Budapest Process
Expert Thematic Meeting on return and reintegration
Budapest, Hungary - 3-4 March 2020

Summary

1. The Expert Thematic Meeting gathered 75 participants from 25 countries – Afghanistan, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Moldova, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Serbia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey and Ukraine – as well as the European Commission, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Bali Process Regional Support Office, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Women Empowerment Literacy and Development Organization (WELDO).

2. Meeting background: Following the adoption of the “Istanbul Commitments and its Call for Action”, the Budapest Process Senior Officials endorsed an Implementation Plan of the Call for Action following the six priority goals. This expert thematic meeting is the first dialogue activity listed in the Implementation Plan under Priority Goal 1 on countering irregular migration and will be complemented by further activities and meetings on countering smuggling, return and reintegration as well as sustainable border management. Furthermore, this meeting builds upon previous Budapest Process meetings on return and reintegration held in 2017 and 2018 as the annual thematic focus for those two years.

3. Meeting objectives and structure: The meeting’s main objective was to better understand what conditions need to be met so that return and reintegration work in a mutually beneficial manner for the countries as well as the individuals concerned and to identify the structural constraints of return and reintegration. For the first time, this meeting was held under Chatham House Rule for plenary and break-out group sessions. The discussions in the plenary and break-out groups aimed at answering the following broad questions: What type of structural issues need to be addressed in countries of destination and countries of origin to make return and reintegration effective? What are the ingredients for genuine return partnerships? Further discussions took place specifically on identification tools, the whole-of-government approach in return, mapping major stakeholders in the return and reintegration processes, addressing needs of returnees and their communities, including self-sufficiency and the role of the private sector, and finally ingredients for genuine return partnerships.

4. Panel discussion: An initial panel discussion with selected participants set the tone for the two days of break-out group discussions by revisiting the guiding questions in a panel setting. The importance of trust-building when discussing cooperation on return, readmission and reintegration was highlighted as well as the importance of regular bilateral communication to avoid misunderstandings. Sharing responsibilities in the process of return as well as managing expectations of returnees and of governments are to be kept in mind. While acknowledging the limited resources available, the panel reiterated that a smart use of human and financial resources as well as involvement of varied stakeholders including local communities was essential. Furthermore, the nexus between return-reintegration and debt needs to be studied. Finally, panellists highlighted the importance of upholding human rights as well as the importance of exploring more effective return partnerships in relation to legal pathways for migration.
5. **Recommendations reached in break-out sessions:**

a. **Session 1 from a “sending perspective”: ‘Modalities for identification and return’ and ‘Return management systems and the whole-of-government approach’**

- The credibility of the return process starts with credibility of the identification process, engagement of countries of origin in a transparent approach;
- Various tools (interviews, language identification, etc.) are effective for identification purposes but need to be regularly updated and harmonised and shared at various levels (within a given country and external partners) and their usefulness monitored to ensure proper identification;
- Ensuring funding of return management systems for countries of origin and exchanging between countries of origin and destination on these systems is necessary for improved identification;
- Engaging with liaison officers and with consular attaches is helpful;
- Returns are facilitated when cooperation is broadened to other areas of migration including exploring legal pathways for migration, not just return, such as in the case of migration partnerships;
- Several databases exist and have different usage modalities whether limited for a specific entity, nationally or regionally: knowledge sharing on these databases and developing modalities for their wider usage are needed.
- Training including certification as a means to assist in reintegration can be offered both before return or upon arrival. Providing training based on the existing job opportunities in the receiving country and on soft skills such as financial literacy is essential;
- Involving the private sector as a gateway for reintegration, including through providing micro financing is a good practice;
- Involving municipalities/local government in reintegration is needed to avoid frictions between host community and returning communities;
- Partnerships between several line ministries are needed for pre- and post-return activities, including vocational training and other possible support programmes in countries of origin.

b. **Session 2 from a “receiving perspective”: ‘Mapping major stakeholders’ and ‘Addressing needs of returnees and their communities’**

