European Commission

European Migration Network

POLICIES AND PRACTICES ON OUTREACH AND INFORMATION PROVISION FOR THE RETURN OF MIGRANTS IN EU MEMBER STATES AND NORWAY

EMN INFORM   2020

1. INTRODUCTION

This EMN Inform analyses and reports on Member States' policies and practices in accomplishing outreach activities and providing information to third-country nationals on their return options, following the adoption of the EU Return Directive in 2008.

It is the third Inform in a series of three on return counselling produced by the European Migration Network (EMN), which are the result of a proposal by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to the EMN to engage in research focusing on practices related to outreach, counselling and information provision in return and reintegration processes. The first Inform centred on the policies and practices in place on return counselling for migrants in the EU Member States whilst the second focused on how return counsellors are supported throughout their work to provide reliable, up-to-date and relevant counselling to third-country nationals.

The information used in this third Inform draws from the EMN studies on Dissemination of Information on Voluntary Return (2015)[1] and the Effectiveness of Return in EU Member States (2017),[2] updated and complemented by an Ad Hoc Query on Policies and Practices of Outreach and Information Provision for the (voluntary) Return of Migrants in EU Member States and Norway (2019).[3]

This Inform makes a distinction between outreach and information provision activities and return counselling; the former refers to the act of providing return related information, which is broader, can take many different forms and targets a wider audience than return counselling. Conversely, return counselling refers to the formal process by which a potential returnee receives information and assistance to prepare for his/her return. This mainly takes place (but not always) following a negative asylum decision or a return decision, whereas information and outreach provision activities can take place at any time, in any location and by a wider range of actors between the arrival in, and the (possible) departure of the third country national from, a Member State.

A wide variety of State and non-State actors are involved in the delivery of information and outreach in return processes (as further elaborated in section 5); in this Inform, Member States are referenced in instances where non-State actors (international organisations or NGOs) have been contracted to deliver information and outreach activities on behalf of the Member State. Non-State actors are referenced when referring to specific approaches or for activities undertaken on independent mandate.

2. KEY POINTS TO NOTE

- Though distinct activities in theory, in practice, outreach and information provision and return counselling were found by most Member States to be interdependent and complementary, and coincided in many instances.

- All Member States plus Norway provided a legal or policy framework in which to carry out outreach and information activities, but these were mainly through 'soft' law tools (guidelines, policy documents etc).

- The main actors responsible for carrying out outreach and information provision activities were the national authorities of the Member States; however, many delegated these tasks to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and

intergovernmental organisations such as the Red Cross and/or IOM.

- The main target groups for outreach and information provision were rejected asylum seekers, followed by irregularly staying third country nationals and finally asylum seekers.

- The content of the information activities focused mainly on the different voluntary return options, the conditions of eligibility, assistance and benefits provided under Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes; and contact information of the responsible actors implementing AVRR programmes.

1   This third Inform was part of the 2019 EMN Work Programme and therefore includes contributions from the United Kingdom as an EU Member State up to 31 January 2020". This EMN study was based on the contributions of: AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, DI, FR, HU, HR, IE, LV, LT LY, MT, NL, PT, PL, SK, SI, ES, UK plus NO. The synthesis report is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/info_on_return_synthesis_report_20102015_final.pdf, last accessed on the 01 October 2019. While the study was from 2015, the information reported in this Inform was reconfirmed or updated by EMN National Contact Points in 2019.

2   This EMN Study was based on the contributions of: AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, LU, NL, ES, SE, SK, SI and UK. The synthesis report is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/00_eu_synthesis_report_return_study_en.pdf, last accessed on 01 October 2019. While the study was from 2017, the information reported in this Inform was reconfirmed or updated by EMN National Contact Points in 2019.

3   EMN Ad-Hoc Query on "Policies and Practices of Outreach and Information Provision for the (voluntary) Return of Migrants in EU Member States and Norway", launched on 27 November 2019, responded by: AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, FI, FR, HR, HU, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI and SK, plus NO, ERRIN and IOM.

- Outreach activities were found to be more successful when the dissemination tools were varied, the timing was carefully considered and when many languages were made available.

