Return and Reintegration of Migrants: A European Dialogue
“Return and Reintegration of Migrants: A European Dialogue”, Conference held on October 18, 2018 in Berlin
Background and Overview

Not everyone who has arrived in Europe in the last few years can or wants to stay. Many European countries support the voluntary return and reintegration of migrants. The European Commission and different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are also active in this area. In order to foster good cooperation, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) organized a European dialogue on the 18 October in Berlin. Over 90 participants from twelve countries took part in the dialogue: practitioners, policy makers and international academics working in the field.
The European Dialogue offered a platform for exchange between European actors at ministerial level, providing important impulses from implementing agencies, the countries of origin and academia. In-depth exchange was favored by expert inputs on policy coherence of migration and development policies. The importance of voluntary return and sustainable reintegration was emphasized. The European Dialogue further provided the opportunity to get to know and share good practices as well as to foster further development of existing approaches through contributions from the academic field.

“How does an improved coordination within one country and amongst European Union (EU) countries contribute to the complementarity and therefore to an improved quality of programs?”
Dr. Christoph Beier, vice-chair of GIZ, emphasized the importance of cooperation and coordination in the field of voluntary return during his opening speech.

In his welcome speech, Dr. Christoph Beier, vice-chair of GIZ emphasized that the cooperation and complementarity of European actors are key for the process of successful return and reintegration. Bilateral and international frameworks dealing with the issues are now of greater relevance for domestic, foreign and development policy. Successful return is not about preventing people from re-emigrating, but about increasing the development impact of the return itself. It has to be beneficial for the returnee and the country of origin. Measures to foster reintegration and return have to address both the individual and the structural level.
Kathleen Newland, co-founder and senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute, Washington D.C., held the impulse presentation on the “Complex Policy Framework of Voluntary Return Migration”. Key messages were drawn from her new publication “Balancing Acts: Policy Frameworks for Migrant Return and Reintegration” as part of the series “Towards a Global Compact for Migration: A Development Perspective”. First, the return of migrants who have no legal right to stay is the sovereign right of national governments and a legitimate instrument for managing migration. In past years, it used to be common to weigh factors such as the capacity of the countries of origin to absorb returnees, the migrants’ degree of integration in the country of destination and the dangers they would face upon the return to their homelands. Since 2015, however, return has become a policy priority for many migrant-receiving countries, and other policy issues, such as development assistance or trade relations, are subordinated to cooperation on returns.

Government decisions about returning migrants are complex. They are influenced by many different policy interests. These interests intersect and sometimes they conflict. However, national policymakers need to reconcile them because they are all national interests. They have, e.g., to consider the rule of law framework: Governments argue that immigration laws are meaningless if they are not enforced, e.g. returning unauthorized migrants. That may conflict with humanitarian convictions: policy makers sometimes agree to temporary or even permanent residence, if people are suffering due to natural disasters or violent conflict. From a development point of view, large-scale returns can cause damage to a country, if its ability to absorb returnees is weak and the loss of remittances is high.

“Government decisions about returning migrants are complex. They are influenced by many different policy interests.”
Large-scale returns can even lead to public disorder or reinforce criminal networks (e.g. deportation of gang members from the United States to El Salvador). Politicians in destination countries sometimes believe that their popularity among voters depends on their ability to send back irregular migrants. Governments in countries of origin, however, think that their credibility could be eroded if they agree to return arrangements. Newland remarked that viewing returning policy through a single policy lens could produce unintended consequences both domestically and in partner countries. Therefore, it requires a whole-of-government-approach to identify where the sum of national interest lies.

She explained the challenges of return on the basis of the example of the Gambia: before 2017, the Gambia with its only 2 million people had been the fifth largest source of unauthorized migration across the Mediterranean. With the end of a repressive authoritarian government in 2017, many receiving countries expected the Gambians to return home. However, there has been no economic transformation yet, the unemployment rate is around 38 percent and 22 percent of the Gambia’s GDP comes from remittances. Among the young, mostly male migrants, there is unrest and frustration about not having reached Europe and about the inability of the new government to improve the economic situation. Hence, it would not be helpful to return migrants to the Gambia now, Newland said. Reintegration assistance for a country like the Gambia is provided by a small number of mostly European countries. It may take the form of cash payments to individuals, vocational training, counseling, support in finding work, or assistance to communities to help them absorb returnees. While many programs were too new to be evaluated, Newland identified the following weaknesses of reintegration programs: short time frames; individually targeted benefits in a sea of collective needs; a neglect of social, cultural and psychological integration; and failure to address the structural and political problems that led people to emigration.

