

Reintegration of returning migrants

SUMMARY

Returning more and more migrants with irregular status to their countries of origin has become a key European Union aim in efforts to reduce illegal migration. Despite its high political priority, reiterated in European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's 2017 State of the Union address, the effective implementation of this objective is problematic, mainly due to resistance at the individual level, but also from the countries of origin. The 2016 partnership framework with third countries attempts to enhance cooperation with partner countries on readmission, using a wide range of positive and negative policy incentives. To make the return option more attractive for migrants with irregular status, the EU's return policy promotes voluntary returns through reintegration assistance packages. No less than 90 specific assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes (AVRR) have been established by EU Member States, co-financed by the European Union, and implemented mainly by the International Organization on Migration (IOM).

Maximising sustainable returns, understood not only as absence of re-emigration, but also as a returnee's positive impact on the development of their communities of origin, is a key challenge. The nature of return chosen, and the success of economic and social integration of migrants in host countries, are the main factors of successful reintegration at the pre-departure stage, together with social and psychological counselling in preparing the reintegration project. Following arrival, training and in-kind assistance to start up a business, accompanied by measures to re-establish social networks, are what works best. Close cooperation with local partners is necessary to include reintegration assistance within existing development initiatives, to avoid duplication, resentment against returnees, and to respond to local needs.



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Glossary

Returning migrant: a person who returns to their country of citizenship after having been an international migrant (whether short-term or long-term) in another country, and who intends to remain in their own country.

Asylum seeker: a person who seeks safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than their own and awaits a decision on their application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments.

Migrant in irregular status: a person who enters and/or stays in a country without the necessary documents and permits.

Voluntary return: situation where a migrant makes a free choice to leave the country. In most cases in the EU Member States, this covers a departure where the migrant in irregular status voluntarily executes a return decision, irrespective of whether the assistance for return and reintegration is granted or not.¹

Readmission: act by a state to accept the re-entry of an individual (own national, third-country national or stateless person).

Reintegration: re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or a process, e.g. of a migrant into the society of their country of origin or habitual residence.

Focus on return in the reshaped EU policy on migration

Subject to strong migratory pressure driven by conflicts, instability and poverty in its neighbourhood, the European Union (EU) is adapting its policy framework to cope with this protracted crisis situation. Reducing the incentives for irregular migration has become one of the main objectives of both external and internal dimensions of EU migration policy. Enacting a more effective EU return system and addressing the root causes of migration are among the main axes chosen to make the migration option less attractive. The EU faces a number of challenges in returning migrants to their countries of origin, in particular to Africa. Among the main problems encountered by states where migrants arrive are: difficulties to obtain travel documents; limited availability of diplomatic representation of some countries in the EU; an unwillingness to cooperate on the part of authorities in countries of origin where [remittances](#) account for a significant part of their gross domestic product (GDP).²

The [Valletta summit](#), held in November 2015 between the EU, African countries, and international and regional institutions, resulted in the establishment of the [EU Emergency Trust Fund](#) for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa. The fund supports an ambitious [action plan](#), marrying traditional external migration instruments related to international protection, asylum, and human trafficking, with measures addressing the root causes by investing in development and poverty eradication. Strengthening the reintegration process in partner countries is included in the fifth priority on 'return, readmission and reintegration'.

To complement the EU comprehensive approach to addressing migration set up in the [European agenda on migration](#) in May 2015, the European Commission launched a [new partnership framework with third countries](#) on 7 June 2016. An increase in rates of return to countries of origin and transit is one of the main objectives of this new approach. In order to achieve this, and dissuade people from taking the dangerous journey to Europe, the EU aims to enhance cooperation with partner countries on migration management, mixing positive and negative incentives into EU development and trade policies. The partnership framework for cooperation with partner countries on migration

management envisages a parallel scaling up of development assistance and capacity building to address the root causes of migration, in exchange for intensified cooperation on readmission with a preference for voluntary return and focus on reintegration. As presented in the [consecutive progress reports](#) on the partnership framework with third countries under the European agenda on migration, the EU has recently taken steps to develop the political dialogue with the countries of origin and transit on migration. This includes the continued but difficult effort to negotiate [readmission agreements](#) with priority countries, while developing other forms of cooperation in the field of migration. Cooperation undertaken in several priority countries includes projects addressing the root causes of migration and supporting inter alia reintegration and returns.

