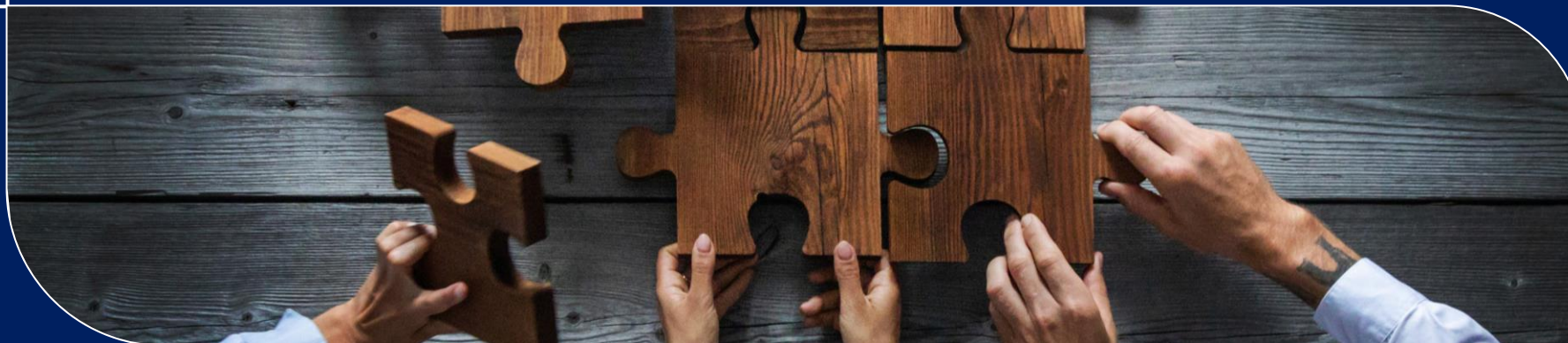


1st Publication June 2025



Quick View Manual on Return & Reintegration Counselling

Hands on Information for European Return and Reintegration Counsellors



REINTEGRATION PROGRAMME

Return and Reintegration Counselling

Quick View Manual for Return & Reintegration Counsellors

Return and reintegration counselling is becoming increasingly important in the EU, because it opens a pathway for a **dignified** and more **sustainable return** for irregular migrants with or without a return decision. Well informed returnees, with access to **return and reintegration assistance**, are more likely to successfully reintegrate. Before returning, it is equally important that they have adequate information about the situation in their country of origin. At the beginning of the process the migrant should therefore be provided with information by a professional return counsellor. The **quality of a counselling session** depends on the knowledge, skills and experience of the person who does the counselling. This manual will give you, whether experienced or not, an overview of the most important aspects of return and reintegration counselling in practice. As a guide, it will help you to quickly find the relevant information and advice that you need. Welcome to the **Frontex Quick View Manual on Return and Reintegration Counselling**.

How to Use this Manual?

Find the relevant topic on the top.

1. Introduction

2. Legal Aspects

3. Role of the RRC

4. Principles & Professional Standards

5. Communication

6. Return Counselling in Practice

7. Vulnerable Groups

8. Special Attention Points

9. Reintegration



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I. Glossary

AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
CoO	Country of Origin
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Asylum Agency
EURP	European Reintegration Programme
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
Frontex	European Border and Coastguard Agency
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPSN	Identification of persons with special needs
LRP	Local Reintegration Partner
MS/SAC	Member States and Schengen Associated Countries
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
RET	Frontex Return Division
RIAT	Reintegration Assistance Tool
RRC	Return and Reintegration Counsellor
RP	Reintegration Partner
VR	Voluntary Return

II. Definitions

1. Counselling

Counselling is defined as a **process** of **talking about and working through personal or professional problems**, situations and challenges **with a professional**. A counsellor helps to address specific issues **in a positive way** by helping to clarify the issues, explore options, develop strategies, and increase self-awareness. The goal of counselling is to **enable** an individual to make critical and **informed decisions** regarding alternative courses of actions without external influence. Counselling will help an individual to obtain information and to clarify emotional concern that may interfere with or be related to the decision involved. Effective counselling is built on a strong relationship between the counsellor and the individual. This may be time-consuming and **results are often not achieved after one session**. A competent counsellor should be empathetic, tailor his/her approach to the individual's needs, and foster collaboration and good listening.

2. Return Counselling

Return counsellors generally deal with migrants **prior to their return**, while reintegration counsellors support them to reintegrate after their arrival in a third country. Return counsellors could be civil servants in the MS and/ or Frontex Return Specialists, NGO staff or private actors who perform this task on behalf of a MS authority. **It is not always easy to clearly distinguish where return counselling ends and where reintegration counselling starts**. The EU strategy on return and reintegration names both activities at different stages of the return process. Nevertheless, a return counsellor will touch upon topics related to the reintegration process and a reintegration counsellor could be in contact with the migrant already in the pre-departure phase of the return process.

II. Definitions

Subject to the specific circumstances of each case, return counselling essentially entails **individual return advice** to potential returnees on different procedures, including information on the (1) **obligation to leave** the country and the **consequences if not leaving**, (2) different **return support schemes**, (3) information on the situation in the country of origin and (4) the potential **prospects** for the returnees **for a new start in their country of origin/ country of return** with the aim to (5) encourage (assisted) voluntary return². During the pre-departure phase, counsellors need to **identify potential vulnerabilities** and assess their impact on the return and reintegration process.

3. Reintegration Counselling

Reintegration counselling is the provision of information to a returnee on the reintegration assistance process. It is **usually performed by reintegration partners** (NGOs or international organisations) and/ or third country authorities. Within the process of reintegration counselling, the addressing of **identified vulnerabilities**, needs and opportunities is fundamental for the creation and implementation of a comprehensive **reintegration plan**. Potential reintegration partners under the EU Reintegration Programme (EURP), but not exclusively, have an important role in facilitating and delivering high quality reintegration assistance to returnees. To enhance readability of this manual, the term 'return counsellor' refers to both return and reintegration counsellor.

4. Migrant, Returnee or Third Country National?

Return and reintegration counselling can take place at different stages of the asylum or return process. The asylum procedure precedes the return process and can be clustered in four main stages: (1) identification, (2) application, interview and decision making by the respective MS authority, (3) the appeal procedure and (4) the return decision. Since not all migrants make use of the opportunity to appeal, a return decision could enter into effect after the time limit for the appeal has passed. In this manual, a third country national who receives counselling, **before a decision** was made on his/her application for international protection, **is referred to as "the migrant"** – which refers also to asylum seekers for the purpose of this manual. Once a **return decision has been issued** or an individual decision by the migrant to return has been made, the document refers to that person as **"the returnee"**. Whenever it is not clearly possible to distinguish between migrant or returnee, the neutral term **Third Country National (TCN)** is used.

5. Country of Origin and Country of Return

Not all irregular migrants want to return to their country of origin (CoO) and some return and reintegration programmes also support migrants to return to a third country other than their CoO but in which they have the legal right to stay long-term. The permission to stay/reside in another third country could derive from the nationality of a spouse or other family members. However, these cases are very rare in practice and in general migrants return to their CoO. For the purpose of this manual, the term Country of Origin, also includes other third countries where the migrant has the legal right to stay long-term.

² Commission SWD(2021) 121 final "The EU framework on return counselling and the Reintegration Assistance Tool", available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021SC0121>, last accessed 24 October 2023.

1.1. Context and Purpose of the Manual

The return process begins with the **issuing of a return decision** and an order to leave the EU. Since it can be difficult for a migrant to comprehend a return decision, it is beneficial to have specialised staff who can inform the migrant about their options of return, by providing the necessary information. This will allow migrants to take **informed decisions** which increases the likelihood, or willingness, to opt for voluntary return. The quality of a counselling session depends on the knowledge, professional skills, and experience of the individual counsellor performing the task. The aim of this manual is to support return counsellors, whether they are experienced or not, in the most important practical aspects of their daily work.

Why Another Manual?

The Quick View Manual (QVM) is an **easily accessible** and **user-friendly** tool that gives counsellors an edge, when they prepare for, or conduct a counselling session, even under time pressure and high workload. It is a knowledge multiplication tool, that reflects best practices and guidelines on return counselling across the EU Member States. The main objective of the QVM is to **provide a common standard**, which can be used **across the EU**, with practical and easily reachable support for daily counselling activities. It includes information about communication techniques, how to handle difficult migrants, and operational procedures that are common practice across the EU Member States. The QVM contributes to a qualitative improvement of return and reintegration counselling by adopting a mixed approach which takes into account the needs of the migrant and the compliance aspects within the Member States, alike. Welcome to the Frontex Quick View Manual on Return and Reintegration Counselling.

1.2. Rationale Behind Voluntary Return

The new legal framework put forward in the **New Migration Pact** reinforces voluntary return as a crucial element of the common EU system for returns. Alongside effective reintegration measures, voluntary return aims to ensure a **humane, effective, and sustainable return** of irregular migrants. Voluntary return, which is usually considered more cost-effective than forced return, gives returnees opportunities and considers their needs, expectations and prospects once returned¹.

Return and reintegration counselling are key components of the return process. These services aim to support a potential returnee to make an informed decision based on the available options of assisted return support. While return counselling takes place in the pre-departure phase, reintegration counselling is usually provided after arrival in the Country of Origin².

Return and reintegration counselling opens the pathway for a **dignified** and more **sustainable return** for irregular migrants, with or without a return decision. **Voluntary return is therefore the desired option** for irregular migrants. A person that has returned voluntarily receives several benefits compared to a forced return which helps to reduce the **negative perception of return in such cases**. Such benefits could be refraining from an entry ban or the receive higher amounts of cash and in-kind assistance. However, persons who are to be returned by force can also receive assistance under certain national and European return and reintegration schemes. According to IOM, **well-prepared returnees**, preferably, with access to tailored return and reintegration assistance, are more likely to **successfully reintegrate**².

¹ eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0120

² Returning Home: Evaluating the Impact of IOM's Reintegration Assistance for Migrants in the Horn of Africa - IMPACT Study Report #1 | IOM Publications Platform, last accessed 05 March 2024

1.3. Return Counselling Practice Within the EU

Return counselling is done differently across the EU MS, due to differing national legislation, procedures, and funding schemes. State actors and non-state actors alike are active in return counselling, contributing to both **a diverse counselling landscape** and different approaches towards the migrant. This entails that responsibilities and workflows are not only different across MS, but sometimes also within a MS depending on which actors are involved. This manual aims to capture the most important elements of counselling that can be found across all of the EU. Counsellors can find the topics that are most relevant for their MS specific situation, and learn about topics that go beyond their responsibilities but are common practice in other MS.

1.4. The Role of Frontex

Frontex strives to support **the implementation of the EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration** by concrete multiannual programmes and initiatives. The Agency provides operational and technical support to MS in all phases of return, including voluntary return and reintegration assistance. One Frontex flagship programmes is the **EU Reintegration Programme**, which offers reintegration assistance on behalf of the MS in multiple third countries. See further under:

European Reintegration Programme (EURP)

Operational Implementation by Frontex

High-quality assistance, that enables returnees to socio-economically adapt during their reintegration process, requires **well-trained return and reintegration counsellors** who can provide correct and relevant information to third country nationals, both in the pre-departure phase and after their arrival to the CoO.

Operational Implementation by Frontex

For this purpose, **Frontex deploys return specialists**, that are trained as return and reintegration counsellors. Frontex also provides return counselling training for national authorities of the MS. To promote a holistic and comprehensive support in the area of return counselling, **Frontex develops manuals, country information leaflets, and communication materials** to increase the efficiency of counselling activities, and to create the necessary links between all phases of the return process.

Steps taken by Frontex

European Reintegration Programme (EURP) since 2022

Common EU Return & Reintegration Counselling Curriculum since 2023

Targeted support for Return and Reintegration Counsellors since 2023

How was this manual developed?

The Quick View Manual mirrors to a large extent the topics of the EU-curriculum for return and reintegration counsellors, that was developed by Frontex in 2022/23. To ensure that the content of the Quick View Manual is aligned with best practices of European return counsellors, several development workshops were held in 2024 with practitioners from the Member States. The Frontex EURP reintegration partners were also consulted to improve pre-departure information provision and strengthen the link with the requirements of the reintegration process. Finally, other already existing manuals, such as the IOM return counselling toolkit and the return counselling toolkit for children were also taken into consideration.

Where can I find the relevant laws related to return and reintegration counselling?

Currently, there is no **legal framework in place at EU level**, that defines, or limits return and reintegration counselling in particular. However, there are **policy documents** which try to align return counselling activities throughout the EU, such as the **EU framework on return counselling**, which is part of the **EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration**. In addition, there are several important legal and policy documents that every return and reintegration counsellor should be informed about. In this section you will get an overview of the following topics:

2. Legal Aspects & EU Policy background

2.1. EU Strategy on Voluntary Return & Reintegration

2.2. Migration Pact & its consequences

2.3. Return Directive

2.4. Return Decision

2.5. European Migration Network

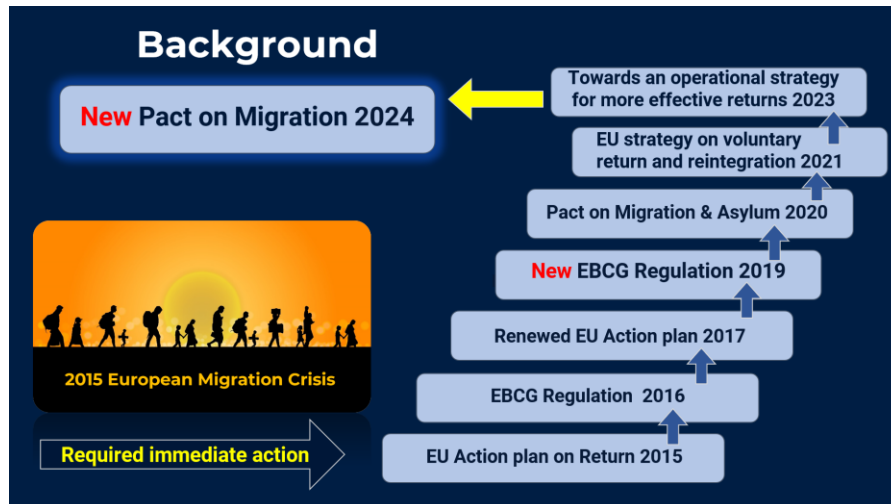
2.6. Role of IOM & other Organisations



2.1. EU Strategy on Voluntary Return & Reintegration

The EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration, adopted in April 2021, is an important deliverable within the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum**. The strategy promotes voluntary return and reintegration as an integral part of a common EU system for returns. It sets out practical measures to **strengthen the legal and operational framework** for voluntary returns, in both the EU and transit countries, by **improving** the quality of **return and reintegration programmes**, establishing better links with development initiatives, and strengthening the cooperation with partner countries outside of the EU.

A common EU system for returns is an essential component of a comprehensive and integrated **migration management system**. Voluntary and forced returns are both key elements of an **effective return policy**.



[Read the EU strategy – click here.](#)

Relevance of the Strategy for Return Counsellors

The EU strategy has many actionable implications, especially for policy makers on EU and MS level. However, it also touches directly upon the daily tasks of a return and reintegration counsellor. On the practitioner level, the successful implementation of the strategy will depend on the skills and dedication of the individual return counsellors. The below aspects are especially relevant for all return counsellors, and they will be further explained in separate chapters of the Quick View Manual:

1. Effective coordination between all stakeholders. See... **Engaging with Stakeholders**
2. Supporting voluntary return & reintegration of migrants.
3. Effective return counselling and referral. See... **Referrals**
4. Ensuring quality of support. See... **Principles and Professional Standards**
5. Funding modalities for voluntary return and reintegration.

European Reintegration Programme (EURP)

Different Approaches in Return Counselling

The EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration clearly defines the basic methodology, stages and content of return counselling. The three **different** counselling **approaches** described by the EU Commission that are especially relevant for return counsellors are the following:

- A.) **migrant-centred** approach
- B.) **compliance** approach
- C.) **mixed** approach

More detailed information on these approaches and what implications they have on the work of return counsellors can be found under: **Role of the RRC**

2.2. Migration Pact and Its Consequences

The new pact on migration and asylum was adopted in June 2024 and it will enter into application in mid-2026. The main aim is to **establish and strengthen the common EU system for migration management**. The pact rests on **4 main pillars**: (1) secure borders, (2) fast and efficient procedures, (3) effective system of solidarity & responsibility and (4) embedding migration in internal partnerships. In practice, this also entails a potential **wider use of return counselling across the EU as an integral part of promoting voluntary return**. Efficient returns are crucial for successful migration management, and well-trained return counsellors are needed in all MS to improve the effective return rate.

2.3. Return Directive

The Return Directive (2008/115/EC) **defines and sets the common standards and procedures** in EU Member States and Schengen associated countries for returning irregular migrants. It emphasises the **respect for fundamental rights** in the area of return and **defines vulnerable groups** and the consideration of vulnerabilities during the return process. Every return counsellor should know its content, specifically the following articles:

- Art. 3 – Definitions (incl. vulnerable persons)
- Art. 5 – Non-refoulement, best interests of the child, family life and state of health
- Art. 6 – Return decision
- Art. 7 – Voluntary departure
- Art. 8 – Removal
- Art. 9 – Postponement of removal
- Art. 10 – Return and removal of unaccompanied minors

Apart from the EU Return Directive, every return counsellor needs to be familiar with the national procedures and regulations associated with return counselling and voluntary return in general. These may also vary among the EU MS.



2.4. The Return Decision

Common standards for issuing a return decision are defined in Art. 6 of the Return Directive. **Return decisions are issued by the responsible MS authorities**. Most third country nationals that counsellors engage with have a negative decision on asylum, including an order to leave the territory and/or a return decision. **Such persons are eligible to receive reintegration assistance**, offered under national or European return and reintegration schemes. In some programmes reintegration assistance can be provided regardless of the type of return (e.g. voluntary and/or forced return).

Practice tip for counsellors

Be aware that migrants can feel anxiety and be stressed, especially if they are expecting to be forcibly returned after receiving a return decision. Another factor that may have a negative impact on a migrant's state of mind can, for example, be a re-entry ban, as such entails that they cannot visit relatives in other MS of the Schengen area. An entry-ban can be imposed on the returnee together with the return decision or after a forced removal. Contrary to forced return, **assisted voluntary return** can be a **humane alternative**. When a return decision has been issued it is therefore crucial that a return counsellor supports a migrant to make an informed decision by providing **relevant advice on all possible options**. All irregular migrants should also receive information about the negative consequences of not complying with a return decision before a procedure of forced removal is initiated.

2.5. European Migration Network (EMN)

The European Migration Network was established in 2008 with the aim to **foster best-practice and knowledge exchange** between migration and asylum experts. It is funded by the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) which is the main tool for providing financial assistance for all EMN activities. **Reports and studies** produced and **published by EMN** in the field of migration management **can be a useful resource for return counsellors**.

