

Budapest Process

Thematic Meeting on Return and Reintegration

Dates: 27-28 June 2022

Location: Istanbul, Türkiye

Report

1. Budapest Process representatives from all participating and observer states were invited to attend the thematic meeting on return and reintegration. The meeting gathered **61 participants from 31 countries and organisations** – Albania, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom, as well as the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process, European Commission, European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), International Organization for Migration, Migration Policy Institute and Samuel Hall.

2. Meeting background and objectives:

The Budapest Process (BP) has highlighted the importance of return and reintegration, most notably in its political declaration and action plan adopted in 2019. Priority Goals 1 and 2 of the Action Plan, focusing on irregular and regular migration, both address the topic of dignified return and sustainable reintegration. Thus, over the past few years, the BP has held several meetings on return and reintegration looking at lessons learned and recommendations to help facilitate a dignified return and a sustainable, inclusive, and rights-based reintegration for returnee migrants. Desiring to have its dialogue better translate into action on ground, the Budapest Process Reference Group was launched in 2021. The Reference Group endorsed three project proposals to be implemented under the Budapest Process, including one entitled “Reinforcing Return Migration, Reintegration and Development Initiatives in the Silk Routes”. The project’s main objective would be “to ensure the inclusive, long-term, rights-based and sustainable reintegration of returnee migrants to Silk Routes countries through supporting the development of specific and concrete policies, programmes and services at the national and local levels”.

Therefore, the overall objectives of this thematic meeting were to explore tangible opportunities for cooperation among the countries of origin, transit and destination and to jointly develop a roadmap for the BP to accordingly support its network in achieving the outlined goals.

3. The meeting was opened by the representative of the Turkish Chair of the BP. Subsequently, **opening statements** were delivered by a representative of the European Commission and the Head of the Budapest Process Secretariat. The meeting was held under Chatham House Rule.

4. The European Commission updated participants on the **EU Strategy for Voluntary Return and Reintegration** as well as their work on the EU Framework on Return Counselling developing a common curriculum for return counsellors and the enhancement of the effectiveness of online tools such as the Reintegration Assistance Tool (RIAT) and Return and Reintegration Assistance Inventory.

5. This thematic meeting comprised of four sessions: Session 1 focused on “Türkiye’s lessons in establishing reintegration frameworks, policies and reintegration infrastructure”. Session 2 focused on “Current challenges and opportunities for improving procedures and methods for returns management”. Session 3 focused on “Exploring best practices and ongoing innovations for supporting

the sustainability of returnees' economic, social and psychosocial reintegration". Finally, the last session was a "Working Group Session to form a roadmap for implementing the Budapest Process' project – *Reinforcing Return Migration, Reintegration and Development Initiatives in the Silk Routes*"

As a result of the interventions and discussions over the two days, the following **recommendations** emerged:

Improving Returns Management

- **Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes are most effective when they are implemented within the context of an overarching and multifaceted cooperation framework with the partner origin country.** This implies that, ideally, cooperation should also exist on broader migration governance, including border management and law enforcement, labour migration regimes, protection, etc.;
- **Intra- and inter-ministerial coordination in countries of origin, transit and destination must be improved and streamlined** as the lack of coordination can lead to inefficient outcomes for returns processes and negatively affect returnees;
- **Preventing disinformation being spread by smugglers and traffickers is important** to prevent and counter irregular migration by using **innovative and persuasive messaging** via multiple communication channels to counter the innovative methods used by smugglers;
- **Returns to post-conflict regions requires a very special and tailored approach.** Full spectrum humanitarian support on the ground should be provided to fragile and vulnerable communities as well as development support in terms of livelihoods, conditional cash-transfers, education, should come after stabilisation of basic needs;
- **The legal status of some returnees in countries of destination needs policy focus** as those legal workers employed under temporary contracts are vulnerable to exploitation and are also less likely to seek help from authorities, thereby making returns harder and more dangerous; **victims of forced labour need to be given special support for full recovery and reintegration;**
- **New readmission agreements can be more easily negotiated when they are accompanied with expansion of legal channels,** such as student-mobility, business and trade facilitation and labour visa schemes (e.g. seasonal and circular migration), whereas existing readmission agreements need to be implemented in letter and spirit in order to encourage cooperation;
- **Forced returns remain a necessary part of migration policy, however, they should only be considered in instances where due legal process has been fulfilled** in alignment with international laws and obligations; **The Principle of Non-refoulement must be upheld at all times,** especially when processing a large numbers of returnees;

