



Council of the
European Union

**Brussels, 25 February 2020
(OR. en)**

6217/20

LIMITE

**JAI 136
MIGR 18
FRONT 32
RELEX 155
COMIX 78**

NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Delegations

Subject: Presidency paper on enhancing effective and sustainable reintegration of returnees: vocational training and building third-country ownership

Delegations will find in annex the above-mentioned Presidency paper for the forthcoming Integration, Migration and Expulsion (IMEX) working party meeting on 4 March 2020.

**Presidency paper on enhancing effective and sustainable reintegration of returnees:
vocational training and building third-country ownership**

Building on the discussions on various aspects of reintegration held during the Romanian and Finnish Presidencies, the Croatian Presidency intends to further explore the potential of vocational training in the voluntary return and reintegration process, as a tool that could help increase return effectiveness.

This paper takes account of discussions on the use of vocational training in the reintegration process held during the Integration, Migration and Expulsion (IMEX) working party meeting on 7 November 2019. At that meeting, delegations recognised the **potential of vocational training** to encourage return and support sustainable reintegration, but also pointed to the risk of such training becoming a pull factor if provided in Member States prior to return.

Reintegration support can make irregular migrants more likely to accept voluntary returns because it provides an alternative to irregular stay and uncertain prospects in the host country and makes the return process more predictable. Well-targeted reintegration support can help to secure sustainable reintegration and thus prevent irregular re-migration. This can be even more important in situations where enforcing a return decision is not possible because of a third country not accepting forced returns or in the case of certain categories of migrants who are difficult to return or are given ‘tolerated’ status.

In order to achieve effective and sustainable reintegration, returnees should be socially and economically integrated in the home community so that they are able to cope with migration push factors and do not re-migrate irregularly. In order to address one of the major push factors, namely the lack of economic prospects and possibilities, it is important that returnees be given the means to provide for themselves and their families.

The skills acquired by a returnee may not match well with the labour market needs in their home community; therefore it might be difficult for the reintegration process to be successful in the long term. In that sense, it is important to identify at an early stage of the return process what skills a potential returnee has, what training they may have already received and what vocational training may still be needed to improve their prospects of gainful employment in the country of origin.

Therefore vocational training that would provide returnees with sustainable and long-term prospects in their country of origin, coupled with pre-return and post-return counselling and psychosocial support, is crucial. It is also important in the case of older minors, who could, through vocational training or apprenticeship programmes suited to their age and through psychosocial assistance addressing the transition to adulthood, be guided towards self-sufficiency. Vocational training could also be adapted and applied to support the successful return and reintegration of other vulnerable categories.

Vocational training could be part of a voluntary return/reintegration package. It should be in line with the relevant national policies and strategies, based on a sound market analysis, and aligned with the requirements of the labour market in the country of origin. The package could also include additional measures supporting job placement, access to micro-loans (inclusive finance), funding for starting small businesses or private sector partnerships, or it could be a part of EU private sector investments in the country of origin.

Since the start of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in 2017, 44 740 people have received economic support in the Sahel, North Africa and Horn of Africa regions. In addition to professional training, such economic support also includes job placements, setting-up of microbusinesses and cash-for-work programmes. More than half of all assisted persons¹ within the programme have already benefited from such support, while the others are in the process of receiving it. Similar programmes are being implemented with EU funding in Afghanistan and Bangladesh, for example.

¹ The number of those having benefited from the programme, however, includes not only returnees from the EU, but also stranded migrants.

In order to achieve the full potential of vocational training, it is necessary to invest in **building or strengthening the capacity and ownership of relevant institutions and agencies in the countries of origin** with respect to reintegration schemes, as well as in the necessary links with other services, such as social and educational systems, and labour market requirements. Ideally, reintegration schemes and individual reintegration plans should take into account the larger context in which the return takes place and should be linked to other development and governance-supporting initiatives in the country of return.

An approach enabling the linking of reintegration schemes and individual reintegration plans with priority development projects in countries of origin would contribute even further to **ensuring that reintegration is sustainable. It would help to build the resilience of the community against the push factors of illegal migration**, and it would prevent community members from finding themselves in a situation where they would be likely to view illegal migration as a preferable option to unsustainable living conditions.

To ensure such ownership, vocational training should be provided by/in close cooperation with the ministries competent for labour and employment, vocational training agencies and educational institutions in the country of origin, which should have a good overview of the existing situation, making it possible to match labour-force surplus and demand. They could also be given a role in measuring the impact of interventions and in identifying possible gaps, so as to further contribute to building their ownership of the reintegration process.

For the forthcoming IMEX meeting on 4 March 2020, delegations are invited to consider the above information and answer the following questions:

1. Do you offer vocational training as part of your reintegration programmes/packages? In practice, do you see a positive correlation between that component of the offered reintegration programmes/packages and the acceptance of/increase in voluntary returns?
 2. Do you have experience with supporting vocational training in third countries coupled with building and strengthening country-of-origin reintegration capacities and ownership?
 3. Do you agree that building and strengthening the reintegration capacities of countries of origin and their ownership of reintegration schemes through government-led bodies could lead to more success in the reintegration process? Should vocational training be provided/arranged by national/local authorities?
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