterative research process. First, a model for understanding the decision to return was developed, based on previous research on this topic and drawing on the review of literature presented in the previous chapter. The model was in turn used to guide the interview schedules for individuals and focus groups by identifying factors expected to be critical in the decision-making process. By and large, the empirical evidence collected confirmed the validity of the model, in which the range and interrelatedness of factors is stressed. However, in the last part of this chapter, various refinements and extensions are identified as a possible avenue for further research in this area.

#### A model for understanding the decision to return

In Chapter 2, the review of literature suggested that the factors influencing decisions to return include both 'push' and 'pull' factors that are economic, social, personal and political in scope, and that on balance, family and life cycle factors might be more important for returnees than for initial emigration. Based on this identification of a range of possible factors that influence the decision to return, Figure 3.1 sets out a 'model' of these factors. The 'model' has a number of elements. First, influences on the decision to return come in the form of both information about options and inputs that structure how these options are viewed. Concerning the former, the decision to return – as long as it is voluntary – is typically made after comparing information about conditions and prospects in the host country with those in the country of origin (Koser, 1998; Faist, 1999; Muus and Muller, 1999; King, 2000) as well as information about policy interventions in the form of extra incentives or disincentives to stay or return (Arb, 2001; Bloch and Atfield, 2002). However, nobody is a perfectly 'rational' decision-maker, and different people come to different conclusions even on the basis of the same evidence (Malmberg, 1997; Fisher and Martin, 1999). One reason relates to individual attributes such as age and gender (King, 2000; Reichnert, 2002). Another relates to the broader context of social relations. These are reflected in the model as 'inputs' to the return decision.

**Figure 3.1: Factors determining the decision to return**



## Empirical evidence on factors affecting return

It is possible to conceive of a wide range of conditions in the country of origin and the host country that potential returnees might take into consideration in making the decision whether to return. For the purposes of this study, two strategies were adopted to explore these factors further. First, in focus group sessions, respondents were invited to identify factors that they considered most important in determining return motivations, either for themselves or for others in their community. After prompting about points that might be more important for certain age groups, men or women, or people in work or education or those not, they were asked to rank the factors they had chosen by placing them within one of three concentric circles to indicate whether they considered them 'very important', 'less important' or 'not important'. Subsequently, they were asked to discuss the information they felt was available both about return itself, and about schemes designed to assist return. In contrast, individual interviewees were asked to identify one key factor or 'bottom line' that had to be met, or would have to be met, before they would return. Their response was probed further by offering a choice of 15 factors pre-selected by the interviewer (see interview schedule in Appendix 1). Respondents were asked to identify the factor they considered most important, and to explain why, before answering a series of more systematic questions about government assistance to return.

Reactions to the request to rank factors that influenced the return decision varied between the different focus groups (Table 3.1), reflecting in part their level of interest in return. At one extreme, in the Afghan focus group, there was strong resistance, led by one group member in particular, to distinguishing between different factors at all:

*All the issues are so interconnected that classification is a bit difficult. Security, jobs, education – which is more important than the other? There is nothing there (Afghanistan) and we want everything. So we would put everything in the centre, and we would not need another circle. (AM30+)<sup>9</sup>*

The Iranian and Kosovan focus groups did not complete the prioritisation exercise either, because of widespread agreement amongst the Iranians that few would want to return permanently to the country under the current regime, and because the Kosovan group simply could not agree (even though some were interested in returning). In contrast, the Somali, Kurdish and Tamil groups all agreed that peace and security in the home country was the key issue, and the extent to which this existed was actively debated. Family factors were often cited next in order; in contrast, economic factors were mentioned much more rarely, or even explicitly rejected as key issues, as was the availability of ‘explore and prepare’ visits, although this is not surprising as they are not currently offered to any of the groups interviewed, except Afghans who currently appear to view all return initiatives with some suspicion.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 3.1: Ranking of factors influencing the decision to return in focus groups**

Group	Most important	Fairly important	Least important	Not important at all
Somalis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Peace</b></li> <li>• Political changes</li> <li>• <b>Safety</b></li> <li>• Family support</li> <li>• Feeling at home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Immigration status</li> <li>• Status</li> <li>• Reconstruction</li> <li>• Financial help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loneliness in Britain</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health care</li> <li>• Explore and prepare visit</li> </ul>
Tamils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Peace</b></li> <li>• <b>Security</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tamil independence</li> <li>• Loneliness in UK</li> <li>• Employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration status</li> <li>• Voluntary return programme</li> <li>• Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health care</li> <li>• Explore and prepare visit</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Family considerations</li> </ul>
Kurds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Safety</b></li> <li>• Democracy</li> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Human rights</li> <li>• Political changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family considerations</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Health care</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Reconstruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore and prepare visit</li> <li>• Financial help</li> </ul>
Afghans			Factors not prioritised	
Iranians			Factors not prioritised	
Kosovans			Factors not prioritised	

Source: Field data (2002-03)

In individual interviews, a total of seven respondents declined to comment on what key factors influenced the decision to return – these again were people who were unwilling even to countenance return. Otherwise, the responses showed some resistance to the notion that just one factor is of key importance in determining return motivations, especially amongst those who were actively considering return. Only five respondents were willing to identify just one factor. Numerically, the most important issue mentioned in individual interviews was again ‘security’, followed in this case by ‘employment’, ‘family’ and ‘health care’ (Table 3.2).

<sup>9</sup> AM30+ denotes an Afghan male respondent aged in his thirties. This notation is used throughout the report.

<sup>10</sup> The first funded Explore and Prepare programme was set up in 1999 for Kosovans who came to the UK on the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme, but has not been available since April 2000. According to the Refugee Council, 70 per cent of those who undertook an ‘explore and prepare’ visit at that time said it was useful in helping them to make the decision on whether to return permanently, and 55 per cent had actually returned permanently within a year. The Afghan explore and prepare programme was announced in August 2002, but not actually made available until 14 months after the start of the voluntary return programme, and six months after removals had started.

**Table 3.2: Factors influencing return motivations amongst individual interviewees**

	Chinese	Kosovans	Somalis	Tamils	Total
Security	0	2	10	7	21
Employment	1	4	7	1	13
Family	1	2	0	6	9
Healthcare	1	1	3	4	8
(Not willing to return)	2	4	1	0	7
Freedom	1	1	2	1	7
Democracy	1	1	2	0	7
Age	2	0	3	0	5
Education	0	0	4	1	5
Asylum status	2	0	1	1	4
Money	1	0	2	0	4
Housing	1	0	1	0	3
Welfare benefits	0	0	2	0	2
Discrimination	1	0	0	0	1
Shops and facilities	0	0	1	0	1
Assistance Programmes	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Field data (2002-03). Multiple responses allowed.

However, more important than the numerical ranking of different factors are the reasons that respondents in focus groups and individual interviews gave for selecting the factors that they did. This is considered in more depth below.

### Structural factors: conditions in host and home countries

Factors identified by the respondents at the structural or contextual level can broadly be divided into political, economic and social factors. As noted above, political factors were mentioned across focus groups and individual interviews, with a strong emphasis on security in the country of origin. This was most clear in the Afghani, Tamil and Somali focus groups, where security in the respondents' country of origin could also be seen as objectively problematic. For example, in response to an initial question about why those in the Afghan focus group did not wish to return, a first participant commented:

*It is quite nice to say for the media and everyone that the Taliban is gone and all is fine. Yet Afghanistan has returned to the situation of 1992: civil war, war lords, chaos and all of those ... We have not seen any changes. The situation has become worse than the Taliban time (AM30+).*

These views were echoed by other members of the group, with one commenting that "there is no security outside Kabul and even in Kabul" (AF20+), whilst another agreed "yes, the UN force is in Kabul and not outside. And there is no security" (AF20+). Meanwhile, in other groups, similar views emerged. For example, this exchange in the Somali focus groups shows how the group explained their decision to rank 'peace' as the most important factor in their decision to return:

Int: *Can you tell me why you have put them in those circles? Maybe start with the most important circle.*

R1: *Well in the most important circle I think it is obvious. Peace, well that is clear. That is the most important thing of all. (SM30+)*

R2: *Yes, that is the one. (SM50+)*

R3: *The most important. (SM20+)*

R1: *And they go together with the safety and the political changes. If there is peace then it will be safe. If there are political changes there will be peace and it will be safe, you see?*

However, it is interesting to note that even as these explanations were being put forward, other issues also cropped up. For example, in the Afghan group, after agreeing with the first respondent that a lack of security was the major problem in Afghanistan, one respondent went on to say "people who left Afghanistan ten years ago and settled down here, they have their houses, their children were brought up here, they don't

want to leave everything they made here for the past ten years and just go somewhere there is no house, no education ..." (AF20+). Similarly, as the discussion in the Somali group unfolded, one respondent (SM20+) made it clear that political change on its own was not sufficient: it had to be the right political change, involving international recognition of Somaliland. Amongst the Turkish Kurdish group, there was also a requirement for some for the establishment of an independent Kurdistan, as well as a strong discussion of the importance of 'responsibilities' in the UK:

*I don't know if I speak for everyone here, but personally, I have responsibilities here. I have responsibilities for my family, for the community. I would have to resolve those things first. (TKM30+)*

At the same time, definitions of security varied between the groups. Amongst the Tamils interviewed, security related to the overall political climate in Sri Lanka. One individual interviewee commented "people don't want to return. No one is sure about the peace talks" (TM60+), and another that: "People have experience of peace processes before, when they still failed to solve the problem. This time the peace process will also break down" (TF20+). Two Kosovan respondents who also identified security also referred to a general environment of safety, with one commenting: "The problem is the politics. The army, the soldiers" (KM20+). In contrast, for other respondents, security was more of an individual matter:

*I heard of one person who went back and was killed. All the village thought he had a lot of money because he had been abroad, and they came to his house and killed him (CM20+).*

*The government in China thinks we have committed a crime by applying for asylum. They might arrest us when we get back (CM30+).*

*I cannot go back. I do Falun Gong. If I go back they will punish me (CF20+).*

*Nowadays everyone has a gun in Afghanistan. All the ordinary people carry guns and explosives, so they can harm anyone they dislike quite easily. There are no rules to protect innocent people (AF20+).*

For some groups, economic factors also appeared to be of some importance, with employment being the main issue cited. Here, the fear of not being able to find a job after returning home was key, especially amongst Kosovans. For example, one Kosovo focus group participant elaborated:

*Basically now, you go there [Kosovo] you can't do anything. Because there is no work! Again, there is a major issue, because we are the people within Europe. I can go there, I can leave the UK, but then I would return back as an economic migrant, and I don't want that! So, I think you need to build another opportunities, which is the employment there. How many people are working there? Twenty per cent or even less than that! And the war is finished two or three years ago (KM20+).*

Meanwhile, in individual interviews, the following comments were typical:

*If I had a proper job I might go back (KM20+).*

*All my friends want to go back. Employment is the main issue for them (KM20+).*

*I plan to go back in about two years. I have to find a job there. At the moment there is not much. But as soon as the economy gets better I will go back (KM40+).*

As the last excerpt in particular highlights, return motivations are dynamic and can change as conditions at home and in the host country change. Another Kosovan made this point explicitly, and also showed that employment in the UK may be a consideration: "My decision to return is moment-related. I would go after I lost my job here" (KM20+). Nonetheless, on balance, those who were unemployed at the time of interview were not found to be more likely to be contemplating return than those who had a job, suggesting that restrictive policies on employment in the UK do not necessarily affect the return decision.

Excerpts from both the individual interviews and focus groups can help explain this. First, two unemployed Chinese respondents provided a similar reason for not wishing to return: "I paid £10,000 to get here, I need to pay that first" (CM30+); "I borrowed £5,000 to get here, it will take me two years to pay that off" (CM20+). Neither of these respondents would consider going home until they have paid debts incurred to pay agents to transport them to the UK, and both were actively looking for employment. At the same time, a number of

those considering return were employed, but several explained that they have a target for savings, and plan to return once it has been achieved:

*We are saving money to build a house and send the children to school. I need £20,000 for that. When I arrived I thought it would take me seven years – I have been here five (CM20+).*

*I'll need to earn £15,000 to pay for the children's education. With a good job that will take me four or five years, with a bad job maybe ten years (CM30+).*

These sentiments were echoed in the Afghani focus group, where one participant commented:

*The reason for that [why economics prevent people returning] is most of the people who came here spent a lot of money. This is because UK is the only western country that does not have a facility for applying for asylum while abroad. ... In the case of the UK, you have to come in illegally, then apply for asylum. That is what all the Afghanis did, they paid agents with money they got from selling their houses. So you asking someone to go voluntarily on something like \$500 or \$600 in instalments, when the average cost of coming here was over \$10,000 ... and they are offering that \$500 or \$600 in three instalments, they are wasting a lot of theirs and people's time with these kinds of schemes (AM30+).*

However, amongst other national groups, economic themes came out less important, especially during focus group interviews. For example, aside from the above point, and a remark that those looking for work need to go to the US, employment and money were not mentioned at all in the Afghani focus group. In the Somali group, the only exchange about employment (despite several prompts) involved one participant commenting that they would never stay in the UK because of a job (if it were safe in Somalia), and another saying that he/she might, but only because he/she worked with Somalis and would miss them! Meanwhile, in the Iranian focus group, there was a lengthy discussion in which all participants agreed that Iranians are hardworking, and would not be put off by a lack of jobs, whether in Iran or outside.

Rather than economics, it tended to be social factors that were second in order of importance across the different national and ethnic groups as a whole. For example, in the Somali, Iranian and Kosovan focus groups, there were sometimes lengthy discussions about the 'natural' desire of many refugees to return to their homes, although some who had been abroad for longer commented that they were no longer sure that their country of origin was their 'home'. Interviews with returnees in Bosnia and Kosovo also showed a third of respondents in each country mentioning that one reason they returned was to be 'at home'. However, perhaps most important was the influence of the location, needs or attitudes of respondents' families. This issue is dealt with next.

### Individual factors: age, gender and family circumstances

Overall, evidence collected in both individual interviews and focus groups suggests that for those interviewed at least, family-related factors were rather more important than individual characteristics. First, in terms of the age of individual respondents, little difference was found in the likelihood of interest in return, whilst age was only very rarely mentioned as a factor influencing return within focus groups. Where it was, some contradictory findings emerge. For example, in the Somali focus group, one respondent mentioned that older Somalis were the only ones in the community not wishing to return to Somalia at some time, whilst interviews with three elderly Tamils highlighted some of the reasons why the elderly might not be so willing to return. First, they had all arrived in the UK many years ago, and had permanent status in the UK (either as British citizens or refugees). They also reported that they had become accustomed to Britain. Another reason that recurred during interviews related to healthcare – all three respondents were ailing, and all felt that they would not be so well looked after in Sri Lanka as they are in the UK. However, at the same time, two of the same respondents expressed a desire to die in Sri Lanka. One commented: "Most in the elderly community would like to die there...but you need someone to look after you" (TM60+). Meanwhile, in the Kosovan focus group, one respondent commented that those who had returned included "very old people ... they simply couldn't think to live in UK ... couldn't live a life in this country. Again, because of the language. And this is why they returned and they wanted to return in their own country" (KM20+).

In terms of gender, again no obvious relationship emerges from either individual interviews or focus group interviews. In the individual interviews, amongst the three Chinese respondents who had never even considered return, two were male and one female. The only Kosovan never to have considered returning

was female, whereas the only Somali not to have was male. Amongst the Tamil interviewees, two men and two women had never considered return. Few male or female respondents cited reasons either to stay or go that appeared directly to be related to their sex. Meanwhile, in focus groups, both Tamil and Kurdish respondents discussed and explicitly rejected the notion that women and men would make different decisions, although one Kurdish woman participant noted that return might be harder for women.

