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EMN
European Migration Network

Coherent return and reintegration assistance

European Migration Network Inform

September 2024

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Explanatory note

This inform was prepared on the basis of national contributions from 27 EMN NCPs (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and UA, RS) collected via an AHQ developed by the EMN NCPs to ensure, to the extent possible, comparability. The information contained in this inform refers to the situation in the abovementioned EMN Member and Observer Countries up to 31 October 2023.

Statistics were sourced from Eurostat, national authorities and other (national) databases.

Published

September 2024

European Migration Network (EMN) “Coherent return and reintegration assistance” [Date], [URL], last accessed on [day month year].

For more information

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1. KEY POINTS TO NOTE

- The European Union (EU) Strategy for Voluntary Return and Reintegration identifies key challenges affecting the coherent implementation of return and reintegration policy, including insufficient coordination among stakeholders and lack of a coherent framework. This inform aims to identify the approaches used to ensuring coherence between different return and reintegration actors at national level and EU level.
- More than half of the contributing European Migration Network (EMN) Member and Observer Countries reported adopting a coherent approach to return and reintegration assistance. Coherence is understood and implemented in a variety of ways and may consist of institutional cooperation, coordination and division of competences between national return and reintegration actors which is prescribed in legislation; national strategies on return; Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); projects and/or practical implementation elements (e.g. guidelines).
- Most EMN Member and Observer Countries reported not having national guidelines, policy or background documents in place to ensure coherence with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) EU Reintegration Programme (EURP), or the EU framework on return counselling and the Frontex Workplan on return and reintegration counselling.
- About half of the EMN Member and Observer Countries have specific mechanisms or platforms to ensure and/or monitor collaboration between different stakeholders. Several countries have established working groups or regular meetings between the key stakeholders involved.
- Most countries reported challenges to ensure a coherent approach to return and reintegration at national level. The main challenges include communication and coordination, lack of (trained) staff, lack of harmonisation at EU level, lack of sufficient monitoring data, and funding issues.
- The majority of EMN Member and Observer Countries do not have standards or specific monitoring indicators to evaluate the promotion of voluntary return and reintegration and/or coherence. A small number reported evaluation and monitoring activities, primarily focusing on internal systems and reintegration outcomes.
- Some EMN Member and Observer Countries noted that a lack of coherence at national level can create unnecessary overlaps, bottlenecks and ineffective work. A lack of information-sharing may result in duplication of activities, unnecessary planning, and ineffective use of resources.
- Most EMN Member and Observer Countries reported that their return and reintegration policy is aligned with other national policies, mainly internal security and development assistance policies.

2. INTRODUCTION

Development and implementation of a coherent return and reintegration approach is central to an effective and sustainable return and reintegration policy. Coherence is significant as the landscape of return and reintegration becomes more diverse, in particular in relation to the increasing role of Frontex. With new stakeholders involved and increased focus on linkages between reintegration and development cooperation, return and reintegration are also becoming more complex. This change comes against the backdrop of increasing efforts and investments at European and EU Member State level.

The EU Strategy for Voluntary Return and Reintegration (the Strategy) was published in 2021 and affirms the idea of coherent European return and reintegration support as an essential element of a common EU return system to improve the overall effectiveness of EU migration policy.[1] The key challenges identified by the Strategy include a number of aspects that affect the coherent implementation of return and reintegration policy: fragmentation of approaches; lack of structured monitoring framework; lack of a coherent framework for return counselling and a mechanism to refer returnees to return and reintegration programmes; insufficient stakeholder coordination; lack of sustainability, including due to a lack of ownership and capacity in countries of origin; and insufficient funding.

The Strategy considers the participation of national and local authorities in both host countries and countries of return, host local communities, and civil society crucial to the design of reintegration programmes. This cooperation is proven to support the promotion of trust with third-country nationals,[2] to offer the returnee substantial chances in the country of return, and to enhance the effectiveness of return and reintegration programmes.

National authorities, together with relevant stakeholders, are carrying out a variety of measures to facilitate return and reintegration programmes and enhance the effectiveness of returns. Some EMN Member and Observer Countries identify challenges and opportunities through evaluations and studies. For instance, tailored return and reintegration programmes that consider not only the person's situation and motives but also the current circumstances in their country of origin have a significant impact on successful and effective returns.[3]

1 European Commission, 'New EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration', 2021, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/new-eu-strategy-voluntary-return-and-reintegration-2021-04-22_en, last accessed on 21 September 2023.
2 International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'The effectiveness of return in EU Member States: challenges and good practices linked to EU rules and standards EU', 2017, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/publications/effectiveness-return-eu-member-states-challenges-and-good-practices-linked-eu-rules-and-standards-eu_en, last accessed on 21 September 2023.
3 EMN, 'Incentives and motives for voluntary departure', Inform, 2022, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-07/EMN_Voluntary-depart_INFORM_final_080722.pdf, last accessed on 21 September 2023.

