



Return assistance: a change of perspective

Return assistance - in practice

Sandu, Gambia



Due to a lack of opportunities to stay and work in Switzerland, Mr. S. decided to return to his home country, The Gambia, a few months after his arrival. He had spent less than a year in Europe, which he had reached after crossing Libya and the Mediterranean Sea.

The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) approved reintegration support for his return, which would allow him to begin an income-generating activity in The Gambia. Before leaving, however, he was uncertain and doubtful, so the return counselor organized a call with IOM in Banjul. This gave IOM staff on the ground the opportunity to explain the formalities of the disbursement to him in the local language and reassure him again that he would indeed receive the assistance.

As already discussed in Switzerland with his return counselor, Mr. S. wanted to start a livestock farm with the help of the reintegration support. He contacted IOM Banjul the day after his arrival and was able to submit the necessary invoices and documents two weeks later so that IOM could approve the purchase of 7 cows and a bull. However, the delivery of the animals to his farm and the accompanying payment of reintegration assistance to the vendor, in the presence of IOM staff, was delayed by one month. This was mainly due to internal travel restrictions related to COVID-19 and the fact that the farm is very remote and difficult to reach.

On August 28th, 2020, IOM staff paid him a visit at his farm. Mr. S. showed them his cows and the farm and told them that he was generally satisfied with his current situation. Besides the cattle breeding, the cultivation of his land brings him a small additional income, so that his needs are sufficiently covered. Thanks to owning the cows, his economic and social situation is now better than before, and he is no longer planning to leave the country.

As a humanitarian and, at the same time, reasonably-priced solution, the concept of Return Assistance has proved itself and gained acceptance in many European countries. The object of Return Assistance is to harmonize the justified interests of migrants with those of Switzerland and the countries of origin. Return Assistance makes a valuable contribution to a sustainable and successful return. It is conceived so as to rule out undesired pull factors in the direction of Switzerland.

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