



## Rabat Process

Euro-African Dialogue on  
Migration and Development

Reference country action

## Thematic Meeting

# Voluntary return and reintegration

**25-26 April 2023**

**Yaoundé, Cameroon**

Ministry of External Relations  
703, Rue 1025 Hippodrome  
B.P. 18 Yaoundé 1er

**Outcome  
document**



**Belgique**

partenaire du développement



ROYAUME DE BELGIQUE

Service public fédéral  
Affaires étrangères,  
Commerce extérieur et  
Coopération au Développement

Under the Co-Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon and the Kingdom of Belgium

Project funded by the European Union



Implemented by the ICMPD



**ICMPD**

International Centre for  
Migration Policy Development

In the framework of the Programme to Support the Africa-EU Dialogue on Migration and Mobility (MMD)

## Introduction

### Thematic meeting on voluntary return and reintegration:

- Co-chaired by Cameroon and Belgium
- Echoing the priorities of Area 5 of the Cadiz Action Plan 2023-2027 on return, reintegration and readmission, and specifically its objective 10
- The meeting was a follow-up to the webinar on key factors for the success of voluntary return and reintegration programmes in January 2021, co-chaired by France and Cameroon
- The meeting attracted a diverse audience of around 100 participants from 27 European and African countries

### Objectives of the meeting:

- Discuss new perspectives on return and reintegration in the framework of the EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration and in several African countries;
- Identify a common body of good practices between European and African countries on the conditions for successful voluntary return and reintegration programmes, enabling the development and strengthening of these initiatives;
- Raise awareness of the importance of strengthening synergies between local and national reintegration and development programmes;
- Inform on the need to strengthen the protection of migrants in all phases of voluntary return and reintegration.

### Expected results of the meeting:

- Enable stakeholders to become familiar with the main operational actors working on the issue of voluntary return and reintegration and their respective approaches;
- Exchange good practices, experiences and recommendations in this area;
- Link the actors in charge of return and reintegration with the actors in charge of development and protection of migrants.

This document provides an overview of the main **conclusions of the meeting**, as well as **good practices, challenges and recommendations** related to voluntary return and reintegration.

## High-level opening ceremony

The high-level opening ceremony was chaired by Mr. Jean-Charles de Cordes, Project Manager, Rabat Process Secretariat ; Mr. Omar El Khayari, Head of the Consular and Social Cooperation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Abroad (current Chair of the Dialogue) ; Ambassador Philippe Van Damme, Head of the European Union Delegation to Cameroon ; Ambassador Lieven de la Marche, Special Envoy for Migration at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Belgium (co-chair of the thematic meeting) and Mr. Oumarou Chinmoun, Minister Plenipotentiary, Secretary General of the Ministry of External Relations of Cameroon (co-chair of the thematic meeting and host country).

In the course of their speeches, the speakers agreed on the need to adopt **comprehensive migration governance in the framework of a solidary partnership approach and shared responsibility**. They also recalled that, since its inception in 2006, the spirit of compromise, dialogue, and partnership had always been at the heart of the principles guiding the Rabat Process. It was also mentioned that **return is an essential pillar of a comprehensive migration policy** and that coordinated actions between host countries, transit countries and countries of origin should be put in place to **ensure the protection and human rights of migrants** in the framework of voluntary return and reintegration policies and programmes.

## National and regional approaches: The importance of ownership of voluntary return and reintegration processes by partner countries

During this discussion, several good practices in the field of voluntary return and reintegration were identified in Morocco and Ghana. The EU-IOM Joint Initiative for the Protection and Reintegration of Migrants and the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration from a Development Perspective were also presented.

### Morocco's national programme for assisted voluntary return of irregular or vulnerable migrants

The assisted voluntary return and reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin comprises **three important phases**: 1) assistance to pre-departure candidates (registration, psychosocial support, health care, distribution of food kits); 2) preparation for departure of voluntary return candidates (professional orientation, ticketing, financial assistance, departure) and 3) support for the socio-economic reintegration of returned migrants in their countries of origin.

Since 2004, 40,000 people have benefited from the assisted voluntary return programme, primarily Senegalese, Nigerian, Malian, Cameroonian and Guinean nationals. Since 2008, all returns organised in partnership with IOM have been accompanied by **reintegration assistance**.

