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# Roma Returns to the Western Balkans

“NO PLACE FOR US: NEITHER HERE, NOR THERE”



2017



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### **It's better in Germany**

After 10 years in Germany, my husband, children, and I went back. We do not have any documents, and now we are neither here nor there. We are collecting secondary raw materials and live from it. We do not have any other jobs, it is very difficult here.

**Female (45-54 years old)**

## **Executive summary**

The recent arrival of more than one million refugees and migrants into the European Union (EU) has once again drawn attention to the number of migrants and asylum seekers from the Western Balkans. In the first three quarters of 2015 alone, Eurostat recorded 177,925 asylum applications made by persons arriving from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo\*, and Serbia in EU/ European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. Roma<sup>1</sup> are “hidden” within these statistics. A recent European Union’s European Asylum Support Office report<sup>2</sup> about asylum seekers from the Western Balkans states that Roma make up the most of asylum seekers from Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Based on micronarratives, this report intends to present

Roma voices returning from the EU to the Western Balkans. Micronarratives are fragments of stories that people tell each other every day. As testified by stories told by the Roma, the main reason to embark on an uncertain – and often unregulated – migration to the EU is the search for mere survival in terms of income and physical and emotional security. Those who returned from the EU feel rejected and alienated with limited support for reintegration. Some hope to try their chances again, despite the fact that “there is no place for us, neither here, nor there” as stated by one Roma woman, who returned to the Western Balkans with her family after ten years of living and working in Germany. However, all 1,175 storytellers want a decent life where they have control over the main events that influence the well-being of themselves and their children.

\*For the United Nations: All references to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

\*For the European Union: This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘Roma’ is used here to refer to a number of different groups (e.g. Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, Abdal) and includes travellers, without denying the specificities of these groups. All these groups are considered under the wider “Roma umbrella term under the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies”.

<sup>2</sup> See: Asylum Applicants from the Western Balkans: Comparative analysis of trends, push-pull factors and responses. Luxembourg: European Asylum Support Office (EASO), 2013. Accessed November 3, 2017. <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/BZ0213708ENC.pdf>.

Asylum Applicants from the Western Balkans: Comparative analysis of trends, push-pull factors and responses – Update. European Asylum Support Office (EASO), May 2015. Accessed November 3, 2017. [https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Asylum-Applicants-from-the-Western-Balkans\\_Update\\_r.pdf](https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Asylum-Applicants-from-the-Western-Balkans_Update_r.pdf).



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# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EC	European Commission
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EU	European Union
EURA	EU Readmission Agreement
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
TCN	Third-Country National
WB	World Bank

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# I. Introduction

The migration of citizens, and some Roma among them, from the Western Balkans to Western Europe is not a new phenomenon. The first wave of migration can be traced back to the late 1960s, when the main reason for leaving the country was the economic situation<sup>4</sup>. The motives for migration fundamentally changed in the 1990s with the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and subsequent political instability, legal uncertainties, and lack of economic opportunities. A number of factors marking the second decade of the 2000s might have influenced the decision to migrate. There are a number of push factors at play, but the main reasons are economic decline and the slow recovery after the 2008 economic and financial crisis; lack of trust in public institutions and services<sup>5</sup>; tensions between certain population groups and (perceived) discrimination; high and persistent unemployment, which stood at 21.6% in the region in 2015, with youth unemployment rates ranging from 38.8% in Montenegro to 54.3% in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)<sup>6</sup>.

The recent arrival of more than one million refugees and migrants into the European Union (EU) has once again drawn attention to the number of migrants and asylum seekers from the Western Balkans. The full scale of migration is difficult to determine as not all migrants report leaving their country of origin

or their arrival at a destination country. However, asylum applications can be indicative of trends. In the first three quarters of 2015 alone, Eurostat recorded 177,925 asylum applications made by persons arriving from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo in EU/European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries<sup>8</sup>. This figure is more than three times higher than the 53,000 applications received only three years earlier<sup>9</sup>. This number has risen despite the fact that 96% of all asylum applications from citizens of the Western Balkan region were rejected in 2012<sup>10</sup>, and that all countries were listed as “safe countries of origin.”<sup>11</sup>

“Hidden” within these statistics are Roma. A 2015 European Asylum Support Office (EASO) report<sup>12</sup> about applicants for asylum from the Western Balkans state that Roma make up the most of the asylum seekers from Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to this report, Roma constitute 90% of all asylum seekers from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in Germany, and 60% of all asylum seekers from these two countries in Switzerland. Most of the applicants from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Germany are also assessed to be Roma.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ever since the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in late 1960s opened its borders, the population was encouraged to migrate as a strategy to resolve problems of agricultural overpopulation, unemployment, and unskilled labour. Roma joined migrants searching for jobs in Western Europe, mostly in Germany and Austria.

<sup>5</sup> *Public Opinion Survey: Balkan Barometer 2016*. Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council, 2016. Pg. 106 & 112. Accessed November 3, 2017. [http://www.rcc.int/seeds/files/RCC\\_BalkanBarometer\\_PublicOpinion\\_2016.pdf](http://www.rcc.int/seeds/files/RCC_BalkanBarometer_PublicOpinion_2016.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Cunha, Barbara, Ekaterina Vostroknutova, Agim Demukaj, et al., *South East Europe, Regular Economic Report No. 10: Resilient Growth Amid Rising Risks*. Washington DC: World Bank, Fall 2016. Pg. 7. Accessed November 3, 2017. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/521981474898709744/SEE-RER-Report-Fall-2016.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Lange, Sabina. *The Western Balkans: back in the EU spotlight*. European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2016. Pg. 1. Accessed November 3, 2017. [https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief-9\\_Western%20Balkans.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief-9_Western%20Balkans.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> *Asylum Applicants from the Western Balkans: Comparative analysis of trends, push-pull factors and responses*. Luxembourg: European Asylum Support Office (EASO), 2013. Pg. 9. Accessed November 3, 2017. <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/BZ0213708ENC.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> An EU “Safe Countries of Origin” List. Accessed November 3, 2017. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2\\_eu\\_safe\\_countries\\_of\\_origin\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_eu_safe_countries_of_origin_en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> See: *Asylum Applicants from the Western Balkans: Comparative analysis of trends, push-pull factors and responses – Update*. European Asylum Support Office (EASO), May 2015. Accessed November 3, 2017. [https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Asylum-Applicants-from-the-Western-Balkans-Update\\_r.pdf](https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Asylum-Applicants-from-the-Western-Balkans-Update_r.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Compared to the 2013 EASO report, Roma continue to be most numerous among the applicants from Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The report also noted that fragile labour markets, inadequate welfare, health and education systems, in combination with weak social structures have a profound effect on Roma, constituting major push factors. Most of the requests for asylum on these grounds are refused and asylum seekers are subsequently sent back.

This response from the EU on migration from the Western Balkans can be contextualised in relation to: a) efforts of the EU Member States to create a common immigration policy regulating the entry, residence, working conditions, and non-discrimination of EU citizens and third-country nationals (TCNs) within the EU's territory; b) processes of accession negotiations; and c) the most recent large-scale refugee and migration crisis.

In 2009-2010, the EU granted visa-free travel to the Schengen zone for citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This arrangement allows TCNs from Western Balkan countries to travel and stay in the Schengen area for up to 90 days but precludes them from legally working in the EU. Although the EU regulates the rights of TCN workers, it is ultimately up to EU member states to decide admission policies for non-EU nationals. Each Member State regulates the type and number of labour migrants it will admit.

From the perspective of the migrant, the 90-day period of visa-free stay in the destination country provides time to prepare the necessary documents and to contact potential employers, or, as it often happens, engage in unregulated available work.

The EU has standardised the procedures of regulating the expulsion of irregular migrants through the Return Directive. This directive delineates common rules for the return and removal of irregular migrants, the use of coercive measures, detention, and re-entry. Regular (legal) migrants from the Western Balkans could be subject to the Return Directive once they no longer fulfil the conditions of entry to the Schengen zone (for example, if the tourist visa/stay has expired or if the tourist engaged in unregulated employment). The Return Directive is also applicable to asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected.

Regarding asylum policy, the "safe countries of origin" list was developed on both the individual Member State and EU levels since member states found only a fraction of asylum applications from citizens of these countries to be well-founded. According to the EU's definition, countries on this list have a democratic system without widespread persecution, torture, the threat of violence, or armed conflict. All six countries in the Western Balkans region have been designated as "safe countries of origin" in the list proposed by the EU, allowing the MS to fast-track asylum applications from the Western Balkans. As a result, asylum applications are usually rejected and the applicant becomes subject to the Return Directive.

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14 Asylum Applicants from the Western Balkans: Comparative analysis of trends, push-pull factors and responses. Luxembourg: European Asylum Support Office (EASO), 2013. Pg. 11-13. Accessed November 3, 2017. <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/BZ0213708ENC.pdf>.

15 The Schengen zone (with a gradual abolition of checks at common borders) was agreed to in June 1985 and implemented in 1990 with an aim to eliminate internal border controls and introduce common visa policy within EU. The Schengen area currently includes twenty-six European countries. These countries effectively have a common visa policy and strengthened border controls along external borders with non-Schengen countries. Twenty-two of the current twenty-eight EU member states are in the Schengen area.

16 Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, 16 December 2008, OJ L. 348/98-348/107; 16.12.2008, 2008/115/EC

17 Safe countries of origin: Proposed common EU list. European Parliament: February 2017. Accessed November 7, 2017. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/569008/EPRS\\_BRI%282015%29569008\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/569008/EPRS_BRI%282015%29569008_EN.pdf) and

An EU "safe countries of origin" list. European Commission. Accessed November 7, 2017. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2\\_eu\\_safe\\_countries\\_of\\_origin\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_eu_safe_countries_of_origin_en.pdf)

As part of the Return Directive, the EU has the authority to conclude readmission agreements with third countries. EU Readmission Agreements (EURAs) are based on reciprocal obligations and are concluded between the EU and non-EU countries to facilitate the return of people residing irregularly in a member state to their country of origin or to a country of transit. As of May 2017, the EU has completed EURAs with five countries in the Western Balkans region – Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, BiH, Montenegro, and Serbia. These EURAs operate alongside multiple bilateral readmission agreements between individual EU Member States and Western Balkan countries, as well as Kosovo.

These regulations allow for data collection (Table 1) about asylum seekers that were returned to a country<sup>18</sup> of origin or to another country, either voluntarily (both assisted and non-assisted return), or non-voluntary (forced to leave). However, the data can only be collected if the immigration authorities were made aware of the situation. The figures in Table 1 do not represent the total number of persons present in the country.

**Table 1. Total number of persons from the Western Balkan region returned (Annual data rounded)**

Country and Territory	No of People							
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Albania	69,300	63,195	50,875	8,775	10,920	22,015	25,850	36,595
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1,170	1,200	1,120	1,165	3,085	3,075	3,540	4,335
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	1,370	1,305	2,215	3,430	2,775	4,630	1,110	6,060
Montenegro	200	190	220	255	520	415	570	1,230
Serbia	8,285	5,850	8,705	8,630	10,035	11,385	9,490	13,755
Kosovo	0	4,195	4,630	4,175	4,595	5,795	4,705	18,865
<b>Total</b>	<b>80,325</b>	<b>75,935</b>	<b>67,765</b>	<b>35,060</b>	<b>31,930</b>	<b>47,315</b>	<b>45,265</b>	<b>80,840</b>

This report abstains from a detailed analysis of the wider legal and political context<sup>19</sup>, and instead focuses on empirical evidence outlining personal experiences of Roma returning to the Western Balkans from EU member states. It appears that the complex legal and policy framework regulating the migration to EU countries does not seem to have deterred migrants, including Roma from the Western Balkans. A 2011 survey conducted by the UNDP/EU/World Bank in twelve countries<sup>20</sup> revealed that 24% of marginalised Roma considered moving to another country in the future. The respondents from Serbia, BiH, and Albania expressed the strongest intent to move. The 2013 report on the survey results

revealed that the main reasons for leaving were “better chances for employment” (64%); “better pay/better working conditions” (16%); and “better living conditions/social and healthcare systems/political situation” (15%)<sup>21</sup>. According to the 2011 survey, the most preferred destination was Germany among Roma from the following regions: Montenegro (67%), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (62%), BiH (52%), and Serbia (44%). Greece was the top destination for Albanian Roma at 56%. The report also found that the shorter distance and presence of migrant networks (relatives and friends) were important in choosing the destination country.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In Eurostat data statistics for “returned” include: (i) those returned under EURA; (ii) returned under other readmission agreement; (iii) returned without existing a readmission agreement, and (iv) an “unknown” category (people recorded as returned but without data). These four groups are only persons who are apprehended or otherwise come to the attention of national immigration authorities hence recorded in these statistics.

<sup>19</sup> The broader legal and political context with regards to regulation of migrations and its implications for Roma will be presented the larger qualitative study on the migration of Roma from Western Balkans to the EU.

<sup>20</sup> UNDP/WB/EC 2011 survey on a random sample of Roma and non-Roma households in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Slovakia

<sup>21</sup> Cherkezova, Stoyanka and Ilona Tomova. An Option of Last Resort? Migration of Roma and Non-Roma from CEE countries. Bratislava: UNDP, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The perception that there are better opportunities in the EU remains persistent among Roma and non-Roma in the Western Balkans despite complex migration regulations and evidence to the contrary. Many Roma in the EU live in worse conditions compared to other EU citizens.<sup>23</sup> This perception is influenced by societal problems for certain groups in the Western Balkans who face discrimination, protracted economic stagnation, and inadequate public services (health and social, in particular). In comparison, EU economies recovered faster after the economic and financial crisis, public services are better organised and more accessible, and prospects of finding work appear to be less limited. As evidenced by stories in this report, migration then becomes a practical strategy to escape long-term, structural exclusion and/or discrimination in the case of Roma. Other research finds that reasons for migration do not differ between Roma and non-Roma. Both groups aspire to improve their living standards and realise their human potential, although their starting position differs in terms of social capital and resources at their disposal. As the evidence shows, this strategy proves to be short term. Roma who have returned to their communities of origin face pre-migration conditions at best, deteriorated situations in some cases, and certain improvements in living conditions only in a small number of cases.

It is against this backdrop that the UNDP, in partnership with the World Bank and with the support of DG NEAR, is undertaking a set of surveys to explore the situations of Roma returning from the EU to the Western Balkans. This report, which presents an analysis of stories/micronarratives among those returning, is one of the building blocks in creating an overall picture of the situation. Other blocks include:

- A qualitative study about a) the needs of Roma returnees in terms of education, employment, health, and housing in communities of their origin or in another third country, b) human capital, social networks, and other resources which returnees bring with them, and c) human and financial resources of local governments for the integration of returnees;

- A quantitative data collection (regional survey) in the Western Balkans and Turkey. The survey covers living conditions, employment, income status, access to health and education services, personal documentation, and also includes a set of questions tapping into the experience of Roma migration/return from the EU to the Western Balkans and Turkey.

This report is based on micronarratives. Micronarratives come from people – they are fragments of stories we tell each other every day. As testified by stories told by the Roma, the main reason to embark on an uncertain – and often unregulated migration to the EU – is the search for mere survival in terms of income and physical and emotional security. Those who return feel rejected, alienated, and have limited support for reintegration. Some hope to try their chances again, despite the fact that “there is no place for us, neither here, nor there” as stated by one Roma woman, who returned to the Western Balkans with her family after ten years of living and working in Germany.

The report is divided into eight main sections. The second section provides a brief overview on micronarratives as a data collection method. The third section introduces the profiles of storytellers, while section four presents their reasons for migration. Sections five and six reveal the emerging patterns of reality faced by returnees upon arriving in their country of origin. Migration cycles in the seventh section show recent experiences with migration and indicate intentions to go abroad in the near future. Despite the predominance of obstacles present in most returnees’ stories, there are examples of interventions that lead to positive outcomes. These examples are a helpful guide for policymakers.

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<sup>23</sup> Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU MIDIS II) Roma - Selected findings. November 2016. Accessed November 3, 2017. <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings>

## II. The power of story - micronarratives as a data collection method

Micronarratives come from people – they capture important events, subtle changes in attitude, behaviour, and perceptions. They give people a voice and help us understand their experiences and attitudes, while also contributing to knowledge sharing and making informed decisions. This approach holds that the best way to understand the perspectives, beliefs, and dispositions influencing decision-making and well-being is to understand the actual decisions being made, not merely the trends surrounding them.

The method<sup>24</sup> further requires the interviewer to engage in deep conversation with the storyteller/respondent by beginning with a prompting (open) question to elicit the storyteller's experience. The respondent's analysis of a story within a certain framework provides a wealth of metadata about stories, which are then coded through software<sup>25</sup> that captures these decisions in the form of narratives. However, this method goes beyond the usual qualitative interview approaches, which relies on researcher interpretation. Instead, respondent/storytellers analyse their own stories within a certain framework.

This approach avoids direct questions and navigates sensitive topics by allowing respondents to “code” their own stories, instead of relying on external experts to do so. This helps to unpack the cultural, social, and even political elements of the issue without the overlay of researcher subjectivity.

In this case, the size of a sample is not as important, meaning that it does not matter whether there are 200 or 400 stories in a cluster. Specialised software is used to group the stories into clusters. This method also allows for deeper analysis, using the layers of clusters by adding variables, such as the demographic characteristics of the storytellers, the emotional intensity of stories, and the role of different actors in the story, among others. The significance of this method is that it goes beyond statistics to examine personal stories and to give people a voice.

Micronarratives have been identified as the most appropriate method for qualitative data collection, as they provide authentic and detailed information from Roma themselves, and also engage them in the process of analysis and intervention design. A team consisting of Roma activists and UNDP Roma focal points from Albania, BiH, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo was formed to design a micronarratives framework (Appendix 1). The team was trained by Narrate Ltd to use the method.

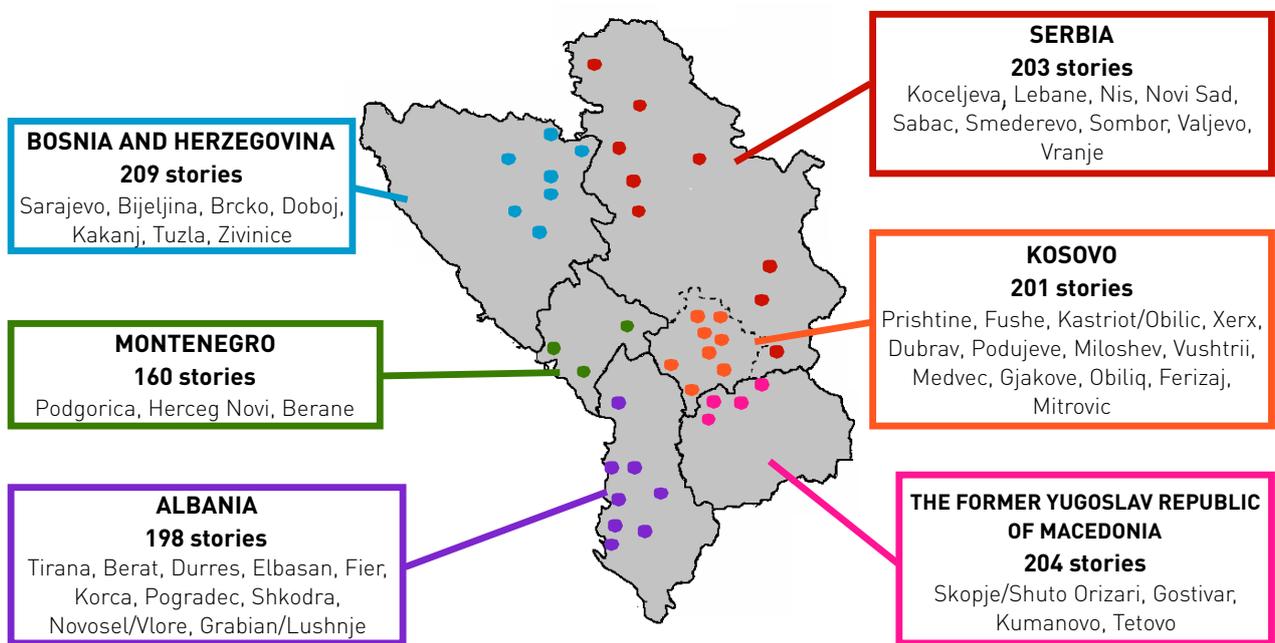
Roma activists collected a total of 1,175 stories in localities with more compact Roma populations and with already recorded returnees in the Western Balkans in the period from 15 November 2016 – 15 March 2017. Roma activists and available official data were the main sources of information about municipalities/localities where Roma are returning.

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<sup>24</sup> This method involves several steps. Step 1. Respondents' memory is triggered to situate respondents in an experience they or someone they know have had, seen, or heard about and that relates to the field of interest; Step 2. Respondents share a narrative associated with that experience; Step 3. After a narrative is shared, respondents are asked to code (add meaning, self-signify) their narratives by responding to several predefined closed-end questions. Some of the questions require respondents to situate the meaning of the story within a specific shape (e.g., triangle). In this way categorisation of meaning is made possible. Storytellers are then asked to respond to several multiple-choice questions, including questions about themselves (demographics) and about their narrative. For data visualisation, demographics and other multiple-choice questions serve as tags and enable colour coding and filtering of data (e.g. by gender, age, or role of other parties in the stories shared) allowing deeper analysis and better understanding of issues and meaning for specific subsets of population.

<sup>25</sup> SenseMaker® is a proprietary research method and tool developed by Cognitive Edge (cognitive-edge.com)

**Graph 1. Map of localities where stories (micronarratives) were collected**

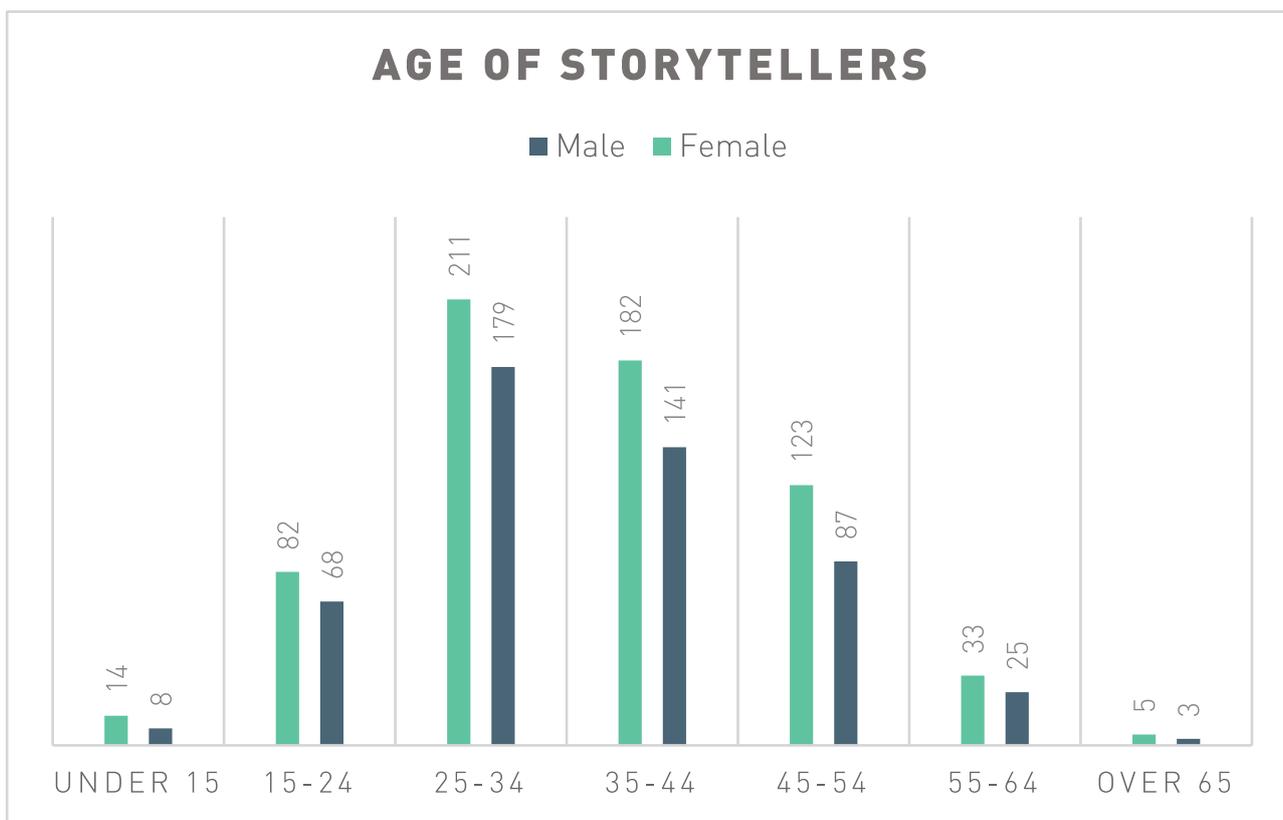


# III. Profiles of Roma storytellers

All storytellers are Roma, 44% of whom are women and 56% are men. Their age ranges from 14-65 years. Educational backgrounds span from elementary (23%) to higher academic degrees (1%). The majority of storytellers (95%) between the ages of 15 and 65 are unemployed.

## HOW OLD ARE ROMA STORYTELLERS?

Graph 2. Age distribution among the storytellers (by gender)



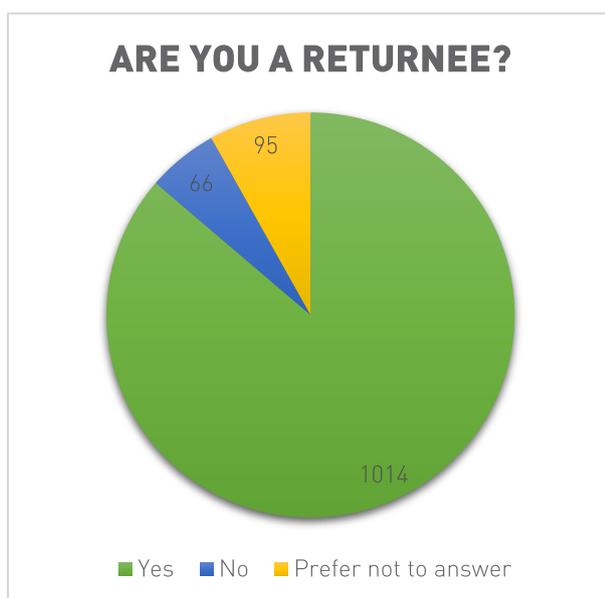
Stories of returning to a habitual place of origin were largely conveyed by young, working-age Roma: 33% of storytellers are 25-34 years old, 28% are 35-44 years old, and 13% are 15-24 years old. There are 22 stories told by Roma younger than 15 and eight stories told by those over the age of 65. The former illustrates the perspective of children and, in particular, in relation to education and interactions with peers. The latter mostly reveals either personal experiences with migration due to health reasons or experiences of those whose children or close relatives

went abroad. The age distribution of storytellers is the same throughout in the Western Balkans region. This indicates the working-age Roma are the primary group migrating and returning to their place of origin.

## IDENTIFYING AS A RETURNEE

➤ The majority of the 1,175 storytellers (86%) identified themselves as returnees, therefore, their stories provide first-hand experience about migration and return.

**Graph 3a. Number of returnees among storytellers (n=1175)**



Ninety-five Roma storytellers did not want to answer whether or not they were a returnee even though their stories often suggest they have returned.

Sixty-six storytellers answered that they were not returnees. Although they might not have migrated themselves, their stories were about returnees they know (i.e., a family member or neighbour). These stories are equally valuable as they give a voice to persons other than returnees, who are also affected by migration. For example, the storyteller from BiH described the experiences of others:

However, not all of these sixty-six storytellers who considered themselves to be non-returnees were telling a story about other returnees. Some of these storytellers were telling a story about their own return yet at the same time they do not identify themselves as returnees. The following example was taken from a storyteller who did not identify as a returnee, implying ambiguity over the concept of a “returnee.”

### **Looking for salvation, and ending up worse**

In a large Roma family, there were two women. They gave birth to 15 children, and faced all kinds of violence from their husbands. The younger one decided to leave that life behind and, while she was begging, she met a man from Zivinice.

With him she got the necessary papers and left for Germany to live with what he claimed was his family. When she was there, she faced a very hard life, she still had to beg, and was hungry, filthy, and sometimes sexually abused until she was found by the police. For a while she was placed in a psychiatric ward, then she was deported and placed in another institution in Sarajevo.

**Female (35-44 years old), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### I don't know what to do next

I went to Germany with my sister to seek asylum. After 6 months, I was returned against my will. I am in a worse situation now than when I left, without work and without an income.

**Male (30-34 years old), Montenegro**

It may be suggested that those who were forcibly returned to their place of origin might not choose to be labelled as a returnee. They may associate the term "returnee" with only those who return to their home places of origin willingly and intentionally.

