Repatriation and the best interests of the child

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Chapter 1

General introduction

> In October 2013, the socialist government of French president Francois
> Hollande ordered border police to arrest a 15-year-old schoolgirl while
> she was on a field trip to a Peugeot factory in eastern France. In full view
> of her classmates, the crying [Leonarda] Dibrani was forced into a squad
> car and whisked away into police custody. Within days, Dibrani and her
> family were deported to Kosovo. (*Excerpt from background article*)[1]

With forced repatriations usually taking place during the night, the arrest of
Leonarda Dibrani in full view of her classmates spurred protests by thousands of
high-school students in France. Attempting to calm things down in a nationally
televised address, president Hollande offered a compromise by which Leonarda
could return to France to finish her studies, but without the rest of her family.
This resulted in even more controversy; the majority of public opinion was in
favour of the deportation (Gaffney, 2015), while those opposing the compromise
criticised it for putting the child in a position to choose between her parents and
schooling.

Not only in France did the forced repatriation of migrant children[2]
lead to public resistance; other European countries also experienced debates
after migrant children had been forcefully sent back to their countries of origin.[3]
With migration policies of EU Member States being restrictive, the return of
rejected asylum seekers has become a high priority on the national agendas of
EU host states – both as a way to remain in control of the borders and migration
flows, and as a message to discourage other asylum seekers who wish to come
(Black & Gent, 2006, p. 16). After a rejection of the asylum application, asylum
seekers are generally encouraged to return voluntarily to the country of origin
(*e.g.*, through Assisted Voluntary Return packages). When not cooperating with
the return decision, they are returned by force.

Within the last six years, the number of migrant children – arriving
either together with their families or alone – showed a *six-fold* increase in

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1   McKenna, M. (2014). Far from home: A 15-year old girl is paying the real price for a fa-
ther's lie and political missteps in France. Kosovo 2.0, 7, p. 22-26.

2   In this dissertation, migrant children are defined as 'children who are forcibly displaced
or migrate to another country, be it with their family members or alone, and whether or
not seeking for asylum' (see also European Commission, 2017, p. 2).

3   See for instance 'Ophef over uitzetten ziek kind [Commotion about deporting ill child]',
Trouw (9 augustus 2013); 'Tvangsudviste Remzi kan ikke få sin medicin [Medicin not avail-
abe for expelled Remzi]', DR dk (29 September 2013); 'Saga e Nisit [The Saga of Nis]' and
'Nis Beqiri kthehet në Suedi [Nis Beqiri is returned in Sweden]' Telegrafi.com (9 October
2013; 20 November 2013).

the European Union (EU). In 2015 and 2016, children made up 30% of all asylum applicants in EU member states (European Commission, 2017).[4] There is no data available about the proportion of rejected asylum seekers who actually return after a return decision, nor about the amount of returned children (EMN, 2016). As president Hollande's response to the Dibrani case illustrated, host countries may struggle with 'a clash between two normative frameworks' (Bhabha, 2001, p. 293). This clash consists of 'immigration control preoccupations' on the one hand – in which both children and adults are seen as illegal migrants – and 'welfare protection (including child's rights) concerns' on the other – in which "…the child is viewed as a child first, and an asylum seeker or alien second" (Bhabha, 2001, p. 293-295). This clash is also visible in policies and practices of other EU member states. For instance, despite human rights (including children's rights) being at the heart of EU laws and policy, the recent agreement between the EU Member States and the Afghan government to facilitate the forced repatriation of asylum seekers is argued by various organisations to be in violation of children's rights.[5]

The Best Interests of the Child principle and repatriation

In both the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* and all EU asylum regulations and directives[6], one of the key articles of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) is included: the best interests of the child principle (art. 3 CRC), which stipulates that in all decisions that impact children, their best interests should be a primary consideration. In a recent communication to the EU

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4   Between 2010 and 2013, more than 60% of all first asylum applications in EU member states were rejected (either being inadmissible or unfounded). In 2014 and 2015 this number decreased to approximately 50%, likely because of more asylum applicants having arrived from Syria (EMN, 2016, p. 2).