In 2016, the arrival of half a million returnees to Nangarhar, Afghanistan, distorted the local economy and overburdened the infrastructure: the number of high school students doubled, day laborers increased six-fold, and land values rose by 1000 percent. In addition, the decreasing living standards for returnees and long-term residents bred resentments against the returnees. Newland thus recommended a close alignment between reintegration and development programs. She mentioned Switzerland as a pioneer in adopting a whole-of-government approach for migration and in particular for returns. Additionally, she pointed out the program “Returning to new opportunities”, implemented by GIZ and commissioned by the BMZ, which created more continuity between the pre-departure and post-return stage of returns. She recommended that “lessons learned” in this program could be deployed in other programs.
The high-level panel discussed the “Challenges and achievements in the greater migration picture”. Moderator Astrid Ziebarth (German Marshall Fund) wanted to know, how the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 fostered the in-depth cooperation of the different ministries in the panelists’ countries. She asked how the panelists managed the multiple policy priorities within their states and between countries of origin and countries of destination.

First, the Ambassador of the Republic of Kosovo, Beque Cufaj, looked back at the Bosnian War. 1.2 million refugees fled from Bosnia, of whom around 320,000 sought asylum in Germany. Many of them had to leave Germany after the civil war ended. Cufaj suggested that Germany should use the experiences of return made during that period. In 2014 and 2015, migrants from Kosovo came to Germany again. One of the reasons for this migration was the misleading information that Germany would give them jobs and houses according to Cufaj. Most of these migrants had to return to Kosovo as their applications for asylum were rejected. Finally, he complimented Germany for its “Western Balkan Regulation”, which allows people from Western Balkan States to get a visa in Germany if they have a contract of employment there.

Dr. Elke Löbel (BMZ, Commissioner for refugees) explained that the BMI and the BMZ are closely cooperating at present: “We started to build a bridge between both ministries”. At the beginning of the debate about returning migrants from Germany, there was the idea of cutting development aid for those countries that refused to take their people back, so called “less for less” approach. The German government instead prefers a “more for more” approach based on joint migration and development concepts. The BMZ aims to promote a coherent approach – an example being the ongoing cooperation with Morocco, where specialists work on vocational training, development cooperation, return and reintegration, as well as advice in migration policy.

“Cutting development aid would have made the reintegration of migrants even harder.”

Elke Löbel
Dr. Christian Klos (BMI) stressed the good cooperation between the BMI and the BMZ. Differing points of view prevailing three years ago have moved towards common ground now. For example, return counseling in Germany and reintegration programs in the countries of origin are now interlinked. The BMI strives for a close relationship with countries of origin, based on partnership, not on predominance.

In his statement, Stefano Signore (European Commission) emphasized the importance of monitoring projects on return and reintegration. He mentioned some key success factors for returnee integration programs. Ministries of foreign affairs and of development policy as well as migration policy makers should work together in a joint effort. Furthermore, partner countries should be included to bring in their perspective. All the different actors working on the ground, including international organizations, civil society, and government authorities, should connect. In addition, European member states could more systematically use the opportunities existing under EU programs, such as the "European Return and Reintegration Program (ERRIN)".

In the following discussion, it became apparent, that the political pressure by populists’ parties exacerbates working on these issues. In the end, Kathleen Newland formulated the wish that monitoring and evaluation should be improved, because data on return and reintegration is unreliable or missing. She expressed her hope that the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) will bring together the interests of countries of origin and countries of destination.
QUALITY, COORDINATION AND COMPLEMENTARITY OF VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS

The second part of the conference was structured around three thematic workshops that took place in parallel and allowed for in-depth discussions in smaller groups. The workshops started with several short inputs by experts and practitioners, followed by an exchange of views among all participants.