- Monitoring the impact and measuring the effectiveness of the outreach and information provision activities was found by many Member States to be challenging mostly due to difficulties in defining and measuring effectiveness or to remain in touch with successful returnees.

3. DISTINCTION BETWEEN OUTREACH AND INFORMATION ACTIVITIES AND RETURN COUNSELLING

In theory, a distinction exists between outreach and information provision and return counselling; however, in practice, this distinction was not clear-cut.

For the majority of Member States plus Norway and the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN),[4] outreach and information provision activities were closely interlinked with return counselling. In most instances,[5] information and outreach served as a preliminary step towards return counselling, by reaching out to potential returnees and informing them about the various options and the availability of counselling. In others,[6] there was no immediate sequencing between information provision and counselling, but the two were considered as closely linked together and took place either at the same time or within the same stage of the return procedure. Notably Sweden did not make any distinction between information and outreach provision and counselling, the two coinciding completely.

In Germany, in the Netherlands and for IOM the distinction between counselling and information and outreach was clear-cut in theory and in practice. Even though there was a complementarity as both activities occurred in the same general process, the activities had different objectives and were aimed at different target populations. Outreach and information provision activities were much broader, had different formats, were undertaken by different authorities and could take place in different locations; the aim was usually to reach as many migrants as possible, including the most hard to reach population. Conversely, return counselling was more akin to a tailored two-way interview process, developing an AVRR plan specific to the individual person's needs.

4. LEGAL / POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROVISION OF OUTREACH AND INFORMATION ON RETURN (EU AND NATIONAL)

Following the adoption of the Return Directive,[7] Member States introduced changes in their rules to disseminate information on voluntary return pertaining to how and when voluntary return should be introduced, or the content of the information.[8] These changes consisted of legislative and/or soft law changes, in the form of guidelines and operating procedures.

Six Member States have included a legal obligation to provide information on voluntary return in their national legislation.[9] These obligations have given rise to implementing measures in different formats including practitioner guidelines;[10] internal guidelines/ regulations of the State;[11] action plans;[12] implementing protocols[13] and memoranda of understanding.[14]

Conversely, other Member States plus Norway have established soft law approaches, giving rise to guidelines and practices on information provision, without adding them to their national legislation.[15] Some examples include:

- Cooperation agreements / memoranda of understanding between national authorities and the service provider of AVRR programmes, regulating the returnees.[16]

- State-developed operational guidelines, handbooks and circulars distributed to specific actors responsible for disseminating information on voluntary return to irregular migrants.[17]

- Administrative provision not explicitly mandated by law.[18]

4   AT, BE, BG, CZ, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LU, PL, NO, SL, SK, SE and ERRIN.
5   BE, BG, CZ, ES, FR, HR, IT, HU, LU, NO and ERRIN.
6   AT, FI, PL, SL, SK, SE.
7   Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32008L0115, last accessed on 01 October 2019.
8   AT, BE, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI and SK plus NO.
9   AT, BE, FR, PT, SI and SK.
10 AT.
11 BE, SK.
12 FR.
13 PT.
14 SI.
15 CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, HU, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL PL, SE, SI, UK plus NO. For FI, there has been a legislative change to place the AVR programmes under the responsibility of the Finnish Immigration Service.
16 CY, CZ, EE, ES, HU, IE, LV, LT, LU, PL, SI.
17 DE, FI, LU, SE, UK, NO, Despite the established practice, Estonia has not introduced provisions on the dissemination of information yet.
18 CY, CZ, EE, MT, NL, PL.

5. KEY ACTORS INVOLVED IN CONDUCTING OUTREACH AND INFORMATION PROVISION FOR THE RETURN OF MIGRANTS

A broad range of actors, both State and non-State (civil society/intergovernmental organisations) provide information on voluntary return. Additionally, some State actors and/or the implementing partners of AVRR programmes involved other actors such as public service providers (e.g. health workers) and community organisations (diaspora, religious, migrant-led groups etc.) to provide information on AVRR.

