



CASE STUDY ON RFTFs (RETURNING FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS) IN ALBANIA



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CASE STUDY ON RFTFs (RETURNING FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS) FAMILIES IN ALBANIA

This case study has been prepared within the framework of the country needs assessment, aimed at *"identifying key needs for the prevention of violent extremism in Albania."*

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1. INTRODUCTION

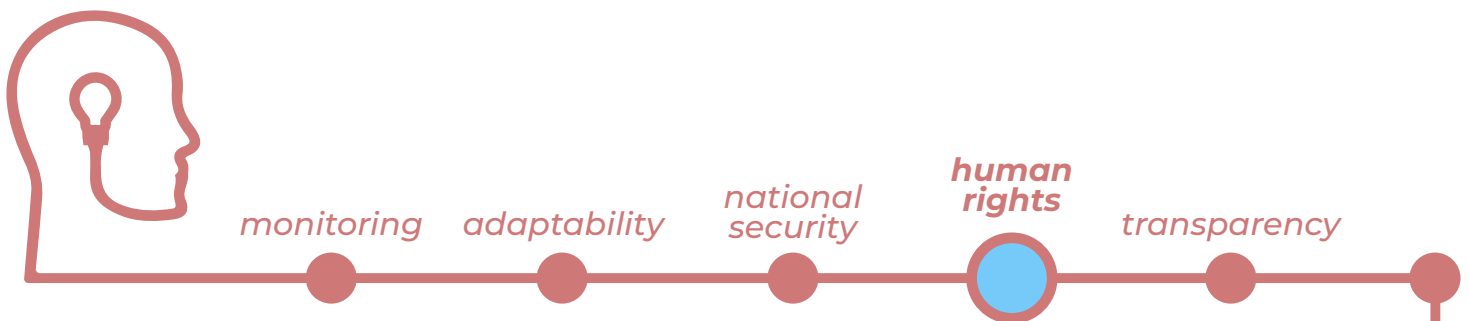
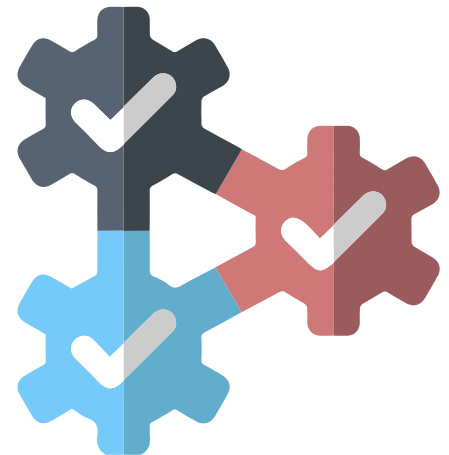


In the early 2020, Albania faced a significant challenge with the repatriation of its citizens from conflict zones in **Syria and Iraq**. This situation emerged as a multifaceted issue, not just concerning national security, but also delving into **Human Rights, Societal Stability**, and the **Integration of Returnees into the Community**.



Albania's decision to repatriate and reintegrate Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters, or Returnees represented a balance between national security, human rights, and social stability. The Albanian approach to Rehabilitation and Reintegration of returnees was methodical and involved a Multi-Agency Integrated Approach, based on a harmonious collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and international organizations.

Albania tailored each phase of the Rehabilitation and Reintegration to the unique needs of each returnee. Special attention was given to reintegration, which involved investing in counseling, conflict resolution skills, and community activities. Inter-institutional Technical Groups played a key role in ensuring that individual protection plans were not only created but also effectively implemented.



Albania's response to R&R was grounded in strategic analytical thinking and showcased an intricate balance between ensuring **national security** and **adhering to international human rights standards**, with nuanced understanding of the complex social fabric into which these returnees are woven. Continuous monitoring, adaptability, and a transparent approach were essential to navigate the political landscape and mitigate the risks associated with RFTFs family members effectively.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

The challenge of repatriating Albanian citizens from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, particularly in the early 2010s, was multifaceted, involving a significant number of families and individuals, including a mother with five children. The rehabilitation and reintegration processes for these returnees were complex, requiring coordination between various Albanian government entities and international partners.



ALBANIA

Upon arrival in Albania, the family members underwent rigorous procedures by the State Police, including identification, documentary checks, and other security measures. In alignment with human rights principles, they were temporarily accommodated in a designated Reception Center operated by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

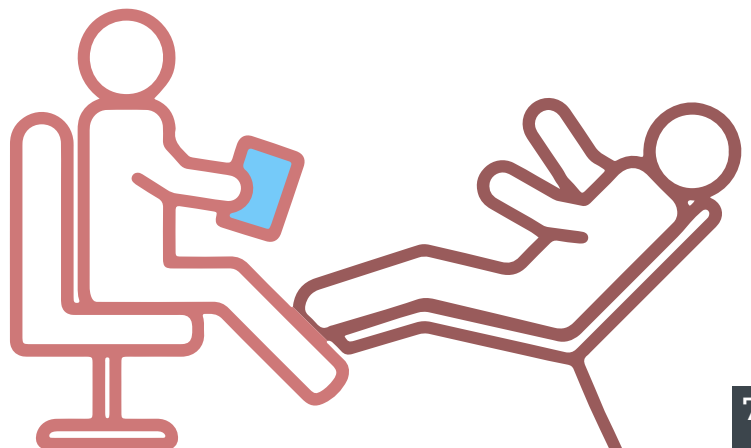


Special attention was given to the **educational** needs of the children, including basic education services and preparation for their enrollment in local schools. International collaboration, especially with Lebanese authorities and organizations controlling former conflict areas, played a critical role in the **repatriation** process. The returnees, recognized as family members of deceased Albanian FTFs, were subject to thorough investigations by the Special Prosecution Office (SPAK) to determine any involvement in terrorist organizations.



*The case study **The case study Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters' families to Albania** highlights the human aspect and the complexities of the repatriation rehabilitation and reintegration processes. The returnees initially showed signs of stress, resistance, and distrust, which are typical reactions after exposure to high-stress or traumatic events. However, their cooperation with the rehabilitation teams gradually improved, leading to significant behavioral changes such as distancing from previous radical influences. Handling returnees' cases underscored the importance of a coordinated multi-agency effort, continuous monitoring, and adaptability of support plans for the effective rehabilitation and reintegration of families returning from conflict zones.*

The comprehensive and empathetic approach delivered in the R&R processes involved trauma-informed care, educational and vocational assessments, continuous **psychological support**, and sessions focusing on social reintegration and community engagement. The successful completion of the above initiatives represent a model for effective rehabilitation and reintegration practices, emphasizing the need for compassionate approaches that address individual and collective needs within a supportive community framework.