However, there were some exceptions, which suggest that fears of gender-based persecution and discrimination do need to be taken into account. For example, one Somali in the focus group discussion expressed concern that she might be raped should she return, whilst another commented on the religious and cultural burdens placed on women in Somalia (although in the Iranian focus group, another respondent suggested that enforcement of wearing the *hijab* was not as strict as often thought in the West). A Chinese respondent already cited above was concerned that she might be sterilised should she return to China. One Afghan respondent even noted how a gender-specific concern stopped her returning after she had taken steps to find out about return programmes:

*I was about to fill in the forms, and everything. Then I decided not to. After the Taliban was gone, I thought I could go and work there with UN or some charity. But after getting information on how women are being treated, there is no way I was going to go (AF20+).*

Some further insight was gained from a further eight interviews conducted with women (four Somalis and four Turkish Kurds), and an additional focus group session, each intended to focus on gender. Each individual interviewee was asked whether she felt there were any particular issues about return arising from her being female. What is most striking is that six of the eight respondents insisted that there were no gender-specific aspects to the return decision. One Somali declined to answer. Another alluded to different expectations among men and women about return:

*Let me think. I don't think I have different priorities to any one else. Of course you hear people say that women are more nurturing and things like that, but I don't have children myself so I don't have that responsibility. I would say though that I will probably experience a bigger change in circumstances than my husband, just because of the expectations there. I think that's partly why I want to wait, until I am too old to care about such things (SF30+).*

The all-female focus group led to a broadly similar conclusion. In discussion all the women agreed that there was no difference between men and women as regards return motivations, although they might have different expectations. It is important to note, however, that this focus group only included Somali women.

In addition to age and gender, consideration was given as to whether marital status made a difference to attitudes towards return. Of 27 individual respondents who were single, only four had never even considered returning, and three of these were Tamils who cited security concerns. Several young, male Chinese respondents reported that while they were actively considering return in order to marry, they then planned to return with their wife to the UK: "I will go back to middle China to find a wife there. She has to be from the same background and have the same habits. But then I'll bring her back to the UK" (CM20+). Meanwhile, in the Somali focus group, one respondent mentioned that she knew of people who had returned to Somalia in order to marry. However, rather more common was for respondents to note how getting married in the UK represented a powerful reason not to return, and certainly married respondents were less likely to have considered return.

Another characteristic recorded of the respondents was whether or not they had children living with them in the UK. Although the individual interviews showed no clear pattern as a whole, focus group discussions with the Kosovans and Tamils made clear that children tend to weigh against an inclination to return – with the same issue also arising from individual interviews among the Chinese. The most important reason cited was a desire to educate children, and a conviction that the education system is better in the UK than in any of their countries of origin. On the other hand, one female Tamil respondent, who had registered for a return programme, explained that taking her children home was her main reason for doing so: "That is our country. My daughter is growing up and she is forgetting Tamil. I want our son to grow up there too" (TF30+).

Limited evidence was found of divergent views on return within families. One Tamil respondent said: "I have thought about going home, but my daughter doesn't want to go back, she is well-integrated here" (TM60+). He went on to explain that he was dependent on his daughter (he was aged 76), which might explain why her opinion held sway in this particular instance. In contrast, another Tamil respondent said: "I've discussed going home with my daughter, who is 13. She doesn't want to go – she doesn't write Tamil and she grew up

here. But she will like it once we are back” (TF30+). Clearly the opinion of this younger child had little influence on the decision to return.

No evidence was found in either individual interviews or focus groups of differences in opinion between husbands and wives. The vast majority of respondents confirmed that return had been discussed with partners, but none reported disagreements. This is perhaps unsurprising as respondents were unlikely to divulge personal discussions during the interview, still less in focus groups. Arguably ethnographic research would be required to uncover the family decision-making process. However, focus groups did provide some insight into divergent opinions at a community level. In particular during the meeting with Iranians, the respondents disagreed quite strongly over whether or not it was safe to return and what factors might encourage more Iranians to return. These meetings also provide some insight into gender relations, and suggested that men rather than women take the lead within communities. It might be reasonable to extend this conclusion to individual families too. One female respondent during the Kosovan focus group nervously admitted: “If you are part of the community you are just a number and you don’t really have a say, you just wait to see what everyone else does” – she was then abruptly interrupted by a male respondent who went on to contradict her.

A female Afghan respondent hinted during another focus group at the extent to which family or community level discussions might influence individual return. She said:

*I graduated last June, which was why I thought if I applied for a job in Afghanistan I would have a better chance...but when I talked to older people, they told me that because I am a woman, and I am young, no one would recognise me (Af20+).*

In addition, the location, needs and attitudes of families came out as an important social factor having some influence on return decisions. For example, amongst respondents to individual interviews, around half of those who had considered return did not have any family in the UK at the time of the interview. Meanwhile, if the Somalis are excluded from the analysis, the vast majority of those who had considered return had no family members in the UK. Similarly, of those who had never considered return, most – eight out of eleven – did have family in the UK. It was less easy to discern a pattern in terms of whether respondents had family at home, since the vast majority did, whether they had considered return or not. On the one hand, a desire to rejoin family members recurred often in discussions about return with individual interviewees. For example, similar sentiments were expressed by three different nationalities in the UK:

*I want to go back and settle with my parents. I want to look after them (TM20+).*

*If my family can come here I will stay, but if they can’t I will go back (CF20+).*

*I am going back. It is hard here and I miss my wife (KM30+).*

Meanwhile, four of those interviewed in Bosnia, and six in Kosovo mentioned that they had returned in order to be reunited with family members. However, on the other hand, others in the UK also remarked that they wanted to stay outside their own country so that they could send home money to friends and relatives. This reminds us that we should not view the influence of families on return migration decisions in simplistic terms.

## Policy incentives to return

The effect of public policy on the decision to return is a wide area, since policy can influence overall conditions in countries of origin and host countries (Richmond, 1981; Eltink, 1999). However, for the purposes of this study, it is helpful to identify policies that have a specific impact on return at two levels. First, the kind of status and treatment that asylum seekers get in the UK might influence their willingness to return; and second, policies that provide incentives in the form of return or reintegration assistance might be relevant in asylum seekers’ decisions.<sup>11</sup> Concerning the former, in individual interviews, no obvious relationship emerged between the status of the respondents and their return motivations. Thus out of nine individual respondents who had explicitly rejected the idea of return, five had permanent status in the UK, but

---

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that the fieldwork for this report was conducted before the emergence of recent proposals to remove benefits from asylum seekers who fail to participate in voluntary return once their appeals are exhausted.

four did not. Meanwhile, of those who had considered return, about a third had temporary status, but some two-thirds had either UK citizenship, refugee status or ILR, and so had no legal need to consider return.

This finding is not surprising. It is sensible to assume that of those still awaiting the outcome of an application or appeal, some will be pessimistic about their prospects in the UK and think about returning, whilst others are optimistic and plan to stay. As indicated earlier, there may also be many other variables that influence the return motivations of those with permanent status. Finally, it is worth noting that all four of the respondents whose appeals had been rejected had at least thought about now returning home – one said: “I have no status so they can send me home at any time” (CM20+). Nevertheless, several respondents who were still awaiting the outcome of an appeal insisted that they would stay even if unsuccessful:

*If they turn me down I would stay here to work illegally (KM20+).*

*If I get status I can work here legally, if not I'll work illegally' (CF20+).*

In contrast, one Somali respondent explained why permanent status would encourage him to consider returning:

*I think it is important. Who can say what will happen? If I go back it might be good it might be not good. It is difficult. So I might want to leave and come back to live here. But I think they will not allow such a thing unless you become British. It is not a choice (SM30+).*

Another interpretation of the importance of status emerged from the interviews conducted in Bosnia and Kosovo. When asked why they returned when they did, 19 of 30 respondents in Bosnia and 13 of 34 in Kosovo stated that they had not wanted to return then, but had been obliged to when their status terminated. Some interviewees in Bosnia said that the authorities had told them if they did not return when they did they would be prohibited from ever coming back to the host country again. None of these returns were officially classified as ‘involuntary’ or ‘forced’, but these findings demonstrate that some people would rather return than remain in host countries illegally.

In relation to more direct policy incentives, it is very striking that the only choice not selected by any individual respondents as an underlying factor in a decision whether or not to return was assistance programmes. Three broad reasons emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions. One was that many respondents had never heard of assistance programmes. Another was that some respondents simply did not believe what they had heard, namely that they might be eligible for assistance to go home. But the overriding reason was the feeling among the respondents that assistance could not overcome more fundamental obstacles to return – most significantly insecurity and longer-term unemployment. This message was strongly reinforced during a stakeholder interview at IOM.

While assistance programmes were therefore not considered central in making a decision whether or not to return, most respondents did feel that if they decided to return assistance would help. It is important to reiterate that what these respondents were saying was that should they decide to go home then they would do so with or without assistance, but that assistance would help. They were asked to specify what sort of assistance would help, and the responses are shown in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3: Policy interventions considered potentially useful**

	Chinese	Kosovans	Somalis	Tamils	Total
Money	1	4	9	2	16
Employment	2	3	6	3	14
Training	1	5	0	1	7
Housing	1	1	3	2	7
Asylum status	1	2	0	0	3
Healthcare	0	0	0	1	1
Go and see visits	1	0	0	0	1
None	5	1	0	3	9
No response	0	0	1	3	4

Source: Field data (2002-03). Note: multiple responses allowed.

Clarification is firstly required over those respondents who did not list any factors. Four respondents would not reply at all. Three were Tamils, for whom insecurity in Sri Lanka made them unwilling even to consider return. Three other Tamils were willing to answer the questions, but made a point of saying that there was no form of assistance that would make any difference, again because they felt assistance could not overcome a general lack of security in Sri Lanka.

There was a quite different reason why more than half of the Chinese respondents explicitly stated that no aspect of assistance would facilitate a return. This emerged during an interview with a Chinese community leader, and appears to arise from a 'culture' of self-reliance: "The UK Fujian Community Centre doesn't have links with IOM. People who want to go home don't need help. They have their own money. You don't see Chinese people queuing for benefits. It is the Chinese mentality – they don't like to depend on benefits".

That 'go and see' visits only appeared once is worth comment, as the stakeholder interview at European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) identified such visits as an essential element in facilitating voluntary return. It may be simply that the respondents had not heard of such programmes, rather than their actively identifying them as not useful.

## Information and the decision to return

One further feature of the model presented in Figure 3.1 remains to be discussed, namely information. First, it is important to ask to what extent the respondents felt they knew about conditions in their country of origin, and thus had information on the basis of which to make a comparison of conditions. A second question concerns how they obtained this information, and the extent to which they trusted different sources of information. Thirdly, it is interesting to ask whether the information they did have was accurate – although this is much more difficult to judge, since the accuracy of information about countries of origin is often highly contested. Finally, as noted above, it is also relevant to ask whether respondents knew about government incentives to return, how they obtained this information, and whether they gained an accurate view of what is on offer.

Amongst individual interviewees, all except six respondents said that they did have information about conditions in their home country. Of those who claimed to know nothing, five were Chinese, and one was Kosovan. It seems rather unlikely that these respondents had no access to information, since several had arrived relatively recently, most had been contacted via community centres and therefore would be able to talk to fellow nationals in the UK, and most had family members in the country of origin, with whom they were in contact. Perhaps a more plausible explanation, for at least three of these Chinese respondents, is that they were simply unwilling to countenance return at the time of the interview. This might dissuade them from seeking information, or alternatively dissuade them from talking about it. However, it may also genuinely be the case for some people that they do not know about the situation at home, as related by one Chinese respondent who had considered return:

*"I don't have any information. My parents don't tell me anything, because they are afraid I will worry"* (CF30+).

For those individual interviewees who reported they did have information about their home country, Table 3.4 shows the main sources of this information. For the Chinese, Somali and Tamil respondents, the primary source was friends or family at home. A similar conclusion can be drawn from discussion in the Afghan focus group, where although TV, internet and newspapers were mentioned, when asked how this information was valued, one participant replied (and all agreed):

*In our community, word of mouth counts quite a lot, travels quite fast. I know someone who knows someone who knows someone, etc. That's how: something might have happened this morning in Kabul, but when I get home I will hear of it. Someone will call someone in Holland who will call someone in Germany who calls someone in Britain who will call my mother (AM30+).*

In contrast, what was printed or broadcast especially in the UK media was viewed by Afghan respondents as highly unreliable, designed to paint a false (rosy) picture of life in Afghanistan. This raises a dilemma observed elsewhere in the context of information dissemination (Koser and Pinkerton, 2002). On the one hand, family and friends are likely to be the sources of information most trusted by the respondents. On the other hand, they may not always be particularly accurate sources of information.

**Table 3.4: Sources of information about conditions at home**

	Chinese	Kosovans	Somalis	Tamils	Total
Family or friends at home	3	2	10	7	22
Media	1	6	4	6	17
Internet	-	2	-	1	3
Unspecified	1	2	-	2	5
No information	5	1	-	-	6

Source: Field data (2002-03). Note: multiple responses allowed.

For Kosovans and Tamils, national media was also reported to be an important source of information. The Somali respondents who mentioned the media stressed the importance of international media, especially the BBC, a judgement that was reinforced in the focus group of Somali women. Finally, in the Iranian focus group, no source of information was regarded as reliable, as indicated by this response of an older group member to a question on where you could go for information that could be trusted:

*Really nowhere! You can hear some from TV, some from radio, some from people, and you can gather it all together and mix it and say, 'OK, something happened' (IF60+).*

It was difficult to gauge the extent to which the information the respondents had was accurate or up to date, or even relevant to their particular concerns. Certainly the impression given by many during focus group discussions was that much available information was not reliable. Individual stories were recounted, or generalisations made, with apparently little willingness to think more carefully about prospects in the country of origin. Once again a possible explanation is that many of these respondents were not actually planning to go home when they were interviewed. This seems intuitive: if people are not planning to go home in the near future, there seems no reason why they should monitor employment opportunities or the availability of housing there. In contrast, the seven respondents who had actually registered with IOM to return were more actively investigating possibilities upon their impending return. The implication appears to be that there is no information gap. Respondents who wanted to access information about conditions in their country of origin could, but those who did not want to often did not bother.

In the model, a decision is represented as being made not just on the basis of information about conditions at home and in the host country, but also about policy incentives and disincentives. It was suggested above, for example, that one reason assistance programmes did not figure significantly as a factor influencing return motivations was that respondents did not know about programmes. In fact over half of the individual respondents interviewed stated that they had never heard of any assistance programmes in the UK, with this lack of knowledge particularly acute amongst Somalis. However, the findings from interviews in Bosnia and Kosovo were rather different. All but one of the 34 returnees interviewed in Kosovo said that they knew about return programmes before returning, while only five of 30 in Bosnia had apparently been unaware of return programmes. At the same time it is important to note that none of these respondents stated that the main reason they had returned was the availability of assistance.

One explanation for this discrepancy is that potential returnees may only actively investigate assistance programmes once they have actually made the decision to return. Some support for this idea comes from interviews in Bosnia, where five respondents stated that they had not initially been aware of return programmes when they first considered returning, but ended up using assistance when they finally returned. This would appear to reinforce the observation in the previous section that assistance programmes are not a crucial factor in deciding whether or not to return, though they may be of use once the decision has been made. This is a particularly salient point as a number of returnees interviewed in Bosnia said that they had heard of available assistance to return by the same authorities who were telling them that their status had been changed.

For those individual respondents in the UK who had heard of assistance programmes, their sources of information were, in descending order, word of mouth from friends or at community centres (13), a solicitor (5), advertisements in the media (2), and a poster at a Refugee Action office (1). This finding reinforces research on information dissemination in other contexts (Koser and Pinkerton, 2002) that concludes that asylum seekers and refugees are most likely to rely on personal contacts for information about policies. Once again, these are also the information sources most likely to be trusted.

It is also worth noting, however, that even when respondents had heard about return assistance programmes, they often had very unclear ideas about exactly who was eligible and what the programmes entailed, as these quotes from individual interviews reveal:

*I've heard they offer a programme for people who have special skills and better education. People have to be highly educated (CM20+).*

*I think maybe there's a chance to get computer training (KM20+).*

*I've read about programmes, but they're only for people with refugee status aren't they? (CF40+).*

A final observation that emerged during an interview with one Kosovan respondent was the opinion that return assistance programmes should not be advertised at all: "I personally don't think they should advertise it. How can they guarantee that lives are going to be safe? They can't. So don't advertise it" (KM20+). In contrast, though, in the Iranian focus group, respondents in general appeared to be more in favour of large-scale publicity. One even compared return programmes with mortgages, saying that full information is needed before a decision can be made.