The Frontex-funded EURP[4] (formerly "Joint Reintegration Services") was launched on 1 April 2022 and offers individual reintegration assistance for returnees in their countries of origin. The EURP provides an opportunity for EU Member States to increase the availability and use of promoting return and reintegration support and step-up returns. A coherent return counselling and return and reintegration structure at Member State level is necessary to make full use of the EURP and other Frontex services (i.e. the Frontex Workplan on return and reintegration counselling; Frontex Application for Return (FAR)).

This inform was prepared based on contributions from 27 EMN Member and Observer Countries[5] and refers to the situation up to 31 October 2023. It complements previous research by the EMN on various aspects of (voluntary) return, including the 2022 EMN inform on incentives and motives for voluntary departure.[6]

3. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

This inform presents an overview of the overall governance structures and linkages in the existing return and reintegration processes within EMN Member and Observer Countries in order to identify possible connections and/or similarities. The main objectives of the inform are:

- To provide an overview of mechanisms in place for implementing and setting up **coherent national return and reintegration programmes** in EMN Member and Observer Countries;
- To provide an overview of EMN Member and Observer Countries' **holistic migration process chains, including interfaces and stakeholders involved**, from the development of return and reintegration programmes to the dissemination of information and implementation of the programmes.

The main focus of the inform is on **coherence,** which it defines as follows: a clear relationship between different stakeholders and between different stages of return and reintegration projects/activities at national level, in the context of an overall national strategic framework for effective return policies. Elements in this framework include funding, a mechanism to refer returnees to return and reintegration programmes, and structured coordination between stakeholders at national level.

4. A COHERENT APPROACH TO RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

The majority of EMN Member and Observer Countries[7] have adopted a coherent approach to return and reintegration assistance. This coherent approach typically consists of institutional cooperation, coordination and division of competences between national return and reintegration actors, which is prescribed in legislation;[8] national strategies on return;[9] standard operating procedures (SOPs);[10] projects;[11] and/or practice[12] (e.g. guidelines, conventions). Annex 1 provides an overview of the main stakeholders involved at national level in the design, development, funding of support services, and application/processing modalities of return and reintegration programmes.

In some EMN Member and Observer Countries,[13] **national legislation** provides for a coherent return approach. This mainly prescribes the cooperation and division of competences between different actors. In Spain, forced and voluntary return competences laid down in Royal Decree 139/2020 are coordinated by the State's Central Administration. In France, the roles of the stakeholders involved are laid out in government instructions with a joint steering scheme between the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII) and the Ministry of the Interior and Overseas Territories.[14] In the Netherlands, Implementation Guidelines for the Aliens Act describe the way in which the organisations involved in return and reintegration processes work together and their roles, including guidelines on the cooperation between the Repatriation and Departure Service, the IOM and several non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In Ukraine, the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons and the corresponding procedure specifies that the procedure for the voluntary return of foreigners and stateless persons is carried out by the territorial departments of the State Migration Service in cooperation with international organisations and/or NGOs. The process of establishing a coherent approach to return and reintegration is underway in Serbia, following recent adoption of the legal framework determining the responsible authority.

4 Frontex, 'Reintegration Assistance', https://www.frontex.europa.eu/return-and-reintegration/reintegration-assistance/ , last accessed on 3 July 2024.
5 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and UA, RS.
6 EMN 'Incentives and motives for voluntary departure', Inform, 2022, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-07/EMN_Voluntary-depart_INFORM_final_080722.pdf, last accessed on 4 March 2024.
7 AT, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SK, and UA, RS.
8 ES, FR, IT, NL, PL, and UA, RS.
9 AT, EE, IT, LT, PL, SE.
10 AT, CY, DE, LV, MT, PT, and UA, RS.
11 IE, IT.
12 CZ, FI, IE, IT, SE.
13 ES, FR, IT, NL, PL, and UA, RS.
14 An instruction from the Minister of the Interior from 2021, and an instruction from the Ministry of the Interior and the OFII from May 2022.

Box 1: National legislation on coherent return in Poland

In Poland, the national migration law prescribes coherent and effective management in voluntary return and reintegration assistance. The Border Guard cooperates with IOM and Frontex to provide assistance in voluntary return and reintegration. The central body of the Border Guard ensures coherence of activities, based on guidelines, internal procedures, conduct algorithms, and adopted practice.

Eight EMN Member and Observer Countries[15] reported concluding SOPs. In Germany, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF*) handles the development and administration of federal programmes and also acts as a partner for federal states, municipalities and NGOs to ensure a coherent approach to return and reintegration. This cooperation has resulted in several documents and procedures that define the nationwide approach to promoting voluntary return and reintegration.

