Analytical Report

Building better return
and reintegration programs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Return and reintegration programs are an important part of overall migration management. Most countries place significant emphasis on entry requirements to regulate migration inflows, and equal emphasis on return and reintegration is necessary. 'Returns' exist in three main categories: **forced** (where departure decisions are made by state authorities), **voluntary** (where departure decisions are made in consultation with the traveller) or **self-managed** (where the traveller makes all departure decisions). For the purposes of this policy paper, 'return' means predominantly 'voluntary return' or return other than forced return. Furthermore, this paper specifically addresses those return programs that link with some form of post-return assistance (reception assistance, post-arrival assistance, reintegration assistance) in the country of origin. It identifies efficiencies and methods that represent best practice and increase performance of the program. It also identifies new perspectives and new ways of viewing traditional policy and program settings. Return and reintegration programs are governed by traditional program settings and function in a standardised manner. However, it is important to recognise the limitations of general program settings. This paper examines the function and utility of these programs. Additionally, there is a discussion of major program features and operational challenges. The paper includes findings from a short examination of return and reintegration programs for all fifty Prague Process participant states.

WHAT IS RETURN AND REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE?

A simple explanation breaks the assistance into two major parts: **travel assistance** and **post-arrival assistance**. Return assistance is quite straightforward and concerns itself with the primary requirements for inter-country travel (travel ticket and travel document). Reintegration assistance is a little more complicated as it depends on the needs of the recipient. Some recipients require a small amount of assistance, while others require a larger amount of assistance. Time to prepare and administer the assistance is also a factor, and can occur over a 12-month period if required. Within return and reintegration assistance there are five sub-categorises of assistance:

▶ **Pre-departure assistance:** assistance before departing the host country. Typically includes return counselling and assistance with travel documents (if required).

▶ **Travel assistance:** assistance to travel from the host country to the country of origin.

▶ **Reception assistance:** this assistance is administered on the day of return, usually at the arrival airport. For example, people with identified medical conditions may require reception assistance.

▶ **Post-return assistance:** this assistance is administered immediately following day of return and usually constitutes daily living assistance, for example, housing or food.

▶ **Reintegration assistance:** broader assistance for livelihood activities. Usually describes one activity or a series of activities administered with assistance from an organisation, contributing to reintegration in the first 12 months following return.

THE UTILITY OF RETURN AND REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE

There is a range of reasons why return and reintegration assistance has its place in a migration management program. Some are operational reasons, while others demonstrate higher-level government objectives. In reality, however, **some people simply need assistance to return home**. Within all immigration caseloads, there are people who want to comply with departure orders, but require assistance to do so. It is then a matter for the host government to decide how to assist these people. There are also other objectives for implementing a return and reintegration program not directly linked to individual beneficiaries. These may include:

▶ **Political and diplomatic reasons:** host governments build policy narratives around return and reintegration assistance, underlining the dignity and humanity of voluntary return versus forced return. Return and reintegration assistance sometimes represents a strong bargaining chip for diplomatic discussions. It allows a host country to contribute to capacity building objectives in the country of origin and may be necessary to achieve other migration or trade goals.

▶ **International cooperation objectives:** return and reintegration assistance allows host governments to demonstrate commitment to international migration objectives and a well-rounded migration management program. It is important for host governments to demonstrate a comprehensive migration program consisting of entry and exit procedures. It shows a clear system for the orderly movement of people and clear reference points for dialogue with other countries.

▶ **Operational advantages:** for some departures, voluntary return is a practical, time-saving alternative to forced return. Voluntary return or self-managed return is a good operational solution for compliant cases who do not pose personal or transport risks. Of course, there is the inherent risk of non-compliance with an undertaking to depart voluntarily, but this is mitigated by clear policy settings for the relationship between forced and voluntary return. This point is harder to sell to some host countries, especially those who do not believe in the efficacy of voluntary return programs. Likewise, some host countries declare a preference for voluntary return amidst the operational certainty of forced return.

CURRENT PROGRAM FEATURES

All return and reintegration programs follow a similar format. Assistance is broken down into stages and involves pre-departure, departure, arrival and post-arrival assistance modules. What follows is my blueprint for building a return and reintegration program, called CPIM, which identifies the major categories of work. .

COMPLIANCE

Compliance can mean different things in different immigration programs and across different countries. In the context of this paper, compliance means engaging with an immigration caseload in accordance with a legal or policy framework. The first step is correctly identifying and engaging the target caseload. This is crucial for accurate compliance work and provides an opportunity to deliver the right information to the right people. Compliance activity is usually determined by legislation, which underwrites policy, but policy settings typically decide how and when engagement occurs. Compliance is also a vital starting point for pre-departure assistance. Irrespective of the mode of return (voluntary, forced or self-managed), this is an opportunity to present important pieces of information about the next steps in the process.