The **challenges** identified by the Moroccan authorities are threefold: 1) the sustainability and annual development of the assisted voluntary return programme depends on the available funding capacities; 2) the scale and pressure of migration; 3) donor procedures.

**Recommendations** include: 1) reintegration support facilitates a more dignified socio-economic return; 2) return with a reintegration project is also an indirect support to the country of origin and a means of sustaining the return; and 3) assisted voluntary return reduces the rate of re-migration to host/transit countries.

### The government-to-government approach of the Return and Reintegration Facility (RRF): The Migration Information Centre for Returned Migrants in Ghana

The **Migration Information Centre for Returned Migrants** was established at the Accra International Airport in December 2019 as part of the government-to-government approach to building the capacity of Ghana's Immigration Service officials. The centre was established to develop an **effective return migration and reintegration management system in Ghana**. It provides assistance to returnees to Ghana on reintegration options and orientation. In addition, the centre helps coordinate return operations with other relevant stakeholders.

**Challenges identified** by the Ghanaian authorities include a lack of information and communication in the countries of departure prior to the return of migrants and limited monitoring of the reintegration of returnees for logistical reasons.

In terms of **recommendations**, the capacity of officials on the special needs of returning migrants, conflict management and asylum procedures in the EU should be strengthened. Host and transit countries should also provide detailed information on migrants prior to their return (luggage, documents, etc.).

#### THE EU STRATEGY ON VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION IN A DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

On 27 April 2021, the European Commission adopted the [EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration](#) as part of a strengthened common European return system. It aims to overcome the fragmentation of approaches, to make the return and reintegration process sustainable and to promote coordination between all stakeholders involved in return and reintegration.

**The sustainability of reintegration is essential** as it addresses the needs of the most vulnerable (children, victims of trafficking), contributes to local development and builds the capacity of host communities, the private

sector and local stakeholders. There is also a need to strengthen **referral mechanisms** to public services involved in the reintegration process, such as health care providers, training or education services and employment agencies.

**Three recommendations were identified:**

- Return migrants should be considered as part of a **comprehensive approach**, also targeting the most vulnerable people in the countries of origin (potential migrants).
- Return and reintegration actors should establish more **synergies** with actors in charge of development programmes.
- Future development actions should, to the extent possible, take into account and integrate **the needs of return migrants** in order to facilitate their referral.

**THE EU-IOM JOINT INITIATIVE FOR THE PROTECTION AND REINTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS**

From 2017 to 2023, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for the Protection and Reintegration of Migrants provided migrants with voluntary return and reintegration assistance focused on supporting migrants and their communities.

Implemented in **13 countries in West and Central Africa**, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative has 5 main features:

1. Strengthen government ownership of the sustainability of migration management programmes beyond the Joint Initiative;
2. Provide life-saving humanitarian assistance, return, community stabilisation and outreach interventions;
3. Pilot an integrated approach to reintegration in partnership with national actors;
4. Support the regional dimension and interventions based on regional data collection;
5. Ensure flexibility in the event of changes in migration flows and other events such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Between 2017 and June 2022, **118,000 migrants benefited from voluntary return and assisted humanitarian return** in West and Central Africa and **98,000 migrants benefited from reintegration assistance**.

**Lessons learned for successful voluntary return and reintegration**

This panel followed **two complementary approaches**: 1) the feedback of concrete experiences from Dialogue partner countries, such as Belgium and Cameroon; and 2) the presentation of research, monitoring and evaluation work by research organisations, specialised in monitoring and evaluation issues.

**Cameroon's experience in accompanying return migrants**

The Yaoundé-based NGO PAARDIC has been monitoring projects and supervising returnees to Cameroon under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for the Protection and Reintegration of Migrants. This led to the identification of a number of **good practices**:

- Good collaboration between the NGO and the Cameroonian authorities (different ministries in charge);
- Use of migrants already identified and followed up as relays to get in touch with migrants who are difficult to reach;
- Development by the NGO of a map of the projects of migrants settled in the regions of Cameroon;
- Creation within the NGO of a database of active migrants and networking of migrants (creation of a WhatsApp group between the NGO and migrants);
- Accompanying migrants in formalising their activities.