In January 2022, Cyprus, in cooperation with the European Commission and Frontex, drafted SOPs for returns, which describe the main principles of return counselling, as well as assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) projects. Latvia concluded SOPs between the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and the State Border Guard. In Malta, the remit of the Returns Unit within the Migration Directorate is outlined in SOPs, which explains how coordination and cooperation with multiple stakeholders is ensured so that return and reintegration can be implemented efficiently. In Slovakia, assisted voluntary return is defined in the Act on Residency of Foreigners No. 404/2011 as 'being carried out by the IOM or another non-governmental organisation on the basis of an agreement with the Government of the Slovak Republic'. Ukraine has concluded an intersectoral SOP and a Protocol of cooperation with IOM. Serbia is preparing an SOP for all stakeholders to strengthen the system, improve competent authorities' capacity, and enable a smooth transition from IOM (the only institution dealing with AVRR). Portugal's Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA) is finalising a manual of procedures and good practices that harmonises conduct and clarifies competences, which will be distributed to the various stakeholders in the return process (the police and AIMA).

In six EMN Member and Observer Countries,[16] **national strategies** outline a coherent approach on return and reintegration. In Estonia, the Internal Security Strategy 2020-2030 aims to make the return process faster and more efficient. The programme for 2024-2027 contains actions to support a coherent approach to return and reintegration (e.g. return counselling, referrals to the AVRR programme or EURP). Sweden has return strategies at ministry level to ensure coherence between ministries and agencies, while a State Secretaries' group and an interdepartmental working group have been formed to continue coordination.

Box 2: National strategy on coherent return in Lithuania

In Lithuania, the National Integrated Border Management Strategy 2020-2024 states that 'voluntary return needs to be facilitated through a set of coordinated and appropriate reintegration measures to ensure that return to the country of origin does not undermine the dignity of the individual, with a particular focus on voluntary return and departure'. It emphasises that promoting voluntary departure requires cooperation with NGOs and international organisations organising and implementing AVRR projects in countries of origin.

Practical cooperation

The Czech Republic has no particular document defining a coherent approach among state authorities, return and reintegration, but activities are carried out in direct cooperation with or under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior, ensuring high-level coherence at national level. In Italy, a new AVRR project is planned within the framework of the 2021-2027 Asylum and Migration Integration Fund (AMIF) programme, targeting coherence between the stakeholders involved. In Sweden, meetings are held with the responsible authorities to ensure cooperation, joint activities and joint working groups. In Ireland, the Department of Justice Immigration Service Delivery function, Repatriation Division, works with other relevant units across Immigration Service Delivery, including the International Protection Office. In line with an increased focus on voluntary return and to enable the Department of Justice to foster and grow an internal programme, a new dedicated Voluntary Returns Unit has been set up, staffed by people with specialist experience. Cross-institutional cooperation is encouraged. The Unit works with IOM to effect cases for AVRR.

Finland's recurring working group meetings on Frontex cooperation are led by the Ministry of the Interior, together with the relevant authorities. There are also ministry-led government policy programme meetings on return policy package implementation that support cooperation between relevant national authorities.

15 AT, CY, DE, LV, MT, PT, and UA, RS.
16 AT, EE, IT, LT, PL, SE.

5. POLICIES ON PROMOTING COHERENT VOLUNTARY RETURNS AND REINTEGRATION

National guidelines on coherence with other EURP-joint reintegration services programmes

Fifteen EMN Member and Observer Countries[17] do not have national guidelines or policy or background documents that seek to ensure coherence of voluntary return and reintegration programmes with either the EURP joint reintegration services programme, or the EU framework on return counselling and the Frontex Workplan on return and reintegration counselling. France does not have national guidelines, but, there is a national OFII programme. Nevertheless, France works with the EURP joint reintegration services programme when there is no OFII national programme. Six EMN Member Countries[18] reported having some form of such guidance in place.

In Poland, voluntary returns and reintegration are carried out either through IOM projects or via the EURP. Voluntary return and reintegration assistance is based on guidelines that are adjusted to the dynamically changing migration situation and current needs in the implementation of return policy. This allows for optimal use of the potential of both entities (IOM and Frontex) and the appropriate adaptation of assistance to the needs and expectations of a specific beneficiary.

Germany has no official national document explicitly describing coherence of national programmes vis-à-vis the EURP and the Frontex Workplan, but existing national guidelines are continuously adapted to ensure coherence. EURP and European efforts to standardise return counselling are also incorporated in the guidelines for return counsellors. These guidelines were published in March 2023 to foster the coherent implementation of EURP and national programmes.

Belgian asylum and migration agencies actively engage with various Member State platforms (EURP, FAR, the Return and Reintegration Facility (RRF), Frontex, etc.) to foster coherence and harmonisation between Member States' national voluntary return programmes and the EU framework for return counselling. In Cyprus, SOPs specifically mention how the EURP is integrated in its national AVRR policy.

Five EMN Member Countries[19] joined the EURP only recently and are working to implement the programme. Lithuania started taking part in the EURP and the Reintegration Assistance Tool (RIAT)[20] in 2023 and coherence is achieved through practice, as national strategic migration policy documents do not mention it yet. The Estonian Police and Border Guard Board (PBGB) joined the EURP in November 2023 and put in place a renewed SOP for return counselling, including cooperation with IOM Estonia to provide comprehensive return support service and information exchange to avoid duplication of services.