PLANNING

Efficient departure planning primarily concerns itself with determining availability for travel. It is where the host government determines a person's ability to travel and how travel will occur. It selects the likely method of travel (forced return, voluntary return or self-managed return), and assesses fitness-to-fly if travelling by air, or fitness-to-ride if travelling my land. Travel is then booked, either the host government covers the cost of the journey or the traveller self-funds. Additionally, at this step, the host government decides if this traveller qualifies for assistance at any stage of the journey. Host government policy settings determine the availability and amount of assistance and the criteria for awarding the assistance. Other assistance, such as medical or family assistance, is also determined at this stage.

IMPLEMENTATION

This step is the travel day and involves all necessary assistance for leaving the host country. Transport to the departure point (airport or bus station) may be required, and policy settings typically decide if the traveller requires and receives this assistance. Additionally, some travellers may require assistance navigating departure and arrival airports, and some host governments automatically provide departure assistance to maximise departures. Reception assistance, as discussed earlier, is also part of this step, and provides any on-arrival assistance in the country of origin.

MONITORING

Monitoring return and reintegration programs is difficult, mainly because recipients voluntarily engage with monitoring milestones. For this reason, it is important to select a monitoring method that matches the objectives of the program and use clear indicators for determining success. Building programs that sustain engagement is an objective guide for monitoring activities. Rather than focusing exclusively on the quantitative methods (numbers of returns and recipients) or qualitative methods (the sustainability of returns), sustained engagement provides a time-based measure for the success of component parts of the program. It also provides some clear outputs. For a returns program, it means that presenting the right information to the right people at the right time maximises departure numbers. For a reintegration program, it means providing assistance linked with in-country realities.

Demonstrating success of the program is subjective, and differs from one version of the program to another. Host governments have different views of success, see explanations for 'sustained return' and 'effective return' below. Therefore, it is a matter of linking program objectives with outputs. A simplistic view counts the number of recipients of the program, but this count may not identify the number of recipients who gain benefit from the program. Likewise, measuring 'benefit' is akin to measuring 'sustained return'. Whatever the chosen method, the best approach is identifying how recipients benefit from participation in the program.

Each of the following monitoring options delivers slightly different results for informing policy development and future program design.

- ▶ **Start-to-finish performance:** examines recipient progress through key program milestones.
- ▶ **Segmented performance:** provides examination of individual segments of the program. There may be a particular interest in pre-departure counselling, for example, and this becomes a focus for monitoring.
- ▶ **Focus on outcomes:** outcomes can be either the number of returns, the number of people accessing reintegration assistance, the number of people completing reintegration activities.
- ▶ **Sustained return:** a traditional measure of success despite it is difficult to measure. Measures the recipient's ability to stay in the country of origin and not migrate further. Sustained return is dependent on many factors, some of which are beyond the control of a return and reintegration program.
- ▶ **Effective return:** a shortened version of start-to-finish performance, focusing predominantly on the return journey. Typically examines the successful completion of returns (i.e. successful departure and arrival, including any links to post-arrival assistance).

MAJOR OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS

The major challenge for these programs is its voluntary nature, which means there is no guarantee of departures. On its own, this challenge makes voluntary return very different from forced return, and it frustrates some host governments because it provides too much flexibility for migrants required to depart. In some respects, voluntary return is seen as unnecessary, as forced return, sometimes, provides a more direct solution. However, there is rich evidence supporting the setting up of a harmonious returns program featuring the availability of both voluntary and forced return.

Other major challenges for the program include travel documents and accusations of bribery. **Travel documents** remain a big challenge for returns programs, forced and voluntary. If you cannot successfully identify a traveller, they will not travel. Equally, if the traveller does not maintain a valid travel document, this could also pose problems for return. **Allegations of bribery** are common for voluntary return programs that exchange money for agreement to depart. Voluntary return programs are ideally uninfluenced by any kind of coercion, and the offer of cash assistance or large amounts of in-kind assistance sometimes clouds the purity of decision making. It is a matter of perspective though, determined by the policy settings of the day. Some host governments count returns, other have a more principled approach when administering return and reintegration assistance.

PRAGUE PROCESS STATES NATIONAL RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS

This paper undertook a short examination of return and reintegration programs for all fifty Prague Process states in order to assess the existence and visibility of national return programs, as well as their main characteristics and function. All information was gathered from open sources freely available on the internet.[1] Whereas such open source information may not provide the most accurate results for all states, it is indicative of the programs available.