5   In autumn 2016, the EU and the government of Afghanistan hosted an international donor conference for Afghanistan. In the margins of this conference, the EU and Afghanistan came to the 'Joint Way Forward' agreement on migration, in which the forced repatriation of rejected Afghan asylum seekers was facilitated. The warnings against the destabilising effect these deportations would have in combination with the mass deportations of Afghans from Pakistan, and the alarming situation for Afghan returnee children that was brought forward by various Non-Governmental Organisations (Gladwell et al., 2016; Save the Children, 2016), were all in vain. At the moment of writing, EU Member States have returned hundreds asylum seekers since the agreement was made. Human rights organisations argue these deportations to be in violation of international law (Amnesty International, 2017).

6   See Article 24 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000/C 364/01); Article 6 of the Revised Dublin Regulation (604/2013); Article 20 of the Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU); Article 23 of the Reception Directive (2013/33/EU); and regarding return specifically, Article 5 of the Return Directive (2008/115/EC).

member states, the European Commission (2017, p. 13) confirms that "...decisions to return children to their country of origin must respect the principles of non-refoulement and the best interests of the child". In addition, the Commission notes that such decisions should be taken after 'a case-by-case assessment' and "...a fair and effective procedure guaranteeing their right to protection and non-discrimination" (European Commission, 2017, p. 13). Also in the recent *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, the world's leaders have stressed their commitment that any type of return "...[should] respect the rules of international law and must in addition be conducted in keeping with the best interests of children and with due process" (UN General Assembly 2016, para 58).

Though mentioned as one of the principles that a return decision should respect, a best interest of the child assessment as interpreted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter 'the Committee') is not a standard procedure in migration procedures in EU member states (Kalverboer, 2014; Montgomery & Foldspang, 2005). In its General Comment no. 14 (2013), the Committee lays down the steps that should be taken when assessing and determining a child's best interests. Eventually, the best interests assessment should be aimed at "...ensuring both the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights recognized in the Convention and the holistic development of the child" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013, para. 4). Therefore various elements should be evaluated and balanced in 'light of the specific circumstances of each child':

> These circumstances relate to the individual characteristics of the child or children concerned, such as, inter alia, sex, level of maturity, experience, belonging to a minority group, having a physical, sensory or intellectual disability, as well as the social and cultural context in which the child or children find themselves, such as the presence or absence of parents, whether the child lives with them, quality of the relationships between the child and his or her family or caregivers, the environment in relation to safety, the existence of quality alternative means available to the family, extended family or caregivers, etc. (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013, para. 48).

The General Comment further elaborates on the elements that should be weighed, consisting of: the child's views, identity and vulnerability, family environment and relations, care protection and safety, and the right to health and education (par. 52-79). In addition, to ensure correct implementation, the Committee provides several child-friendly procedural safeguards, such as the

child's right to express his or her own views, assessing the child's interests through qualified professionals in a multidisciplinary team, and taking into account the child's perception of time (par. 85-99).

Furthermore, the Committee states that when assessing a child's best interests, decision-makers should take in mind that a child's capacities will evolve, and therefore that they should refrain from making 'definitive and irreversible decisions':

> [decision makers] should not only assess the physical, emotional, educational and other needs at the specific moment of the decision, but should also consider the possible scenarios of the child's development, and analyse them in the short and long term. In this context, decisions should assess continuity and stability of the child's present and future situation (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013, para. 84).

Regarding return decisions in migration procedures, the best interests assessment thus implies that different 'scenarios of the child's development' should be considered with regard to the outcome of the decision to repatriate a child to the country of origin. In order to do this, evidence is needed about what such different 'scenarios of the child's development' after a decision to return to the country of origin could consist of.

How migrant and asylum-seeker children are developing *after return* is, however, not investigated thoroughly yet. In contrast, research into migrant children is often conducted in the high-income host countries where they are staying, and focuses on issues related to acculturation difficulties, exposure to traumatic experiences, or mental health (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012; Reed, Fazel, Jones, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2011). These studies show that risk factors could occur during different stages, such as experiences before the flight (*e.g.*, having been exposed to war, violence, or the loss of loved ones), during the flight itself (*e.g.*, dangerous ways of travelling, and vulnerability to abuse during the journey) or after arrival in the host country (*e.g.*, discrimination and insecurity regarding the right to stay) (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Fazel et al., 2012; Hodes, 2000; Van Os, Kalverboer, Zijlstra, Post, & Knorth, 2016).