Standards for the evaluation of the promotion of voluntary return and reintegration

Fourteen EMN Member and Observer Countries[21] reported not having standards or specific monitoring indicators for evaluating the promotion of voluntary return and reintegration and/or coherence. Nine EMN Member Countries[22] reported evaluation and monitoring activities. France monitors and evaluates the system for illegally staying foreign nationals benefiting from return preparation schemes (*Dispositifs de préparation au retour* - DPAR) outside the Paris region in a table featuring indicators such as average occupancy rate, average length of stay, voluntary return rate, forced return rate and return rate (voluntary plus forced/exits). In addition, the data recorded in the national return and reintegration app is processed each month, providing statistics on the countries of return and reintegration, as well as beneficiary profiles (age, gender, legal status (e.g. rejected or withdrawn asylum seeker), family situation, department of origin in France, etc.). The national reintegration scheme was evaluated in 2020, showing its effectiveness in ensuring sustainable returns.[23] In addition, a multi-year contract on objectives and performance signed between the OFII and the General Directorate for Foreign Nationals in France (DGEF) sets out a number of performance indicators to strengthen assisted voluntary return (AVR): the number of AVR beneficiaries, share of nationals of visa-required countries among AVR beneficiaries, share of rejected asylum seekers among AVR beneficiaries, and share of AVR beneficiaries who have passed through a DPAR. Germany promotes the introduction of European indicators (e.g. by the Quality Monitoring Framework ()QMF developed by RRF for the EURP).

Belgium's Federal Agency for the reception of asylum seekers (Fedasil) has created monitoring tables to assess voluntary return efforts in reception centres, including indicators on quantity of information sessions for residents, numbers of counselling meetings (including for unaccompanied minors), volume of files submitted for voluntary return, as well as those for return and reintegration support. Fedasil's partners - Caritas and IOM - have internal quality frameworks to monitor collaboration with local partners and services delivered. In Ireland, IOM's Internal Monitoring Policy is used for IOM AVRR programmes and monitors a range of areas, including budgets and expenditure, project activities, project results, and risks.

As outlined in Bulgaria's signed Action Plan on Return, the performance of return specialists deployed in Bulgaria is assessed. Austria builds on many years of experience in

17 BE, ES, FI, FR, HU, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, SE, SK, and UA, RS.
18 AT, CY, CZ, DE, PL, SI.
19 EE, LT, MT, NL, PT.
20 The EU Reintegration Programme is managed via the Reintegration Assistance Tool (RIAT), a digital platform developed by the European Commission to streamline and standardize information exchange, benefiting third-country nationals, reintegration partners, and Member States. For more information: https://www.frontex.europa.eu/return-and-reintegration/reintegration-assistance/ , last accessed on 3 July 2024.
21 CY, CZ, EL, FI, HR, HU, LT, LU, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK.
22 AT, BE, BG, DE, EE, ES, FR, IE, MT.
23 An evaluation of reintegration in 14 countries with interviews with 373 beneficiaries out of a total of 1 357 beneficiaries over the period 2014-2017.

promoting voluntary return by subjecting current developments to regular overall assessments, with return assistance adapted accordingly. Implementing organisations in Spain submit interim and final reports based on models and indicators provided by the Directorate-General for Humanitarian Assistance and Social Inclusion of Immigration.

Box 3: Annual review of indicators in Malta

In Malta, the Return Unit's Communication Strategy sets out a strategy for the promotion of return and reintegration outreach throughout the year. At the end of the year, the RU reviews its strategy to assess whether or not the activities were successful and any lessons that can be taken. It then develops a new strategy for the following year. Indicators vary from numbers of posts on social media, numbers of migrants counselled, returned, and/or reintegrated, numbers of meetings with stakeholders, volume of promotional material printed and disseminated, etc.

Mechanisms and platforms ensuring collaboration among different stakeholders

Thirteen EMN Member Countries[24] have a specific mechanism or platform to ensure and/or monitor collaboration between different stakeholders. The remainder do not have any such mechanism in place.[25]

Ten EMN Member Countries[26] have established working groups or regular meetings between the key stakeholders involved. Cyprus established a Working Group on Returns in January 2021, with the participation of all national stakeholders, the European Commission and Frontex. It monitors all return procedures, including cooperation between national authorities and with EU stakeholders. Belgium has instituted different Coordination of Return (COTER) working groups, including on voluntary return. COTER serves as a platform to discuss different issues. The Netherlands has established various consultation forums to ensure collaboration between different stakeholders. Cooperating organisations meet to discuss specific cases, share information and identify trends which may require policy responses. In France, the OFII is supervised by the DGEF of the Ministry of the Interior and Overseas territories, based on objectives assigned through a Contract of Objectives and Performance (COP). The current COP covers the period 2021-2023. It was piloted by the Ministry through biannual review meetings and a biannual monitoring committee. The OFII also works closely with its supervisory body on business and support issues. Preparatory meetings for the Board of Directors are held regularly with the supervisory ministry and the budget department. The OFII coordinates its communications activities with those of the DGEF. The DPAR scheme is overseen by the Prefect of the host department and the relevant OFII regional directorate, as part of a steering committee involving all departments and partners concerned.