3. THE FIRST WAVE OF RETURNEES



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Moreover, the first wave of returnees to Albania highlighted the significant human aspect of the crisis, particularly in terms of the psychological and social care required for these individuals and their families.



1. Legal and Security Reforms: Albania's response was grounded in comprehensive legal reforms and enhancements in law enforcement capabilities. This included amendments to the Criminal Code with Law no. 36/2017, and Law no. 89/2017, and the establishment of dedicated entities like the Center for Coordination Against Violent Extremism (CVE Center) established by Decision no. 737, dated 13.12.2017, of the Council of Ministers, "On the establishment of the Coordination Center Countering Violent extremism (QKEDH)". These measures were essential for addressing the legal status of adult returnees and ensuring robust security measures without infringing on human rights.



2. Multi-Agency Collaboration: The R&R programs necessitated a coordinated approach among various stakeholders, including government agencies, international organizations, and NGOs. This collaboration was crucial in covering all aspects of the returnees' needs, from healthcare and psychological support to legal processing and long-term societal reintegration.



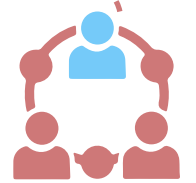
3. Initial Reception and Assessment: Returnees were first accommodated in Reception Centers, where they underwent health assessments, psychological evaluation, and essential needs assessments. These centers, operated by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, served as transitional points for initial rehabilitation and reintegration.



4. Tailored Rehabilitation Programs: Special attention was given to the unique needs of returnees, especially children. Rehabilitation programs were designed to address psychological counseling and social care, focusing on those born in conflict zones and ensuring their integration into local schools and communities.



5. Community Integration and Stigma Management: Public awareness campaigns played a crucial role in fostering community acceptance and dispelling misconceptions. The aim was to reintegrate returnees as productive, law-abiding members of society, involving them in community activities and educational initiatives.



6. Role of the Interinstitutional Technical Groups: These groups were pivotal in providing continuous monitoring and support, adapting strategies as required. They ensured that individual protection plans were not only created but also effectively implemented, reflecting a dynamic and responsive approach to evolving needs.



7. International Collaboration: International actors like GCERF and IOM provided financial and technical support, building capacity within Albanian institutions. This global partnership emphasized a human rights-based approach while addressing security concerns.



8. Challenges and Adaptations: Albania navigated several challenges, including balancing stringent security protocols with human rights, addressing cultural reintegration, and streamlining coordination among different agencies.

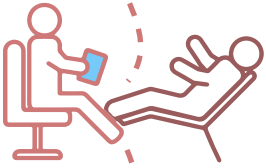
3. THE FIRST WAVE OF RETURNEES



The success of these efforts in Albania highlights the importance of a comprehensive, empathetic, and coordinated approach in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from conflict zones. It reflects a deep understanding of the complex social and psychological needs of individuals who have experienced the trauma of conflict and displacement.



1. Initial Psychological and Social Assessments: Upon their return, individuals and families, like the mother and her five children, were accommodated in a Reception Center. Here, the initial focus was on psychological evaluations and social assessments. These were crucial for identifying trauma-related issues and understanding the family members' dynamics and their social needs.



2. Tailored Psychological Support: Given the traumatic experiences that many returnees, including children, had undergone, psychological support was a cornerstone of the rehabilitation process. For the mother in the case study, signs of stress and resistance, typical after exposure to traumatic events, were evident. The rehabilitation team employed trauma-informed care, focusing on building trust and cooperation. This approach led to behavioral changes and distancing from previous radical influences, showcasing signs of deradicalization.



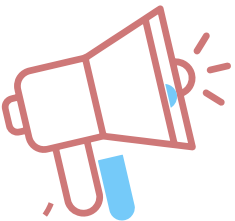
3. Focus on Children's Needs: The children's welfare was a primary concern. Psychological support was extended to address any trauma and emotional distress they had experienced. Special attention was given to integrating the children into the local school system, which involved both educational support and addressing any related anxieties or trauma.



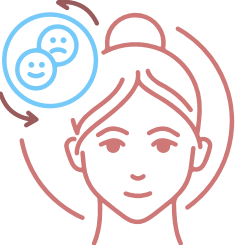
4. Ongoing Counseling and Therapy: Regular counseling sessions and therapy were provided to the families, ensuring continuous psychological support. This approach was essential for addressing the varied psychological impacts of the conflict on the returnees, particularly the children.



5. Community Engagement and Social Reintegration: Efforts to normalize the returnees' lives involved their participation in community activities, such as local events and summer camps. This was crucial for fostering social cohesion and reducing stigma. The returnees' involvement in these activities helped in building a new supportive network and enhancing their social skills.



6. Support in Navigating New Social Dynamics: Counseling and mentorship programs were designed to aid returnees in adapting to community norms and reconstructing their lives in the new social environment. Public awareness campaigns were also significant in promoting community acceptance and understanding.



7. Monitoring and Evaluation of Psychological Well-being: The psychological and emotional well-being of the returnees was continuously monitored. Regular evaluations by psychologists helped assess the effectiveness of the psychological interventions and the returnees' adaptation.

4. THE REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES

The Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees in Tirana, was characterized by a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach. The roles of these agencies, provide a practical example of this multi-faceted strategy.

4.1 Healthcare services



Initial Medical Assessments: Upon arrival at the Reception Center, returnees received immediate medical assessments. This was crucial for identifying any urgent health issues, including physical injuries or conditions resulting from their time in conflict zones.

Psychological Evaluations: Psychologists from healthcare services played a key role in assessing the mental health of the returnees, focusing on identifying trauma and other psychological impacts. These evaluations were essential for understanding their mental state and planning subsequent psychological support.

Ongoing Mental Health Support: Continuous psychological and psychiatric support was provided, with healthcare professionals regularly monitoring the mental well-being of the families and adjusting treatments as needed.

4.2 Education Department



Assessment of Educational Needs: The education specialists evaluated the educational levels and needs of the returnee children. This was particularly important for children, who had experienced significant disruption in their education.

Integration into Local Schools: Efforts were made to integrate the children into the local education system. This included enrolling them in appropriate schools and providing additional educational support to address any learning gaps.

Support Teachers and Programs: Support teachers were assigned to assist with the children's education, facilitating their adaptation to the new educational environment.

