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4.15.6 Programmes supporting return and reintegration assistance

The current EU acquis on immigration stresses the importance of voluntary returns over forced returns.[1220] The role of voluntary returns and programmes supporting them are further strengthened in the proposal for a recast Return Directive.[1221] Against this background, several important developments took place in 2020 in EU+ countries, including expanding the target group which can apply for assistance in a return, tailored assistance to vulnerable persons and specific profiles, and new methods to provide information.

Several EU+ countries reported extending the duration of ongoing projects related to return, for example Cyprus[1222] and the Netherlands. In contrast, other countries discontinued programmes, such as France's reintegration programme in Moldova and Slovenia not having success in a tender procedure for an implementing partner.

Czechia widened the list of foreign nationals who are entitled to the voluntary return programme, which is financially supported by the Ministry of the Interior. This was a result of a legislative change which was adopted in 2019.[1223]

Similarly, in Norway, as of March 2020, standard support assistance may be increased in order to ease the return and reintegration process, for example for returnees with special medical needs or if it is assessed to be more cost-effective for Norwegian society, for example, for returnees with special medical conditions. This is the result of a new regulation which entails more flexibility and the possibility to tailor return or reintegration support to individual cases.

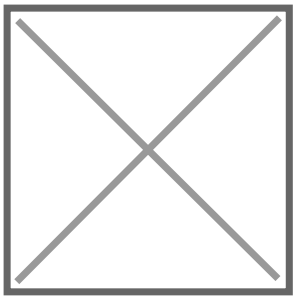
The Swedish Migration Agency, in cooperation with the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN), developed a pilot project called "Sustainable Reintegration in Afghanistan" (ERRIN-SRA), offering assisted voluntary return to a specific nationality of applicants. The project aims to improve long-term opportunities for returned Afghan citizens returning from Europe by assisting them in starting businesses in Afghanistan. As part of the activities, an information campaign was conducted in selected districts of Afghanistan to sensitise families to the challenges faced by returnees in an effort to tackle the issue of post-return stigma.

Under the project "Rete Ritorno Volontario Italia" (Volunteer Return Network Italy), the institutional network of reporting on returns was strengthened, training and information sessions were carried out, and a dedicated toll-free number for potential returnees was activated. Italy was also involved in a project to promote returns from third countries to other countries of origin The Ministry of

Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in agreement with the Ministry of the Interior, allocated additional funds to support the IOM in Tunisia to offer assisted voluntary repatriation and reintegration services in countries of origin of migrants who were stranded in Tunisia. Similar support is planned for Libya.[1224] France also had two similar reintegration programmes in Morocco and Tunisia.

A policy brief by the Migration Policy Institute Europe, “Rewiring Migrant Returns and Reintegration after the COVID-19 Shock” provided suggestions on how to improve the return and reintegration infrastructure, and partnerships between origin and destination countries after the COVID-19 pandemic.[1225]

Civil society organisations were concerned about an inadequate budgetary allocation to projects on voluntary assisted return and reintegration in Spain.[1226]



[1220] Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:348:0098:0107:EN:PDF , Recital 10.

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[1222] Ministry of Interior | ????????? ??????????. (2020, September 29). *??????????? ???????? ?????????? ?? ??? ?????? ?????????? ????????????? ??? ?? ???? «?????? ????????????? ?????????? ?????????? ??? ???????????» [Grant Agreement signed with the International Organization for Migration for the project "Center for Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration"]* .

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[1223] 176 Zákon ze dne 18. ?ervna 2019, kterým se m?ní zákon ?. 326/1999 sb., o pobytu cizinc? na území ?eské republiky a o zm?n? n? kterých zákon?, ve zn?ní pozd?jších p?edpis?, a další související zákony [Act 176 of 18 June 2019 amending Act No 326/1999 Coll., on the stay of foreigners in the territory of the Czech Republic and on the amendment of certain acts, as amended, and other related acts], June 18, 2019.

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[1224] European Migration Network. (February 2021). *EMN Bulletin*. https://emn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/00_emn_33rd_bulletin_final_en.pdf

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