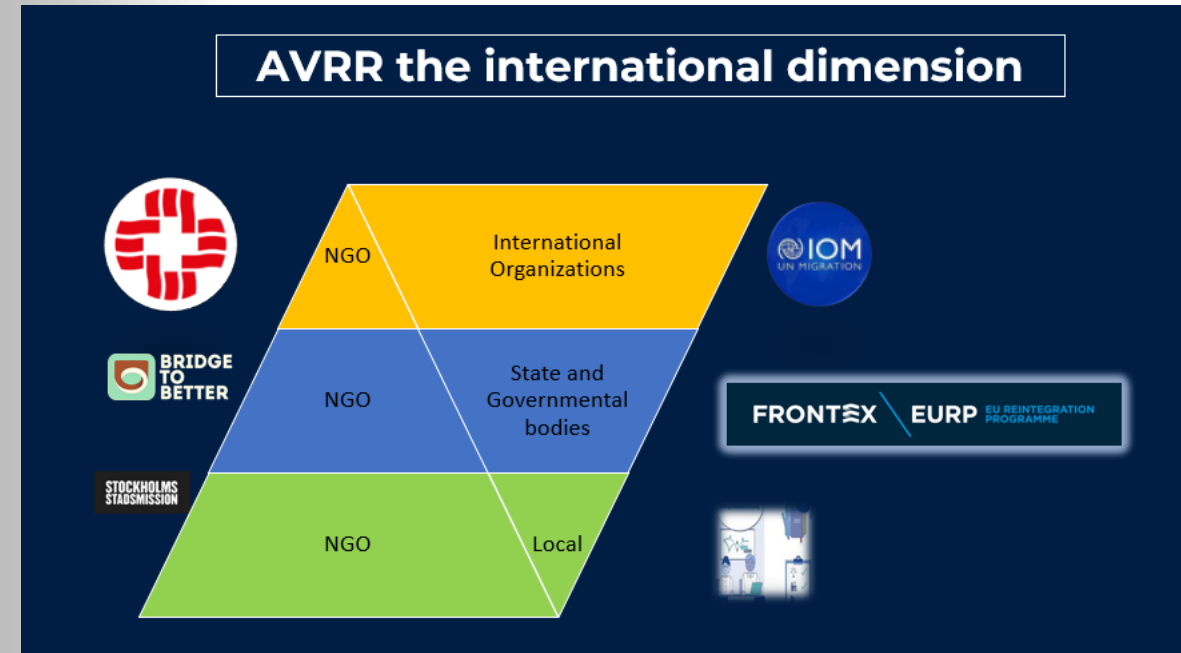
[EMN Website – click here.](#)

2.6. Role of IOM and Other Organisations

Voluntary return, return counselling, pre-departure assistance to migrants, as well as the reintegration phase are not new concepts but have existed since 1979. **The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was a pioneer** in supporting assisted voluntary return and reintegration, also commonly known as **AVRR**. Since 1979, IOM has assisted more than 1.6 million returning migrants and today IOM counsellors are active in many EU MS and third countries. Apart from IOM, UNHCR, other **organisations, like Caritas, the Red Cross and various charities also provide return counselling**. The mentioned organisations publish a wide range of booklets, studies, as well as other resources related to return counselling. Given their vast experience in this line of work, these materials can be a valuable source of information for return counsellors in MS.

[IOM Policy Framework for AVRR – click here.](#)

A diverse AVRR landscape



Further reading material...

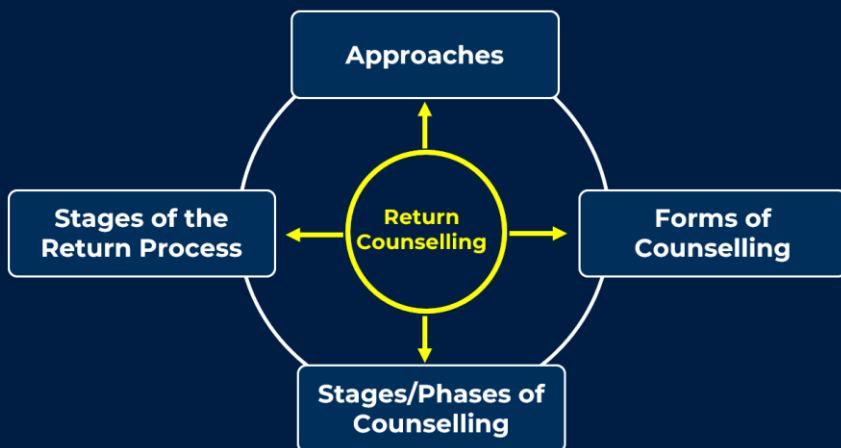
[IOM return counselling toolkit – click here.](#)

[UNHCR – advice on return - click here.](#)

REINTEGRATION PROGRAMME

Return and Reintegration Counselling

What is the role of the return and reintegration counsellor?



3. Role of the RRC in the Different Phases of the Return Process

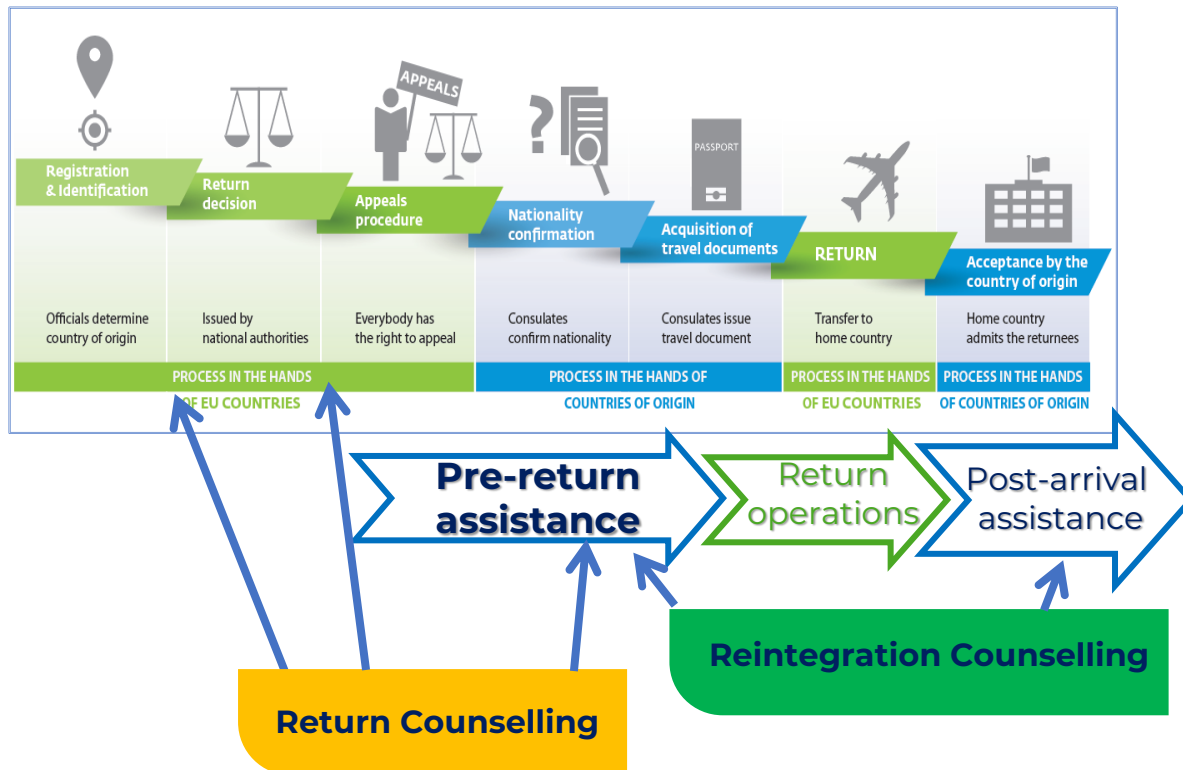
- 3.1. When and why is return counselling happening?
- 3.2. The Different Approaches in Return Counselling
- 3.3. The Different Forms of Return Counselling
- 3.4. The Different Stages/Phases of Return Counselling



3.1. When and why is return counselling happening?

Return **counselling** can take place at different stages of the return procedure and sometimes migrants even request return counselling during their asylum procedure. To have a better understanding of when counselling could take place, see the following infographic which explains **the different stages a migrant goes through**, starting with the arrival in Europe until either the return or integration.

From Arrival to Return...



Counselling During the Return Process

Return and reintegration counselling focuses on **engaging in a dialogue** with the migrant. It aims to **discuss the different options** that are **available** to irregular migrants, **regardless of the outcome of their asylum procedure**. The return process starts when a return decision is taken by a responsible MS authority or with the individual decision of the migrant to return voluntarily. An individual decision to return can be taken at any time, even before a return decision has been issued by a MS. Following the issuance of a return decision, irregular migrants have a limited period of time when they can depart voluntarily. Return counselling must take into account this given and limited timeframe, before any preparations for a forced removal are initiated by the responsible MS. **Return counselling both seeks the best options for the migrant while providing information on the legal consequences of not complying with a return decision.** It can take place before the issuance of a return decision, informing about the possibilities for return and reintegration support or after the return decision and obligation to return has been issued. Counselling can also take place after the returnee's arrival in the TC and is in such case conducted by the (local) reintegration partner (RP/LRP) or the responsible TC authority.

It is not always easy to clearly distinguish where return counselling ends and reintegration counselling starts.

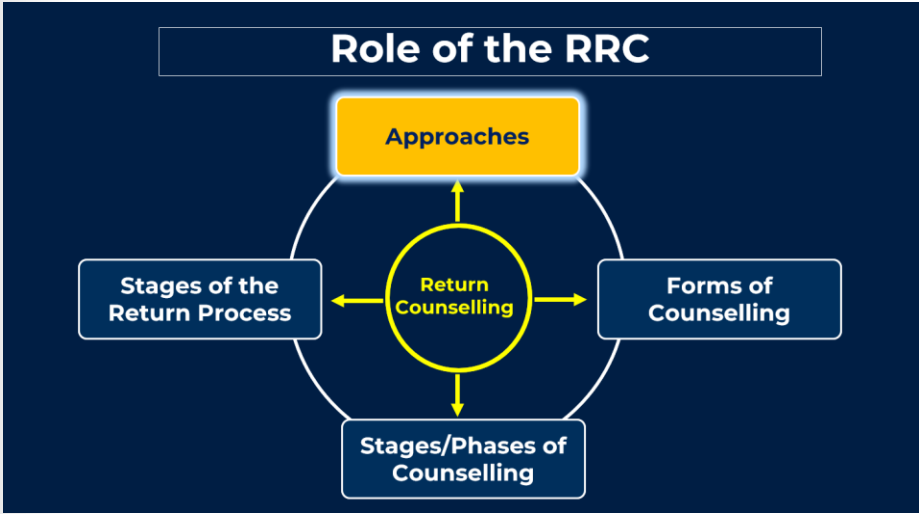


3.2. The Different Approaches in Return Counselling

Since there are many actors involved in return counselling, there are also different approaches to it, which are shaped by organisational values as well as limitations of the entity that provides counselling. The three main approaches are defined as follows:

The migrant-centred approach focuses on **supporting the individual** to make an informed decision. It provides support that is adapted to the migrants' situation, their specific needs, country of origin and journey as well as their own capabilities. The approach covers not only the individuals' future but aims to provide **tailored support** that **takes into account the migrants' psychological wellbeing** by looking at the previous migration stages and seeking to understand what pushed the migrant to leave their country of origin in the first place and why they decided to return or why a return decision was issued. The discussion should remain focused on return, but understanding the context of the migrant's situation is essential to providing tailored support.

The compliance approach by contrast focuses on **convincing the migrant to return** and/or to comply with either a return decision. This approach can take place in a more coercive setting after a negative decision on stay. It may also be carried out in a similar setting as the migrant-centred approach, depending on the competences and mandates of the organisations involved. **In some MS the use of voluntary return is restricted by national laws and forced return is the only option** for irregular migrants with a return decision. The compliance approach takes such institutional realities into account.



The mixed approach combines the two approaches to achieve a **balance between** providing the support and information that best suits the **migrants' needs and** experiences, while **implementing national return policies**. This implies informing the individual of the various options available, while emphasising the benefits of return. **The approach can also shift** from a migrant-centred approach to a compliance approach, **based on the migration stage** of the individual. This happens when after the initial counselling stages, it becomes evident that the migrant has little to no option to legally stay, or when initial proposals for voluntary return have failed. For an approach to be effective, the method and content should be adapted to the migrants' specific circumstances and to the migration stage. It should take into consideration external circumstances, including the situation in the country of origin, health considerations and family situation.

EU Framework on Return Counselling and RIAT– [click here.](#)

3.3. The Different Forms of Return Counselling

Counsellors need to adjust their counselling style to the target group and depending on the circumstances, counselling can be done in different forms:

- **Individual Counselling**
- **Group Counselling**
- **Family Counselling**

Individual counselling is the most common form of return counselling where trust building can be easier due to a more confidential space that can help to talk about personal plans and circumstances, that people might not share in front of others or in a group.

Family counselling refers to return counselling of various family constellations, with one lead applicant and person who often seems to be the one taking decisions for the whole family. Counsellors need however to make sure that the needs of the child(ren) and other family members are also accounted for. More information under: **Vulnerable Groups**

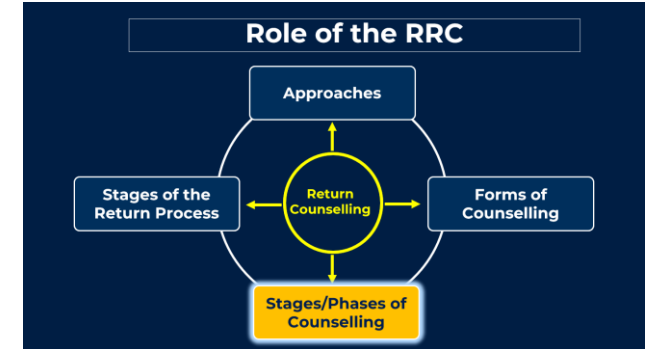
If possible, the counselling session should take place in a room which is suitable for the purpose (e.g. ideally having toys or a kids' corner).

Group counselling requires a different approach and can be used to deliver general information to larger groups of the same nationality or that speak the same language. This form of counselling is often used if supporting resources, such as interpreters are limited and time constraints make it necessary for the counsellor to reach more people at once. Group counselling should be just at the initial stage of counselling and once a decision on return has been transitioned to individual counselling sessions.

3.4. The Different Stages/Phases of Counselling

The EU Framework on Return Counselling identifies 4 stages of return (and reintegration) counselling:

1. **Information and outreach,**
2. **Decision-making,**
3. **Pre-departure preparation**
4. **Post-arrival support.**



The aim of the **information and outreach stage** is to inform the migrant about the options to stay, and/or to assist him/her in returning voluntarily to their home country. Herewith, the migrant is advised on the possibilities and may be referred to relevant organisations responsible for implementing assisted voluntary return and reintegration. This generally takes place when the TCN is crossing the external borders or transiting from the third country.

During the migrants' **decision-making** process on return, the role of each counsellor is to present information on the legal options, in light of the fact that the migrant has been issued a return decision. **Return counsellors must explain what the obligation to return entails** and inform the migrant about the consequences of failing to comply with the decision. In comparison to the information and outreach stage, the return counsellor now provides more individual and case-specific information about the return procedure and the support available.

3.4. The Different Stages/Phases of Counselling

There are situations where the migrant does not consent to return voluntarily. In such cases the return counsellor might need to inform the relevant authorities so that they can initiate the necessary steps for forced return. However, in the case of voluntary return, and once the migrant has expressed that he/she will comply with the return decision, **the pre-departure preparation** phase begins. In this phase, return plans are laid out by identifying the available assistance. This could for example include an escort for vulnerable persons with medical needs, or for minors; opportunities relating to training and education, and which ideally meets the needs of the returnee; onward transport to the place of return; and short-term accommodation upon arrival. **The type of assistance** that is available depends on the provisions and decisions of the host MS and **might differ across the EU**.

In the **Post-Arrival Support Stage**, the returnee is provided with information about the reintegration assistance available in the CoO. The reintegration plan is developed prior to departure, and it is adapted to the specific needs of both the returnee and the local context. In general, most of the work in this phase is done by the reintegration counsellor of a reintegration partner, who identifies the needs of a returnee and assesses whether they are different to those identified by the return counsellor in the MS. After that, a tailored reintegration plan is developed together with the returnee. Ideally a pre-departure call has been made by the return counsellor in the MS to **link the returnee with the reintegration counsellor** before his/her arrival in the CoO.

EU Framework on Return Counselling – [click here](#).

What are principles & professional standards in return counselling?

Professionalism should enable return counsellors to fulfil their role to the best of their ability. It also inspires peers and colleagues and may give a deep sense of satisfaction in doing the work of a counsellor.

Return counselling is essentially about **working with people who often find themselves in a difficult situation** that requires them to make tough decisions. In these situations, irregular migrants usually share their experiences with other migrants. The **professionalism and attitude** of the individual return counsellor will therefore always impact the overall reputation of return and reintegration counselling. A good reputation of the “profession” is essential for successful outreach towards migrants.

4.1. Professional Standards

4.1.1.

Appearance

4.1.2.

Ethics

4.1.3.

Personal & Professional Values

4.1.4.

Institutional Responsibilities & Limitations

4.1.5.

Awareness of the Existence of Personal Biases

4.1.6.

Professional Distance & Personal Engagement

4.1.7.

Knowledge & Skills

4.1.8.

Building Confidence & Trust

4.1.9.

Contact & Working Alliances



4.1.1. Appearance

Appearance is what meets the eye first which is why a migrant's first impression of a return counsellor matters. Appearance can both help to **break the ice or create reservations** on the migrant's side. It concerns more than just being appropriately dressed for the situation and it is always purpose oriented. To build trust from the beginning, return counsellors should not do counselling in uniforms but due to institutional requirements this might not always be possible to avoid. Counselling without uniforms helps to reduce the power distance between the migrant and the counsellor from the beginning (More under: **Communication**). In addition, body language and friendly facial expressions are part of an appearance that contributes to breaking the ice and **supports the trust building process**. (More under: **Trust Building**)

4.1.2. Ethics

Like in any other profession, **strong work ethics are essential** if return counselling is to succeed. A good work ethic rests on several pillars, such as integrity, responsibility, quality of work delivered, discipline, and teamwork. In practice, these pillars translate into traits that characterise the work of a good return counsellor. Such traits are reliability, dedication, initiative, adaptability, accountability, and good time management.

4.1.3. Personal & Professional Values

Good work ethics are usually an outflow of strong personal values. Some professional values are universal, while others depend on the job and its specific requirements. Return counselling is often conducted as a part-time activity, in addition to other tasks performed by civil servants and non-state actors in the MS. Return counsellors could for example be social workers, asylum case workers, border guards, or police officers.

Depending on the professional background, every return counsellor has a set of professional values from previous occupations that influence the way how the work is done. Nevertheless, counsellors should additionally **strictly adhere to the code of conduct** relevant to their respective organisation in order to safeguard the fundamental rights of their clients.