4.3 Law Enforcement and Security Agencies

Initial Security Screenings: Upon arrival, returnees underwent security screenings conducted by law enforcement agencies. This was to ensure that no security risks were posed by the returnees to the local community.

Surveillance and Monitoring: Law enforcement agencies were also responsible for the ongoing monitoring of the returnees, particularly in cases where there were concerns about radicalization or involvement in criminal activities.

Coordination with Legal Proceedings: Where necessary, law enforcement agencies coordinated with legal bodies to address any legal issues pertaining to the returnees, such as the investigation conducted by SPAK.

4.4 Local Governance and Social Services

Provision of Housing and Basic Needs: Local government units, in collaboration with social services, facilitated the provision of housing and other basic needs to the returnees. This included finding suitable accommodation and ensuring the families had access to necessary amenities.

Social Integration Programs: Social services organized programs and activities to aid the social reintegration of returnees, helping them to rebuild their lives and integrate into the community.

Case Management: Case managers played a pivotal role in coordinating the various services and support provided to the returnees, ensuring a cohesive and comprehensive approach to their rehabilitation and reintegration.



This approach not only facilitated the practical aspects of reintegration, such as healthcare and education, but also addressed the broader social and psychological needs, ultimately aiding in the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of families.

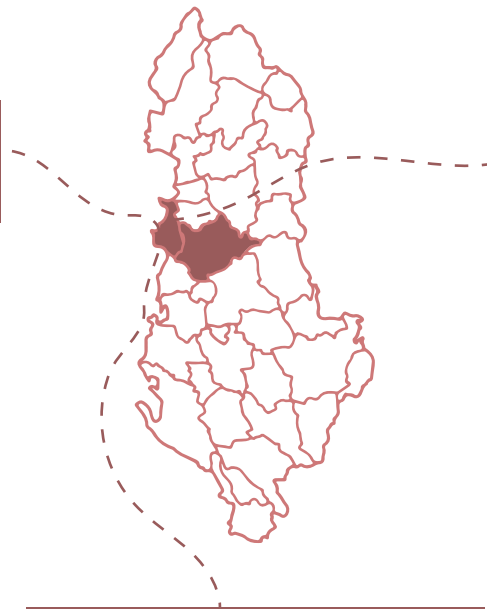
5. REHABILITATION AT THE RECEPTION CENTER IN DURRES AND REINTEGRATION IN TIRANA

5.1 Initial Reception at the Reception Center in Durrës

Upon their arrival, the families were received at the designated Reception Center in Durrës. This center, operated under the joint supervision of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, was crucial in initiating the reintegration process.

1 Security Screenings and Identification

Conducted by the State Police, these initial procedures ensured the verification of the identities of the returnees and addressed any immediate security concerns.



2 Development of Individual Profiles

This phase included rapid medical check-ups and initial psychological evaluations to assess the health status and immediate needs of the family. The psychological state of such returnees who exhibited signs of stress and resistance, was particularly noted for subsequent interventions.

3 Immediate Medical and Psychological Assistance

Each family member's specific needs and conditions were assessed to create individual profiles, which were crucial for tailoring the subsequent rehabilitation plans.

5.2

Detailed Needs Assessment and Planning in Tirana

Once the immediate needs were addressed at the Reception Center in Durrës, the families were transferred to Tirana for a more detailed assessment and integration process.

1 Comprehensive Psychosocial Assessments

Conducted by specialists, these assessments were crucial for understanding the deeper psychological and social needs of each family member, especially considering the children's varied ages and experiences.

2 Legal and Documentation Procedures

Families underwent procedures to ensure they had all necessary legal documents. This was particularly important for children born outside Albania or those lacking valid identification documents.

3 Planning for Long-Term Rehabilitation and Integration

Based on the detailed assessments, a long-term rehabilitation and integration plan was developed. This included aspects like accommodation, education for the children, vocational training and employment opportunities for mothers, and ongoing psychological support.

5.3

Integration Steps in Tirana

In Tirana, the focus shifted to the families' reintegration in the community and long-term stability.

1 Housing and Community Integration

Efforts were made to secure stable housing for the families. In several cases returned mothers expressed their desire to live close to relatives and parents, and this was facilitated so to ensure a more effective reintegration in the community.

2 Education for Children

Special emphasis was placed on the education of the children. They were enrolled in local schools with additional educational support provided, including sessions with a teacher to ease their transition into the educational system.

3 Ongoing Support and Monitoring

The families' reintegration process was continuously monitored by case managers and the relevant agencies. Regular meetings and updates were conducted to assess the families' situation, covering aspects like legal status, psychological well-being, and educational progress.

The Rehabilitation and Reintegration process in Tirana, as evidenced by most returnees, highlighted the importance of a multi-dimensional and phased approach. The collaborative efforts of various governmental and non-governmental entities underscored the comprehensive strategy adopted by Tirana to address the complex needs of returnees from conflict zones.

6. REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION PROCESSES



“ These processes spanned from immediate post-arrival care to longer-term integration, covering a spectrum of medical, legal, psychological, and social assessments. Moreover, the educational and employment support for the repatriated children in Albania was an integral part of their comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration process.

6.1 The phased rehabilitation and reintegration process Top of Form

72-Hour Phase

Psychological Support:

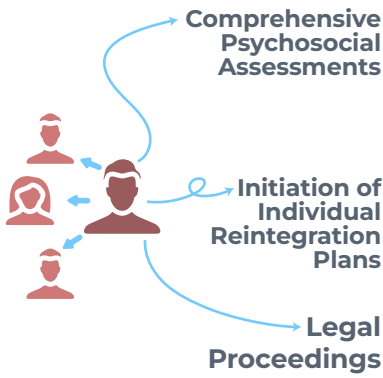
The initial psychological evaluation focused on identifying immediate trauma or stress, particularly important for mothers and children who had experienced conflict environments. This phase set the groundwork for more detailed psychological support in subsequent phases.



Immediate Medical and Legal Assistance:

Upon arrival, families received immediate medical check-ups to address any health concerns. Legal assistance was also provided, including identification and documentary checks. This was crucial for establishing the legal status of the family members, especially for children born in conflict zones.