Stakeholder interviewees were similarly divided in their opinions about information campaigns, especially over the stage in the asylum procedure when information should be disseminated to asylum seekers. Some felt that asylum seekers should be made aware of their various options from the outset, in other words shortly after arrival in the UK. Others were concerned not to be seen to be promoting return. One solution suggested by several stakeholders was to direct asylum seekers to information sources, rather than actually to provide it. There was a general consensus that refugee community organisations were best placed to provide information, largely because they are more likely to be trusted than other sources.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to understand in more depth the decision of refugees and asylum seekers to return to their country of origin. The model presented conceptualises this decision as one depending on three key factors – the structural conditions in home and host countries (which in turn can be divided into political, economic and social factors), the individual and family characteristics of the refugees and asylum seekers themselves, and incentives that exist in public policy that may persuade (or dissuade) people from returning. Findings from both individual interviews and focus groups have confirmed that this wide range of factors encompasses the issues of importance to potential returnees, and that further generalisations are context-specific rather than universal. However, on balance, some support is also found to confirm the findings of previous studies that conditions at home rather than in the host country, and especially political factors, are of primary importance, at least in the way that forced migrants express their view of the decision-making process.

However, in addition to confirming the usefulness of the model, the research has also pointed to some other pertinent issues. First, it is possible to identify amongst the individuals and groups interviewed a number of categories of people, for whom there appear to be a distinct set of issues guiding their return decision. For example, one category comprised respondents – particularly those with permanent status – who had reasons unrelated to conditions at home not to return there. These included those who had been in the UK for many years and were settled here, and others whose children were enjoying success in the UK and had no reason to want to go home. Another respondent had no family members left in his country of origin. These people were pleased if conditions in their country of origin were recovering, but this by no means tempted them to return there. A second category comprised one or two respondents who admitted they had come to the UK with a specific goal, usually related to income or education. While sometimes also citing specific problems at home, these respondents were apparently not considering returning until they had achieved their goal.

A third category comprised two young Chinese male respondents, both of whom planned to return to China to find a wife, but then to come back again to the UK. Discussion with a Chinese community leader indicated that this was not unusual. He reported that "lots of people want to go back when they are still young to get a wife, but then come back here", continuing "maybe only ten per cent of Chinese here are female. So lots of men will go back eventually to find a wife. Otherwise they'll be single forever, won't they?" For this category of people, return was only intended to be temporary, although the opportunity to re-emigrate after their return was something mentioned by a number of other respondents. A final category comprised one or two

respondents who simply were not coping with living in the UK and wanted to go home, irrespective of long-term possibilities there. For example, one commented that “I feel a foreigner here, I will only get mental satisfaction when I go home” (TM20+), whilst another said simply: “I am unwell and homesick. I want to go home” (CM30+). For these respondents, conditions at home were clearly less important than dissatisfaction with their life abroad. However, the analysis also shows that the majority of participants in this research who had given serious consideration to returning, were waiting or had waited until they knew they could return safely. Amongst these, some were also delaying until employment conditions improved, and they could be sure of finding a job, although for others this was not a major consideration.

In addition to this possible categorisation of responses, one striking conclusion of this chapter is that targeted policies to promote return appear relatively ineffective in terms of the importance accorded to them by interviewees. A number of reasons for this are apparent, including that potential returnees simply do not know about return assistance. This suggests the need for greater outreach in order to inform people of the existence of such programmes, to explain entitlements and eligibility, and to raise general awareness. However, there is also a critical issue of trust, in that the individuals interviewed often remain to be convinced that the UK Government is sincere in its efforts to support voluntary return and the reconstruction of post-conflict states, rather than simply forcing people to go back.

Finally, for a number of respondents, there appeared to be a kind of ‘staged’ response to the decision to return, in which a key factor – usually the issue of security – was of paramount importance, and other factors – such as employment, government incentives, etc. – would only even be considered once this first issue was resolved. This reflects sequencing of priorities in time, but does not necessarily imply that factors other than security were of lesser importance or fundamentally surmountable once the security issue was overcome. For many respondents, the sequencing or prioritisation of factors considered in the decision to return implies also that returnees are also thinking about the sustainability of their return, rather than simply whether it is possible, safe or advantageous at a particular point in time. How exactly this sustainability can be defined and measured is considered in more detail in the next chapter.

## 4. The sustainability of return

### Introduction

Concern with the sustainability of return reflects a broad awareness in the academic literature and amongst policy-makers that return migration is not a simple and straightforward process. For return migrants themselves, particularly those who have sought refugee status abroad, return is not necessarily the 'end of the refugee cycle', but the start of a new journey that may include many difficulties and potential further migration or displacement. Quite a large and well-established literature on the difficulties faced by return migrants has focused on the economic, social, and political conditions that return migrants experience, their experience of reintegration and on their degree of 'satisfaction' or 'dissatisfaction' in comparison with their expectations of return (see Chapter 2). This literature defines reintegration in a number of different ways, and seeks to explain its relation to a number of different factors.

### What constitutes a sustainable return?

Before moving to the specific analysis of sustainability indicators in relation to return to Bosnia and Kosovo, this section considers the notion of sustainability in a more general sense. For this purpose it is helpful to consider three standpoints from which sustainability can be conceptualised. First, return can be viewed as 'sustainable' in relation to the situation of each individual returnee, and also in relation to the home society as a whole. For example, reports on the return of refugees to countries after the end of conflict have raised the prospect that unco-ordinated return could destabilise the situation, and damage the process of rebuilding (Refugee Council, 2000). Second, 'sustainability' for individuals can be considered from the (subjective) vantage point of the returnees, as well as in terms of objective measurement of their situation. Third, sustainability can be measured in relation to the physical location or desired location of migrants after return, but also in relation to socio-economic and political-security considerations (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1: Elements and potential measures of the sustainability of return**

	Physical	Socio-economic	Political-security
Subjective perception of returnee	(Lack of) desire to re-emigrate	Perceived socio-economic status	Perception of safety, security threats
Objective conditions of returnee	Proportion of returnees who (do not) re-emigrate	Actual socio-economic status of returnees	Actual persecution or violence against returnees
Aggregate conditions of home country	Trends in levels of emigration and asylum-seeking abroad	Trends in levels of poverty and well-being	Trends in levels of persecution, conflict and violence

The most simple extension to the common sense definition of a sustainable return as one that involves no subsequent remigration would be that return should be considered 'unsustainable' not only if the individual or group of returnees immediately re-emigrates, but also if they have a strong desire to do so, checked only by force (*subjective physical sustainability*). However, return might also be considered unsustainable for individuals if there are inadequate jobs or incomes or irretrievable loss of assets or livelihood (*socio-economic sustainability*), or wholly inadequate access to services or security (*political sustainability*) or indeed a perception that this is the case amongst returnees (*subjective socio-economic* or *political sustainability*). Thus, Simmons (2000: 1) argues that

*refugee return will be faster, more complete, and more lasting if those going back to their country of citizenship can be provided with safeguards for their personal security as well as access to housing, jobs, and resources for repairing their communities. Many other supports*

*and conditions may be necessary, if one defines success to include the eventual full participation of returnees in national social, economic, and political life, and their active engagement in quest of solutions to national problems.*

It is also important to bear in mind that to actually *measure* sustainability, a definition that is precise in terms of time period, and the geographical area to which 're-emigration' applies is needed. For example, is a return sustainable if returnees are forced to re-emigrate after a few years? Alternatively, is return sustainable if they are forced to move within their home country, and cannot remain in their original place of origin?

One key question here is against what benchmark returns should be considered sustainable? From an individual point of view, is a return only sustainable when an individual's likelihood of re-emigrating, or life chances, or security are equivalent to those he or she enjoyed in the country of asylum? Alternatively, are they sustainable when they are equivalent to those who remained behind in the home country, or to the conditions enjoyed by the migrant before he/she left? Should housing, jobs, and full participation in national life be expected for returnees when these are not available for all other members of society?

For an individual or household, one starting point for thinking about possible benchmarks is the concept of a 'sustainable livelihood', which has been the subject of considerable attention from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) in its work on poverty and well-being in developing countries. According to this framework, an individual or family livelihood is considered 'sustainable' if it can be maintained *without external inputs*, and if it is *sufficiently robust to withstand external shocks*. Key elements of a sustainable livelihood include factors such as income, which in turn is often (but not exclusively) related to employment and support from outside in the form of external assistance and remittances, as well as assets. However, developing such a measure would clearly be highly context specific and may be extremely difficult to calculate.

A similar problem arises in relation to aggregate measures of sustainability in the country to which individuals are returning. For example, an economy might be considered unsustainable if it cannot be maintained without continued external economic subsidy, whilst a political situation might be considered unsustainable if without external intervention it had a tendency towards violent conflict. Perhaps as a result, international development targets tend to have focused more on universal measures of well-being, such as the proportion of the population below the poverty line, or measures of infant or child mortality, and school attendance rates.

Table 4.1 suggests that there might be up to nine distinct definitions of a sustainable return, according to the type and dimension of sustainability that is prioritised. In turn, each of these definitions would generate its own potential measurements of sustainability, which would need to be geographically and temporally precise. The following section sets out some working definitions and measurements, before going on to highlight some findings from the pilot research in Bosnia and Kosovo in relation to each of these definitions.

## Measuring sustainability

In developing a process to measure sustainability, three options present themselves in relation to the three types of sustainability identified:

- measure the perceptions of individual returnees themselves;
- measure the objective conditions of individual returnees;
- measure the wider conditions in the country of return.

These perceptions and conditions can also be measured in three dimensions – socio-economic, political-security, and physical. Thus, definitions might be developed as follows:

### Physical sustainability

- *Subjective physical sustainability* for an individual returnee is achieved if they do not wish to leave their home country within a certain time after their return.

- *Objective physical sustainability* for an individual returnee is achieved if they do not actually leave their home country within a certain time after their return.
- *Aggregate physical sustainability* is achieved if levels of emigration from the home country do not increase as a result of the return process.

### Socio-economic sustainability

- *Subjective socio-economic sustainability* for an individual returnee is achieved if returnees believe they have an adequate level of well-being (in terms of income, assets, jobs, housing), measured at a certain time after their return.
- *Objective socio-economic sustainability* for an individual returnee is achieved if returnees reach an adequate level of well-being (in terms of income, assets, jobs, housing), within a certain time after their return, when measured against an appropriate benchmark, and without external inputs.
- *Aggregate socio-economic sustainability* is achieved if levels of well-being (in terms of income, assets, jobs, housing) do not decline as a result of the return process.

### Political sustainability

- *Subjective political sustainability* for an individual returnee is achieved when he/she believes that he/she has an adequate level of security and access to public services (e.g. health and education), measured a certain time after his/her return.
- *Objective political sustainability* for an individual returnee is achieved if he/she gains access to public services (e.g. health and education) and is not a victim of violence or persecution within a certain time after his/her return.
- *Aggregate political sustainability* is achieved if levels of access to public services (e.g. health and education) and of violence and persecution are not worsened as a result of the return process.

Of the physical measures, the most effective measure is likely to be *subjective physical sustainability*, which could be estimated through surveys of (assisted) returnees carried out over time. However, this leaves open the question of the time period over which desire to re-emigrate should be measured, and the ability of such a survey to measure genuine levels of intention or commitment to re-emigrate. In contrast, measuring actual levels of re-emigration would be logistically extremely challenging. Of the socio-economic measures' three definitions, again the subjective measure is probably the least problematic, as objective measures run into problems of what constitutes income, how to classify remittances, and whether the receipt of remittances or other external income (e.g. welfare payments) can be considered 'sustainable'. Meanwhile, overall, the aggregate measures are perhaps the most problematic, not least because of the near impossibility of linking any change in aggregate measures (e.g. an increase in emigration) to the fact of return.

Based on the individual definitions outlined above, it is possible to identify a series of indicators capable of inclusion in a survey instrument administered to a sample of returnees. Ideally, these should also be capable of comparison with the population as a whole, and over time for each individual returnee, since only in this way can there be a truly 'objective' measure, or indeed a measure capable of monitoring aggregate change. A summary list of the measures included in the survey instrument piloted in Bosnia and Kosovo is provided in Table 4.2. These indicators include some that describe respondents' perceptions of sustainability, and others providing a more objective indicator of their situation. For the objective data, indicators were selected with a view to comparable figures available from regular surveys such as the Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS – conducted in some countries) or Labour Force Surveys. As noted in Chapter 2, the survey instrument also included basic information on each returnee, such as age, gender, experiences abroad, etc.

**Table 4.2: Indicators of the sustainability of return**

Dimension of sustainability	Key indicators	Possible sources of comparison
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wish to re-emigrate</li><li>• Plan to re-emigrate</li><li>• Re-emigration of family members</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can be compared over time</li></ul>
Socio-economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employment (all household members)</li><li>• Income level</li><li>• Income sources</li><li>• Whether return was to pre-war home</li><li>• Receipt of humanitarian assistance</li><li>• Receipt of remittances</li><li>• Access to education</li><li>• Access to health care</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• LSMS and Labour Force Surveys measure employment, income, sometimes remittances</li><li>• Demographic and Health Survey measures access to health</li><li>• Education surveys measure access to education</li><li>• All indicators can be measured over time</li></ul>
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feeling of security</li><li>• How reality of return compares to expectation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Ad hoc</i> surveys often measure actual and perceived security</li><li>• Both indicators can be measured over time</li></ul>

Source: Field survey, 2002

The following section explores how respondents in Bosnia and Kosovo responded to questions about these different aspects of sustainability, whilst also drawing on in-depth interviews with key informants and available statistical material to gain some insight into sustainability at the aggregate level in the two countries. It is worth noting that the two countries have had a relatively high proportion of assisted returns within overall returns, which may influence some of the conclusions. Given the small sample size, more attention is paid to the qualitative answers given by respondents than to the numerical figures. Some of the factors that may lie behind trends in sustainability in the two countries are then considered in *What influences sustainability?*

## Measuring sustainability in Bosnia and Kosovo

### Physical sustainability

Physical sustainability was defined above as involving the level of, or desire for re-emigration amongst returnees and/or the home country population as a whole. In practice, despite the apparent simplicity of a definition that simply looks at re-migration rates, it is not always easy to assess objective physical sustainability, except in the context of respondents' stated desires or plans to re-emigrate (and the desires, plans, and actual re-emigration of their family members). For example, although it was more difficult to track individual returnees in Bosnia than in Kosovo (suggesting that more may have re-emigrated), an accurate measure of objective physical sustainability would require a robust monitoring process, ideally including follow-up over a period of months and years after return, rather than simply 'immediately' as is often the case when return projects are monitored. A basic application of this principle has been made by IOM (2003) with respect to return to the three republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, but such data were unavailable on a systematic basis for the Bosnia and Kosovo returns.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> One agency that has attempted this approach is the Swiss Development Cooperation, which in Bosnia provided return assistance both at the time of voluntary return, and in a second tranche six months later, in order to monitor follow-up. Some NGOs, such as Edinburgh Direct Aid, also try to follow up on returnees over time, although this is often relatively *ad hoc*, and is likely to focus mainly on those in special need of assistance, thus giving a relatively negative view of 'sustainability'.

However, if the *subjective physical sustainability* of return for individual returnee is considered, in both countries, strong views were expressed by a number of respondents about their desire to re-emigrate. Thus in Bosnia, half of all respondents interviewed said they would like to return abroad, mostly for economic reasons, whilst in Kosovo, 21 out of 34 respondents said they would like to leave Kosovo again if they could. One Kosovan man and his Bosnian wife now living in Bihać were asked if they had been abroad again since returning from Germany. They replied: "No. We have no chance to, but we would go anywhere." This sentiment was echoed by other interviewees in Bosnia, many of whom regarded their return as involuntary.