4.1.4. Institutional Responsibilities & Limitations

When it comes to work ethics and professional values, it is important to note that **every institution and organisation has its own set of specific values and rules** that define the "workplace culture". Consequently, return counsellors do not have many options to change the written and sometimes unwritten rules. Some organisations that are active in counselling also have a high staff turnover, and part of a professional approach is to ensure the knowledge transfer from experienced to new staff. This needs to be managed and standardised by the institution/organisation. Professional standards are therefore not just the individual counsellor's responsibility but also a managerial/institutional one.

4.1.5. Awareness of the existence of Personal Biases

Since every return counsellor has a unique and different set of personal and professional values, it is **important to be aware of personal biases and blind spots**. A return counsellor should seek to overcome personal biases and try to be objective as far as possible. Objectivity means that different people from different cultures, experience and professional backgrounds can observe the same phenomenon and agree on what it is. A professional return counsellor is therefore **open for feedback and constructive criticism** in order to improve and to become more objective.

4.1. Professional Standards

4.1.6. Balance of Professional Distance & Personal Engagement

Return counselling involves working with people and their problems, which often relate to the return decision or the order to leave the country. This is not an easy task as it entails dealing with clients who sometimes are frustrated, discouraged, desperate or even aggressive. A **healthy professional distance** as well as **personal boundaries** are **crucial** to stay productive and motivated as a return counsellor.

4.1.7. Knowledge & Skills

Return counsellors need to be well informed and up-to date on the specific return and reintegration programmes that are available. **Knowledge of the countries of origin** is not optional but **a must**. However, possessing the relevant skills does not necessarily mean that a return counsellor knows how to deal with every possible scenario or situation beforehand. There can be many situations or cases in the practice of return counselling that push the counsellor to his/her limit in terms of knowledge. A professional return counsellor should always perceive challenging situations as learning opportunities and **show a willingness to improve** his/her skillset. This can for example be done by being part of a return counselling network, self-study, and/or attending thematic trainings workshops or conferences. Skills include the ability to effectively communicate and work together with interpreters and cultural mediators, who are essential for ensuring effective counselling. Return **counsellors need to have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities** and be able to guide, brief and debrief the interpreters and cultural mediators. (More under: **Interpreters**)

4.1.8. Building Confidence & Trust

All the professional standards mentioned above are leading to **the most important resource** needed in return counselling which is trust. Only when a migrant is convinced that the return counsellor can be trusted, he/she will be ready to start sharing information and be open for the process of voluntary return. Even in case of a forced return procedure, having the trust of the migrant **can reduce tensions and prevent disruptive behaviour**. Moreover, gaining the trust of a migrant is one thing, but keeping it requires that return counsellors are transparent about what their limitations are and refrain from **making promises that they cannot keep**.

4.1.9. Contact & Working Alliances

Return counsellors should be part of a counselling network to **exchange professional experiences and to get help, advice, or support**, when dealing with difficult cases. Ideally, return counselling is conducted in teams. A well-functioning network helps to refer the TCN to other services that might be needed, especially when dealing with vulnerable persons or medical cases. (More under: **Vulnerable Groups**)

4.2. Dos & Don'ts in Return Counselling

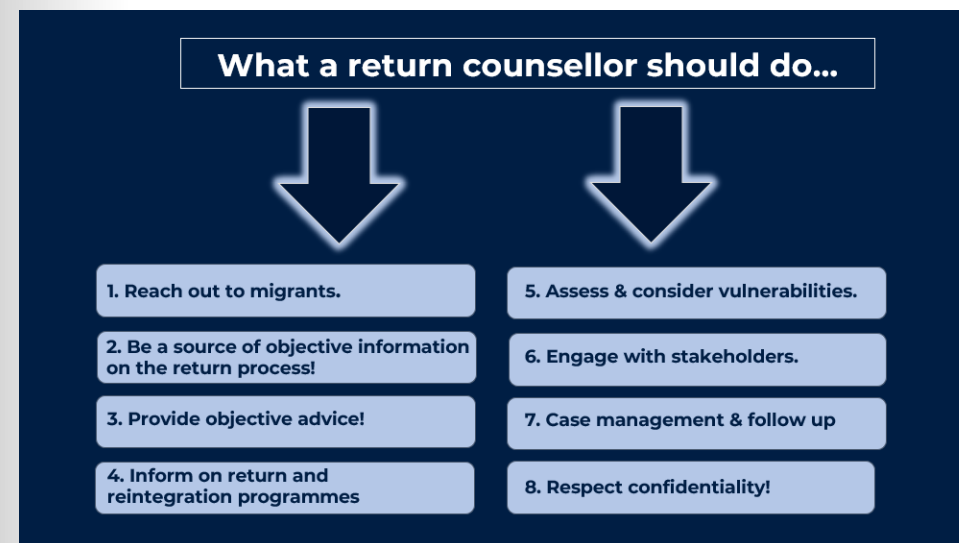
4.2.1. What a Counsellor Should Do

4.2.2. What a Counsellor Could Do

4.2.3. What a Counsellor Should Not Do?

4.2.1. What a Counsellor Should Do

There are many tasks and responsibilities that a return counsellor will encounter during a counselling session, and in some situations, it **can be difficult to distinguish between** what is **mandatory** to do and what is **optional**. There are however, some tasks every return counsellor **must** do, regardless of their place of deployment or the location where the counselling takes place. Counsellors need to be good **and empathic listeners** in the first place, but also do the following:



4.2.2. What a Counsellor Could Do

Depending on national requirements and policies, **the responsibilities of a return counsellor** in regard to preparing the return of a migrant **may vary**. In some MS, return counsellors have more responsibilities while in others they have less. Irrespectively, a **return counsellor should always** actively **assist the migrant with the steps that are necessary** for arranging the return (such as getting a new travel document from the embassy). Here is a list of tasks a return counsellor could be entrusted with:

What a return counsellor could do?

Referrals to other services (medical cases)

Book and organise interpreter's services

Assisting by making flight arrangements

De-escalate, mediate in conflicts

Help organise travel documents

Hand out cash assistance of the return programme

4.2.3. What a Counsellor Should Not Do?

There are some requests that might come up during the counselling sessions that go beyond the mandate and responsibility of the return counsellor. It may be **requests for help and assistance** relating to poor reception conditions, problems with housing, the return decision itself, or access to social, medical, and legal services. It is therefore important to **clearly communicate the limitations of return counselling**, and wherever possible counsellors should refer the migrant to the appropriate instance. Sometimes return counsellors might be tempted to "help" in areas where they are not competent enough or where they lack the mandate, for example by giving legal advice on whether a migrant should appeal a return decision or not. It is therefore important that return counsellors know what they **should not do**, and in which cases any overstepping of their mandate could negatively affect the return process and cause more difficulties for the migrant.

What a return counsellor should NOT do?

Use manipulative or excessive interviewing

Receive presents from the migrant for the assistance offered

Help in areas where others are responsible

Legal counselling or advice

Make false promises about things that are uncertain

Overestimate own ability to deal with difficult clients (e.g., mental health issues)

Summary

Counselling skills are mainly **acquired through on-the-job practice**, and it is the personal experience combined with a lot of practice that improves the counselling as such. There are **numerous dos and don'ts** which often are country and situation specific, and that cannot be taught nor acquired by reading a manual. Intuition, emotional intelligence, and advice from experienced colleagues will support a return counsellor to approach each case on an individual basis in order to find the best solution for migrant.

Adopting **the migrant centred approach** is, in general, **crucial for building trust** and promoting a good reputation of voluntary return, and return counselling, among migrants. However, any **actions taken by a return counsellor** using this approach **should not** overlap with the services of social workers and migrant services, nor an overstepping of the return counsellor's mandate.

Encourage & guide the TCN to take co-ownership and responsibility for the process.




REINTEGRATION PROGRAMME

Return and Reintegration Counselling

How to deal with cultural & behavioural aspects in return counselling?

Return and Reintegration counselling involves dealing and communicating with people, who are in a very crucial and difficult situation in their lives. **Circumstances, stress, and traumatic experiences can influence the behaviour of people negatively** which is why return counsellors may encounter clients who are angry, aggressive, impatient, or depressed. Dealing with such persons is not always an easy task and it requires that counsellors strike a **balance** between **personal engagement** and **professional distance**. This section will cover the following topics:



Practical Advice on:

- 5.1. Impact of Stress
- 5.2. Psychological Aspects & How To Detect Them
- 5.3. Communication Basics
- 5.4. Intercultural Communication
- 5.5. Cultural Aspects
- 5.6. Importance of Country of Origin Information



5.1. Impact of Stress

What are main stressors?

There are many situations in life that may cause people to feel stress and/or anxiety, such as: financial problems; moving to a new place; starting a new job; divorce; becoming a parent; retirement; or the death of a close person.

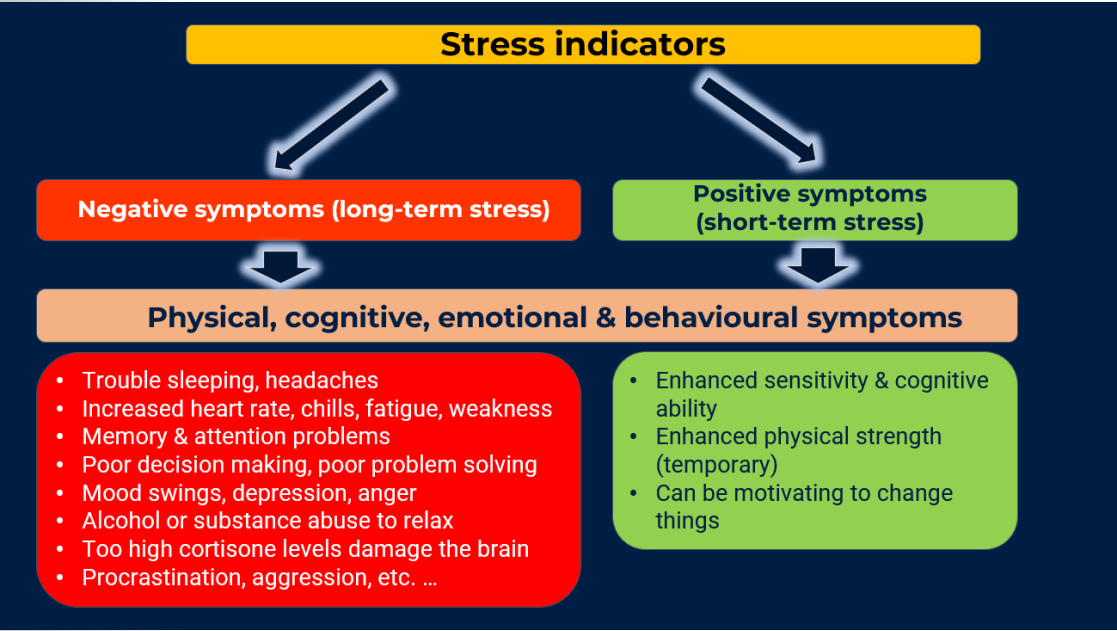
Migrants have often leave their CoO at a great cost and when they receive a return decision, they find themselves in a situation that induce **stress and uncertainty on many levels**. Before receiving a negative decision on asylum, the conditions in reception and detention centres can also have contributed to higher stress levels. A long-term exposure to various stressors can negatively impact the health, behaviour, and abilities of a migrant.

Stress is furthermore not only affecting the migrant, but it **can also impact the counsellor**, as a result of the general working conditions, workload, and/or difficulties relating to specific cases. Stress can have a negative impact on the counselling performance.



Impact of Stress on the Human Body

Stress can cause various but clearly recognisable symptoms.



In addition to this, some migrants might have mental health issues, sometimes due to traumatic experiences, that can get worse if they are under stress.

How to deal with stress as a counsellor?

As a precautionary measure, it is important for return counsellors to have an **easily accessible support network** of both return counsellors and services to reach out to when needed. It is also in the responsibility of the organisation/agency employing the return counsellor to provide regular support and supervision for deployed staff. Ask your supervisors to **find out what options are available** in your organisation.

What's your support strategy?

↓

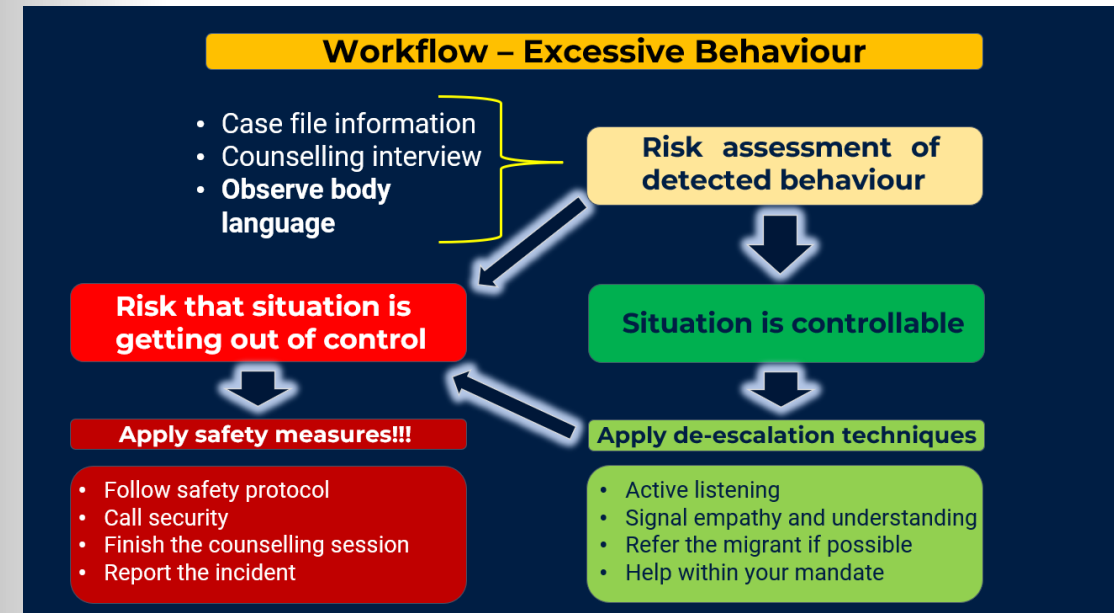
- ☒ Are you part of a counsellor network?
- ☐ Are you part of a team?
- ☐ Is supervision offered in your organisation?
- ☐ Are workshops available to improve your skills?
- ☐ Are you supported by other services?
- ☐ Is there a report mechanism for serious instances?

Checklist

- Sometimes support networks are not available or not entirely known to the counsellor.
- If providing a support network is not a priority of the counsellor's organisation, return counsellors themselves need to invest in building a support network proactively.

Excessive Behaviour a Return Counsellor Could Encounter

Return counsellors are often confronted with returnees who show symptoms of anxiety, aggression, deception, psychological instability, or even psychotic behaviour. Although excessive behaviours such as these are not frequently encountered, **counsellors must be prepared to handle such cases**. It is not the responsibility of a counsellor to treat migrants with psychological or other behavioural issues, but it is **important to know what to do**, how to deescalate a situation or apply safety measures for self-protection, and where to refer migrants in need of additional support.



5.2. Psychological Aspects and How to detect Them

Migrants with Mental Health Problems

Some migrants might suffer from mental health issues, such as depression, trauma (i.e. PTSD), or schizophrenia. Individuals with mental health issues **may display abnormal behaviour** caused by side effects of medication or because of not being medicated at all. Hence, return counsellors may experience disruptions during the counselling process. While it is **not always easy to detect a mental health issue** immediately, some **common disruptions** during the counselling process that could be caused by the underlying mental health issues of the migrant are:

- Being late or missing an appointment
- Telling different stories during the meetings
- Changing the mind about return and reintegration plans
- Impatience & lack of understanding for lengthy procedures
- Emotionally overreacting (crying, screaming, threatening self-harm or suicide)

However, these types of behaviour does not necessarily indicate a mental health problem but could instead be part of a tactic to either prolong the irregular stay or to obstruct the return process.

Disruptions & How to Respond

Return counsellors are not responsible for the mental well-being of their clients and a **counsellor should not feel ashamed if he/she is not capable of dealing with a certain problem of a migrant**. On the contrary, to know one's own limitations is a sign of proper judgement and professionalism. **In case of doubt**, return counsellors should **always consult colleagues** or refer the migrant to a competent stakeholder or medical service.

Practice tip for counsellors

- Check if the voluntary return declaration is sincere.
- Have an exit strategy (e.g., strict time limit for each session).
- If migrants threaten self-harm or suicide, the case must be reported to a superior.
- End the session if necessary and ask/ consult colleagues to assist.

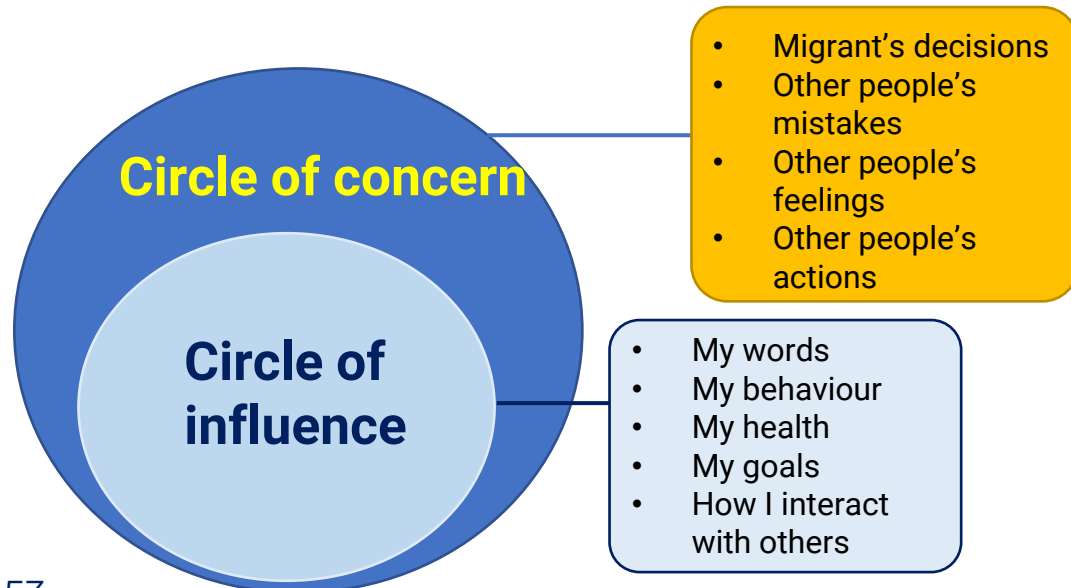


5.3. Communication Basics

What you can and cannot change?

People generally worry about many things, even those that lie out of their control. Everything **beyond the immediate control** of the individual counsellor, lies within the **circle of concern**. For example, the decision of the migrant to return voluntarily, MS migration policy, or even the weather.