7-Day Phase

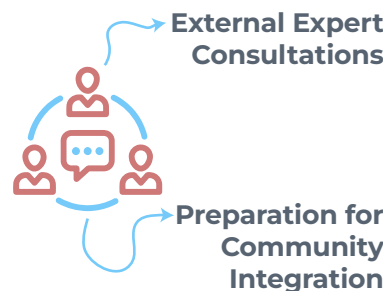


In this phase, the families underwent more in-depth psychological evaluations. These assessments aimed to understand the deeper psychological impact of their experiences and plan for appropriate interventions.

Based on the assessments, individual reintegration plans were put in place. They included steps for the families' gradual integration into Albanian society, focusing on their specific needs and circumstances.

The Special Prosecution Office began investigating the legal status of adult returnees, a critical step for clarifying any legal obligations or proceedings that might be necessary.

14-Day Phase



This phase involved consultations with external experts, including Child Protection Unit specialists, for further psychological and social assessments. This collaborative approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the families' needs.

The plans for integrating the returnees into local communities were further refined, involving extensive coordination with local authorities and institutions. This step was crucial for smooth transitioning from the reception center to community living.

30-Day Phase



By this phase, the individual reintegration plans were elaborated. These plans were holistic, focusing on accommodation, financial support, social integration, and continued psychological care.

The CVE Center played a pivotal role in coordinating support from both state and non-state actors, ensuring that the families received all necessary assistance for a successful reintegration.

This phase marked the beginning of the family's long-term integration into society, with a focus on securing stable accommodation and initiating the children's educational journey.

72-Hour Phase

7-Day Phase

14-Day Phase

30-Day Phase



Throughout these phases, the approach to the families' rehabilitation and reintegration was characterized by its adaptability, responsiveness to evolving needs, and a strong focus on ensuring their dignity and rights. Medical assessments ensured physical well-being, legal proceedings clarified their status, psychological support addressed mental health, and social assessments facilitated their integration into the community.

6.2

Educational and Employment Support: In-depth look at the educational and vocational programs provided to the returned children

Initial Support



Assessment of Educational Levels and Needs

The children's education levels and specific needs were carefully evaluated. This assessment included understanding their previous educational experiences, any interruptions or gaps in their learning, and specific challenges they faced due to their past environments.

Identifying Language and Cultural Barriers

Special attention was given to identifying any language barriers, especially for children who might have had their early education in non-Albanian settings. Cultural differences were also assessed to facilitate a smoother integration into the local education system.

Educational Planning



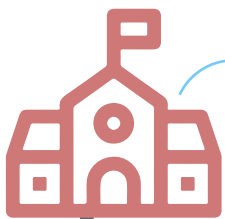
Development of Individualized Educational Plans

Each child's unique educational needs led to the creation of tailored educational plans. These plans considered the children's ages, previous educational exposures, and specific areas where they needed additional support.

Collaboration with Educational Institutions

The authorities collaborated closely with local schools and educational institutions to ensure these plans were feasible and that the schools were equipped to meet the children's needs.

Integration into Educational Systems



Enrollment in Local Schools

The children were enrolled in appropriate local schools, considering factors like their age, academic level, and proximity to their residence.

Special Educational Support

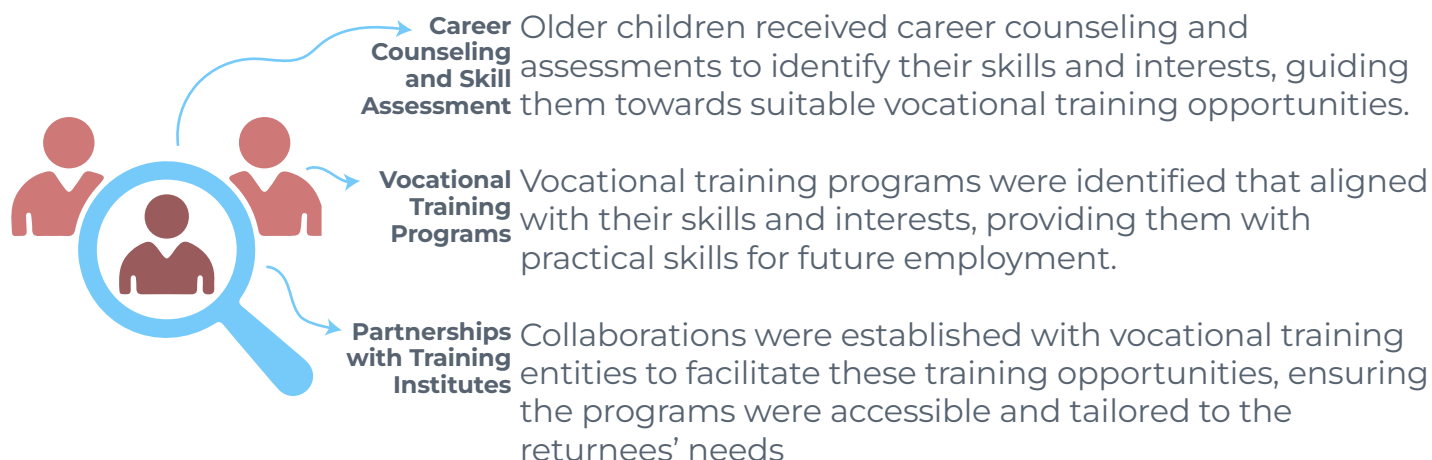
Additional educational support included language classes for those needing to improve their Albanian language skills, catch-up classes for subjects they were behind in, and other tailored educational interventions.



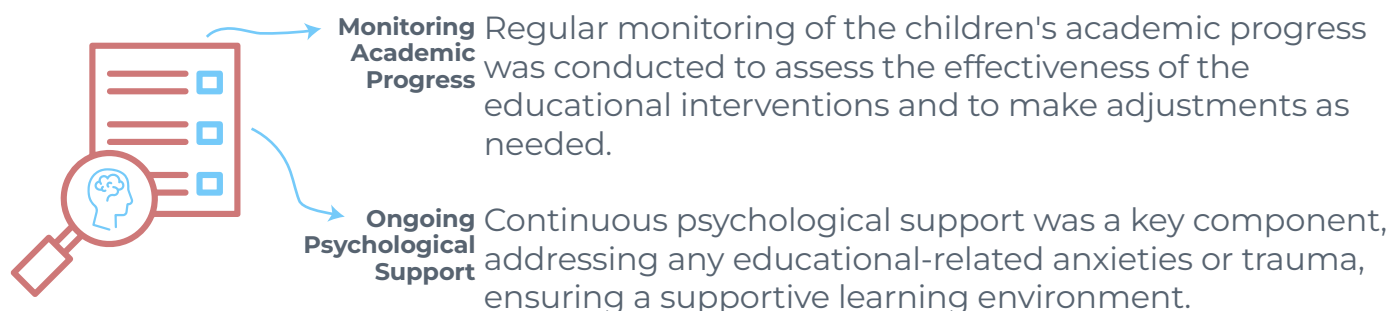
Psychological Assistance in Schools

Recognizing the trauma these children had experienced, psychological support was integrated into their school life, ensuring they had access to counseling and mental health support during their education.