Sustainability of return: success factors and main obstacles

Successful reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin is an essential element contributing to the sustainability of the return, which is considered achieved in a narrow sense when the returnee does not re-emigrate. A recurrent recommendation to policy-makers found in the literature is to question the effectiveness of such narrowly understood sustainability and the emphasis on increasing return rates. The alternative proposed is to aim instead for return sustainability in a broader sense that includes establishing self-sufficiency and a meaningful impact on the economic and social development of communities of origin. In the absence of long-term monitoring of returnee situations, hard evidence is lacking to systematically assess the sustainability of returns. However, existing evaluations based on case studies and interviews identify several factors, presented in table 1, that affect sustainable reintegration.³

Table 1 – Components for sustainable reintegration

| | Pre-departure stage | Post-return stage |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Individual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary and/or chosen character of return. • Legal possibility to re-immigrate (in form of circular migration for example) makes decision to return voluntarily easier.⁴ • Social and economic success in host countries. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable political and socioeconomic situation in the countries of origin. • Strategy on skills training and financial support to develop a livelihood. • Support for re-establishment of social network. • Psychosocial follow-up during at least 12 months upon arrival. |
| Structural | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of diaspora experience to design policies. • Policy dialogue between countries of origin and host countries to establish coherent policy approaches, with civil society implication. • Specific target group measures, including for unaccompanied minors, women and disabled migrants. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country of origin effective anti-discrimination and equal access policies, in particular to a social protection scheme. • Education and vocational training opportunities for returning migrants. • Placing reintegration assistance into existing development initiatives to avoid duplication of structure, resentment against returnees, and to respond to local needs. • Collective reintegration projects to (re)build social networks. |

Successful reintegration is highly dependent on the opportunity to develop an income generating activity, access to social networks, and on psychosocial health. Indeed, a poor perspective for economic self-sufficiency, lack of family and community ties, and feelings of shame, failure and anxiety, may hinder the reintegration process. As [interviews](#) with

returnees to Mali demonstrate, strong family expectations (of gifts, favours, and financial support) place major social pressures on returnees, who need help to deal with them both economically and psychologically.

Reintegration assistance⁵ (see Table 2) is also acknowledged as a success factor in the return process, in terms of both motivation for the return and its long-term sustainability. Reintegration assistance takes different forms: from limited once-only reinstatement grants, to a larger spectrum of economic, social and psychological measures (including individualised assistance for vulnerable migrants, such as minors or the disabled) and longer term structural and development support for the concerned communities.

Table 2 – Main forms of reintegration assistance

| Pre-departure phase | Post-arrival phase |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Legal and return counselling. | Housing (including temporary accommodation). |
| Medical and psychosocial support. | Subsidised employment. |
| Relocation grants. | Education/vocational training. |
| Financial assistance (i.e. cash incentives as travel aid). | Healthcare/medical assistance. |
| Temporary accommodation. | Capacity-building. |
| Support for travel. | Support to set up a business. |

According to accounts of experience gathered by the [International Organization of Migration](#) (IOM) regarding assistance 'in kind' compared to 'in cash', the former provided only for the migrant's immediate needs after arrival, and was more useful than a large cash grant. This means of support avoids putting the migrant under pressure to share money with the extended family and facilitates follow-up and counselling on expenditure. The European Commission [comparative study](#) 'Best practices to interlink pre-departure reintegration measures carried out in Member States with short- and long-term reintegration measures in the countries of return', also emphasises the importance of returnee involvement in the decision-making concerning in-kind assistance allocations. Another key element of training that should be provided to the returnee before or after arrival, is the development of business skills – demonstrated in best practices that emerge across the case studies. The Commission study also stresses the necessary inter-linkage between, on the one hand, the returns and reintegration policies of the destination countries and, on the other hand, social and economic inclusion in countries of origin. This implies collaboration between host states and countries of origin, tailoring reintegration measures not only to individual needs, but also to the needs of the countries of origin.

