



Federal Office
for Migration
and Refugees



Conference Report: Voluntary Return in a European Context

Conference organised by the German National Contact Point
of the European Migration Network (EMN)
on 4 May 2017 in Berlin



Co-financed by the
European Union





Foreword

On 4 May 2017, the German National Contact Point of the European Migration Network (EMN) organised a conference on “Return Counselling – Integrated Return Management – Reintegration” in cooperation with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and the Representation of the European Commission in Germany. The conference was held in both German and English, while simultaneous interpretation was provided. The conference took place at the European House in Berlin.

More than 130 participants joined the conference from several European countries, EU institutions, the Federation, the Länder and municipalities as well as several research institutes, international organisations and NGOs.

This conference documentation summarises the main aspects of each presentation and is available in German and English.

The conference documentation is also available online, including the speakers’ presentations as well as additional information: www.emn-germany.de

We wish you a pleasant read.

The German EMN National Contact Point

The European Migration Network

The European Migration Network (EMN) was launched by the European Commission in 2003 on behalf of the European Council in order to satisfy the need of a regular exchange of reliable information in the field of migration and asylum at the European level. Since 2008, Council Decision 2008/381/EC forms the legal basis of the EMN and National Contact Points have been established in the EU Member States (with the exception of Denmark, which has observer status) plus Norway.



The German EMN National Contact Point
(without Gaby Wecker)

The EMN's role is to meet the information needs of European Union institutions, Member States' authorities and institutions as well as the wider public by providing up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum, with a view to support policymaking in these areas. The National Contact Point for Germany is located at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Nuremberg. Its main task is to implement the annual work programme of the EMN. This includes the drafting of the annual policy report "Migration, Integration, Asylum" and of up to four topic specific studies, as well as answering Ad-Hoc Queries launched by other National Contact Points or the European Commission. The German National Contact Point also carries out visibility activities and networking in several forums, e. g. through the organisation of conferences or the participation in

conferences in Germany and abroad. Furthermore, the National Contact Points in each country set up national networks consisting of organisations, institutions and individuals working in the field of migration and asylum.

In general, the National Contact Points do not conduct primary research but collect, analyse and present existing data. Exceptions might occur when existing data and information are not sufficient. EMN studies are elaborated in accordance with uniform specifications valid for all EU Member States plus Norway in order to achieve comparable EU-wide results. Furthermore, the EMN has produced a Glossary, which ensures the application of comparable terms and definitions in all national reports and is available on the national and international EMN websites.

Upon completion of national reports, the European Commission drafts a Synthesis Report with the support of a service provider. This report summarises the most significant results of the individual national reports. In addition, topic-based policy briefs, so-called EMN Informs, are produced in order to present and compare selected topics in a concise manner. The EMN Bulletin, which is published quarterly, informs about current developments in the EU and the Member States. With the work programme of 2014, the Return Expert Group (REG) was created to address issues around voluntary return, reintegration and forced return.

All EMN publications are available on the website of the European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. The national studies of the German National Contact Point as well as the synthesis reports, Informs and the Glossary are also available on the national website: <http://www.emn-germany.de/>

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Voluntary return in the spotlight of European migration policy

9.30

In their welcoming addresses, Elisabeth Kotthaus, Deputy Head of the Political Section at the Representation of the European Commission in Germany, and Dr. Uta Dauke, Vice President of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, spoke of the challenges of migration policy, the relationship between the EU and third countries on the topic of return, as well as on the funding of return programmes in the countries of origin.



Elisabeth Kotthaus, Representation of the European Commission in Germany

Elisabeth Kotthaus expressed her appreciation for the possibility to hold a joint conference with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in the European House in Berlin for the second time, “and that you have selected the very important topic of return, which poses major challenges to us all.” With the European Migration Agenda of May 2015, the European Commission under Jean-Claude Juncker had provided a far-reaching strategy for the current crisis and for a better management of migration movements. This also includes a humane return policy, the implementation of which, however, poses very great challenges to all actors concerned, as Elisabeth Kotthaus pointed out in her welcome.

“The difficulty lies in doing justice to the values of the European Union, whilst at the same time returning people who have no right to remain back to their home countries in a way that is humane, but also effective.” A new EU Action Plan on return and its funding through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) was adopted by the Com-

mission in March 2017. “Here too, return and the promotion of voluntary return play a major role”, said Kotthaus. The EU would also have to keep an eye on return in relationships with the countries of origin.