Vocational Training and Employment Support



Continuous Educational Support



By addressing both immediate educational needs and long-term career prospects, the government demonstrated a comprehensive commitment to the well-being and future prospects of returnees from conflict zones.

7. INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS



“ The repatriation and legal processing of the returnees in Albania involved significant international collaboration, reflecting the complexities of handling such cases in the global context of counter-terrorism and human rights.

GCERF's engagement in Albania, initiated in 2019 as part of its Western Balkans regional expansion, has been instrumental in addressing the complex challenges of Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R). A critical aspect of GCERF's support in Albania was its emphasis on strengthening the capacities of frontline workers. These workers, including both government and non-governmental entities, are crucial in the specialized case management required for effective R&R. GCERF's initiatives provided these frontline actors with the necessary skills and resources, thereby enhancing the overall quality and efficiency of the R&R process. This approach not only addressed immediate needs but also contributed to building a more resilient and capable support system within Albania. The involvement of civil society in these efforts was particularly significant, fostering a collaborative environment that integrated local knowledge and expertise into the R&R programs. In addition to direct assistance, GCERF's strategy in Albania involved creating sustainable systems for ongoing R&R efforts. This included integrating R&R processes into national referral mechanisms and local government structures, ensuring a lasting impact. Part of this strategy was the establishment of multi-use, multi-agency centers managed by municipalities, designed to offer comprehensive support services. Moreover, GCERF placed a strong emphasis on community engagement, particularly in early identification and response to radicalization. This preventative approach was crucial in addressing potential risks at an early stage. By aligning its efforts with government-led strategies and identifying gaps in national mechanisms, GCERF's past support in Albania not only addressed immediate challenges but also laid the groundwork for sustainable and effective R&R processes in the long term.

Role of International Entities in Repatriation

Support from Foreign Governments

The Albanian government worked closely with foreign governments, particularly those controlling the former conflict areas, to facilitate the identification and safe passage of the families back to Albania.

Involvement of International Organizations

International organizations played a crucial role, providing logistical support, expertise in dealing with conflict zones, and assistance in negotiating safe access for the repatriation of the family.

Collaborative Efforts for Safe Repatriation

The repatriation of the returnees was the result of coordinated efforts between Albanian authorities and various international entities. This collaboration ensured that the process was conducted safely and in compliance with international laws and standards.

Legal Processing and Documentation

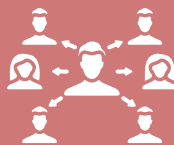
Verification of Identity and Family Ties

Legal processes, including DNA testing, were employed to verify the identities of the family members and ascertain familial relationships, especially for children born in conflict zones. This step was crucial for establishing their legal status and determining the appropriate custody and care arrangements.



Assistance in Obtaining Necessary Documentation

Efforts were made to provide the returnees with the necessary legal documentation. This process was facilitated by international collaboration, ensuring that all legal procedures adhered to both national and international standards.



Legal Investigations by Albanian Authorities

The Albanian Special Prosecution Office (SPAK) conducted investigations to determine the involvement of adult returnees in terrorist activities. This was a sensitive aspect of the legal process, requiring a balance between national security concerns and the rights of the individuals involved.



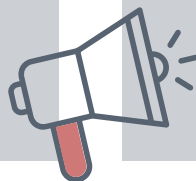
International Legal Frameworks and Human Rights Considerations

Adherence to International Human Rights Standards

Throughout the repatriation and legal processing, there was a strong emphasis on adhering to international human rights standards. This approach was vital to ensure that the returnees were treated fairly and with dignity, respecting their rights as individuals.

Collaboration with International Human Rights Organizations

The involvement of international human rights organizations provided an additional layer of oversight and guidance, ensuring that the returnees' rights were not infringed upon during the legal processes.