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[1] **Key search terms**: <country name> 'assisted return program', 'return and reintegration program', 'AVRR'. **Key search criteria:** outbound (sending) migration programs rather than inbound (receiving) migration. Some Prague Process MS have inbound return and reintegration programs (i.e. return to Country X) but not outbound programs (i.e. return from Country X). A full list of search results is at **Attachment A.**

Best national websites in terms of content and design (top 5)

Country	URL	Key features
Austria	http://www.voluntaryreturn.at/en/	best website, very easy to navigate, great looking website
Belgium	https://www.retourvolontaire.be/	The benchmark websites for years, still a very good website, easy to navigate, good availability of information
Bulgaria	https://migrantlife.bg/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration	honourable mention, very good website, easy to navigate, good information
Finland	https://voluntaryreturn.fi/en/	very clean website, good information, very well designed
Switzerland	https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/rueckkehr/rueckkehrhilfe.html	contains good videos and stories, presents the reality of return

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

▶ 72% of the Prague Process states (36) have a visible return and reintegration program.

▶ 66% of Prague Process states (33) work with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to administer its program.

▶ Three Prague Process states self-manage a program without the assistance of an external organisation.

▶ 14 Prague Process states without a visible program are all **non-EU countries**. This statistic forms the basis for further discussion.

There are 23 Prague Process non-EU MS. Nine Prague Process states have visible return and reintegration programs (7 work with IOM, 2 self-manage) and 14 states do not a have a visible program. Some of these 14 states do have return and reintegration programs for inward migration, but there was no information to suggest the existence of an outward program. This could be for a variety of reasons, including small caseload or a preference for forced return.

In general, there is potential to identify common interests and **explore joint solutions for non-EU Prague Process states.** One suggestion is identify some common functions among willing participating states for further development. These common functions provide **economies of scale**, particularly for low volume caseloads, and **provides an opportunity to save time and money for governments and donors**. Centralising more program functions also increases government control of the program and allows for greater alignment with program requirements. This includes taking back control of functions that are currently the duties of external organisations.

Different Prague Process states have different priorities for migration programs. While some states want to improve an existing program – e.g. seeking better value for money or greater operational capacity – others are building new programs from scratch. Whatever the challenge, there are some major focus areas that link to performance of return and reintegration programs.

▶ **Increase policy control:** policy settings provide an essential procedural framework for a return and reintegration program. Some host governments entrust too much policy control to external organisations. It means the program can never meet 100 percent of the program requirements. First, decide what you want for the program to do (major functions) and the target caseload, then build your program and then engage external organisations.

▶ **Increase program control:** program settings dictate operational capability. Centralising as many program functions as possible provides a greater level of control. In-housing these functions is a method currently adopted by some MS and allows for greater end-to-end control.

▶ **Increase customised features of the program:** each immigration caseload includes specific challenges, such as visa over-stayers, foreign national criminals, and medical cases. Additionally, a host government may have some specific objectives for the program, such as providing greater assistance to migrants from a specific country. It is important that these specific requirements are visible in policy and program settings and not rely on general or ad- hoc capability.

▶ **Seek operational alliances:** some operational alliances already exist, where some MS have common objectives and there is opportunity to work together. Again, this is another example of finding economies of scale. Other than operational work, strategic alliances provide good information sharing and capacity building platforms.

▶ **Choice of service partners:** the choice is informed by a number of factors, including expertise, price or political objectives. Some MS have worked with the same service partners for decades and might not be looking for change. The key question here is whether the service partner is providing the required operational outcomes. If not, there is an opportunity for the program to operate at greater capacity under a different partnership.

▶ **Increase the visibility of forced returns:** forced return demonstrates that there is a method for managing involuntary departures. Nothing increases subscription to voluntary return programs like a visible, functioning forced returns program.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Three suggested activities represent the next phase of work for return and reintegration programs for Prague Process states. Firstly, complete **mapping and analysis** of the return and reintegration programs for non-EU Prague Process states that will form a blueprint, which shall identify opportunities for training and coaching on policy development and program design, as well as opportunities for further program development with willing states. This activity also produces a large amount of information for potential future joint actions between states with similar challenges and program requirements.

Secondly, link **EU MS with program development objectives for non-EU colleagues**. Some EU MS are already building return and reintegration programs in non-EU MS, providing funding and knowledge to support returning nationals. The initiative gives rise to **return and reintegration partnerships**, supporting dialogue between EU and non-EU MS on willingness to develop return and reintegration initiatives, including capacity building and funding opportunities. This topic also encourages focus on specific topics, such as a geographic region, migrant nationality, or migration challenge.

Thirdly, establishing **return and reintegration activity hubs** permit the selection of geographic hotspots for greater investment and development. The hub is an administrative focal point for return and reintegration initiatives in a particular region.