This study aims to gain insight into how children are faring after return to their countries of origin and to identify the risk and protective factors for children's development after return. This knowledge is needed to better consider the possible scenarios of children's development in the return decision-making.

In addition, this dissertation provides points of consideration regarding the reintegration support for asylum-seeker children who need to return to their countries of origin. The findings can thus contribute to the best interests of the child assessment and determination in the host countries before the repatriation.

State of the art: Current knowledge on return migration

Currently, the situation of returnees in their countries of origin is not formally monitored – let alone the situation of returnee children specifically – nor do government discourses and policies include the experiences of returnees (Lietaert, Derluyn & Broekaert, 2014). Studies into return migration focus generally on the situation of *adult returnees*.

Research conducted into the situation of returned migrants in the 1960s and 1970s was focused on labour migrants returning to their countries of origin. In these studies, scholars studied the questions which type of migrants decided to return and why they decided to do so, as well as why so many of them faced readjustment difficulties in the cultures in which they were originally socialized (Gmelch, 1980). Nowadays, returned migrants consist of 'a heterogeneous group of actors': returned migrants not only comprise (high- or low skilled) labour migrants, but also returned refugees, rejected asylum seekers, and irregular migrants (Cassarino, 2004, p. 270). Though academics have argued that due to its multi-faceted and contextual character it is difficult to develop one theory about return migration (Van Meeteren, Engbersen, Snel, & Faber, 2014), reintegration processes seem to be generally influenced by the initial migration motives; the duration of stay in the host country; the conditions of the return, and the returnee's preparedness and his or her opportunities to mobilize resources before the return (Cassarino, 2004).

During the last decades, the research focus concerning return migration shifted to the question when the return of refugees or rejected asylum seekers could be considered sustainable or 'successful' (Black et al., 2004). This question can be investigated from various perspectives (*e.g.*, from the viewpoint of individual returnees, countries of origin, or of the host countries). From the perspective of the individual returnee, Black et al. (2004, p. 39) argue that "… return migration is sustainable *for individuals* if returnees' socio-economic status and fear of violence or persecution is no worse, relative to the population in the place of origin, one year after the return". Other scholars emphasise additional interrelated dimensions that are important for sustainability of the return, such as the economic, social network and psychosocial 'embeddedness' after the

return (Ruben, Van Houte, & Davids, 2009; Van Houte & De Koning, 2008; Van Houte, 2014).

In the discourse concerning the return of ex-refugees or rejected asylum seekers, it is often assumed that returnees will easily reintegrate into their 'home' countries, as they return to the place where they 'belong' (Black & Gent, 2006). However, various studies into the circumstances of adult returnees in post-conflict societies report obstacles for reintegration and disappointment, such as a lack of social services and health care, unemployment and poor living conditions, vulnerability as a returnee, or continuing persecution or discrimination (Carr, 2014; Ghanem, 2003; Huttunen, 2010; Lie, 2004; Riiskjaer & Nielsson, 2008; Toscani et al., 2007; Webber, 2011). These findings have led scholars to conclude that "… in practice, the experience of return may be more, rather than less, problematic than the experience of exile" (Black & Gent, 2006, p. 20).

The situation of children after return
The heterogeneity and degree of voluntariness of return migration is also reflected in studies into the situation of returned migrant children. Various studies have been conducted into the situation of children in *highly-skilled* migrant families or *expats*, who return to their country of origin after a stay abroad (Hatfield, 2010; Knörr, 2005; Moriyoshi, 2001; Ní Laoire, 2011; Yoshida et al., 2002; Yoshida et al., 2009). These children are often conceptualized as 'Third Culture Kids', referring to a 'globalized third culture' that they are thought to live in (Hatfield, 2010, p. 245). After return to the country of origin, they can face identity issues and adjustment difficulties, such as not feeling at home, isolated from peers, or feeling lonely (Knörr, 2005; Yoshida et al., 2002). The families within this group return to high-income countries, with the child's best interests and a 'better life' for children often being the primary return motivations for these families (Ní Laoire, 2011).