5.1. State actors

State authorities in Austria, Belgium,[19] Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and Norway played an active role in the direct dissemination of information on voluntary return.

Activities undertaken to promote voluntary return included for example: the training of staff on how to make information on voluntary return available to the target groups;[20] the production of informative material;[21] provision of return counselling to irregular migrants;[22] or establishing information hubs for interested migrants to visit.[23]

To illustrate this point, Germany appointed a Coordination Agency for Integrated Return Management to develop return counselling guidelines plus instructions on the dissemination of information. The Agency is on hiatus as of now, but its duties have been transferred to the Centre for the Support of Return (Zentrum zur Unterstützung der Rückkehr – ZUR) in Berlin. The centre includes all State actors in Germany who are responsible for the topic of return (voluntary and forced). Similarly, the Czech Republic established a Return unit in the Ministry of Interior responsible for all activities relating to the voluntary return programmes.

5.2. Non-State actors

A broad range of non-State actors was found to be involved in disseminating information on return. These organisations may be contracted by the State to undertake this work or are mandated independently to do so.

Notably, many Member States entered into contracts with non-State actors concerning activities focusing on return, including outreach and information provision.[24] Conversely, three Member States did not contract NGOs.[25]

The following main actors were involved:

- IOM[26] and/or NGOs[27] could be contracted by the State to implement AVRR programmes, where the aim was to provide clear, thorough and objective information to adequately prepare and inform potential returnees. Hungary relied on UNHCR to inform beneficiaries of international protection about voluntary return options.

- Diaspora groups[28] and/or community groups[29] may be involved in providing brochures and other information distributed to them by NGOs staff contracted to disseminate information and/or by State authorities; or in some cases, by raising awareness about AVR(R) programmes or providing return counselling.[30]

- Other types of non-State actors included social, health and education services[31] or legal advisors[32]; this usually required collaboration with State authorities often in the form of trainings or referral systems.

6. TARGET GROUPS

The main target groups of outreach and information provision activities were rejected asylum seekers,[33] closely followed by irregularly staying third-country nationals[34] and finally asylum seekers.[35] Several Member States plus Norway and IOM further targeted other types of groups,[36] such as beneficiaries of international protection[37] or vulnerable groups including unaccompanied minors and victims of human trafficking.[38]

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19 Belgium has implemented a series of new projects "CONEX" whereby local authorities in cooperation with NGOs aim to reach specific target groups, usually quite illusive, by employing native counsellors who then engage with these groups directly in the streets.

20 BE, DE, EL, FR, NL, PL, UK, NO.

21 BE, DE, EL, FR, MT, NL, UK, NO.

22 BE, CZ, DE, EL, FR, MT, NL, PL, UK, NO.

23 BE, EL, NO.

24 AT, CY, CZ, DE, ES, FI, HR, HU, IE, LU, PL, SI, SK plus NO. Member States under contract with NGOS : AT, BE, DE, FI, HU, NL, SI, plus NO and Member States under contract with IOM: AT, BE, CY, DE, FI, HR, HU, IE, LU, NL, PL, SI, SK, plus NO.

25 CY, LU, PL.

26 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, LU, MT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK, NO. For LU, IOM is now the main actor in outreach and information provision.

27 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, LU, NL, PL, SE, SI, UK, NO.

28 AT, CZ, DE, HU, IE, LU, NL, UK, NO.

29 AT, CZ, DE, ES, IE, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI, UK, NO.

30 DE, MT, NL, UK, NO.

31 AT, DE, EL, ES, FR, LU, LV, PL, SI, UK.

32 DE, EE, FI, HU, IE, LV, PL, NO.

33 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK plus NO and IOM.

34 BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, FR, HR, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK plus NO and IOM.

35 BG, CY, CZ, DE, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, MT, NL, SE, SI, SK plus NO and IOM.

36 BG, CZ, DE, ES, FI, HR, IT, PL, plus NO and IOM.

37 BG, HR.

38 DE, ES, FI, HR, IE, NO, IOM.

7. CONTENT OF INFORMATION

The content of the information disseminated usually fell within one of the following categories:

- The possibility of returning voluntarily;[39]

- The conditions of eligibility, assistance and benefits provided under AVRR programmes;[40]

- Contacts of the responsible actors implementing AVRR programmes.[41]

- Most Member States with the exception of three,[42] also included information on forced return into their outreach and information provision.