**Several recommendations** were also identified in order to strengthen the sustainability of reintegration:

- Strengthen the involvement of local authorities and communities in the preparation and implementation of activities concerning returnees to Cameroon;
- Reduce the settlement time of trained migrants;
- Create reception centres for returnees;
- Increase the budget allocated to the settlement of return migrants;
- Establish tax exemptions on income-generating activities of returnees;
- Connect migrants by sector of activity;
- Develop partnerships with trade and employment structures;
- Regularly strengthen the capacities of migrants according to the new needs identified;
- Set up a psychosocial follow-up and support system for returnees.

### **The Belgian approach: the importance of pre-departure reintegration support**

The Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) coordinates voluntary return and reintegration programmes from Belgium to the countries of origin. The reintegration programmes aim to develop services and provide tools that enable individuals to proactively address their needs.

**The preparation of reintegration beneficiaries before their return** to their country of origin is of significant importance. This pre-departure counselling allows 1) return and reintegration counsellors to learn about the needs of the returnee, to detect possible vulnerabilities and to organise a first meeting; 2) to provide tools and services that correspond to the needs of the returnee; 3) to adapt the criteria according to the needs; 4) to establish early communication between the returnee, the local partner and the Northern partner for future collaboration.

#### **OVERVIEW AND LESSONS FROM RESEARCH, MONITORING AND EVALUATION: THE EXPERIENCES OF SAMUEL HALL AND THE CENTRE FOR EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT (C4ED)**

C4ED is a non-profit research centre that aims to bridge the gap between research and practice in global development. It has been commissioned by DG INTPA to conduct a survey of managers of 84 projects funded by the Emergency Trust Fund (ETF). The final results will not be available until the end of 2023, but **several observations** can already be made: 1) there is a low number of projects targeting return migrants in the evaluated portfolio; 2) among the projects targeting return migrants, there are difficulties in integrating them in the projects (need to adapt the projects to their specific needs, need to strengthen the collaboration with the referring institutions); 3) for the time being, there are positive signals on the support to return migrants but difficulties in measuring the impacts and results not specific to return migrants.

Samuel Hall has conducted a significant amount of research, monitoring and evaluation work on voluntary return and reintegration in recent years, commissioned by various return and reintegration actors, including **several monitoring tools**:

- **Reintegration Sustainability Survey and Outcome Monitoring Framework**: a scoring system to be deployed in all IOM reintegration programmes to compare reintegration trends across country contexts and over time.
- **A toolkit for monitoring child reintegration**: 22 economic, social and psychosocial indicators were used to calculate reintegration scores.
- **Monitoring reintegration of victims of human trafficking**: This study presents an innovative toolkit for monitoring the reintegration experiences of trafficking survivors.
- **A one-stop website for all monitoring tools**: IOM has set up a [one-stop shop](#) for all methods, tools and guidance on reintegration monitoring and evaluation.
- Training for governments on return and reintegration (Georgia, Iraq, Serbia).

**Several challenges** were identified by Samuel Hall, including 1) the lack of a common definition of reintegration; 2) the need for a common tool to measure reintegration; 3) the importance of having a common vision at regional and/or continental level; 4) the need for the involvement of local actors (including the private sector).

## Strengthening links between reintegration and local and national development programmes in West and Central Africa

It was recalled that in order to achieve sustainable and locally rooted reintegration, it is necessary to **strengthen the links between reintegration and socio-economic development programmes** in the countries of return.

### The experience of the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII) in implementing job creation projects

Foreign nationals in an irregular situation can benefit from OFII return assistance, which includes the organisation of the trip (beneficiary and family) with the possibility of financial assistance. In some countries, in addition to voluntary return assistance, reintegration assistance may be offered to returning migrants in order to facilitate their sustainable resettlement. This scheme is based on **3 levels of assistance**: 1) social reintegration, 2) reintegration through employment (assistance in finding and taking up a job, assistance with vocational or university training) and 3) reintegration through business creation.

Like many countries in Africa, the **labour market in Cameroon is mostly informal**. This situation does not allow for reintegration through employment to be as significant as reintegration through the creation of economic micro-projects. For candidates who have not found a potential employer, the country's Public Employment Service (PES) and the designated operator can help them look for a job. If this job search fails, a reorientation towards business creation is possible.