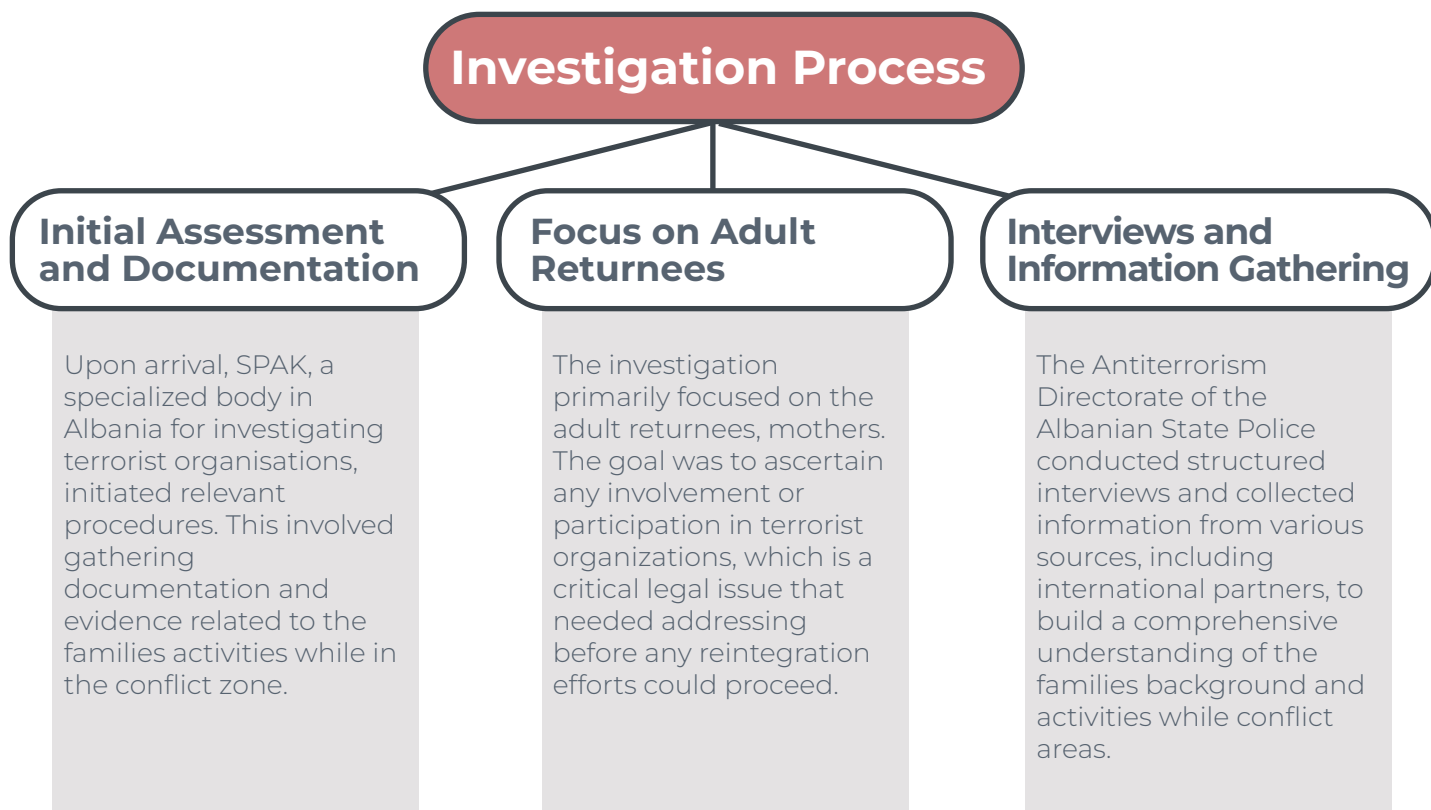


This approach not only facilitates the logistical aspects of repatriation but also ensures that legal and human rights considerations are adequately addressed, reflecting a comprehensive and responsible approach to handling cases of returnees from conflict areas.

8. LEGAL STATUS INVESTIGATIONS: INSIGHT INTO INVESTIGATION PROCESS AND DNA TESTING, RELATED TO THE FAMILIES' LEGAL STATUS AND CUSTODY ISSUES



“ The legal status investigation of the repatriated returnees, particularly regarding the families' involvement in terrorist activities and the determination of custody and familial relationships, was a critical aspect of their reintegration process in Albania.



DNA Testing for Familial Verification

Verification of Family Ties

One of the major challenges in the repatriation process was verifying the families' ties, especially for children born in the conflict zone. DNA testing played a crucial role in this verification process.

Legal and Custodial Implications

Determining the biological relationships within the families had significant legal and custodial implications. It was essential for establishing legal custody of the children, especially in cases where one or both parents might have been involved in terrorist activities.

Collaboration with International Entities

The DNA testing process was likely supported by international entities, ensuring that it adhered to scientific and legal standards. This cooperation was vital given the nature of the families.

Legal and Humanitarian Considerations

Protection of Children's Rights

A significant focus was also on protecting the rights of the children involved. Ensuring their well-being and best interests were central considerations in any legal decisions regarding custody and care.



The process exemplifies the complex legal challenges involved in repatriating families from conflict zones and highlights the importance of a thorough, multidisciplinary approach that encompasses legal, humanitarian, and security considerations.

9. COMMUNITY INTEGRATION AND CHALLENGES



“ Community integration and the associated challenges for the returnees, to Albania, are key aspects of the reintegration process.

9.1 Community Integration

Social Services Support In Tirana, the local social services played a crucial role in facilitating the families' reintegration into the community. This included assistance in finding housing, enrolling children in schools, and providing necessary social welfare support.

Educational Integration A significant focus was placed on integrating the children into the local educational system. This involved not only enrolling them in schools but also providing additional support, such as language classes and psychological counseling, to help them adapt to the new environment and overcome any learning barriers.

Psychosocial Support Ongoing mental health support was crucial for the families, especially given their traumatic experiences. Psychologists and therapists provided counseling and therapy to address issues of trauma, helping the family members adjust to their new lives and integrate socially.

Economic Empowerment For the adult members of the families, economic empowerment through vocational training and job placement services was important. This not only provided them with financial independence but also facilitated their integration into the community by allowing them to contribute productively.

Community Engagement Activities Participation in community activities, such as local events or summer camps for children, played a vital role in fostering social connections and reducing the stigma associated with being returnees from conflict zones.

9.2 Challenges in Community Integration

Stigma and Public Perception One of the biggest challenges was the stigma associated with returnees, particularly those returning from conflict zones associated with terrorism. Overcoming this stigma required significant efforts in public awareness and community engagement to foster understanding and acceptance.

Cultural Reintegration For many returnees, especially children, adapting to the cultural norms and societal expectations of their home country after spending time in a vastly different environment posed a significant challenge.

Trauma and Mental Health Issues Addressing the psychological trauma experienced by returnees was critical. The families, especially the children, needed ongoing psychological support to deal with the effects of their experiences in conflict zones.

Legal and Bureaucratic Hurdles Legal challenges, such as obtaining necessary documentation and regularizing the legal status, particularly for children born abroad, were significant hurdles in the reintegration process.

Economic Challenges Ensuring economic stability for the returnees was a challenge. Providing adults with employment opportunities and the necessary training to reintegrate into the job market was essential but often difficult.

Coordinated Multi-Agency Approach Ensuring effective coordination among various agencies - social services, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and employment agencies - was challenging but necessary for a holistic reintegration process.

10. SOCIAL INTEGRATION



“ Social reintegration was a complex process involving efforts to integrate them back into the community while managing public awareness and stigma.

10.1 Community Integration Efforts

Social Services Support In Tirana, social services played a pivotal role in the families reintegration. This included finding housing, enrolling children in schools, and providing necessary social welfare support.

Involvement of Cross-Sectoral Technical Group The integration of the families involved collaboration across various sectors, including education, health, social services, and local NGOs. This group ensured that the family received comprehensive support tailored to their unique needs.

Public Awareness Campaigns To mitigate stigma and foster community acceptance, public awareness campaigns were crucial. These campaigns educated the public about the circumstances of returnees and aimed to dispel myths and fears surrounding individuals returning from conflict zones.

Community Engagement Activities The families participated in activities, which were instrumental in building social connections and fostering acceptance. Activities like community events or summer camps for children helped in normalizing their presence in the community.

10.2

Management of Stigma and Public Perception

Addressing Misconceptions Efforts were made to address misconceptions and fears about returnees. This involved transparent communication about the reintegration process and the steps taken to ensure public safety.

Involving Community Leaders Engaging community leaders and influencers in public awareness efforts helped in reaching a broader audience and effectively addressing stigma and fears.