Time for net-working: during the coffee breaks and workshops, the participants had the opportunity to get to know each other.
Workshop 1

“GOOD PRACTICES – HOW TO INTERLINK RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS?”

The workshop „Good Practices: How to interlink return and reintegration programs?” was conceived to share and discuss examples of well-working programs and activities in the field of return and reintegration of different stakeholders. A special focus was placed on how to interlink return and reintegration activities. Several key challenges can limit the success of return and reintegration programs: they are often narrow in scope, rarely provide structural support to the countries of origin, and often lack individual support over longer periods. According to these challenges, the workshop asked the question of what is required for a well-proven approach to support the reintegration process for migrants and the local communities in the countries of origin.

Siw Skjold Lexau (Ministry of Justice and Public Security Norway) initiated the discussion with an update about the new approach used by Norway, starting with a change of language. Norwegian Authorities are now referring to “assisted return” instead of “assisted voluntary return”. The idea is to change the focus of the discussion from the “if” to the “how” of return in cases where there is no applicable basis for staying in Norway. The country has also experimented quite comprehensively with ensuring a sustainable reintegration in the countries of origin, including pre-departure trainings. However, challenges remain particularly with regard to measuring long-term effects and sustainable reintegration.

Anja Tomic (GIZ) explained the German approach that individual support and counseling can lead to sustainable reintegration, if combined with a comprehensive approach relating to local development and structural long-term support in countries of origin. The initiative „Returning to new opportunities“ funded by the BMZ aims to support people returning to their countries of origin by linking them with social and economic support opportunities. The initiative includes providing pre-return information and advice in Germany, including establishing initial points of contact and personalized offers of support in the countries of origin. After return, the initia-
tive aims to support training and employment as well as social support and opening these up to returnees. The program is linked to existing projects focusing on the institutional, legislative and structural improvement of labor markets, vocational education or municipal development. It thus also supports the long-term development of its partner countries.

Alba Brojka (Cooperation and Development Institute Albania) calls for a “multi-layered approach” to solve multi-layered problems that returnees and countries of origin face. Albania is confronted with a number of challenges related to returnees, particularly in urban areas, where returnees originating from rural areas settle upon their return. That puts an additional stress on already burdened public services like social, educational and health services. To address sustainable reintegration, Alba Brojka recommends pre-return capacity-building programs that provide returnees with digital and entrepreneurial skills as well as professional skills needed in relevant sectors in the countries of origin. Furthermore, (public) institutions in the country of origin need to receive further capacity-building to improve the existing and non-existing services.

Jezerc Tigani (Terre des Hommes Albania and Kosovo) stressed that transnational case management could be key to improve sustainable reintegration. The cooperation of social workers across countries could help prepare the relevant structures in the country of origin for returnees and significantly improve the provision of adequate support services. Good practices already exist in the work with unaccompanied minors, which could be extended to include adult returnees.

Nevertheless, she and Meike Riebau (Save the Children, Germany) also emphasized the need for a more children focused approach to return and reintegration. Small measures, such as taking the school year into account when scheduling a return, can have a large effect on the education and life of children and youths. Manfred Haehnel (ERRIN) reminded everyone that the challenges of 2015 forced ministries and actors, who had not been cooperating for a long time, to suddenly develop coherent approaches and expand the dialogue with the countries of origin. Sustainable solutions can only be based on comprehensive approaches that include all relevant actors in Europe and the countries of origin.

“We need pre-return capacity building programs that provide returnees with e.g. digital and entrepreneurship skills.”

Alba Brojka
KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

• Financial support for individuals: some participants argued that this would not affect the development of countries of origin. However, individual support and counseling are necessary for sustainable reintegration and thus contributes to the development of local communities.
• Need for a comprehensive approach to return and reintegration: returnees and countries of origin are confronted with multi-layered problems.
• Need for pre-return capacity-building programs that train returnees in e.g. entrepreneurial skills and skills needed in the food and tourism industry.
• Use a target group approach, e.g. support and emphasis of children’s rights: well-informed and able to complete the school year.
• Need for more coordination, building on what is already there.
• Combine development and home affairs objectives.
• Include a country-specific long-term structural approach and connections to local structures and processes.
• Finding different approaches to economic reintegration.
• Government negotiations as a starting point to interlink return and reintegration.
“POST-RETURN MONITORING AND EVALUATION – HOW TO MEASURE SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION?”