For example, one man now living in Sarajevo but originally from Brcko, where he was working temporarily as a security guard for an international organisation, reported:

*We haven't alternative. We must stay. We have wish to go somewhere else but in Europe. Just go out, maybe in Germany or another country (BM30+).*

A Serb returnee to Sarajevo, who felt he was forced to return, lamented the policies which keep him in Bosnia where he feels he is discriminated against and has no future:

*It's not possible. I would return tomorrow to Germany. That's why I am sorry because I couldn't go to Holland, or Sweden, or Denmark or some other country (BM40+).*

Even where return was clearly voluntary, people sometimes regretted their decision. A woman in Sanski Most in Bosnia spoke about her return from Scotland:

*We were accepted in the community. We had Scottish friends. Now we regret our return. We were in touch with two or three other Bosnian families. The situation is getting worse and worse. After three months we wanted to return [to Scotland] but we couldn't as our visa had expired (BF40+).*

Meanwhile, an elderly couple, who had returned from Sweden with a comprehensive assistance package which included follow-up assistance for two years said, when asked if they thought they had made the right decision:

[laughter] *No. The Swedish government advised people not to come back here, because the [economic] climate is very low. They gave us that advice and said just stay here if you want to stay. They said that 95 per cent of people who come back to Bosnia, they again return to Sweden and that is a problem for them (BM70+).*

However, others are willing to give more time to see if their plans work out. For example, a young man from Sarajevo who was living and working in Italy for the duration of the war, but who returned to Sarajevo to be with his family and to study, commented:

*For now I will stay in Sarajevo because I am studying here and trying to start a business. I am studying at Business School here in Sarajevo. Also I am trying to start my own private business. I applied to the Italian Embassy for a refund of my pension contributions but I was rejected (BM20+).*

In Kosovo, similar sentiments were expressed, even though the return process was more often voluntary. For example, a man who had been in Germany commented:

*I still live the hope that one day I can leave. Only for economic reasons, not for other reasons of course. When I think about the fact that my children are growing up and my wife has no job...I think it is better to go abroad and work there, rather than taking some bad way, some negative way in criminality for example. I know personally I cannot meet the wishes of all my children. I cannot the meet the wishes, of one, let alone three. That is where the problems are. Before I know I have problems with my own children (KM40+).*

However, along with that wish, most people see the limitations of their dream:

*For me it is a big dream to go. But I don't think it will ever be true...If I would hear of something, to go outside, I would go. But in Switzerland...? We have no chance. We heard on the TV, they said 'no, no more refugees in Switzerland (KF30+).*

And as another respondent, who had enjoyed temporary protection in Belgium, summarises it:

*I want to go to Belgium or America. Because I have two sisters there, it will be easy for me to stay there. I want to go now. But it is difficult to go. I have my Yugoslav passport, but without a visa...it is difficult! When you go there, you have to marry a girl or something like that. Without papers it is difficult (KM20+).*

As legal options to leave are limited, some of those interviewed had considered illegal options, although most mentioned the risk factors involved:

*[going illegally] is too dangerous. But apart from that, we lived in Germany for eight years. I don't want to throw away what I got from Germany. If it is possible to get a visa, then yes. If not, no. I don't want any problems with the police there (KF30+).*

Only three of those interviewed in Kosovo said clearly that they did not want to go abroad at all any more. One woman thought of herself as too old to do that, whereas another said:

*I want to stay here, of course! This [Kosovo] is the best country in the world! Well, for me it is the best...Maybe not for you [interviewer] but I am a Kosovan, so it is better here for me! I speak with all the people here in Albanian. That is not very difficult, because it is my language. I understand the mentality of the people. Over there [Belgium] it is different than over here [Kosovo] (KM20+).*

The remaining twelve respondents in Kosovo were not sure whether or not they wanted to re-emigrate. Some could not bear thinking about it, knowing chances are very limited to go abroad:

*I try not to think about Germany, because when I compare this and that life, it is incomparable. Thinking about Germany will only destroy me, so I'd rather not think about it. I am unemployed here, while everything was catered for there. Thinking about it will drive me crazy. I have three children to support, yet I have no means of supporting them. Another question please ... (KM40+).*

Others again are not sure about their desire to go to another country, as they realise their vision about it might be idealised:

*Sometimes it got in my head that if I could I would leave the country straight away! Back to Holland! But that was just a thought. I have to get used here and go on with my life. (...) I often think about going to Holland [again]. Then I also think: 'maybe it is not same as it used to be. Maybe it is different now. Maybe there will be things I don't like.' And what should I do then? Return again? I can't play with my life like that. Go for some time and return for some time and so on (KF10+).*

It is interesting to note that out of 21 interviewees in Kosovo who actively wanted to re-emigrate, and a further ten who were not sure, sixteen mentioned they would only want to go abroad temporarily if they did leave, and only six said they wished to leave for good. The suggestion is that respondents considered return not as unsustainable in principle, but rather as unsustainable at this particular point in time. Meanwhile, only three respondents had made either firm or tentative plans to re-emigrate, suggesting that the actual rate of re-emigration from Kosovo was likely to remain low, largely because it is not a feasible option for many people.

It was not possible in the context of this pilot study to analyse *aggregate physical sustainability*, since this would require accurate monitoring of emigration levels for the country as a whole, and these statistics were not available.

## Socio-economic sustainability

Socio-economic sustainability was defined above as involving levels of well-being, with a particular emphasis on employment, income, assets, and housing, as well as the extent to which individuals were reliant on others to satisfy their needs. In practice, the poor state of the economy of both countries means that there remain high levels of unemployment, poor job prospects and low incomes not just for returnees, but also for the population as a whole. Problems also existed for returnees in terms of gaining access to housing, or retaining their assets. However, the extent to which these problems reflected or caused a problem of sustainability of return is more debatable.

Looking first at *employment*, in a number of respects, unemployment, and employment in the shadow economy can be seen as symptomatic of the economic unsustainability of return to both Bosnia and Kosovo. For example, a number of respondents in both countries reported surviving on sums remitted by relatives who were still living abroad, or in some cases on sums earned by family members during temporary visits abroad to work. Clearly the return process has contributed to cutting off this source of income for many people in Kosovo. Few returnees had been offered employment as part of a return package, although some in Kosovo had benefited from job placements or assistance to establish a business provided by the state of Berlin in Germany or by Belgium, in both cases assisted by the IOM. A total of five households in Kosovo reported that they had no money coming in at all, thirteen were living on one wage, seven had two wages and five were living on pensions. In this sense, many of those interviewed reported a low level of *subjective socio-economic sustainability* on their return.

However, this lack of employment does need to be placed in the context of a general lack of employment amongst the Bosnian and Kosovan populations as a whole, such that the position of returnees is perhaps not *objectively unsustainable* in comparison. Similarly, although many Bosnian respondents in particular had experienced a decline in the employment status compared to pre-war, there is no evidence that this has involved a more marked decline than amongst those who did not leave during the war, again suggesting that return was not necessarily *objectively unsustainable* in relation to this benchmark. For example many of the respondents in Bosnia had worked in state-owned companies before the war, and these no longer exist. Many women who said they had been working prior to the war now classified themselves as 'housewives'. Only a couple of interviewees were working in the same job as before the war, including a bus driver in Hadzici (Sarajevo) and a man who had rebuilt his pre-war insurance and car wash businesses since returning from Germany.

A number of difficult situations were reported during interviews in both Bosnia and Kosovo. One Bosnian woman whose husband had worked making machine tools in a munitions factory in Goražde before the war reported how they had made provision for their return:

*All the time in Germany we had been working and saving for seven years and buying furniture, clothes, food because we knew we would need everything because here we would find nothing. My husband bought tools for welding and we were thinking if we didn't find any work here we would have this machine and my husband could earn enough for bread and milk. And even if he didn't work at all we could sell these things [laughs] (BF30+).*

In contrast, another woman from an isolated village in the Bihac region compared the pre-war employment of her and her husband with their current situation, which is that she does not work at all and her husband gets some part-time work with an NGO:

*I worked for fifteen years for a state-owned agricultural co-operative as a store manager. One year before the war started I opened my own shop. My husband's job meant that he travelled around a lot, to Slovenia, Croatia and Germany. He was at home on a two-month holiday when the war started and then couldn't leave for work afterwards. My husband's income when he was in Germany was around 5,000 DM. We also had five dulumbs of land, which we grew fruit trees on (BF40+).*

Another woman from the same village who went to Germany described the demise of the former state-owned wood industry in the region:

*My husband worked in Sipad Kljuc for two years but without salary when he returned. Now the factory is not working ... Our only income is from milk. We have enough for ourselves and a little, maybe five litres, to sell (BF30+).*

A man with a wife and three children in Bihac who worked as a mechanic for the local transport company before the war:

*I am working irregularly, if someone needs some help. People pay me in furniture as they have no money to give me. So we have furniture but no food. People thought we had brought lots of money with us so they gave us nothing. I can't pay for the registration on the car [needs car to work]. There is no chance for anyone here, no employment here (BM30+).*

A woman from Goražde who previously worked in a textile factory before going to Germany:

*I am 51 now, and I work at something I have never done before, just for the children. We have some livestock, and I never did that before, never as a child, never. Only for the children [laughs] (BF50+).*

A man with a young family from Sarajevo:

*No. I had never been outside Bosnia. I didn't have a passport as I was working for the military before the war, and travel outside the country was forbidden for military personnel. [Now] I work as a driver for a local bus company. My wife is teaching English as a volunteer, and is still studying English (BM30+).*

A man who is a trained professor of sociology, told of the different jobs he had done before, during and after the war:

*I was deputy director of a newspaper [says the name]. At that time it was maybe the best newspaper in Bosnia (BM50+).*

When asked what he did during his time as a refugee in Scotland, he said:

*In the beginning nothing, then everything. We had social benefit and sometimes I worked on the black, but never illegally. In the fish industry. There was a lot of industry fishing.*

Now he is employed in the Sarajevo authorities working with refugees. Similarly, another man was found living in a run-down area of Sarajevo, displaced from his pre-war home in Brcko, and remaining in Sarajevo because it is the only place he feels he has any opportunity for work, whatever it may be:

*[Before the war] I had my own business, export import. Sales manager ... [In Germany] I worked first in some hotel, in the kitchen, and then I worked in a building-site. ... [Now] In OSCE. As security guard (BM30+).*

Finally, a Serb man who has returned to a suburb north of Sarajevo reported that before the war:

*I was an officer, manager at the Volkswagen car factory [in Germany]. ... Many kinds of job. Cleaning, for some firm producing something, in a café, in a warehouse, many kinds of work. You have to work anything, everything. ... Since I've been back I haven't worked anywhere (BM30+).*

The situation was rather different in Kosovo with respect to differences between pre-war and post-war employment experiences, since many Albanians had not had access to jobs for a long time before the war because of ethnic discrimination. Thus, at the time of interview, 22 individuals reported that they were employed, compared to just eight that had employment before the war. This also reflects the fact that a number of those interviewed in Kosovo had been students before the war, with a common pattern being that they had not been able to continue their studies while abroad. For example, one returnee reported:

*I had finished the first year [of university] and was just about to start the second year and then they [the Serbs] shut the university in Albanian language (...). My mother was sacked and my father was working without pay because he had not signed an agreement to be a loyal citizen of Serbia (KM30+).*

Nonetheless, out of a total of nine such former students who had returned, six said they had found a job in Kosovo, although this was rarely related to their field of studies. For example, as a young male returnee from Belgium, who had set up as an auto mechanic as part of the reintegration fund said:

*My plan is to finish my studies [theatre school] and to quit this job in order to work with my profession (KM20+).*

Two former students were still studying at the time of the interview, and only one former student had not been able to find a job.

In terms of *income*, there was again a case to be made that return had been unsustainable for the respondents interviewed in both Bosnia and Kosovo, as few were found to be earning above the poverty line, although it was not easy to relate this to an appropriate benchmark. In order to measure income, individuals were asked to estimate whether they fell into one of three pre-defined categories – i.e. below an extreme

poverty line (less than 125€ per month for a family of four), below the poverty line (more than 125€ but less than 300€) and above the poverty line (more than 300€ per month).<sup>13</sup>

In Bosnia, most interviewees were found to be below the poverty line, with the situation being particularly problematic in villages where very few people have regular work. For example, one woman from the Bihać region described how she, her husband and their two children manage:

*We earned 26 KM<sup>14</sup> this month from selling milk ... We grow all our own food. Everything else, clothes and other stuff, comes from EDA [Edinburgh Direct Aid] when they bring convoys here. Our eldest child goes to school in [next village] and we have to pay for the bus. Gathering wood [for heating] is difficult (BM30+).*

This compares with just 20 per cent being classified as poor by the World Bank, and suggests that this sample of returnees at least have experienced worse conditions than the population as a whole<sup>15</sup>.

In Kosovo, there was more confusion amongst respondents in responding to the question on income, and more problems in comparing this with a standard indicator for non-returnees (since Kosovo is not a sovereign country, and so country-level data does not exist). In particular, those interviewed in Kosovo were not sure whether they should include income from remittances (this was generally excluded, see below) or how much income they generated from land or animals. There was also confusion between monthly income for a family, and yearly income for an individual (not least because family sizes varied considerably). Overall, ten respondents in Kosovo reported that their family income was over 300€, with nine saying they earned between 125€ and 300€, and a further 15 falling below the 'extreme poverty' line. Income seemed closely related to employment – nine of the ten people above the poverty line were employed, with the only other one receiving money from his wife in the Netherlands where she had stayed behind temporarily. Meanwhile, eight of the nine people earning between 125€ and 300€ also had a job, with the other respondent in this category being a student who received money from his parents. In contrast, of those earning below the 'extreme poverty' line, twelve were unemployed, whilst the remainder, although employed, were using a small income to support a large family.

In addition to income and employment, a variety of assets can form an essential part of a 'sustainable livelihood'. In this study, a simple measure of the assets that returnees owned or had access to was used, again comparing these with the situation experienced prior to the war and displacement, and with nationals who had not sought asylum outside the country. Here too, there was some indication of the lack of sustainability of the situation for returnees, although again the position of returnees was considered similar in many respects to that of those who had not fled during the war.

In Bosnia, although most (22 out of 30) of those interviewed were found to have returned to their pre-war house (although many had not originally returned to the house when they came back to Bosnia), these houses were often in a much worse state. Twelve interviewees in Bosnia reported that their houses had been destroyed during the war, and that they had either rebuilt them with a reintegration grant or, for the lucky ones, received some assistance from reconstruction NGOs. However, other assets left in Bosnia were generally lost. Nobody had retained savings from before the war. Any livestock or vehicles people left behind were not recovered. Meanwhile, many people had already spent their reintegration grant on bringing back any assets accumulated abroad, whilst it was common to spend the remainder on subsistence items within the first few weeks after their return.

In Kosovo, only 19 of those interviewed were found to have returned to their pre-war house or at least to a house on the land they had owned prior to the war, and once again, considerable destruction of property was reported. None of the respondents mentioned that they regained savings on their return, although nor did any mention that their savings were stolen. In cases where the house was not burned or severely destroyed,

---

<sup>13</sup> An alternative method of estimating which category they fell into was also offered, which distinguished *yearly* income *per person* of less than 375€ (very poor); between 375€ and 925€ (poor) and more than 925€. These levels were designed to provide a rough equivalence with poverty lines used by the World Bank-funded Living Standards Measurement Surveys, which are available in 28 poorer countries worldwide.

<sup>14</sup> KM = Konvertible Mark, the Bosnian currency. 1 KM is around 1.9€.