EU policy on return and the reintegration issue

With effective return rates to third countries remaining around 36 % (27 % if returns to the Western Balkans are disregarded), EU return policy is at a standstill. In 2016, the [total number](#) of third-country nationals ordered to leave the EU stood at 493 785, while 983 860 third-country nationals were found to be present illegally. Among the main causes of this impasse is the reluctance of the migrants themselves on the one hand; and on the other, an unwillingness on the part of countries of origin to cooperate on readmission.

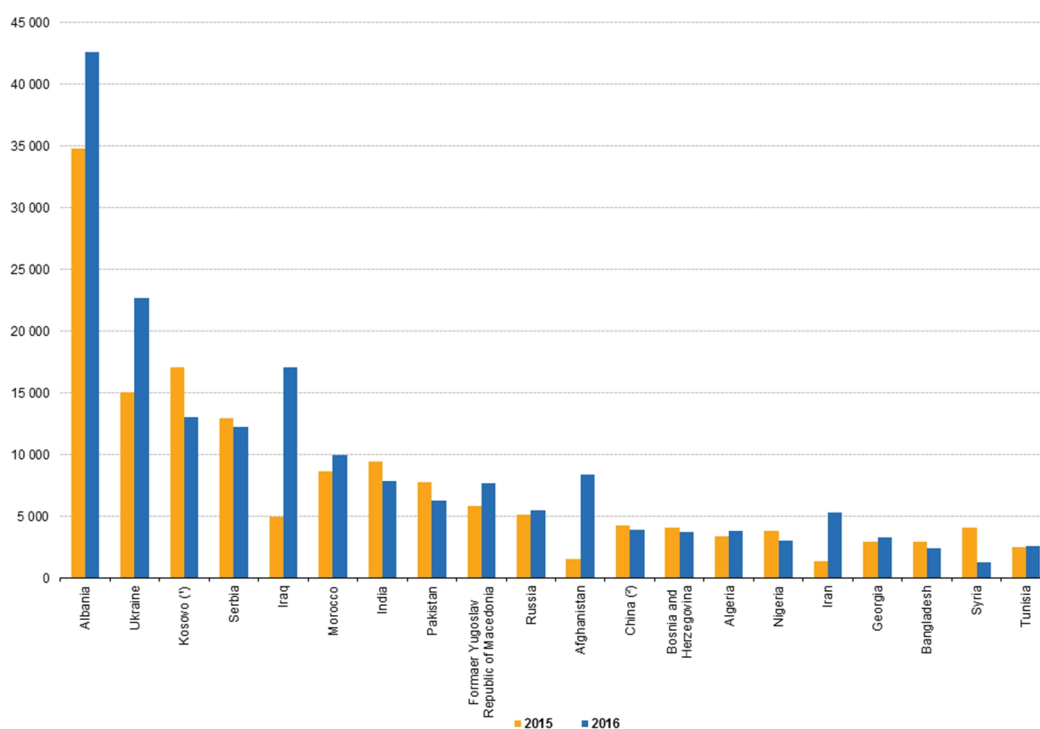
Improving EU reintegration assistance is therefore one of the incentives the EU is using to enhance cooperation at individual and international levels. The [EU common rules on return](#) (often referred to as the [Return Directive](#)), which entered into force in 2010, promote voluntary return – an option preferred over forced return – and require Member States to provide enhanced return assistance, including from the relevant EU funding.

The renewed [action plan](#) on a more effective return policy in the European Union stresses the need to harmonise the assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) packages in order to avoid 'return shopping', whereby migrants choose to apply in those Member States offering the most lucrative packages.

Assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes (AVRR)

As documented by the [European migration network's](#) return expert group, there are no less than [96 programmes](#) designed to help migrants to return and reintegrate in their home country in the EU, implemented by 27 Member States.⁶ The majority of these programmes assist migrants who have been granted a period of time for voluntary departure before a forced removal is executed. Several Member States have developed programmes targeting the specific needs of vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, victims of human trafficking, or people with special medical needs. On a yearly basis, over 55 000 migrants benefit from these programmes, carried out by the IOM, and, in several cases, by the competent national authorities. Sometimes, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also involved, especially important when dealing with the [return of vulnerable groups](#), particularly unaccompanied and separated migrant children. While the majority of AVRR are open to all third-country nationals (with some exceptions, for example, no cash allowance is granted to nationals of Western Balkan countries or

Figure 1 – Top 20 states of non-EU citizens returned to their country of origin, 2015-2016



Note: coverage changes over time. 2015: excluding Austria. Ranking based on the average for 2015 and 2016.
 (*) Under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99.
 (**) Including Hong Kong.

Data source: [Eurostat](#), 2016.

OECD countries), other programmes target the reintegration of nationals of specific countries (the top four are: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Iraq).

Role played by the International Organization on Migration (IOM)

IOM is a main actor in implementing AVRR programmes. In 2015, IOM provided AVRR assistance to 69 540 returnees (24 % minors) from 97 host and transit countries and 156 countries of origin. This represents a sharp increase (approximately 60 %) in comparison to 2014. More than 40 % were rejected asylum seekers. With more than 35 000 returnees, Germany alone represents more than 50 % of AVRR. A clear increase in AVRR was seen in 2015 from transit countries such as Yemen, Indonesia, Morocco and Niger. However, AVRR from Europe continues to represent 80 % of the total number.

Three types of assistance are most commonly offered, depending on the migrant's particular situation:⁷

- **In-kind assistance prior to departure:** information and counselling to prepare the reintegration project, help to obtain travel documents, accommodation and transport.
- **In-cash assistance at the point of departure/after arrival:** all EU Member States covered by the study provide an in-cash allowance at some stage, most often to cover expenses during travel and immediately following arrival. The amount varies considerably, from €40 in the Czech Republic to €3 300 in Sweden, although the majority of programmes offer between €100 and €500. The differences are linked with the different objectives of the grants provided: while some cover just expenses during travel and immediately after arrival, others serve to finance the reintegration project in the country of return.
- **In-kind assistance in the country of return:** 31 programmes delivered by 20 Member States provide reintegration support in the form of training and/or education; business start-up; equipment and furniture; accommodation; and legal and administrative assistance. The value of this in-kind assistance varies from €600 in Latvia to €5 000 in Germany and Spain.

These programmes amount to a total budget of €133 million (per standardised year). They are financed on average at 55 % from the [European Return Fund](#), and 45 % from national budgets.

Mapping EU instruments supporting reintegration

The EU has supported return and reintegration programmes in third countries since 2005, mainly through the Development Cooperation Instrument [thematic programme on migration and asylum](#). According to the Commission, over 10 years, around 50 projects including reintegration component have benefited from more than €65 million in EU funding under this framework.

Recently, more specific initiatives have been adopted to both support reintegration related actions in partner countries and the Member States' AVRR programmes, thereby demonstrating an increasing understanding of the nexus between the success of the EU migration policy and the partner countries' development.

Special measure to improve reintegration of returnees in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan

Under the [regional programme for Asia](#), the European Commission approved a €92 million regional project supporting the reintegration of returnees in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in 2016. This project provides for immediate in-kind support for

returnees; medium- to longer-term reintegration support through community-based projects; capacity-building for the government and provincial directorates; and monitoring of reintegration sustainability.

