Each year thousands of children are sent back from the EU to countries from which they fled, alone or together with their families. Some may go back to safe havens, but for the most part we don’t know if they return to places where they are able to continue their development.

Yet, all EU-countries have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), requiring that states act in the best interest of the child. By signing this agreement, they attest “that every child has the right to grow up and to develop physically and spiritually in a healthy and normal way, free and with dignity.”

So when children are sent back to their home countries, we need to know if they are OK!

How do we know they are OK?
In reality, returnees are rarely monitored and there is limited contact between countries of origin and countries of destination. This makes it difficult for host countries to make well-informed decisions regarding return.

The Best Interest of the Child
For children this is even more pressing, because the best interest of the child has to be taken into account in all decision-making. Research in Kosovo indicates that returned minors do face problems. Recent reports by UNICEF and the Kosovo Health Foundation (March 2012) and by ECRE and Save the Children (December 2011) have called for monitoring mechanisms that incorporate the best interest of the child.

To know the impact of return policies and to make them CRC-proof, there is a need to monitor returned children more systematically.

Developing Monitoring Mechanisms
The Monitoring Returned Minors (MRM) research project develops a monitoring instrument that contributes to more sustainable and safer return of minors. The project was initiated by HIT Foundation, on behalf of the European Commission, and started in November 2012. MRM is executed in close collaboration with Nidos, Micado Migration, the University of Groningen and local researchers. The outcomes will be presented in the European Parliament in February 2014.
Monitoring Tool

MRM provides a monitoring tool that shows how returned minors to Kosovo and Albania are doing compared to their peers.

- **Baseline** - The tool offers a set of validated questionnaires, based on the Childs Rights Convention (CRC), a manual of how to implement the interviews and a baseline (a frame of reference) that any return case to Kosovo and Albania can be compared with. The more cases are put into the baseline, the more valuable the tool becomes.

- **Insights** - The monitoring tool gives insight in problem areas the group faces as whole as well as individual challenges. Policy adjustments in EU-member states will lead to more targeted support before and after return. The monitoring tool will also give insight whether the decision to return has been in the best interest of the child.

- **Usability** - The tool can be used by any EU member state that sends minors back to their country of origin, with or without support. The tool is easy to implement at limited costs. Return organisations may use the tool to measure the impact of their return support programs.

- **Potential** - A similar baseline can be developed for any other country minors are send back to.

Practice

The MRM research project is interviewing 150 minors that have returned to Kosovo & Albania after 2010 and that have been back for at least one year. It includes both unaccompanied and accompanied minors; Albanians and Roma; children up to 14 as well as adolescents between 15 and 18. They returned from several European countries, including Germany, France, Sweden and the Netherlands.

The questionnaires are based on a set of 14 criteria developed by the University of Groningen (Kalverboer & Zijlstra, 2006). They developed the Best Interest of the Child Questionnaire (BIC-Q) and the Best Interest of the Child Self assessment (BIC-S) to monitor the development of children in the asylum procedure in the Netherlands. MRM is elaborating the questionnaire to apply it to returned minors. It looks specifically at how the child is doing in relation to its peers in the home country.

The BIC-Q criteria

**Family**
1. Adequate physical health
2. Safe direct physical environment
3. Affective atmosphere
4. Supportive, flexible childrearing structure
5. Adequate examples by parents
6. Interest
7. Continuity in upbringing conditions, future perspective

**Society**
1. Safe wider physical environment
2. Respect
3. Social network
4. Education
5. Contact with peers
6. Adequate examples in society
7. Stability in life circumstances, future perspective

More Info?

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Project Partners

- **HIT Foundation** develops innovative solutions to tackle complex challenges at the crossroads of labour and migration. Through action research and practical experiments, HIT provides new input to advance policy and practice in the Netherlands and across boarders. www.hitfoundation.eu

- **Nidos** is the independent guardianship and (family) supervision agency in the Netherlands. Nidos carries out the guardianship task for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, pursuant to the law. www.nidos.nl

- **Micado Migration** is a German consultancy specialized in migration and its consequences, both in countries of origin and in destination countries. www.micado-migration.de

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