Cooperation between all stakeholders remains essential

It also became clear in the welcoming speech given by Dr. Uta Dauke, Vice President of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, that the topic of return is becoming more and more significant in European migration policy. International cooperation such as that within the European Migration Network (EMN), in which representatives from the EU Member States work closely together, is therefore particularly important. Dr. Dauke stressed: “We very much welcome the fact that the European Commission has stepped up its support for the Member States.” It is also particularly valuable that the EMN with its Return Expert Group is being used as a platform for exchanges on return.



Dr. Uta Dauke, Vice President of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

In her address Dr. Dauke briefly outlined the current situation in Germany: The large number of asylum-seekers from 2015 posed major challenges for the Federation, the Länder and the local authorities. Roughly 700,000 asylum decisions had been taken in the last year. 62.4 per cent of the displaced persons were granted protection status. Roughly 260,000 asylum applications were rejected. “The central preconditions for successful, sustainable return include early counselling in the arrival centres, as well as comprehensive counselling on voluntary return, tailored programmes, and efficient support for reintegration in the countries of origin.” As the competent authority, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees cooperates intensively with all governmental and non-governmental players addressing return – nationally, Europe-wide and internationally, Dr. Dauke pointed out.

Programmes within German and European return policy

9.45 • Return has come into the spotlight of German interior policy, as Dr. Emily Haber, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of the Interior, stressed in her opening speech.



Dr. Emily Haber, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of the Interior, underlined the importance of return policy as a key instrument of migration governance.

Dr. Emily Haber said in her welcoming address that Germany had faced major challenges in the past two years, and that the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees had accomplished great achievements, even though there had been considerable criticism at the beginning. The Federal Office has taken 700,000 decisions on asylum in 2016, almost twice as many as in the previous year. The protection rate was 62 per cent, but it would continue to change this year, Dr. Haber continued. As a central tool for managing migration, return would take on special significance, with voluntary return currently being in particular focus.

Networking and coordination between authorities is important

Dr. Haber considered that Germany had to continue to improve linking all authorities, individuals and persons concerned. Return to and reintegration in the countries of origin had to play a particular role there. “Unfortunately, return is not as simple, predictable, transparent and calculable to organise as many expect it to be”, said Dr. Haber. “We have our hands full in coordinating things, as the legal dis-

tribution of responsibilities covers the Federation, the Länder, local authorities and large numbers of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).” A number of laws intended to make return easier have already been passed in Germany. The Act Improving the Enforcement of the Obligation to Leave the Country (Gesetz zur besseren Durchsetzung der Ausreisepflicht) for instance aims above all to return persons who place the security of the country at risk. A centre has been established in Berlin to support returns (ZUR) in order to improve coordination between the Federation and the Länder, with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and the Federal Police also represented. The funding has however also been increased: the Federal Ministry of the Interior has 40 million euro at hand for special programmes targeting returnees. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development is also spending another 50 million euro on reintegration programmes. The focus here is on establishing migration centres which will be run by the GIZ (Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit).



Participants of the conference. Interpretation was provided both for English and German.

Return programmes of the Federation

Dr. Haber also provided an overview of the existing return programmes and projects in Germany in her speech: the REAG/GARP voluntary return programme has been running for almost 40 years, and is regularly adjusted in line with current developments in migration movements. It is funded by the Federation and the Länder. Returnees receive travel expenses and a financial travel benefit, as well as initial financial aid for their new start in their country of origin. Further, the programme StarthilfePlus (Initial Aid Plus) has started in February. It is funded by the Federation and implemented by the IOM (International Organization

for Migration). Anyone deciding to leave voluntarily at a particularly early stage in the ongoing asylum procedure or before the notice on the outcome of the procedure has been delivered receives both the funding that has been mentioned and further initial aid after returning to their country of origin. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees also involved several experts from the Return Expert Group of the European Migration Network last year in setting up a hotline providing information for interested returnees, staff in authorities and volunteers who are engaged in this field.

Direct exchange with partners and the Länder

Not only the Federation, but also the EU has adjusted to the changed migration movements of the past two years, and presented an action plan for return in March. The funding for this purpose was topped up to 200 million euro, and is to be used for both national and EU programmes. FRONTEX, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has likewise been further strengthened, and its mandate has also been expanded to the field of voluntary return. A successful return policy in a large federal state like Germany is contingent on close cooperation between all concerned at national and European level, Dr. Haber pointed out, adding: "Experience shows that an exchange with other countries frequently yields the best results." She was therefore particularly glad to note that the EMN conference was being attended by representatives of the Federation, the Länder, independent institutions and guests from EMN Member States.