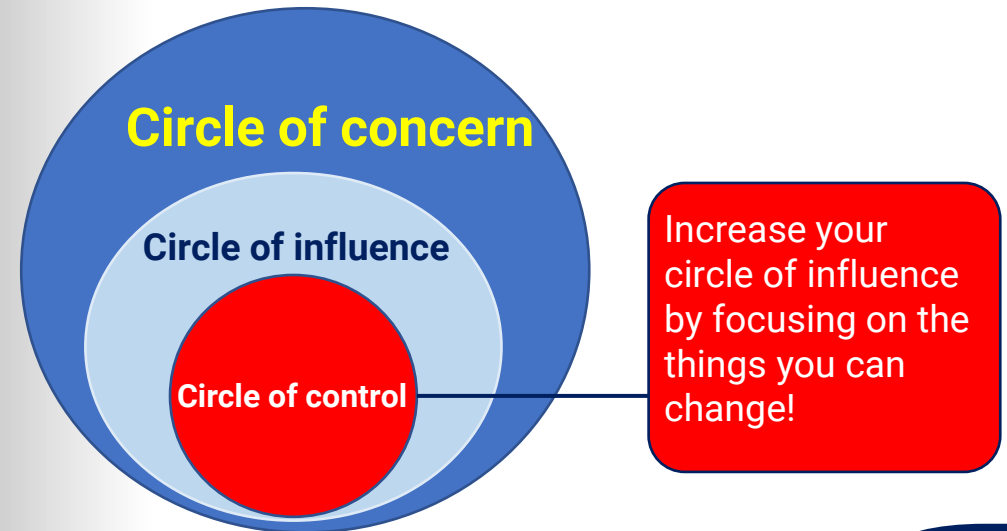
Return counsellors should **focus on aspects that lie within the circle of influence** - meaning things that can impact or change the migrants' actions and attitude, such as showing empathy towards the migrant or to provide high-quality information.



Circle of Concern vs. Circle of Influence & Control

People who focus too much on things that they cannot change, reduce their circle of influence and work reactively. By contrast, people who are proactive will increase their circle of influence by:

- Paying attention to the things they control
- Investing time and effort in things that can be changed
- Having a positive attitude that increases their influence
- Having their feelings in subordination to their values
- Making choices based on their values not on their impulses



Importance of Body Language

Body language is one of the most important ways to communicate and **its impact is often underestimated**. It includes facial expressions, tone of voice, hand gestures, or the posture of a person. A common saying is that 'the body never lies', or at least in contrast to words, body language is more likely to tell what a person really thinks. To know all different types of body language signals is difficult, even for an experienced return counsellor, but **being aware** of them **is important** to ensure effective counselling. Body language can, for example, indicate if a migrant is interested in AVRR or not, which in turn may support a return counsellor in deciding how much time he/she should invest in the case/conversation. Furthermore, since body language is **determined and influenced by culture as well as gender**, it can be easily misinterpreted as the seemingly same gestures can have different meaning in different cultures, countries of origin, or even between men and women. Lastly, while it is important to be able to interpret nonverbal cues, it is **equally important that counsellors are aware of their own body language** and the signals they may transmit to the migrant.

Do not try to convince migrants, who clearly indicate, with either words or their body language, that they are not interested.

Mirroring some ones body language is a good way to respond to the body language of a conversation partner, because it puts the conversation partner at ease and can contribute to a more open dialogue

Body language that is not congruent with the words that are said, indicates that a person has different intentions.

Listening Techniques

An important task during return and reintegration counselling concerns listening to the migrant's story, objections, or plans. There are two types of listening techniques, active and passive.

Active listening:

- Being present with all your senses with attention to the other person without judgement.
- You try to put yourself in the position of the other person's feelings and perceptions by opening yourself completely to him/her and by empathising with his/her thoughts and feelings.
- You listen to the story, and you observe the non-verbal behaviour to find out the underlying feeling (use your own non-verbal communication to show that you are with your conversation partner).
- You summarise what you hear and respond to what is being said (connecting).
- You try to understand the intentions and the experience of the other person by asking questions.

Passive listening:

- Listen to a person, without interrupting or asking questions
- Confirm with a "hum" or "yes"
- Turn your body to the receiver, nod, and maintain eye contact
- Follow the other person's story

Persuasion Styles

There are different persuasion styles and techniques that can help to transmit a message to the migrant. Although it is **important to distinguish persuasion from manipulation**, a return counsellor should be convinced that what is offered, is indeed the best available option and in the best interests of the migrant. People often sense if they are being manipulated and this could lead to a loss of trust and even damage the return counsellor's reputation.

The **rational persuasion style**, which is mostly used in North-West Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world is based on a direct conversation, emphasising a cause-and-effect strategy.

Another persuasion style, that is mostly used in Arabic countries, Latin America or the Mediterranean area is **emotional persuasion**. It involves displaying feelings, sometimes poetically and intensively, which in Northern countries it could be interpreted as exaggeration or overreacting.

A Balanced Persuasion Approach in Counselling

In many countries in Asia and Africa people use imagery and indirect persuasion, meaning that they tend to talk about sensitive subjects in an indirect way, using for example metaphors and imagery speech.

For a return counsellor it is **important to recognise these different styles of persuasion** and adopt a culturally sensitive approach when promoting voluntary return and reintegration programmes.

People from different cultures are used to different persuasion styles.



5.4. Intercultural Communication

Communication Skills in Counselling

The most important skill that a return counsellor must cultivate, is the ability to communicate with people from different cultures and backgrounds. Communication skills can be learned and if they are practiced regularly, they will get better over time.

In the following section you will get an overview of some communication takeaways that are crucial for effective return and reintegration counselling:

Overview:

Cultural Aspects

- Iceberg model & Mayer Matrix
- Cultural awareness & 6 dimensions of national culture)

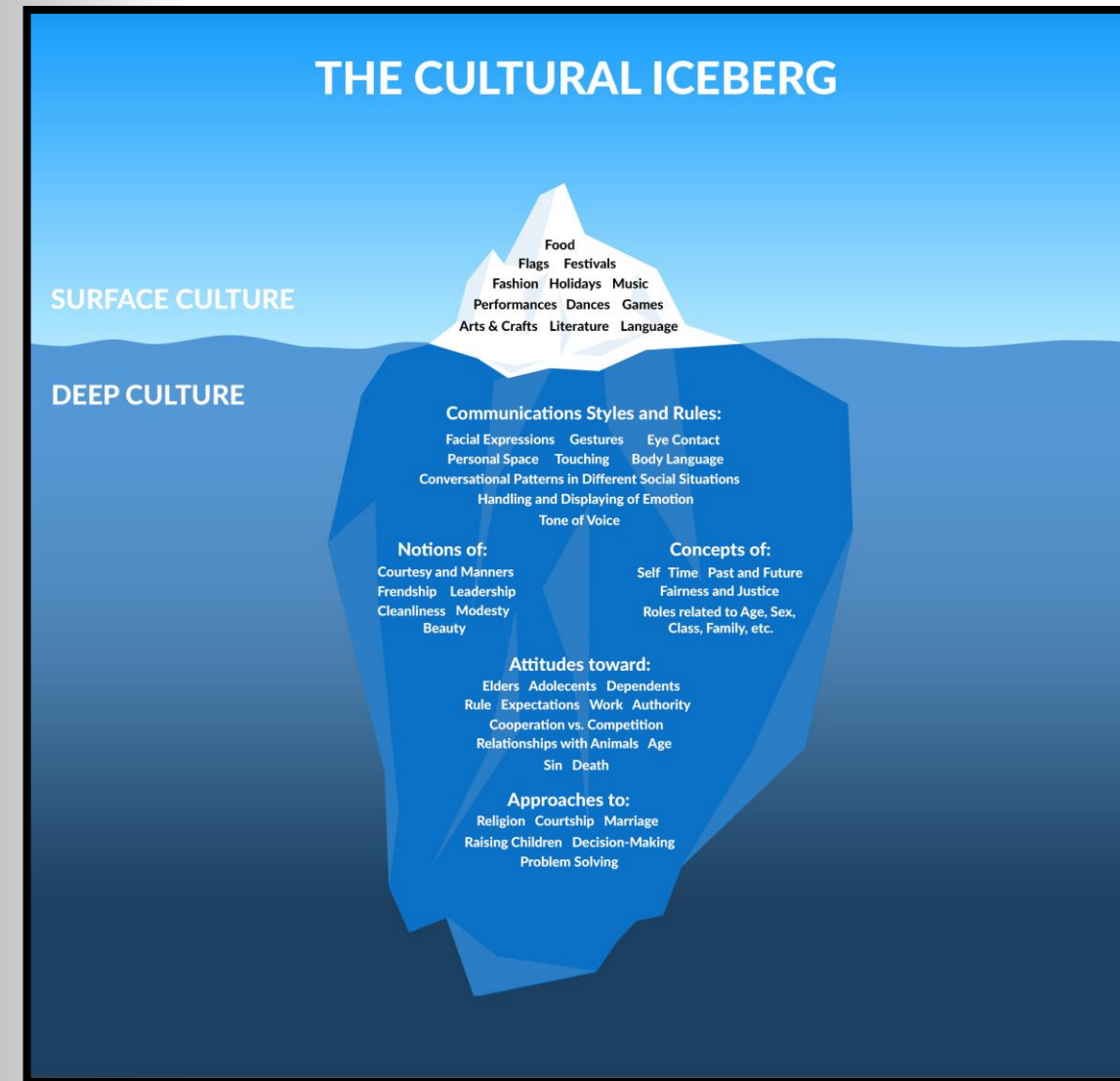
5.5. Cultural Aspects

Cultural Iceberg Model

Communication can be difficult and lead to misunderstandings, even if people come from the same culture. **The cultural dimension is a challenge in return counselling**, but it can be bridged in part by the interpreter.

Return counsellors, however, need to be aware that most cultural aspects, such as values, moral standards, and what is considered accepted behaviour are hidden and cannot be seen. In some countries it is considered **shameful** if a person for example admits in public that they **did not understand** something properly. In such cases, people instead tend to pretend that they in fact understood everything.

The return counsellor might ask if the migrant understood everything that was discussed, and the migrant could respond with “yes”, even if that is not the case. A possible solution to avoid this situation would be to **ask the migrant to rephrase in his/her own words what was discussed** and agreed upon. In this way it is easier to know what the migrant really understood. Alternatively, return counsellors could ask the interpreter to write down the concrete next steps that need to be taken by the migrant.



Emotionality and Confrontation Avoidance

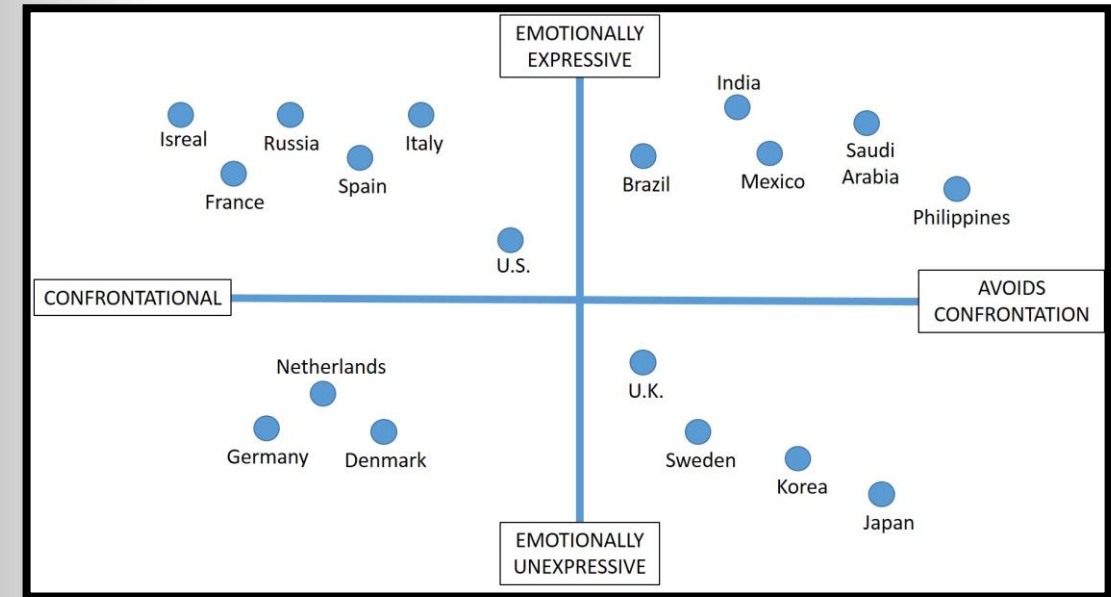
Because people communicate differently around the world, **return counsellors are required to acknowledge cross-cultural communication styles**, which include unwritten rules on evaluating, persuading, leading, disagreeing, and trust-building. Given the extent of emotionality and confrontation that is used in interactions it is **impossible** for a return counsellor to **know all these nuances** and differences and master them at the same time. The main goal should not be to avoid all types of possible misunderstandings or to know all cultural nuances. Like many other professional skills, counselling skills are developed and improved on the job through experience and over time. **What matters is to be aware of these differences**, have enough counselling practice and to have a professional and skilled interpreter or cultural mediator who can give insight and advice on cultural particularities.

Direct vs. indirect communication

The way how direct or indirect information, ideas and opinions are shared and interpreted between individuals differ across cultures, and **often it is not the message itself but how it is conveyed that makes the difference**. In return counselling it is therefore important to be aware of your communication style and to understand how it might differ from that of a TCN. The **level of emotionality** attached to a conversation can, for example, lead to irritation and misunderstandings, particularly if the counsellor and the TCN are not used to the emotional expressions of the other. When a TCN from an emotionally expressive and confrontational culture talks to a counsellor from an confrontation avoiding and emotionally inexpressive culture conflicts can occur easily. The way how things are said can be interpreted as rude or offensive on the receiving end, even the sender did not intend to be offensive.

There are several resources, books and tools available that can help to raise awareness and to improve cross cultural communication. The Erin Meyer Matrix exemplifies these differences and was developed by one of the leading researches in cross-cultural communication:

(Erin) Meyer Matrix

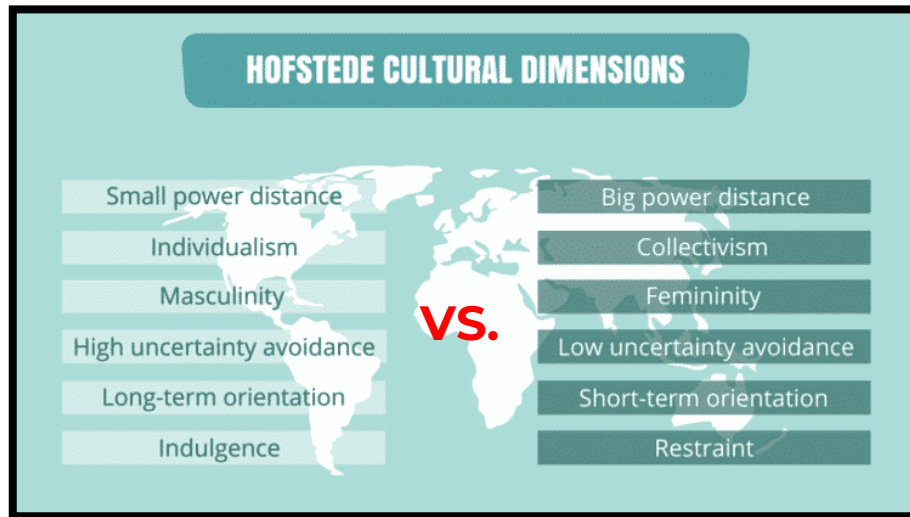


A direct way of communicating might be interpreted as offensive in some cultures.



Impact of National Culture

Another concept that return counsellors should be aware of is the impact of different **dimensions of national culture**, that is based on extensive research of Geert Hofstede. It describes how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. A migrant may have resided outside the country of origin for a longer period of time and in doing so he/she has been influenced by various cultural dimensions. During a counselling session, **return counsellors should** not only be aware of the impact of culture but also **be able to adjust and work with these differences**. The Hofstede model consists of six dimensions that distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other.



Compare different nations here:
Country comparison Tool of the
Culture Factor Group

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness and intercultural communication are at the core of return and reintegration counselling. However, the main goal is not to avoid all types of possible misunderstandings or to know all cultural nuances. Like in other professions, counselling skills are developed on the job, and they generally improve with experience and over time. Counsellors are, usually, also supported by interpreters or cultural mediators who may give insight and advice on cultural particularities.

An important aspect to be aware of in return counselling is the concept of **power distance**, namely how persons in authority are perceived, addressed, and treated in different cultures. Return counsellors are in a position of authority and depending on the MS, they may also be members of for example the police or the border guard. A TCN's past experiences with law enforcement in the CoO may therefore influence his/her perception of a counsellor in the MS.

Another important aspect to take into consideration during the counselling, as it can impact the decision-making process (more under: **Decision Making Process**), relates to whether decisions are made on a more consensual or a more hierarchical basis (level of individualism vs. collectivism). A TCN from a more **collectivist culture** might, for example, not take the decision to return alone or without prior consultation with family members. Yet, although the family may strongly influence a TCN's return process and decision to return, counsellors often do not have any contact with them. Training on non-discrimination and intercultural communication can also help overcoming personal and cultural biases.

Be aware of the impact of culture on the decision making process of the migrant.



Practice Tips for the Counselling Session

Keep in mind the differences of deep culture, which have an impact on the interpretation of what you say.

Be aware of different communication styles and how people express themselves (indirect vs. direct, confrontational vs. confrontation avoiding).

Take national culture into consideration when adapting your communication (power distance level of individualism).

Be aware of differences on how people make decisions based on their culture (consensus based or hierarchical).

Invest time in learning and self-study about cross-cultural differences and communication.

5.6. Importance of Country of Origin Information

It is of paramount importance that counsellors not only are up-to-date on country specific support and reintegration schemes, but also with the country specific situation that migrants will face upon their return. Up-to-date Country of Origin Information (COI) is usually provided by the relevant national asylum agencies. However, many return counsellors do not have access to such information as it is often restricted or classified. The **EUAA COI portal is an open-source data** with non-classified COI that can be accessed by anyone, including return counsellors. Frontex furthermore provides **country information sheets for return counsellors**, that are updated regularly. There are also various other open sources, such as the below links as well as field monitoring and reporting work by OHCHR and others, that can be accessed by counsellors in case they need to dive deeper in country specific data.

However, in the end none of the mentioned resources can substitute first-hand information retrieved on the ground, which in most cases is not available to the return counsellor. For this purpose, the **local RPs should be contacted to get up to date information or case specific advice**. If a migrant has lived abroad for many years, there might have occurred many changes in their CoO, for example in terms of the general situation or in relation to administrative procedures. It can therefore be beneficial for the migrant to connect with the RP to receive up-to-date information and to better prepare for the return.

EUAA Country of Origin Portal

UNHCR Country Information and Guidance

The EU Fundamental Rights Information System

6. Return and Reintegration Counselling in Practice

Return and reintegration counselling is implemented differently across the EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries due to national requirements and legislation. These differences directly impact the workflows of the return counsellor. Depending on the types of **responsibilities and tasks** of the return counsellor in the pre-return phase, **specific skills** and preparations are needed to make the necessary return preparations for the migrant. In this section, you will find specific and practical advice on the following topics to help you during the counselling sessions:



Practical Advice on:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 6.1. Engaging with Stakeholders | 6.8. Decision Making Process |
| 6.2. Outreach towards Migrants | 6.9. Preparations prior to Return |
| 6.3. Setting of the Counselling Session | 6.10. Referrals |
| 6.4. Case Preparation | 6.11. Interpreters |
| 6.5. Safety Measures | 6.12. Case Management |
| 6.6. The first Interview | |
| 6.7. Trust Building | |



6.1. Engaging with Stakeholders

Which stakeholders are necessary for a successful counselling?