First line support – referral mechanisms

- **Return Counselling should be conducted to ensure that returnees have full information on support structures and referral mechanisms.** Effective return counselling is essential to strengthen the links between the pre-departure and post-arrival phases and to ensure the success of reintegration policies and programmes;
- All countries should strive to develop **digitalised and integrated 'Returnee Case Management Systems'** as these systems can be used for data collection and analysis for returnee needs and can allow for a 'one-stop-shop' approach to exist for all reintegration programmes; **referral systems can also be incorporated into these case management systems;**

- **Efforts must be made to build an effective data collection and management system to fully document all returnees** – this is the only way that referrals can be done in a more comprehensive and targeted manner and needs of vulnerable returnees can be addressed;
- **More research should be conducted on the causes of re-migration**, as it seems that a substantial proportion of returnees seem to look for ways to re-migrate;

Ensuring Sustainable Reintegration

- **Returnees need to be provided the means to acquire adequate livelihoods** – vocational training, up-skilling, re-skilling, skill-matching, and recognition of prior learning and other measures are important in making returnees more employable
 - Business loans and seed-funding for new ventures should be considered for those seeking to establish their businesses, however, it must be understood that not all returnees are entrepreneurial, rather they may seek to become skilled in some craft;
- **Although social protection systems in Silk Routes countries are increasingly well-funded and quite complex and multifaceted in terms of how they respond to the varying needs of fragile members of society, the sheer size of burgeoning populations means that resources are often simply not enough to meet the needs of all.** International support is therefore needed to reinforce existing social welfare/protection systems at all levels (local, provincial, central)
 - Support for NGOs and CSOs with direct financial assistance coupled with sustained capacity building is essential to ensuring sustainability of reintegration projects;
- **Reintegration support programmes should include psycho-social counselling as many returnees, especially victims of trafficking, need intensive help to recover;** some returnees, in particular vulnerable groups, sometimes find themselves not being accepted back into their community or are otherwise simply unable to cope with changed socio-economic circumstances;
- **Monitoring the reintegration process of returnees is critically important** when trying to ensure that instability upon return does not cause re-migration tendencies; **Need Assessments, based on data gathered from returnees, should be continuously conducted by government and non-government stakeholders** so that up-to-date information is available regarding challenges faced by returnees and opportunities for service improvement
 - Reintegration programmes need to be targeted towards specific groups, e.g., the needs of high-skilled returnees are different compared to low-skilled returnees, victims of THB / medical needs etc.
 - Need to take into account that returnees during COVID-19 had a unique set of challenges and returned in a context of very difficult socio-economic circumstances in their home countries;
- **Returnees sometimes return to remote/peripheral areas; therefore, it is important to have partners in such areas to assist with reintegration**
 - However, NGO/CSOs in peripheral regions tend to have their own networks which they mobilise for providing reintegration support to returnees and it might thus be hard to get these networks into a referral system which might prevent the system from becoming truly comprehensive – this issue should be addressed through stakeholder mapping at the local levels;

6. Action points and way forward:

- **The Budapest Process Secretariat will develop a Roadmap so that the concrete recommendations made during this meeting can be converted into Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound interventions**
- Consultation on the **Roadmap** will be conducted in the 2nd half of 2022; fundraising will then be conducted for the 'Reinforcing Return Migration, Reintegration and Development Initiatives in the Silk Routes project' through which a portion of these interventions can occur.