- Mapping stakeholders including what their work entails and how they work is the first step in discovering how stakeholders can better work together;
- Involvement of local communities and local administrations and the diaspora when mapping stakeholders is necessary as they have an essential role to play;
- Reintegration is not an after-thought, but should be considered as an essential part of the whole return process as well as part of the whole migration cycle, starting from the pre-migration decision-making stage;
- Considering that reintegration never fully ends, it is vital to provide a continuity of care with short- mid- and long-term measures;
- Strategic communication needs to be coordinated between different stakeholders, to avoid confusion among returnees, who are frequently flooded with offers and often mixed messages;
- Government to government cooperation is an effective practice not only in the area of return but also reintegration and requires ownership from both sides for successful outcomes;
- Engagement with the civil society is useful in the reintegration process, but also the government needs to come in to create conditions for sustainable reintegration.
Furthermore, government ownership on the return process is needed throughout the whole process: from individual return assistance, to the post-arrival (referral) centres and reintegration cooperation. In order to ensure such ownership, capacity building of governments is crucial;

- The support provided by development partners should be coordinated through the relevant ministries in the country of origin to ensure a smooth coordination and usage of the funds available for the agreed objectives;
- On reintegration, preparedness through counselling, including on managing expectations, psycho-social and security aspects, is crucial;
- Countries of origin should include gender and child-friendly approaches in their policies, strategies and action plans on return and reintegration;
- Certification of skills gained abroad or in the country of origin upon return through training programmes arises as a key area for successful reintegration because with the acknowledged certification, opportunities for employment multiply;
- It is important to focus on non-discrimination of returnees throughout the reintegration process;
- Socio-economic, psychosocial, security and environmental factors, such as high unemployment, conflict and drought in the region of the returnee need to be taken into account as they may hinder effective reintegration.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of reintegration on the ground is essential; various common guidelines for assessing successful reintegration are available.

c. Session 3: Ingredients for genuine return partnerships

- On building trust: return diplomacy requires understanding of economic, social and security pressures on countries of origin and destination to facilitate partnerships;
- Bilateral agreements and migration partnerships: bilateral agreements, Memoranda of Understanding and migration partnerships are needed and useful for providing modalities including for managing return and reintegration within a broader context;
- Monitoring: Continuous monitoring of reintegration programmes and re-evaluating what doesn’t work and identification of the reasons for this should take place;
- Research: It is deemed important to consider reintegration as part of the process and not an after-thought. Further research on successful and sustainable reintegration should be conducted;
- Holistic perspectives: there is a need to deploy holistic programmes of reintegration with involvement of CSOs, employment services and government programmes;
- Mainstreaming return and reintegration to development projects is helpful. In practice linking return and reintegration to development cooperation is complicated by the multiplicity of stakeholders involved;
- Micro-financing: micro-financing opportunities for returnees can be a good practice to foster reintegration
- It is important to reason in terms of livelihoods and consider that not all returnees wish to become entrepreneurs or return to business-friendly environments.

6. Next steps and looking ahead: In the last session, small groups prepared suggestions to take forward in the implementation of the Call for Action in the topic of return, readmission and reintegration. The following suggestions were highlighted as relevant within the wider context of the dialogue:

a. conduct a mapping of stakeholders on the sending and receiving end to better understand their roles and activities in return and reintegration for further cooperation;
b. provide assistance in establishment of **direct contacts** and getting the right people around the table in addition to exchange data amongst countries;

c. conduct small group discussions on **return from transit countries and on returns in emergency situations**;

d. provide platforms for information sharing on reintegration programmes (how they work and what programmes are available in each country);

e. suggest concrete steps and consider possible **pilot projects** as well as share success of microfinancing in reintegration;

f. assistance in launching awareness campaigns in order to better counter irregular migration

f. **harmonise efforts of international organisations, iNGOs and service providers** in the delivery of reintegration programmes.