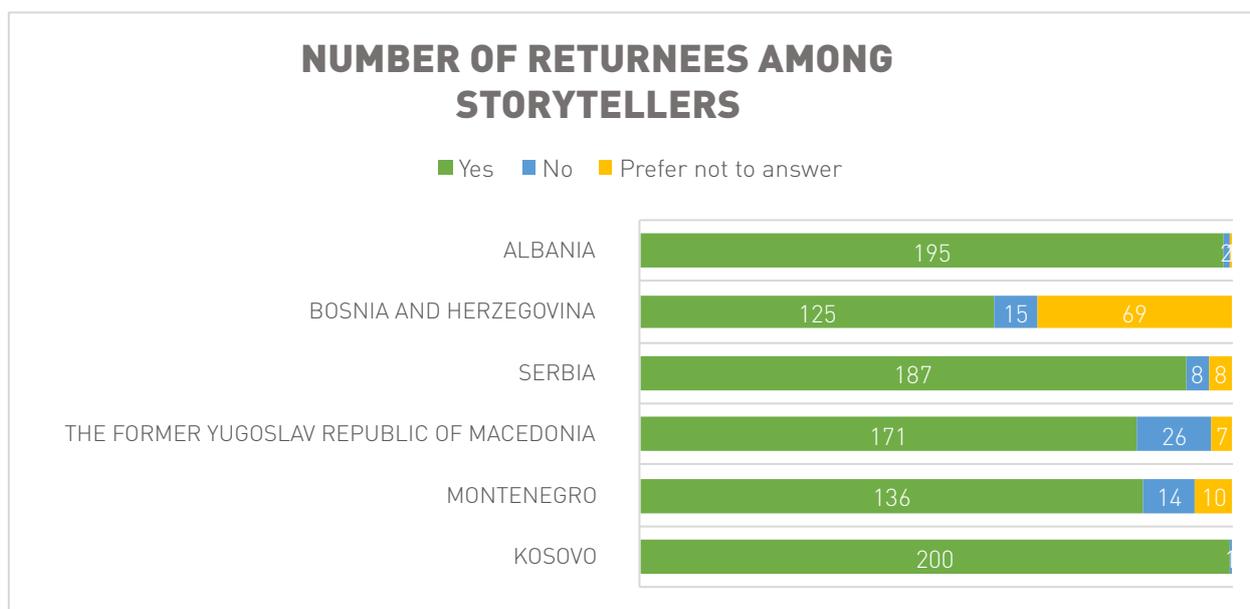
### Surviving month to month

I returned a year ago from Germany, and there have been no changes in the country since I left. I live on social assistance, which amounts to 2500 MKD, and with some extra work I can survive for a week. But it is very hard to survive from month to month, so I plan to go back to Germany.

**Female (30-34 years old), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

Furthermore, some stories show that the returnees plan to leave their country of origin again, which is another reason why some storytellers might not consider themselves as a "returnee." In the following example, a woman who returned from Germany a year ago also does not identify herself as a "returnee" as she plans to go back:

**Graph 3b. Number of returnees among storytellers (by country and territory)**

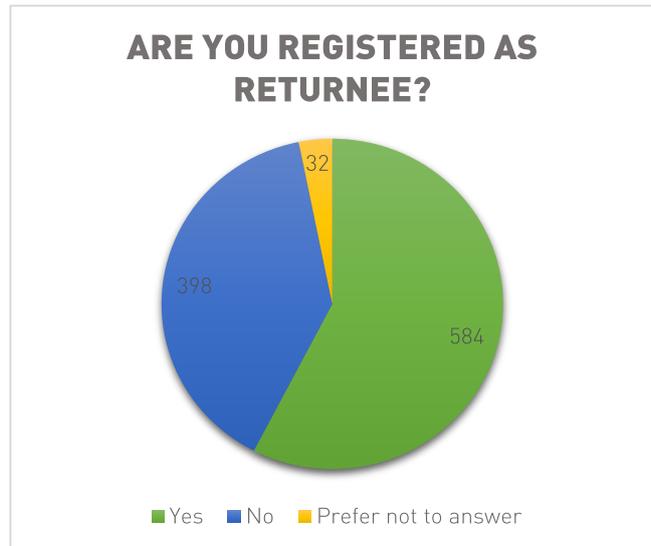


Graph 3b points out that all storytellers (except one) in Kosovo are returnees, as are the majority everywhere else. The number of storytellers who prefer not to answer whether or not they are returnees is relatively high (69 people) only in BiH compared to other counties. These 69 respondents were mostly from

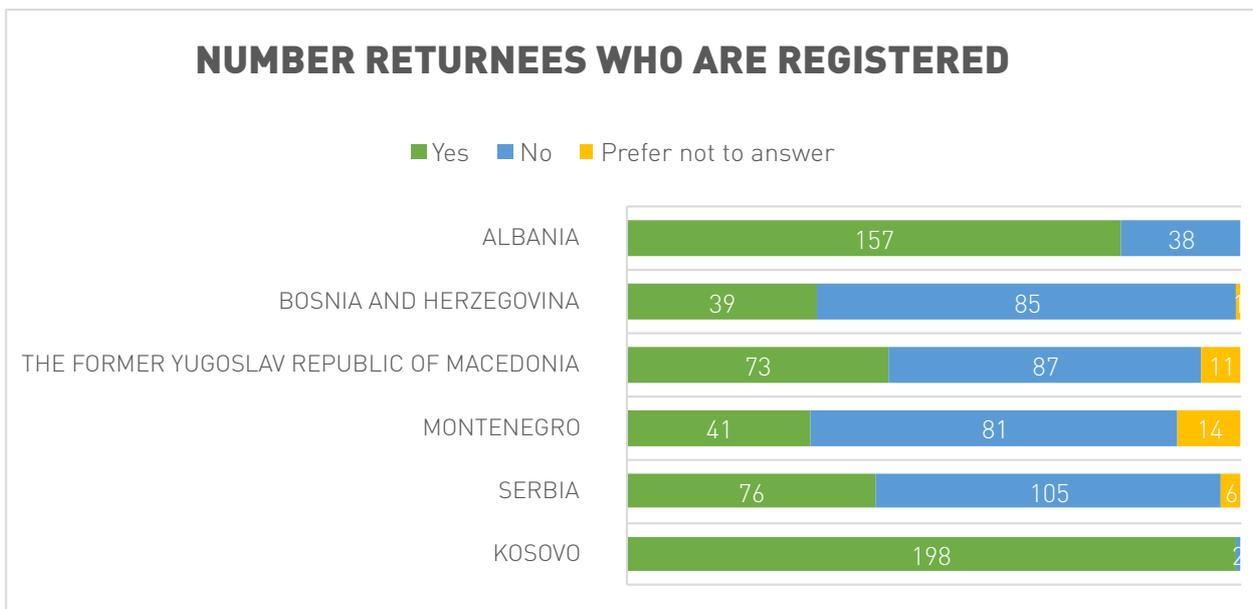
Kakanj and Sarajevo. Their unwillingness to disclose their status may indicate a low level of trust, which could be exacerbated by reintegration challenges they face in these localities by identifying themselves as returnees or a decision to be "invisible" as returnees.

### Graph 4a. Number of returnees who are registered (n=1041)

Out of the 1,014 Roma who indicated that they are returnees, 584 (58%) are officially registered as returnees, 398 (39%) are not registered as returnees, and 32 (3%) preferred not to answer.



### Graph 4b. Number of returnees who are registered



The data reveals that the majority of returnees in BiH, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia are not registered with the authorities. The majority of storytellers in Albania and Kosovo reported to be registered with the authorities. This is especially apparent among storytellers in Kosovo, where 198 of 200 returnees are registered. This may be explained by the fact that team collecting stories reached out exclusively to registered returnees.

Registering as a returnee may ease the process of reintegration, as indicated by this man's story from Serbia:

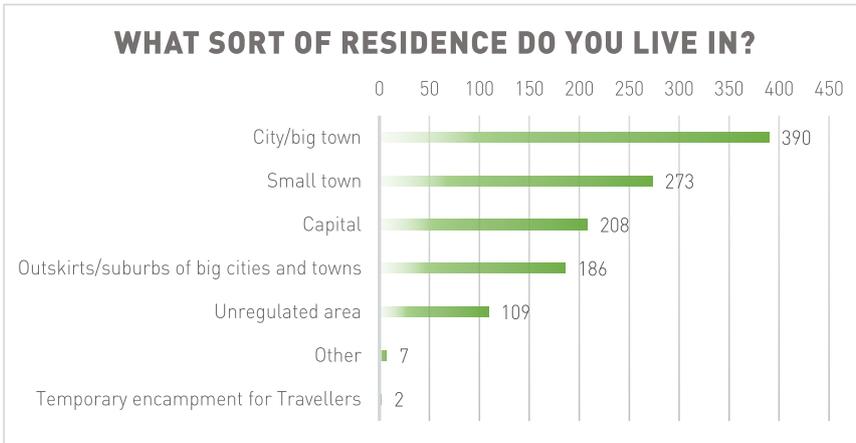
#### Return

When we returned from Germany, we registered as returnees. We found a job in a private company. We live modestly, but we can live. We also receive social assistance and child allowance.

**Male (30-34 years old), Serbia**

# WHERE DO STORYTELLERS LIVE?

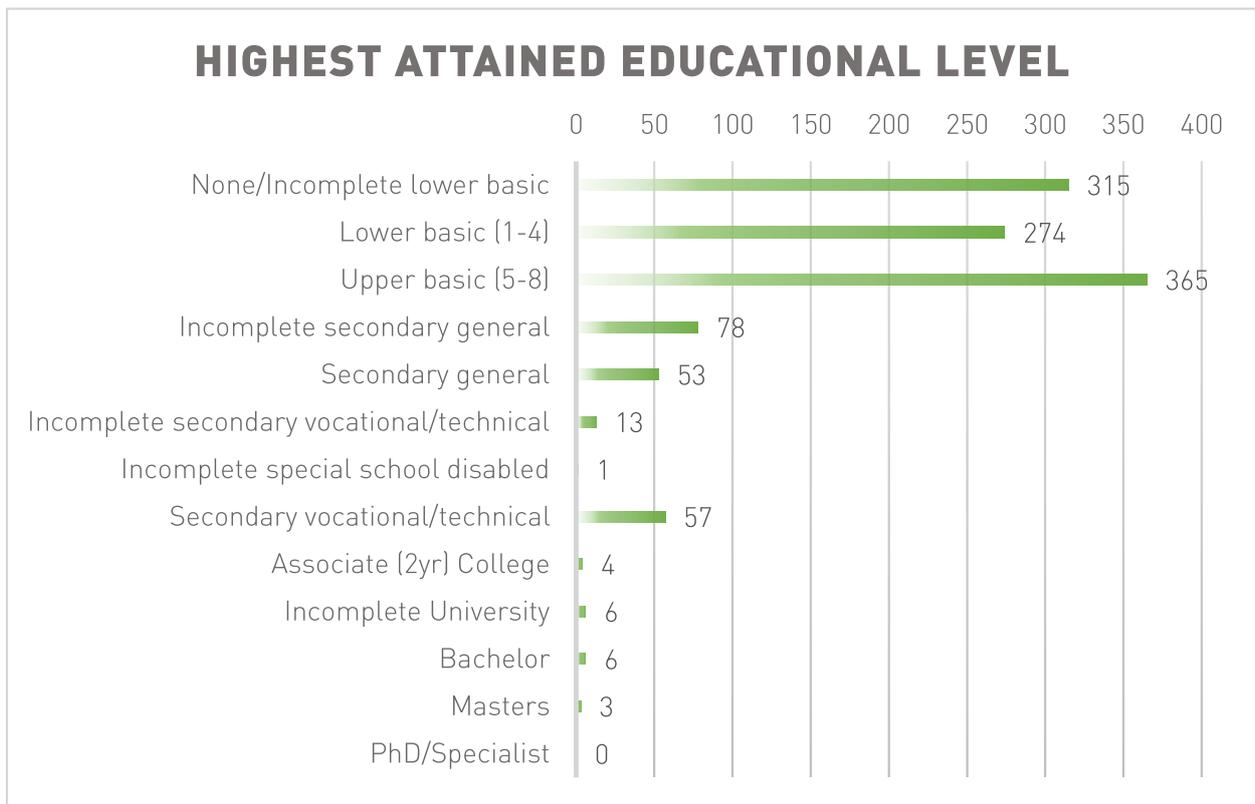
**Graph 5. Places where Roma storytellers live**



Half of Roma storytellers resided in capital cities or other big cities in their place of origin in the Western Balkans (598). However, the storytellers also reported that they live in small towns, on the outskirts or in suburbs of big cities and towns, or in unregulated areas. This might indicate that more Roma migrate to the EU from urban areas.

# EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF STORYTELLERS

**Graph 6a. Highest attained educational level of storytellers (n=1175)**



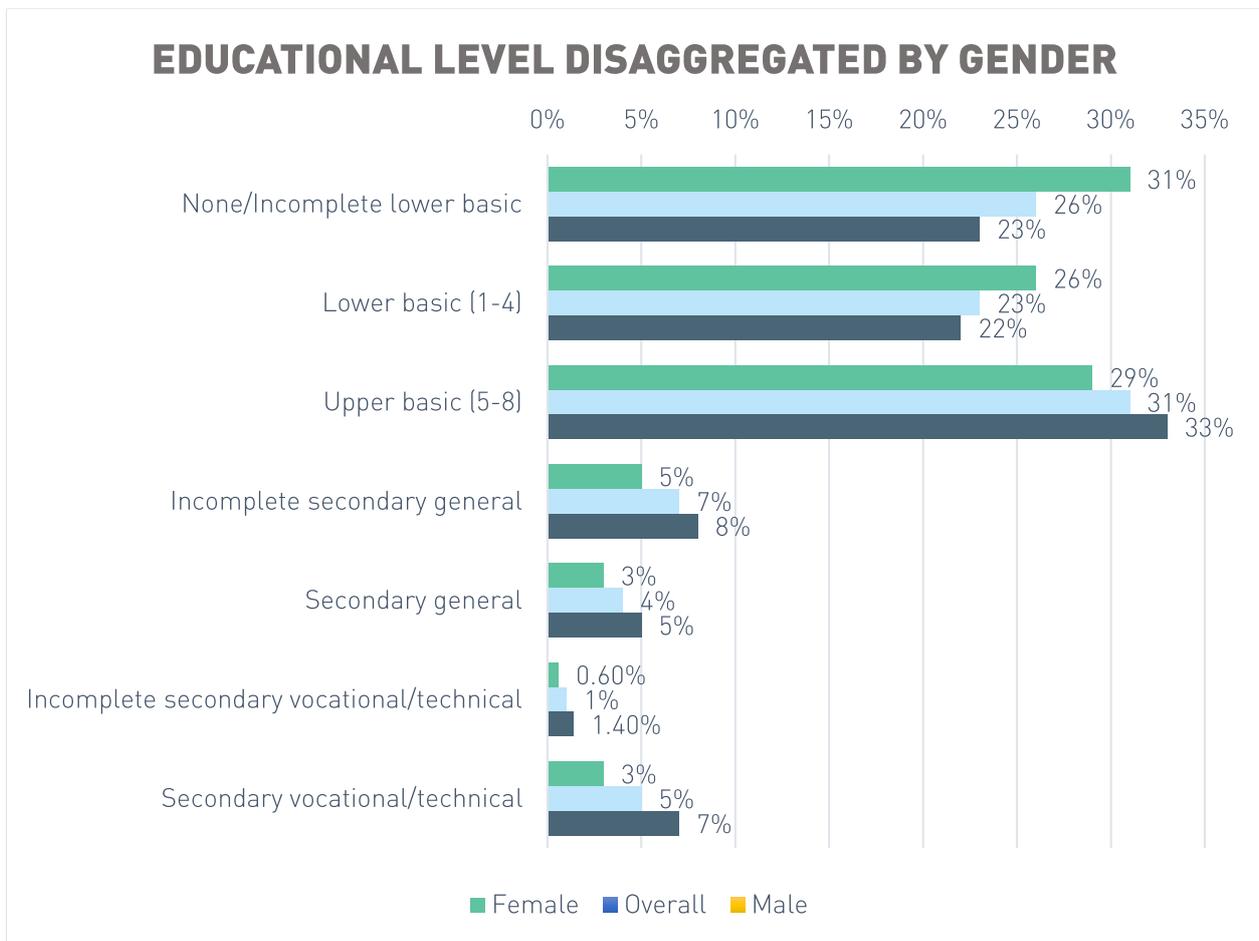
Out of the 1,175 respondents, 315 (29%) have never entered or completed their education at the lower basic level, which refers to grades one through four. Of those interviewed, 274 (23%) respondents finished lower basic education. In the chart above, 365 (34%) of Roma interviewed finished upper basic education.

In terms of secondary general education, 78 (7%) haven't completed it and only 53 (5%) have secondary general education diplomas. Thirteen interviewees (1%) have not completed secondary vocational/technical education, and only 57 (5%) finished their secondary vocational/technical education.

Among Roma storytellers aged 15 or above, 26% (302) have none or incomplete basic education, 24% (271) have lower basic education, and 31% (356) have upper basic education. This data shows that the highest level of education attained by more than 80% of Roma storytellers of working age (aged 15 or above) was basic education. This is one of the contributing factors to difficulties in finding employment upon return, as well as in leaving their countries of origin in the first place.

Results of the highest level of education attained by storytellers disaggregated by gender show that Roma women lag three to four percentage points behind men starting from basic upper education. There is a significant eight percentage-point gap between female and male storytellers with no/incomplete lower basic education.

**Graph 6b. Highest attained educational level of storytellers (by gender)**



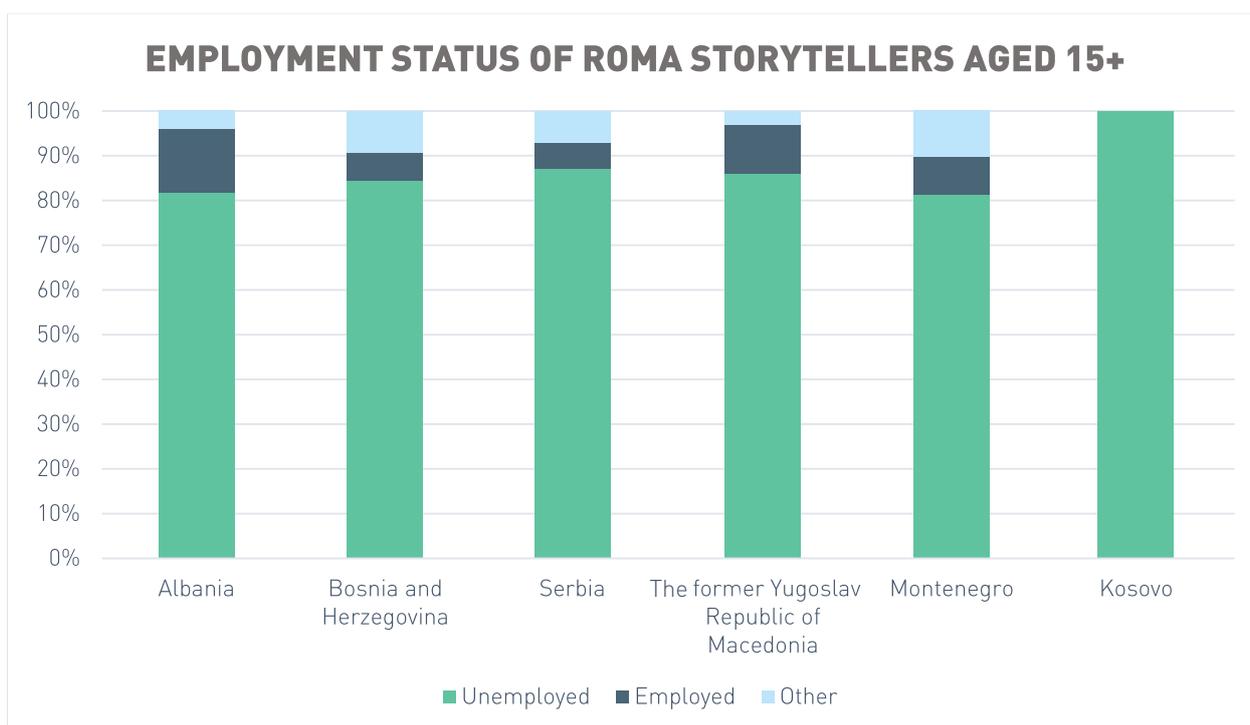
# EMPLOYMENT STATUS

In terms of employment, 997 (95%) of 1,045 Roma storytellers older than 15 reported that they are unemployed. Unemployment echoes as one of the main themes throughout all the stories told: the lack of employment opportunities has been one of the main push factors to go abroad. Finding work upon return has also been the major hurdle for Roma returnees.

**Table 1. Self-reported employment status of Roma storytellers aged 15 and above (n=1153)**

Employment status	Number	Percentage
Unemployed	997	95.40%
Employee in private company	15	1.40%
Employee in public, municipal company	37	3.50%
Self-employed in own business, freelancer	13	1.20%
Employer in own business with employees	11	1.10%
Member of producer's cooperative society	10	1%
Family worker in family business or on family farm without payment	12	1.10%
Other	50	4.80%

**Graph 6. Self-reported employment status of Roma storytellers aged 15 and above (n=1153)**



The vast majority of storytellers are unemployed: 82% in Albania, 84% in BiH, 86% in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 81% in Montenegro, 87% in Serbia, and all in Kosovo.

Among the few employed storytellers, 11 out of the 15 who reported to be working in the private sector are from Albania. Similarly, 12 out of 13 who reported to be self-employed in their own business are from Albania. Montenegrin interviewees are most represented among those who employ other people to work in their businesses, with 7 out to 11 storytellers.

The only testimony of a person with a higher educational degree points out that a university degree does not guarantee access to the labour market:

### Unemployed MA Degree Holder

I have a master's degree in social work. I've been jobless for almost 8 years. After completing my education, I got involved in all NGOs in Kumanovo, but without any effect; upon project completion, I would remain jobless. I also volunteered at the primary school "11th October" as a teacher of the Roma language to students from 3th to 9th grade. But here also, my work engagement was over. I volunteered at the Center for Social Work without any compensation. I'm not politically affiliated, so therefore, it is difficult for me to find a job. In the end, I went to Germany seeking asylum. They kept me for 8 months, I was expelled, and got back to Macedonia again. I don't know how the state is making a positive example for the people who have or complete higher education, or hold a master's degree. What example do we make for young people?! I am still unemployed. I am currently engaged in an NGO.

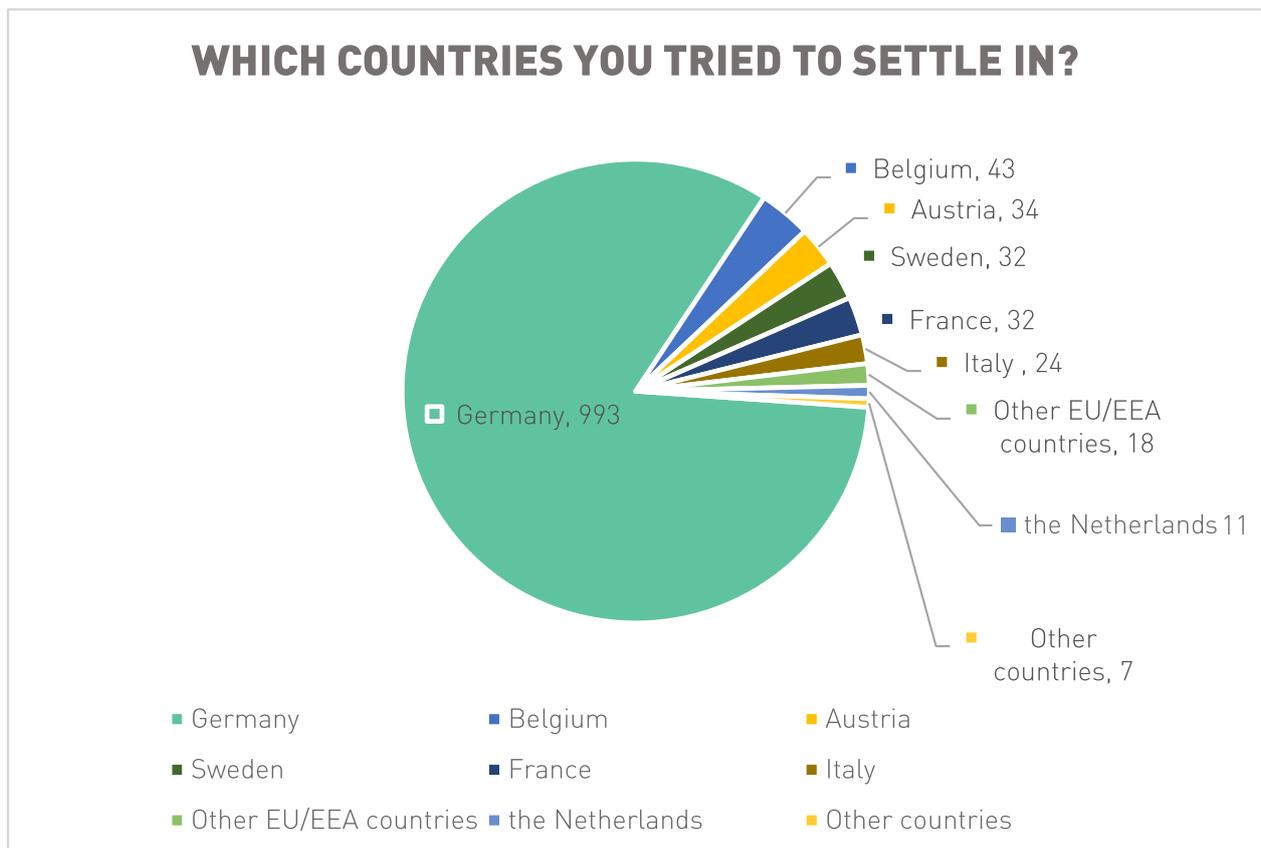
Male (30-34 years old), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

## WHERE DO ROMA MIGRANTS TRY TO SETTLE?

The majority of stories are about returning from Germany. Although Germany is the top destination for Roma from the Western Balkans, some have tried to settle in other Western European countries such as Belgium, Austria, Sweden, France, or Italy. Some

Roma from BiH tried to settle in France (18 persons), Italy (17), and Sweden (15). Roma from Serbia tried to settle in Austria (26) and Belgium (17). Belgium was the second choice for Roma from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (15).

Graph 5. Countries in which Roma from Western Balkans tried to settle



The destination countries for the most part reflect migration routes set by the former Yugoslav migrant workers in late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as refugee routes from the 1990s. These flows created migrant networks that continue to influence preference of destination countries.

### **A high price**

My son, his wife, and my granddaughter were in Germany. We had no means to live here, so our son told us to come to Germany and apply for asylum. He said that lots of our people were there. He also told us that we would get 700 euro per month, even if for 3-4 months, and we would be able to save some money for firewood and coal. So, we got to Germany, and after 3 months, my wife got sick and had a kidney operation. A month after her operation, we had to go back home. We have problems with doctors here, and she is not well.

**Male (55-64 years old), Serbia**

It also appears that a decision to travel to some destinations can be influenced by travel assistance “support” offered to start the journey as demonstrated by the example below:

### **You suffer and you get nothing in the end.**

A man visited us from Macedonia to ask me if there's someone who wants to go to Germany or somewhere else. I asked how much he charged for a trip there, and how much it was for one adult. He said 250 euro for an adult and 150 euro for a child. He asked if I wanted to go, and I said: “That was why I was asking! You'll take me, then you'll come back for my brother.” “When you take us, we'll give you the money,” that was the deal. I lived there for two years. I was very happy, because I had everything there. Nobody goes to Germany just because it looks good, but for a better life. My daughter married into a very nice family. After she was married, I got sent back.