Return counselling can only be effective if all relevant stakeholders **communicate and cooperate** properly.

Be aware that the **most important stakeholder is the migrant** since the decision to return and reintegrate in the CoO is primarily affecting his/her life, and possibly the family situation as well. To organise a voluntary return involves many different stakeholders and the return counsellor needs to engage with them proactively.

How can you reach out to stakeholders?

Third country national	Invite him/ her for an interview.
Family of the returnee	Contact the family together with returnee.
Embassy/consulate	Assist in getting travel documents.
Police	Ask the police for information.
Return counsellor	That's you. What are your skills?
Reintegration partner (RP)	Contact the RP together with the returnee.
Asylum/ immigration service	Make sure you have the correct information.
NGO's or Red Cross/UNHCR	Can help you with family tracing.
Legal representative	Needs to be involved in the return process.
Social caseworker	Can assist the migrant, too.

How to decide on stakeholder importance?

Not all stakeholders have the same interest in the return of the migrant and their influence on the return process itself may vary. **Stakeholders can be supportive or obstructive** during the return process. Obstructions can occur if crucial stakeholders, such as embassies, or consulates are delaying or even refusing to issue travel documents. Other crucial stakeholders with influence over the migrant are peers and family members. **A potential returnee sometimes revokes his/her decision to return voluntarily after engaging with one or more of the crucial stakeholders.** Return counsellors often do not have any contact with, or leverage on, these influential stakeholders. Stakeholders can in general be divided into groups based on their level of influence on, and interest in, the return process. To avoid any obstructions, it is **important for the return counsellor to determine (case by case) which stakeholders are the most influential** in the return process, and how to proactively engage with them.

Decision Making Matrix for Stakeholders

		Interest (stake) in a successful return	
		Low interest	High interest
Influence on the return process	High influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Important to get them involved despite their low interest e.g., medical personnel, doctors influential	Most important Stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in good cooperation e.g. immigration service, embassy, police crucial
	Low influence	Least important Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No active engagement necessary e.g., local city administration (host community)

6.2. Outreach Towards Migrants

Reach out to the Migrant

Effective and successful counselling is based on trust, and in particular the migrant's trust in the return counsellor to act in his/her best interests and to provide the correct information. The **main source of information for the irregular migrant on asylum and return matters are their peers and other migrants** and to a lesser extent leaflets, posters or websites on return and reintegration. Nevertheless, these channels can reinforce a migrant's decision-making process by having it explained visually.

Outreach towards potential returnees is one of the tasks of a return counsellor. It is also a responsibility of the MS and the organisation where counselling takes place to enable and support effective outreach towards the migrants. The main purpose of outreach is to inform, advise and provide the correct information on the different return options. It **involves good coordination with the reception/ detention centres or hotspot administrations**. Outreach can also be provided to migrants without a fixed place of residence. This is common practice in some MS and entails reaching out to, and establishing with, migrants in for example parks or public places in city. Do not wait for the migrants to come to you, take the initiative and go to them, if your organisation gives you the freedom to do so.

Outreach is important because migrants often lack correct information or are unaware of the possibilities they have.



Different Forms of Outreach



Individual conversations

Group information meetings

Presentations for social workers in reception facilities

Informing about services with posters, leaflets & business cards

A good outreach strategy includes networking and connecting with other return counsellors and local stakeholders. The **main goal is to inform potential returnees** in your area of responsibility **what services and assistance you can offer** to them as a return counsellor. On the next page you will find some important questions that can guide you to your outreach planning.

Outreach in Practice

An outreach plan **can only yield positive results** if the relevant stakeholders, such as the social service workers, colleagues from the asylum service, or staff in the reception centre administration are onboard. To carry out a successful outreach strategy return counsellors **must engage with the relevant stakeholders** first, before talking to the migrants.

Make an outreach plan



Who are the other counsellors in the area? – Are you in contact?

Are there other migrant centres in your reach you didn't visit yet?

Do social workers in migrant centres know the services you offer?

Do you visit the detention or the reception centre regularly?

Are posters, leaflets and opening hours distributes in migrant centres?

Are migrants invited to the counselling when they receive a return decision?



Onboard the Stakeholders

Once you have an overview of the specific stakeholders in your area, you can reach out to them and inform them about your work, the benefits of the return and reintegration programmes, and **specify what you can and cannot offer to the migrant**. It is also very important to provide information about the average length of the return process, from the lodging an application for return or reintegration assistance until the actual date of return. Experience shows that if a decision on a voluntary return has been made by the migrant, he/she expects that the return will happen as quick as possible. A **proper communication** of the length of the process helps to better manage the migrants' expectations and avoids or **mitigates potential frustration**.

What the engagement with stakeholders eventually looks like depends on the organisational setting and the circumstances where the counselling takes place. Due to the specifics of a case load assigned to a counsellor, or whether there is an open-door policy at the open reception centres or the decentralised accommodation where the migrant might stay – **counsellors will have to deal with different stakeholders** who do not have same influence or importance in each counselling setting. For example, counsellors that work in an office or a social service centre will engage with different main stakeholders compared to a counsellors situated at a detention or reception centre.

Onboard the stakeholders

Experience demonstrates that in reception centres and centralised accommodation facilities, it is often the staff who are the first to inform migrants about the possibility of return counselling. The staff are therefore one of the **key stakeholders** in such a counselling setting. If staff are convinced that a counsellor offers a good service, they may recommend the return counsellor in case they see a migrant that feels homesick or tells them that he/she wants to return .

To summarise, **effective outreach** is an activity that stands on two pillars – engaging the stakeholders and engaging the potential returnees.

A good outreach strategy contributes to more counselling sessions.



6.3. Setting of the Counselling Session

The environment where a counselling session takes place can influence the willingness of the migrant to be open to, and to share, information. Return counselling should **ideally** be done **in a calm place, for example an office that provides a confidential space for conversations**. In reality, this is however not always possible due to a lack of available rooms in often overcrowded reception and/or detention centres. Since counselling can take place at different stages of the migration path, **the return counsellor needs to adapt** to these different settings and circumstances. Counselling sessions could take place in the following different places/forms:

A: At arrival points, first reception centres, transit centres

Bear in mind, that the migrant might not be willing to talk about return at that point and other that needs are likely to have priority.

B: Counselling in immigration detention facilities

Explore if counselling can be done in a dedicated and appropriate office in the detention centre. Be aware that the detention circumstances may negatively affect the psychosocial condition of the migrant to a varying degree.

C: Remote return counselling

Explore if counselling can be done outside of the detention centre.

How to improve the setting?

Ideally, a return counsellor has a separate office where he/she can easily adjust the setting to ensure **a confidential space**, in which the migrant feels safe to openly communicate without fearing that other people hear about his/her private issues. If a return counsellor does not have access to a separate office dedicated to counselling, he/she should explore whether there are other meeting rooms available, where counselling could take place to ensure an appropriate confidential and **safe setting**.

1. Prepare a friendly room with plants or pictures on the walls.

2. Prepare a confidential environment to reduce the power distance.

3. Provide something to drink for the migrant. Be aware of the risks involved with hot drinks.

4. Provide a confidential space where you can close the door.

5. Prepare paper, crayons and some toys for parents with children.

6. Apply safety measures and the local security protocol.

6.4. Preparing a case for a Counselling Session

What do you need before the first counselling?

Depending on the workload and the amount of people scheduled to be counselled per day, the time to prepare each counselling session can be very limited. Some preparations are general and recurring for each case while others are more case specific. **Proper case management is key** to successful return counselling and ideally there is a standardised (digital) case management system in place. More information under:

8.4. Case Management

General Case Preparations

- Be **informed and up-to date** on the general conditions in the country of origin of your clients (information can be found on the **Country-of-Origin Information Portal of the EU Asylum Agency** and on national data bases or by open-source analysis).
- Personal data and legal status, and if possible case history, should be known.
- All needed application documents should be ready and available (e.g., application and consent forms)
- Information on support programmes needs to be up to date (information & leaflets on the return & reintegration programmes in the correct language).
- Business cards or contact details for further appointments are available.
- Interpreter or cultural mediator is available or booked.

[EUAA Country of Origin Portal – click here.](#)

Counselling Sessions – Specific Preparations

- Sometimes a specialised caseworker must be involved (e.g. in the case of unaccompanied minors or alleged victims of human trafficking – depending on national requirements and protocols)
- Vulnerabilities – See further under **Vulnerable Groups**
- A legal Guardian is involved, if necessary
- The security staff must always be informed in case of known behavioural issues or if counselling is done in open or detention centres – see further on the next page.

To steer the conversation effectively, you need to know beforehand what information you need to proceed with the next steps.

Checklist

What information do you need from the migrant?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Administrative status of the migrant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any health condition
<input type="checkbox"/>	Status of the asylum procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	Possible vulnerabilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Status of the appeal procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	Existence of functional social network in home country
<input type="checkbox"/>	Existing ID & travel documents	<input type="checkbox"/>	Work experience & educational background

6.5. Safety Measures

Safety Measures & practice tips

Safety measures must consider the specific circumstances of the case. To determine what the relevant measures are in your case, you should consider factors such as:

- Psychological state of a person (mental health)
- Medical state of a migrant (also contagious diseases)
- A known criminal record of the migrant
- Counselling in a team or alone
- The location of the session
- Local safety protocols and rules
- Nature of the counselling session (mandatory or voluntary)

Safety measures apply not only to the return counsellor, but also to the migrant and the interpreter. Since counselling concerns personal information about the migrant, the conversation must take place in a **confidential setting** that respects his/her needs and safety.



Practical Tips for Return Counsellors

1. Communicate the safety and confidentiality rules to the interpreter and to the migrant before the counselling session.
2. The return counsellor should protect the interpreter's identity and not disclose his or her name to the migrant unless the interpreter gives his/her consent.
3. Contingency planning should include possible scenarios and exit plans and needs to be communicated to the security staff where the counselling takes place.
4. Make sure you are aware of the possibilities and limitations of a meeting room (Don't sit in a corner and not with your back to the door).
5. Remove any sharp objects out of the room.
6. Is there an emergency button or a possibility to call in security fast enough?
7. Plan hygienic safety measures in case of known contagious diseases or in an epidemic/pandemic. Don't start or continue with the counselling session if you are not well prepared or informed on the (mental) state of the person.

More in the Communication

Because of security don't do counselling alone in an open camp & always in a team, if possible.



6.6. The First Interview

The Importance of the first Interview

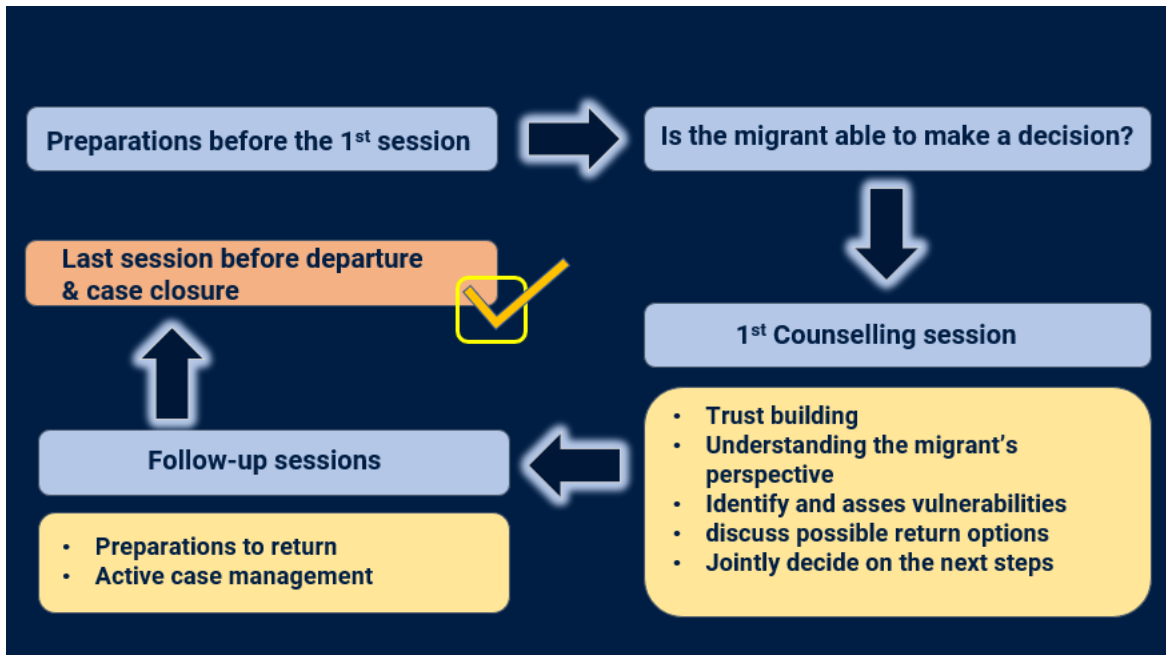
The first interview is a **very important step** at the beginning of the counselling process. Depending on the decisions of the migrant, and the complexity of the case, it can be succeeded by several follow-up meetings. The main goal of the first session is to **break the ice** and build trust for future sessions. It should ideally also start a dialogue about the migrant's future in the country of origin by **discussing the different return options**. See **Decision Making Process**

If a migrant is not interested, it could be that the case is closed from the return counsellor's side already after the first session.

Every counselling session plays an important part in the return process that eventually leads to the return of the migrant. Since the whole return process can take a few weeks up to several months, it is also **important to consider and communicate the time constraints** that are attached to a return decision and an order to leave the country. If there is a rotation in staff, it is important that all information or meeting outcomes are properly documented in the case file, to ensure that other colleagues can easily follow-up on the case.



Return Counselling Cycle



Try to have a dialogue instead of monologuing.



6.7. Trust Building

Return counselling is a people-centred job and like in any other relationship-based professions, trust is essential to ensure a functioning working relationship. Since return counselling concerns advising people in their decision-making, it is **fundamental to create and maintain an atmosphere of trust**. It is also crucial for the decision-making process which starts during a return counselling session. If there is a lack of trust, a returnee will not be open to advice, or proposals made by the return counsellor. The connection of trust once it is established is also called **rapport** (more under chapter 6.8.). Building trust during the counselling session is not an easy task, especially if there is just one session or meeting.

Several general principles can contribute to a successful trust building:

1. Be aware that trust building takes time.

Trust building takes time, and it is unrealistic to expect that the migrant immediately will trust and believe the return counsellor. Because of personal experiences in the country of origin, a migrant may have a profound mistrust for government officials and/or counsellors. Cultural and even religious differences can also be a source of mistrust.

2. Be empathetic and put yourself in the shoes of the migrant.

Empathy is key for creating an atmosphere of trust. It concerns the ability to put oneself in the position of the migrant. **As a return counsellor** it is important to remember that counselling often takes place after a negative decision on asylum when the migrant is at a turning point in his/her life and in a situation of crushed hopes and uncertainty for the future.



3. Be true to your word that is reflected by your actions.

Trust cannot be created if a migrant doubts the information that he/she receives from the counsellor, and/or believes that it is incorrect, incomplete or does not reflect the reality.

Clear and honest communication, which includes expectation management on the duration of the process, can contribute to maintaining the trust.

4. Adapt your communication to the reality of the person you are talking to.

Easy and understandable communication that avoids technical terms and official bureaucratic language, can help to foster trust with the migrant. Since some migrants are illiterate or only have basic education, it will be easier for the migrant to understand the interpreters if return counsellors **adapt the language** to the educational background of the migrant.

5. Be aware of cultural obstacles to trust building.

Misunderstandings can be a source of mistrust and are often rooted in cultural differences and concepts about roles, responsibilities and expectations. A professional **interpreter needs to have** sufficient knowledge of the migrant's culture and country of origin. This can help to avoid misunderstandings and bridge the communication gap between the return counsellor and the migrant.

Don't share personal data without the written consent of the migrant!



Confidentiality is of Utmost Importance

Return counsellors receive a lot of personal information about the migrant during the counselling process. Data protection is essential for ensuring the safety and integrity of the migrant, and counsellors should only collect, process and store personal data that are adequate, relevant, and limited to what is necessary for the purposes. Access to personal data stored in data bases of the authorities is strictly limited to the staff involved in the case management and must not be disseminated to persons or organisations without authorised access. Before sharing any personal data, counsellors should always make a risk assessment in line with the data protection regulations governing their organisation, and ensure that there is a lawful basis for sharing the requested information.

In some cases, it might be that the authorities have issued **a more extensive ban on sharing personal information about a person**, due to threats to their life by other persons or even family members. In practice, this means that no information on the current address can be given to anybody outside of the law enforcement authorities that deal with such cases. Return counsellors may be approached by other migrants, family members or non-stakeholders, who request the counsellor to provide information about other returnees. Such information should never be shared without the consent of the person concerned. For purposes of integrity, counsellors should neither confirm to unauthorised persons that a specific individual has an open or ongoing case.

Maintaining confidentiality is a professional requirement which is of utmost importance for data protection purposes as well as a fundamental component in building trust towards the migrant.



By clearly communicating the purpose behind any data collection and the limitations with regard to access, migrants may feel more confident in sharing information.

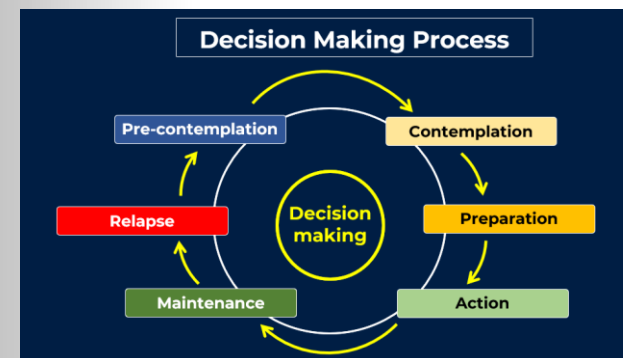
- As a general rule, information about a migrant **must not** be shared without the explicit written consent of the person.
- Return counsellors without access to the national migrant register or other relevant government databases, usually do not know if there is a **ban on personal information** issued on a person.
- In case of doubt, the return counsellor can always contact the competent migration authority to get more information on the specifics of the case.

6.8. Decision-Making Process

Return counselling is not only about sharing information and advice on different return options. During the counselling process **the migrant also needs to be able to make an informed decision**. Decision-making is not always easy, especially if it involves elements of uncertainty and concerns making life-changing decisions. It is rather a process that is influenced by different factors and highly determined by cultural values and norms. Decisions that affect an individual are made differently in collective societies compared to societies which are characterised by a more individual focused culture. For persons coming from societies characterised by the former, the choice to return voluntarily often depends on other stakeholders, like the family and relatives of a migrant, and not only on the migrant's individual preferences.