The Workshop “Post-return Monitoring and Evaluation - how to measure sustainable reintegration?” aimed at identifying key challenges, discuss solutions and provide recommendations for a quality post-return monitoring and evaluation system.

The first impulse presentation by Katie Kuschminder (Maastricht University) outlined current practices of post-return monitoring and evaluation as well as new emerging tools. Currently, the EU focuses on the “effective return rate”, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) concentrates on “assisted voluntary return and reintegration” as a strategy, while academia studies the impact of return on both the individual and the respective community, questions the level of subjectivity or objectiveness of monitoring approaches and outcomes, and distinguishes between reintegration and remigration aspirations. Yet, there is no common understanding amongst actors of what sustainable reintegration means.
In the second input, Anne Dussart (Caritas Belgium) added insights from a practical humanitarian perspective. Caritas' monitoring is based on self-assessment and personal visits. Monitoring through continuous support, assistance and contact is a way to improve the quality of projects and thus create better perspectives for the returnees.

A consensus quickly emerged among the participants. Long-term evaluation projects are needed to understand the impacts of return and the status of reintegration not only on the returnee's life, but also on the society at large. This, however, does not mean that program monitoring should be left aside. Moreover, the area of post-return monitoring offers many opportunities for improvement of the tools and processes. These can be informative for programming and increase harmony in the operationalization of concepts and definitions.

In addition to the development of operational instruments that can shape a common understanding of post-return monitoring, participants raised technical issues. These included the importance of trained, local interviewers who can collect objective data as well as looking at the long-term impacts of return and reintegration, beyond the limited scope of individual programs.

**KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Clarify and harmonize definitions and concepts: currently, there is a lack of harmonization and clarity in definitions, which leads to a lack of coherence. There is a need for long-term evaluation projects that offer both insights into the return impact on the migrant and the society at large as well as opportunities for improving tools and processes that can be informative for programming and increase harmony in the operationalization of concepts and definitions.
- Recognize the differences between monitoring, evaluation and longer-term research.
- Utilize and incorporate knowledge from existing fields.
- Programming needs workable tools that can be operational in the short term and overcome technical issues, such as the importance of trained, local interviewers.
- Monitor from the beginning with a long-term perspective.
- For designing and implementing Monitoring and Evaluations Systems, partnership approaches that are inclusive of counselors in the countries of destination, the countries of origin and returnees are needed.
- GIZ could establish a community of practice.
EUROPEAN PROGRAMS: HOW TO ENHANCE COOPERATION

With the GCM set to be adopted in December 2018, cooperation and complementarity in return and reintegration programs are gaining greater importance. Against this background, workshop 3, “European programs: How to enhance cooperation and complementarity?”, aimed to encourage an exchange between European actors and thus support their alignment and cooperation. The first impulse presentation was given by Sergo Mananashvili (ERRIN). After outlining ERRIN’s existing cooperation between European States and the initiative’s aim to facilitate return and reintegration, he mainly stressed the importance of integrating activities into existing structures. In the second impulse presentation, Timo Stegelmann (Help e.V.) emphasized the particular role of NGOs, as they often have direct access to the target group. Help e.V. has been working with vulnerable groups such as the Romani people in the Western Balkans since the late nineties. The NGO concentrates on rural areas to allow for a closer proximity to the target group of returnees and those interested in migration.

Lenie van Groot (European Reintegration Support Organizations, ERSO) briefly outlined ERSO as a network of nine organizations working with migrants in Europe and with partner organizations in the countries of origin. She pointed out the significance of this cooperation with respect to providing effective counseling, and stressed the important role of partner organizations when it comes to identifying and supporting vulnerable groups in specific contexts. As local partners have a better picture of the situation, they can help to address those most in need.