**Male (45-54 years old), Montenegro**

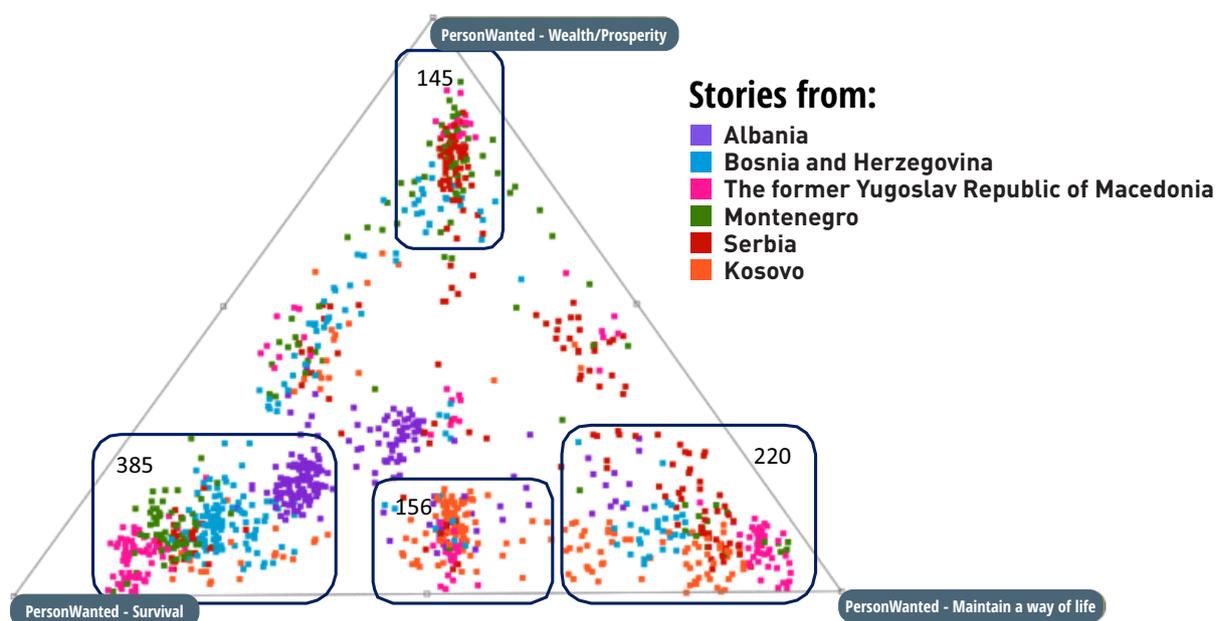
# IV. Narrating the reasons for going away

The main reasons in deciding to go abroad were mere survival, maintaining a current standard of life, or a combination of both. Survival is the main theme in a cluster of 385 stories, followed by a cluster of 220 stories about maintaining a standard

of living. Another cluster of 156 stories was about the combination of both, which indicates that a number of Roma are balancing between the thin line of survival and maintaining the standard of living.

**Graph 6. In your example, the main person/you wanted... (n=1136)**

**In your example, the main person/you wanted:**



A typical story about survival can be illustrated by the example below:

### How to survive?

I went to Germany due to the poor economic situation of my six-member family. Our living conditions in Germany were good, but after fifteen months we returned to Macedonia. In our country, we are again faced with the same problems as before departure, but an additional problem was that the Center for Social Welfare did not want to accept our documents for social welfare benefits, because of the law. I am currently unemployed and collect plastic bottles to make a living with my family.

**Male (35-44 years old), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

Table 2. Reasons to go abroad

## ALBANIA

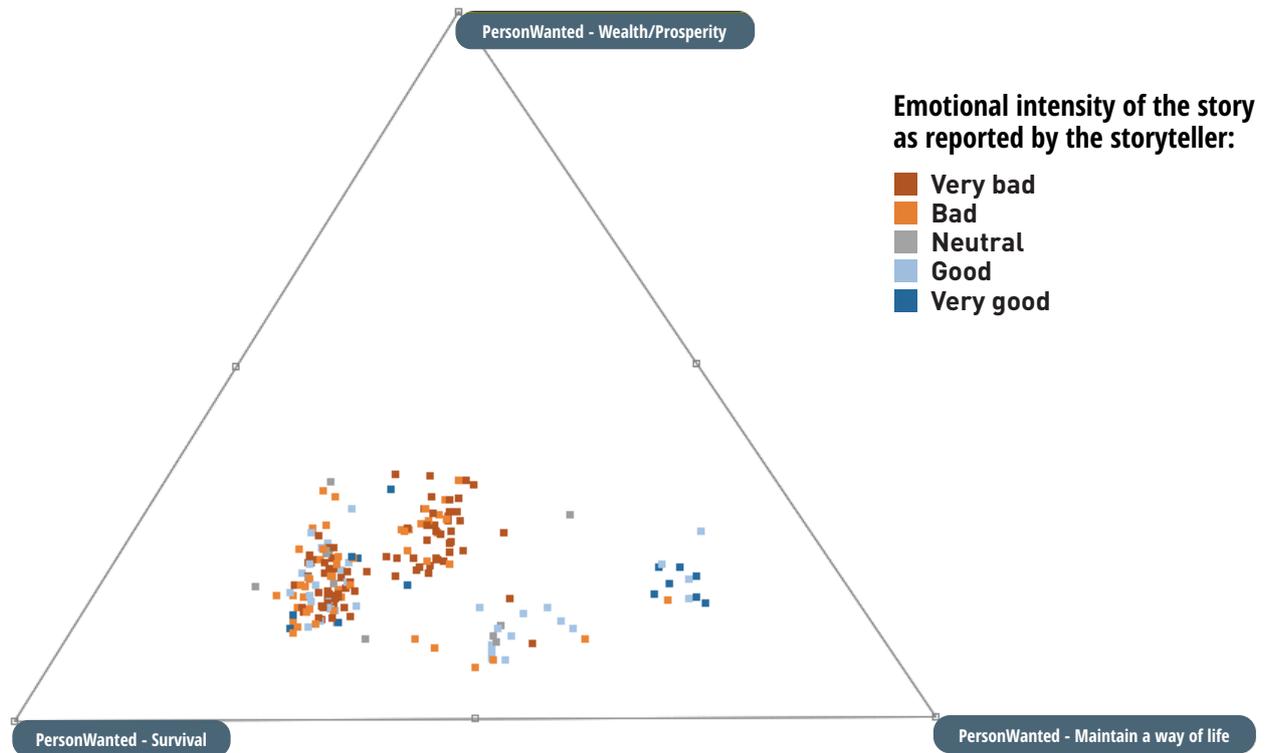


Table 2. Reasons to go abroad

## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

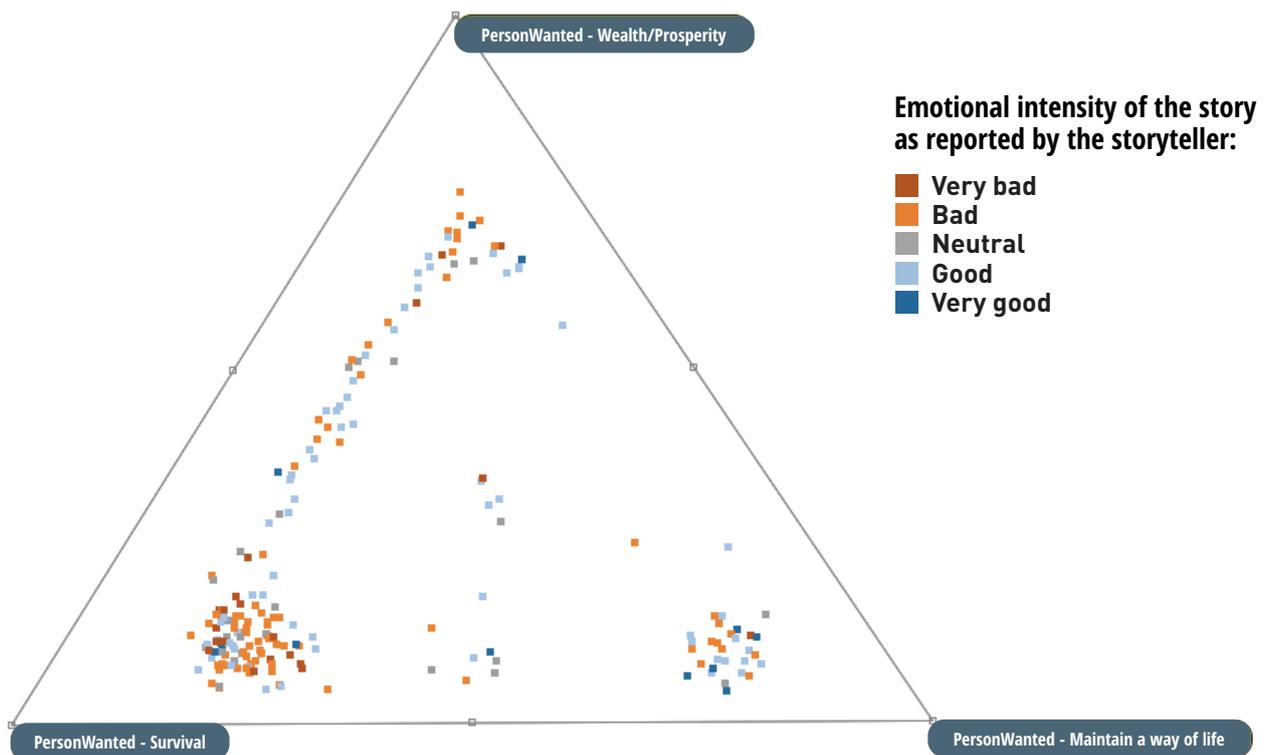


Table 2. Reasons to go abroad

## THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

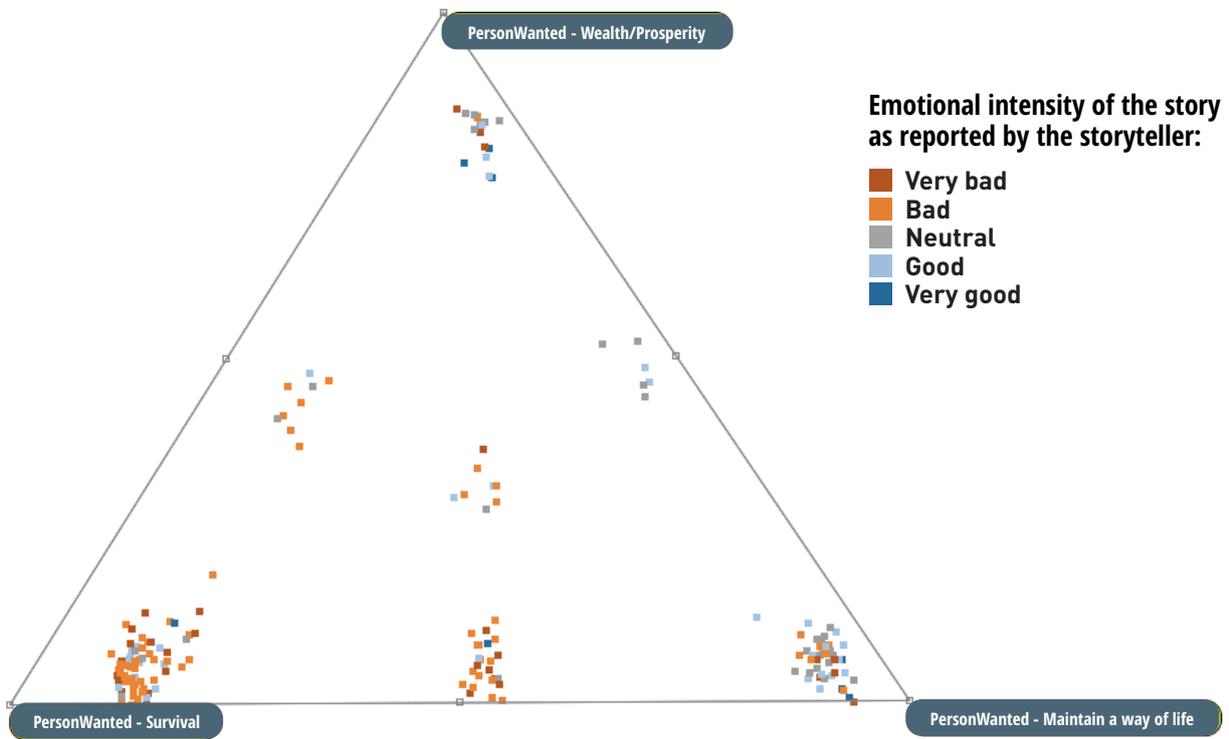
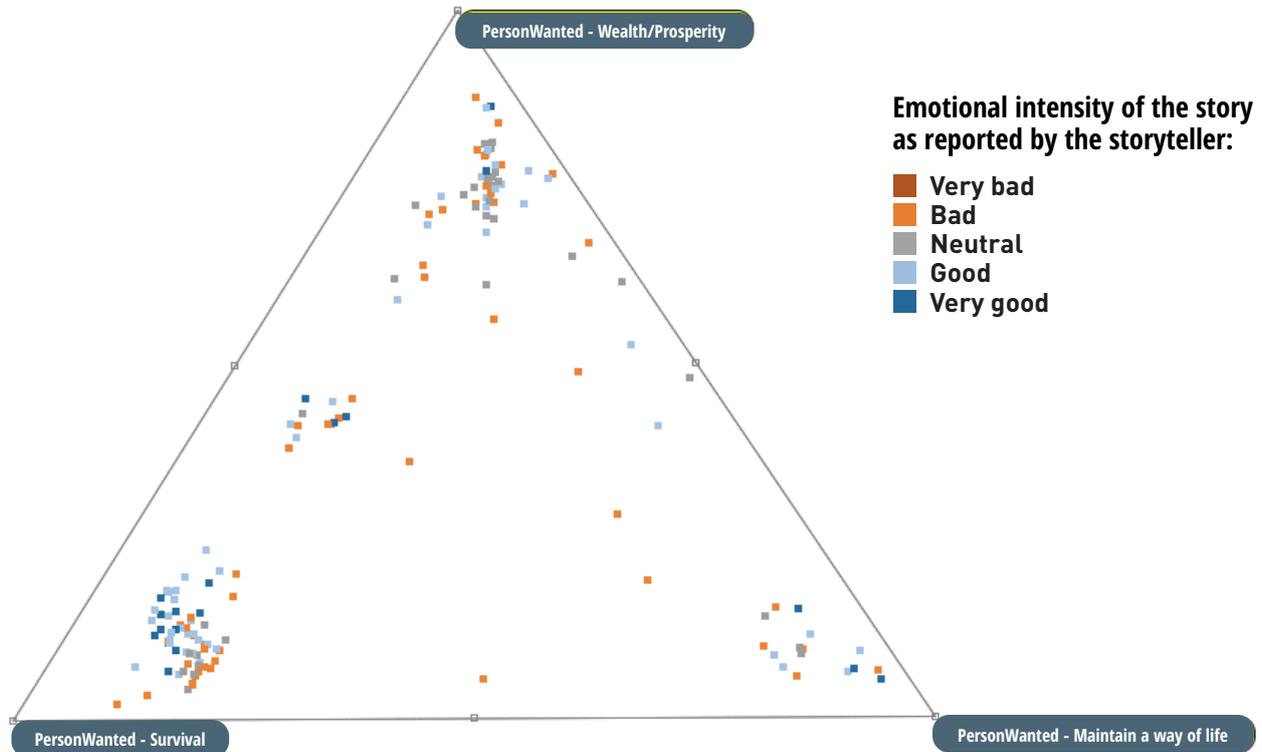
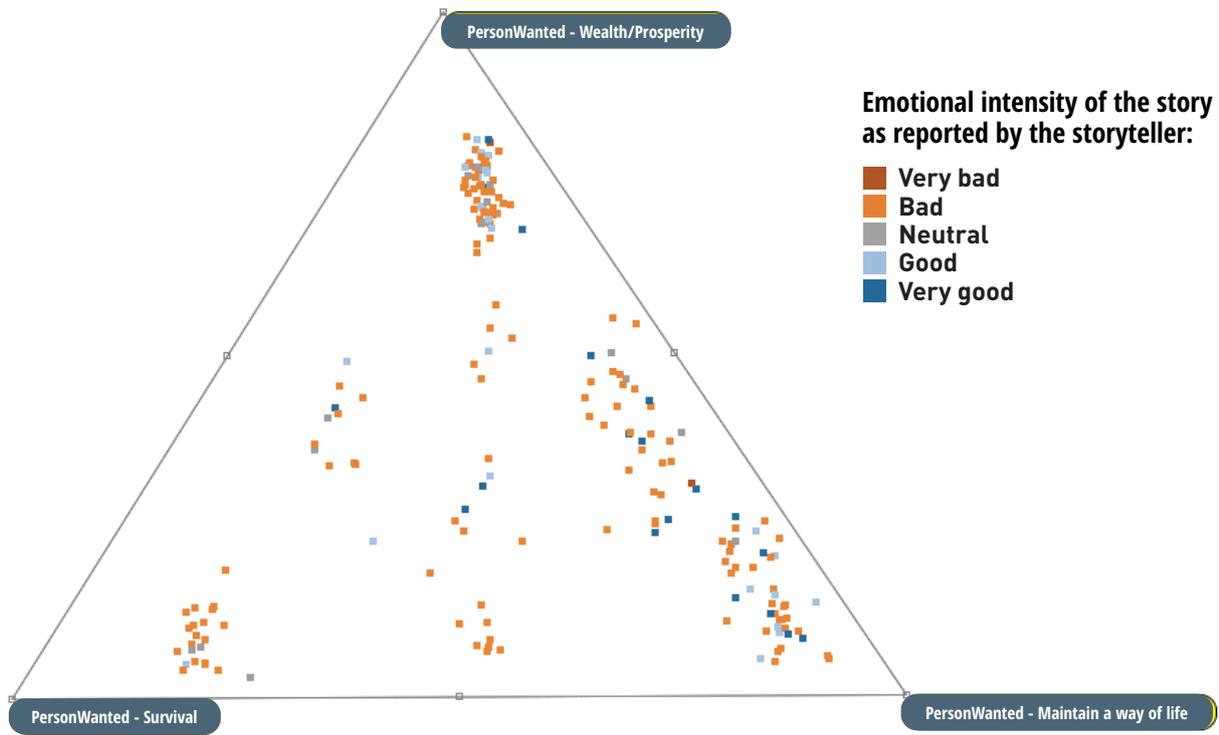


Table 2. Reasons to go abroad

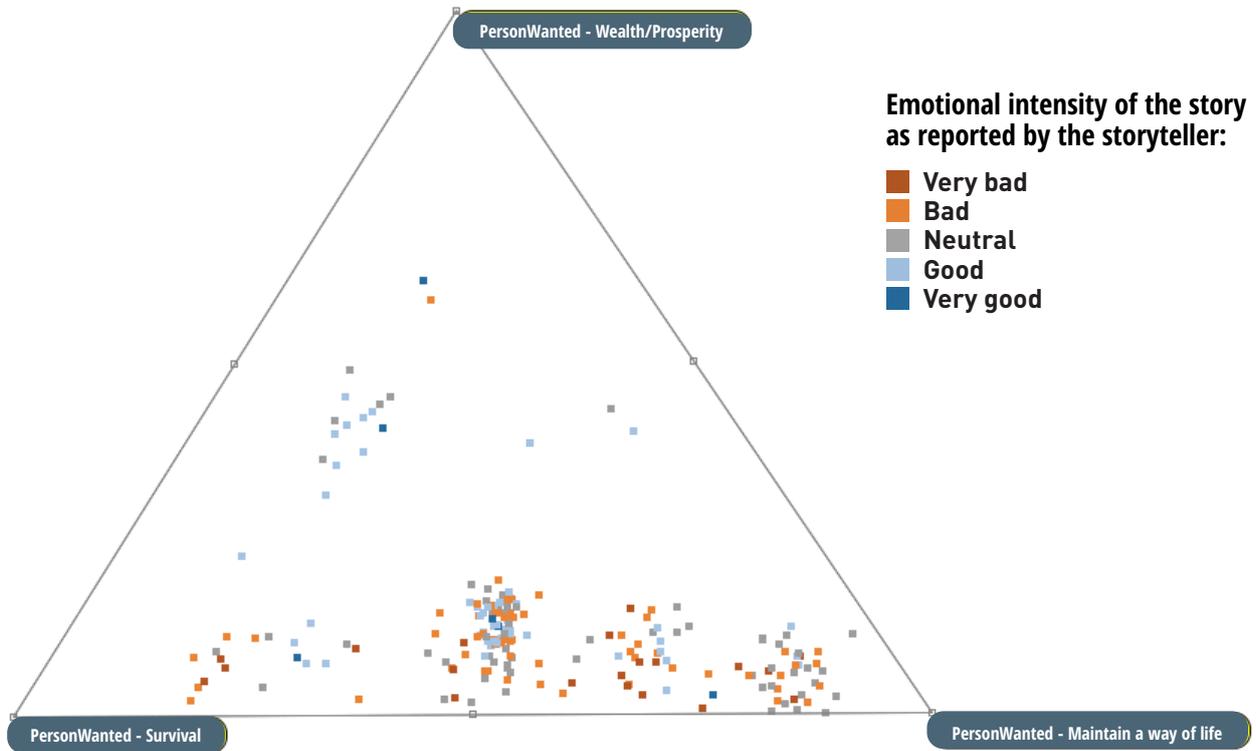
## MONTENEGRO



**Table 2. Reasons to go abroad**  
**SERBIA**



**Table 2. Reasons to go abroad**  
**KOSOVO**

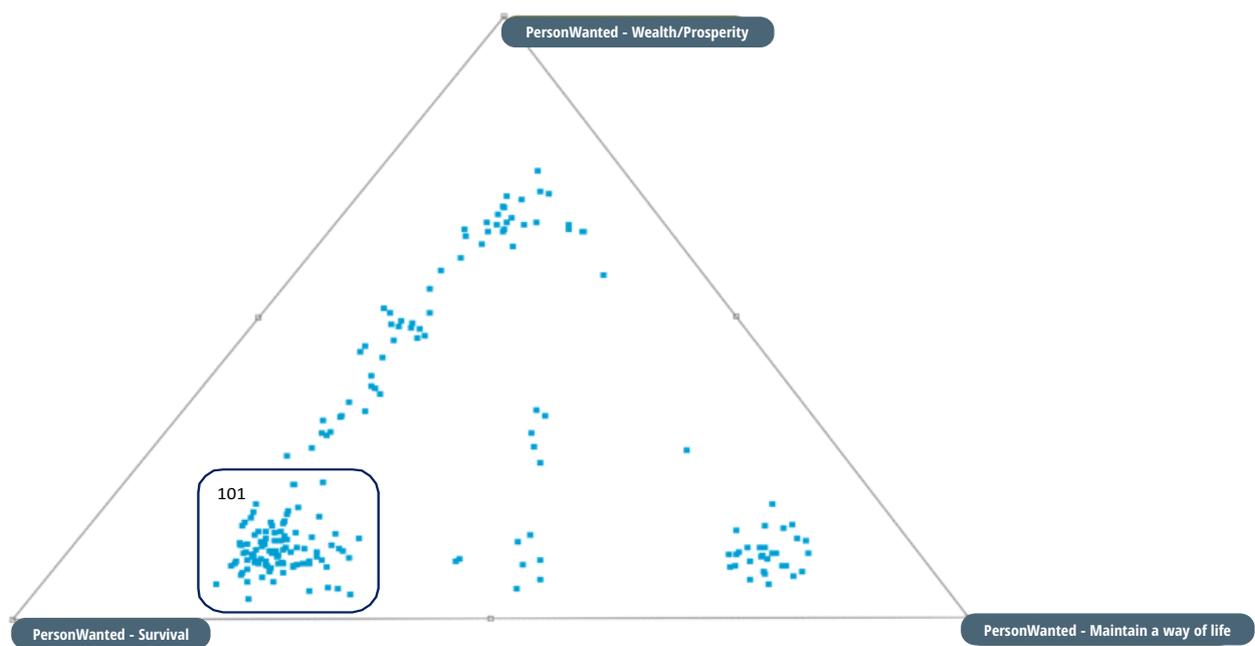


Destitute living conditions can also be a major push factor, as explained by a woman from Albania:

We are 4 families, living in two rooms. We are 15 people in total. We have no jobs; we only live from collecting garbage. In this situation, we went out to Germany, hoping to work, to buy a home. We travelled through Montenegro to Dusseldorf and got to a camp in Neuss. We spent the first week in Bonn. It was very good, the kids went to school, and the social institution helped us with food. Together with my husband, we joined a professional course that we finished in eight months. When left the "camp," we did not know the language well enough to communicate and to work. In the second year, we had the last interview and got a negative response - we were told to return to Albania and we agreed to go back. We came back to Albania. From the savings that I made in Germany, I paid off my debts. Now we are thinking of going back for asylum, because we have no support here. We are forgotten by the state, not only us, but all Roma.

**Female (30-34 years old), Albania**

**Graph 6a. Reasons to go abroad (Bosnia and Herzegovina, n=203)**



The fact that half of Roma storytellers in Bosnia and Herzegovina chose survival as a main reason behind the decision to leave the country indicates higher socio-economic insecurity compared to other Roma in Western Balkans. This is not surprising given that

Bosnia and Herzegovina has the highest poverty rates in the region, with Roma being a high-risk group in terms of poverty and social exclusion.

### **I cry at night**

I went because I got sick and tired of not having food to give to my children. Everyone went back and forth. They went again and again. I thought that I too should go with my husband and children. We were in Germany. In Berlin. At first, we were in a "camp," and later they moved us to a hotel in Berlin. I asked for Berlin, and they sent us there. We received social assistance, so we could buy food. It was good. Our children were not hungry. They had something to eat, and it was warm in our accommodation. Then we got a call and had to leave the country. We have nothing here. We came back, and the flood has taken everything away. We returned to a dump. The walls were all wet, all destroyed. We got no compensation. Others got vouchers for furniture. But we did not. Only recently I got 35 Bosnian Marks to treat my illness. This is not enough. My husband and I collect waste so we can feed the children. It is a very hard life. Sometimes I have nothing to give to children to eat. I cry at night.

**Female (30-34 years old), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

A story of a female returnee is a typical example of hardships experienced by Roma families before seeking asylum abroad and after returning:

### **Stop discrimination**

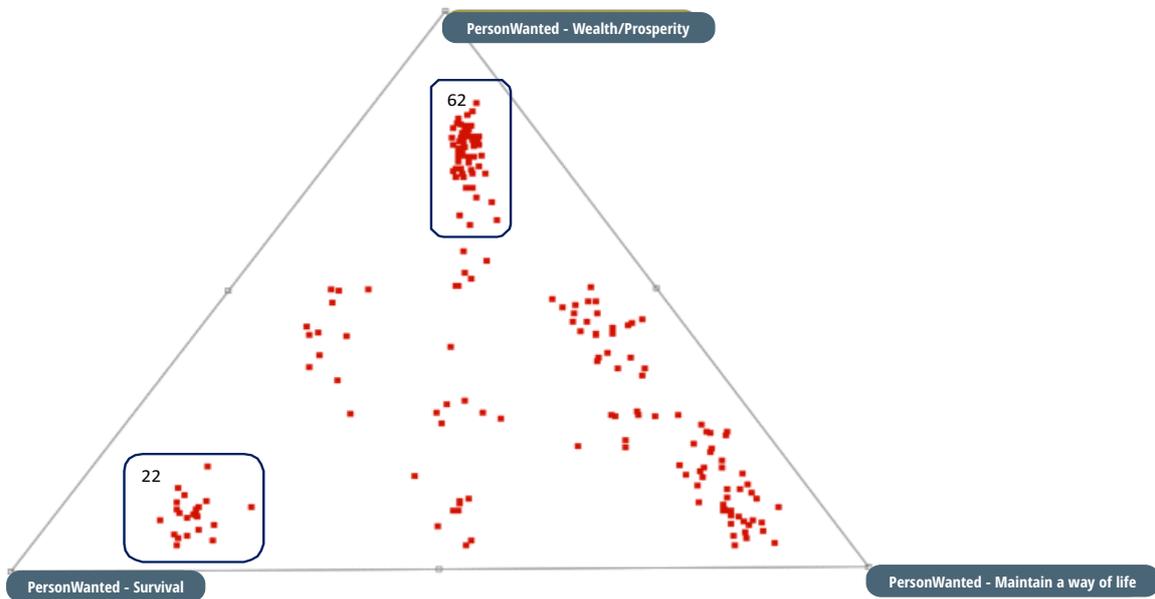
When I finished primary school and learned my trade as a baker, I looked for a job. I kept getting rejected without any explanation. I regularly signed on at the job centre and went to all meetings advertised, but I was never able to find employment. I decided to attend an economics school and use those qualifications to try to find a job. I tried in vain, but I didn't give up. I got an offer from a friend in Germany to work with him illegally. I went to Berlin to work with his scrap metal company. At first it was great, until I was meant to get my first pay check. They said they'd give me the money after I finished my three months. Three months went past, and no money. I couldn't even take breaks. I decided to speak to my boss to ask for my money. He threw 300 euro in my face and told me to leave for Bosnia and that that was enough for me, even though the deal was for 300 euro per month. I returned to Bosnia disappointed and offended. I could only apply to the job centre after six months. Luckily, an NGO offered me a job, and now I'm working successfully. To tell you the truth, I think there will always be discrimination in Bosnia.

**Male (20-24 years old), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

A story of a male from Bosnia and Herzegovina signals that discrimination is a mechanism of exclusion:

In contrast to other countries where survival and maintaining a way of life were the main themes, seeking wealth/prosperity was a more common feature in stories from Serbia (62 out of 195).

**Graph 6b. Reasons to go abroad (Serbia, n=195)**



**My country**  
 We got some money from government funds in Serbia, and my husband and I started our firm. We didn't have enough. The business failed, and we had to return the money. We claimed asylum, brought some money, returned the money we took to start a business. It's better to live in Germany, and we're used to it, but we returned to Serbia voluntarily. Now we're selling used goods at a market and educating our kids who also help us with work.  
**Female (35-44 years old), Serbia**

Seeking wealth or prosperity should not be necessarily interpreted that living conditions among Roma in Serbia are better than elsewhere. It may only indicate that Roma in Serbia are more aware of the need to improve their situation by seeking more prosperity rather than just aiming to survive or maintaining the current standard of living.