Box 4: Joint Return Support Centre (ZUR) in Germany

Germany's central exchange platform for federal and state governments is the Joint Return Support Centre (ZUR), whose Voluntary Return Working Group is primarily concerned with collaboration of the different stakeholders in the field of voluntary return and reintegration. Regular meetings and written information exchanges between the different stakeholders are organised within this framework. To ensure a comprehensive view on specific topics, experts, non-governmental partners and return counsellors are invited to share their expertise at those meetings. Additional meetings and networks from local to federal level also facilitate collaboration on voluntary return and reintegration.

Box 5: Analytical Centre for the Protection of State Borders and Migration (ANACEN) in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the Analytical Centre for the Protection of State Borders and Migration (ANACEN) is a leading analytical body that fulfils the role of a permanent analytical and coordination unit with an interdisciplinary focus in the field of border protection and migration. It operates at an expert level and its activities are managed by the Coordinating Body for the Management of State Border Protection and Migration. All key authorities participate in ANACEN's activities, with close cooperation and the exchange of information enabling a rapid operative response to problems arising. Regular and ad hoc meetings take place for different forums.

6. CHALLENGES TO ENSURE COHERENT APPROACH TO RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Key challenges to coherence

Seventeen EMN Member and Observer Countries[27] reported challenges at national level to ensure a coherent approach to return and reintegration. These include communication and coordination challenges between different stakeholders,[28] a lack of (trained) staff,[29] a lack of

24 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IT, MT, NL, PL.
25 BG, EL, HR, HU, LT, LU, LV, SE, SI, SK, and UA, RS.
26 AT, BE, CY, CZ, EE, FI, FR, IT, NL, PL.
27 AT, BE, CY, CZ, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK, and RS.
28 AT, BE, CZ, DE, FI, FR, IT, MT, NL, SE, SK, and RS.
29 CY, CZ, FR, MT, NL, SK, and RS.

harmonisation at EU level,[30] a lack of sufficient monitoring data,[31] and funding issues.[32]

Communication and coordination challenges

Twelve EMN Member and Observer Countries[33] reported specific communication or coordination challenges between the key actors involved in return and reintegration. Germany's federal system implies a large number of stakeholders in voluntary return and reintegration, presenting constant challenges for coherence. However, this can also be a strength of the federal system, as different perspectives and procedures are taken into account.

Belgium reported challenges arising from dual roles, insufficient information-sharing between different agencies, a lack of uniform files, and differing target groups. This creates a challenge in maintaining equilibrium while collaborating with diverse partners (e.g. Caritas, IOM) to implement the national voluntary return and reintegration programme. Finland highlighted that return issues are divided between different agencies, potentially creating gaps in procedures and steering actions. Sweden noted that different stakeholders have different interests and mandates, which might hinder a coherent approach. In addition, return is not prioritised by all stakeholders, preventing progress and expected results. Austria emphasised that challenges arise from partially different support packages, depending on the country of return and the reintegration partner, as well as different booking modalities for travel, depending on the status of the returnees, which can increase the administrative burden.

Box 5: National actors in the Netherlands: different perspectives

In the Netherlands, actors operating at different levels may have different perspectives on a desirable and effective return and reintegration policy. At national level, policies on irregularly staying migrants are primarily geared towards promoting voluntary return. At local level, municipalities need to balance their commitment to return policy with their regard for public order and safety and undocumented migrants' well-being. According to an evaluation of the National Immigration Facilities,[34] these different perspectives can sometimes lead to friction. While national actors may expect municipalities to stop providing reception to ineligible irregularly staying migrants, municipalities may fear potential negative consequences for public order and safety and for undocumented migrants themselves.

Lack of (trained) staff

Seven EMN Member and Observer Countries[35] reported a lack of sufficient staff or lack of training for staff working on return and reintegration. The Netherlands reported that capacity problems mean that stakeholders from different organisations cannot always attend coordination forums. Different case managers appear to work differently and are not always aware of the support foreign nationals can receive from NGOs. France has planned to organise seminars for return agents in France and reintegration agents abroad to ensure they have a better understanding of the reintegration system and pass on the right messages to candidates for reintegration. The Slovak Republic reported the challenge of aligning common procedures on return and reintegration and providing training on return counselling for staff in police detention centres for foreigners. In Ireland, a new dedicated Voluntary Returns Unit has been set up, staffed with people with specialist experience.

Lack of harmonisation at EU level

A lack of harmonisation at EU level was reported as a challenge by Belgium, France and in part by the Netherlands. Belgium reported that discrepancies exist between EMN Member and Observer Countries' return and reintegration assistance programmes, resulting in varying amounts and forms of reintegration support. France highlighted the need to ensure coherence between European countries to prevent people from benefiting from AVRR support when they have a valid residence permit in another European country. The Netherlands' Repatriation and Departure Service identified increased legal complexity resulting in prolonged stay in the Netherlands, due to repeated legal proceedings, pressure on the migration chain, a lack of compliance with return agreements within Europe related to the Dublin Regulation, and a lack of reciprocity with countries of origin.