A detailed account of the content of information and outreach given by each involved actor, can be found in the EMN report on Information for voluntary return (2015).[43]

In some cases, the content of information on return addressing specifically vulnerable groups was detailed in the legislation or practical guidelines.[44] For instance, in Ireland, suspected victims of trafficking were provided with information on accessing AVRR programmes as one of a range of options available to them under the 'Second National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking in Ireland'. IOM Ireland provided such information to those who were referred to them, after having expressed a wish to receive such information. Further information on how outreach and information activities targeted vulnerable groups can be found at the end of section 8.1.

8. DELIVERY OF INFORMATION

For outreach work to be successful, it is essential that information reaches the expected target groups. Thus, effective dissemination tools and channels must be deployed, and consideration given to issues such as timing and language of content. This section sets out how information and outreach was delivered in practice.

Member States reported that outreach was an important way to disseminate accurate and up to date information in communities, which could then be multiplied through word of mouth and peer-to-peer exchanges.

8.1. Dissemination tools

Member States and Norway used a wide array of dissemination tools to provide information about return and to get in touch with the individuals concerned.

8.1.1 Types of dissemination tools

As indicated in the table below, the tool most commonly used was leaflets/brochures, in some cases as part of campaigns to promote AVRR programmes; or handed to third-country nationals in reception/detention facilities.

Posters were found to be an effective method of dissemination, especially since they could also be effective in reaching irregular migrants not in touch with the authorities, as reported by Belgium, Poland and the Slovak Republic.

Websites were a common way to disseminate information and reach out to the individuals concerned. They offered anonymity and were easily accessible.

Similarly, the use of social media pages enabling the State to reach out to target groups was reported in France and the United Kingdom (UK).[45] Social media pages also allow users to access information, seek advice and discuss return options with their peers.

Outreach visits may be performed by the AVRR service providers or implementing partners (as was the case by IOM in Croatia, the Netherlands and Poland) or by the National Immigration Authority (for example, the UK Home Office immigration enforcement community engagement staff). In Germany, outreach activities often targeted specific community centres, to ensure that the intended population was reached.

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39 BE, DE, EE, ES, FI, CZ, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, SE, SK, UK plus NO.

40 BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LU, LT, LV, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK, UK plus NO.

41 BE, CZ, EE, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, NL, SE, SK, UK and IOM.

42 BE, HR, SK.

43 EMN study on Dissemination of Information on Voluntary Return (2015), pag.24.

44 ES, IE, SI, SE, UK and NO and IOM.

45 In the UK, social media has been used by the NGO Refugee Action to deliver its government funded AVR programme 'Choices' but not directly by the Home Office.

Table 1 Tools used in the Member States plus Norway for disseminating information on (voluntary) return

Tools	(Member) State	Total
Leaflets/brochures	AT, BE, CZ, EE, FI, FR, IT, LU, NL, PL, SK, CH and NO	13
Only national language(s)	FR, NL, PL, CH, and NO	5
Posters	BE, CZ, FI, EE, IT, LU and SK	7
Websites	BE, EE, FI, FR, LU and NO	6
Drop-in clinic (face-to-face)	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK, UK, NO	22
Helplines/info lines	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK, UK, NO	21
Dedicated social media pages (e.g. Facebook)	BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR[46], HU[47], IE, IT, LU, NL, SE, SK, UK, NO	18
Information Cam-paigns	BE, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, HU, IE, IT, LU, NL, PL, SE, SK, UK, NO	17
Community visits	AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, NL, PL, SE, SK, UK, NO	16
Online discussion forums	CY, DE, ES, FR[48], IT	5

Source: European Migration Network, Synthesis Report for the EMN Focused Study 2015 on Dissemination of Information on Voluntary Return: how to reach irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities.