### The Youth Empowerment Project (YEP Gambia) implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC)

The Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) aims to strengthen existing youth development systems, structures, and services in order to create employment opportunities and enhance the skills of working youth. The project provides opportunities for women and young people who wish to enter the commercial agricultural, service, or tourism sectors.

The first phase of the project, which ran from 2017 to March 2023, aimed to improve the employability and income generation of young people and increase the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises and value added in key sectors.

### Sustainable reintegration and employment opportunities for youth in West Africa by Enabel

The Belgian development agency Enabel implements several programmes for the socio-economic reintegration of returnees in West Africa. These initiatives aim in particular to enable the reintegration of returnees, the sustainable socio-professional integration of the local population (in particular young people and people in vulnerable situations), as well as to promote the inclusive economic development of countries of origin.

In this respect, Enabel has identified several **findings and challenges**:

- How to effectively monitor and orient returnees? How to measure it?
- Geographical challenge: the returnee returns to a territory and it is necessary to make the return coincide with development programming
- Matching the skills of returnees (training, employability) with the reintegration offer
- Ensure complementarity between the different types of offers and coordination between actors (ecosystem)
- Orientation and awareness-raising process that takes place upstream before starting a voluntary return and reintegration process
- Impact on social cohesion: how will the community experience the return of the returnee?
- Follow-up/monitoring of the orientation and reintegration process

**Several lessons learned** were also identified:

- Integration of multiple objectives
- Access to decent employment through labour-intensive programmes
- Orientation and social engineering processes for the mobilisation of young people, especially (return) migrants
- Improving access to (self-)employment and quality of employability through support and coaching
- Approaches to facilitate women's employment and enhance gender equality
- Multi-level governance

#### THE OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK ON REINTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT DEVELOPED IN THE ERRIN TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP

The operational framework established in 2022 builds on the experiences, challenges and lessons learned by the reintegration and development actors who were part of the ERRIN Technical Working Group on Reintegration and Development.

The framework consists of 1) **operational standards** to strengthen the practical and operational linkages between the reintegration and development sectors; 2) **an ecosystem of actors** to improve coherence and synergies between reintegration and development actors; and 3) **standardised processes** to identify examples of good practices, lessons learned and recommendations that can be used as a reference for key indicators.

**The referral mechanisms** are based on four principles:

- Written agreements, focusing on standard operating procedures;
- Coordination within an ecosystem of actors, with an emphasis on local ownership;
- Pre-departure and post-arrival linkages, with an emphasis on planning and eligibility guidelines;
- Multi-dimensional programming, with an emphasis on monitoring.

**Conclusions on referral mechanisms:**

- They offer returnees a continuum of services in all areas, while promoting ownership by actors of the country of origin. This approach implicitly recognises that there is often no single organisation capable or mandated to meet all the needs of return migrants.
- Return migrants need both short-term individualised support and long-term support.
- They ensure that reintegration and development actors help countries of origin to address these needs together.

## Strengthening the links between voluntary return and the protection of migrants

**Assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes can contribute to improving the well-being of vulnerable returnees**

**According to IOM, there is a need to integrate reintegration into national sectoral plans to comprehensively address the vulnerabilities of returning migrants.**

Returning migrants have specific needs that need to be addressed in a holistic manner, such as **medical, psychosocial and mental health needs**, as well as the need to access **basic social services**. Moreover, most migrants returning to West and Central Africa are **indebted** (68% according to an IOM study). Through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, government actors have increasingly sought to integrate reintegration into their sectoral strategies and national programmes in order to help returning migrants access the services they need.

In this regard, IOM identified several **recommendations**:

- Design and invest in a robust and interoperable data collection and management system;

- Maintain the progress made in capacity building;
- Strengthen complementarity, cross-sectoral coordination and linkages with development programmes for optimal use of resources;
- Conduct advocacy and awareness raising;
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation efforts.

**The PROSPECT project implemented by ICMPD in Nigeria** aims to:

- Strengthen the governance framework for reintegration in Nigeria;
- Improve the visibility of specific services for vulnerable return migrants (including victims of trafficking);
- Strengthen the capacity of actors (pre- and post-arrival) to deal with returnees;
- Strengthen operational cooperation between actors before departure and after arrival.