Lack of sufficient monitoring data

A lack of sufficient monitoring data was reported in Finland and Spain. Finland struggles to measure and monitor results, especially when different agencies are responsible for different tasks. Spain reported the need for more data on reintegration.

Issues related to funding

A lack of sufficient funding was reported in Finland, Germany and Serbia. Germany reported that securing and fairly allocating sufficient funds to finance programmes to promote voluntary return and reintegration is often a major challenge. Serbia reported dependence on donor support because existing funds within the national budget were not sufficient for the smooth functioning and implementation of return, especially reintegration programmes. This requires additional efforts to ensure strong and effective coordination and exchange of information among different projects. Austria reported challenges due to different financing structures, such as through Frontex, AMIF and national financing.

Impact of a potential lack of coherence on return and reintegration

Thirteen EMN Member and Observer Countries[36] reported that a lack of coherence among responsible

30 BE, FR.
31 ES, FI.
32 AT (different financing structures), DE, FI, and RS.
33 AT, BE, CZ, DE, FI, FR, IT, MT, NL, SE, SK, and RS.
34 Regioplan, 'Eindevaluatie Landelijke Vreemdelingenvoorziening', 2022, https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ronl-fd604a90b83ea335d0be50699334b3b840ec9997/pdf, last accessed on 10 December 2023.
35 CY, CZ, FR, NL, MT, SK, and RS.
36 BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, HU, HR, IT, LU, LV, PL, SI, SK.

actors for return and reintegration at national level was not typically observed in practice. Nevertheless, they provided some insight into the perceived potential negative impact of a lack of coherence on the achievement of policy objectives. Germany underlined that in return policy, even a perceived lack of coherence could become the subject of political/societal debates (e.g. false incentives, preferential treatment, discrimination), potentially reducing the acceptance of programmes. There was also a risk that incoherent programmes would not use their funds in a targeted manner.

Sweden highlighted that a lack of coherence could create unnecessary overlaps, bottlenecks and ineffective work, but chiefly that national return policy objectives cannot be reached if all parties are not working towards the same objectives. Finland underlined that a lack of information-sharing could result in duplication of activities, unnecessary planning and ineffective use of resources, thereby impacting (at least indirectly) achievement of national return policy objectives. Serbia reported that a potential lack of coherence among stakeholders, including non-state actors, could diminish national efforts to establish systems and necessitate additional time and resources. Partnership agreements with IOM and intersectoral SOPs aim to ensure coherence.

Alignment of return and reintegration policy with other national policies

The vast majority of EMN Member and Observer Countries[37] reported that their return and reintegration policy was aligned with other national policies. In Sweden, there is an ongoing process to achieve a whole-of-government approach.

In 10 EMN Member Countries,[38] return policy is aligned with internal security policies and strategies. Poland underlined that return policy is consistent with its internal security policy. The goal of migration policy is coherent migration management ensuring public safety and order, which is particularly important in the context of the current challenges for Poland in relation to migration pressure on the eastern section of the state border. In Finland, the government policy programme on preventing illegal stay reflects the security policy, where return issues are also vital. Latvia similarly emphasised the links between return policy with national security issues: in the context of the Belarus crisis of unauthorised entry of migrants into the EU from 2021 to 2023, both return and reintegration issues, as well as national security issues, were affected. Ireland's legal framework on voluntary return provides that individuals convicted of particularly serious crimes, or where there are reasonable grounds for considering the person a risk to the security of the State, may not avail of the option of voluntary return. This means that the person cannot evade deportation, or return to the State once deported. This is considered important in strengthening the role of immigration legislation in relation to public safety.

Five EMN Member Countries[39] highlighted the link between return and reintegration policy with development assistance and the external dimension of migration. In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports voluntary return and reintegration programmes as part of its framework for international development cooperation. In Finland, the new government has opened discussions on return and reintegration policy between the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs. In Belgium, Fedasil pursues continuous dialogue and cooperation with national development cooperation actors (e.g. the Federal Public Service (FPS) of Foreign Affairs and the Belgian Development Agency (Enabel). Partnership agreements were concluded, together with a joint strategy paper to harness and promote the potential of migration for sustainable development.

37 AT, CY, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SK, and RS.
38 AT, CZ, DE, FI, HR, IE, LT, LV, MT, PL.
39 CZ, DE, FR, FI, NL.