<sup>15</sup> <http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/CPPProfile.asp?SelectedCountry=BIH&CCODE=BIH&CNAME=Bosnia+and+Herzegovina&PTYPE=CP>

most returnees nonetheless mentioned that their furniture was missing. As one man who had returned from Finland commented:

*many things were missing. Electric appliances, furniture. When we left the house we had not even time to lock up and people must have come in and looted our possessions (KM40+).*

On savings, one woman from Goražde described what had happened to her family's investments:

*Before the war yes we did [laughs] but now no. We could save some money but it was in the bank and it [its value] fell so we couldn't use it (BF40+).*

In Kosovo, most people reported that they did not have savings anyway, as many did not have a job before they left, and trust in the banking system was in any case low. As a returnee from Belgium commented:

*Everything was damaged and destroyed. Usually people here did not have any savings, because the banking system was uncertain, so they would lose all their savings (KM30+).*

Some returnees were able to bring some savings back with them from abroad, although in many cases, these also appear to have been fairly minimal. In Kosovo, for example, ten interviewees said they brought goods with them from the host country, although this was often downplayed, as by the same returnee from Belgium:

*We brought some furniture, just for the sake of remembering Belgium. (...) with that little money that I earned during my [illegal] work, I had to pay for a truck with foreign registration plate and that is how I brought that here to Kosovo. (...) Someone I knew drove the truck here.*

Moreover, most of those who had returned to Kosovo with assets reported paying for the transportation by themselves, with only three receiving assistance.

In contrast, in Bosnia, amongst the sample group, there were a few more examples of individuals bringing back personal belongings, furniture, and in some cases cars and savings, whilst those who returned with NGOs at least reported receiving a luggage allowance which meant that they did not have to use their reintegration assistance to pay for such assets to be transferred. For example, some, especially those who had been in collective accommodation abroad and had been unable to work had not saved anything. This woman from Goražde had been in a collective centre for the whole time:

*That's all, for three years. Three years food was there and one year we had some bonds for food so we could go to the shop and buy food. It was just the minimum. We couldn't save any money because we didn't have any real money we just had these bonds (BF40+).*

Similarly, a family who recently returned to their home in the Republika Srpska after being in collective accommodation in Germany for four years and then displaced in Goražde for five years reported bringing back:

*Just our luggage. Our furniture came back before us on a truck, and we stored it in Sarajevo with a friend while we were in the transit centre. Also savings, between 2-3,000 DM (BF40+).*

In contrast, a family from Goražde who had prepared for their return, and managed to build a house with the money they had saved:

*OK. [laughs] Twenty thousand DM but that was seven years. We paid sixty thousand DM for rent over seven years in Germany because it was 600 DM a month so we couldn't save as much money as we spent. For one month the telephone bill was a minimum of 300 DM and that was the maximum we could save. And always we were helping my parents and sister sending money and packages and we never sent less than 1,000 DM (BF30+).*

Another man had worked in Germany in a hotel and saved money:

*Yes, I bring furniture, car.*

INT: *And did you have any savings, did you save any money while you were there?*

R: Yes.

INT: *How long did it last?*

R: [laughs] *It goes so fast. Maybe two years.*

INT: *And then it was gone?*

R: Yes. *Because I had no job, I must pay rent, and so (BM20+).*

The provision of a luggage allowance for returnees was important for a number of returnees, including this woman from a village near Bihać, who said that it made their return much easier:

[We brought back] *our furniture. The EDA truck had a seven cubic metre allowance for each family. ... Yes. Without EDA we would have returned, as my husband wanted to, but their help was massive. Other returnees had to use their allowance [from IOM] to get their furniture back (BF40+).*

A final area in which the sustainability of return might be measured concerns the extent to which returnees are economically independent, or whether they continue to be reliant on financial support from the government, an aid organisation, or relatives abroad. In one sense, a straightforward conclusion can be drawn that few of the returnees interviewed in Kosovo or Bosnia are individually dependent on humanitarian assistance, as only a few of those interviewed in Kosovo, and only a small group of elderly people in Bosnia received assistance from the government or an aid agency at the time of interview. In Kosovo, two families who stayed in Switzerland receive occasional help from a Swiss private aid organisation. A few respondents in Kosovo were also in receipt of a pension, but this amounted to just 28€ per month, whilst assistance to the long-term vulnerable in Bosnia, in the form of food aid and non-food items given to those residing in collective accommodation, was due to cease at the end of 2002. Three elderly returnees to Bosnia who came with relatively comprehensive assistance packages that included financial support and medicines did not know what they would do when this assistance ran out.

Meanwhile, only a handful of respondents reported any form of reliance on remittances from abroad, although one woman in Kosovo whose family had been in Germany did report that:

*My son [who still lives in Germany] sends us money regularly, because you need money regularly. He does not exceed with money, but only what we need (KF30+).*

However, the lack of reliance of returnees on remittances does not necessarily imply that return has been sustainable; indeed, lack of access to remittances could on the contrary be interpreted as a key problem for returnees, as well as those who did not seek asylum abroad. Overall, there are relatively few respects in which returnees are worse off than those who did not leave during the war, although one problem noted by the representative of UNDP in Pristina, was that those who have been abroad have often lost the local social networks that can help provide support to those in financial or other difficulty.

Once again, it was not easy to measure *aggregate socio-economic sustainability* of return in the two countries. One in-depth interview which suggested return was not sustainable in an aggregate sense was with the administrator in Skenderaj, who stated that more people returning to Kosovo would negatively affect overall sustainability with respect to employment and housing, and would lead to less remittances coming from abroad. However, tracking such an impact, and isolating it as an effect of return, would be far from straightforward.

## Political sustainability

Unlike the physical and socio-economic dimensions of sustainability discussed above, political sustainability is perhaps more difficult to define in terms of the outcomes for individual returnees, and in this sense, it is difficult to measure from a sample of returnees. One sense in which the political sustainability of return can be gauged at an individual level is in terms of the extent to which returnees themselves feel safe on their return. Indeed, this might be seen as a particularly important measure of sustainability, even though it is primarily *subjective*, given the importance that appears to be attached to security questions by potential returnees who are considering whether or not to return. A total of five returnees to Bosnia, and six returnees to Kosovo reported that they did not feel safe, and a further twelve – all except one of them in Kosovo – reported that they were uncertain of the security situation. The difference between the two countries in terms

of uncertainty on security may reflect the relatively recent return to Kosovo in comparison to Bosnia. It is also important to note that those who are most in fear of persecution may be least likely to make themselves available for a 'public' interview. Two-thirds of returnees to both countries reported that their general situation since their return was worse than they expected, with only two respondents saying that the situation was better than they had expected.

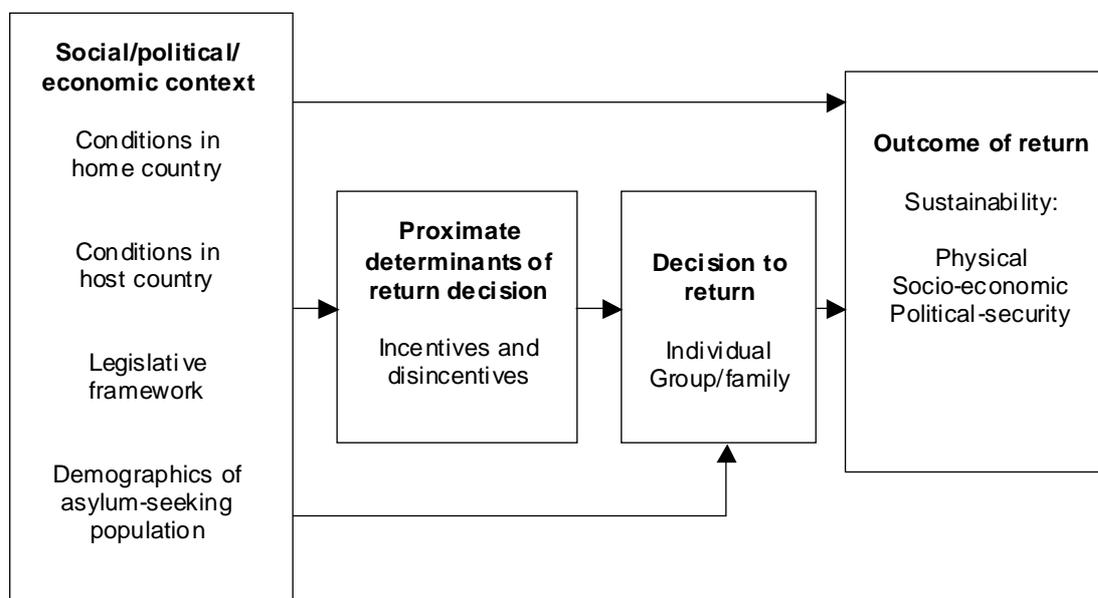
In addition, as with the other dimensions of sustainability, political sustainability can also be conceptualised at an aggregate level: the notion is that the 'unsustainable' return of refugees and asylum seekers might contribute to a worsening political situation for the community as a whole, in which violent conflict and insecurity is made more likely. For example, given the extent of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, for many returnees it was not possible for them to return to their pre-war home. The fact that these people became 'internally displaced' as a result when they returned could be seen as contributing to a worsening of the political atmosphere. Meanwhile, some returnees found their houses occupied by internally-displaced people, sometimes leading to considerable tension at a local level. In this sense, there is perhaps a clearer indication of a lack of *aggregate political sustainability*, especially in Bosnia, than for the other forms of aggregate sustainability. Nonetheless, this remained difficult to measure.

### What influences sustainability?

In addition to seeking to measure sustainability, it is also important to consider the factors that influence sustainability, particularly where these are open to policy influence. Here this question is addressed through cross-tabulation of selected indicators of sustainability with a series of independent variables, which reflect factors that are expected to influence sustainability. Although this does not show the *causes* of sustainability of – and would not do so even if the sample size were larger and statistically representative, such a cross-tabulation can point to factors which may be important, and on which further research and policy measures might be targeted.

A framework of how different factors might affect sustainability is presented in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1: Factors leading to the sustainability of return**



Based on these different factors, a series of relevant variables that can be drawn from the survey of returnees in Bosnia and Kosovo are listed in Table 4.3. However, not all of these variables showed sufficient

variation in the dataset to be able to draw any meaningful conclusions. For example, pre-war jobs were too varied, whilst hardly any of the sample reported discrimination whilst they were abroad, had previous migration history or had received remittances from migrant family members before the war. In turn, most of those interviewed whose families had been abroad with them had returned with their family, whilst of these, all who had children of school age had been able to send them to school.

**Table 4.3: Variables that may influence the sustainability of return**

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

Source: Field data (2002-03)

### Factors influencing physical sustainability

A number of factors appeared from the sample to be linked to the desire to re-emigrate, including age, gender, pre-war accommodation, pre-war employment, whether the language of the asylum country was learned, employment in asylum country, accommodation in asylum country, whether living in pre-war home, follow-up from return organisation, willingness to return and reasons to return. Some of these associations are unsurprising, for example, younger men were on average more likely to want to leave Bosnia or Kosovo again, whilst those who had not returned willingly, and whose main reason for return was the termination of their status abroad, were also more likely to want to leave again. In addition, those who had been employed in their asylum country and those who had been displaced from their pre-war home, were also more likely to want to re-emigrate.

However, some of these associations were less obvious. For example, if the question of whether returnees had learned the language of their country of asylum is examined, it was those with weaker language skills

who were found to be more likely to wish to re-emigrate, whilst follow-up from the return organisation was also linked with an increased desire to return abroad. Those who had lived in an apartment before the war, and those who had been housed in collective centres abroad were also more likely to wish to re-emigrate. This may reflect the fact that it was poorer, more vulnerable individuals and families who were more likely to have been housed in collective centres and then to have been displaced from their apartments on their return who maintained a desire to go abroad again. However, it may also be that the experience of living in collective centres and being displaced more than once was itself disempowering, and contributed to the lack of a 'sustainable' solution on return.

Those who had citizenship or full refugee status in their asylum country were also on average slightly less likely to want to re-emigrate than those who had temporary protection, although the difference here was not large enough to draw any firm conclusions.

### Factors affecting socio-economic sustainability

Factors which appeared to be linked with employment – specifically whether a returnee was employed or not – were gender, pre-war education, pre-war employment, whether asylum was sought alone, education in asylum country, employment in asylum country, accommodation in asylum country, whether living in pre-war home, receipt of return assistance, willingness to return and reasons for return. In contrast, only education, the receipt of return assistance, and the reason for return appeared to correlate clearly with income levels since return.

As with physical sustainability, once again, those who returned willingly, and because they wanted to be at home, were more likely to have found employment and were less poor since their return. It is also unsurprising to note that over half of those who had just primary schooling before seeking asylum were now extremely poor, compared to only just over a quarter of those who had gone on to a higher level of education (and none of those who had been to university either before or during exile). One issue here is causality, however. For example, those in receipt of return assistance were also less likely to be working, and more likely to be poor but this may simply reflect the fact that the poor and those unable to work sought return assistance, rather than the other way around.

Other associations are also not clear in terms of causation. For example, three-quarters of those who had taken language classes were working on their return, compared to just half of those who had not received any education whilst they were abroad. Meanwhile, two-thirds of those who had sought asylum alone, and two-thirds of those who had worked in the asylum country were now working on their return, compared with half of those who had sought asylum with their families, and half of those who were on social benefits.

### Factors affecting political sustainability

Those who were more likely to express fears over security included men, and those who had gained a more permanent form of status – whether indefinite leave to remain, refugee status or citizenship abroad. For example, nearly half of those who had achieved a right to remain abroad (and had therefore clearly chosen to return voluntarily) said they had some security fears, whereas only a quarter of those who had temporary protection or no status abroad expressed such fears. This may reflect the fact that those who had achieved a refugee or equivalent status abroad were those who objectively had most to fear on return. However, it is interesting that those who said they had not wanted to return were also more likely to express fears about their security.

More positively in terms of public policy, those in receipt of return and reconstruction assistance, and those who had received follow-up from the return agency, were also less likely to have fears about their security.

### Conclusion

This chapter has focused directly on measures of physical, socio-economic and political-security measures of sustainability in relation to return to Bosnia and Kosovo, but it is important also to draw out general themes from this pilot study on measures of sustainability that might have more general applicability. One problem

with the analysis so far is the fact that it involves a rather complicated definition of sustainability, which builds on multiple indicators that are not always available over time, and might be measured against a range of possible benchmarks. The researchers' response is to seek to simplify the definition. In this context, two definitions of sustainability are suggested, one focused on 'individual sustainability', and the other on 'aggregate sustainability'. In terms of individual sustainability, it could be argued that:

Return migration is sustainable *for individuals* if returnees' socio-economic status and fear of violence or persecution is no worse, relative to the population in the place of origin, one year after their return.

In contrast, aggregate sustainability implies:

Return migration is sustainable *for the home country or region* if socio-economic conditions and levels of violence and persecution are not significantly worsened by return, as measured one year after the return process is complete.

In both of these cases, re-emigration, or perhaps more importantly the desire to re-emigrate, may represent a useful proxy indicator for whether a return process has been sustainable. Beyond this, of the indicators that were included in the interviews conducted with returnees in Bosnia and Kosovo, the most useful, in the sense that there was significant variation in responses between those who were interviewed, were the desire to re-emigrate (as an indicator of physical sustainability), employment and income levels (as measures of socio-economic sustainability), and feeling of security (as an indicator of political sustainability). It has been argued that to accurately measure sustainability, these indicators ideally need to be measured using a representative sample of returnees, and compared either to a selected control sample, or to an existing survey or dataset providing similar information for the population of the country of return as a whole.

In contrast, in order to measure aggregate sustainability for the country or region to which people return, a different kind of process is needed. Here, in-depth interviews with key informants were used, which provided a useful insight into the broader effects of return, as well as some views on how to conceptualise sustainability, although in general these interviews did not provide a basis on which to measure sustainability in any precise way. A more sophisticated tracking system to monitor aggregate changes in incomes, employment, security and migration patterns could be envisaged, but would be unlikely to be robust enough to isolate the impact of return itself on these indicators. However, it is suggested that these difficulties should not be seen as a reason not to consider aggregate sustainability in monitoring return programmes, since this is arguably a particularly important issue in terms of policy coherence.

## 5. Conclusions

### Introduction

The overall objective of this research has been to provide information relevant to the development of policy on voluntary return. It has presented and analysed a significant amount of original, primary data, collected among seven different groups of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, as well as among returnees in Bosnia and Kosovo. Chapter 3 developed understanding of the factors influencing the decision to return voluntarily, and examined and assessed the role of incentives. Meanwhile, Chapter 4 developed understanding of the concept of sustainability by elaborating a working definition and establishing a process for measuring sustainability, whilst also assessing the factors that appear to contribute towards sustainability.

