Steps to Voluntary Return

Counselling and decision making: Return counselling centres inform openly about voluntary return and possible support measures in a confidential conversation. On this basis, potential returnees can make an informed decision.

Application and preparation: The return counselling office will submit the necessary applications for assistance after deciding on voluntary return, possibly through REAG/GARP and StarthilfePlus. The costs of preparing for departure must be covered in advance by applying to the relevant social security office or other responsible funding agencies.

→ The return counselling office supports you in obtaining the necessary documents such as a valid passport, passport replacement documents or a border crossing certificate.

→ The return counselling office provides information on whether a reintegration programme is possible and assists in applying for and preparing reintegration projects.

Departure: As a rule, departure is by scheduled flight or bus. The flight confirmation or, if applicable, the bus ticket will be handed out at the final meeting in the return counselling centre.

New start in the country of origin: In addition to reintegration programmes, arrival support is also available in some countries. Likewise, IOM supports medical care or provides temporary accommodation in some vulnerable cases.

There is no legal entitlement to any support for voluntary return. Assistance can only be granted once for each person. In the event of re-entry to Germany or a non-departure, the assistance granted may be reclaimed under certain conditions.

Reintegration Projects

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees participates in the European Community programme ERIN (European Reintegration Instrument Network), which supports returnees with regard to social and economic reintegration after their return to their country of destination.

With the reintegration project URA, the Federal Office of Migration and Refugees supports Kosovar nationals with social and psychological counselling and employment services after their return to Kosovo. Some Federal States, municipalities and independent agencies carry out their own reintegration projects in certain countries of origin. Further information can be obtained from the competent state authorities and the return counselling centres.

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Voluntary Return

Persons whose application for asylum has been rejected in Germany may decide to return voluntarily within their departure period. In this case, voluntary return is an alternative to forced repatriation.

Voluntary return also opens up new opportunities and prospects for asylum seekers whose asylum procedures have not yet been completed and for those who have already been granted residence.

Persons who decide to return voluntarily can leave the country without the assistance of the authorities on a date chosen by them. There is the possibility of receiving funding for the transport costs to the country of origin.

The Federal Republic of Germany tries to support as many returnees as possible within the meaning of its humanitarian responsibility. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees is responsible for designing and implementing programmes to support voluntary return.

Counselling Services

Returning from Germany

→ On the information portal for voluntary return www.ReturningfromGermany.de, a central search function is available for finding the nearest return counselling centre, information on countries of origin and on return and reintegration programmes. The portal contains all the information from the ZIRF database, which is collected and evaluated by the Information Centre for Voluntary Return (ZIRF) of the Federal Office.

→ Via ZIRF-Counselling, authorised return counselling centres can make specific enquiries about medical care and treatment options for illnesses, local infrastructure and the job and housing market in the countries of origin. In cooperation with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) carries out direct research locally and also publishes the answers in the ZIRF database.

Nationwide return hotline of the Federal Office:
For general questions on return, the staff of the return hotline will help you from Monday to Friday between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. in German and English. Telephone number +49 911-943-0

Return counselling centres

Return counselling centres clarify the possibilities of voluntary return in confidential discussions. They examine which federal or state programmes could be used, help with applications, clarify individual questions regarding the situation in the countries of origin and explain how to proceed. The nearest return counselling centre can be found via the portal www.ReturningfromGermany.de

A counselling interview has no influence on the outcome of the current asylum procedure.

Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes

The Federal programmes REAG/GARP and StarthilfePlus:

REAG/GARP: The humanitarian aid programme Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum Seekers in Germany/Government Assisted Repatriation Programme is implemented by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) on behalf of the federal government and the states.

Depending on the respective nationality, different levels of cover can be granted:
→ Transport costs,
→ Travel allowance,
→ Start-up aid for nationals of certain countries of origin

StarthilfePlus: This programme supplements the support provided by REAG/GARP with financial support for returnees who have been granted start-up assistance under the REAG/GARP programme. The amount of financial support depends on the date of the decision to opt for voluntary return before, during or after the asylum procedure and within the legal obligation to leave the country.

Application procedure

Support from the two federal programmes can be requested through return counselling centres as well as competent state authorities or local authorities (e.g. social security offices or immigration authorities), welfare associations, state hostels, representative of foreign affairs or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Voluntary return can also be carried out independently of these assisted voluntary return programmes at any time.