“ Experience shows that an exchange with other countries frequently yields best results.”

Dr. Emily Haber

Sustainable Return as a multidimensional process

10.15 • Dr. Katie Kuschminder, Research Fellow at the Global Governance Programme of the European University Institute gave insight into her long-standing research on the return and reintegration of migrants and refugees into their countries of origin. Dr. Kuschminder pointed out that the political discussion on sustainable return too often focuses on the deterrence of returnees migrating again from their countries of origin (remigration), while the process of return and reintegration in its complexity is neglected.

Sustainable return is an ambiguous term lacking a uniform definition. Political discussions often emphasise the deterrence of remigration after having returned to the country of origin, resulting in a focus on measuring the willingness to remigrate. However, this in itself is already a simplification: willingness needs to be differentiated further into the aspiration, the intention and the realisation of remigration. Referring to her own research findings on Assisted Voluntary Returnees in eight countries, Kuschminder illustrated that even though half of the returnees have an aspiration to remigrate, only 10 per cent concretely intend to do so, a large majority of which intend to remigrate through legal pathways. This leaves only a very small share of returnees that intend to remigrate irregularly. The strong focus on the deterrence of remigration within the political discussion on sustainable return thus falls far short of grasping the reality.

“ Sustainable return is a complex process which can be regarded as the outcome of a successful reintegration process.”

Dr. Katie Kuschminder

In contrast, the scientific community more often refers to a definition of sustainable return set forth by academics or in some cases by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which includes reintegration of the returnees, the impact on the receiving society in the country of origin as well as possible legal remigration channels:


“Sustainable return should be understood either as: (a) successful reintegration in the country of origin, which includes the economic, social and psychosocial aspects and the capacity of the individual to cope with push factors, both old and new, on the same level as the local population or (b) eventual legal remigration made possible by skills acquired during the reintegration process.” (IOM, 2015)



Dr. Katie Kuschminder in her keynote speech

Kuschminder suggested that in order to meet the political goal of sustainable return, all aspects mentioned in the IOM definition should be considered in future research and monitoring. “If we want to understand the decision making of returnees, we need better data. This is a major challenge for research.” Objective as well as subjective indicators therefore need to be addressed, including feelings and perceptions. Until now, such monitoring and evaluation of existing return and reintegration programmes are missing. However, studies indicate that forced returns and deportations rather lead to high levels of unsustainable return while some evidence shows that positive decision making factors lead to higher levels of reintegration and sustainable return. If one wants to understand how and why people decide to return in the framework of an assisted voluntary return programme, these factors also need to be taken into account.

“Remigration and Sustainable Return are not one and the same – Remigration is not a sound indicator for measuring sustainable return. Sustainable Return is a complex process and should be viewed as the result of a successful reintegration process. In order to better understand this process, there is a strong need for more data and evidence on objective and subjective factors, which exceeds focusing on aspirations, intentions, and realisations of remigration. Thereby, host countries funding individuals for Assisted



Voluntary Return play an important role in developing a first database on returnees by including monitoring of the returnees in their programmes.”

“ If we want to understand better how returnees reach their decisions, we need more data. This is a major challenge for research.”

Dr. Katie Kuschminder

In general, the countries of origin and the local communities should further be included in the planning and managing of the return process as they, too, play a crucial role. Returnees are not always welcome in their countries of origin or the local communities and sometimes even face social exclusion and non-acceptance. Programming should therefore include options for social reintegration and working with local communities in order to sensitise them for returnees.