Another group of returned migrant children are the *children of labour migrants*, or the so-called 'second generation', who stayed in host countries due to the parents' employment and returned to their countries of origin together with their families (De Bree, Davids, & De Haas, 2010; King, 1977; Neto, 2016; Vathi & Duci, 2016). One of the earliest studies in which the situation of the children within returnee families was taken into account, concerned a study into the situation of Italians returning from the UK in the 1970s (King, 1977). This study found that especially adolescents had difficulties with regard to adaptation, such as language difficulties and getting used to the cultural differences. Though this type of return is often characterized to be *voluntary*, previous scholars argue that

both aspects of a forced and voluntary character can play a role. For instance, in a research into the psychosocial wellbeing of returnee children in Albania who stayed with their families in Greece, Vathi and Duci (2016, p. 6) argue that the economic crisis and the ensuing financial difficulties made it a 'not-so-voluntary return' for these families.

A last category of returnee children consists of children who were either forcibly displaced or left their home countries because of social-economic circumstances, and stayed as refugees, asylum seekers or irregular migrants in *high-income* host countries, neighbouring *low- or middle-income* countries, or *internally displaced* within their own home countries. Considering that circumstances in the host countries are likely to influence the situation after return (Van Meeteren, et al., 2014; Van Houte & Davids, 2008), we will focus in the following description of the literature on the situation and wellbeing of migrant children who returned (either voluntarily or by force) from *EU host countries* to their countries of origin.[7]

Returnee children after having stayed as migrants in EU host countries
Studies focusing only on returnee children and youth are scarce and have been conducted in Afghanistan (Bowerman, 2017; Gladwell et al., 2016) and Western-Balkan countries (Hasanović, Sinanović, & Pavlović, 2005; Knaus et al., 2012; Vathi & Duci, 2015). In addition, some studies focus on the situation of adult returnees in Iraq (Bak Riiskjaer & Nielsson, 2008), Morocco (De Bree, Davids, & De Haas, 2010) and Bosnia (Lie, 2004), and also mention the situation of children in these families. Another study investigated the situation of returned youth in Afghanistan through the perspectives of local professionals (Gladwell & Elwyn, 2012).

The studies often focus on psychosocial outcomes (such as the feeling of belonging or the psychosocial wellbeing of the child), or have a more explorative character and assess the different kinds of challenges that children or families experience after return.

Migrant children returned in post-conflict countries
A research into returned asylum-seeker children (N=120) in Bosnia and Herzegovina found that repatriated children faced various struggles after the

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7   For studies focusing on returned children who were internally displaced or who stayed in other (non-EU) host countries, see Cornish, Peltzer and MacLachlan (1999); Hasanović, Sinanović and Pavlović (2005); Loughry and Flouri (2001); Mels, Derluyn, Broekaert and Rosseel (2010); or Zúñiga and Hamann (2015).

return, such as socio-emotional and psychological problems, a lack of social support and social network, difficulties with adjusting to living in poverty and to a different school system (Hasanović, Sinanović, & Pavlović, 2005). Additionally, a study into returnees (N=21) from Norway to Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that parents worried about the future prospects for their children with regard to issues such as medical treatment for psychological problems, safety and an unstable situation in the country. Furthermore, the re-establishment of children's feeling of 'being a native' after their return was problematic, and the lack of common memories about the war an obstacle in establishing relationships (Lie, 2004, p. 185).

In a research into the situation of repatriated children (N=164) from Germany and Austria to Kosovo, challenges consisted of dropping out of school, bullying and difficulties making friends, language problems, severe mental health problems and the lack of health care to address these (Knaus et al., 2012).

Similar difficulties for returnee children were found in studies into the situation of former unaccompanied asylum-seeker minors (N=25) who returned by force from the UK to Afghanistan (Bowerman, 2017; Gladwell et al., 2016). The returned youngsters faced interconnected challenges, such as mental health difficulties, limited access to support and health care, and problems with finding employment and continuing education. In addition, weakened or disappeared family- and social networks had an additional impact on this group, as well as the stigma and discrimination as a returnee or the 'failure' of returning empty-handed to their families.[8] With the general insecurity in Afghanistan, and the vulnerability of being a returnee or 'Westernised', the safety of returnee youth is a critical issue after their return (Bowerman, 2017; Gladwell & Elwyn, 2012; Gladwell et al., 2016).