More under:

Stakeholders



The decision-making process can be divided into different phases.

1. Pre-contemplation/ Intention Phase

In this phase, the migrant does not think of changing his behaviour. The person is **not willing to talk about change** or anything related to return for that matter, and any attempts to steer the person in that direction will be met with resistance. Because the person is in resistance (to avoid change), he/she is likely to use **conservative language** – meaning words that express the unwillingness for change, such as ‘I don’t want’, ‘I can’t’, ‘I don’t need’, ‘I am not interested’, etc. To push for behavioural change in this situation will make the person more reluctant to change. Instead, it is better to **listen to the person and ask** what the advantage of maintaining the status quo would be. In this phase, return counsellors needs to **establish a connection with the migrant**, also known as rapport, and built trust.

More under:

Trust Building

Building up rapport is essential for all forthcoming phases of the decision-making process. Ask questions and **show genuine interest** in the reasons to why someone does not want to change (yet). Try to understand the other person and **put yourself in their shoes**. When the migrant feels heard, there will be more room to focus on other aspects of change.

2. Contemplation Phase

In the contemplation phase the migrant understands that something will have to change but feels ambivalent. The migrant **starts to think about changing** his/her behaviour but also tries to favour the current state by not fully committing to anything. When the person is ambivalent about what decision to take, a decision conflict – which is an individual's uncertainty about the action to be taken – will occur.

Now is the time for the migrant to explore his own ambivalence. It is important to let him/her explore the pros and cons of the current and the future state of the situation, by using the decision balance model. The counsellor can help in this process by not providing all the answers and solutions for the migrant, if he/she is not yet ready for change. If the migrant indicates a need for it, **more information could be provided** or to discuss the person's ambivalence, to compare the pros and cons, and to listen carefully to the person's underlying desire. The information provided should include information **about return and reintegration support** and practical tips on what is the most favourable solution for the migrant.

By discussing the available options with the person and for example, asking about his/her core values and drive, **will help the person to understand** which situation, option or preference is more important to him or her. An individual's personal values influence the choice(s) that he/she eventually makes and which options he/she considers realistic or not.

What does someone really want? Once that is clear, counsellors can give more focus and attention to that during the conversation. Return **counsellors can for example ask** the person about the reason why he/she wants or desires to move in that direction. By devoting sufficient time and attention to this, the person will eventually be able to make a choice as his/her ambivalence balance will tip in one direction or the other.

A person who is in the contemplation phase is generally still resisting, and when contemplating the pros and cons of different options he/she uses both conservative and preparatory change language. In this **phase it is therefore crucial to provide tailored information** that takes the individual circumstances of the migrant into account.

Practice Tip

As a counsellor, it is important that you:

- Do not push for change and do not give solutions!
- Try to establish/keep 'rapport' and a relationship of trust.
- Let the person explore the different options for the current and future state by using the "decision balance" (**see page 94**).
- Seek for 'change language', because this language argues for change (and argues against maintaining the status quo).

3. Preparation Phase

In this phase a person is thinking more and more about changing his/her situation. The person prepares to change, or **actively shows willingness** to adapt his/her behaviour but does not take any concrete actions to change it yet. The person understands the need to take a different course of action and talks more in terms of “I need to” while being **interested in finding out what options are available**. Although it is still only a tough process without concrete actions, the person uses preparation change language to a greater extent compared to before.

During the preparation phase the return **counsellor is coaching/ leading the person**, and the interaction goes well directed towards change. A return counsellor can, for instance, **show real examples** of migrants who have returned successfully and/or contact a reintegration partner (either online or via phone), to further **clarify any questions** the potential returnee might have.

Practice Tip

Be careful with your “being right” reflex! Because if the migrant feels outside pressure when being in this phase, he/she may drop out or return to the contemplation phase.

4. Action Phase and Maintenance

In this phase the migrant takes active steps towards the goal (i.e. returning) by indicating with words that he/she is motivated and committed to realising it. The migrant uses mobilising change language and new behaviour (compliance) replaces old behaviour (resistance). The migrant starts to act proactively to support the return process and enters the **circle of influence**. Revisit **Communication Basics**

During this phase, **a counsellor should ideally**, instead of helping the migrant with everything, encourage the migrant to become more autonomous in finding out what measures he/she can take to facilitate the return. More concretely, **a counsellor can ask** “What can you do yourself?”.

By giving the migrant more autonomy the return counsellor can **focus more on accelerating the relevant operational procedures** to avoid any potential delays caused by the authorities. Delays of this kind can lead to frustration on the migrant’s side and increase the risk that the migrant drops out of the return process.

During this phase, **expectation management** and a good **pre-departure coordination** is **crucial**. Too lengthy procedures can both lead to mistrust and a change of mind on the migrant’s side.

5. Behaviour Maintenance Phase

In this phase, the person has two options: Behaviour maintenance or relapse. **The desired option is** to ensure that the person does not return to the behaviour of resisting but remains committed to, and maintains, the new and changed behaviour.

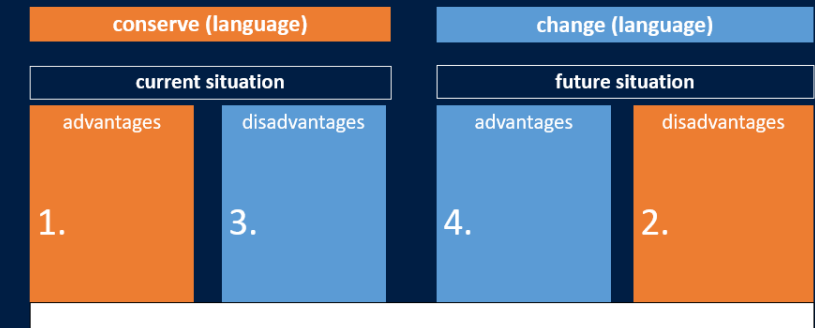
If the migrant decides not to take a final decision regarding the return, or drops out of the process, the return counsellor should **ask the migrant** what the main obstacle is or what went wrong or if more information needs to be provided. If the obstacles can be removed the migrant might step back into the process, and/or go through the different phases rather quickly.

Being aware of the existence of the different phases of the decision-making process and what they entail, **can support** return **counsellors in improving the communication flow**. In reality, it can however be difficult to influence the decisions of people – and migrants – as a third party. Although counsellors can promote and encourage voluntary return – especially if the migrant resides in an open reception centre and is presented with a possibility to avoid forced return – the **people take decisions independently**. The possibility to choose voluntary return does not guarantee that the migrant will refrain from absconding.

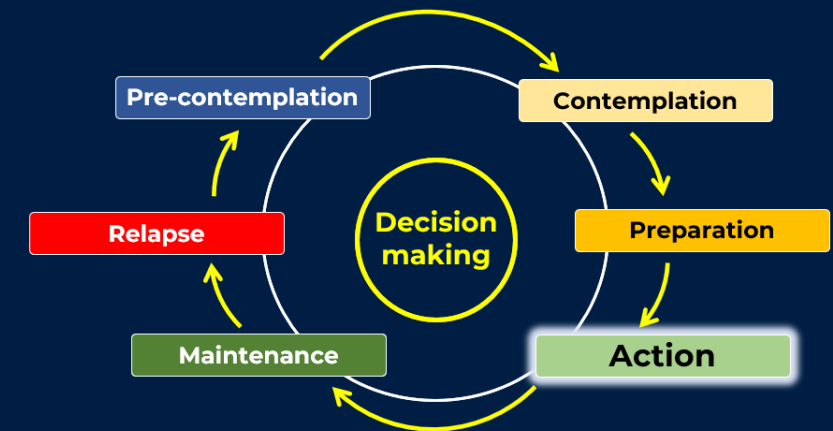
Relapse

Relapse can happen at any stage of the decision making process. A persons could go several times through it to finally maintain the decision they took.

The Decision Balance: from conserve to change



Decision Making Process



6.9. Preparations Prior to Return

One of the most important counselling sessions is the last meeting before departure. It is usually the moment when the return counsellor **provides last minute details** to the returnee as well as information about what he/she needs to know before the departure. It is also the time when all relevant documents are handed to the returnee. Due to the language barrier, an **interpreter is essential** to avoid any misunderstandings that could endanger the successful return.

Things that could go wrong


- The returnee misses the bus/train to the airport (in case of a VR)
- The returnee misses the flight.
- The returnee gets arrested on the way to the airport.
- The returnee disappears/ absconds.
- The returnee changes his mind at the last moment.
- The returnee is very late for the last meeting and no interpreter is available.

Prior to departure there are a number of **must haves** and **nice to haves** that need to be ready.

Checklist of last meeting

Travel documents, medical certificates, other identity documents such as original marriage or birth certificates, the contact details of the reintegration partner, etc. are just a few **must haves**, of a non-exhaustive list of necessary things the returnee needs before departure. Other things, such as school records, or medical certificates of treatments that were undertaken in the host country, are **nice to have**, since such may facilitate the reintegration process.

To dos at the last meeting



- ☒ Hand out cash assistance.
- ☐ Hand out the address of the RP.
- ☐ Explain the travel modalities.
- ☐ Hand out travel documents.
- ☐ Hand out medicine supply.
- ☐ Proof of reception signatures
- ☐ Explain the airport procedures.
- ☐ ...
- ☐ ...

Checklist

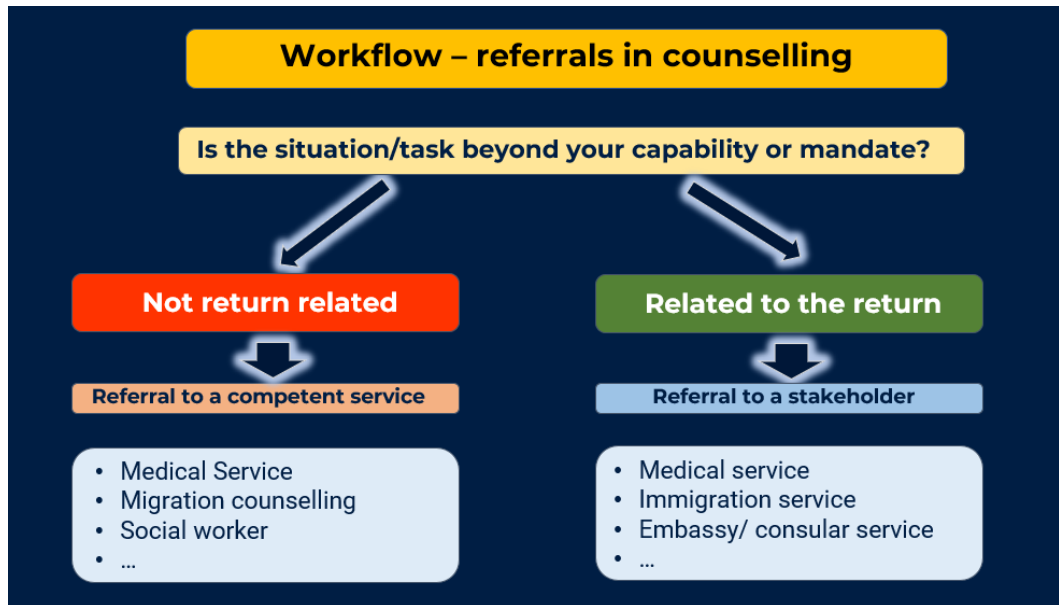
What a returnee is required to have, and what a return counsellor must do, **depends on the procedures of the Member State** or the return programme that is used. It could be that the responsibilities of the return counsellor are very limited and that he/she does not have to hand out any documents or arranging cash assistance payouts.

If your tasks as a return counsellor include handing out for example important documents or cash assistance, you always need to properly document these handovers and make sure that the returnee **confirms the reception of all items with his/her signature**.

6.10. Referrals

Know your own Limitations

It can happen that a returnee asks for help or assistance that lie outside of the competency and mandate of the return counsellor. It may for example concern **non-return related matters**, such as housing conditions, the payment of asylum seeker benefits or medical treatment. If such issues arise during the counselling session, the return counsellor needs to **communicate the limitations of return assistance** to the returnee and refer the migrant to other competent services. A return counsellor needs to **know where to refer the returnee** in such situations. Referrals are also an integral part of the stakeholder cooperation during the return preparation process.



Dropping-out of the Return Process

Not every counselling session results in a voluntary return declaration or an application for return and reintegration assistance.

Even after a voluntary return declaration or an application for assistance is made, it may happen that the migrant changes his/her mind. Such declaration or application could be also a tactic to postpone a forced removal. **Common signals to pay attention to** are a lack of cooperation to contribute to the acquiring of travel documents, a refusal to reveal the true identity or continually missing counselling appointments. Other reasons could be absconding or a decision by the immigration/asylum service to move the migrant to another accommodation far away. The return counsellor should always have the **contact details** and telephone number of his/her clients **to be able to follow up the cases**. Good stakeholder management will also ensure that the return counsellor gets the necessary information, for example, if a migrant is transferred to another location or detention centre.

Who should be informed?

Sometimes migrants return to a counsellor after a longer period of absence. The reason can be that they feel a need to return to their CoO due to urgent family obligations, such as the death or a serious illness of a close relative. It is therefore **useful to duly document** all progress in a case file to facilitate taking up the case once again (**Case Management**).



Dropping-out of the Return Process

A declaration to return voluntarily can lead to an extension of the period for voluntary departure, and to a postponement of the preparations of a forced removal. **If a migrant** with a return decision **is no longer interested** in a voluntary return, the responsible authority **should be informed** so that the preparations for a forced removal can proceed.

6.11. Interpreters & Cultural Mediators

One of the **most important external services** used by return counsellors are interpreters and cultural mediators. In order to successfully involve them during a counselling session, return counsellors must understand how different aspects (e.g. **dynamics**; proper **briefing** and **debriefing**; different levels of professionalism) may have an impact on the counselling.

Interpreters are professionals who generally undergo several years of training. Ideally, they also possess a thorough **understanding of the deep culture** in one or several third countries, which enables them to act as cultural mediators. Due to sometimes **limited availability of highly skilled interpreters or certain languages**, return counsellors may have to rely on semi-professional interpreters or imperfect IT tools and translation apps.

The quality of interpretation services depend on the skillset and level of professionalism of the individual interpreter. These aspects have a considerable impact on the dynamics of the counselling session, and may **support or disrupt the dialogue with the migrant**. Disruptions can for example occur when interpreters do not adhere to the principle of neutrality and overstep their role. Return **counsellors must always lead the conversation** with the migrant and **guide the interpreter** in fulfilling his/her supporting role.

Practice tips

Here is some practical advice when dealing with interpreters:

- Brief the interpreter before the counselling session.
- Introduce the interpreter to the migrant and explain his/her role.
- Debrief the interpreter after the meeting, if applicable.

Practice Tip

- ✓ Professional interpreters always translate what was said in the first person and not in narrator mode. (e.g.: *"I want to return voluntarily because a family member is seriously ill."* – not: *"He said that he wants to return because a family member is ill."*)
- ✓ Professional interpreters don't have conversations with the migrant on the sidelines or outside of the actual engagement.
- ✓ Professional interpreters are always neutral in relation to ethnicity, political views or religious affiliation of the migrant.
- ✓ Professional interpreters flag potential deceptive behaviour to the counsellor, particularly if it stems from deep culture which counsellors may not grasp.

6.12. Case Management

The return process – from counselling until the migrant boards a plane and eventually returns – can take anything from **a few weeks up to several months**. It could be especially long when cases are complex, for example cases that concern returnees with medical vulnerabilities or the involvement of many different external stakeholders.

If there is a rotation of return counsellors or if team members change, it could be that **different persons work on the same case**. A case can also be handed over if a problem or dispute arises between a migrant and a return counsellor. Regardless of the reasons behind the handover, a **proper documentation of the case is crucial to ensure the continuation** of the counselling and return process.

- The requirements for monitoring, reporting and case file management, generally depend on the internal procedures of the MS.
- Proper management of case files is also part of the daily tasks of a return and reintegration counsellor.



Case File Management

Having a case file and clear rules for case management makes it easier to hand over a case, monitor progress and avoid unnecessary doublings of interviews.

A proper case file **should document the following** in manner that is compliant with data protection rules:

Checklist

Documents & info that could be in a case file

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Personal data that is needed for an application	<input type="checkbox"/>	Languages the migrant speaks
<input type="checkbox"/>	Copy of medical documents	<input type="checkbox"/>	Return & reintegration programme the migrant uses
<input type="checkbox"/>	Signed consent forms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vulnerability assessment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Copies of ID documents	<input type="checkbox"/>	Last meeting/ next follow up meeting
<input type="checkbox"/>	Information of number meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other relevant notes

7. How to deal with vulnerable groups in return counselling?

Every return case is different, with its unique set of challenges that need to be overcome by the migrant and the counsellor to ensure that return and reintegration processes always work in **the best interests of the migrant**. The EU regulations, and the Return Directive in particular, put a specific emphasis and requirement on how to treat vulnerable returnees. These rules should safeguard a more dignified return, that is **aligned with the fundamental rights** of the European Union.

In this section return counsellors will find out **how to define, detect and address vulnerabilities** during the return counselling process.

Vulnerable Groups

Practical Advice on:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 7.1. Recognition of Vulnerabilities Among Irregular Migrants | 7.8. Single Parents |
| 7.2. How to Identify and Respond to Vulnerabilities? | 7.9. Families with Children |
| 7.3. Elderly | 7.10. Returning with a health condition |
| 7.4. Victims of Trafficking and Exploitation | 7.11. Social Vulnerability |
| 7.5. Minors/Children Returning without Parents | 7.12. Economic Vulnerability |
| 7.6. Pregnant Women | |
| 7.7. Unaccompanied Minors | |

7.1. Recognition of Vulnerabilities among Irregular Migrants

A vulnerability is a condition that needs to be adequately assessed and catered for to ensure appropriate protection and the full **respect of the persons' human dignity** and fundamental rights. Return counsellors should always **strive to identify vulnerabilities as early as possible** as they may have an impact on the return and reintegration process. Not all vulnerabilities are however easily detectable.

Vulnerable persons require specific attention under national and European laws. According to Art. 3 of the Return Directive, 'vulnerable persons' include the following: **minors; unaccompanied minors; disabled people; elderly people; pregnant women; single parents** with minor children; and **persons** who have been **subjected to torture, rape, or other serious forms of psychological, physical, or sexual violence**. Although certain population groups, such as the ones listed above, constitute a vulnerable category by European Laws (Return Directive), it is important to always make an individual assessment of each person's particular situation and needs, as vulnerabilities can occur at any time.

In many EU MS and Schengen Associated Countries there are **protocols on how to deal with, and respond to, these vulnerabilities** once they have been identified. Such rules/protocols (e.g. how to engage with unaccompanied minors) **must be strictly followed**, because a violation of these procedures could lead to disciplinary or even legal consequences for the return counsellor.

7.2. How to identify and respond to vulnerabilities?

Not every vulnerability is obvious, and some remain undetected (e.g. victims of torture, rape, or serious forms of psychological, physical, or sexual violence) because victims often avoid talking about these matters, especially if such are connected with a trauma, shame and/or stigmatisation.