Speakers from left to right: Friedrich Einwich (Diakonisches Werk Trier and Simmern-Trarbach), Knut Holm (Norwegian Directorate for Migration), Horst Finé (Office of Administration of the Saarland) and Chair Dr. Axel Kreienbrink (Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees)

Panel I: Return counselling

Pilot projects and best practices

- 11.15** • **Early counselling, inclusion of the environment and cooperation with NGOs – representatives from the Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate and Norway presented pilot projects and their approaches in return counselling.**

Early return counselling is the be-all and end-all

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees launched a pilot project in the Saarland on integrated return counselling in 2016. The Land had previously not provided any return counselling. Horst Finé of the Central Foreigners Authority of the Regional Administration Office of the Saarland described the pilot project, under which initial information on the possibility of return counselling is obtained soon after entering the country. In addition to personal counselling, there are posters and information leaflets in the arrival centre and at the foreigners authority providing information on options for voluntary return. The information leaflets are tailored to different groups of origin and status groups, such as persons from safe countries

of origin, people who fall under the Dublin Regulation and asylum seekers with good prospects to remain. Asylum seekers are now being informed of return counselling options as soon as they are interviewed. 30 per cent then underwent counselling, and 40-45 per cent of them had then returned voluntarily to their countries of origin.

“A relatively large number of asylum applicants have opted to return on the basis of the early information”, Finé stressed, adding that the processing period would average two weeks. Particularly people from the Western Balkans would be departing voluntarily subsequent to the counselling. Even 44 Syrians had returned to their country of origin.

Finé traced the success of the pilot project to the rapid processing, the close cooperation and the short paths between the actors involved. He stated that it was very important for the people in the arrival centre to be informed about the situation in their countries of origin and for them to also be able to ask about everyday matters there such as the availability of medicines. Counselling was the be-all and end-all of successful return. “Difficulties however arise when it comes to returning long-existing cases where additional incentives need to be created for voluntary return”, Finé stressed.

Qualified staff is essential for individual return counselling

Unlike in the Saarland, in Rhineland-Palatinate return counselling has received state funding for many years, and is organised at local level. The Centre of Excellence on Returns is also a special feature in comparison to other Federal Länder. It does not carry out any return counselling for returnees, but primarily advises and trains staff of the many return counselling units in social welfare offices, foreigners authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in municipalities on matters related to voluntary return, as project-leader Friedrich Einwich, from the church-based Diakonisches Werk Trier und Simmern-Trarbach social services organisation, explained.

Einwich considers the advantages to be evident: Qualified staff is vital to individual return counselling, and the Diakonie is in close contact with the counsellors from the various facilities. This enables the Centre of Excellence to react quickly, discuss the need for training and pass on suggestions directly to the competent Ministry.

The Diakonisches Werk Trier und Simmern-Trarbach acts as the institution implementing the Centre of Excellence, which has been promoted from 2015 to 2017 with funds provided by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and co-funded by the Länder Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt. Within the context of the initiative of the Land on return the municipalities will be receiving 1.4 million euro in 2017 in order to promote activities on return. Funds have also been provided for individual returnees from the initiative of the Land since 2017 who are accommodated in reception centres of the Land Rhineland-Palatinate.

The initiative of the Land makes it possible to have complementary or exclusive funding in addition to return programmes of the Federation (in particular REAG/GARP). For instance, 551 individuals were promoted via REAG/GARP in returning from Rhineland-Palatinate in 2014, whilst 824 persons' return was promoted additionally or exclusively with funding from the Land. In 2015, 3,301 individuals were promoted via REAG/GARP, and 2,766 returnees were funded additionally or exclusively via the initiative of the Land. With regard to reintegration, Einwich advised not to focus solely on labour market integration in the country of origin. "Many people are traumatised, and also need psychosocial and medical treatment." It is possible to

additionally use local NGO structures for this in some countries of origin. However, the work of the NGOs is often difficult, and there is a frequent lack of financial support.

Two approaches from Norway

Norway currently has 109 reception facilities for refugees. These are decentrally organised and spread over the whole country. 13,400 individuals are living in the reception facilities and await a decision as to whether they may remain or must return to their countries of origin. Return counselling follows two approaches, Knut Holm from the Norwegian Directorate for Migration UDI pointed out: orientation advice provided by staff of the UDI, and counselling in the reception facilities provided by staff on the ground.


“ Our objective is for people to be able to make informed decisions and return voluntarily.”

Knut Holm

In the first approach, all refugees whose applications are turned down receive individual orientation counselling. They are informed about their options for return and about what happens if they fail to leave the country, in contravention of the law. "We have developed an interviewing method based on the motivational interviewing concept which focuses on motivation", Holm remarked. In particular at the beginning of this counselling session, first of all everyday questions of the persons concerned were clarified, and the conversation was only guided towards the topic of returning after some time had passed. This technique had made it possible to increase mutual appreciation, to shed light on the circumstances and prospects of potential returnees in a more holistic manner, and to strengthen many people's personal resolve to return. Since only few people were willing to return to their country of origin in some facilities, the local authorities, doctors and social workers were also involved. "We need to enter into a dialogue and reach them where they communicate, including in the Social Media."