Asylum, migration and integration fund (AMIF)

EU support for return and reintegration is mainly provided through the [asylum, migration and integration fund](#) (AMIF), which succeeded the European Return Fund (2008-2013). For the 2014-2020 period, around [€806 million](#) of [€3 137 billion](#) was allocated from AMIF to support Member States in this field. In 2017, the Commission is expected to make an additional €200 million available to further increase Member States' capacity to scale up returns.

EU Emergency Trust Fund for addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa

The [EU Emergency Trust Fund](#) for addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa, financed mainly from the European Development Fund and various EU budget instruments, is currently the most often used financing for reintegration related initiatives. Since December 2016, its [Facility on Sustainable and Dignified Return and Reintegration in support of the Khartoum Process](#) sets aside €25 million in support of the 'implementation of rights-based, development-based and sustainable return and reintegration policies'. The activities financed cover assisted voluntary returns from transit countries;⁸ social, economic, psychosocial and legal support for reintegration activities for returnees both from transit countries and the EU; and capacity-building in partner countries to develop and strengthen return and reintegration policies. The reintegration activities that are allocated funding under the indicative €15 million budget comprise, for instance, business development support; work with microfinance institutions; support for housing facilities for returnees; training; and support for professional reinsertion.

Also launched in 2016, under the EU Emergency Trust Fund and with IOM and German and Italian government contributions, the [initiative](#) for migrant protection and reintegration of returnees along the Central Mediterranean migration routes, with an indicative €100 million budget, will finance actions in 14 countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. Among the initiative's six priorities are support for voluntary returns of stranded migrants from transit countries, and individual and community based support for the reintegration of an estimated 24 000 migrants. The reintegration support will include vocational training and help to start micro-businesses or participate in income-generating cooperatives. The reintegration assistance will be delivered in parallel to efforts to address the structural drivers of migration.

Joint Reintegration Projects

This ERI (European Reintegration Instrument) involving 18 EU countries (and Australia) has, since its launch in 2012, assisted [560 returnees](#) from participating EU countries to go back to Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Russia. Its follow-up since 2015, the [European Reintegration Network \(ERIN\) specific action programme](#) is financed through the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund, with funding from partner institutions in the participating countries. The project, implemented by IOM via local services suppliers, is providing AVRR to beneficiaries from Afghanistan, Guinea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Somaliland. These are first steps towards a common European approach to AVRR policy.

European Parliament position

In its [resolution of 5 April 2017](#) on addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU external action, the European Parliament stressed that, in the implementation of the partnership framework, there is a risk of excessive focus on quantitative results. The increase in rates of return has to be balanced against other considerations, such as development of local economies in partner countries, and regional mobility, as well as levels of protection in countries of transit and origin. In this context, the Parliament welcomed the EU programmes on return and reintegration that include capacity building and improvement of migration management, and called for reintegration of migrants to be included in all political dialogues with partner countries.

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Visit also the European Parliament homepage on [migration in Europe](#).

Endnotes

¹ [Comparative study on practices in the field of return of forced return monitoring](#), ICMPD; Matrix Insight Ltd, ECRE, European Commission, 2011.

² [Challenges and good practices in the return and reintegration of irregular migrants to Western Africa](#), EMN Inform, January 2015.

³ Fonseca, A., Hart, L., Klink, S., [Reintegration, Effective approaches](#), International Organization for Migration, 2015; Haase, M., Honerath, P., [Return migration and reintegration policies :A primer](#), Integration Strategy Group (ISG), December 2016.

⁴ Flahaux, M.-L., [The role of migration policy changes in Europe for return migration to Senegal](#), International Migration Review, February 2016.

⁵ ICMPD; Matrix Insight Ltd, ECRE, pp.14-15.

⁶ The study covers all 28 EU Member States except Croatia and Denmark, but includes Norway. The study is based on the result of the review covering mostly the 2013-2014 period.

⁷ [Overview: Incentives to return to a third-country and support provided to migrants for their reintegration](#), EMN Inform, European Commission, pp.4-5.

⁸ Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Tunisia.

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