ANNEX 1. MAIN ACTORS INVOLVED

Country	Main stakeholders involved in the design, development, funding of support services, and application/processing modalities of return and reintegration programmes
AT	■ Ministry of the Interior V/B/10 (strategic orientation, coordination of EURP participation) ■ Ministry of the Interior V/A/4 (AMIF funding) ■ Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (approval of support services) ■ Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services (return counselling, return preparation and organization of return) ■ IOM (return preparation and return organisation, especially for vulnerable target groups, reintegration in Uzbekistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia)
BE	■ The Immigration Office (IO) in Belgium is the national authority responsible for assessing whether a foreign individual qualifies for legal residency ■ Since 1 June 2021, the Alternatives to Detention Department (ATD) within the IO has been responsible for implementing and enforcing alternative measures to detention for irregularly staying migrants ■ Fedasil is mandated with the reception of applicants of international protection and information and counselling of voluntary return of migrants, both within the reception network (in collaboration with the IO) and outside the reception network ■ Caritas is one of the two partners in Fedasil's voluntary return programme and has signed a four-year partnership agreement with Frontex, functioning as a reintegration partner within the EURP project ■ IOM Belgium is one of the two partners in Fedasil's voluntary return programme
BG	■ Ministry of the Interior
CY	■ The main stakeholders are the Civil Registry and Migration Department, Aliens and Immigration Unit, Unit European Funds and Asylum Service
CZ	■ The Ministry of the Interior – Voluntary Return Unit; supported by its Refugee Facilities Department – Assisted voluntary return for ex-asylum seekers and the Directorate of Foreign Police Service implement 'passengers who board without a security guard' (DEPU) and 'deported passengers boarding with a security guard' (DEPA) returns as forced returns Other bodies are involved to a certain level, such as international organisations, national civil society organisations, other state and non-state entities such as embassies, professional associations, local authorities, etc.
DE	■ The main players in the planning, implementation and coordination of programmes to promote voluntary return and reintegration include the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (*Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat* - BMI), BAMF and the relevant authorities of the federal states ■ Reintegration support measures in various third countries are provided by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (*Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung*) and implemented by *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH* (GIZ)
EE	■ The primary institution responsible for policy-making on return is the Estonian Ministry of the Interior. The policy is mainly implemented by the PBGB, subordinated under the Ministry. The PBGB is closely involved in processes and development of national return and reintegration programmes, particularly the EURP. The AVRR programme is implemented by IOM. Funding of support services is provided by the Estonian Ministry of the Interior
EL	■ IOM is the main organisation implementing voluntary returns and the reintegration of third-country nationals in the countries of origin, with which the Ministry of Migration and Asylum cooperates on voluntary returns

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ES	■ At the Ministry of the Interior, forced return is a competence of the General Direction of the National Police, where it is coordinated at central level by the Central Return Unit (UCER) ■ NGOs (or their counterparts in countries of origin) work on reintegration by monitoring returnees ■ The Spanish strategy for reintegration is based on developing voluntary return and reintegration projects managed by NGOs and international organisations specialised in the care of immigrants ■ There are two axes: ■ 1.An annual call on a competitive basis from the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration through the Secretariat of State for Migration, for Voluntary Return projects co-financed by the AMIF Fund (up to 90 %) ■ 2.An agreement signed and renewed annually between Spain and the IOM
FI	■ The Finnish Immigration Service and Finnish police are the main actors in designing support, application and processing modalities for return and reintegration programmes
FR	■ The OFII is responsible for implementing the AVR scheme, as the French government agency responsible for the voluntary return and reintegration of foreign nationals
HR	■ The Ministry of the Interior, the General Police Directorate, the Border Police Directorate is involved in the implementation of the (EURP, with the cooperation and assistance of Frontex's return experts, who conduct return counselling)
HU	■ The voluntary return and reintegration programme is implemented by IOM
IE	■ Voluntary return is provided for in Section 48 of the International Protection Act 2015 and in the Immigration Act 1999. This is an option that is open to individuals who have no legal status in Ireland, who have withdrawn their application for international protection, or who have had their application for international protection refused. Prior to a deportation order being issued, an individual is actively encouraged to leave the State voluntarily. Individuals may engage with the Department of Justice and IOM for assistance in their voluntary return ■ In line with the EU direction and an increased focus on voluntary return and to enable the Department of Justice to foster and grow an internal programme, a new dedicated Voluntary Returns Unit was set up, staffed with people with specialist career experience. While IOM works with the most vulnerable, this Unit assists people who want to return quickly. It also raises stakeholders' awareness of this option ■ The Unit processes cases for voluntary return and continues to work with IOM to effect cases for AVRR and to increase the capacity for the Immigration Service Delivery, Department of Justice to assist in a more meaningful way. The Unit has introduced a more efficient and streamlined process that includes cooperation with both Internal Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) and the International Protection Office
IT	■ The main stakeholders in implementing the return and reintegration programme are the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Office, housed in the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior, the project implementing body (IOM), Frontex EURP, the Prefectures, and the Police Headquarters The Central Directorate of Immigration and Border Police - Immigration Service is the National Contact Point for the EURP
LT	■ The Migration Department monitors the legality of foreigners' stay in Lithuania, informs them of the possibility of voluntary return, makes decisions on their legal status, and provides travel documents ■ The State Border Guard Service monitors the legality of the foreigners' entry and stay in Lithuania, informs them of the possibility of voluntary return, provides travel documents, and carries out both voluntary and forced returns ■ The Ministry of the Interior acts as a coordinating institution to ensure institutional cooperation. It also drafts legal acts ■ The Ministry of Social Security administers the AMIF 2014-2020 national programme, which provides funding ■ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has occasionally been involved in particular cases of international cooperation on return and the organisation of identification missions ■ IOM has been involved in AVRR programmes in Lithuania. It is not currently participating, but plans to resume its involvement in the future