This final chapter specifies the policy implications that arise from the analysis and briefly charts a research agenda for the future. It is first worth reiterating three important reservations. The first concerns the research topic itself. The decision to return – and perhaps to a lesser extent the sustainability of return – often depends on highly individual characteristics and experiences, many of which basically defy accurate measurement or prediction. In part, therefore, the value of this research has been to identify areas where policy is unlikely to make a difference. In addition, however, it does also allow at least preliminary recommendations on the potential for positive policy interventions. A second reservation concerns the research process. While every effort has been made to ensure a degree of trust between interviewer and respondent, there can be no cast-iron guarantees of the validity of all the responses provided. In part this relates to a series of reasons well rehearsed in other Immigration Research and Statistics Service (IRSS) research, concerning for example the sensitive and vulnerable situation in which asylum seekers find themselves, and their occasional suspicions about research commissioned by the Home Office. In part, however, it relates to the nature of the research – often respondents in the UK in particular were answering largely hypothetical questions, and their eventual decisions may transpire to be quite different from their intentions. A final reservation concerns the wider applicability of these findings. All the samples were small, and none can be considered as necessarily representative of their wider national or ethnic population, let alone of asylum seekers or refugees and returnees more generally. The purpose of focusing on largely qualitative research methods was therefore to identify and explore relevant issues, rather than provide firm conclusions.

### Policy implications

The findings in this report have implications for policy in two main areas: influencing the decision to return, and monitoring and encouraging sustainability after return. These are considered in turn.

#### Influencing the decision to return

The research suggests that there is a rather fine line between facilitating voluntary return and encouraging it. The latter at times appears to run the risk of being perceived by potential returnees (as well as asylum advocates) as shading towards involuntary return. It follows that policy interventions in this area should, as far as possible, be designed to allow potential returnees to make their own decisions, rather than encouraging them towards one or other option.

In reinforcement of the above conclusion, the research indicates that the key factors influencing the decision to return may in any case be beyond the scope of direct policy intervention in countries of asylum. From the small sample used, they seem more often related to conditions in the country of origin, especially concerning security, employment and housing. These are areas that are not likely to be influenced by asylum policy. They also pertain to personal characteristics such as age and marital status.

Certain more specific observations flow from this general one. First, it appears from the results that excluding people from employment does not necessarily encourage them to return home. This study found no clear

correlation between employment in the country of asylum and inclination to return home. Second, granting permanent status does not necessarily preclude return for the recipients. This study did not yield a clear correlation between legal status in the country of asylum and inclination to return home. Finally, return assistance appeared, for this set of respondents at least, not to be a fundamental factor in the decision whether to return.

Once the decision to return has, however, been made, return assistance is often viewed as useful to facilitate return. In particular, assistance with employment and training and financial grants were seen by returnees and potential returnees as the most useful types of return assistance.

Finally, more could probably be done to disseminate information about return programmes to asylum seekers and refugees. Half the UK-based respondents in this study had not heard of return programmes. Although it is probably not appropriate for the government directly to disseminate information on return programmes, asylum seekers and refugees should be directed to sources of information. It appears that they are also more likely to trust information provided by refugee community organisations than that provided directly by government – although it is information provided by family and friends that seems to be most trusted of all.

### Measuring sustainable return

In Chapter 4, it was shown that it is possible to measure the extent to which return is considered 'sustainable' by individual returnees, although this is not an easy process. With some adjustment to reflect conditions in individual countries of return, the interview schedule piloted in this research in Bosnia and Kosovo, and reproduced in Appendix 4, was found to be useful in highlighting the perception and to some extent the reality of how far return was sustainable for individuals. In this sense, it could be used to measure the sustainability of return in other countries or situations. However, it should be noted that in order to gain a comprehensive view of sustainability, even for individuals, quite a lengthy and open-ended interview process was adopted, which is expensive to implement in terms of resources. Problems were also encountered in estimating incomes in a way that is compatible with data for the population as a whole in the country of return.

Furthermore, in order properly to measure sustainability for individual returnees, it is important to establish an adequate sample frame at an early stage of a return programme. In Bosnia and Kosovo it was not possible to obtain a representative sample of returnees from which to obtain a generalisable view of the sustainability of return for individuals. Nor was it possible to assess physical sustainability by comparing the number of people who had remained in their country or place of origin after return. However, this reflects the fact that no monitoring system had been put in place at the time of return that was applicable to all returnees.

The findings suggest that a system to measure the sustainability of return could be put in place as part of any future voluntary assisted return programme. This would overcome the problem of representativeness identified above, although such a system could only provide data on sustainability within the group of returnees covered by it. In other words, if the UK Government established a monitoring process for returns from the UK, this could only provide information on the sustainability of returns from the UK.

Ongoing monitoring of sustainability is possible, but would involve trade-offs in terms of cost. In practice, the in-depth interviews were lengthy, and took time. In turn, although some key indicators in terms of sustainability have been highlighted, there are problems involved in monitoring these indicators out of context. Indeed, as noted, ideally sustainability would be measured against a 'control' population of those who never left the home country. Decisions would also need to be made about whether such monitoring would be 'one-off' – as in this research – or whether regular repeat interviews would be possible (this would greatly assist in tracking sustainability over time).

The broader notion of sustainability of return at an aggregate level is more difficult to measure or monitor. In practice, this was examined through in-depth interviews with key informants in the country of origin of returnees, and this did provide some insight on the impact of return on the broader economy, society and policy of the countries of origin. A more sophisticated or quantitative monitoring system is probably not a feasible goal in most countries to which the UK is likely to encourage voluntary assisted return.

## Encouraging sustainable return

Many of the factors influencing the sustainability of return appear to be beyond the scope of direct policy intervention in the country of asylum. These include pre-flight circumstances and personal characteristics like age and gender. It is, nevertheless, possible to make some general observations with implications for policy development.

First, voluntary return appears from the limited sample more likely to be sustainable than involuntary return. In this study, those who had returned to Bosnia and Kosovo voluntarily were less inclined to leave again, and enjoyed, on average, higher income levels. Second, education, employment and training in the country of asylum would appear to encourage sustainable return. The desire to re-emigrate was found to be lower among those who were employed in the country of asylum, and income levels were higher among those who had received education or training. Finally, return and reintegration assistance may encourage sustainable return. For example, returnees in Bosnia and Kosovo who had received reintegration assistance reported feeling safer than those who had not, although the causal link – if any – in this case, remains unclear.

## Further research

As demonstrated in the literature review, there have been relatively few recent studies of the decision to return – especially among asylum seekers and refugees – and very little empirical research amongst returnees. In contrast, there are a growing number of voluntary return programmes being developed and/or expanded both within the UK (e.g. Refugee Action, the Refugee Council, Edinburgh Direct Aid) and across Europe (e.g. AGEF, IOM, UNHCR). These might be expected in the next few years to yield valuable new data and information sources, which will be worth monitoring and analysing.

In addition, analysis of the empirical findings has identified several key areas for future policy-related research. In trying to understand the decision to return, perhaps the aspect least satisfactorily explored here has been the role of the family and community. Various sources of literature cited suggest that the return decision is rarely made individually, and is often the outcome of a compromise between individuals, families and in some cases community members. One reason why this research was unable to uncover this in greater depth was that many of the 'potential returnees' interviewed in the UK were not actually planning to return. It seems sensible that collective negotiations would only take place in earnest once there is a serious proposal for return. Equally, respondents in Bosnia and Kosovo had arguably returned too long ago for research properly to examine the decision-making process – and in any case many had little choice but to return. In-depth research among a small group of respondents who have taken the decision to return, or among very recently returned migrants (ideally after six months to a year), might be the best way to pursue this research.

For similar reasons it has not been possible to ascertain in great depth the extent to which potential returnees in the UK actually know about conditions in their country of origin. A valuable project might interview a group of people shortly before returning, then again shortly after returning, in order to compare their expectations with the realities of return. It may be that gaps between expectations and the reality of return explain the desire of many to re-emigrate. The same comparison could also be achieved, perhaps more effectively, through an ethnographic study that actually followed the process of return.

Turning to the sustainability of return, two more specific research areas have been identified. The first concerns how to measure re-emigration rates. While this research distinguished those in Bosnia and Kosovo who have no desire to re-emigrate, from those who would like to and those who are actually planning to, it could not provide any indication of actual rates. Similarly, while this research has identified some of the reasons why people might wish to re-emigrate, it has not been able to do so conclusively or specifically. It was seen in Chapter 3, for example, that the reason some people did not want to go home was because they were in debt to agents who had apparently transported them to Britain. To what extent might the need to repay an outstanding debt encourage returnees to re-emigrate once more? Other important questions also remain unanswered – for example where re-emigration does take place, do people return to their original host country or go elsewhere? In addition, of the three measures of sustainability identified in Table 4.1, this research has focused largely on the perception of the returnee. Equally important, it has been argued, are the objective conditions of the returnee and aggregate conditions in the home country.

A final potential set of research questions emerge from Table 4.2, which categorises numerous factors that might influence sustainability. The research has allowed cross-tabulation of certain of these – often with surprising findings. However, it has not been possible to assess the significance of several other factors, each of which might be expected to have a bearing on sustainability, including for example the experience of discrimination in the country of asylum and the role of remittances in sustainable return. This would be possible in a more systematic evaluation of the sustainability of return for individuals, based on a statistically representative sample. Such evaluation would be welcome in any future assisted return schemes funded by the UK.

# Appendix 1: Focus group topics

## Introduction

Personal information:

- Handout sheet for participants to fill out
- Introduce ourselves. Let participants introduce themselves to each other and us (name and maybe age and how long in the UK)
- Explain the project (stress confidentiality and anonymity). Explain plans to deposit information in the ESRC data archive
- Stress that research is *not* designed to force people to go back
- Stress that interview and research will *not* have any influence on their asylum status

**NB: prompt for all general questions: do you think there are any differences within your community between different age groups, gender, age, education, employment.**

## General information

- Do you think that in general people from your community want to return to (country of origin)?
- Do *you personally* want to return to (country of origin)?  
[Follow up if 'no': Why is that? Thinking of your community, would you say that other people who don't want to return have similar reasons? Is there anything that might happen in the future that may change your opinion about return?  
[prompt: UK and (country of origin)]
- If you think of the people who are thinking of going back, when would they want to go back?  
[prompt: after finishing education, children certain age, retirement time scale]
- And when are *you personally* thinking of returning?
- Do you know people from your community who have returned?
- Have you considered moving to another country?  
[follow up if 'yes': Where? Have you ever lived there before? When?]

## Possible reasons for return

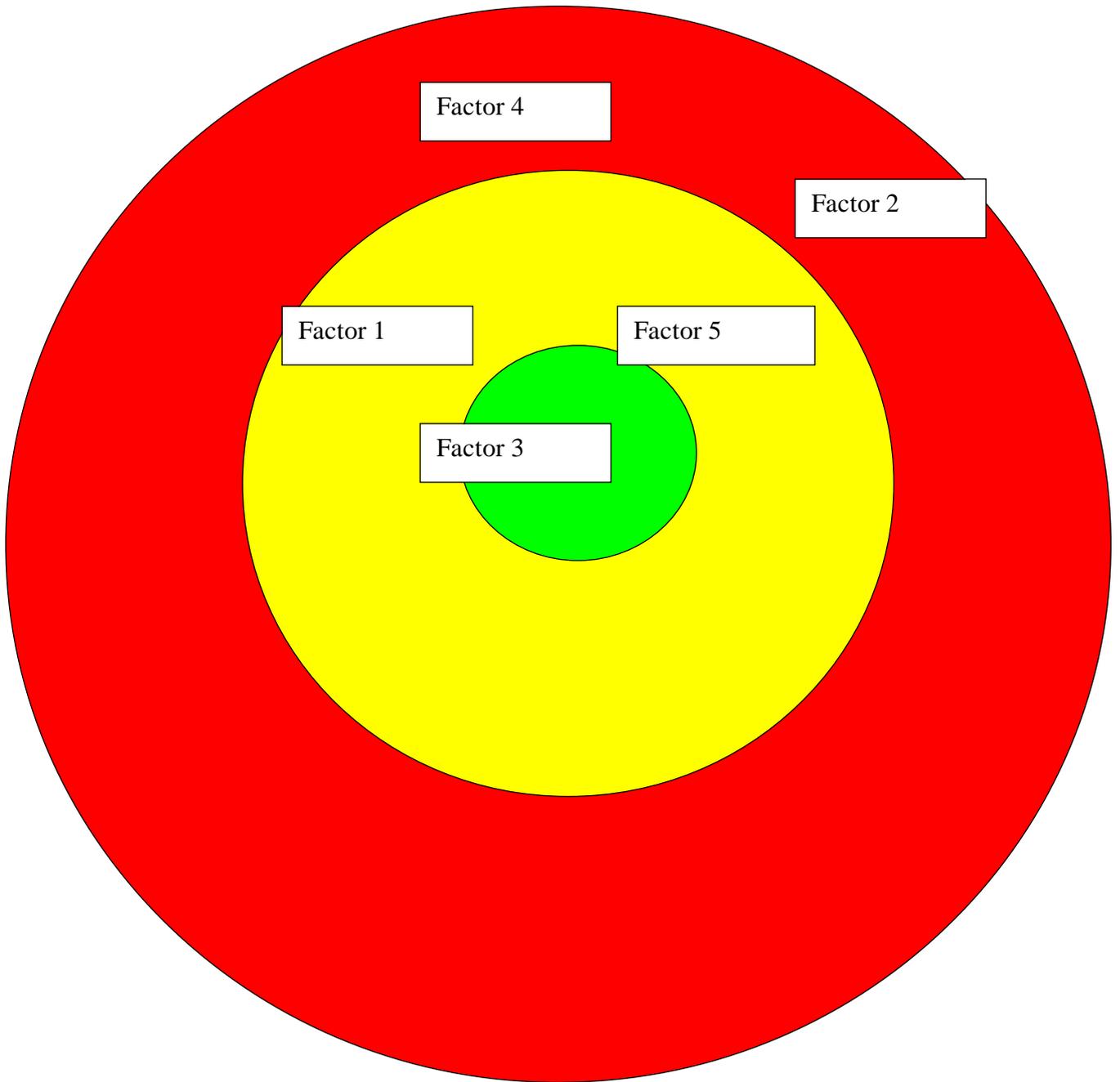
- What are the reasons people in your community have expressed for wanting to return?
- Are there any things that *you* want to do in the UK before you might think about returning? Or any events that might take place in the UK that might make you think about returning?  
[prompt: education, employment, savings, family commitment]  
[follow up: ... emigrating to another country]
- Are there any things that might happen in (the country of origin) which might make *you* consider returning?  
[prompt: peace, rebuilding, housing, employment, politics, health, family issues]
- Is there any help that *you* could be given that might make you think about returning to (country of origin)?  
[prompt: would explore and prepare visits, financial assistance, reintegration assistance, help with rebuilding house, assistance with finding employment be useful?]
- Use of PRA method:  
[prompt: Draw circles on a piece of paper and write down the answers given to the above questions. Let them place the factors on circles (inner circle: very important, intermediate circle: less important, outer circle: not so important. See Appendix 1)]

## Information about (possible) return

- What kind of information about return is available?