A few stories (22) about survival from Serbia reflect extreme poverty faced by Roma in Serbia.

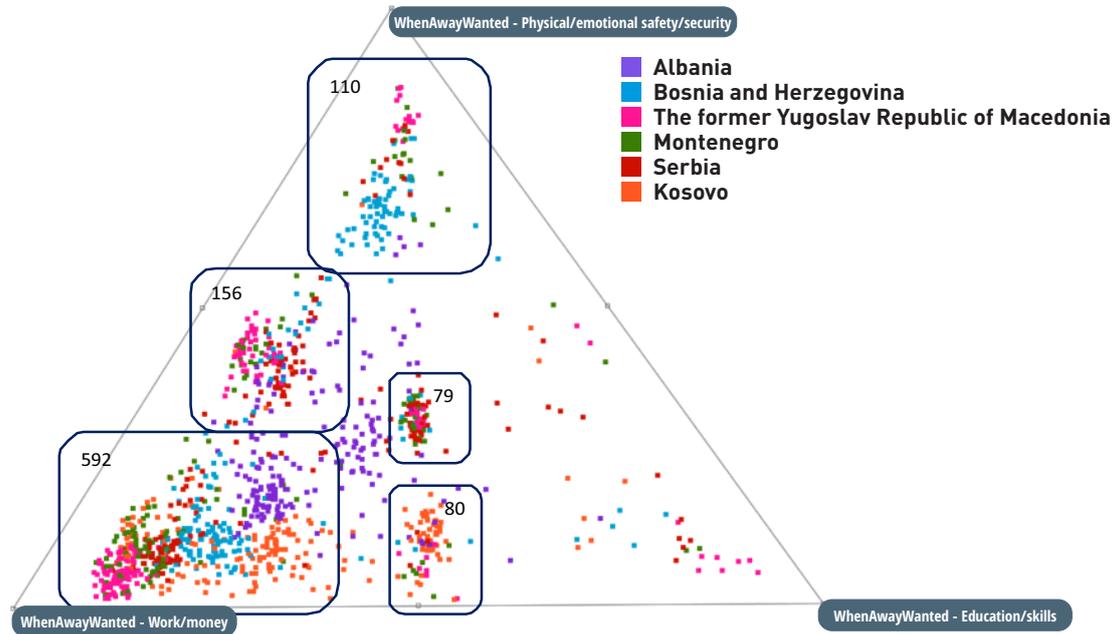
We get food packages from the Red Cross and fruits and vegetables from the food bank. We cannot get social assistance, because first we have to sort out the papers for children who were born in refugee camps in Sarajevo and Mostar. While we are handling this, children go to school irregularly. We have no firewood.  
**Female (35-44 years old), Serbia**

During their time abroad, all storytellers interviewed were mostly seeking work/money (592 stories) or work/money in combination with physical/emotional security (156 stories). This points to a strong interrelation between a need to ensure work/living standards and the need for physical or emotional security. It indicates that Roma in countries of their origin cannot find jobs/fulfil their socio-economic needs, but importantly, they also feel insecure and/or discriminated against.

A smaller cluster of stories (80) reveals that some Roma went abroad seeking work or money in combination with acquiring skills or education.

## Graph 7. In your example, when the main person/you was away, they were seeking... (n=1141)

When the main person/you was away, they were seeking:



### Have I lost my job or not?

One day I went to work and found out I lost my job. It was terrible news for me. I thought a lot about my wife and children at home waiting for me. I agreed with my wife to go to Germany, because our friends and family were there. We thought it was a solution. We applied for asylum, but problems started to come up when the migrant crisis started. We all had to go back. We registered with the employment office, and I also went to register with the Centre for Social Work. The trouble started when I had to prove if I quit or if I was sacked. It's been three months since I've been back, and they still haven't gotten back to me.

**Male (35-44 years old), Serbia**

The story from a male from Serbia indicates this insecurity and limited opportunities in his home country before leaving and after returning, while hinting at the impact of the migrant/refugee crisis on citizens from Western Balkan countries:

### Abject poverty

Abroad I finished my German language course, and I was ready to get a job in some firm and do honest work and make a living. But after 10 months of staying there, we were deported overnight. We came here without anything. They stopped our social assistance payments, and we have nothing to live off. We've been left to our own devices.

**Male (35-44 years old), Serbia**

There are very few stories about seeking education or acquiring skills abroad as the primary or only cause of migration. Importantly, there is a small cluster of 79 stories which is about seeking all three: work/money, physical/emotional security, and education/skills when abroad:

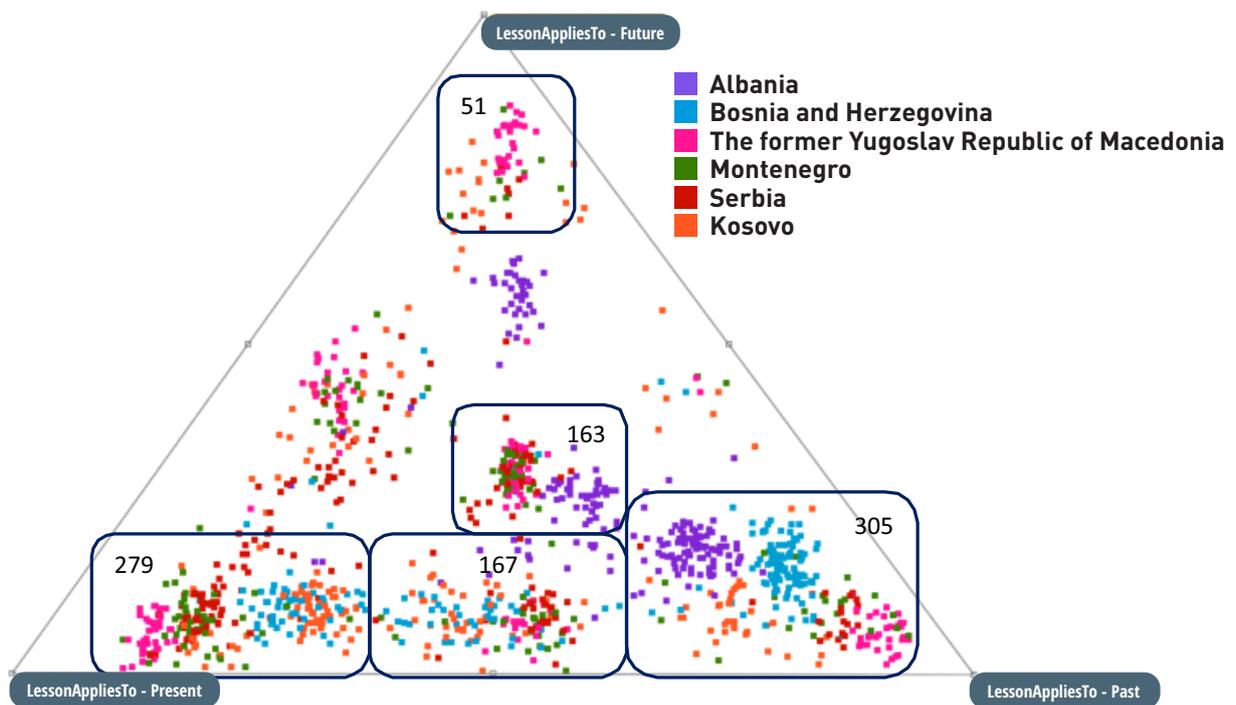
Overall, the stories show that socio-economic insecurity, in combination with physical and emotional insecurity, were the main reasons for Roma to go abroad in the first place. This strongly indicates a need for a combination of interventions that address socio-economic needs, as well as physical and emotional security.

# V. Facing the reality of return

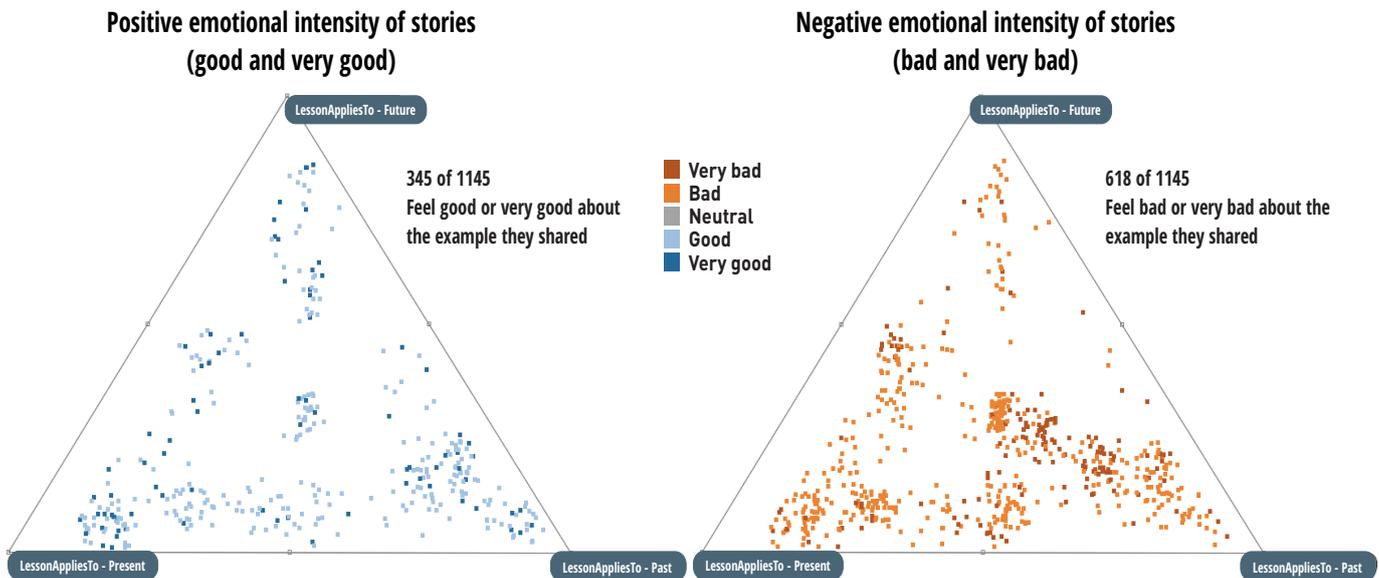
## LESSONS FOR THE PAST OR FUTURE?

The majority of the 1,145 storytellers think that the lessons from their stories about migration and return apply to the past and present. Only a fraction (51) of storytellers said that the lesson of their story is applicable to the future.

Graph 8a. Lessons of story applies to past, present, future (n=1145)



**Graph 8b. Emotional intensity of stories  
(separated by positive and negative emotional intensity)**



Storytellers indicate that stories about return (be they of positive or negative emotional intensity) do not apply to the future. This may mean that Roma returnees are either preoccupied with present-day life or they do not plan on going abroad only to be

returned again. In both scenarios, the fact is that they are under pressure: finding a way to survive and develop coping strategies against physical and emotional insecurity/discrimination does not leave much time to plan for the future.

## Main themes in the stories

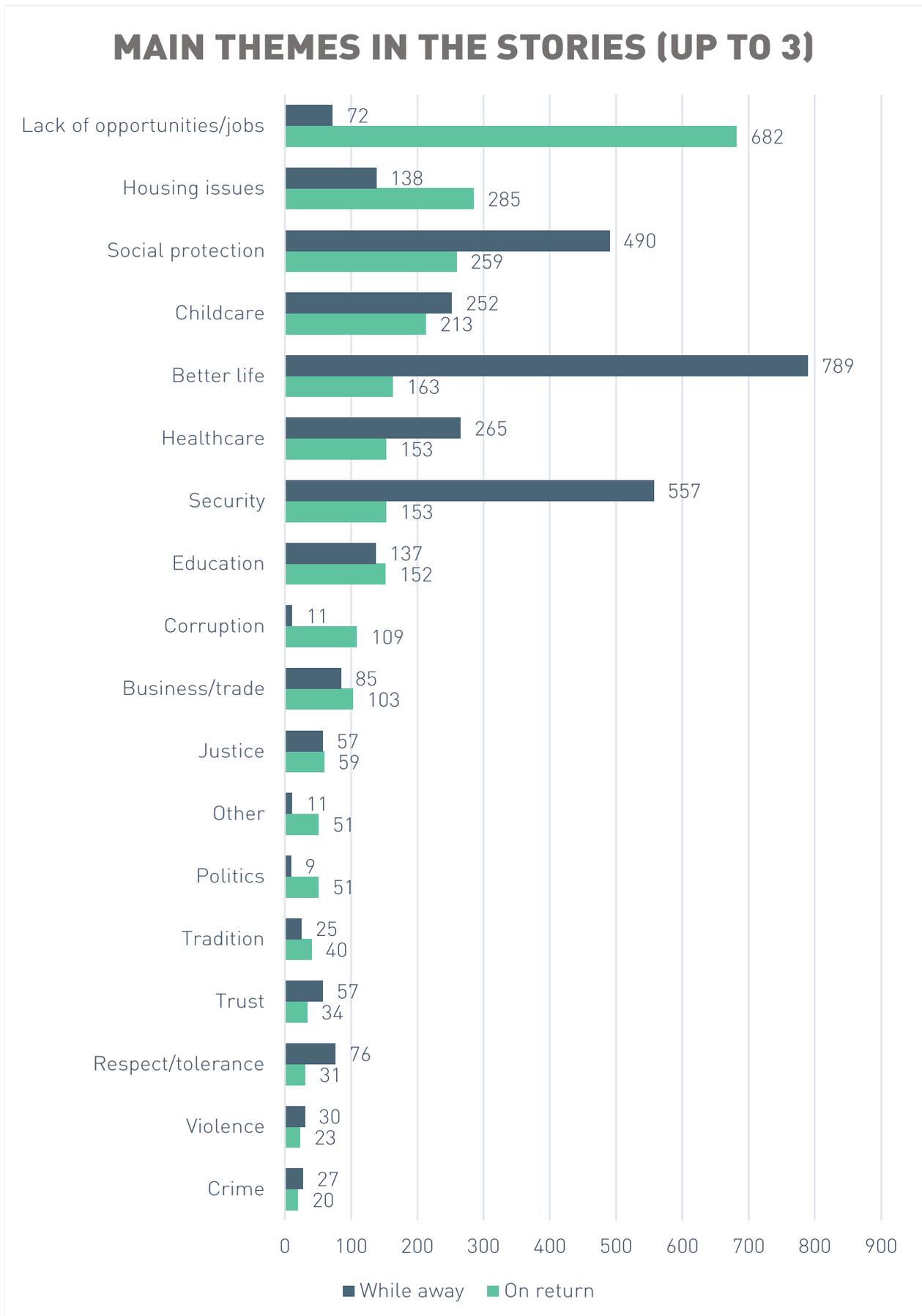
The top five themes in the stories while away are:

1. Better life;
2. Security;
3. Social protection;
4. Healthcare;
5. Childcare.

The top five themes in the stories upon return are:

1. Lack of opportunities/jobs;
2. Housing issues;
3. Social protection;
4. Childcare;
5. Better life.

**Graph 9. Main themes in stories while away and upon return**



Stories about experiences abroad tend to focus on having a better life, having a sense of security, as well as benefiting from social protection, childcare, and healthcare services. The fact that security (physical/emotional) comes as a second theme while living abroad is crucial. A recent report<sup>26</sup> published by the Fundamental Rights Agency found that one of the issues faced by Roma in the EU is prejudice and discrimination. For the Roma in Western Balkans dealing with possible prejudice, insecure travel, the probability of being turned back in the EU offer more security and more prospects to improve living conditions than remaining in their country of origin. A number of stories reveal that being in a reception centre while seeking asylum also offers a certain level of security, particularly in terms of having a safe, warm space where food is provided and utility bills are taken care of. These experiences are in contrast to a few stories about the lack of security

when abroad and in reception centres, particularly when there are a number of refugees/migrants from different backgrounds.

More than half of the storytellers addressed the lack of opportunities to find work in their home countries, difficulties in caring for children and improving living conditions, as well as a lack of access to housing, healthcare, and social protection services. The lack of employment opportunities is a particularly pronounced topic in stories upon return. It appears as if being abroad has intensified the realisation of how difficult it is to find a job in the home country.

Although a relatively small number of stories upon return are about business/trade (103), they are important since returnees seemed to have gained certain “capital” (social and financial) that can be invested in their home countries to improve their standing.

#### **I've succeeded in life**

I returned from Vienna. I sell used goods I got there. I've opened a bakery, and you can live a good life, even here.

**Male (45-54 years old), Serbia**

However, younger generations may have higher aspirations and lower levels of trust that the situation at home will improve in the near future, as told by a young person from Serbia:

#### **The Future**

We returned a year ago. We live well. My parents work in shop. I go to a technical high school. I plan to continue my studies and later go abroad, because I don't think things will get better here. My peers don't go to school, because they don't even have money for food.

**Male (15-19 years old), Serbia**

Corruption is another feature found in some stories (109), although not many, meaning that unfair treatment and limited opportunities make it difficult for Roma to improve their situations. Storytellers mentioned the issue of politics in 51 stories in connection with returning to their country of origin. Taken together with corruption, this could be contextualised as how Roma view the efficacy of local institutions in delivering services. Finally, the theme of tradition, which appears in 40 stories, could be indicative of how Roma who lived abroad, perhaps

for a longer period of time, change their attitudes about social norms prevalent in the localities of their origin. These shifting attitudes can have a profound influence on reintegration into communities upon return as well as an impact on communities in cases where these returnees can influence the social fabric of both Roma and non-Roma communities.

<sup>26</sup> Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey: Roma – Selected findings. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), November 2016. Accessed November 3, 2017. <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings>, 2016

The stories below illustrate complex issues that Roma face upon return, which are sometimes worse than when they left.

#### **We do not have a roof over our heads**

2001 here was terrible, we had no work and a sister kept calling to come Germany to try and apply for asylum. Our child was 3 years old, and we had no money for food or other things we needed. This was the right solution. We went and it was beautiful, it was not too difficult to spend a few days in a reception centre, because we were sure that we would get our own apartment. And we did. My child went to school, we worked, and we had money. We even sent some money to my family back home. That was a life. One day, the police came to us and said that we had seven days to leave Germany. It was a shock to us. We had nothing, could not do anything, we were forced to return. It is very bad here now, there is no work, my child does not know the language, does not go to school as they do not recognise our papers. What shall we do now? We do not have a house, are staying with my family, and do not have money for wood for heating.

**Female (35-44 years old), Serbia**

#### **Discrimination**

I left the country, because I was discriminated against on a national and political basis. I lost my job, because I am Roma and because I didn't have political protection. After coming back, I'm even more discriminated against, because I can't even get social protection and am left alone find some kind of job.

**Male (35-44 years old), Serbia**

#### **The life experience of a Roma returnee**

When I went to Berlin I was afraid not knowing what it would be like for me there, but when I saw how they welcomed me, gave me all the attention I need, not caring about my nationality or colour, at that moment I hoped never to leave. I spent my days without any problems and that was my entire time in Berlin – about a year. Now I'm in Bosnia and I've been going around the Ministry for Assistance to Returnees where I've run into all kinds of people. Some of them understand returnees, others don't want to. There were people who thought I made money in Berlin – they asked for cash for them to help me. So it took a long time until I was able to repair my house to be able live in it again.

**Male (45-54 years old), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

#### **Damned in Germany**

When I arrived from Germany, I was so hurt to see my house full of water. My house was empty, with broken windows. When I came home, my daughter fell ill. Me and my wife took her to a doctor. The doctor said she is under a lot of stress, and we should take her to talk with another doctor. We went to another doctor, and now my daughter is taking medicine. I have nothing left, I sold everything. The situation is very difficult for us here, we have no job, no house. Now I know the meaning of the old saying: "I left as a horse, and came back as donkey." And I would make the same mistake again, because it is lot better there than here.

**Male (did not disclose his age), Montenegro**

#### **The need for housing**

We went to Germany because of extreme poverty. My sisters in law helped us, because we had no money. My husband wanders around garbage cans, we have no work, and my children don't go to school. The main reason for leaving is that we have no home, and that my children don't go to school. We were forced to come back, it wasn't our decision.

**Female (35-44 years old), Kosovo**

#### **Problems everywhere**

Like many other Roma, me and my husband decided to move too. Our son was the reason to do this. He was born with a problem in his legs. We went to Frankfurt, (stayed) in a camp, but we were not given any help even though the boy's condition could be seen. In Albania, he could not be cured. In Germany, nothing happened. After three months in the camp, we had a negative response. Some people in the camp helped us for the ticket. In Albania, we have debts and loans. What else to tell you!! Bad life! Is this a way to live? There like here, the Roma people are not welcomed.

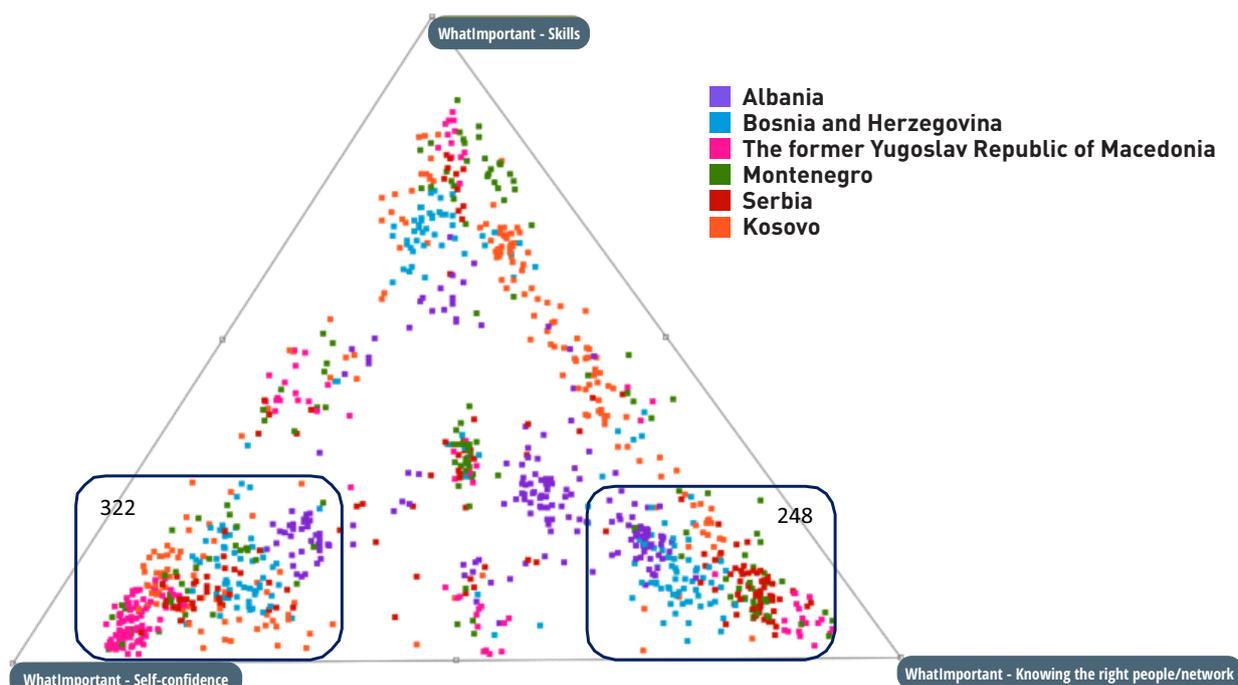
**Female (15-19 years old), Albania**

# WHAT DO STORYTELLERS CONSIDER MOST IMPORTANT?

Most storytellers (322) expressed that the most significant trait of a person who decided to go abroad was self-confidence. The second-most important characteristic, according to 248 stories, was being connected and being part of a network. This was most prominent among Roma from Albania.

**Graph 10. Most important trait in deciding to go abroad (n=1026)**

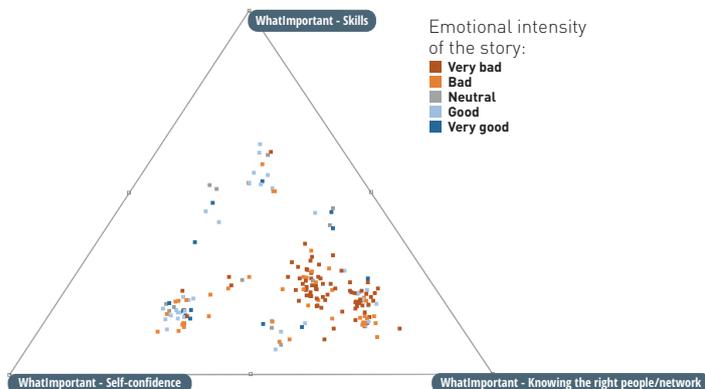
**In your example, what was most important?**



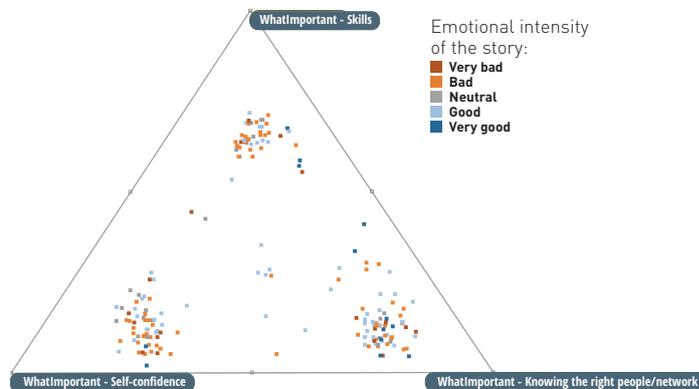
**Table 3. Most important trait in deciding to go abroad**

Emotional intensity of the story as reported by the storyteller:

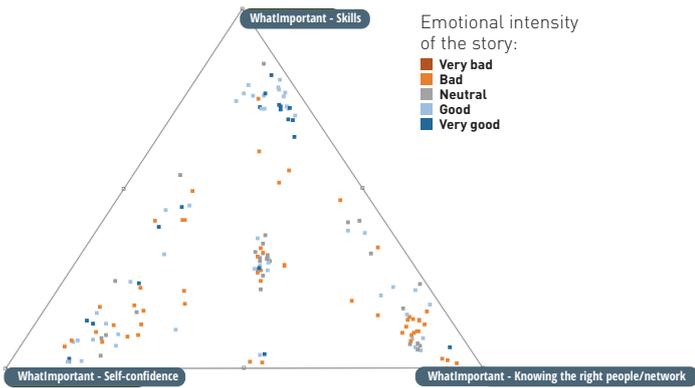
## ALBANIA



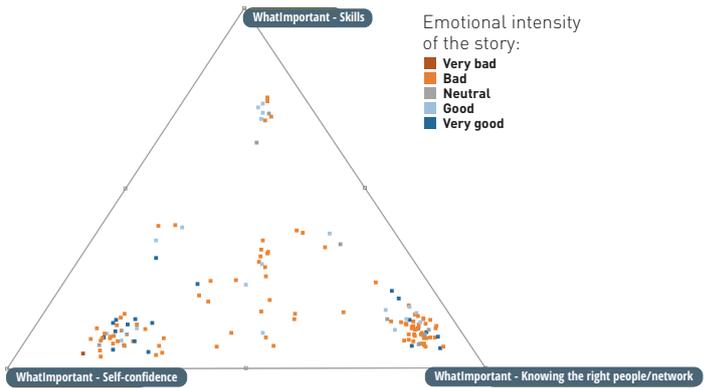
## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



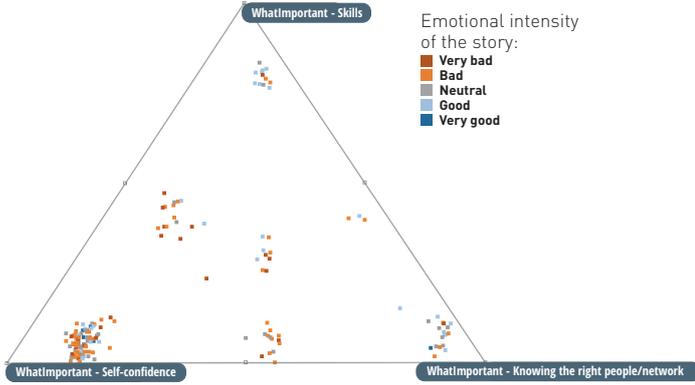
## MONTENEGRO



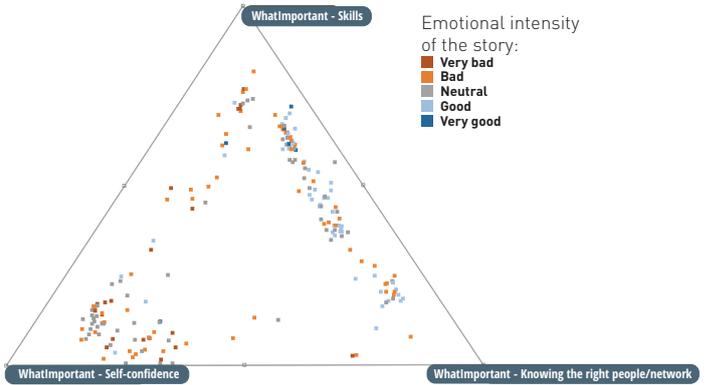
## SERBIA



## THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA



## KOSOVO

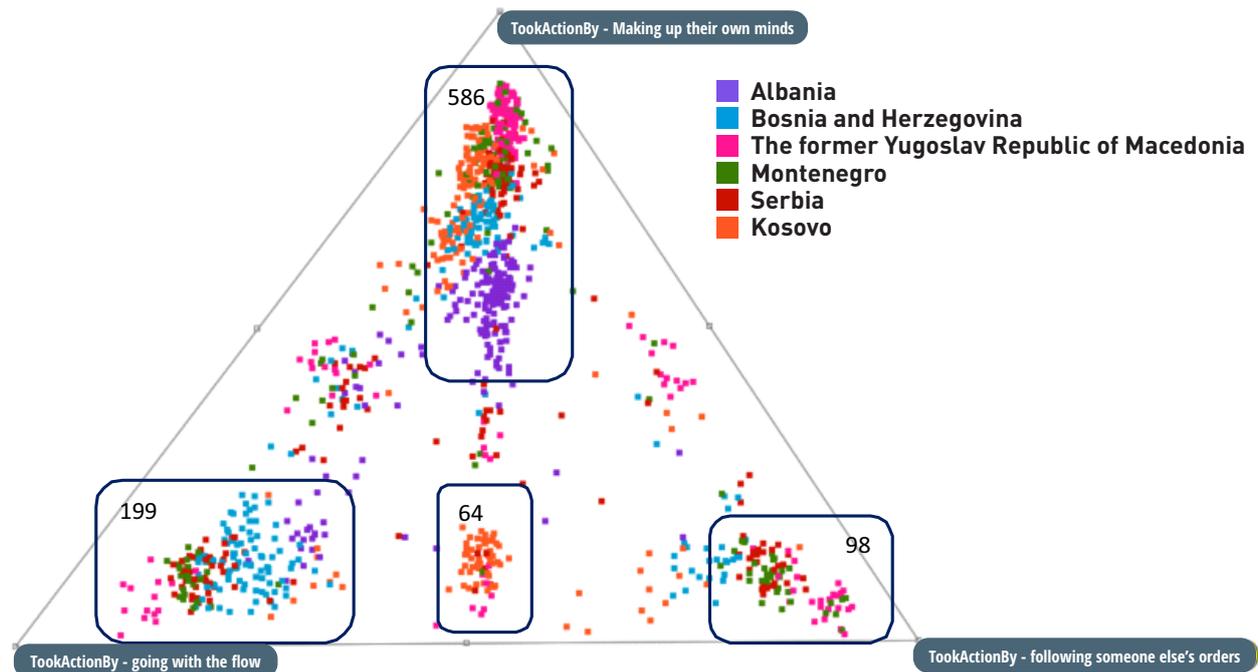


# DECISION-MAKING

In the majority of stories (586), a decision to take a certain action is made by individuals making up their own minds. However, the stories often reveal that decisions to go abroad are influenced by poverty, deprivation of basic needs, and limited or no opportunities in improving living conditions.