Similar challenges were noted in a study into returned children in refugee families who returned to Iraq from Denmark, but failed to reintegrate and returned to the host country (Riiskjaer & Nielsson, 2008). The children in these families referenced feeling as strangers in an unknown country and unsafe. Perceived as being rich and wealthy, several families experienced blackmailing or kidnappings after the return.

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8   Families often had high aspirations and paid large sums for the child's migration (see also Vervliet, Vanobbergen, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2015).

Migrant children returned in non post-conflict countries

In a study into the psychosocial wellbeing of children who returned from Greece to Albania (N=81) the children experienced solitude, confusion and embarrassment, and language problems after the return. The age of the child, the socio-spatial context of the relocation, and the child's involvement in the family's decision to return were found to be important factors regarding returnee children's psychosocial wellbeing (Vathi & Duci 2015).

In a research into the situation of returnees in Morocco from the Netherlands (De Bree, Davids, & De Haas, 2010), a small part of the sample consisted of returned adolescents and marriage migrants (n=6). The adolescents in this study experienced the return as a shock and felt uprooted. Especially the second-generation women were forced to lead isolated lives after the return, which contrasted with their values and upbringing in the Netherlands.

The generally small sample sizes and the possible sample bias in these studies make it impossible to infer generalizations about the situation of children after repatriation, and make it necessary to approach these outcomes with some caution. Nevertheless, the results point towards a sombre picture of development opportunities for children after return, and confirm that "... return migration is not simply a matter of 'going home'" (De Bree, Davids, & De Haas, 2010, p. 489).

Taken together, these studies provide a snapshot of children's wellbeing in different countries after repatriation, and indicate valuable elements for assessing children's interests both at the *individual* level (*i.e.*, age, the length of stay in the host country and whether the child was born in the host country, or belongs to a marginalized ethnic group) as well as at the *social and cultural* level (*i.e.*, growing up in a single-mother household, safety, the social context of the living area after return, the child's involvement in the return decision-making, acceptance by the local community, access to education and healthcare).

None of these studies, however, applied an *integrative view* in which all the elements are included that are interpreted by the Committee (2013) as being essential for assessing children's interest. Furthermore, these studies do not mention how the children could be supported with their reintegration after repatriation. In this dissertation, we therefore wish to study the development of returnee children through an integrative view of all the elements considered by the Committee as being essential in a 'best interests of the child assessment', and to know how asylum-seeker children could be supported to safeguard their development after return to the countries of origin.

An integrative view: The Best Interests of the Child Model and–
Questionnaire

The elements within the individual and social-cultural context in which a child finds him or herself, are integrated in the *Best Interests of the Child Model* (BIC Model – see Appendix 1; Kalverboer, Beltman, Van Os, & Zijlstra, 2017; Kalverboer & Zijlstra 2006; Zijlstra, 2012).

The BIC Model is a pedagogical operationalization of the best interests of the child principle (article 3 CRC) and the child's right to development (article 6 CRC). Based on a pedagogical literature review and on ecological theories viewing children's development as taking place through a child's interaction with their environment (Belsky & Vondra, 1989; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Van der Ploeg, 2007; Zijlstra, 2012), the BIC Model consists of seven child-rearing conditions in a child's *family* upbringing context (1. adequate physical care; 2. safe direct physical environment; 3. affective atmosphere; 4. supportive flexible child-rearing structure; 5. adequate example by parents; 6. interest; 7. continuity in upbringing conditions, future perspective), and seven child-rearing conditions in the *society* context (8. safe wider physical environment; 9. respect; 10. social network; 11. education; 12. contact with peers; 13. adequate examples in society; 14. stability in life circumstances, future perspective).