Chair Dr. Axel Kreienbrink takes questions and comments from the audience



In the second approach, all unsuccessful asylum applicants have been offered an individual consultation in the reception facilities since 2017. The goal was to provide information on the negative notice and its consequences: the current status, its significance and the finality of the proceedings. Using these two methods, more counselling sessions were held in Norway, and there were more voluntary returnees and more returnees in total than had previously been the case. “The combination of the two approaches ensures that people are better informed of their return options”, Holm explained. He hoped that the project would be continued, and that the early counselling would be expanded and made more flexible. “Our objective is for people to be able to make informed decisions and return voluntarily instead of being removed by the police.”

“Motivating interviews are a method for return counselling in Norway.”

Knut Holm



Speakers from left to right: Dan Rotenberg (European Commission), Dr. Patrick Schmidtke (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees - Return Division), Roger Steiner (State Secretariat for Migration of Switzerland) and Chair Corinna Wicher (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees - Directorate for International Tasks)

Panel II: Integrated return management

The role of return counselling, voluntary return and reintegration

14.00 • Experts explained in Panel II what adjustments need to be made in the return process in order to ensure a smoother procedure. It became clear here that effective interlinking between a variety of instruments on return is an important success factor at both national and European level.

Information campaign and integrated return management

Dr. Patrick Schmidtke, head of the Return Division in the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, presented activities on integrated return management at federal level. Germany has taken a large number of initiatives since the beginning of 2017 with the StarthilfePlus programme, establishing a nationwide return hotline and setting up the 'Returning from Germany' web portal. These are intended to reach prospective returnees and provide information on the options that are available for voluntary return and for return counselling.

The Federal Office aims to inform all asylum applicants of the voluntary return options as early as possible, to adapt the information to their respective countries of origin and to present it in their native languages. This information however needs to be presented independently and open-endedly, and does not replace counselling, since the Federal Office is obliged to remain neutral: "The goal is not to motivate people to return before the reasons for their displacement have been heard. People should know to whom they can turn if they are considering voluntary return", Dr. Schmidtke pointed out.

“ The goal is not to motivate people to return before the reasons for their flight have been heard. People should know to whom they can turn if they are considering voluntary return.”

Dr. Patrick Schmidtke

He also spoke about the many challenges for the near future: promotional programmes are run by the Federation, the Länder and the municipalities. Amongst other things the complex struc-

tures mean that it is not easy to find the right information. This is already not simple for those who were in the know. “So how difficult must it be for someone who is thinking about returning, but is unable to understand German”, Dr. Schmidtke pointed out. To find a remedy to this problem, the Federal Office has joined with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in developing the information portal on voluntary return entitled ‘Returning from Germany’, where anyone can seek information on return counselling centres, the right programmes and information on the countries of origin. Furthermore, a return hotline was established along the lines of the one that was in operation in the United Kingdom. This is to benefit rural regions in particular. The hotline aims to complement the counselling centres, not replace them.

“We need faster processing and more coordination”

Dan Rotenberg, Deputy Head of Unit for Irregular Migration and Return Policy at the European Commission, was self-critical in his lecture entitled “The way forward – Efficient implementation of return measures in the EU”: The EU’s system of removing persons who have no right of residence was said not to be sufficiently effective, despite the fact that the EU had already adopted an Action Plan on Return in 2015 the measures of which had been largely implemented. The European Commission considers reasons for the failure of the return policy as lying both outside and inside the EU: For instance in the lack of cooperation on the part of the countries of origin, but also in the Member States’ asylum systems, and the not always consistent enforcement of the obligation to leave. The situation in Europe has also undergone dramatic change in the past two years: roughly 2.6 million refugees had entered the EU in 2015 and 2016; the recognition rate was between 50 and 60 per cent. More than one million people therefore would have to return to their countries of origin. This is a lot more than had previously been the case.

“We need an ambitious analysis of the situation accommodating both humane and political requirements.”