### Graph 11. How the decision to go abroad was made (n=1127)

In your example, the main person/you decided to do something (general action) because



Certain narratives reveal the complexity involved in making a decision. For example, a male from Albania felt forced to go to Germany to escape poverty and provide for his family, however, his decision was partially influenced by the fact that other people were going to Germany.

#### **For a better life**

I worked in the greenery near the Municipality of Durres, but I did not earn enough. I have four children. My spouse was without work. I often borrowed food at the store, but I decided that I cannot keep doing this. I heard stories from people who left searching for a better life. So, I decided to take the whole family and seek asylum. I had to borrow money for the journey. We began the journey in Vlora, because it is easier there to pass through the border. From there, we went to Brindisi and took a bus to Frankfurt and taxi to a reception centre at Ginzen. We registered there. We submitted our passports and stayed for one month. Then we were transferred to Singelhaj. We stayed in a house for eight months. We got social assistance and food. During that time, we had four interviews. They found us a lawyer, and we paid his service with our savings. In the fourth interview, they told us that we should leave Germany. So, we agreed to return. We flew to Albania by plane. All social assistance was suspended. In Durres (Nishtulla), I was abandoned by the municipality. I looked for a job but could not find anything. My wife collects recyclable waste to feed us. We want to go again, but we do not have money to pay for the travel.

**Male (45-54 years old), Albania**

A small number of storytellers have followed someone else's orders, for example, younger people obeying their family members (i.e. parents).

#### **Lost education but still success**

I stayed in Sweden with my parents for 18 months and had no right to go to a regular school. After returning, I had big problems with my enrollment in primary education, and I actually lost two years of my education. Thanks to my parents I managed to take a class exam before a commission and to make up at least one year, but still lost one year. Nevertheless, now it is OK and I continue with my education. My recommendation is that children should not suffer and drop out of school because of the poor economic situation of their parents, i.e. leave the country and go as asylum seekers. The state should focus on improving the economic situation of Roma, both in terms of education and employment. At the moment, I'm attending graduate studies in law in Budapest.

**Female (20-24 years old), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

## **MAIN SOURCES OF INCOME**

The main source of income in half of the stories (534) came from formal or informal jobs. Of all the stories, 177 were about remittances as the main source of income, and an even smaller number of storytellers (131) stated that government support was their main source of income. This clearly runs contrary to the popular opinion that Roma rely on support from central and local level authorities. Micronarratives

show that the majority of Roma returnees are working (most often informally), and earnings from their work are their main source of income.

Graph 12. Main sources of income (n=1138):

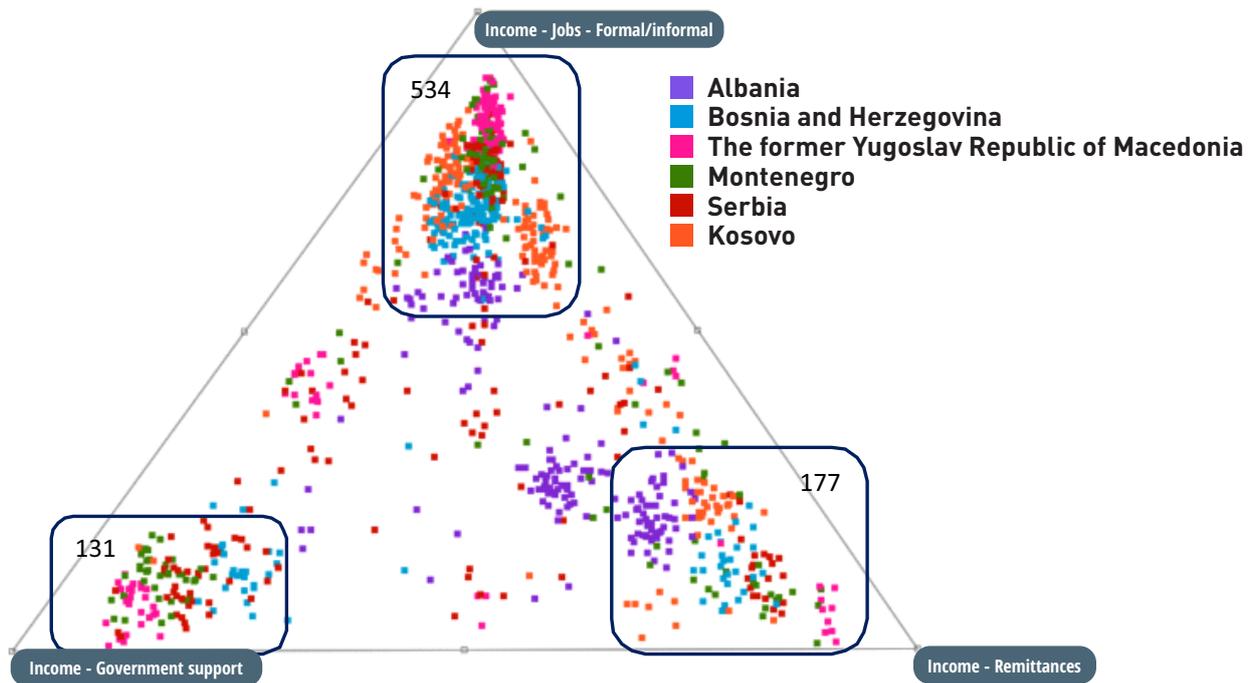


Table 4. Main sources of income (by country and territory)

**ALBANIA**



**THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**



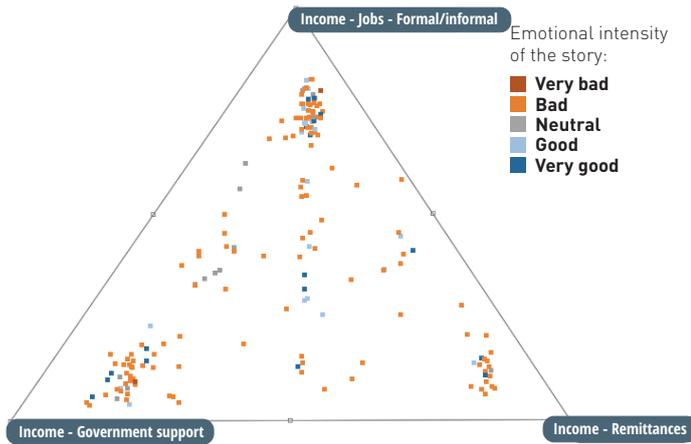
**BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**



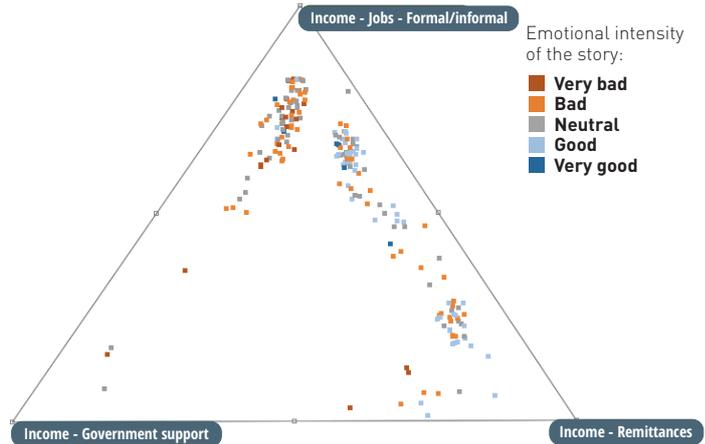
**MONTENEGRO**



## SERBIA



## KOSOVO



In stories from Kosovo and Albania, government support as a source of income is virtually non-existent. Patterns in Kosovo point to a combination of two sources of income: remittances and informal/formal work, which by large would correspond to an overall pattern of sources of income for the general population. Albanian stories are to an extent similar to those from Kosovo, though more clustered in the middle of the triangle, possibly indicating that there is more of a combination of income sources.

Stories from Bosnia and Herzegovina show that people mostly rely on only one source of income: either income from formal/informal jobs, government support, or remittances. In most narratives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, formal/informal jobs are the main income source.

Montenegrin stories are somewhat similar to those from BiH, although there is a pattern indicating a combination of incomes from formal/informal jobs and remittances.

Remittances seem to be the least important source of livelihood in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Interestingly, a combination of sources in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia shows a weak link between remittances and informal/formal jobs, and a somewhat more pronounced - but still weak link - between government support and informal/formal jobs.

Micronarratives from Serbia suggest diversified sources of incomes, and, compared to other countries, it appears that government support plays a role as a source of income. The pattern points out to links between two sources of income. The more

pronounced is the link between government support and formal/informal jobs. However, the link between formal/informal jobs and remittances is weaker and less common.

Storytellers from Bosnia and Herzegovina describe government support as a source of income as “bad,” suggesting difficulties in accessing them and/or their inadequacy. Similar conclusions can be drawn in the case of Serbia, while the opposite is the case for Montenegro, where stories about government’s support are labelled as “good.” Almost all stories about sources of income in Serbia are marked as “bad,” implying that Roma experience difficulties finding jobs, an instability in income, as well as a low/inadequate amount of income from work, government support, and/or remittances.

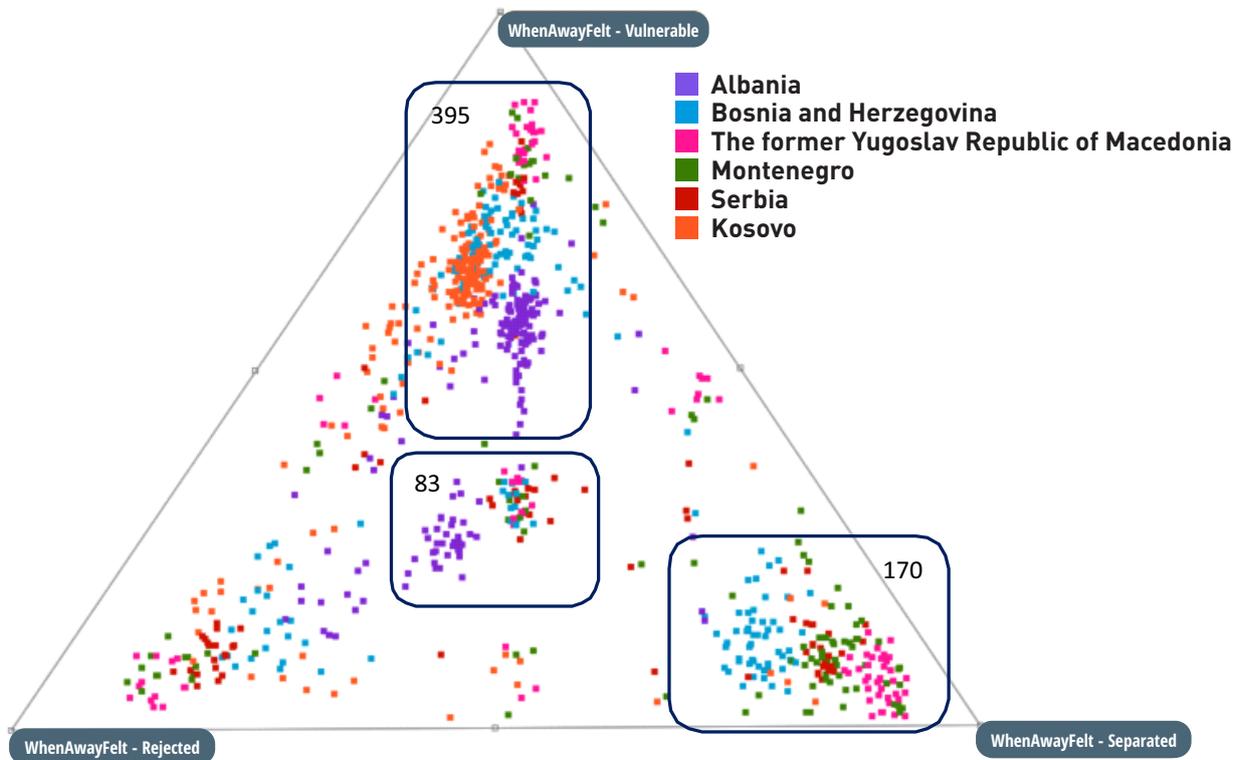
Overall, these micronarratives suggest that government support is the most limited and least-used income source everywhere, except in Serbia. Instead, most incomes come from formal and informal work. Efforts of Roma to derive income from work remain largely invisible to themselves and to the outside world. This is largely due to the fact that there are not many written contracts or records about the work either from Roma or from their employers as they pay no social security contributions. On the other hand, official statistics regularly record social transfers made to Roma, making them visible to the public. In countries with a high poverty rate among Roma communities, Roma tend to apply for more social programmes, meaning that the share of Roma as users in these programmes may seem high. This contributes to the misconception that Roma are a drain to otherwise limited social welfare funds.

# LACK OF SENSE OF BELONGING ABROAD AND AT HOME

In 848 out of 1,175 stories, returnees did not feel a sense of belonging while in the EU (experiencing feelings of vulnerability, rejection and/or separation). Upon returning home, 1,041 returnees felt vulnerable, rejected, and/or separated.

**Graph 13. Feelings of vulnerability/rejection/separation while away (n=848)**

When the main person/you was away, they felt:



Out of 848 stories, 395 indicate that Roma felt vulnerable when abroad. The reasons for vulnerability can be aggravated by the wish to speed up the asylum application process, such as paperwork. This leads some Roma to engage “legal experts,” who may take advantage of them and charge relatively high fees for a prolonged period of time, as is the case of this returnee from BiH:

A long time ago, I spent some time in Germany. I had to come back home because of family problems. After some time, I heard that Germany was again accepting asylum applications from Bosnians. So, I bought tickets for the whole family to go there. When we arrived, I got a lawyer to prepare our application to speed up the process. This cost me 500 euro for his first advice. We got some papers in a short period of time, and the lawyer advised me that I should sort out the remaining papers as soon as possible. So, I decided to keep paying him to help me out. I was paying his fees for four months. Then I realised he is taking our money and was doing nothing. I spent all the money on him that I had saved in BiH and brought with me. Luckily, social transfers were quite generous, so we were able to live normally. We spent nine months in Germany, before we were returned back. My wife was eight months pregnant at the time. Now, when we are back, feeding one more child is an additional problem. I was a fool to listen to people who were telling me that we would be able to stay longer in Germany if my wife was pregnant. It would have been better if I just stayed in BiH.

**Male (35-44 years old), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Others try to find alternative ways of dealing with paperwork. Such alternative strategies do not yield results, but rather push a person into a circle of irregular migration. A few stories point to a possible proliferation of “mediators/helpers” who charge their “services” to those wishing to go abroad and seek asylum.

#### **German documents**

I went to Germany with my wife and children to seek asylum. I spoke some German, so I was able to manage. We spent more than a year in Germany before we had to go back. I brought with me some merchandise to sell here and some money, but that did not last long. So, we went again to Germany to seek asylum. My wife gave birth there, and I found a German person who attested that the child was his. He charged 5,000 euro for this. I gave him 2,500 euro when we made an agreement, and the remaining amount was due when we get papers. But I did not take into account the fact that my wife and I are not legally married. At the end, my wife and children got the papers, and I was sent back. What can I do now? I go to Germany every three months to see my wife and children. I stay a few days, never for a longer period of time, so that the authorities there do not realise what is going on. If they knew, they may deport my wife and children. See what I did for those German papers.

**Male (30-34 years old), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

There are a number of situations in which women can be abused as explained by the following story:

#### **I was happy and thought it will be better**

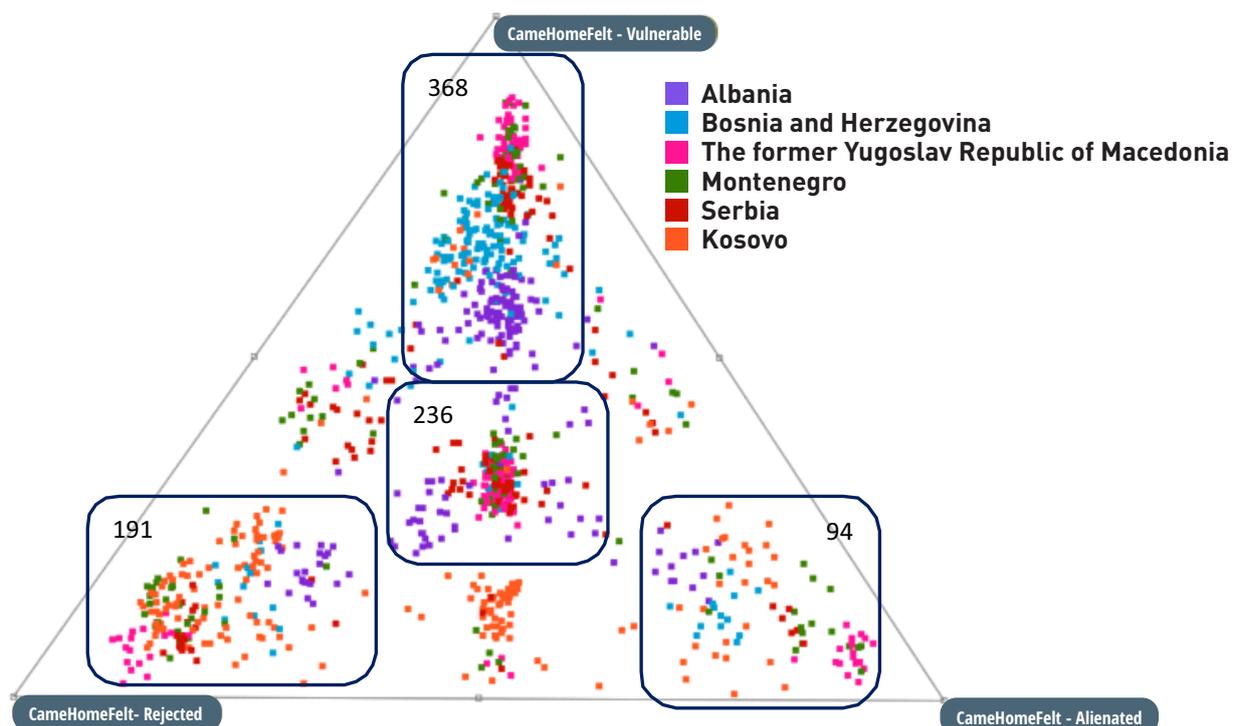
I went to Germany with my parents to seek asylum. We spent six months there. I was happy when we left for Germany, I thought we would live better. We were accommodated in a reception centre, but we slept on the floor, on futons. We had nothing but food. There was a huge kitchen in the reception centre where everyone ate at a certain time. I was often hungry in the evenings, until I went to talk with the “bosses” in the centre. I know a bit of German, so I could communicate with them. They asked me if I wanted to work. I agreed, so I got a job as a cleaner. Still, I used to cry every day. One morning, while my sisters were in the bathroom, a man we did not know came in, and I heard my sister scream. I ran into the bathroom and pulled my sister away. We reported what happened, but no one believed us, until the same thing happened to a Turkish lady. A big fuss was made then, and the man was thrown out from reception centre. I was so happy when we got papers that we needed to leave Germany. When we returned back home, I enrolled in school again. We have nothing, but we are at home.

**Female (15-19 years old), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Stories of Roma from Serbia, Montenegro, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia showed that Roma from these countries felt more separated while abroad than vulnerable. Feelings of separation while abroad were rare among Roma from Kosovo. This may indicate that migrants from Kosovo migrate together with families or join their friends and families abroad, experiencing fewer feelings of separation.

## Graph 14. Feelings of vulnerability/rejection/separation upon return (n=1041)

When the main person/you come home, they felt:



The collected stories indicate that most returnees feel vulnerable both abroad and at home. In a significant number of stories, the storytellers expressed a combination of alienation, vulnerability, and rejection (236 returnees), followed by rejection (191) or alienation (94).

### What shall we do now?

We spent 17 years abroad. We lived well. My wife and I were working, children went to school. We had a life, friends. We felt cursed when we had to come back. I do not know what to do here, where to start from. We have no documents, nowhere to live, the roof is falling on our heads. The children are depressed, they do not know the language. The school does not want to recognise their education from abroad. There are no jobs here, and we do not know what to do next.

**Male (45-54 years old), Serbia**

The reported feelings of vulnerability, rejection, and alienation, or combination of all three among Roma returnees, imply that Roma returnees face significant psychological obstacles upon returning to their home countries. This then has a direct effect on their prospects of successful reintegration.

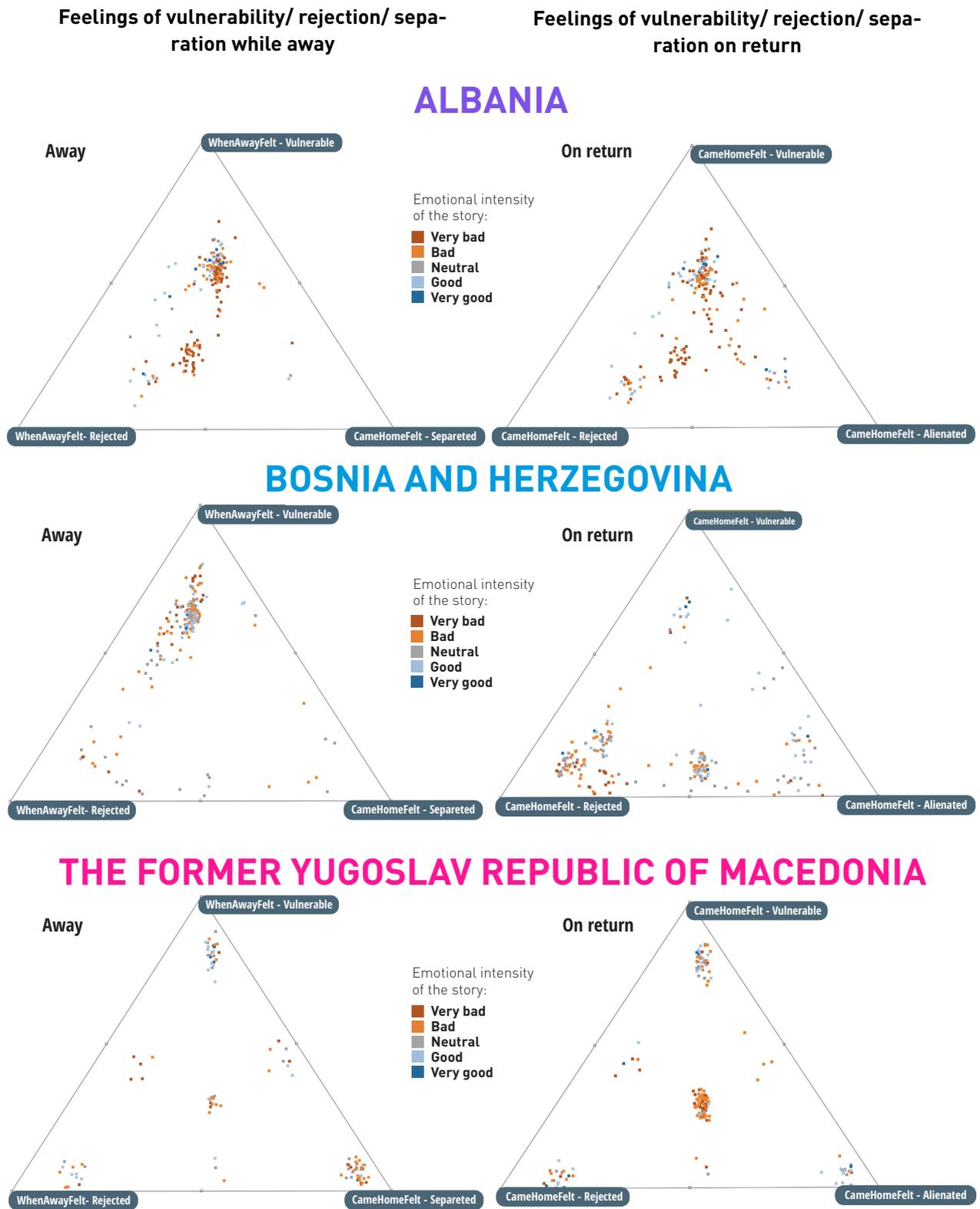
In the example below, the boy said he did not feel rejected, vulnerable, or separated when abroad, but reported feelings of rejection upon return:

### I am a nobody

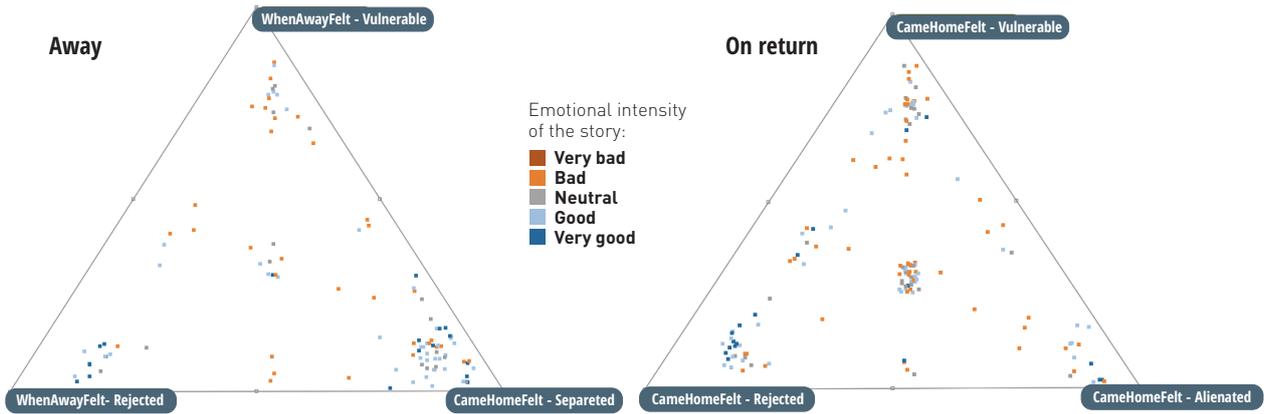
We left, because we had no conditions for a life. First to reception centre, then to a flat. It was excellent there. I went to school, I had friends, and teachers were good to me. When I returned to Bosnia, I heard that my teachers were looking for me, because we did not sign out of school. Teachers objected to this action where we were just taken out of school and went away. Upon return, I did not continue my education, because I was late for the beginning of the school year, and I could not enter. And school here did not want to recognise the period I went to school there. I still want a chance to continue schooling. I have no friends here. I have nothing. In Germany, I received praise and here I am a nobody and nothing.