Through the derived *Best Interests of the Child-Questionnaire* (BIC-Q – see Appendix 2; Zijlstra, Kalverboer, Post, Knorth, & Ten Brummelaar, 2012; Zijlstra, Kalverboer, Post, Ten Brummelaar, & Knorth, 2013), professionals can assess the quality of the 14 child-rearing conditions in the child's environment. Together, these 14 conditions determine *the quality of the child-rearing environment*. A continuous and stable presence of the rearing conditions in the child's upbringing environment provides the best opportunities for a healthy development of the child. When the conditions are of insufficient quality over a longer period of time, this may result in social and emotional problems in children. However, its impact also depends on the child's vulnerability or resiliency (Zijlstra, 2012).

Cultural sensitivity of child-rearing assessment

The BIC-Model child-rearing conditions are based on the CRC principles. The worldwide ratification of the Convention (except for the United States) may imply that the conditions are considered 'universal' with regard to children's needs for a healthy development. Nevertheless, the goals for children's behaviour, family circumstances and child-rearing regimes differ across cultural contexts (Levine,

2007; Levine & New, 2008; Weisner, 2014; Whiting & Edwards, 1988; Whiting & Whiting, 1975).

First of all, the childhood that children experience is determined by the ecological and the material setting in which they grow up (Harkness & Super, 1996). In cultures with high social welfare and wealth, interdependency of the family and social group is not necessary for survival. Children often grow up in small nuclear households, with the extended family performing a small role in the child-rearing. In contrast, in other (non-Western) cultural contexts, the extended family can play a daily role in parenting and a more utilitarian attitude may be applied to children. From an early age on children may be expected to contribute to the family livelihood according to specific gender roles (*e.g.*, girls assisting the mother in domestic chores and babysitting of younger siblings, and boys farming in the field, herding cattle, or working on the streets). Children may be seen as insurance to parents that someone will take care of them later on. Sons are often preferred, as they are expected to take of the parents into their old age, while daughters leave the kinship unit upon marriage (Gielen & Chumachenko, 2004; Kostelny, 2006; Lancy, 2015)

Furthermore, the shared values and beliefs within the cultural community influence the child-rearing practices, and foster the necessary skills, behaviours and beliefs considered important for assuming full membership of the social group (Harkness & Super, 1996). In Western societies children's individual wellbeing is often dominant, with each child being "…a treasure with great emotional value to the new parents…[seeing] children as precious and innocent, needing protection from the world of adults and exploitative labor" (Lancy, 2015, p. 401). As a consequence, many aspects of infants and young children's lives are regulated and emphasis is placed on educating children from a young age or engaging with them in 'play'. In contrast, in traditional societies, for example, the care for children is less 'regularised': there are no separate eating or sleeping arrangements for children, and infants and toddlers do not receive a lot of attention from adults. Instead, "…'intelligence' is conceived of not as cleverness and verbal knowledge but as compliance and awareness of the expectations of others. It is the ability to be a positive contributor to family life and subsistence" (Lancy, 2015, p. 405). Apart from such differences in values related to social responsibility versus autonomy or independency, cross-cultural differences in parenting may also become apparent, for instance, in fostering specific religious or spiritual virtues or in the amount of parental warmth and control (*e.g.*, the use of corporal punishment).

Implication

The meaning and interpretation of the BIC-Model child-rearing conditions, as well as the judgement when a condition is considered to be of a 'good' quality, can vary across cultural contexts. In addition, there might be a risk that the BIC-Model conditions and the assessment with the BIC-Q only focuses on dimensions that are relevant to children in Western countries, and overlooks or neglects important child-rearing issues in migrant children's countries of origin (Van de Vijver & Poortinga, 1997; Chen & Kaspar, 2004). Simply assuming the Western-developed BIC-Q to be measuring the 'universal' construct 'quality of the child-rearing environment' can therefore lead to biased results when applied in an international context. The reliability and validity of its use in countries of origin should be examined beforehand.

Outline of the study

The BIC-Model conditions and the derived BIC-Q instrument were included in a larger European study (the Monitoring Returned Minors project) to develop a monitoring tool for assessing the living situation and wellbeing of returned migrant children. This monitoring tool was developed in Kosovo and Albania.[9] The data collected during the Monitoring Returned Minors project are the basis of this dissertation. The children's situation in Kosovo and Albania can be seen as exemplary for the challenges that children may face related to their rearing environment and social-emotional wellbeing after return in countries of origin.