Dan Rotenberg

“This is why we have to re-examine the way we do things”, Rotenberg said. “We need faster processes, a multidimensional approach and better coordi-

nation, both in and between the Member States.” The European Commission published a renewed Action Plan in March 2017 and addressed specific recommendations to the Member States, including making greater use of detention for the purposes of deportation in order to enforce returns. Something must also be done to prevent the misuse of the asylum system. Any lack of cooperation on the part of countries of origin must be documented EU-wide and information exchanged between Member States. When it comes to voluntary return, above all the exchange of best practices and the harmonisation of the various promotional programmes would be important in order to avoid incentives towards “return shopping”.

Rotenberg was sceptical when it came to the question of whether the EU Returns Directive should be reformed: “Given the large number of persons obliged to depart that we will have in the months to come, we are in a kind of emergency situation to which we need to react now. To be clear: It would take years to reform the directive. This would not help the Member States in the current situation.”

Quality and efficiency assurance in the Swiss model

Roger Steiner of the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration spoke on “Quality and efficiency in the context of integrated return management”. Steiner considers incentive systems for voluntary return and credible enforcement of deportations to belong together: Each one of them would be more difficult without the existence of the other. The large number of stakeholders is however a challenge in Switzerland, too. Steiner explained the problems which had arisen in Switzerland when it came to efforts to monitor the enforcement of return. The Bundesrat (the Swiss Federal Government) wished to use monitoring to identify where problems lay and to ensure maximum transparency, but also to enable a comparison to be drawn between cantons. “The Federation and the cantons were calling for enforcement to be monitored, but there was no consensus as to how this was to be achieved”, Steiner said.

“Efficiency and quality play an important role in the acceptance and credibility of (Switzerland’s) return policy.”

Roger Steiner

A further project on which Steiner reported is the drawing up of quality standards for return counselling, which are to guarantee uniform counselling all over Switzerland. Efficiency and quality criteria were defined in a first interim report. The final results are expected at the end of 2017. Roger Steiner concluded his speech with the following words: “We are quite convinced that an efficient, high-quality return system will make a major contribution to the credibility of return policy, both when it comes to enforcement and in counselling”.

Discussion

Dr. Stefan Dünnwald, Bavarian Refugee Council and Pro Asyl, wanted to know of the speakers in the discussion panel how people were being dealt with who were to be deported if the countries of origin refused to cooperate: Bavaria alone was host to several thousands of Senegalese who could not be removed because of the lack of cooperation on the part of the Senegalese authorities. This had very recently also affected increasing numbers of unsuccessful Afghani asylum seekers. Some of those concerned would travel on to other EU Member States and abscond. They would prefer living in illegality to the state of being obliged to leave (while at the same time they cannot be deported). Living in illegality, however, would entail greater vulnerability to prostitution, criminality and possibly also radicalisation. "Should the assisted return and reintegration programmes not therefore be made more attractive so that they constitute a real alternative?" Dr. Dünnwald asked.



Dr. Stefan Dünnwald, Bavarian Refugee Council and Pro Asyl

Steiner agreed that onward migration within Europe was a problem. This was exactly why there was a need for international cooperation and a holistic approach. "If each nation-state only runs its own programmes, that will be difficult", said Steiner.

With regard to the reintegration programmes Dr. Schmidtke stressed that it was right to continue considering how real prospects in the countries of origin could be given for instance to those who were obliged to leave. "It would be short-sighted for us to believe that voluntary return is completed as soon as a person is on a plane". The voluntary return programmes should ideally be designed in such a way that they were taken up not out of coercion, but on the basis of a personal motivation. In Germany, therefore, the Federal Ministry of the Inte-

rior has acted together with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development to launch the Prospects at Home initiative – a reintegration programme which is to implement a development-sensitive approach towards return. The URA reintegration programme was in operation for Kosovo, and programmes existed in many other third countries within the ERIN (European Reintegration Network) programme, but there was no such programme for Senegal.

According to Rotenberg, the European Commission is also aware of the problem of onward migration and of the lack of sustainability and remigration after return. The Commission is already investigating this and looking for solutions. What is needed would probably also be pressure on the countries of origin, which had previously refused to cooperate or to take back their citizens. It could also be helpful to work together within ERIN, as a joint position vis-à-vis individual countries of origin could carry more weight than if each Member State were to approach them individually.



Speakers from left to right: Po-Ling Ho (Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice), Dr. Sarah Tietze (IOM), Peter Bonin (GIZ) and Chair Janne Grote (EMN National Contact Point)

Panel III: Reintegration programmes

A new start in the country of origin

15.45 • The third panel discussed examples of tried-and-tested practices, new approaches and proposals as to how reintegration can succeed and reintegration programmes can be designed.