PRA circle method  
Factors indicate answers given



## Appendix 2: UK interview schedule

# Sussex Centre for Migration Research

### Understanding voluntary assisted return Schedule for UK in-depth interviews

- Confirm willingness to answer questions
- Confirm confidentiality of interview
- Stress that interview is not to persuade people to return
- Stress that interview and research will not have any influence on their asylum status
- Ask if willing to be taped
- Inform that tape will be anonymised, and tape or transcript can be offered to interviewee

Date (dd/mm/yy): \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview number: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Section 1: Personal information** (can be done last)

1.1 How old are you?

<input type="checkbox"/>									
<20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	>70			

1.2 Gender

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Male	Female

1.3 What is your home nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

1.4 What year did you arrive in the UK? \_\_\_\_\_

1.5 Did you live anywhere else before the UK, but after leaving your home country? If so, where? \_\_\_\_\_

1.6 Do you have members of your family with you in UK? If so, are they living with you? [use box below to record answers]

	Number living with you	Number elsewhere in UK
Spouse		
Dependent children		
Grown-up children		
Parents		
Other dependent relatives		
Other relatives		

1.7 Do you have members of your close family who remained in, or returned to, your country of origin?

	Remained at home	Returned home already
Spouse		
Dependent children		
Grown-up children		
Parents		
Other dependent relatives		
Other relatives		

1.8 What is your current legal status in the UK? Is this status in your own right, or dependent on someone else? [tick one box only]

	Principal applicant	Dependent
1. Asylum application failed		
2. Still awaiting an initial decision or appeal outcome		
3. Have or had some form of time-limited leave to remain		
4. Indefinite leave to remain or refugee status		
5. UK citizen		

1.8.1 If you answered 3 or 4, do you have the right to bring your family to the UK?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

1.9 What is your highest completed education

	Tick one box
1. None	
2. Primary school	
3. Secondary school	
4. Vocational education	
5. University	

1.10 What type of employment did you have in the country of origin? [Use cards 1-3]

\_\_\_\_\_

1.11 What type of employment do you have in the UK? [Use cards 1-3]

\_\_\_\_\_

<b>Card 1</b>	<b>Employment</b>
	1. Employed and working (see card 2) 2. Family farm 3. Family business 4. Informal work 5. Occasional work 6. Not working (see card 3)
	<i>Choose only one</i>

<b>Card 2</b>	<b>Job categories if employed and working</b>
	1. Legislators/managers 2. Professionals 3. Technicians and associate professionals 4. Clerks 5. Service workers and shop 6. Skilled agricultural and fisheries 7. Crafts and related trades 8. Plant and machine operators 9. Elementary occupations 10. Armed forces
	<i>Choose only one</i>

<b>Card 3</b>	<b>Categories if not working</b>
	1. Student 2. Housewife 3. Retired 4. Other (specify)
	<i>Choose only one</i>

## Section 2: Basic facts about return

2.1 Have you thought about return?

	Tick one box
1. Never thought about it	
2. Thought about it	
3. Actively looked into options	
4. Registered with a return programme	
5. Returned on exploratory visit	
6. Planning to return without assistance	

2.2 What have you decided about return?

	Tick one box
1. About to return (indicate when)	
2. Decided not to return	
3. Still undecided	

2.3 Where do you think you will (or would) go back to? (region/town) \_\_\_\_\_

2.4 Have you lived there before?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	----	--------------------------

2.4.1 If no, where did you live? \_\_\_\_\_

2.5 Have you visited there since you left?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	----	--------------------------

2.5.1 If yes, please describe the circumstances \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 3: Discussion about problems and prospects for return

3.1 What were (or are) the key underlying factors or the 'bottom line' before you even considered (or would even consider) a return scheme?

Stress 'before you would even consider'

Ask question *without* prompts from cards first

As prompt, 15 cards will be given to the respondent, each of which sets out an area that they might talk about. The respondent will be asked to pick out the card that represents the area they think most important, and will then be asked to explain.

Jobs	Money	Education	Housing	Health
Status	Discrimination	Freedom	Age	Assistance programme
Shops and facilities	Security	Welfare benefits	Democracy	

Some cards will be left blank, in case the respondent feels there are other factors not covered.

Prompts: Practicalities versus ideals, 'how would you go about getting x', 'do you think it could be difficult?'

3.2 If you were against going at first, is there anything in particular that made you (*would make you*) change your mind and decide to go?

You might like to reconsider the above cards.

3.3 What are the practical obstacles or considerations that you are currently dealing with, or that might make the difference between you returning or not returning?

You might like to focus on some or all of the following ideas

- Having a job at home
- Finish training here
- Getting documents from the embassy
- Arranging to get your own house back
- Finding some sort of accommodation
- Terms of government assistance
- Support from refugee group
- Withdrawal of legal status in host
- Information about possibility to *do something* on return
- Family commitment/support

3.4 Have you discussed the idea of returning with your family? If so, what are the main issues you have discussed? If not, why not?

3.5 Have you discussed the idea of returning with your friends or other members of the community? If so, what are the main issues you have discussed? If not, why not?

### 3.6 What things will you need to sort out *when you get back*?

You may include any of the factors listed above, or:

- Transferability of pensions
- Transferability of other benefits
- Ability to come back to the UK or other European countries
- Rejection by home community
- Security or safety

## Section 4: Role of governments

This section focuses on the role that is played, or might be played, by governments and voluntary agencies like the Refugee Council or Refugee Action.

4.1 Have you ever heard of any assistance for return offered by the government or a voluntary agency? If so, name the programmes, and where you found out about them. (If no, skip to 4.3.)

4.2 What do these programmes offer?

	Tick any mentioned
1. General financial assistance	
2. Help with return ticket	
3. Help with rebuilding your house	
4. Help with finding a job at home	
5. Help with training	
6. Opportunity to go and visit your home town	
7. Other (specify)	

4.2.1 Which of these programmes do you think would be the most useful kind of assistance? Why? Presumably, if respondents are not aware of any programmes or types of assistance that is available (either here now, here in the past, or elsewhere) then a short résumé or overview will be given to enable them to answer this? (In which case a pre-determined explanation agreed across the team will be necessary.)

4.2.2 Would any of these programmes make a difference/help you in making a decision to return? How?

4.3 What (else) would make a difference in helping you to return?  
Prompt for each as though it was a separate question. Probe why / why not

	Tick any mentioned
1. More money	
2. More help with return	
3. A new house	
4. A firm job offer	
5. More training	
6. Opportunity to go and visit before returning	
7. Other (specify)	

4.4 Is returning discussed within your family? Is yes, why? If no, why not?

4.5 Is return discussed amongst your friends or within your community? Is yes, why? If no, why not?

- 4.5.1. Do you feel that return is encouraged (or approved of) by your community?  
If yes, why and how?
- 4.5.2. If not, in what ways is that lack of encouragement expressed?
- 4.6 Do you feel you have enough information about return programmes?
- 4.7 Do you feel you have enough information about return conditions at home?
- 4.8 What is the most important type of information for you in making a decision to return?
- 4.9 Where do you go to get that information?
- 5.0 If the government could do only one thing to help people who wanted to return, what would it be?

**Thank you for your help in offering this interview.  
Repeat offer of tape transcript**

## Appendix 3: Key stakeholder interviews in the UK

Albanian-Kosovan Community Centre UK, London

Asphaleia, Worthing

Central London Law Centre

Country and Information and Police Unit, Immigration and Nationality Directorate,  
Home Office

European Council for Refugees and Exiles, London

International Organization for Migration, London

Refugee Action, London

Refugee Council, London

South London Tamil Welfare Group

UK Fujian Community Centre, London

UNHCR, London

## Appendix 4: Interview schedule in Bosnia and Kosovo

### **Sussex Centre for Migration Research**

#### Understanding voluntary assisted return

##### Interview schedule for returned migrants

- Confirm willingness to answer questions
- Confirm confidentiality of interview
- Ask if willing to be taped
- Inform that tape will be anonymised and made available to researchers on request, and tape of transcription can be offered to interviewee.

Date (dd/mm/yy): \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Interview number: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:       **1. Male**     **2. Female**

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

How old are you?

<20		20-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		60-69		>70	
-----	--	-------	--	-------	--	-------	--	-------	--	-------	--	-----	--

#### **Section 1: Pre-war**

1.1 Where were you living before the war?

1.1.1 Geographical location: \_\_\_\_\_

1.1.2 Accommodation: **1. House**   **2. Apartment**   **3. Other**

1.2 Please list all your close family members at that time

Family member	Year of birth	Living in property <b>1. Yes</b> <b>2. No</b>	Employment Card 1	Employment Card 2/3	Living elsewhere <b>1. Yes</b> <b>2. No</b>	Still there? <b>1. Yes</b> <b>2. No</b>
Interviewee						
Spouse						
Child 1						
Child 2						
Child 3						
Other 1						
Other 2						
Other 3						

<b>Card 1</b>	<b>Employment</b>
1. Employed and working (see card 2) 2. Family farm 3. Family business 4. Informal work 5. Occasional work 6. Not working (see card 3)	
<i>Choose only one</i>	

<b>Card 2</b>	<b>Job categories if employed and working</b>
1. Legislators/managers 2. Professionals 3. Technicians and associate professionals 4. Clerks 5. Service workers and shop 6. Skilled agricultural and fisheries 7. Crafts and related trades 8. Plant and machine operators 9. Elementary occupations 10. Armed forces	
<i>Choose only one</i>	

<b>Card 3</b>	<b>Categories if not working</b>
1. Student 2. Housewife 3. Retired 4. Other (specify)	
<i>Choose only one</i>	

1.3 What sources of income and belongings did you and your family have before you left?

	Tick all that apply	
1. Employment (see 1.2)		
2. Land		Size of land (acres):
3. Other property		
4. Car/vehicle		
5. Machinery		
6. Livestock		
7. Social benefits		
8. Pension		
9. Remittances		
10. Savings		
11. Other – specify		

1.4 What was the highest level of education you achieved before you left?

Education level	Tick one box only
1. University or higher	
2. Higher school (technical)	
3. Vocational school completed	
4. Secondary school completed	
5. Vocational school started	
6. Primary school completed	
7. Primary school started	
8. No education	

**Section 2: Asylum**

1.1 Where did you apply for asylum? (name country) \_\_\_\_\_

2.2 Who went with you?

	Went	Still there	Went to another country	Still there
Spouse				
Dependent children (<18)				
Grown-up children (18+)				
Parents				
Other dependent relatives				
Other relatives				

2.3 Did you go directly there? **1. Yes** **2. No**

2.3.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

2.4 Did you have any previous migratory experience to that country or other? **1. Yes** **2. No**

2.4.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

2.5 Whilst you were there:

	Tick all that apply	
Did you learn the language?		Use Card 4
Did you receive any other education?		Use Card 5
Did children attend school?		Use code from q1.4
Did anyone in your family work?		<b>1. Regular legal work</b> <b>2. Irregular work</b>
Did you have any other income/belongings?		Use codes from q1.3
Did you, or anyone in your family experience any form of discrimination?		

<p><b>Card 4 Language fluency</b></p> <p>1. Fluent 2. Quite well 3. Not very well 4. Not at all</p> <p><i>Choose only one</i></p>
---

<p><b>Card 5 Education abroad</b></p> <p>1. University 2. Further education 3. Language course 4. Occasional course</p>
---

2.6 In what type of accommodation did you live while you were there?  
**1. Reception centre** **2. Private accommodation** **3. Other**

2.6.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

2.7 Looking back, how did you feel during your stay abroad? \_\_\_\_\_

2.8 What was your last status in host country?

	Before leaving	Still retained?
1. Asylum application failed		N/A
2. Still awaiting an initial decision or appeal outcome		
3. Have or had some form of time-limited leave to remain		
4. Indefinite leave to remain or refugee status		

**Section 3: Return**

3.1 When did you return (dd/mm/yy)? \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_?

---

3.2 Did you want to return? [prompt if necessary]

	Tick one box only
Wanted to return when I did	1
Wanted to return earlier	2
Wanted to return later	3
Wasn't sure if I wanted to return	4
Didn't want to return at all	5

3.2.1 Please explain/specify:

---

3.3 Why did you return when you did?

3.3.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

3.4 When you returned did you feel you had enough information to make an informed choice?  
**1. Yes      2. No**

3.4.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

3.4.2 How/where did you get information about return? \_\_\_\_\_

3.5 When you returned how did you find the situation compared to your expectations?  
**1. Better      2. Same      3. Worse**

3.5.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

3.6 Did other members of your family return at the same time? **1. Yes      2. No**

3.6.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

3.7 Did any of your friends/neighbours return at the same time? **1. Yes      2. No**

3.7.1. Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

3.8 Is this your pre-war home? **1. Yes      2. No**

3.8.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

3.9 What kind of belongings did you and your family bring back with you?

	Tick all that apply
1. Savings	
2. Car/vehicle	
3. Furniture	
4. Social benefit	
5. Pension	
6. Other – specify	

3.10 What belongings did you and your family regain on your return?

	Recovered (1)	Destroyed (2)	Lost/stolen (3)
1. Land			
2. Other property			
3. Livestock			
4. Savings			
5. Other – specify			

3.11 Were you aware of any help or assistance from the government or another organisation to return? **1. Yes** **2. No**

3.11.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

3.11.2 If aware, how/where did you find out about it? \_\_\_\_\_

3.12 Were you assisted to return? (*Tick assistance and specify programme and time*)

Type of assistance	Specify the programme/organisation	During return	After return
Not assisted at all			
Go-and-see visit			
Return paid travel			
Travel organised and provided			
Return with reintegration grant (how much?)			
Return to rebuilt house			
Return to job			
Other			

3.13 If you were not assisted, why not? \_\_\_\_\_

3.14 If you were assisted, how long after return did the agency assisting you keep in contact?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Section 4: Post-return**

4.1 If received assistance, did the assistance you received to return make returning easier?  
**1. Yes 2. No**

4.1.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4.2 Since you came back, has anyone in your family left again for another country?  
**1. Yes 2. No**

4.2.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4.3 Are the other people (friends/neighbours) who returned at the same time as you still here?  
**1. All still here 2. Some are still here 3. All left**

4.3.1 Please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4.4 Are you planning to leave the country again? **1. Yes 2. No 3. I don't know**

4.4.1 Why yes/no and please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4.4.2 (If q4.4=yes) Where will you go? \_\_\_\_\_

4.4.3 (if q4.4=yes) For how long will you go? \_\_\_\_\_

4.5 Are any of your family members planning to leave again? **1. Yes 2. No 3. I don't know**

4.5.1 (if q4.5=1 or 2) Why yes/no and please explain/specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4.5.2 (if q4.5=1) Where will they/he/she go? \_\_\_\_\_

4.5.3 (if q4.5=1) For how long will they/he/she go? \_\_\_\_\_

4.6 Current employment status of those in household (use Cards 1-2, report for all household members. If not employed, see question 4.6.1)

Family member	Employment Card 1	Employment (Card 2)
1. Interviewee		
2. Spouse		
3. Child 1		
4. Child 2		
5. Child 3		
6. Other 1		
7. Other 2		
8. Other 3		

4.6.1 For those not working, why are you not working?

	Tick all that apply
1. Student	
2. Housewife	
3. Retired	
4. Waiting for reply from employer	
5. Waiting for recall from employer	
6. Waiting for busy season	
7. Other HH member does not want you to work	
8. No source of employment	
9. No job for your ethnic group	
10. Other – please specify	

4.7 How important were the following experiences gained in country of asylum in relation to the job you have now?

	Very important (1)	Important (2)	Not important (3)	Not gained (4)
Formal education				
Language(s)				
Training courses of government or organisation				
On job training from company				
General work experience				
General life experience				

4.8 What sources of income and belongings do you and your family have now?

	Tick all that apply
1. Employment (see 4.6)	
2. Land	
3. Other property	
4. Livestock	
5. Social benefits	
6. Pension	
7. Remittances	
8. Savings	
9. Other – specify	

4.9 How much do you earn? (use Card 7a and 7b, either income per person per year or income per family (of 4 members) per month)

Card 6a	Income
Income per person per year	
1. Less than 375 Euro	
2. More than 375 DM but under 925 Euro	
3. More than 925 Euro	
Choose only one	

Card 6b	Income
Income per family (4 members) per month	
6. Less than 125 Euro	
7. More than 125 Euro but under 300 Euro	
8. More than 300 Euro	
Choose only one	

4.10 Have you received any loans under a micro credit scheme? **1. Yes** **2. No**

4.10.1 (if 4.10=1) If so, when did you start with that (year)? /\_\_\_\_\_/

4.10.2 (if 4.10=1) Have you paid back the loans yet? 1. Yes 2. No

4.11 Do you receive any assistance now? 1. Yes 2. No

4.11.1 If yes, please specify:

	Tick all that apply
Food aid	
Clothes	
Winter fuel	
Advice/ information	
Practical help (goods)	
Micro credit loans	
Other – specify	