**Return counsellors are at the centre of the return and reintegration support system for vulnerable returnees as they are able to:**

- Detect/identify previously unidentified victims of trafficking;
- Meet people who have already been identified and supported in national anti-trafficking programmes;
- Meet people who fear being trafficked in their country of origin;
- Meet people who may have been involved in criminal proceedings against their traffickers in the country of return or in another EU country.

#### RESULTS OF THE STUDY ON MIGRANT HEALTH, CONTINUITY OF CARE AND IMPACT ON REINTEGRATION BY SAMUEL HALL

The study was conducted between March and July 2022 in six countries (Brazil, Ethiopia, Gambia, Georgia, Pakistan and Senegal). It explores the **links between the health needs, access to care and sustainable reintegration of returnees** around 4 objectives:

- To identify the health status of returnees and their health needs;
- To analyse the influence of the external environment on reintegration outcomes;
- To identify good practices in short and long-term reintegration assistance;
- Formulate programmatic and policy recommendations to support sustainable reintegration.

**The findings of the study** showed that:

- Only 1% of people reported poor health before migration, compared to 37% before return. Their health deteriorated during the journey.
- Returning to an unsupported environment is detrimental to the mental and physical health of returnees.
- Economic reintegration often takes priority over unmet health needs.
- Country health systems and universal health coverage influence the health of returnees and their reintegration outcomes.
- Returnees face problems of continuity of care due to their status and a decline in the quality of care after their return.

Several **structural recommendations** were made in this study:

- Establish a continuum of care for migrants;
- Fund gender-specific initiatives;
- Strengthen information exchange and protection at the transnational level;
- Strengthen screening and referral upon return;
- Integrate reintegration and health programmes, and include health indicators in surveys throughout the migration process;
- Strengthen governance by establishing formal collaborative arrangements between national and civil society actors;
- Add a longitudinal follow-up study to better understand the interaction between return migrants' health and reintegration over time.



## **Recommendations and areas for improvement for the success of voluntary return and reintegration projects**

### **Policy and strategic recommendations:**

1. First of all, it is important to agree on a common definition of sustainable and effective reintegration.
2. Coordination between all state and non-state actors at transnational, national and local levels should be prioritised and the different ecosystems should be involved.
3. Co-ownership of voluntary return and reintegration projects is necessary between the countries concerned, donors and the structures that accompany return migrants.
4. In order to make reintegration projects sustainable, access to credit and bank loans for returnees should be facilitated.
5. It would be necessary to exempt taxes on income-generating activities of returnees.
6. Development programming and return strategy should be coordinated as much as possible.
7. It is important to take into account the skills of the returnees in order to adapt them to the reintegration offer.
8. Referral mechanisms should be integrated into national structures to ensure better coordination between them.
9. It should be ensured that funding for self-employment initiatives is adapted to reintegration projects.
10. The issue of transferring personal data of return migrants between different actors should be framed by data sharing agreements, and personal data of return migrants can only be transmitted with their consent.

### **Operational recommendations:**

1. The importance of the pre-departure phase of voluntary return (orientation and awareness-raising process) and the links between this phase and the sustainability of reintegration projects should be recalled.
2. The importance of pre-departure and post-arrival coaching, learning and training was also recalled, including the training of local governments/authorities that can offer long-term support to migrants.
3. Reintegration should be further included in development initiatives and planning, focusing on temporality, location and matching the skills of returnees with the job offer.
4. Coordination between actors is essential. The different levels of coordination are necessary to ensure that both the individual support aspects of resettlement and the development aspects of the territories to which migrants return are taken into account.
5. It is important to contextualise reintegration actions so that they are consistent with development processes and programmes.
6. It is important to ensure that the various programmes that provide for reintegration initiatives follow the return in a fluid manner, and that they are not only individualised but also thought out in each specific context and with a long-term perspective.
7. It is necessary to involve state and local actors in countries of return to ensure ownership and coherence of reintegration and development initiatives.
8. Promoting social cohesion and addressing the needs of communities in countries of return is paramount.
9. It is important that returnees are accompanied by a monitoring and guidance structure, that their holistic needs, including protection, are considered, and that their reintegration is monitored over time.
10. Psycho-social and health care for returnees should be strengthened.
11. It is essential to raise awareness among the family and the community before the return of the migrant in order to anticipate any form of exclusion and discrimination.