



Comments from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development on the DEval Evaluation Report: “Return and reintegration: Evaluation of the BMZ’s support to promote sustainable reintegration of returnees from Germany in their countries of origin”

Summary

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) welcomes the report “Return and reintegration: Evaluation of the BMZ’s support to promote sustainable reintegration of returnees from Germany in their countries of origin” submitted by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval).

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the support measures commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for long-term reintegration of returnees during the period under review with respect to their relevance, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and coherence so as to provide a body of evidence for future policymaking on this issue.

The evaluation examined reintegration support measures conducted as part of the BMZ’s initiative area “Returning to New Opportunities”, in particular the “Migration for Development” programme, which ran from 2017 to 2023 in 13 countries and offered support to returnees mainly from Germany and Europe. Whilst the analysis focused mainly on measures providing individual support, it also covered activities for strengthening capacities and institutions. In order to assess the programme’s underlying assumptions, the evaluation examines the impact pathway of economic reintegration support at individual level, specifically support for business creation.

The findings are based on 120 interviews with returnees from three countries selected for case study – Ghana, Morocco and Iraq (northern Iraq) – and also on interviews with experts and document evaluation.

Findings of the evaluation

Based on the interviews, DEval concludes that, in the three case study countries, the individual support provided partially fulfilled the criteria of relevance and effectiveness. It concludes, however, that the criteria of sustainability and impact were only barely fulfilled at individual level. Sustainability at institutional level has, the evaluation concludes, been partially achieved and the impact at institutional level has been positive. It recommends that the BMZ rethink its engagement in the field of sustainable reintegration of returnees from Germany.

Relevance of the findings

The evaluation offers the BMZ insights that can be drawn on when further developing its portfolio for supporting the sustainable reintegration of returnees from Germany and Europe in particular. Given the narrow focus of the analysis, which deals primarily with the reintegration measures implemented as part of one specific (“global”) programme, the BMZ will need to consider to what extent the findings are applicable to the rest of its reintegration portfolio, which also includes reintegration of returnees in situations of displacement.

Furthermore, the evaluation only covers the period up until 2023. As a result it could unfortunately not take account of some major adjustments the BMZ has made since, for example regarding the monitoring of support for reintegration. The BMZ welcomes the important comments and recommendations, some of which can offer ideas for optimising the implementation of ongoing projects in this area.

DEval recommendations and BMZ conclusions

DEval issues three fundamental and six further recommendations that are mainly directed towards the BMZ. First and foremost, it is recommended that the BMZ approach reintegration as one overall process; in this way, short-term, medium-term and long-term measures can be conceptually aligned and operationally coordinated at both the design and the implementation stage. Secondly, the BMZ should focus equal attention on various different groups of returnees in future, including deportees, and measures should be tailored to different target groups. Thirdly, the BMZ should incorporate integrated impact and process monitoring when commissioning measures in order to ensure effective, outcome-driven programme management and minimise implementation gaps.

The further recommendations are: 4) to strengthen the transnational referral process and ensure all sections of the target group are reached by establishing or expanding joint points of contact in cooperation with relevant players, such as the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community; 5) to offer case-based, long-term, individual support for returnees (at least twelve months); 6) to define economic and social participation as goals of equal importance in reintegration support; and for the GIZ: 7) to diversify the portfolio of measures for psychological and social support; 8) to expand the portfolio of economic support measures and 9) to expand measures for raising awareness among national institutions and authorities in the partner countries for the specific needs of returnees.

The "Migration for Development" programme ended in 2023 because the BMZ decided to adopt a coherent approach to migration that covered not only questions of return and reintegration but also regular migration. Four of the aspects mentioned in the recommendations were already reflected in the planning for the follow-up programme that has been in operation since June 2023, "Centres for migration and development". These advice centres continue to provide individual reintegration support. However, one of the main focuses of the follow-up programme is to strengthen and build sustainable partner structures and capacities – both those of government partners and of civil society partners – for the sustainable reintegration of returnees (cf. recommendation 9). That means there is also a strong focus on ensuring greater coherence with the various forms of support offered nationally, as called for in the report. With the aim of adopting a comprehensive approach, the programme now places greater emphasis on advice and training for labour and educational migration, thus also providing a broader range of services for returnees as well. Monitoring has been switched from a focus on output to a greater focus on impact. This is also being used in managing the programme and adapting implementation to needs (cf. recommendation 3).

Had this change of focus been taken into account, the BMZ believes the recommendations could have been more appropriately formulated. If the evaluation had taken greater account of the partner countries' perspective, it could have provided valuable information for assessing the measures implemented from a development policy point of view. Nevertheless, the analysis and the recommendations do provide a good starting point for further optimising the current programme or possible future projects for the reintegration of returnees.