The first part of this dissertation analyses the validity of the BIC-Model conditions and of the assessment with the BIC-Q to measure the quality of the childrearing environment of returnee children in the cultural context of the Western-Balkans. The second part of this dissertation focuses on the child-rearing environment, social-emotional wellbeing, and support for reintegration of the returnee children in Kosovo and Albania, and the factors that are associated with their situation after return.

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9   The Monitoring Returned Minors (MRM) project was financed by the European Return Fund and ran from November 2012 until February 2014. The Hit Foundation led the MRM project. Other cooperating organisations consisted of Nidos, Micado Migration, APPK, Kosova Health Foundation and the University of Groningen. Kosovo and Albania were selected because at the moment of conducting the study, a large part of the asylum caseload in the European Union consisted of asylum seekers from Western-Balkan origin, notably Kosovo and Albania (EASO 2013, 2015). This group of asylum seekers faced the lowest recognition rates of all asylum applicants in the EU, as most host countries considered the Western-Balkan countries to be safe countries of origin.
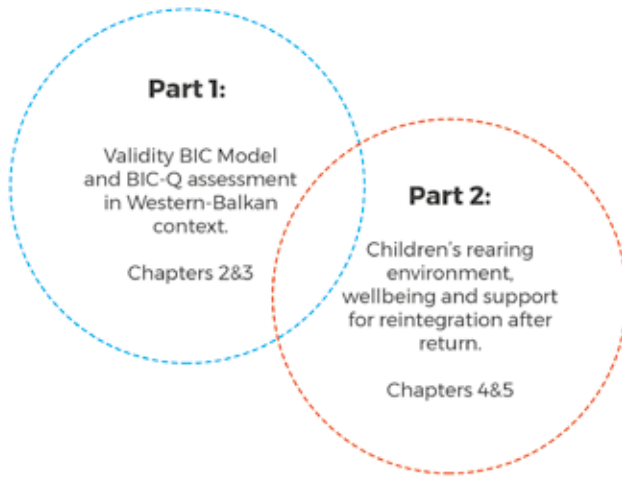
In part one, we first assess the face and content validity of the BIC-Model conditions by focusing on the relevance, meaning and interpretation of the conditions in the cultural context of the Western-Balkans. Then the factors are analysed that influence the assessment in an international context and, more specifically, the judgement of the conditions from different cultural perspectives, *i.e.* the Western-Balkans' versus the Western-European perspective. At last the construct validity is assessed through measuring the strength of the BIC-Q scale when applied in Kosovo and Albania and when completed from a local perspective on child-rearing. The following research questions are addressed in part one:

- o   To what extent do the BIC-Model conditions have the same meaning and are interpreted in the same manner in a Western-European and a Western-Balkan context? **(Chapter 2)**
- o   Which cultural factors may influence the assessment and judgement of the BIC-Model conditions in a Non-Western context, using a local Western-Balkan cultural perspective? (**Chapter 2+3)**
- o   To what extent is the BIC-Q a reliable and strong scale to measure the quality of the child-rearing environment when completed from a Western-Balkan cultural perspective on child-rearing in countries of origin (*i.e.*, Kosovo and Albania)? **(Chapter 3)**

In part two, we assess which children seem to fare well or seem particularly vulnerable, and what kind of difficulties they are facing after repatriation. A follow-up study focuses on how the reintegration and wellbeing evolves over a longer period of time for a subset of the children, and how migrant children can be supported with reintegration after the repatriation to their countries of origin. The following research questions are addressed in part two:

- o What is the quality of the child-rearing environment, as measured with the BIC-Q, and how is the social-emotional wellbeing of migrant children after the return to their countries of origin (Kosovo, Albania)? **(Chapter 4)**
- o Which factors predict the social-emotional wellbeing of migrant children after their return to these countries? **(Chapter 4)**
- o How does the wellbeing and reintegration of these returnee children evolve over a longer period of time? **(Chapter 5)**
- o What are the experiences of professionals, parents and children with assistance that was provided to alleviate concerns in the child's situation after the return to these countries? **(Chapter 5)**

Part I

Validity of the BIC-Model child-rearing conditions and assessment with the BIC-Q in the cultural context of the Western-Balkans