Dr. Sarah Tietze of the IOM's Information and Return Counselling Centre in Berlin and Brandenburg presented the Vietnam reintegration project. 70 Vietnamese, some of whom had previously been living in Germany on an irregular basis, and most of whom were obliged to leave, have been supported in their return to and reintegration in Vietnam via the project in recent years. The reintegration project drew up plans for the future with the participants prior to their return. The counselling was open-ended, and was provided anonymously if this was so wished. A Vietnamese-speaking counsellor has been recruited for this purpose onto the staff of the project in Germany ('native counsellor'). In order to inform the target group about assisted return and on return counselling, a roundtable was carried out in advance with relevant Vietnamese migrant organisations, and information work was carried out on a continuous basis in relevant places in the Vietnamese community in Berlin in order to build trust and prevent rumours spreading, as well as to warn against fraudulent "counsellors".

2,000 euro per returnee were available for benefits-in-kind in Vietnam for economic reintegration, which could be used amongst other things to start up a business, for basic and further training, for medical treatment or for housing. The majority of those concerned opted to go self-employed, for instance starting up snack bars, a computer shop or trading in gas bottles. The work experience and qualifications had been taken into account, and the returnees' families had been included in the return planning right from the start. This aspect in particular was important as there could be a lack of understanding in some cases regarding return, as well as social stigmatisation, but the family was also highly important when it came to business start-ups and obtaining information on local economic activities. There was a monitoring process six and 12 months after the return. "However, there is frequently too little monitoring of reintegration", Dr. Tietze found. In general terms, it was not always helpful to push for people to depart quickly, said Dr. Tietze, who pointed out: "We should consider to expand reintegration programmes both to more countries of origin and to individuals who have no recognised entitlement to protection, as they also have needs and require counselling and guidance."

“ A reintegration plan must be tailored to the individual, their strengths and their resources. **”**

Dr. Sarah Tietze

The Vietnam reintegration project is a successful example which has been jointly promoted by the Federal Länder Berlin and Brandenburg, the European Return Fund (ERF) and the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) for more than five years. “Our experience with reintegration programmes in our project, as well as in other projects in many municipalities and Länder, has been positive; these are well complemented by ERIN, but the programme cannot replace them”, Dr. Tietze summed up. The Vietnam reintegration project will unfortunately no longer be promoted at Länder level with the expansion of the European Reintegration Network programme (ERIN).

Joint European approach with Australia

The ERIN programme supports both voluntary returnees and forced returnees in their reintegration in their countries of origin or in third countries, according to Po-Ling Ho from the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice in her presentation. This is intended to avoid dual structures within Europe in the future. The programme involves 17 EU States and Australia, led by the Netherlands, as well as 20 third countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan and Somalia, Libya and Ethiopia. Local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the IOM and Caritas are also involved. Returnees receive counselling in the Member States involved on the return and reintegration process. The goal is to enable them to gain access to training or to the labour market in their countries of origin. ERIN focuses on individual reintegration, and is about both jobs and psychological support for returnees.

Some of the ERIN projects also include monitoring, enabling the returnees to provide information to the organisations involved concerning the quality of the counselling and to propose improvements both before and after returnees’ return. Ho closed by summing up the initial experience of a reintegration programme within ERIN in Somalia. A central challenge had consisted in the Somali Government initially not wishing to take returnees back, arguing that they were criminals or sick people who would pose a burden on Somali society. It was therefore necessary to speak to representatives of the Foreign Ministry and the competent Ministries in order to convince them to permit the first Somalis to come back. In the subsequent discussion with the audience, Ho went on to explain how the service-providers on the ground were funded.

“We pay a fee per returnee, for which we receive money from the European Commission”, explained Ho.

Development policy and reintegration

Peter Bonin from the Sector Project Migration and Development of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) spoke about development-orientated and development-sensitive reintegration. As a service-provider in international cooperation for sustainable development, GIZ GmbH supports amongst others the Federal Government in German development cooperation (via the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development as a shareholder). Its programmes have included both prospective returnee migrants and refugees for quite some time, but have been focussed on experts, who are placed in their countries of origin for temporary or permanent stays. The dynamics of the past years, with the large number of refugees and unsuccessful asylum applicants, had now brought a new target group into the spotlight: persons obliged to leave, some of whom would not leave voluntarily. This fact posed new challenges for return programmes within development cooperation. The goal must however continue to be to take account of principles of development-sensitive return. According to Bonin, this includes the sustainable reintegration of returnees, which had to be characterised by a needs-orientated, target group-specific approach taking account of the “do no harm” principle that is entrenched in development cooperation, and involving both society and regional conditions and communities in the countries of origin in the programme development.