Return and reintegration programs are easily typecast as superficial programs but under the right policy settings perform a valuable function in overall migration management. Each host country requires deliberate analysis of risks, challenges and opportunities before implementing one of these programs. The following three points are key principles for building better programs: Firstly, **clear policy objectives** are very important and decide the direction and function of the program. Secondly, once a policy foundation is established, there need to be **clear links from policy to program design**, ensuring that operational aspects achieve the required outputs. Accurate program settings are also very important, allowing the program to achieve higher-level government objectives for a particular country of origin or specific political directives. Without this preparation, there is risk of establishing a program with generalised functions, which will not meet all requirements. Thirdly, where possible, **joint solutions provide a beneficial way to achieve economies of scale and identify better methods**. The Prague Process dialogue provides an appropriate forum for willing participant states to identify joint solutions and other initiatives for return and reintegration programs.

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ANNEX

Search terms: <country name> 'assisted voluntary return'; 'voluntary return'; 'AVR'; 'AVRR'; 'deportation'*

Context: outward migration, returning foreign nationals

Country	EU	Organisation	Program	Reference	Notes
Albania	No				No evidence of national program
Armenia	No				No evidence of national program
Austria	Yes	IOM	AVRR	http://www.voluntaryreturn.at/en/	Very good website
Azerbaijan	No				No evidence of national program
Belarus	No	IOM	AVRR	http://iom.by/en/activities/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration	New program (2019)
Belgium	Yes	IOM, Caritas	AVRR	https://www.retourvolontaire.be/	Good website
Bosnia and Herzegovina	No	IOM	AVRR	http://www.iom.ba/AVR-2.html	
Bulgaria	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://migrantlife.bg/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration	Good website
Croatia	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://croatia.iom.int/projects/croatia-national-assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration-programme-avr-rhr	2019-2021
Cyprus	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://cyprus.iom.int/about-avrr	
Czech Republic	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://www.iom.cz/aktivity/voluntary-returns-reintegration-and-resettlement	Since 2001; lots of information
Denmark	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://denmark.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration-avrr	
Estonia	Yes	IOM	AVRR	http://www.iom.ee/varre/	Good website
Finland	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://voluntaryreturn.fi/en/	Good website
France	Yes	IOM	AVRR	www.voluntaryreturn.fr	Good website
Georgia	No	IOM	AVRR	http://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=16&clang=1	
Germany	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Rueckkehr/rueckkehr-node.html	Since 1979
Greece	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://greece.iom.int/en/implementation-assisted-voluntary-returns-including-reintegration-measures-and-operation-open-center	
Hungary	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://www.volret.hu/en/	Renewal 2020
Ireland	Yes	IOM	AVRR	http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/Pages/Voluntary_Return_FAQs	
Italy	Yes	IOM	AVRR	http://www.pratomigranti.it/en/servizi/rva/pagina170.html	
Kazakhstan	No				No evidence of national program
Kosovo	No				No evidence of national program
Kyrgyzstan	No				No evidence of national program

Latvia	Yes	IOM	AVR	https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/home/services/departure/voluntary-return-program.html	
Liechtenstein	No				No evidence of national program
Lithuania	Yes	IOM	AVRR	http://returnhome.lt/en/about-program/voluntary-return-assistance-in-the-world-and-lithuania	
Luxembourg	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://belgium.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration	
North Macedonia	No				No evidence of national program
Malta	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://malta.iom.int/mt2015amif101-restart-vi-assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration-country-origin	
Montenegro	No				No evidence of national program
Netherlands	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://english.infoterugkeer.nl/	
Norway	No	IOM	AVRR	https://www.udi.no/en/return/what-is-assisted-return/	
Poland	Yes	IOM	AVRR	http://ternopilska.com/cooperation/iom-assisted-voluntary-returns/?lang=en	
Portugal	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://www.retornovoluntario.pt/en/	
Moldova	No				No evidence of national program
Romania	Yes	IOM	AVRR	http://igi.mai.gov.ro/en/content/assisted-humanitarian-voluntary-return	
Russian Federation	No	Self managed	Voluntary expulsion	https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/541112	
Serbia	No	IOM	AVRR	https://serbia.iom.int/node/670	2019-2021
Slovakia	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://avr.iom.sk/en/	
Slovenia	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://slovenia.iom.int/activities/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration-programme-avrr	2019-2020
Spain	Yes	IOM	AVRR	https://www.iom.int/countries/spain	
Sweden	Yes	Self managed	Voluntary return	https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Leaving-Sweden/Rejection-of-application-for-asylum/Support-for-re-establishment.html	
Switzerland	No	IOM	AVRR	https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/rueckkehr/rueckkehrhilfe.html	Good video
Tajikistan	No				No evidence of national program
Turkey	No	IOM	AVRR	https://turkey.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration-avrr	
Turkmenistan	No				No evidence of national program
Ukraine	No				No evidence of national program
United Kingdom	No	Self managed	VRS	https://www.gov.uk/return-home-voluntarily	
Uzbekistan	No				No evidence of national program