Educational Institutions' Role Schools played a crucial role in integrating the children and managing stigma. Teachers and staff were provided with guidance on how to support the children and foster an inclusive environment.

Media Engagement Responsible media reporting was encouraged to ensure that the returnees' privacy was respected and that sensationalism did not fuel stigma.

10.3

Challenges in Social Reintegration

Cultural Adaptation For children, adapting to the cultural norms of Albania after experiencing life in a conflict zone was challenging.

Overcoming Trauma Ongoing psychological support was essential to help the family members, particularly the children, overcome the trauma of their experiences and integrate socially.

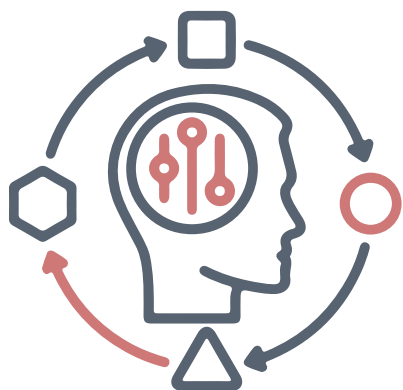
Economic Integration Finding employment and achieving economic stability was a significant challenge, particularly for mothers, who needed to support their children.

Building Trust with Neighbors and Local Community Developing trust and relationships within the local community was crucial but also challenging, given the background and experiences of families.

“

The social reintegration of returnees in Albania was a multifaceted process that required careful management of public perception and stigma, alongside practical support for housing, education, and economic stability. This process not only aided the returned families, but also served as a model for integrating other returnees into Albanian society.

11. CHALLENGES IN ADAPTATION AND RESPONSE



“ The reintegration of returnees in Albania, presented several challenges. These challenges required adaptive responses from various agencies involved in the process.

Ensuring economic stability for mothers, who were responsible for the welfare of their children, was a major challenge, particularly in finding employment and sustainable income sources.

Economic Stability

The children's education was disrupted, and they faced challenges in integrating into the Albanian education system, requiring additional support.

Educational Integration

Legal issues, including the determination of the families' legal status and the provision of necessary documentation, especially for children born in conflict zones, were significant challenges.

Legal Status and Documentation

Challenges in Adaptation

Psychological Trauma

The families, especially the children, experienced significant trauma from living in a conflict zone. This trauma manifested in various psychological issues, including stress, anxiety, and difficulty in adapting to a new environment.

Cultural and Social Reintegration

The families faced challenges in adapting to the cultural and social norms of Albania, especially the children who had spent a significant part of their lives in a different setting.

Stigma and Community Acceptance

There was a significant challenge in managing the stigma associated with returnees from conflict zones. The families faced potential ostracism and fear from the community.

Challenges in Adaptation

1 Comprehensive Psychological Support

The families received ongoing psychological support, with particular focus on the children, to address trauma and facilitate adaptation to their new life in Albania.

2 Tailored Educational Programs

Special educational programs and support systems were implemented to integrate the children into the Albanian education system. This included language classes and additional tutoring.

3 Community Engagement Initiatives

Public awareness campaigns and community engagement activities were conducted to reduce stigma and foster community acceptance. These initiatives aimed to educate the public and build a supportive environment for the families.

4 Economic Empowerment Programs

Efforts were made to provide vocational training and employment opportunities for mothers, aiding in economic stability and independence.

5 Legal and Documentation Assistance

Legal assistance was provided to navigate the complexities of obtaining necessary documentation and establishing the legal status of family members, particularly the children.

6 Multi-Agency Collaboration

The reintegration process involved collaboration among various agencies, including social services, health care providers, education departments, legal bodies, and NGOs. This multi-agency approach ensured that all aspects of the families' needs were addressed comprehensively.

7 Continuous Monitoring and Adjustment

The families' progress was continuously monitored, with reintegration plans being adjusted as needed. This approach allowed for a responsive and flexible strategy that could adapt to the evolving needs of the families.

12. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS



“ The monitoring, evaluating, and directing future approaches in the rehabilitation and reintegration of the returnees in Albania were integral to ensuring the successful adaptation and integration in the Albanian society.

Continuous Monitoring

1 Regular Assessments

Progress of families was regularly assessed to track their adaptation and integration. This included monitoring their psychological well-being, social interactions, and adjustment to the new environment.

2 Academic Monitoring

For the children, their academic progress was closely monitored. This involved regular updates from their schools and additional educational support programs to assess their learning and integration.

3 Health Evaluations

Ongoing health assessments were conducted to ensure that any physical or mental health issues were promptly addressed.

4 Economic Stability Checks

Mother's progress towards economic stability, including their involvement in vocational training and employment, was regularly reviewed.

5 Feedback from Service Providers

Inputs from various service providers, including psychologists, social workers, and educators, were crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the families' progress.

Integration of Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies

1 Multi-Dimensional Approach	The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy employed a multi-dimensional approach, assessing various aspects such as health, education, social integration, and economic stability.
2 Interagency Collaboration	The M&E process involved collaboration among different agencies. Regular meetings of the Interinstitutional Technical Group were held to discuss the families progress and coordinate efforts.
3 Adaptability of Plans	Based on the findings from regular assessments, the individual protection plans for the families were adapted to meet their evolving needs. This dynamic approach allowed for tailored interventions.
4 Involvement of External Experts	Specialists, including psychologists and educators, provided external insights into the families adaptation process, adding depth to the evaluations.
5 Community Feedback	Feedback from the community, particularly regarding the families social integration and acceptance, was considered. This helped in understanding the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives.

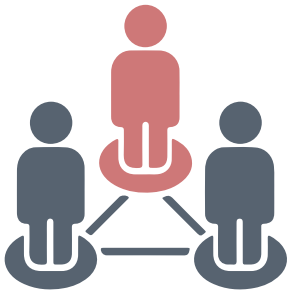
Future Directions

1 Long-term Support	Continuous support was planned for the long-term, especially in areas like education, psychological support, and economic empowerment.
2 Policy Adaptations	Insights gained from the families cases were used to inform future policy and program development in the reintegration of returnees.
3 Sustainable Integration Efforts	Emphasis was placed on ensuring sustainable integration, including long-term educational support for the children and stable employment for mothers.
4 Community Involvement	Future strategies involved greater community involvement to foster a more inclusive environment for returnees.
5 Data-Driven Decisions	The M&E findings were crucial in making data-driven decisions for continuous improvement in the reintegration process.