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LU	■ An agreement between the Directorate of Immigration and IOM places IOM in charge of the design, development and support services of return and reintegration programmes in Luxembourg
LV	■ IOM provides AVRR (including counselling) and conducts training for consultants ■ The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and the State Border Guard are responsible for issuing return decisions and informing third-country nationals about the IOM AVRR programme
MT	■ The Returns Unit within the Migration Directorate, Ministry for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality is tasked with designing, developing, funding, applying, and processing modalities of return and reintegration programs in Malta. It is also tasked with coordinating the IOM-implemented RESTART AVRR projects, which are co-funded by the EU. Both IOM and the Returns Unit work on the RESTART AVRR projects
NL	■ The Repatriation and Departure Service (*Dienst Terugkeer & Vertrek* - DT&V) provides subsidies for return and commissions the Return and Emigration Assistance (REAN) programme ■ The Migration Policy Department (*Directie Migratiebeleid* - DMB) formulates return and reintegration policy. It falls under Ministry of Justice and Security (*Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid* - J&V) ■ The Immigration and Naturalisation Service (*Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst* - IND) can issue a return decision ■ The Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (*Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers* - COA) provides reception until 28 days after the return decision has been issued ■ The Custodial Institutions Agency (*Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen* - DJI) may place foreign nationals in a reception facility with restricted freedom (*vrijheidsbeperkende locatie* - VBL) if they have not departed within the timeframe set by the COA ■ IOM provides counselling and assistance in arranging (preparation for) voluntary return and reintegration ■ Municipalities share relevant information with the DT&V and may provide reception and information to migrants ■ The Association of Dutch Municipalities represents municipalities' interests in formulating and executing return policy
PL	■ The entities involved in the entire process of voluntary return and reintegration are the Border Guard, IOM and Frontex
PT	■ AIMA ■ Police force ■ General Directorate of Reintegration and Prison Services ■ IOM (AVRR programme)
SE	■ Swedish Migration Agency and Swedish Police Authority
SI	■ The Centre for Foreigners within the police is active in the field of reintegration programmes by promoting and implementing the EURP and return counselling
SK	■ Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Police Force Presidium – Police Detention Centres for Foreigners (the Frontex reintegration programme and the Frontex return specialist) ■ Ministry of the Interior - managing authority for Home Affairs Funds for the programming period 2021-2027 ■ Ministry of Finance - audit authority ■ IOM – AVRR programme
UA	■ The territorial department of the State Migration Service (SMS), together with international organisations and/or NGOs, determines within two working days the international organisation and/or NGO that will facilitate the voluntary return
RS	■ The main stakeholders are defined by the Government Regulation on establishing the Programme on Assisted Voluntary Return: Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, the Ministry of the Interior, the Guardian Authority (centres for social welfare and the competent ministry), and IOM as the main implementing partner

For more information

EMN website: http://ec.europa.eu/emn
EMN LinkedIn page: https://www.linkedin.com/company/european-migration-network
EMN X account: https://x.com/emnmigration
EMN YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@EMNMigration

EMN National Contact Points

Austria www.emn.at/en/
Belgium www.emnbelgium.be/
Bulgaria www.emn-bg.com/
Croatia emn.gov.hr/
Cyprus www.moi.gov.cy/moi/crmd/emnncpc.nsf/home/home?opendocument
Czech Republic www.emncz.eu/
Estonia www.emn.ee/
Finland emn.fi/en/
France www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Europe-et-International/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM3/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM2
Germany www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/EMN/emn-node.html
Greece emn.immigration.gov.gr/en/
Hungary www.emnhungary.hu/en
Ireland www.emn.ie/
Italy www.emnitalyncp.it/
Latvia www.emn.lv
Lithuania www.emn.lt/
Luxembourg emnluxembourg.uni.lu/
Malta emn.gov.mt/
The Netherlands www.emnnetherlands.nl/
Poland www.gov.pl/web/european-migration-network
Portugal rem.sef.pt/en/
Romania www.mai.gov.ro/
Spain www.emnspain.gob.es/en/home
Slovak Republic www.emn.sk/en
Slovenia www.gov.si/
Sweden www.emnsweden.se/
Norway www.udi.no/en/statistics-and-analysis/european-migration-network---norway#
Georgia migration.commission.ge/
Republic of Moldova bma.gov.md/en
Ukraine dmsu.gov.ua/en-home.html
Montenegro www.gov.me/mup
Armenia migration.am/?lang=en
Serbia kirs.gov.rs/eng