There is **no uniform way or procedure** in place on how **to detect vulnerabilities** that are not obvious at first sight but a good starting point is to **review the existing case files** where important information on possible vulnerabilities normally could be found, such as **asylum interview reports or other documents**. Return counsellors without access to previous case files should, when possible, reach out to the colleagues/authorities involved in the earlier procedures (e.g. asylum process) and inquire about previously identified vulnerabilities. Access may however also be limited due to data protection restrictions or legislation. Any identified vulnerabilities should **always be documented** in the case file to prevent them from being overlooked at later stages of the return process.

Be aware of national and procedural rules regarding vulnerable groups.



Identify Vulnerabilities During the Counselling

Return counsellors who are successful in **trust building** and manage to engage the migrant in a dialogue during the first interview, may gather more information about possible (hidden) vulnerabilities.

The European Asylum Agency (EUAA) developed a special tool for identifying persons with vulnerabilities and special needs¹⁵.

Try the IPSN-Tool.

Although it was developed for the purpose of improving the asylum and reception procedures, the tool is also **useful in identifying special needs and vulnerabilities** in the context of return. It includes a definition of vulnerability that is wider than the seven that are listed in the Return Directive. A migrant could have an inherent vulnerability (personal experience of trauma, disability, etc.) or be in a situation or circumstance that makes him/her more vulnerable (e.g. a lack of integration into a social support network or limited economic means in the country of origin).

Assess and document vulnerabilities continuously, but don't forget to review older case files.

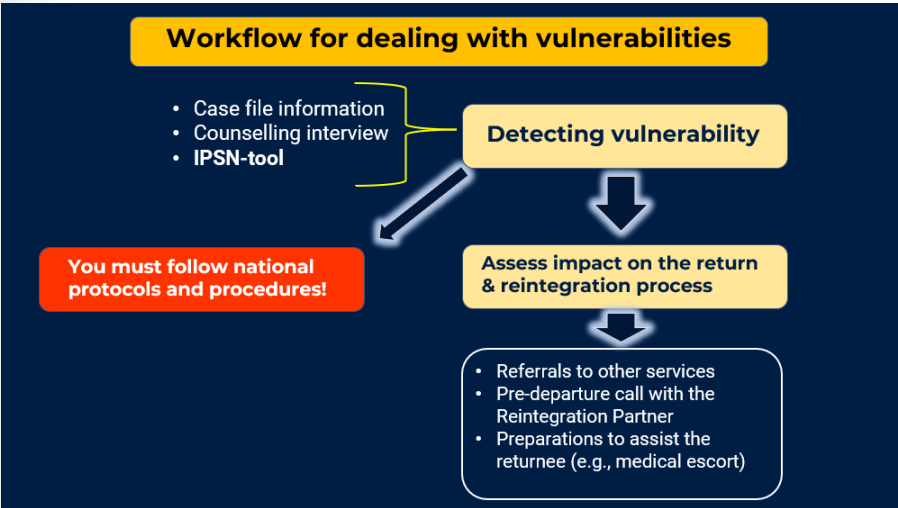


Tool for Identifying Vulnerabilities:

The IPSN-tool is a browser-based tool that allows the user to enter data – in an anonymous and data protection compliant way – to create a report with the **identified needs**. The report can then be used to **plan the next steps of the return process** or as a basis to refer the migrant to a relevant specialised service, where appropriate assistance or support can be offered.

What is the role of the counsellor?

In return and reintegration counselling the **key question** regarding identified vulnerabilities concerns whether the vulnerability could hinder a successful return and reintegration. Return and reintegration **counsellors should** therefore always **strive to identify relevant actions** that may reduce any potential negative impacts linked to an identified vulnerability.



7.3. Elderly

Elderly returnees are facing several challenges when they need to return. It is important to acknowledge that multi-level vulnerability often occurs in the case of elderly people. Chronic health issues and the lack of economic resources as well as **age-related limitations** in starting an income generating activity can increase the vulnerability of the elderly returnee. A **tailored approach** by the counsellor is **needed** to mitigate the possible negative effects on the return and reintegration process.

Instead of starting an income generating activity, funds could mainly be used to invest in another person's business and generate income by becoming a shareholder. However, budgets are often used to improve the living conditions in the home or the flat of the elderly. In case of chronic health issues, **prior contact with the Reintegration Partner is important** to ensure swift access to medical treatment after the return. The social network and the (extended) family also play a paramount role in the case of the elderly and counsellors should talk with the returnee on how the family can assist after the arrival.

When it comes to communicating with elderly, **counsellors should dedicate sufficient time** to explain processes and consider the physical and cognitive state of their client.

7.4. Victims of Trafficking & Exploitation

Among all vulnerabilities, (potential) victims of human trafficking or individuals who were subject to torture or exploitation are the most **difficult to detect**. Cultural barriers, stigmatisation and tabu often make it difficult for victims to share their story, especially when they are interviewed by strangers, such as return counsellors or other government officials.

However, return counsellors can sometimes sense or detect anomalies in a client's behaviour that could indicate a traumatisation caused by human trafficking or exploitation. In such cases it is **important to get a second opinion from a colleague or to further investigate** the case by using existing vulnerability detection tools, such as the IPSN Tool from the EUAA. The browser-based tool allows an anonymous screening and could further clarify which specific needs the person has. It is important to acknowledge that there is **no "waterproof" method** in detecting all "invisible" vulnerabilities.

If you are not sure or on case of doubts about a certain case, you can always involve a colleague.



7.5. Minors/Children Returning Without Parent(s)

In some MS, children at a certain age (**check what rules apply in your MS**) are allowed to return voluntarily to their CoO if they have their parent(s) consent, even if their parent(s) remain in the host MS. Migrants sometimes leave their CoO together with their children to for example apply for asylum in the EU. In these cases, the children are often taken out of school and are separated from their friends and peers. Not all children agree with their parents' decision to leave their CoO. Due to lengthy asylum and appeal procedures and the living conditions in reception facilities, some of the children therefore want to return to their CoO to finish school and to get back to their friends, as quick as possible.

If the **parents' consent** to the return of their underage child, **an assisted voluntary return can be supported**. It should be ensured that the UAM is picked up from the airport after arrival and that there is an adult, for example a legal guardian or relative, in the CoO who can take care of the child. If the UAM only has a legal guardian, the consent and cooperation of the guardian is needed in most steps of the return process.

7.6. Pregnant Women

Pregnant women in the return process **need particular attention and assistance** to ensure the well-being of both the mother and the unborn child. Depending on the national legislation in your MS there might be different provisions that ensure the protection of pregnant women during the return procedure. This could include access to medical care, or a special diet, suspension of the deportation shortly before and after the delivery date, and other types of in-kind assistance. Return **counsellors should follow the national procedures** and make use of the available support and referral options for pregnant women.

7.7. Unaccompanied Minors

Although the majority of EU MS do not prohibit forced returns of unaccompanied minors (UAM), they never – or rarely – remove them in practice. When returns of unaccompanied minors do take place, most are voluntary. Return counsellors should **always check what routines and procedures apply in their respective MS**.

In cases where the return of a UAM has been found to be **in the best interests of the UAM**, return counsellors should support the UAM to make use of all voluntary return options available and to benefit from all AVRR / reintegration programmes that the UAM may be entitled to.

During the return counselling of a UAM it is of **utmost importance** that the minor receives **adequate support** to understand the situation he/she is in and what the available options are in his/her case. Counsellors should **enable the minor to take a free and informed decision to return voluntarily**, without resorting to forced return.

Strictly follow national procedures & protocols regarding the return of unaccompanied minors.



7.8. Single Parents

In the case of single parents, who want to return with a minor, return **counsellors should investigate** properly if the consent of the other parent has been given. This information can be retrieved from documents in the case file, at the national immigration agency or gathered during the interview. If the child was born in the host country, it is usually easier to get reliable information, but it might not be possible in all cases.

If the identity of the other parent is known and he/she intends to stay/remain in the host MS or elsewhere in the EU, his/her **consent is needed** before the child can leave the EU voluntarily. The parent who wants to return should provide the contact details of the other parent so that the return counsellor can inform him/her about the planned return.

Exception:
 If a parent who wants to return with children is residing in a women’s shelter because of threats, the return counsellor cannot contact the other parent. The counsellor should also report the case to a supervisor and follow the national procedures for such cases.

Further reading material...

VEGA handbook: Children at the land borders

7.9. Families with Children

Depending on the family composition and the age of the children there might be **different needs that should be addressed** in the pre-departure phase. In general, children should get information about the return in a child friendly and age-appropriate way. There are several resources available to assist parents to **inform their children about the return process**. These resources helps the parents to prepare their children practically and psychologically.

Frontex has developed, together with experts and child psychologists, **several tools for addressing children’s rights and their needs in the area of return**. Tools like these can help to explain the return process and reintegration assistance in a child-friendly and understandable way. There are 5 books, that are available in 15 languages in digital and print version:

- (1) Children aged 4-11, (2) Teenager book, (3) Unaccompanied minors book
- (4) Parents/guardians manual with information on how to help children with the return process and information on reintegration assistance.
- (5) Activity book, only available in print version.



Practical Aspects for Counselling Sessions

Return counsellors should create a child-friendly environment, to ensure that the counselling interview(s) with the parents can be conducted properly and without disturbances. This could for example include having some toys, paper, crayons and/or a playing corner available. Once a decision for (voluntary) return has been made, **the needs of the children should be included** in the preparation and planning process of possible reintegration activities, as well.

Here are examples of some preparations that take children's needs into account:

- Preparing and translating documents (birth and school certificates),
- Applying for reintegration assistance for children's needs (school supplies, school tuition, tutoring, etc.)
- Contacting the reintegration partner to arrange the school registration.
- Planning the return at the end of the school year.

In some cases, return counsellors should not support the return of children. This could for example be if the counsellor foresees a breach of the do not harm principle (more information under chapter **Special Attention Points**). In case of doubt, return counsellors can get an outside opinion by their superiors or consult other experts.

Children rights and the best interests of the child should be guiding principles.



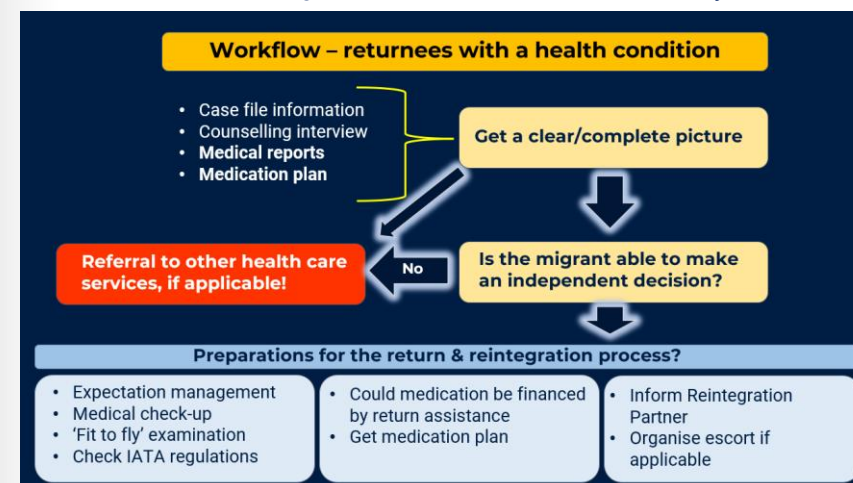
7.10. Returning with a Health Condition

The majority of vulnerable cases concern individuals that have a temporary or chronic health condition. During the return preparation, there are **many aspects** that a return and reintegration counsellor needs **to take into consideration** in relation to such cases.

The key aspects are:

- **Current condition**, assessed by medical services in the host MS
- **Availability** and effectiveness of treatment in the country of return
- **Affordability** of treatment (economic means of the returnee)
- **Accessibility** of treatment (How far is it away?)

What is the role of the return counsellor? Although every case is different and requires tailored solutions that depend on the individual circumstances, **the following general steps should be considered** when dealing with cases of medical vulnerability.



7.11. Social Vulnerability

Vulnerability goes beyond the provisions of the Return Directive and can in many cases be described as multi-layered. In many third countries rule of law, social welfare, and health care are rudimentary or non-existent. **Without a strong social network** that goes beyond the core family, **reintegration prospects are dire**.

Social media makes it possible for migrants that live for many years abroad to stay in touch with their family and friends. Having a functioning social network also **contributes to the psychosocial wellbeing** of a person. Many migrants develop mental health issues during their stay in the EU due to for example isolation, ensuring the social reintegration after their return is therefore crucial for the reintegration process.

The lack of a social network in the CoO makes a person more vulnerable and decreases the likelihood of a successful reintegration. **Return counsellors should** always ask returnees about their social network and **encourage** them to start **reaching out to their contacts** in the CoO, prior to departure.

Returnees may sometimes risk social isolation and stigmatisation by their communities of origin if they failed to make it in Europe and to support the community with remittances. Return counsellors need to be aware of this, when speaking about future plans of the migrant after return. **Counsellors can also connect the migrant with the reintegration partner** who could establish contact with other returnees that for example were in a similar situation but managed to reintegrated successfully.

7.12. Economic Vulnerability

Migrants have **often left their country of origin due to economic reasons** and in search for a better life. To make this “dream” work, they are willing to pay large amounts of money to smugglers. The money often comes from selling their own property or by borrowing from family members and relatives.

A lack of skills or social embeddedness can make it **difficult for a returnee to find a job** or to start an income generating activity after their return to the CoO. The high degree of indebtedness following the migration to Europe puts additional pressure to the returnee. Other factors that make an economic reintegration difficult are the **challenging macroeconomic conditions** in many third countries that can neither be changed by the migrant nor by the return counsellor.

For this purpose, the **expertise and insights of the reintegration partner is crucial**. Reintegration counsellors usually have more data and examples of businesses of other returnees that have failed or turned out to be a success. A return counsellor should **encourage the migrant to contact the reintegration partner** prior to departure to discuss the feasibility of the reintegration plan and business ideas. Reintegration partners have also more firsthand knowledge about the current economic and administrative challenges in the country of return. They can provide **valuable up to date information** that can help the returnee, especially if he/she migrated many years ago.

What are special attention points in return and reintegration counselling?

There are some topics or aspects in return and reintegration counselling that require the **special attention of the return counsellor**. Because of national and EU-legislation, a mishandling of these aspects/cases can sometimes lead to **serious consequences** for the migrant or the return counsellor.

In this section you will **learn more about the red flags** in return and reintegration counselling and how to deal with them in practice.



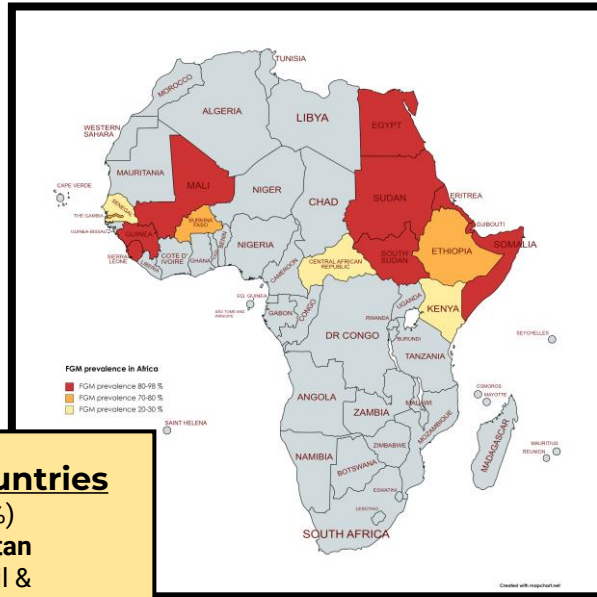
Overview of Important Special attention points

- 8.1. Female Genital Mutilation
- 8.2. Gender-Based Discrimination
- 8.3. Fundamental Rights in RRC
- 8.4. Checklists



8.1. Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a **serious human rights violation**, that is still practiced in many countries.



Other countries

- Yemen (19%)
- Iraqi Kurdistan (45% in Erbil & Sulaymaniyah)

Despite legal efforts and criminalisation in some of those countries, it is still deeply rooted in traditions and religious beliefs and therefore widespread. In some African countries up to 98% of all women are affected. There are different types of FGM, ranging from type I to type III, but **all of these practices constitute a crime in the EU Member States**. FGM is performed on girls and women of varying ages, from small infants to teenagers but also adults.

Legal consequences in the EU

In the EU, minors will be granted international protection if they come from a country with a high prevalence of FGM. Parents can usually get international protection, derived from their child's status, and they will also be informed that the **performance of FGM** on their children will have **serious legal consequences**. It can even lead to the separation from the child, who will be taken into care by the national childcare services in such cases. If a migrant would like to return to a country **with a high prevalence of FGM** together with his/her female minor(s), an assisted voluntary return **must be refused** in the best interests of the child.

Workflow – dealing with FGM cases

- Case file information
- Counselling interview
- Check FGM country list

Is the country of return a high prevalence country?

Yes

Is the child already circumcised?

Yes

Is there a risk of further mutilation? (Type 2 or Type 3)

No

Continue preparations for a return or an assisted voluntary return

No, but parents insist to return

- Refuse return & reintegration assistance
- Inform your superior
- Inform child care services if necessary
- Report the incident

8.2. Gender-Based Discrimination

Migrants who are using counselling services come from various cultures with moral values, traditions, and religious beliefs that can differ from the values within the EU. Cultural differences also include **different gender roles** that for example **determine** which family member it is **who decides** on voluntary return and how return and reintegration assistance will be used. Reintegration counsellors should therefore adopt a **non-discriminatory approach** during the counselling process.

In practice, this means that **all adults in the family should** (1) receive the information on AVRR; (2) give their consent for an AVRR application; and (3) be present and heard during the counselling interview(s). **Return and reintegration counsellors should** also emphasize that reintegration assistance is meant to **benefit all family** members. They can also propose or discuss how funds could be used, to ensure that the needs of all returning family members are considered.

Making an informed decision on return is only possible if information is provided to all adult family members, regardless of their gender.



8.3. Fundamental Rights in RRC

Applying the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** in return counselling for migrants and asylum seekers involves ensuring that all actions, decisions, and procedures respect the rights and principles enshrined in the Charter.

Return counselling must comply with EU law, and the Charter applies whenever an EU institution or a Member State implements EU law—such as the Return Directive (2008/115/EC). This means return counsellors must apply the Charter throughout their work.