**Male (15-19), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

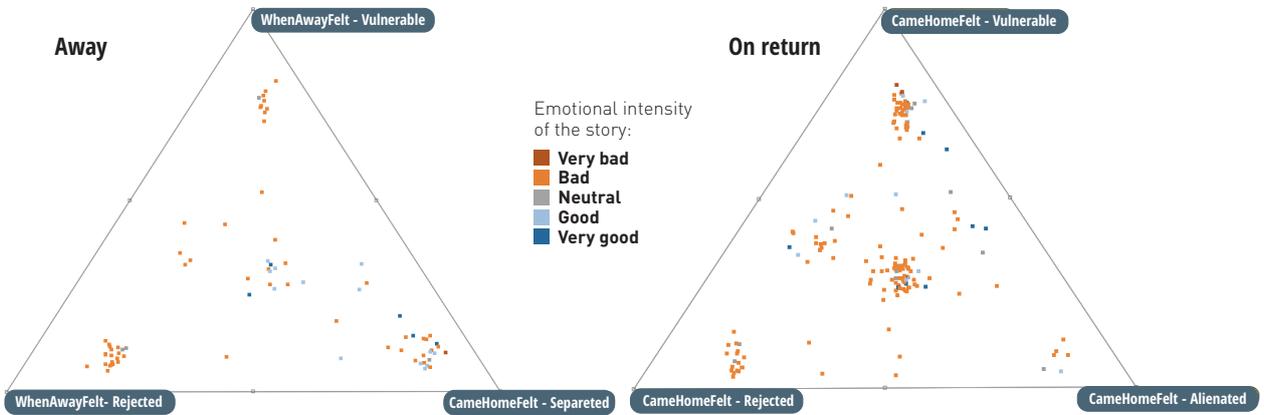
**Table 4. Feelings of vulnerability/rejection/separation while away and on return**



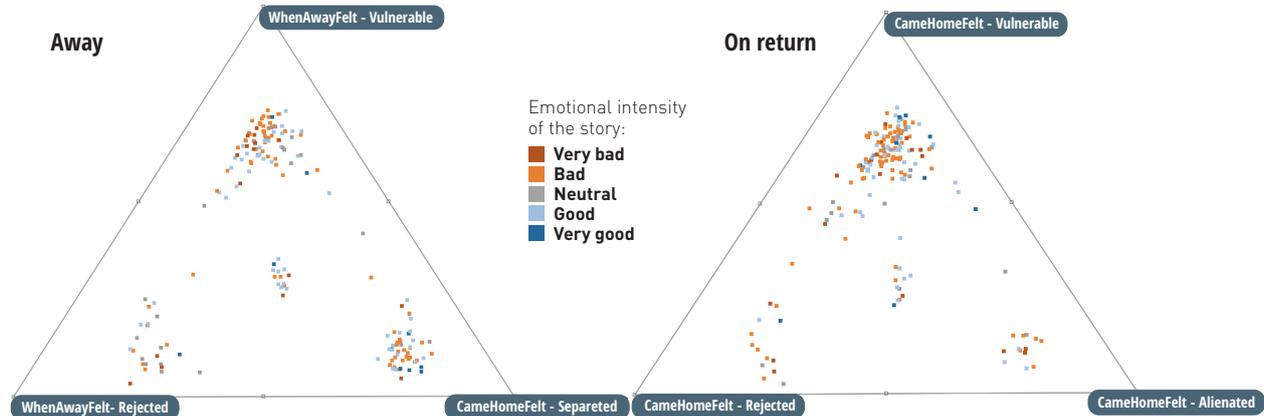
# MONTENEGRO



# SERBIA

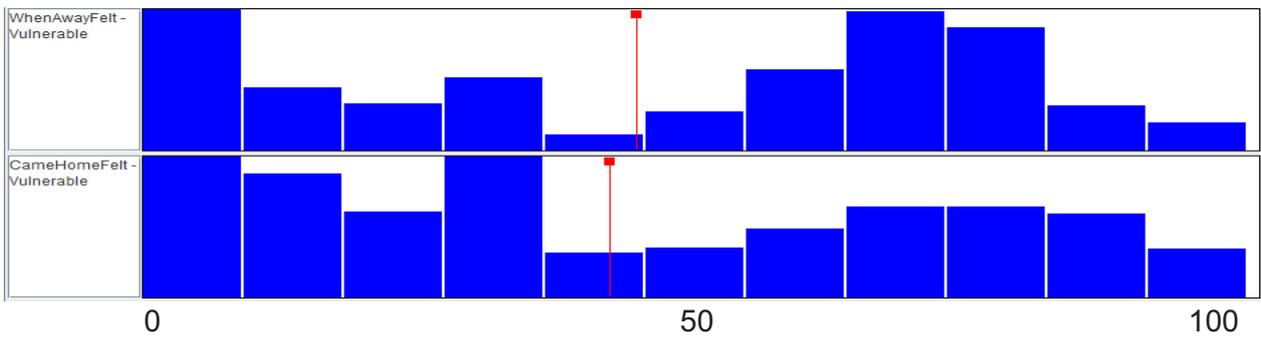


# KOSOVO

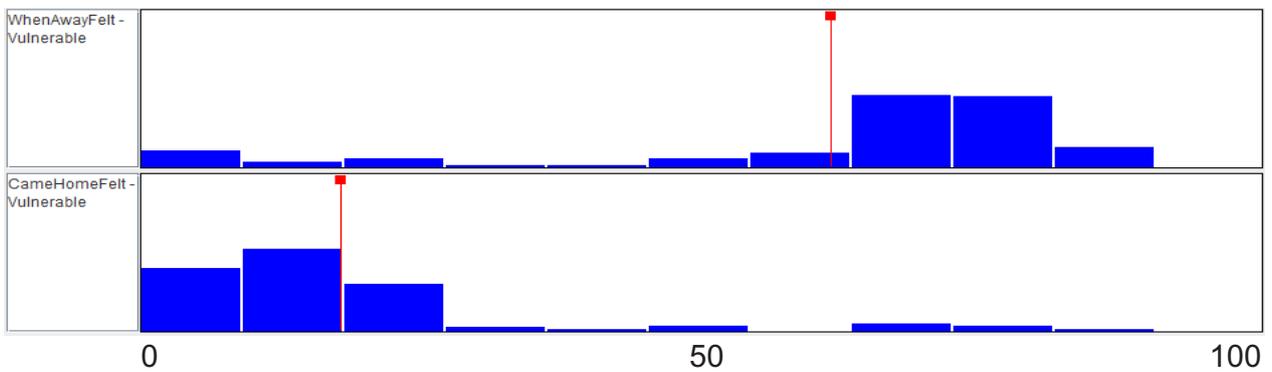


Returnees felt vulnerable both at home and abroad, however, the returnees in Kosovo felt far more vulnerable abroad than when they returned.

**Graph 15a. Vulnerability felt by returnees abroad (top) and upon return (bottom)**



**Graph 15b. Vulnerability felt by Kosovo returnees abroad (top) and upon return (bottom)**



Nonetheless, Roma returnees in Kosovo felt very vulnerable abroad but felt rejected and alienated upon return.

**A difficult experience**

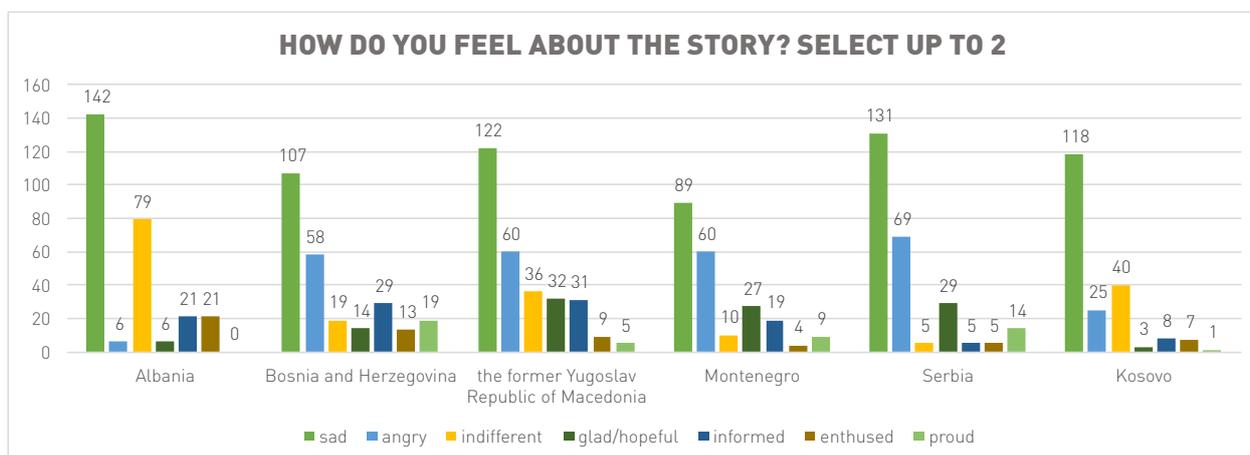
I went to Germany in the fifth month of 2016 for a better life and my kids got registered in school. Sometimes I missed Kosovo. In Germany, I had no family and did not know anyone. We stayed for a while, but together with my wife we decided to come back. With our arrival in Kosovo my wife gave birth to a son and I am still without work. The food needs are barely met from the social assistance we receive, even though I sometimes work informally.

**Male (30-34 years old), Kosovo**

# HOW STORYTELLERS FELT ABOUT THEIR STORIES

Storytellers were asked to reflect on their feelings about their stories/examples they shared with the collectors.

**Graph 16. How storytellers felt about their stories**

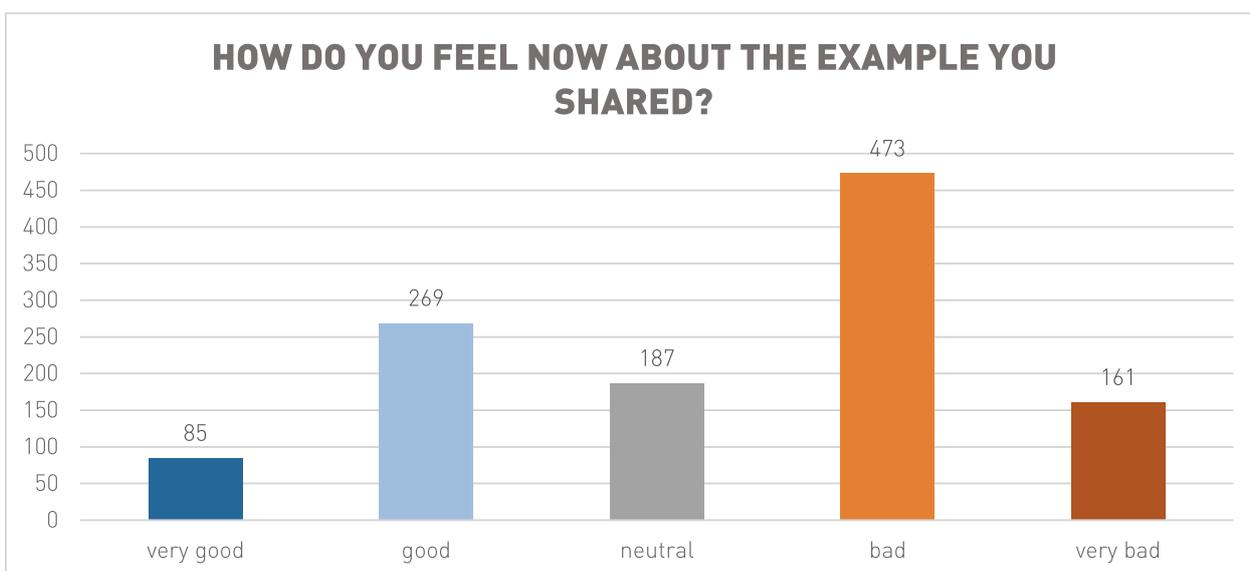


More than half of all storytellers (709) reported feeling sad about their stories, with 278 reporting feelings of anger.

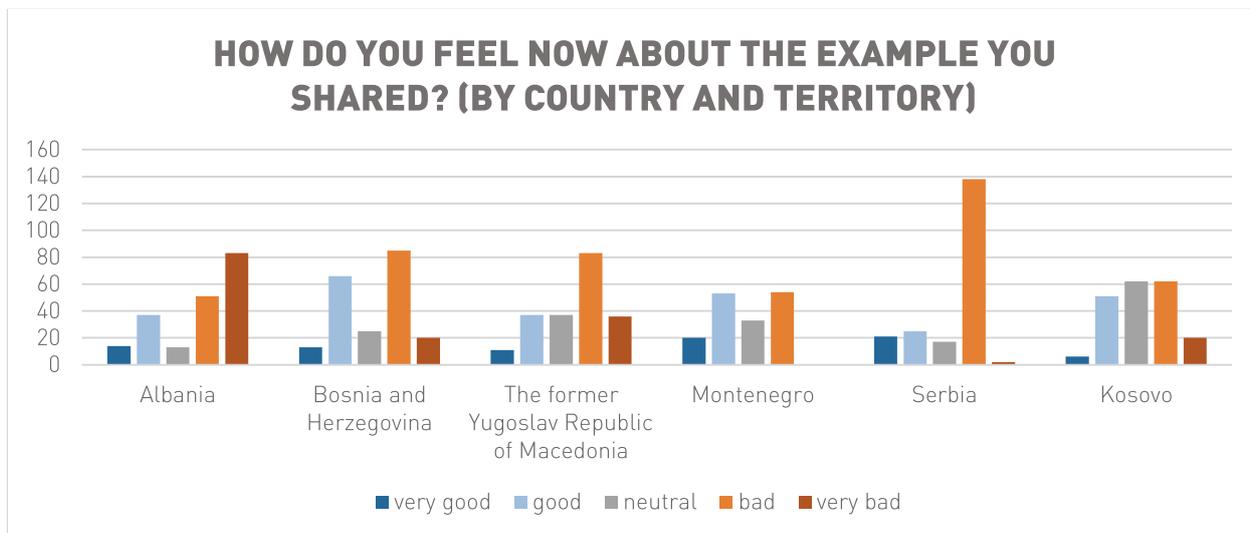
However, a number of storytellers (189) felt indifferent about their narratives. Feelings of indifference in addition to sadness and anger may indicate the hopelessness Roma feel about their situation.

While feelings of sadness are predominant in all countries, anger felt along Roma in Serbia, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Bosna and Hercegovina is also significant.

**Graph 17a. Current feelings of storytellers about the story they shared (n=1175)**

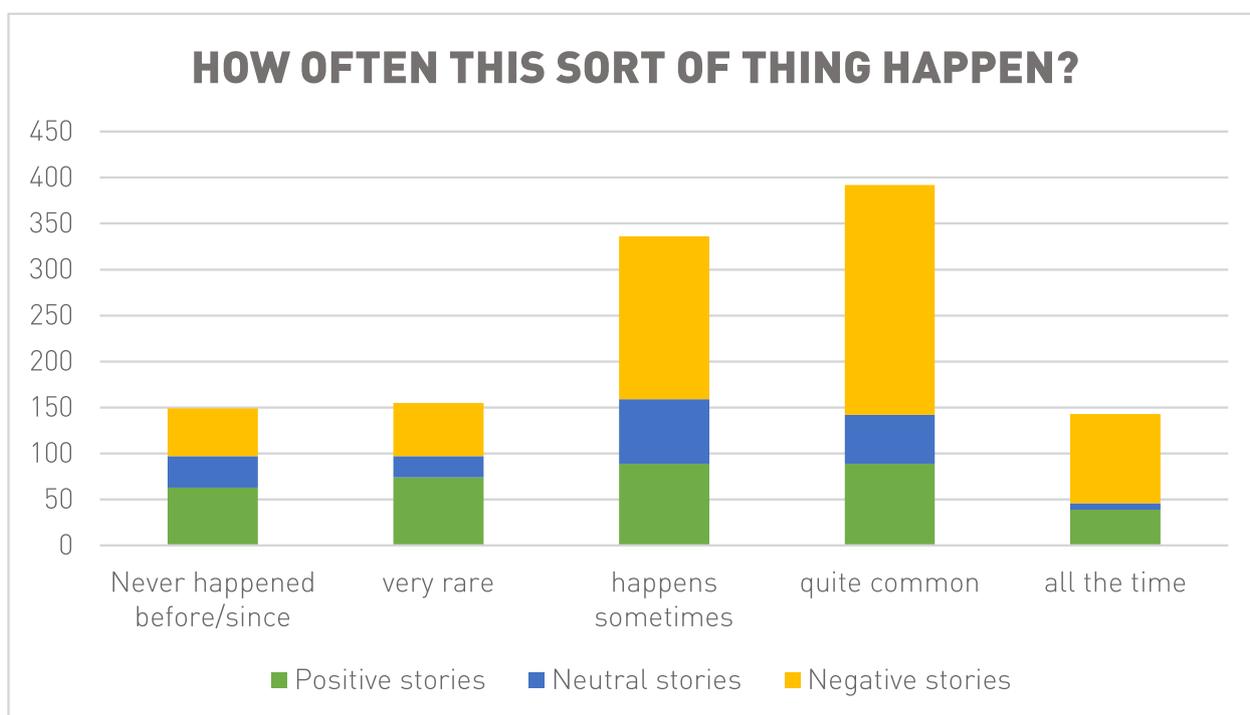


**Graph 17b. Feelings of storytellers about the example they shared (by country and territory)**



Given the choice to reflect how the 1,175 storytellers feel about the example they shared, more than half (634) had negative feelings. This is in correlation with the stories themselves: most were about negative experiences Roma had before leaving their country and after return.

**Graph 18. Opinion of storytellers on the frequency of events in their stories(n=1175)**



- out of 1175 storytellers, 392 (33%) storytellers consider that the events in relation to returning to their country of origin happen “quite often,” while 336 (28%) storytellers consider issues discussed in their stories occur “sometimes.” 143 (12%) storytellers think that the events they experienced happen “all the time.” 304 (25%) storytellers consider that experiences from their stories are very rare or never happen.

# VI. Return is a setback

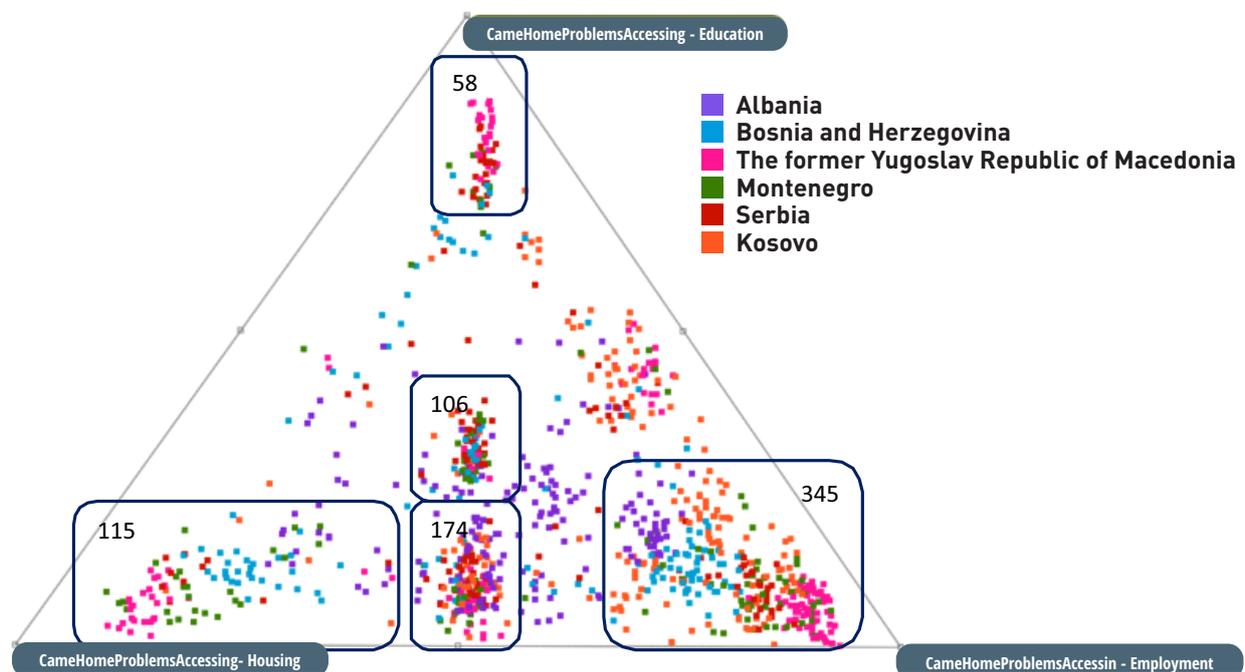
## FACING PROBLEMS UPON RETURN

Out of a total of 998 stories, the majority showed that Roma faced problems in accessing housing, education, or employment upon their return from abroad. In Kosovo, virtually all Roma returnees experience these problems (199 out of 201 reported having these problems). Accessing employment upon return was a major challenge in 345 stories (34%)

of Roma returnees. As the second-largest problem, 174 narratives (17%) revealed problems in accessing housing in combination with employment. A number of returnees at 106 (10%) had problems accessing a combination of all three of these things upon return.

**Graph 19. In your example, when the main person/you came home they had problems accessing... (n=998)**

When the main person/you come home, they had problems accessing:



The clustering of stories shows that accessing employment, housing, and education are strongly interrelated for Roma. Although it is not possible to determine the root cause, it is evident that a combination of these problems contribute to even deeper social exclusion of Roma upon their return to the Western Balkans.

## ACCESS TO HOUSING UPON RETURN

The challenge related to access to finding housing is often times linked with access to infrastructure, as is illustrated by this man's story:

### **Problem with legalisation**

When I went away, my goal was to raise money to build a house of at least 50 square meters, but I built a single room. This is also good, because I did not have that before, I had to pay rent. Now I have a problem, because I do not have legal access to electricity, I am taking it from a neighbour.

**Male (35-44), Serbia**

Problems in accessing decent housing also result in adversely impacting overall well-being:

### **Difficult and bad life in our country**

When I returned, I had some means to survive, thanks to my mother-in-law. A few months later, my husband started working for a utility company. But our life here is really a disaster.

We have a small hut, which is constantly leaking, this roof is about to fall. In Germany, we had a flat and social welfare payments. Living conditions there are good, but here it is a disaster, difficult, and dramatic. I knew I'd come back into a hut, where my children will catch colds, where there is dampness. And it happened, in less than a month after we came back, my little girl got pneumonia.

**Female (20-24), Montenegro**

## ACCESS TO EDUCATION UPON RETURN

Children of Roma returnees face obstacles in obtaining an education. They are unable to participate or even attend school, either because they do not have sufficient language skills to follow the school

curriculum in their respective countries, or they struggle to have their foreign education certificates recognised by authorities.

### **Give me back my life and friends**

I do not even remember when we left Serbia. I cannot remember anything since I was very small. My life is there, I went to school, had friends, I was happy. We lived very nicely for 12 years until we got the "negative." They returned us back to misery and poverty. Here we do not own a house. We sleep with grandparents. I do not go to school, because I do not know the language, we have nothing here. Documents are a real problem in school. All I know is German and Romani. There is no life, no future here for me. I am very sad, and I want everything to be as before. I want to be with my friends.

**Male (15-19), Serbia**

### **Parents' wrong decision to travel to Germany**

I had no choice but to agree with my parents' decision to travel to Germany because they were unemployed. I was very upset that I was leaving Kosovo. In Germany, the children behaved very well with me, but on the first day I felt very upset because the people were so different from the people of Kosovo. My parents in Germany did not work and they did not have the right to work. I got registered in school and the German state provided social assistance for my younger sisters and brothers. After returning to Kosovo, my dad has not found a job yet, and I have not started school because I have problems with registration.

**Male (15-19), Kosovo**

Often times, local schools do not recognise years spent in education abroad, and place children who have returned in lower grades with much younger pupils where they study a curriculum most of which they attended abroad. It can be a real issue for

children entering their teen years to redo grades with pupils who are 6-7 year-old (as it is probably for the teachers as well). This, combined with a lack of documents, could result in children leaving school early:

**Leaving school early because foreign certificates are not recognised**

When we returned from Germany, I was 10 years old. I wanted to keep going to school, but I had to go to first grade with children aged 6. I enrolled and started to go, but I could not fit in with younger children and gave up my education. In Germany, I completed third grade, but I did not have the necessary documents to be able to continue at the appropriate grade.

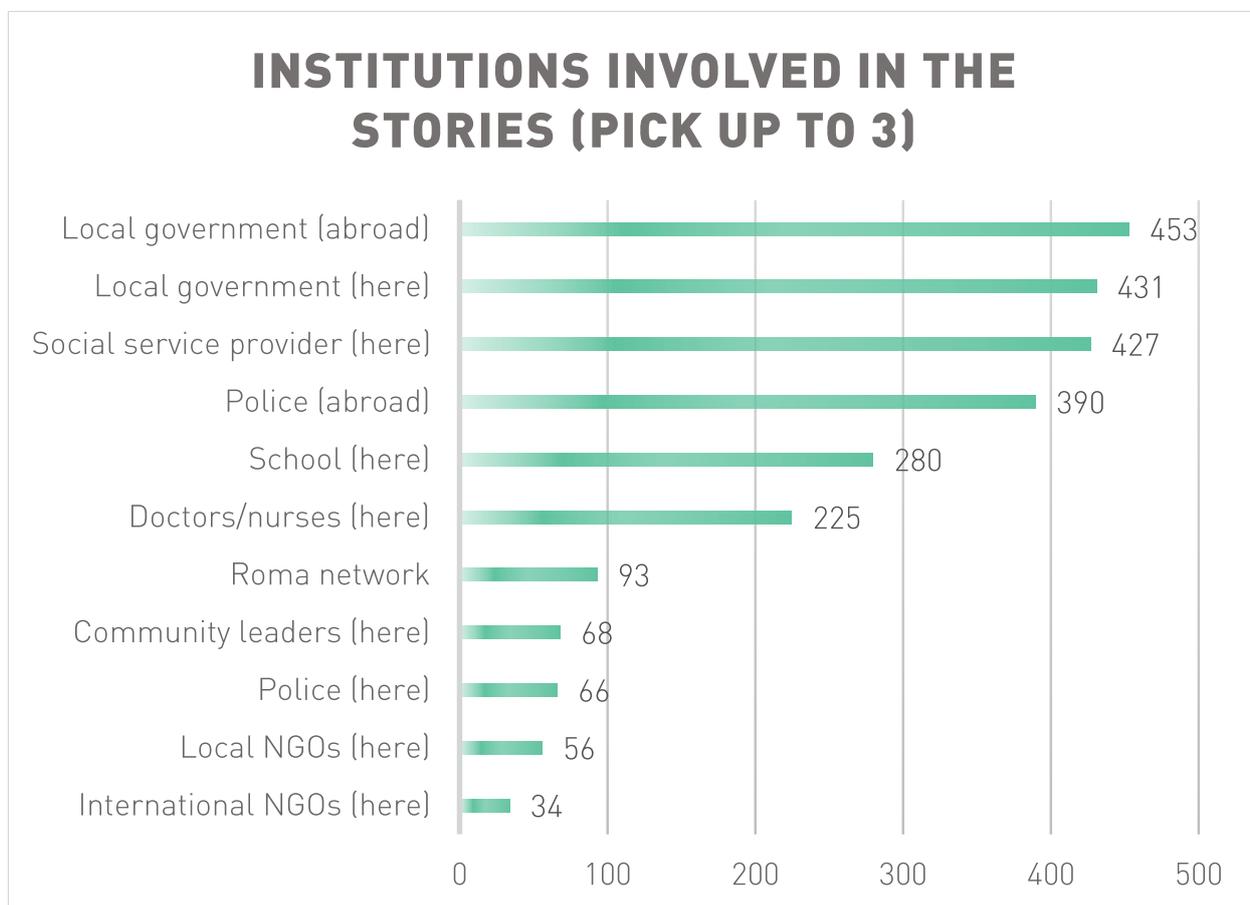
**Male (15-19), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

## INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN THE STORIES

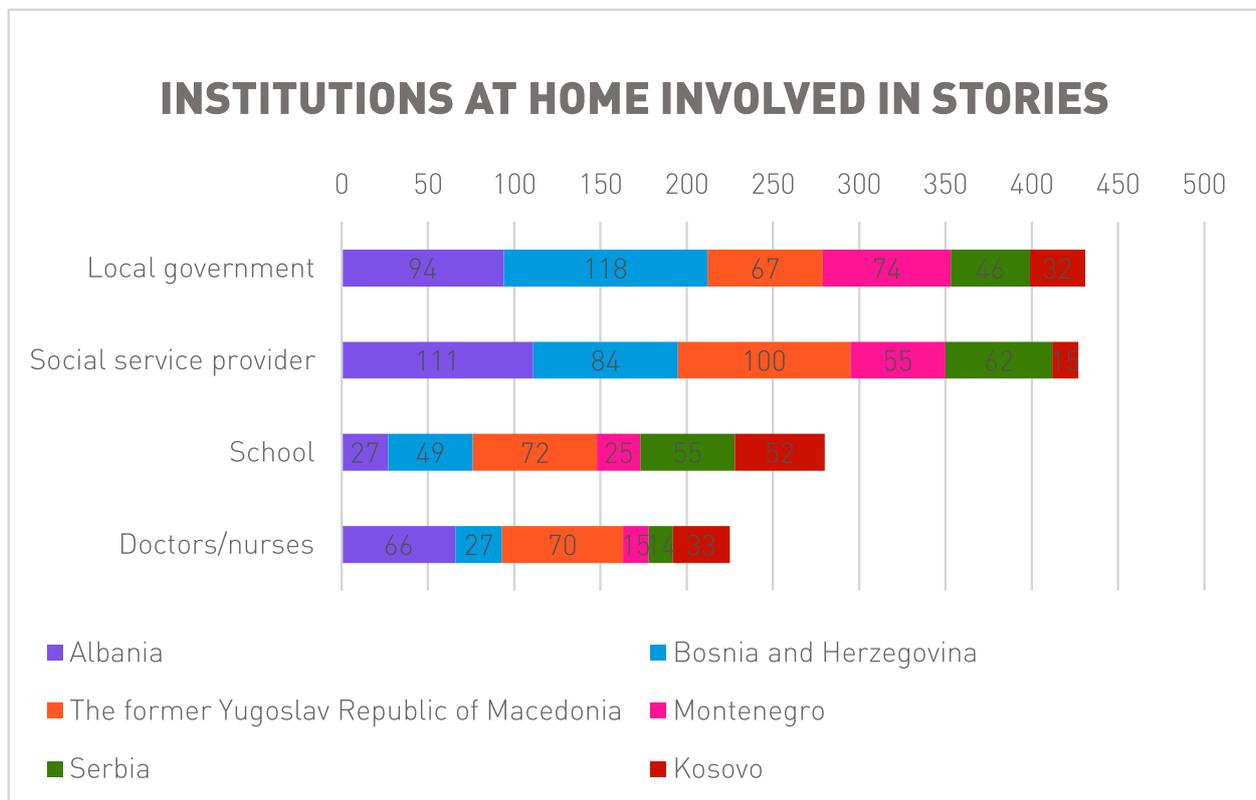
Most stories told by Roma returnees portray both positive and negative experiences with the local government abroad and at home. Police of foreign countries also feature in many stories as part of the asylum-seeking process and return (readmission) procedures.