4.12 Do your children go to school? 1. Yes 2. No

4.12.1 (if q4.13=yes) If yes, how is that going? \_\_\_\_\_

4.12.2 (if q4.13=no) If no, why not? \_\_\_\_\_

4.13 Have you used the healthcare system since your return? 1. Yes 2. No

4.13.1 (if q4.14=yes) If yes, how is that going? \_\_\_\_\_

4.13.2 (if q4.14=no) If no, why not? \_\_\_\_\_

4.14 How do you feel about your security since your return?

4.14.1 Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

## Appendix 5: Stakeholder interviews in Bosnia and Kosovo

### Interviews carried out in Bosnia\*

AWO Heimatgarten, Sanski Most  
Department for Economic Relations (Humanitarian Projects), German Embassy, Sarajevo  
Edinburgh Direct Aid (EDA), Bihac  
Elderly Return Programme (ERP), IOM, Sarajevo  
Former Business Advisor, RQN Programme, IOM, Sarajevo  
Former Programme Assistant, GARP, IOM, Sarajevo  
IOM, Sarajevo  
Mayor's Office, Bihac  
Ministry for Health, Una Sana Canton  
Ministry for Refugees and DPs, Una Sana Canton  
Ministry for Refugees, Repatriation and DPs, Sarajevo Canton  
Ministry for Social Affairs, Goražde Canton  
Municipal Assembly, Bihac  
Municipal Office for Return (MRO), Bihac  
Office for Return and Reconstruction, Bihac  
Office for Work, Social Affairs, Health, Refugees and DPs, Centar Municipality, Sarajevo  
Office of the Coordinator for Refugees and DPs, Goražde  
Programme for Return of Judges and Prosecutors, IOM, Sarajevo  
Technical Support Office, Austrian Embassy, Sarajevo  
UNHCR Goražde  
UNHCR Sarajevo  
World Bank, Sarajevo

---

\* All interviews in Sarajevo, unless otherwise indicated

Interviews carried out in Kosovo\*\*

Association of Experts in the Fields of Migration and Development Cooperation (AGEF),

Pristina

Danish Refugee Council, Pristina

Edinburgh Direct Aid, Skenderaj

International Rescue Committee, Pristina

IOM, Pejë Sub Office

IOM, Pristina

Kosovo Freundschafts Verein, Pristina

Kosovo Statistical Office, UNMIK, Pristina

Norwegian Refugee Council, Pristina

Office of Returns and Communities, UNMIK, Pristina

Project SME, Swiss Contact, Pristina

Psychosocial and Trauma Response Programme (PTR), IOM, Pristina

Swiss Cooperation, Pristina

UNDP, Pristina

UNHCR, Pristina

UNMIK, Skenderaj

---

\*\* All interviews carried out in Pristina unless otherwise indicated.

## Appendix 6: Key data on respondents

### 1. Interviews carried out in the UK

**Table A6-1.1: Country of origin of respondents in the UK**

	Focus group participants	Individual interviewees	Total
Afghanistan	4	-	4
China	*	9	9
Iran	14	-	14
Kosovo	8	10	18
Somalia	10	14	24
Sri Lanka (Tamils)	8	10	18
Turkey (Kurds)	8	4	12
Total interviewees	52	47	99

**Table A6-1.2: Demographic profile of respondents in the UK**

Characteristics	Afghans	Chinese	Iranians	Kosovans	Somalis	Tamils	Turkish Kurds	Total
<u>Sex</u>								
Male	1	4	3	12	15	15	6	56
Female	3	5	3	6	17	3	6	43
<u>Age</u>								
Under 20	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	3
20-29	3	4	2	11	11	3	4	38
30-39	1	3	1	4	6	6	8	29
40-49	-	2	2	2	8	2	-	16
50-59	-	-	1	1	1	4	-	7
60-69	-	-	-	-	3	2	-	5
Over 70	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
<u>Asylum status</u>								
Awaiting	-	3	-	4	1	6	-	14
Rejected	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	4
ELR	-	1	3	2	5	1	5	17
ILR	2	2	1	9	12	7	5	38
UK citizen	2	1	1	2	14	2	2	24
Unknown	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	2
<u>Year of arrival</u>								
Before 1995	3	1	1	3	19	5	10	42
1995-1996	-	1	3	3	1	1	1	10
1997-1998	1	2	1	6	2	2	-	14
1999-2000	-	3	-	4	6	5	1	19
2001-2002	-	1	1	-	4	4	-	10
After 2002	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	2
Unknown	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
Total interviewees	4	9	6	18	32	18	12	99

**Table A6-1.3: Household composition and family ties of respondents in the UK**

Characteristics	Afghans	Chinese	Iranians	Kosovans	Somalis	Tamils	Turkish Kurds	Total
<u>Marital status</u>								
Single*	3	5	2	10	21	8	7	56
Married	1	4	3	5	11	10	5	39
Unknown	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	4
<u>Children</u>								
Yes	2	5	2	4	16	8	5	42
No	2	4	2	12	14	10	7	51
Unknown	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	6
<u>Family members in the UK</u>								
Yes	4	2	4	8	27	11	8	64
No	-	7	1	7	5	6	4	30
Unknown	-	-	1	3	-	1	-	5
<u>Family members in country of origin</u>								
Yes	-	9	-	8	24	9	12	62
No	4	-	6	8	8	8	-	34
Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total interviewees	4	9	6	18	32	18	12	99

**Table A6-1.4: Education and occupational status of respondents in the UK**

	Afghans	Chinese	Iranians	Kosovans	Somalis	Tamils	Turkish Kurds	Total
<u>Highest completed level of education</u>								
None	-	1	-	-	6	-	-	7
Primary	-	1	-	1	1	2	-	5
Secondary	1	4	2	7	10	11	5	40
Vocational	1	1	-	6	5	1	-	14
University	2	2	4	4	10	4	7	33
<u>Employment status</u>								
Professional /technical	2	-	2	6	4	1	5	20
Clerical/service	1	6	2	5	5	5	2	26
Craft/machinery operators	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	3
Unemployed	1	3	1	4	15	7	-	31
Student	-	-	1	1	2	1	5	10
Pension	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Unknown	-	-	-	1	6	1	-	8
Total interviewees	4	9	6	18	32	18	12	99

## 2. Interviews carried out in Bosnia and Kosovo

**Table A6-2.1: Country of asylum of respondents in Bosnia and Kosovo**

	Bosnia	Kosovo	Total
Germany	20	16	36
United Kingdom	3	3	6
The Netherlands	1	4	5
Italy	2	1	3
Switzerland	-	3	3
Belgium	-	3	3
Austria	2	-	2
Norway	-	2	2
Sweden	1	-	1
Denmark	1	-	1
Finland	-	1	1
Canada	-	1	1
Total interviewees	30	34	64

**Table A6-2.2: Demographic profile of respondents in Bosnia and Kosovo**

	Bosnia	Kosovo	Total
<u>Sex</u>			
Male	14	20	34
Female	16	14	30
<u>Age</u>			
Under 20	-	2	2
20-29	4	12	16
30-39	7	11	18
40-49	12	6	18
50-59	3	1	4
Over 60	4	2	6
<u>Number of years spent abroad</u>			
Under 1 year	-	5	5
1-2 years	3	15	18
3-4 years	7	4	11
5-6 years	17	4	21
7-8 years	2	2	4
Over 8 years	-	4	4
Unknown	1	-	1
<u>Immigration status in host country</u>			
Citizen	2	-	2
Refugee	5	1	6
Permanent residence	3	3	6
Temporary residence	19	26	45
Failed asylum seeker	-	4	4
Tourist	1	-	1
Total interviewees	30	34	64

**Table A6-2.3: Education and occupational status of respondents in Bosnia and Kosovo**

	Bosnia	Kosovo	Total
<u>Highest completed level of education before departure</u>	-	2	2
None	8	9	17
Primary	15	19	34
Secondary	2	4	6
High School	4	-	4
University	1	-	1
Unknown			
<u>Occupational status before departure</u>	20	8	28
Employed	3	1	4
Family business	1	1	2
Informal work	-	2	2
Occasional work	6	22	28
Unemployed			
Total interviewees	30	34	64

## References

- Al-Ali, N., Black, R., and Koser, K.** (2001) Refugees and transnationalism: the experience of Bosnians and Eritreans in Europe *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(4), 615-34.
- Andel, J. van** (1999) De mogelijkheden en beperkingen van de gefaciliteerde terugkeer, in Winter, H.B., Kamminga, A. and Herweijer, M. (eds.) (1999) *Een Grens gesteld: Een Eerste Kennismaking van het Nederlandse Terugkeerbeleid*, 69-77.
- Arb, U. von** (2001) Return and reintegration: the Swiss experience in Kosovo *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 20(2), 135-140.
- Ager, A.** (1999) Perspectives on the Refugee Experience. In Ager, A. (ed.) *Refugees. Perspectives on the Experience of Forced Migration* (1999), Continuum, New York, 1-23.
- Agesa, R. and Kim, S.** (2001) Rural to Urban Migration as a Household Decision: Evidence from Kenya *Review of Development Economics*, 5(1), 60-75.
- Ammassari, S. and Black, R.** (2001) Harnessing the Potential of Migration and Return to Promote Development *IOM Migration Research Series*, Geneva.
- Black, R.** (2002) Conceptions of 'home' and the political geography of refugee repatriation *Applied Geography*, 22, 123-38.
- Black, R., Koser, K. and Walsh, M.** (1997) *Conditions for the Return of Displaced Persons from the European Union. Final Report*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Bloch, A. and Atfield, G.** (2002) *The Professional Capacity of Nationals from the Somali Regions in Britain*. Report for Refugee Action and IOM.
- Bovenkerk, F.** (1974) *The Sociology of Return Migration: A Bibliographic Essay* Publications of the Research Group on European Migration Problems 20, Nijhoff, The Hague.
- Boyle, P., Halfacree, K. and Robinson, V.** (1998) *Exploring Contemporary Migration*, Longman, Harlow.
- Dustmann, C. and Kirchkamp, O.** (2002) The Optimal Migration Duration and Activity Choice after Re-migration, *Journal of Development Economics*, 67, 351-372.
- Eltink, L.** (1999) Knelpunten in de uitvoering van het Nederlandse terugkeer beleid', in Winter, H.B., Kamminga, A. and Herweijer, M. (eds.) (1999) *Een Grens gesteld: Een Eerste Evaluatie van het Nederlandse Terugkeerbeleid*, 21-27.
- Faist, T.** (1999) The Crucial Meso level. In Hammar, T., Brochmann, G., Tamas, K. and Faist, T. (eds.) *International Migration, Immobility and Development*, Berg, Oxford/New York, 187-217.
- Fisher, P. A. and Martin, R.** (1999) Should I stay or Should I go? In Hammar, T., Brochmann, G. Tamas, K. and Faist, T. (eds) *International Migration, Immobility and Development*, Berg, Oxford/New York, 49-90.
- Gmelch, G.** (1980) Return Migration *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 9, 135-159.
- Hammond, L.** (1999) Examining the discourse of repatriation: towards a more proactive theory of return migration. In Black, R. and Koser, K. (eds.) *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, Berghahn, Oxford/New York, 227-45.

- Home Office** (2000) *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain*.
- Home Office** (2002) *Asylum Statistics 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2002 United Kingdom*.
- Home Office** (2002) *Asylum Statistics 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2002 United Kingdom*.
- Home Office** (2002) *Asylum Statistics 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2002 United Kingdom*.
- Home Office** (2003) *Asylum Statistics 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2002 United Kingdom*.
- IOM** (2003) *Identification of Sustainable Approaches to Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Asylum Seekers and Persons with Temporary Protected Status*. Final Report to the European Commission.
- Janis, I.L. and Mann, L.** (1997) *Decision Making. A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice and Commitment*, the Free Press New York.
- Kibreab, G.** (2000) When Refugees go Home: The Relationship between Stayees and Returnees in Post-Conflict Eritrea *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 20(1), 53-80.
- King, R., Strachan, A.J. and Mortimer, J.** (1983) *Return Migration: a Review of the Literature*. Discussion Papers in Geography, 19, Oxford Polytechnic, Oxford.
- King, R.** (2000) Generalizations from the History of Return Migration. In Ghosh, B. (ed.) *Return Migration. Journey or Hope or Despair?* IOM/UNHCR, Switzerland, pp. 1-18.
- Koser, K.** (1998) Information and repatriation, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 10(1): 1-19.
- Koser, K.** (2001) *The Return of Rejected Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants*, IOM, Geneva.
- Koser, K. and Pinkerton, C.** (2002) *The Social Networks of Asylum Seekers and the Dissemination of Information about Countries of Asylum Findings 165*, Home Office: London.
- Lepore, S.** (1986) Problems confronting migrants and members of their families when they return to their countries of origin, *International Migration*, 23 (1).
- Manuh, T.** (2002) Return to Ghana: a differentiated process. In Koser, K. (ed.) *New African Diasporas*, Routledge, London, 140-159.
- Malmberg, G.** (1997) Time and Space in International Migration. Multidisciplinary perspectives. In Hammar, T., Brochmann, G., Tamas, K. and Faist, T. (eds.) *International Migration, Immobility and Development*, Berg, Oxford/New York, 21-48.
- Morrison, J.** (2000) *External Evaluation of the Voluntary Return Project for Refugees in the United Kingdom*. London: Refugee Action.
- Morgan, D. L.** (1997) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Second Edition, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.
- Morgan, D. L. and Krueger, R.A.** (1992) When to use Focus Groups and why'. In Morgan, D. (ed.) *Successful Focus Groups* (1992), Sage Publications Ltd, London.
- Moser, C. and McIlwaine, C.** (1999) Participatory Urban Appraisal and its Application for Research on Violence *Environment and Urbanisation*, 11(2), pp.203-245.
- Muus, P. and Muller, P.** (1999) *Beeldvorming onder (uitgeprocedeerde) asielzoekers en vluchtelingen over terugkeer- en migratie(beleid)*. In opdracht van het WODC, Ministerie van Justitie. ERCOMER, Universiteit Utrecht. AWSB Research paper 99/01. AWSB, Utrecht.

- Refugee Action** (2002) *Six Monthly Report, September 2001-February 2002.*
- Refugee Action** (2002) *Annual Review, September 2001 – August 2002.*
- Refugee Action** (2003) *Annual Review, March 2002 – 28<sup>th</sup> February 2003.*
- Refugee Council** (2000) *Report on the British Parliament Delegation. Visit to Kosovo 28<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2000.*
- Reichnert, C. von** (2002) 'Returning and New Montana Migrants: Socio-Economic and Motivational Differences', *Growth and Change*, 33 (Winter 2002), 133-151.
- Richmond, A.H.** (1981) Explaining Return Migration. In Kubat, D. (ed.) *The Politics of Return. International Return Migration in Europe*, Center for Migration Studies, New York, 269-275.
- Rousseau, C., Morales, M. and Foxen, P.** (2001) Going Home: Giving Voice to Memory of Young Mayan Refugees who returned to Guatemala as a Community *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 25, 135-168.
- Simmons, A.** (2000) Introduction: what are the conditions for successful Refugee Return? *Refuge* (2000),19(3), 1-2.
- UNMIK** (2003) *Manual for Sustainable Return.* United Nations Mission in Kosovo, Pristina, January 2003.
- Walsh, M., Black, R. and Koser, K.** (1999) Repatriation from the EU to Bosnia-Herzegovina: the role of information. In Black, R. and Koser, K. (eds.) *The End of the Refugee Cycle?*, Berghahn, Oxford, pp.110-125.

Produced by the Research Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office

This document is available only in Adobe Portable Document Format (**PDF**)  
through the RDS website

Home Office  
Research, Development and Statistics Directorate  
Communication Development Unit  
Room 264  
50 Queen Anne's Gate  
London SW1H 9AT

Tel: 020 7273 2084 (answerphone outside of office hours)

Fax: 020 7222 0211

Email: [publications.rds@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:publications.rds@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

ISBN 1 84473 411 0

© Crown copyright 2004