The lessons learned and data gathered from this process provide valuable insights for future directions in the reintegration of returnees, highlighting the importance of continuous support, community involvement, and sustainable integration strategies.

13. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS



“ Drawing from the comprehensive case study of the repatriation and reintegration of returnees in Tirana, several key lessons and strategic recommendations emerge.

The success of the reintegration was largely due to the effective coordination among various agencies, including health, social services, education, legal, and security sectors. A collaborative approach ensured comprehensive support covering all aspects of the families' needs.

Multi-Agency Coordination is Crucial

The families case underscores the importance of individualized support. Each family member had unique needs, and the personalized plans facilitated effective rehabilitation and integration.

Tailored Rehabilitation and Reintegration Plans are Essential

Public awareness campaigns and community involvement played a significant role in reducing stigma and facilitating the families' acceptance in the community. This aspect is critical for the long-term success of reintegration efforts.

Community Engagement is Key for Social Integration

Lessons Learned

Ongoing Psychological Support is Fundamental

The psychological trauma experienced by returnees, especially children, requires continuous and specialized mental health support. This is crucial for their overall well-being and social adaptation.

Legal and Documentation Support is a Priority

Ensuring that returnees have proper legal documentation and addressing any legal issues early in the reintegration process is essential to prevent future complications.

Monitoring and Evaluation Ensure Adaptability

Regular monitoring and evaluation of reintegration efforts allow for timely adjustments and improvements, ensuring the needs of returnees are consistently met.

Recommendations for Future Efforts

- 1 Strengthen Inter-Agency Frameworks**

Establish and reinforce frameworks for effective inter-agency collaboration. This includes regular communication channels and joint planning sessions to synchronize efforts across different sectors.
- 2 Invest in Community Sensitization Programs**

Develop and expand community engagement and public awareness programs to build a supportive environment for returnees. This can help in addressing misconceptions and reducing social stigma.
- 3 Enhance Psychosocial Support Services**

Allocate resources for comprehensive and long-term psychological support for returnees, emphasizing trauma-informed care.
- 4 Focus on Children's Education and Well-being**

Prioritize the educational and psychological needs of children returnees. Implement specialized educational programs and provide continuous support to ensure their smooth integration into the educational system.
- 5 Ensure Legal Support and Documentation**

Provide legal assistance to returnees, especially in obtaining necessary documentation and addressing any legal issues related to their status.
- 6 Implement Robust Monitoring and Evaluation**

Develop robust M&E mechanisms to continually assess the effectiveness of reintegration programs and make necessary adjustments.
- 7 Prepare for Long-term Integration**

Plan for the long-term integration of returnees, including sustainable economic opportunities, housing support, and community integration initiatives.
- 8 Share Best Practices and Learnings**

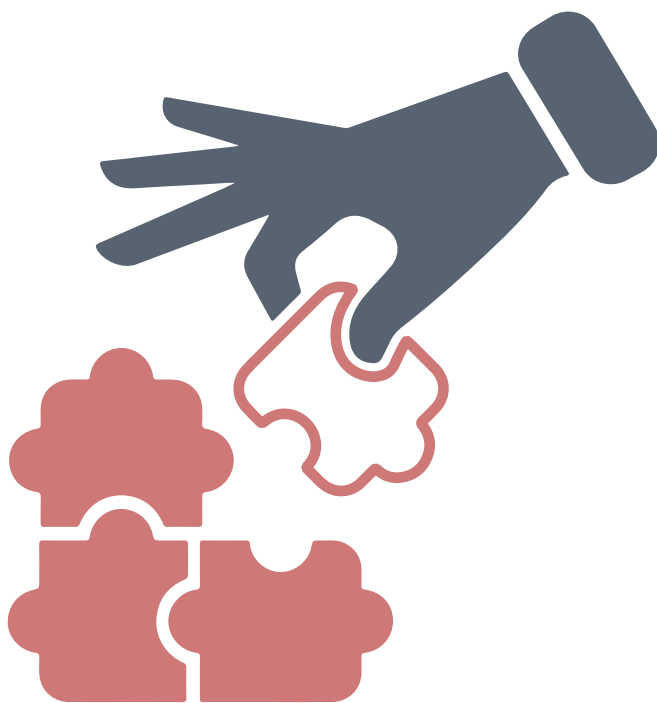
Document lessons learned and best practices from each case of reintegration and share these insights for broader learning and application.
- 9 Foster International Collaboration**

Maintain and strengthen international collaborations for support, resource sharing, and learning from global best practices in reintegration efforts.



Future efforts can benefit significantly from these learnings, ensuring more effective and humane approaches to reintegration that respect the rights of returnees while ensuring community safety and cohesion.

14. CONCLUSION



The comprehensive case study of Albania's approach to rehabilitating and reintegrating returnees from conflict zones presents a multifaceted and nuanced strategy.

Synthesis of Key Findings

1

Holistic Approach

Albania's strategy extends beyond mere repatriation, encompassing psychological care, legal assistance, educational support, and social integration. This holistic approach is vital for the successful reintegration of returnees, especially those deeply affected by conflict and radicalization.

2

Collaborative Multi-Agency Efforts

The success of the reintegration process is largely attributed to the seamless collaboration between various agencies, including health services, social workers, law enforcement, education departments, and NGOs. This inter-agency cooperation ensures comprehensive care and support for returnees.

3

Community Engagement and Stigma Reduction

Albania's strategy includes significant efforts in public awareness and community engagement to facilitate the social integration of returnees. This aspect is critical in reducing stigma and fostering a supportive environment for returnees.

4

Emphasis on Psychological Rehabilitation

Continuous psychological support, especially for children, is a cornerstone of Albania's approach. Addressing the mental health impacts of conflict is crucial for the well-being and successful integration of returnees.

5

Legal and Documentation Processes

Ensuring legal clarity and proper documentation for returnees, particularly for children born in conflict zones, is essential. This legal support is a key step in reintegration and preventing future complications.

6

Adaptive and Individualized Plans

The case study highlights the importance of adaptive and personalized reintegration plans, catering to the unique needs and circumstances of each returnee.

Albania's approach to the reintegration and reintegration of returnees, as illustrated by the case study, highlights a comprehensive, collaborative, and humane methodology. This approach not only addresses immediate security concerns but also focuses on the long-term rehabilitation and integration of returnees into society. The implications of this strategy are far-reaching, offering valuable lessons and insights for global counterterrorism and humanitarian initiatives.



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Preventing Violent Extremism

Tirana, November 2023