Upon return, most returnees have encounters with local governments, social service providers, schools, and health practitioners.

**Graph 20. Institutions involved in the stories**



**Graph 21. Institutions at home involved in the stories (by country and territory)**



Local governments are most often featured in more than half of the stories about return told by Roma from BiH. Returnees to Albania also interact with local governments in almost half of the stories, while this engagement is only marginally present among Roma returnees from Serbia and nearly absent in stories from Kosovo. This may indicate that returnees are unaware of local authorities' responsibilities related to migration and re-integration, are distrustful of institutions, or are choosing to stay "under the radar" and away from authorities. The lack of engagement with local authorities might also suggest insufficient government capacities to manage and coordinate migration/reintegration interventions.

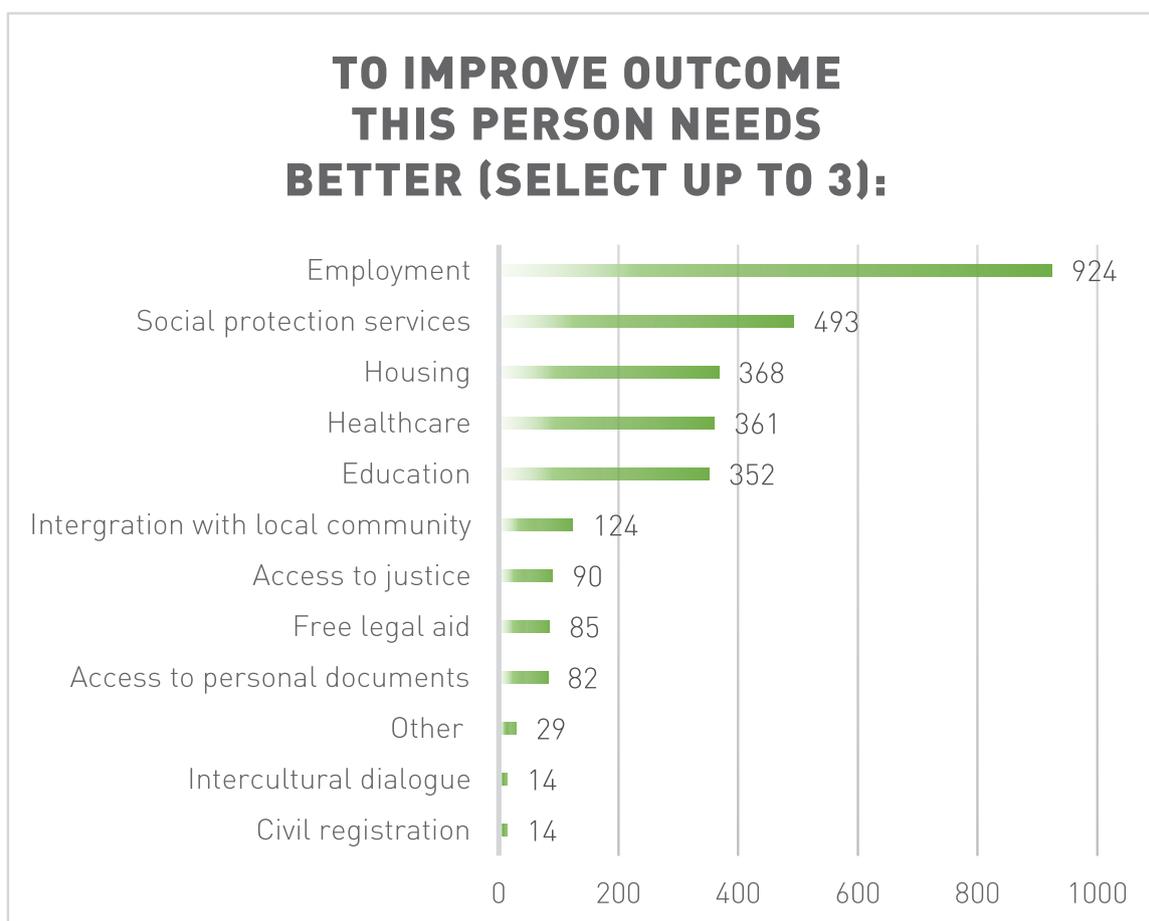
The groups that interacted the most with local social service providers were returnees in Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Kosovo, there is almost no engagement with social service providers, in part because social service provision at the local level is underdeveloped. Another explanation could be the lack of trust among returnees in the adequacy and quality of support. Furthermore, returnees might want to keep a low profile.

The frequency of interactions with all service providers in Serbia is rather low, in particular in light of EASO reports, which show that up to 90% of persons returned to Serbia are Roma. Again, this may indicate that returnees to Serbia may not trust that local governments and local service providers will deliver services they require, or they would like to keep a low profile. The capacity of local actors to create re-integration interventions may also play a significant role in terms of opening and sustaining communication and interactions.

## IMPROVING OUTCOMES IN THE REGIONS

According to all Roma returnees, they need better employment, social protection services, housing, healthcare, and education to improve the outcome in their home countries. Although personal documentation runs as a theme in a number of stories, only 7% (82) storytellers indicated that better access to personal documents can improve outcomes.

**Graph 22. Conditions that need to be improved at home**



Clustering the categories “access to justice,” “free legal aid,” “access to personal documentation,” and “civil registration” together makes it clear that the legal context and civil registration are challenges for Roma returnees in addition to the commonly accepted themes of concern for Roma (employment, social protection, housing, healthcare, and education).

The legal context here does not refer to only legislation but also to the application of legal norms and regulations. Civil servants delivering public services often hold the notion of a “culture of poverty” when it comes to implementing legal norms for Roma seeking access to their rights. In addition, certain legal provisions can impede access to rights for a certain period of time. One such provision is that one needs to prove they have been physically present in the

country for a certain period of time to be able access social assistance or employment programmes.

The way in which services are delivered plays an extremely important role, particularly when considering that corruption, justice, and politics appear as themes in stories. This indicates that local governance systems, their transparency, the way in which regulations are applied, and anti-discrimination legislation used can have a detrimental role in improving conditions of Roma at home. This also points to the importance of processes and interactions between Roma, non-Roma, and local authorities actors rather than a simple establishment of rules.

# ACCESS TO PERSONAL DOCUMENTATION

The lack of personal documentation relates directly to access to employment, education, and social assistance.

The story of this male in Montenegro illustrates a lack of information from local institutions about which documents are needed or where to go to get said documents in order to access services:

## **I want to learn**

My family returned 10 years ago from Germany. They did not allow me to continue my education. Now I do not know how to read and write. I am very embarrassed when I go looking for a job and everyone asks what kind of school I went to. My family has no papers, nothing, we have no support. We live with our uncle, in his barrack. We have no electricity, and do not know who to complain to. They tell us, "go get the documents," but we do not know where to go.

**Male (15-19), Montenegro**

Not possessing personal documentation can be a long-term and often transgenerational issue, which might not have been a cause for concern for a period of time in the past. However, legal "invisibility" is a major issue when trying to find job:

## **Italy was better**

We are a very big, extended family. Almost all of us were in Italy. We had been there for many years, but we had no documents. We had to go back, my parents died in the meantime, and now I live on my own. I have no income, I barely make ends meet, I do not have our documents and cannot get work.

**Male (did not disclose age), Montenegro**

Legal "invisibility" is also problematic when applying for social assistance:

## **Germany's Embassy to recover IDs**

I stayed in Germany for three years with my family. We received a negative response from the court to our asylum application and had to leave Germany. We filed a request for a second asylum, but after five months, the police came and forced us to return to Macedonia by plane. At the very entry in the country, we saw the difference between Germany and this misery. During the deportation, our personal documents stayed in Germany. We came to Macedonia with passes. Not to mention in what condition we found the house! Without ID cards we couldn't submit documents for social assistance. I don't know where to turn to get our IDs back; I've addressed NGOs, but to no avail. I don't know if I should go to the German Embassy to ask them to react and recover our IDs.

**Male (25-29), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

## **A returnee**

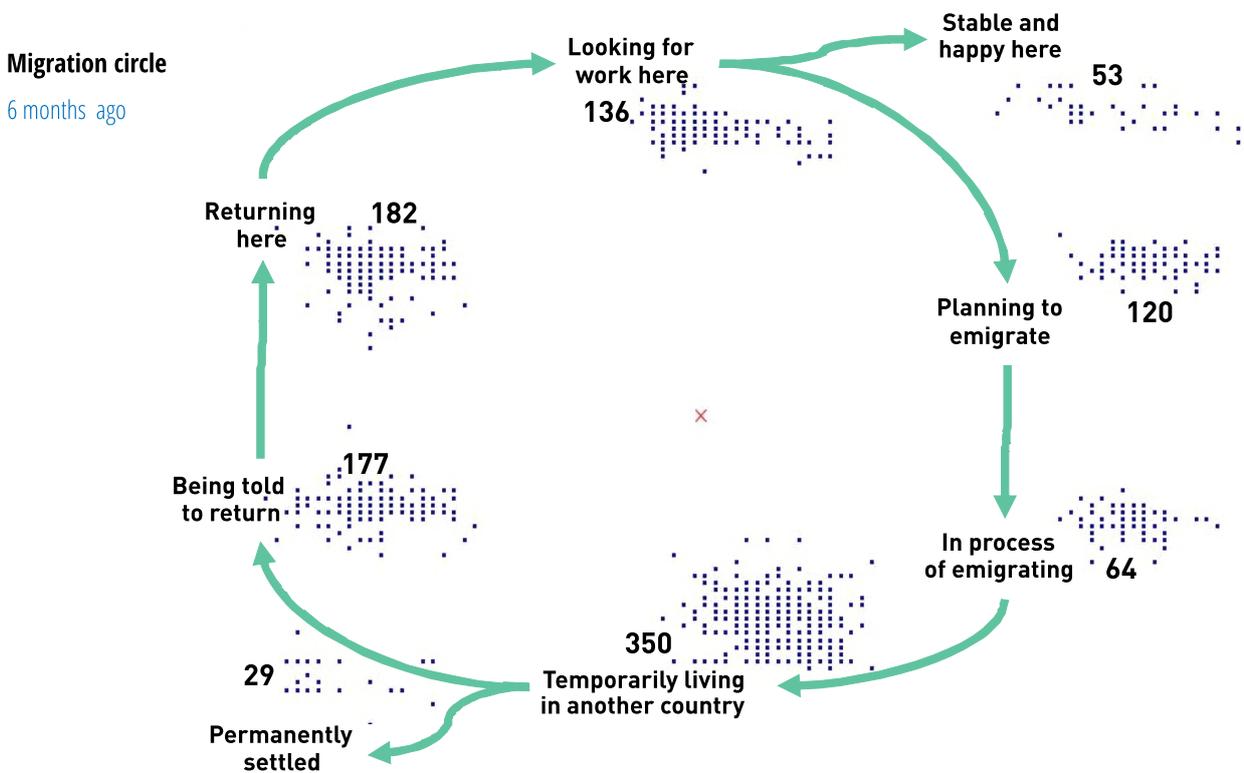
I was sent back from Germany, but not to Serbia. I ended up in Pristina in Kosovo only because I was born there. At the airport, they took my details and sent me to some centre. A few days later I got a Kosovan ID. I was sure that my troubles would end there, but they only just began. Since I had nobody in Kosovo, I went to Smederevo to my sister's place. With a Kosovan ID, I couldn't do anything. Everywhere I went, everyone was surprised that Kosovo had its own ID cards. To make things easier, I registered here. I got a Serbian ID, and I'm planning to get a passport to try and apply for asylum, because my entire family is out of the country. I only have my sister here.

**Male (20-24), Serbia**

# VII. Migration cycle

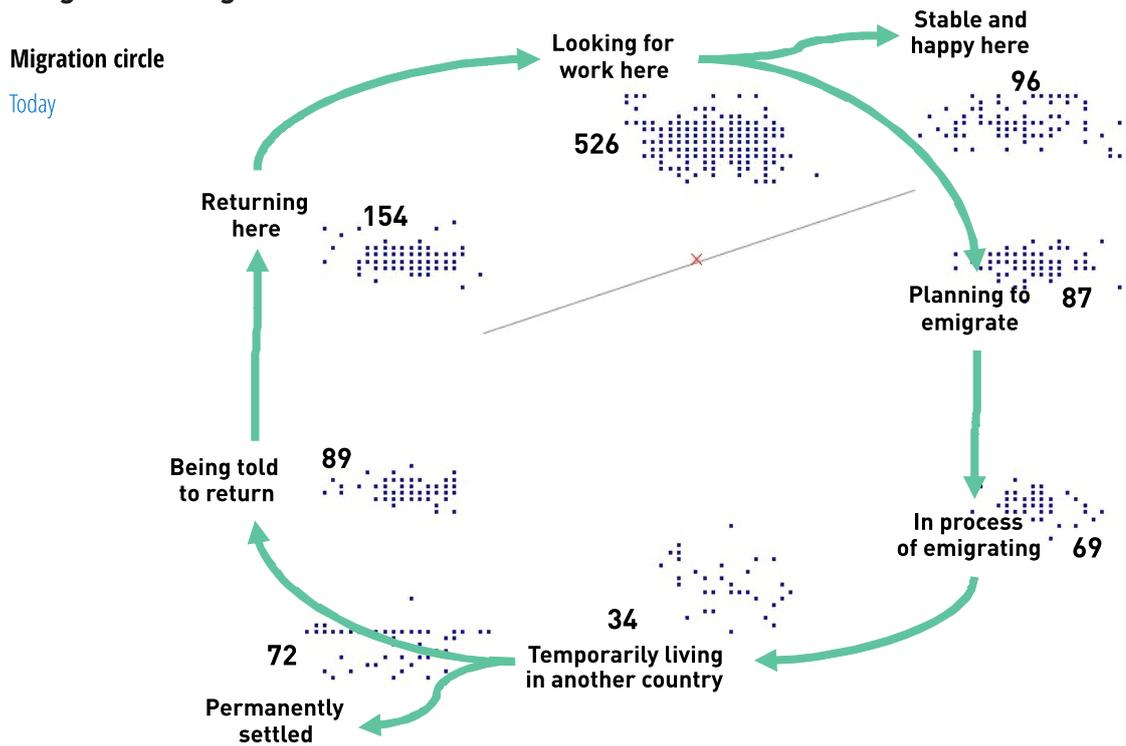
The storytellers were asked to identify at which stage of migration either they or the subject of their stories were six months before the interview, at the time of the interview, and where they believed they would be in the following six months. The migration cycle can point to trends and aspirations and could potentially serve as an early warning tool.

**Graph 23. Stage of migration six months prior to interview**



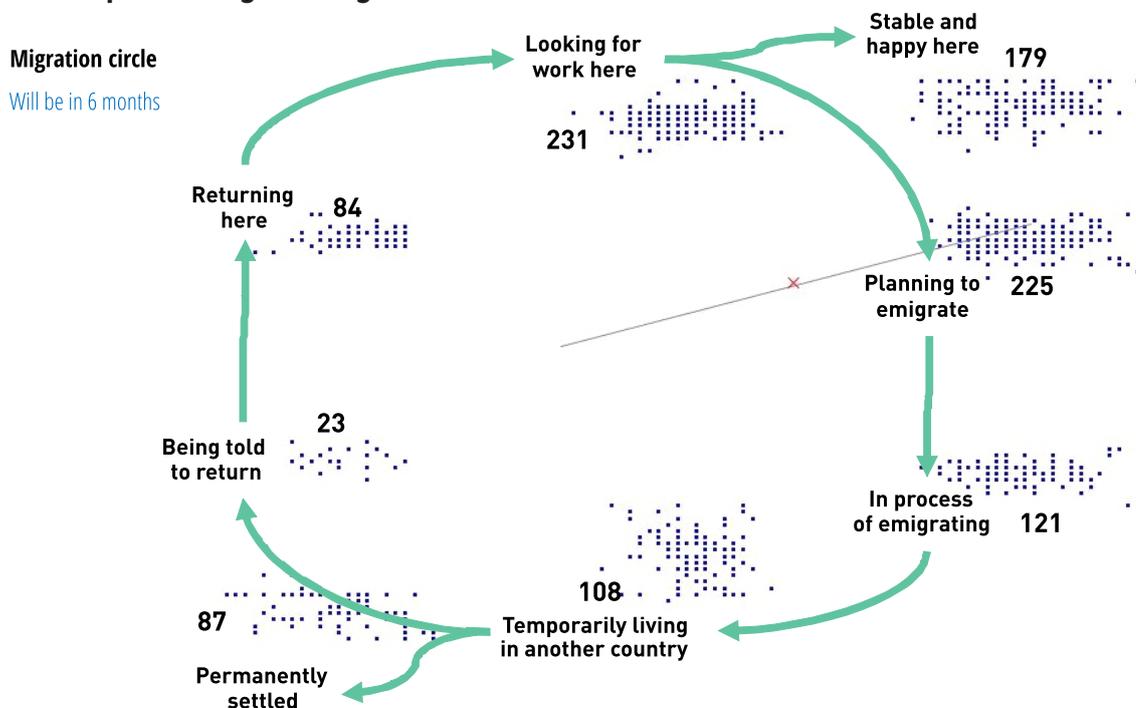
The micronarratives show that more than half of the subjects of the stories are recent returnees. Six months before stories were told, 350 people were temporarily living abroad and 359 were in the process of return, 177 were being told to return, and 182 were returning to their region of origin.

**Graph 24. Migration Stage at Time of Interview**



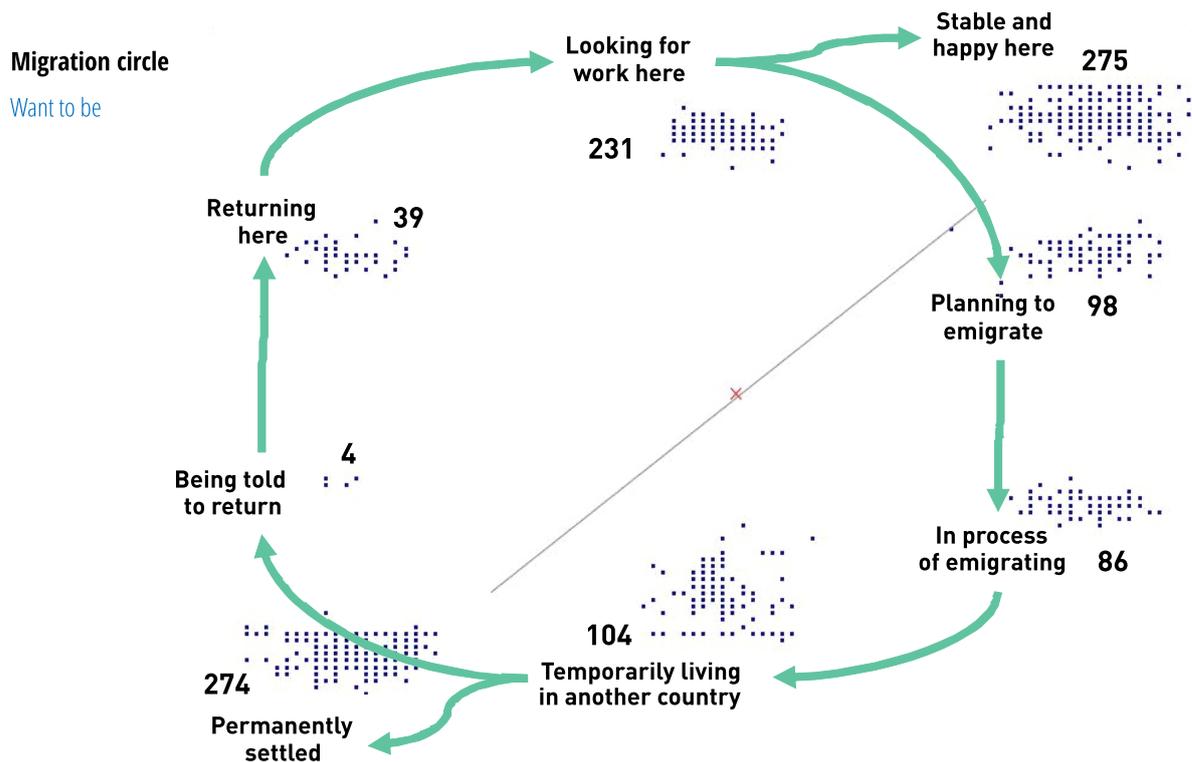
During the interview period, almost half of all subjects in the stories were looking for work in their home country. This indicates that most of the Roma returnees attempt to rebuild their lives in their places of habitual residence and are looking for jobs. Nonetheless, as previously indicated, high unemployment rates and problems accessing employment, in conjunction with other issues, hinder their efforts to build a life back in their home.

**Graph 25. Anticipated stage of migration in six months**



When asked where they expect to be in the near future (in six months), 225 persons reported to be planning to go abroad, 121 persons said they would be in the process of leaving the place of origin, and another 108 persons expected to be temporarily living abroad. This is a total of 454 out of 1058 persons (and possibly their families) from the Western Balkans who indicated that they consider going/being abroad within next six months.

**Graph 26. Desired stage of migration**



The majority of narratives reflecting future goals for migration shows a wish to exit the migration cycle: 275 returnees wanted to be stable and happy in their home place, and 274 people wanted to be permanently settled abroad.

Only a small number of narratives points to engagement in circular migration, often connected with coping strategies leading to income generation:

**We are getting by**  
We sold the house in our village to my brother for 3,500 euro. We saw that others left for Germany and stayed there. After being returned the first time, we decided to go there again, every 3 months. We bring back 2,000- 3,000 euro and mobile phones. When we spend money, we sell phones to get the money needed for the journey to Germany. This is better than living on social transfers.

**Male (35-44 years old), Serbia**

A storyteller from Bosnia and Herzegovina told a story about her relatives who engage in circular migration:

**A fight to survive**  
My cousin got divorced. She has two adult children. All of them are unemployed, living as tenants. They work illegally and find it difficult to survive. One of her friend's mother is demented, so she goes to Holland, takes care of the old lady for three months and comes back. Afterwards her daughter goes for another three months then comes back, and they repeat that. Dear God, what a hard life they live for those three months. They're in the house non-stop, they don't go out until her daughter comes home from work, so she can stay with the old lady. They say it's hard, but they have to live like that, because they have no other ways to survive.

**Female (45-54), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Overall, the data collected from the micronarratives hint at an ongoing migration cycle among all Roma persons interviewed. Most of the returnee storytellers were abroad recently, and are thinking of going abroad in the near future or are already in the process of emigration. Nonetheless, the pattern of migration cycles indicates that the ultimate goal for Roma is to escape the cycle of migration by

settling permanently either at home or abroad. Most narratives indicate a preference to settle at home providing access to work, housing, education, health, and security. Data collected through micronarratives could be a monitoring tool for Roma migration cycles if repeated regularly and in a larger number of localities.

## VIII. What can be done?

Overall, micronarratives confirm what is already general knowledge: Roma in the Western Balkans are facing grave challenges accessing labour markets, education, housing, health, and social services. They indicate that discrimination and unfair treatment of public service providers add to their already disadvantaged position. Importantly, these narratives expose the uncertainty and insecurity Roma face both at home and abroad. In many cases, feelings of insecurity abroad are cushioned by the fact that they have a good roof over their heads, their basic needs are being met, and that they are often times treated better than at home. Upon return,

the situation for many is worse than when they left: some lack adequate documents; children lose years of education; houses are ruined; and there are no prospects of finding gainful employment. All this results in feelings of indifference at best and anger at worst. The impact on the social fabric and cohesion is already emerging: there is pronounced distrust in institutions and broken bonds with communities. Still, narratives from about half of returnees are about settling permanently in their home communities. This can be achieved, as illustrated by “success” stories, hinting at which interventions have made reintegration possible:

### **INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT: REGISTRATION OF RETURNEES, DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION, ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING DOCUMENTATION, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE**

A registered returnee in Serbia recounted her story regarding the assistance she received from local institutions to obtain personal documentation, enrol her children in school, and receive social assistance:

#### **There is hope**

I returned from Germany with four children. I'm a single mother. All my children went to school there. When I came here, I did not have a single document apart from my passport. I went to the Office for Roma Issues seeking support. I got information for returnees. I was given help with enrolling my children in school and validation for their school grades. They helped me get all personal documents, for me and for the children. I used my right to social assistance and child support. My children are fitting in. In the beginning, they had problems with the language, but thanks to the teachers, they have overcome it. This school year, my daughter enrolled in high school, and she got a scholarship from the city.

**Female (35-44 years old), Serbia**

A returnee in Montenegro who was unemployed explained his story of receiving assistance from the Centre for Social Welfare in Montenegro as:

#### **Far away, life is coming back**

When they sent me back, my parents were here, and I had no problems after returning. I was worried I would have nowhere to go, but I went to the centre for social work to help me since I was unemployed.

**Male (35-44 years old), Montenegro**

A female returnee in Montenegro conveyed how she enrolled her child born abroad into the civil registry through assistance from a municipality coordinator:

#### **Registering**

I could not register my baby into the civil registry in Montenegro. My child was born in Sweden, but they do not register asylum seekers in the registry there. I had a document from the hospital that I gave a birth to a child. When I got back, my mother-in-law told me to go to the municipality, and the coordinator there would help me. Thanks to her, I registered my child into the registry.

**Female (20-24 years old), Montenegro**

A male returnee from Serbia explains how the Office for Roma Issues helped get his children their citizenship papers:

#### **Citizenship**

My family and I have been returned from asylum to Serbia. Immediately, we had problems with citizenship papers, because two of our children were born in Germany and three in France. Only the first is from Serbia. We heard about the Office for Roma. After addressing the office, we were given instructions on how to get papers more easily. After a year, we got all the necessary documents and citizenship for all our children.