Audience of the conference

The programmes must also focus both on structural and long-term processes and on providing social and psychological support immediately after return. Sustainable reintegration could however ultimately not be equated with immobility or with preventing onward migration, and this should not be understood to be the sole success factor of the return process. The considerations were to be incorporated amongst other things into the new return programme entitled ‘Prospects at Home’, which is being implemented in cooperation between the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Federal Ministry of



the Interior. The focus is on countries from which a large number of asylum seekers have come to Germany who have poor prospects of remaining. The programme comprises both return counselling in Germany and reintegration in the country of origin, which is to be facilitated by training and qualification activities, support in finding jobs and starting up businesses, as well as in awarding miniloans. A total of 150 million euro have been earmarked for the programme, 50 million euro of which have been awarded for 2017.

“ Reintegration takes time and costs money.”

Peter Bonin

The costs have gone up, “but I believe that it is necessary and that we will make an important contribution in the long term.” The project is still in its infancy, “but we are working hard at it”, Bonin said.

Closing remarks: Learning from experience

17.00 • Dr. Christian Klos, Federal Ministry of the Interior, closed by speaking about the challenges involved in return, the significance of European networks and new approaches for involving the Diaspora, using the Gambia as an example.



Dr. Christian Klos, Federal Ministry of the Interior, stressed the importance of exchanging information and experiences across national borders.

“Do we know too little about what happens to people after they return to their countries of origin? What are the criteria for successful return?” At the end of the one-day EMN conference on voluntary return, integrated return management and reintegration, Dr. Klos summed up by stating that there were definitely still major gaps in knowledge when it came to these topics. In Germany one has started by adopting standard definitions. It is important for all countries in Europe to look at what was happening beyond their borders, to engage in an exchange and form networks. It is only through exchange that joint strategies and programmes for the future can be developed, according to Dr. Klos. Germany for instance had sought inspiration in Switzerland for the new StarthilfePlus incentive-based programme for voluntary return, linking tiered return aid to the duration of a person’s residence.

Voluntary return and return counselling

The EMN conference also provided an opportunity to ask about the criteria and the credibility of return counselling, according to Dr. Klos. “How open-ended can individual return counselling be? It ap-

pears to be essential in psychological terms in the counselling situation, but in legal terms it cannot be so, if a person is obliged to leave the country.” Given the large number of persons seeking protection in Germany, voluntary return would play the central role. At the same time, said Dr. Klos, there was a need to remain credible with regard to the enforcement of the obligation to leave. Consistent removals would also lead to an increase in voluntary return. It is important to be aware of this connection, Dr. Klos pointed out. The experts at the conference have concentrated on prerequisites and measures to improve return counselling. New measures and tools are needed for this. Such a measure to approach potential returnees in a suitable manner was the ‘Returning from Germany’ return portal, which Germany had developed in order to provide such people with all the information they needed.

Close cooperation with the Gambia

Cooperation with the countries of origin is elementary in order to be sustainably successful. In the very week before the EMN conference, representatives of the Federal Government had travelled through Western Africa and spoken amongst others with the President and the Minister of the Interior of the Gambia. The change of government which had just taken place offered a good opportunity for a positive development in the country. The Government had expressed an interest in taking Gambians who had migrated to Europe back to their country so that they could help develop the country. “We can naturally not offer everyone the same kind of development prospects as the Gambian President, who started by working as a doorman in London before he returned”, Dr. Klos joked. It was however worthwhile supporting the countries of origin in the interest of the reintegration of their citizens. Cooperation could also lead to innovative approaches. The Gambian Minister of the Interior had for instance offered to meet the Gambian Diaspora in Germany to lobby for people to return to their home country. This initiative will be taken up in order to see whether it might make it easier to reach the target group.



Imprint

Publisher:

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Date: Juli 2017

Layout: Jana Burmeister

Photos: Cover photo: Lena Thiem
Photo p. 3: Jana Burmeister
Photo p. 4-18: Lena Thiem