There are several key rights in the Charter that are relevant in return counselling, such as **Human dignity**, enshrined in Art. 1. In practice, this means that potential returnees need to be treated with respect and empathy. Counsellors must **avoid any degrading treatment or coercive talk** during the counselling session. See further: **Dos and don'ts in RRC**

Another crucial aspect is the **Right to Asylum** (Art. 18) and Protection in the Event of Removal (Art. 19). In practice, these articles imply that **return counselling cannot interfere with ongoing asylum procedures** and that return to countries where there is a real risk of serious harm (non-refoulement principle) should be avoided. There are several more rights that are relevant in return counselling, that are covered already in the vulnerability section and in the checklist on the next page. The full text of the EU Charter can be accessed via the link below:

EU Charter on Fundamental Rights – click here

Fundamental Rights Checklist

Depending on the specific case, return and reintegration counsellors need to keep in mind the most important Fundamental Rights that need to be safeguarded during the return procedure. **This applies not only to every counselling session performed in the EU pre-departure, but also to reintegration counselling**, that is done in the CoO on behalf of the EU Member States and with EU funding by a contracted reintegration partner. A non-exhaustive checklist of crucial fundamental rights can be found below:

Which Fundamental Rights are crucial in RRC?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Right to human dignity, Art. 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rights of children, Art. 24
<input type="checkbox"/>	Protection of personal data, Art. 8	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rights of the elderly, Art. 25
<input type="checkbox"/>	Right to Asylum, Art. 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	Equality between men and women, Art. 23
<input type="checkbox"/>	Protection in event of removal or expulsion, Art. 19	<input type="checkbox"/>	Integration of persons with a disability, Art. 26
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prohibition of discrimination, Art. 21	<input type="checkbox"/>	Special protection of families, Art. 33

The provisions of the EU Charter on fundamental rights are applicable to all institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the EU and the Member States.



8.4. Checklists

You have now an **overview of the most important** topics in return and reintegration counselling. To quickly find the most important checklists go to the following pages or click the checklist tabs in the PDF version of this manual.

Support Strategy Checklist

Case Preparation Checklist

Pre-departure Preparations

Case File Checklist

Fundamental Rights in RRC

REINTEGRATION PROGRAMME

Return and Reintegration Counselling

9. The Link Between Return Counselling & the Reintegration Process

There are different approaches to what sustainable return and reintegration entails, but regardless of the definition adopted, the best way to achieve sustainability is by using a multi-level approach which engages migrants, return counsellors and reintegration partners. **Return counsellors play a crucial role** in promoting existing return and reintegration programmes that can incentivise migrants without the legal right to stay in the EU to return to their countries of origin or to other countries where their return would be feasible. As a return counsellor it is **therefore important to have a holistic understanding** of the return and reintegration landscape.



Return Counselling & The Reintegration Process

Overview of the Reintegration Process

In this section you will learn more about return and reintegration programmes, specifically the European Reintegration Programme (EURP) and our partner organisations as well as potential misuse.

9.1.

Sustainable Return and Reintegration

9.2.

Return Support Programmes

9.3.

Reintegration Assistance

9.4. EU Reintegration Programme

9.5. Return & Reintegration Plan

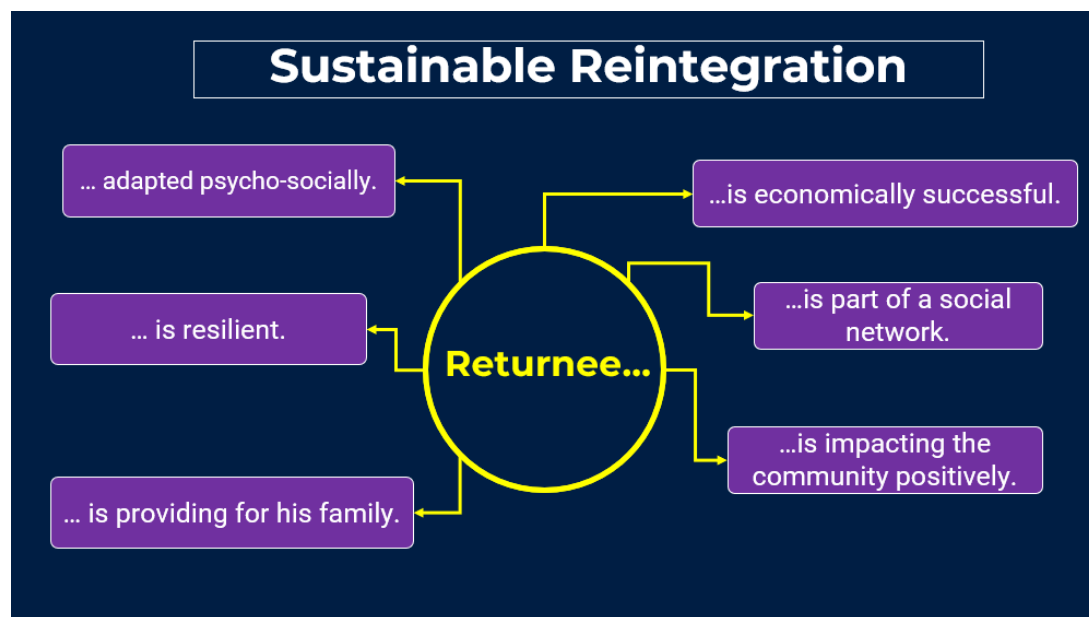
9.6. Potential Misuse of Reintegration Assistance



9.1. Sustainable Return & Reintegration

Because sustainability is one of the major goals to consider when evaluating the spending of public funds, the long-term effects of the measures used should be assessed. Although there is **no single definition of 'sustainable reintegration'**, most definitions are mainly based on either of the two different viewpoints: the receiver's (returnees) or the provider's (EU MS) side.

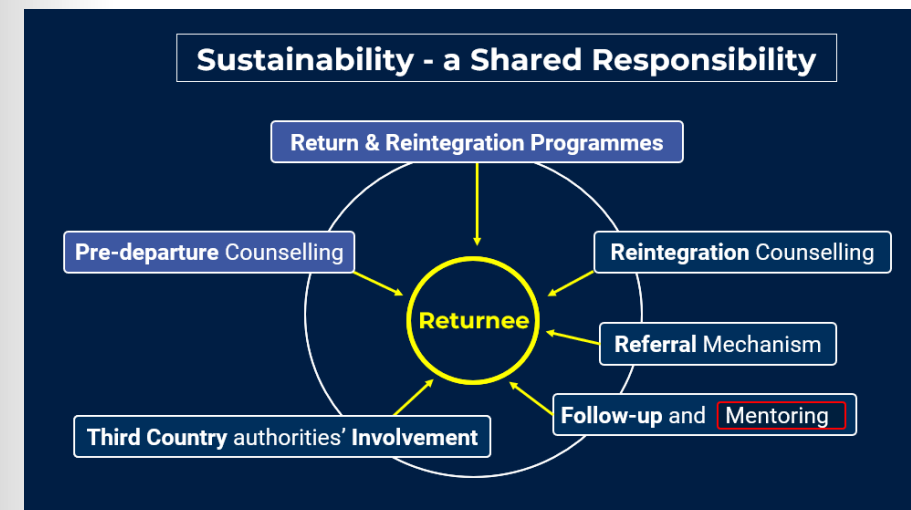
From a migrant-centred perspective, sustainability is attained when a returnee ideally has achieved the following:



Sustainable Return – a Shared Responsibility

From an EU MS perspective it is important that the invested funds have a positive impact on the migrant's life in the short and medium term to significantly reduce the likelihood of returning irregularly to Europe after the migrant has returned to his/her CoO.

Whichever perspective is adopted, successful reintegration ultimately rests in the hands of the main stakeholder – i.e. the migrant – and his/her ability to adapt psychosocially and economically after the return. **Return counselling** and reintegration programmes **can support migrants but cannot solve all the problems** that might occur after the voluntary or forced return. Multi-level support with shared responsibilities between the migrant, the return counsellors, the MS, the reintegration partners and the third countries is the best way to achieve the sustainability goal.



9.2. Return Support Programmes

One of the **key tasks** of a return counsellor is to **promote existing return and reintegration programmes**. There are various AVRR programmes available, on national level, but also on an EU level, such as the EU Reintegration Programme. In some MS Frontex's reintegration assistance is the only available support.

Return assistance is offered prior to departure as an incentive to encourage the voluntary return of an irregular migrant. It usually includes assistance per person and covers the travel costs

A **return counsellor should** always update themselves about changes or new developments, to be able to **inform** the potential returnee on the **country specific assistance available**. MS with national return and reintegration programmes usually provide information on available assistance on dedicated websites, leaflets and/or mobile applications.

Information on AVRR may also be found on national websites of NGOs or international organisations that help and support migrants. A **non-exhaustive overview of available programmes** in the EU can be found on the website of the transnational exchange project.

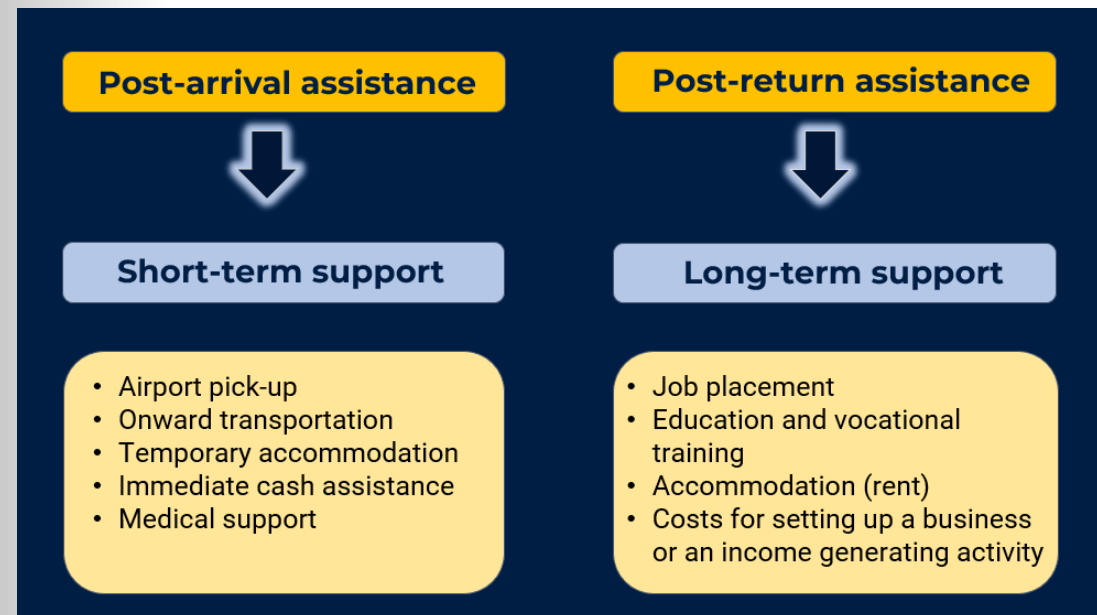
Find out more about AVRR systems in Europe.

9.3. Reintegration Assistance

In addition to return assistance, it is **important to support returnees after their arrival** in the CoO and during their reintegration process. Access to tailored support, especially in the first 6-12 months, **can increase the chances of a successful reintegration** and prevent that the migrant returns to the EU irregularly.

There are numerous national reintegration programmes in the EU and since 1 April 2022, Frontex has introduced the EU Reintegration Programme.

Find out more about the EU Reintegration Programme.



9.4. EU Reintegration Programme (EURP)

Since its inception in 2022, the EU Reintegration Programme (former Joint Reintegration Services) is used by an ever-increasing number of EU MS and SAC. The use of the EURP harmonises efforts across the EU and enable irregular migrants who want to return to their CoO, to receive the same assistance, regardless of the country they are departing from. Return counsellors should **always check if reintegration assistance, in addition to return assistance, is available**. They should seek to maximise the support that a returnee can get by applying for all available programmes – this can increase the chances of a successful reintegration.

Quick facts: (state of play: June 2025)

- Established in 2022
- Used by most of the EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries
- Reintegration assistance in 39+ third countries
- 6 reintegration partners (Caritas International Belgium, ETTC Iraq, WELDO Pakistan, IRARA and Life Makers Foundation Egypt, Mikado Migration)
- Reintegration support for irregular migrants (voluntary & forced return)
- Application process through return and reintegration counsellors

Reintegration assistance is also possible for forced return.



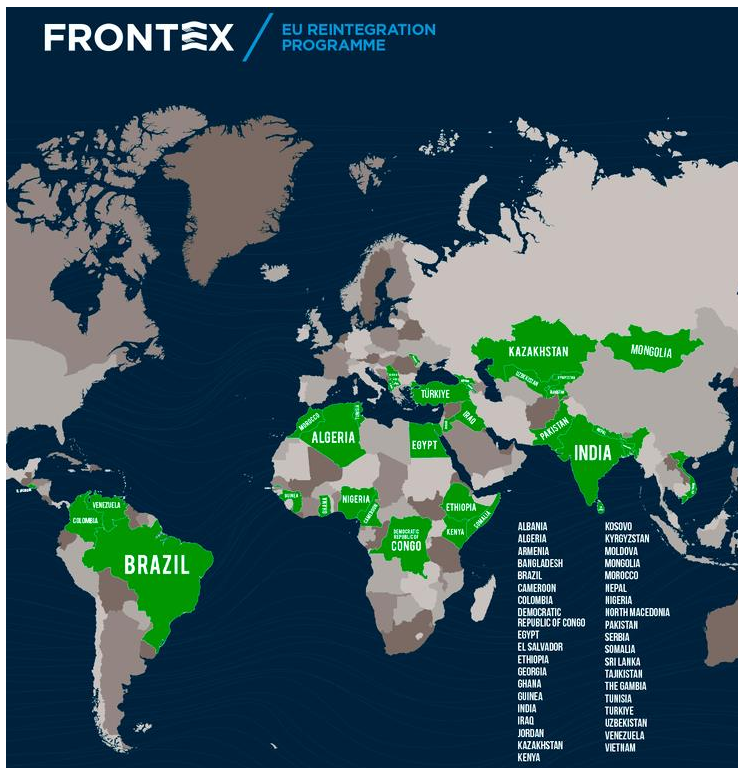
Who are our EURP Reintegration Partners?

Currently, Frontex has six reintegration partners. These partners are delivering the EURP reintegration assistance in cooperation with local reintegration partners.



EURP Geographic Coverage

Frontex provides all relevant information for return counsellors on the reintegration packages, local reintegration partners and other important country information in its **Country Information Sheets**. Information can be found and downloaded on the Reintegration Assistance Tool (RIAT). There is also a **practical handbook for return counsellors** which is available on RIAT. The handbook provides all necessary information on how to use and apply for EURP.



9.5. Return & Reintegration Plan

A **return plan** is mainly developed by the return and reintegration counsellor together with the migrant, taking into consideration all information retrieved from the counselling sessions. The **aim is to ensure a timely and successful return**, without unnecessary delays. The return plan will support and guide the migrant to prepare for the return and the first steps after the arrival in the CoO. If possible, the **reintegration partner should also be involved** to ensure that the migrant receives updated country specific information relevant for their individual needs. Additionally, the reintegration partner needs to receive the information on the specific needs of the migrant to prepare the post-arrival assistance .

The migrant is the main responsible person for the **reintegration plan**. The development of the plan starts in the pre-departure phase and under the supervision of a return counsellor. After arrival, the plan will be finalised together with the reintegration partner. The **main purpose** of planning the reintegration is to allocate reintegration funds in an efficient manner to **ensure that the support given to the migrant is sustainable** in the medium and long term.

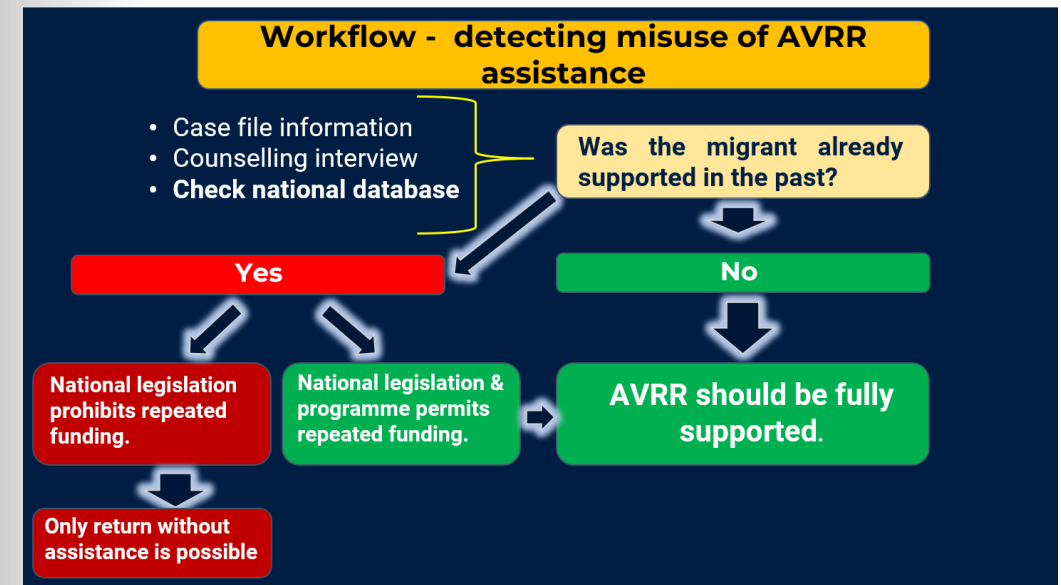
Tipps for a Reintegration/Business Plan

1. The plan should reflect the personal circumstances and work experience of the migrant and include a feasibility assessment of the planned activities. The key questions are:
2. How does the planned reintegration activity improve the migrant's economic condition?
3. How does the planned reintegration activity improve essential needs of the migrant?
4. Is the planned reintegration activity contributing to the psychosocial adaptation of the migrant after arrival ?
5. Does the plan include steps to support the social reintegration of the migrant?

Frontex is using a standard template for its reintegration programme (EU Reintegration Programme) with general guidelines for developing the business plan. The template can be downloaded by all RIAT users.

9.6. Potential Misuse of Reintegration Assistance

Return and reintegration assistance, whether financed by the EU or national programmes is intended to improve the lives of returnees in a way that minimises the possibility to return to Europe irregularly. Many programmes do not share data on the individuals that have benefited from them, for example due to data protection rules. Sometimes migrants use, or attempt to use, these information loopholes to receive funding more than once. This is called reintegration shopping. To prevent this phenomenon and the abuse of public funds, some MS national regulations therefore only allow migrants to receive assistance once.



Quick View Manual for Return & Reintegration Counsellors

You have now reached the end of this Quick View Manual on Return and Reintegration Counselling.

To summarise, **counselling is a very complex but also interesting task**, that requires a **holistic approach** to be successful. Knowledge of return counselling is mainly developed through on-the-job training, and the relevant skillset is acquired through practical experience. Nevertheless, this manual can support counsellors, especially those with limited experience, in their daily tasks by providing a solid overview of the basics of return and reintegration counselling.

Summary

Every person that a counsellor meet is different which means that each case may be accompanied by different, and often unforeseen, challenges. The information and general advice on each of the topics included in the QVM (legal and policy background, practical aspects of conducting a counselling session, return and reintegration programmes, communication skills) will help counsellors across the EU to tackle case specific challenges, identify adequate measures, and enable them to confidently plan the next steps of the return process.

We are aware that this manual cannot answer all questions nor cover all possible scenarios that may occur as part of return and reintegration counselling. Lastly, we would like to underline that the QVM is a complement to professional training, not a replacement. If you need further advice on certain subject matters contact your national migration authority for trainings, workshops, or to receive information on how to participate in a Frontex return counselling training.

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