**Male (35-44 years old), Serbia**

Another male returnee in Serbia had a similar experience, where officials assisted in obtaining personal documents and enrolling his children in school:

#### **Help**

When I came back, I had a problem with personal documents. I was told that the municipality had a person that helps Roma. I went a few days later, and with the help of that person and certain officials, I received birth certificates, citizenship for myself, the children and my wife. The same person helped to enrol children in school. I am pleased that the municipality has a person who can help Roma.

**Male (35-44 years old), Serbia**

A male Roma who returned to Serbia recounted his experience is using the municipality to access housing:

#### **Repairing the house**

After two years in Germany, we returned to Serbia. In these two years, the house suffered severe damage due to flooding. The walls were damp, and the floor was completely ruined. We went to the Office of Roma, who sent us to the Municipality of Smederevo. The municipality saw the problem and paid us damages in the amount of 60,000 dinars.

**Male (25-29 year old), Serbia**

Financial support that local authorities can allocate to returnees to refurbish their homes to become inhabitable are of big importance for a new beginning:

I went abroad for a better life, for work, for my children. I did not have a home. On the way, I had problems especially in the mountains of Hungary. There, in Germany, I had my apartment, furniture and my salary. I returned voluntarily and after returning to Kosovo I was helped by the municipality with 450 euros for home furnishings. I'm still unemployed.

**Male, Kosovo**

These narratives indicate that support was most often received through municipal offices dealing specifically with Roma issues, with dedicated staff, who in many cases are Roma themselves. These offices exist usually in municipalities where Roma comprise a significant share of the population. Such structures have existed for some period of time. They

are not necessarily tasked to deal with reintegration. These offices are able to significantly contribute to integration by using their experience in advocating for the needs of Roma and other disadvantaged groups and their skills in managing responses of various institutional actors.

## THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can often be more attuned to the particular needs of people, more flexible, and quicker to respond. Numerous narratives illustrate this:

A young returnee explained how a Montenegrin NGO assisted her family in accessing housing:

### **Yet I am happy**

It was good for us there, however, we got sent back. When I came here, we went to my mother- and father-in-law. They were not able to take in my children. We approached the «Young Roma» NGO for help. They told us that we would get a house. I was very happy and satisfied, because when we came back, we had nowhere to live, and my mother-in-law was bothered by the children. We had to make a small hut, where we now live and are waiting for our houses to be built. I am grateful to the municipality, to the “Help” and “Young Roma” NGOs that they are building houses for us. When we arrived, we had nothing. I came with two suitcases, but when I found out that I was getting a home, I was so happy. I collected the money, and I’ve already bought some furniture and am waiting for the house to be finished.

**Female (20-24 years old), Montenegro**

A female returnee in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia described how an NGO helped her family to enrol their daughter to school:

### **Help from NGO to access education.**

When we returned from Germany, my daughter had a problem enrolling into school. She had certificates from a German school. She took those certificates to a high school «Nace Bugjoni» where she wanted to enrol at the beginning of the school year. The director told us that she could enrol if the certificates were translated into Macedonian. We went to the «Drom» NGO and told them about our problem. They helped us, talked with the school director, and he allowed her to start attending classes while we waited for the certificates to be translated. She is going to school regularly and is achieving excellent results.

**Female (45-54 years old), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

NGOs with experience in working across sectors can support individuals in accessing services, provide empirical evidence about their needs, and advocate for new services and interventions. However, the narratives indicate that support from NGOs, as well as from institutions is fragmented and often depends on their resources.

## SUPPORT FOR INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND ACCESS TO LABOUR MARKETS

One of the most important factors in deciding to move abroad was the lack of employment opportunities. It was the main obstacle to re-integration upon return. A few stories about starting businesses upon return can be illustrative of possible interventions.

The following stories show how savings from abroad were used in starting their own businesses:

### **A better life.**

I get some child support and added some of my savings and went with my family to claim asylum. Before the war, I was in Germany for a bit, so I knew how things worked. I went to where my family was and claimed asylum. They took us in and I started receiving social security. There I started collecting secondary raw materials and second-hand goods, which I sold straight away. We spent two and a half years at the shelter, then they sent us back to BiH. Here, I had a house to live in, I even had a nice bit of cash saved up, so I started my own business. Now I even have two people employed.

**Male (35-44 years old), Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### **I got lucky in my life.**

I returned from Vienna. I'm selling my stuff from there. I opened a bakery, and you can live well, even here.

**Male (45-54 years old), Serbia**

The next story illustrates how state support can be used in starting a business upon return:

### **Worth trying**

I was seeking a better life, but they sent me back. Here, after returning I tried to earn for my family. I started a business where the state exempted us from paying tax because of my minority status, so we could employ ourselves and start a business.

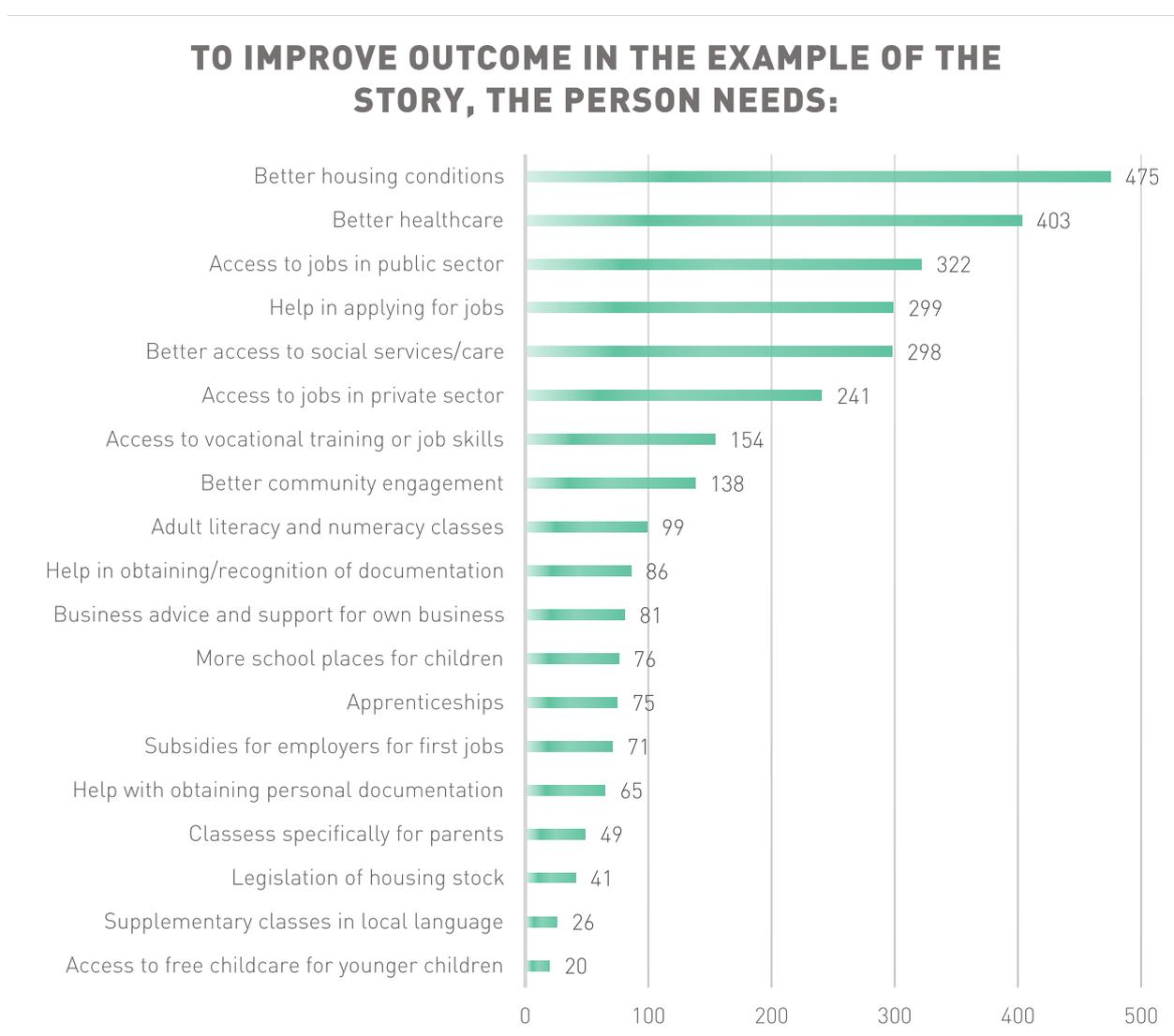
**Male (30-34 years old), Montenegro**

Narratives about starting businesses are far few and between. There are no stories about finding jobs in the public sector, despite the fact that almost everywhere in Western Balkans affirmative action clauses are included in legislation, including for those with a minority background. Thus, access to income generation and jobs remains the weak link in re-integration of Roma returnees.

## IX. Toward a conclusion

Based on their conversations with Roma returnees, the story collectors were also asked to single out three of the most important things in the storytellers' countries that would improve living standards.

**Graph 27. Things needed to improve storytellers' living standards, according to collectors**



## The top five needs for returnees identified by collectors were:

1. **Better housing conditions;**
2. **Better healthcare;**
3. **Access to jobs in the public sector;**
4. **Help in applying for jobs;**
5. **Better access to social services/care.**

Overall, the assessment of the needs of Roma returnees from the EU to the Western Balkans points out that a combination of interventions to improve housing, access to employment and education would improve outcomes in terms of well-being and re-integration.

It is noteworthy that the story collectors identified supplemental actions such as various inclusive labour market measures (i.e. help in applying for jobs, access to vocational training or job skills, adult literacy and numeracy classes, apprenticeships) and state support for business (i.e. business advice and support for own business, subsidies for employers for first jobs) in improving the situation of Roma returnees in the Western Balkans.

In addition to the collector's assessment, it is important to reiterate the insecurity and uncertainty present throughout most of the narratives. One of the most detrimental factors for inclusion is not having control over their lives with regard to their uncertain legal statuses both abroad and at home (before migration and after return). Most of them live in worse conditions than they did in EU: living in reception centres for asylum seekers brought security with regards to expenses, schooling, and healthcare. At times, it provided the opportunity to save and/or earn some money, however, these centres often lacked a social network that could support their reintegration upon return. Some returnees spend more than ten or even fifteen years in the EU – reintegrating with their communities, or with what is left of them is more complex than of those who stayed for only a couple of months.

A comprehensive response is needed to address obstacles, including poverty and exclusion in combination with a weak and fragmented institutional response, and a lack of a social network that could support reintegration. Such a response should also include tackling the root causes for migration, including the way in which representatives from public institutions interact with Roma.

# ANNEX 1. MICRONARRATIVES FRAMEWORK

## Micronarrative framework: Roma returnees

Give us an example (good or bad) of what life is like for you (or someone you know) after coming back from another country. What happened?  
*Tell us about what happened. Say as much or as little as you wish.*

**New alternative:**

“Give us a specific example (good or bad) of something that happened to you (or someone you know) on your return from another country.”

Describe what happened...

Please give your experience a title

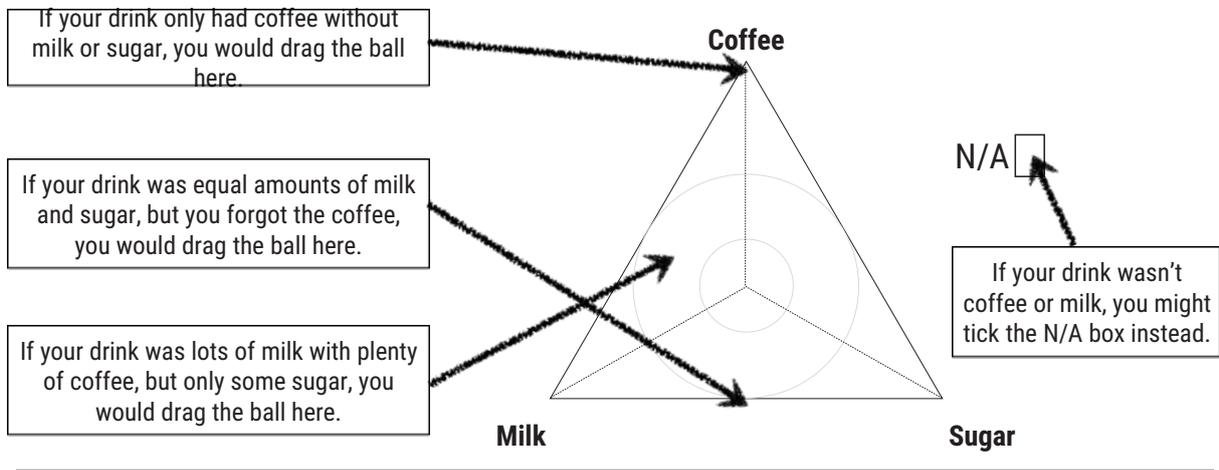
**This is the first set of questions about your experience. Your perspective is what matters.**

- For the following questions, put a mark in each triangle by moving the ball to a position that best describes the experience you shared.
- The closer the ball is to any one corner, the stronger that element is in the experience you shared.
- If you do not move the ball in a given triangle, then no response will be registered for that question.

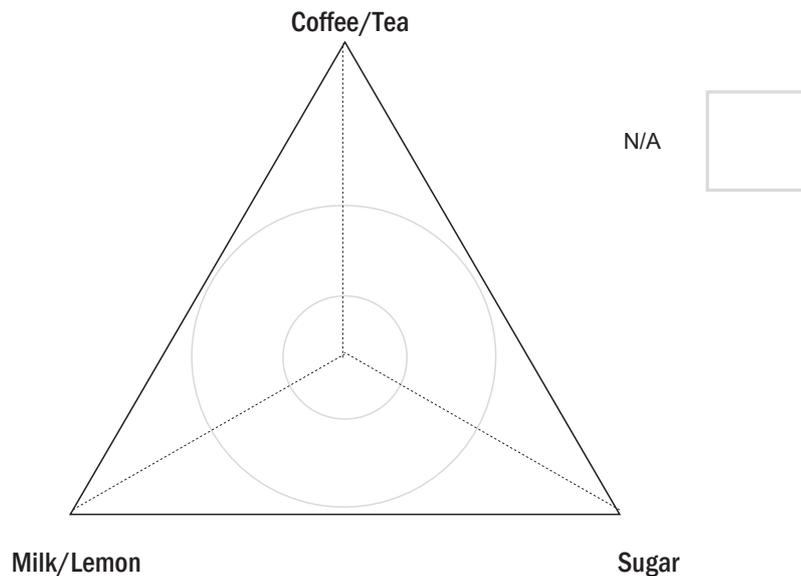
If a triangle does not relate to your experience, check the N/A box.

The example below may help - thinking about how you take your coffee

### How did you take your last coffee?



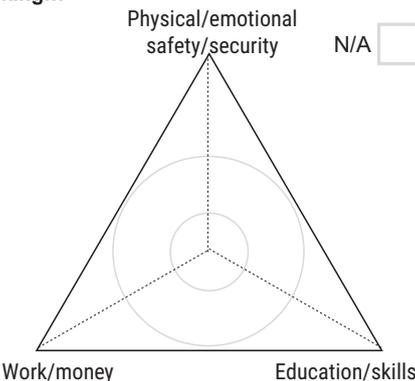
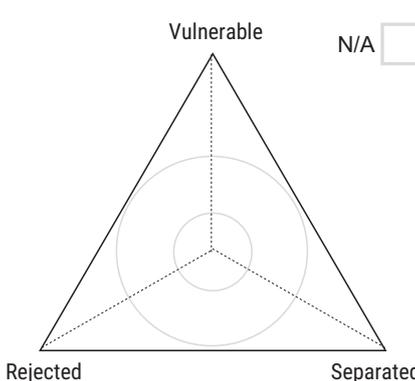
### So how was your last cup of coffee/tea?



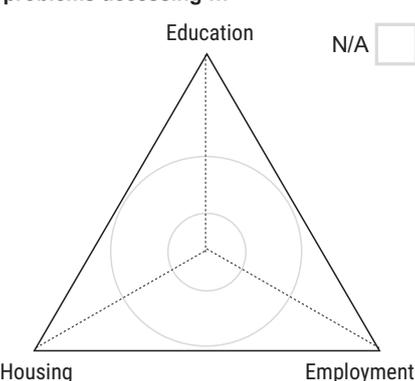
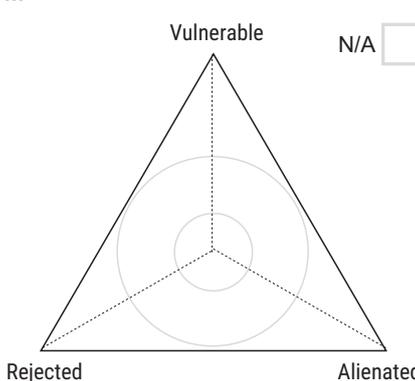
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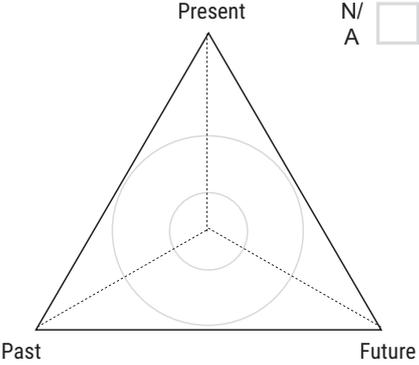
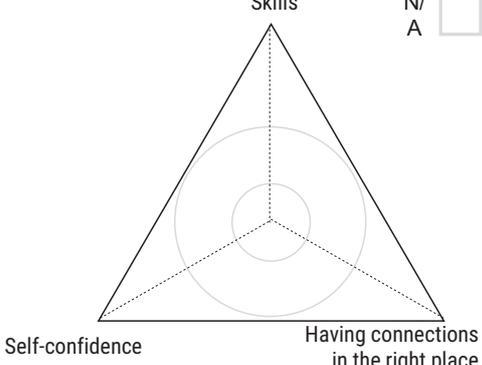
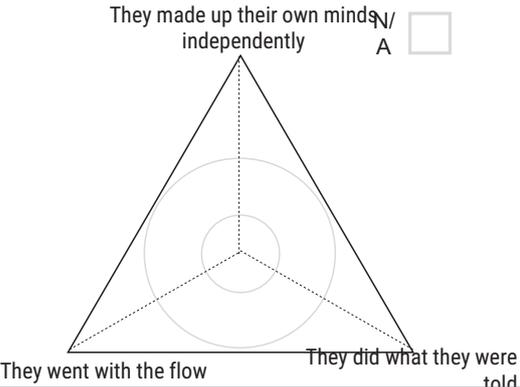
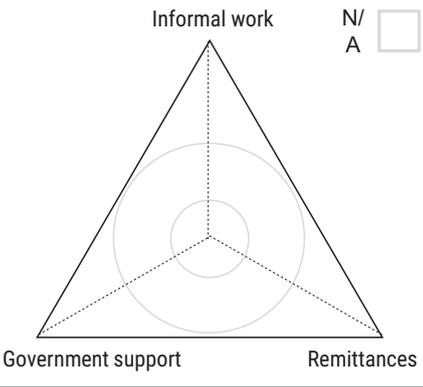
**First, thinking about your example, when the main person/you was/were away.**

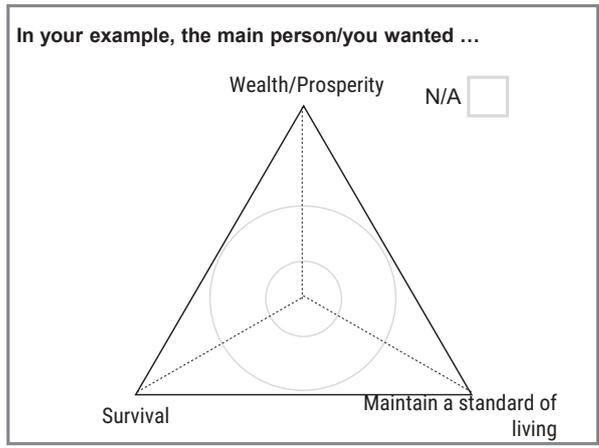
<p>In your example, when the main person/you was away they were seeking...</p> <p>Physical/emotional safety/security <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p>  <p>Work/money Education/skills</p>	<p>In your example, when the main person/you was away they felt ...</p> <p>Vulnerable <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p>  <p>Rejected Separated</p>
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**Next, thinking about your example, when the main person/you came back.**

<p>In your example, when the main person/you came home they had problems accessing ...</p> <p>Education <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p>  <p>Housing Employment</p>	<p>In your example, when the main person/you came home they felt ...</p> <p>Vulnerable <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p>  <p>Rejected Alienated</p>
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**Next, thinking about your example overall.**

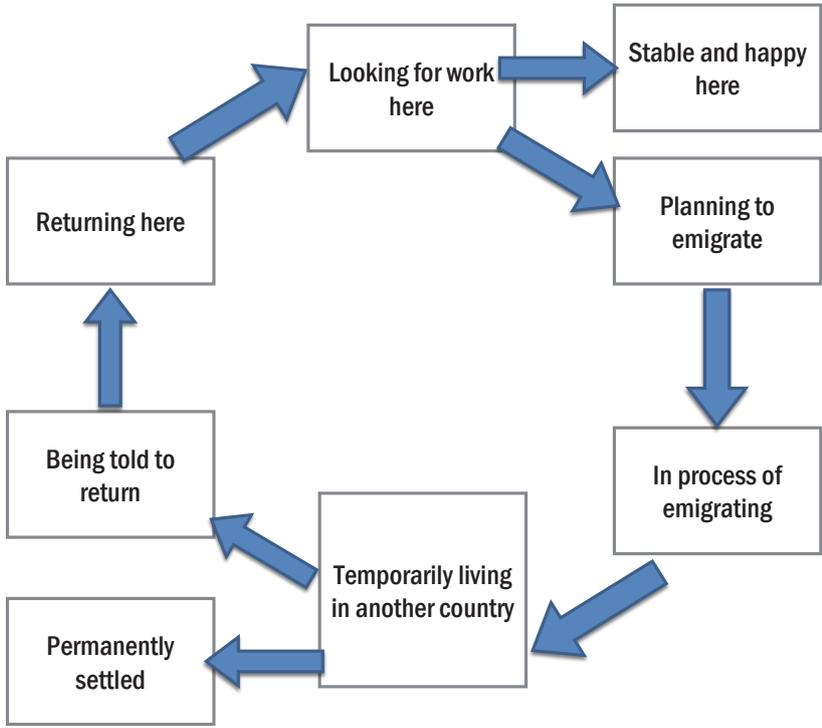
<p><b>The lesson in your story applies to ...</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Present</p> <p style="text-align: right;">N/A <input type="checkbox"/></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Past <span style="float: right;">Future</span></p>	<p><b>In your example, what was important?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Skills</p> <p style="text-align: right;">N/A <input type="checkbox"/></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Self-confidence <span style="float: right;">Having connections in the right place</span></p>
<p><b>In your example, the main person/you decided to do something (general action) because ...</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">They made up their own minds independently</p> <p style="text-align: right;">N/A <input type="checkbox"/></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">They went with the flow <span style="float: right;">They did what they were told</span></p>	<p><b>In your example, the main sources of income are ...</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Informal work</p> <p style="text-align: right;">N/A <input type="checkbox"/></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Government support <span style="float: right;">Remittances</span></p>



For this question:

- For the main person/you in your example, please put the relevant number onto the grid below to show where you think they are.

1	This is where they were 6 months ago
2	This is where they are today
3	This is where they will be in 6 months
4	This is where they want to be



Now, some more standard questions about your experience.

How do you feel about this story  
(Select up to 2)

- glad/hopeful
- enthused
- informed
- angry
- sad
- proud
- indifferent

How do you feel now about the example you shared?

- Very good
- Good
- Neutral
- Bad
- Very bad

How often does this sort of thing happen?

- Never before/since
- Very rare
- Happens sometimes
- Quite common
- All the time

Your story involves (pick up to 3)

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local government (abroad) | <input type="checkbox"/> Police (here)                   | <input type="checkbox"/> School (here)            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local government (here)   | <input type="checkbox"/> Local NGOs (here)               | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctors/nurses (here)    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Roma network              | <input type="checkbox"/> International NGOs (here)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Community leaders (here) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Police (abroad)           | <input type="checkbox"/> Social service providers (here) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please tell us)   |

To improve the outcome in this country, the main person/you needs better ... (select up to 3)

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Access to personal documents | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Access to justice            | <input type="checkbox"/> Intercultural dialogue           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil registration           | <input type="checkbox"/> Integration with local community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social protection services | <input type="checkbox"/> Free legal aid               | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please tell us)           |

What needs to happen to improve these?

Your story includes (on return) ... (pick up to 3)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Security                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Childcare              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Politics                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect/tolerance      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business/trade             | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better life                | <input type="checkbox"/> Violence               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Trust                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corruption                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Justice                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing issues             | <input type="checkbox"/> Crime                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of opportunities/jobs | <input type="checkbox"/> Tradition              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social protection          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please tell us) |

Your story includes (while away) ... (pick up to 3)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Security                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Childcare              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Politics                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect/tolerance      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business/trade             | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better life                | <input type="checkbox"/> Violence               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Trust                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corruption                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Justice                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing issues             | <input type="checkbox"/> Crime                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of opportunities/jobs | <input type="checkbox"/> Tradition              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social protection          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please tell us) |

Which countries and territory has the main person/you tried to settle in? (Choose all that apply)

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Albania                | <input type="checkbox"/> Greece                | <input type="checkbox"/> Norway             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Andorra                | <input type="checkbox"/> Hungary               | <input type="checkbox"/> Poland             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Austria                | <input type="checkbox"/> Iceland               | <input type="checkbox"/> Portugal           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Belarus                | <input type="checkbox"/> Ireland               | <input type="checkbox"/> Romania            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Belgium                | <input type="checkbox"/> Italy                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Russia             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bosnia and Herzegovina | <input type="checkbox"/> Kosovo                | <input type="checkbox"/> Serbia             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bulgaria               | <input type="checkbox"/> Latvia                | <input type="checkbox"/> Slovakia           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Croatia                | <input type="checkbox"/> Liechtenstein         | <input type="checkbox"/> Slovenia           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cyprus                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Lithuania             | <input type="checkbox"/> Spain              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Czech Republic         | <input type="checkbox"/> Luxembourg            | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweden             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Denmark                | <input type="checkbox"/> Republic of Macedonia | <input type="checkbox"/> Switzerland        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Estonia                | <input type="checkbox"/> Malta                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Republic of Turkey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finland                | <input type="checkbox"/> Moldova               | <input type="checkbox"/> Ukraine            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> France                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Monaco                | <input type="checkbox"/> United Kingdom     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Georgia                | <input type="checkbox"/> Montenegro            | <input type="checkbox"/> None               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Germany                | <input type="checkbox"/> Netherlands           |   |

And finally, we'd like to know some things about you.

Are you...

Male       Female

Prefer not to answer

Are you a returnee?

Yes       No

Prefer not to answer

Are you registered as a returnee?

Yes       No

Prefer not to answer

How old are?

Under 15       35-44

15-19       45-54

20-24       55-64

25-29       Over 65

30-34       Prefer not to say

What sort of residence do you live in?

Capital       Unregulated area

City/big town       Fixed encampment for Travellers

Outskirts/suburbs of big cities and towns       Temporary encampment for Travellers

Small town       Other (please add)

What is the highest education level you have attained?

None/Incomplete lower basic       Secondary vocational/technical

Lower basic (1-4)       Associate (2 yr) College

Upper basic (5-8)       Incomplete university

Incomplete secondary general       Bachelor

Secondary general       Masters

Incomplete secondary vocational/technical       PhD/Specialist

Incomplete special school disabled

Are you...

Unemployed       Employer in own business with employees

Employee in private company       Member of producers' cooperative society

Employee in public, municipal company       Family worker in family business or on a family farm without payment

Self-employed in own business, freelancer       Other (specify)

Your story is anonymous and it is impossible for anyone to identify you from this survey. However, if you would like your story kept confidential so that no-one else can read it, please tick here:

To be filled in by the collector

Collector ID

Collection district/area

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                    |
|                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please add) |

How was the story?

- Must read
- Might be good to read
- Some interest, but not crucial
- No particular interest
- Ignore it

Collector's notes (was someone else present, were answers influenced by others, other considerations, etc)

From your conversation with the participant, what would improve the outcome in the example (here in country), the main person/you need... (pick up to 3)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business advice and support for own business | <input type="checkbox"/> Better community engagement   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better healthcare                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Subsidies for employers for first jobs  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Access to jobs in public sector              | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with obtaining and recognition of overseas documentation (school and work) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Access to jobs in private sector             | <input type="checkbox"/> Apprenticeships   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help in applying for jobs                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Supplementary classes in local language   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Access to vocational training or job skills  | <input type="checkbox"/> Adult literacy and numeracy classes   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better housing conditions                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Classes specifically for parents  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More school places for children              | <input type="checkbox"/> Better access to social services/care   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help with obtaining personal documentation   | <input type="checkbox"/> Access to free childcare for younger children                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legalisation of housing stock                | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please tell us what)   |

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