Throughout the workshop, participants mentioned that the interests of different actors who work on return and reintegration programs are not yet sufficiently coordinated. A closer coordination between home affairs and foreign affairs could improve this.
In some return and reintegration efforts, the involvement of other ministries such as Ministries of Finance or Labor may be key. Furthermore, a development focus does not automatically target the most vulnerable. In order to ensure that reintegration programs are more inclusive, a closer collaboration between government programs and civil society organizations (CSOs) is recommended by the participants. Including smaller CSOs in the planning process can be helpful since they have a practical view on the topic. This should be combined with capacity building for them. It was further pointed out, that designing sustainable programs, e.g. in entrepreneurship, can be very complex. While some returnees might become self-employed out of necessity, others might be seizing the opportunity to create their unique business idea. Supporting the latter can be very sustainable, as they might become employers themselves after some time.

Reintegration projects have yet to become more sustainable in order to be effective in the long run. Initiatives trying to bring returnees into the labor market often do not acknowledge the dynamics of developing markets sufficiently. Thus, a long-term philosophy as a base for designing reintegration programs is needed. According to the participants, there have been improvements lately when you compare return and reintegration programs in terms of sustainability in general and the scales of such programs some years ago and now.

**KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Coordination between different actors is crucial, for instance among and within member states (government, ministries, civil society, etc.), among member states and countries of origin (Gov2Gov), among CSOs, as well as among member states and CSOs. This is necessary to overcome the mismatch of interests of different actors.
- Complementarities should be strengthened: e.g. at the national level between Ministries of the Interior and Ministries of Development as well as at EU level.
- Secondments between ministries and development agencies can be useful.
- Try to create linkages at the program level between reintegration and development efforts, e.g. ERRIN has a new working group on reintegration and development.
- Involve CSOs and use their experience and knowledge as well as build their capacity.
- Try to align gov2gov with capacity building of local CSOs as well as of national governments.
- Think sustainably: focusing only on reintegration and development is not enough (private sector, etc.).
- Use existing fora (Khartoum and Rabat Processes) to discuss complementarities and cooperation with countries of origin (through dedicated workshops).
NEW FINDINGS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The final plenary discussion was organized in “fishbowl” style. The aim was to merge the different ideas on voluntary return and reintegration. The guiding question was how to support quality, complementarity and coordination of return and reintegration programs and to explore the future roles of development cooperation, private sector, civil society and international organizations. The audience was invited to answer spontaneous quantitative questions like “How confident are you, that Europe will be able to greatly improve return and reintegration if these measures are implemented?”. Dr. Sarah Tietze (IOM Germany) and Jerzerca Tigani (Terres des Hommes Albania / Kosovo) explained the necessary measures from their point of view. Tietze explained that questions of monitoring and evaluation had been neglected so far because of a lack of funding. However, this has changed. IOM is now doing monitoring and evaluation: “We sent out a lot of questionnaires and are really curious. We need to know what happens after return.”

Tigani countered that her organization emphasizes measuring quality: “Governments only measure numbers, but numbers don’t show how successful a program is.”

The shortage of evaluation is closely linked to a lack of consensus on key definitions. For instance, is a “successful” program defined by a high number of returnees or by the high quality of their reintegration? Similarly, the GCM mentions “safe and dignified return” – but what does “dignified” mean? NGO representatives answer this question by referring to the ability to live in dignity, to go to school or work, and to feel valued. If reintegration does not incorporate these aspects,
people will be counted twice in return to their countries of destination and could be counted twice in return and reintegration programs. In the long term, it will not be enough to provide money and structural support to returnees. Hence, the structural capacity of the countries of origin are crucial for successful return. However, a key concern is that currently the perspective of the countries of origin is rarely taken into account.

In addition, participants pointed out that pre-return programs should include social aspects to support the reintegration, and that information on return and reintegration programs should be more widely accessible, for instance through social media. It should also be available to all target groups, for instance to illiterate participants through video or audio material. It is important that decision makers bear in mind that the line between voluntary and forced return is very thin. In this perspective, the term “assisted return” as coined in the Norwegian context seems quite appropriate.

In the end, it is key that all actors in this field continue learning from each other and try to better understand the individual motives of migrants who consider returning to their countries of origin.