As regards the practical applicability of the findings, it is regrettable that the analysis was only able to examine a very small proportion of the total number of measures implemented. The initiative area "Returning to New

Opportunities" and the programme "Migration for Development" were, for example, specifically designed to benefit not only returnees but also the local community. This was a political decision, made partly because, in discussions on development policy, partner governments had highlighted the possible threat to social cohesion and stability of services only being offered to returnees. The evaluation does not, however, look at this aspect of the BMZ's engagement in any great detail, even though a large proportion of the funding was earmarked for this particular target group. DEval expresses criticism that this broad focus means that services are not sufficiently aligned with the needs of returnees. The report does not, however, examine how services match up with the needs of local communities, making it hard to see what basis there is for this conclusion. In many contexts, including contexts of displacement, a "do no harm" approach" is applied, whereby development cooperation measures are quite deliberately designed so as to benefit all sections of the population equally in the interests of social cohesion. A more comprehensive analysis providing the reasons for DEval's criticism would therefore have been of general interest.

Unfortunately, the report also does not address a number of other basic questions that would be of relevance for the further development of the portfolio, for example whether physical advice centres are the most suitable vehicle for providing reintegration support or whether, for example, virtual formats might also prove effective.

For the BMZ, the very small sample size of people interviewed in the three countries makes it doubtful to what extent the findings can be applied to all measures implemented as part of Returning to New Opportunities or to other development measures in general.

As the evaluation covers only 3 of the programme's 13 partner countries, the BMZ feels it would have been helpful, for example, to have more details on the analysis mentioned in the report of contextual factors that had a

bearing on the implementation of the programme, for example the trends in economic growth, the business climate and widespread unemployment in the three sample case countries. These factors significantly influence the success of returnees' business start-ups. A detailed analysis of them would make it easier to assess which of the challenges identified in programme design and implementation are likely to apply in other contexts.

The BMZ agrees with the finding that there is room for improvement with regard to the coordination that takes place with other players involved in voluntary return and reintegration; this would ensure that seamless support was provided during the entire process of reintegration, from preparing returnees for return to supporting them in their countries of origin. Short-term measures following a person's return, for example assistance with travel costs or start-up assistance after voluntary return, do not fall within the BMZ's mandate as they do not fall within the category of development policy. Other forms of social support that the evaluation recommends should play a greater role in future, such as medical support or help with rental costs, are also generally the responsibility of non-development policy programmes for supporting voluntary return. The BMZ will continue to work towards better coordination between the ministries and with international players and for measures to be linked up more closely with each other and complement each other, e.g. by strengthening communication between providers of measures in the countries of origin and the pre-departure counselling centres in Germany. However, the BMZ does not have the mandate to coordinate the entire return and reintegration process.

The BMZ finds nothing in the report to justify its conjecturing that, for reasons of domestic policy, it did not adequately seek to address deported returnees. The BMZ had decided that the programme's full range of services would be open to deported returnees at all times. It could, however, examine how it could better reach out to this particular target group and tailor services more to their needs.

The report calls for a greater focus on psychosocial support measures. The focus on this aspect was already strengthened during the implementation of the "Migration for Development" programme and is being continued as part of the ongoing activities. The main focus is on strengthening and further developing the services already being offered by, for example, civil society.

In the interests of sustainability, the BMZ's focus in the current reintegration support programmes is on integrating services into the partner countries' own national systems as part of the broader system of social services, so that in the long term those services can be provided by the partners themselves.

Beyond some anecdotal evidence, no specifics are provided in the analysis to back DEval's assessment that design and/or implementation deficiencies were found in the cases looked at in the case study countries; that makes it difficult to address any deficiencies that may exist. The BMZ does, however, take seriously the comments that, in the cases investigated, services should have been better tailored to the capacities and needs of the returnees, that in some cases there was no follow-up and that the services should have been made more inclusive, especially with regard to vulnerable groups.

Given that the overarching development policy goal is to strengthen national structures in the long term and in view of the scientific evidence, also quoted in the DEval report, showing the limited sustainability of individual economic reintegration support, the BMZ regards it as questionable whether it should, as the report recommends, offer long-term individual support as part of its development cooperation. This recommendation will therefore be examined critically within the overall context of programme design and in the light of a cost-benefit analysis.

The BMZ would like to express its thanks for the findings and recommendations presented in the DEval report, which will be taken into account when designing measures in this field in future.

The full DEval evaluation report "Return and reintegration: Evaluation of the BMZ's support to promote sustainable reintegration of returnees from Germany in their countries of origin" can be downloaded from <https://www.deval.org/en/evaluations/our-evaluations>.