8.1.2 The example of Information campaigns

Information campaigns are complex strategic projects aimed at disseminating a specific message (in this case information on return) to a pre-defined target group. A campaign typically employs multiple tools and channels of communication, sometimes involving a range of actors and is implemented within a fixed time period.

Most Member States were found to implement campaigns to better disseminate information on (voluntary) return among irregular migrants. Some of these campaigns also targeted specifically those irregular migrants who were not in contact with the authorities, contributing to raising awareness of the return procedures available in the Member State. Table 2 provides an overview of these tools:

Table 2 Specific campaigns implemented between 2010–2019

Campaign Type	(Member) State
General campaigns	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, PL, SK, UK, NO[49] and IOM
Targeting migrants unknown to the authorities	BE, CZ, DE, FR, HU, IE, MT, UK, NO[50] and IOM

Source: European Migration Network, Synthesis Report for the EMN Focused Study 2015 on Dissemination of Information on Voluntary Return: how to reach irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities.

In some Member States, campaigns served the purpose of informing about AVRR programmes and were therefore implemented by the main organisation delivering the AVRR programme.[51]

Channels used for disseminating information during campaigns were varied, as shown below in the following examples:

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46 This channel is planned for the future, it has not been implemented so far.
47 The only compact information campaign was conducted in several phases in 2009 – 2011.
48 Only for some projects.
49 In the case of NO, these campaigns are undertaken by the NO IOM office.
50 See above.
51 CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, MT, PL, SK, UK, NO and IOM.

- Targeting transportation hubs and/or public spaces with posters;[52]

- Using broadcast / mainstream media such as television, radio, newspapers, and internet;[53]

- Targeting places frequented by potential returnees in the normal course of their lives such as festivals, cultural centres, religious centres and even restaurants in an attempt to reach (irregular) migrants who were not residing in organised facilities or in touch with the migration authorities;[54]

- Working with diaspora communities;[55] and targeting community-specific media[56] or even via cultural mediators.[57]

- Via social media.[58]

Eight Member States have not implemented any information campaigns.[59]

8.1.3 Reaching out to vulnerable groups

Member States have made specific efforts to reach out to vulnerable groups in the population,[60] for example:

- Belgium and Sweden have developed specific material addressed to minors (unaccompanied or with families) in the form of brochures or booklets. Belgium further developed a video about the risks of irregular stay.

- France collaborated with Belgium and ERRIN in a project aiming to better reach irregular migrants in Northern France and Belgium.

- Cyprus will implement monthly mobile visits to its Open Reception Centres for Vulnerable Applicants to International Protection at the beginning of 2020.

- IOM, according to the needs in the different countries in which it operated, developed trainings,[61] specific leaflets/posters/websites/campaigns,[62] has reinforced its collaboration with national authorities[63] or has reached out directly to these populations in the field.[64]

8.2. Timing of information dissemination

Timely dissemination of information on return was essential to ensure a successful return procedure. Providing information at an early stage was found to be effective as it allowed authorities to reach third-country nationals at risk of falling out of contact with the authorities and becoming irregular stayers.[65]

Several Member States and Norway included in their national legislation or guidelines a specific indication as to when in the asylum or migration process a third-country national should be informed about return.[66] In some Member States, this information was given at the same time as the issuance of a return decision,[67] in others, it was (also) given alongside a negative decision on international protection.[68] In some cases it was also provided when a third-country national decided to seek international protection.[69]

For other Member States, no specific guidelines on how and when to provide outreach information about return were found to be in place. However, in such cases, one approach adopted was to provide consultations and information meetings on return, taking place systematically during stay in organised facilities, such as reception centres,[70] detention centres[71] and immigration reporting centres.[72]

8.2.1 Information provision within forced return

Information about forced return was not usually the subject of outreach and information provision activities in all Member States except one.[73] Instead, in several cases, this information was provided during a return counselling session[74] or alongside a return decision.[75] In seven instances, the immigration services provided this information, alongside the police or border guards.[76] NGOs, particularly Caritas, were also involved in providing the information, alongside IOM in Germany, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. The content usually included general information about the risks incurred by not complying with a return procedure and in some cases, this information also included logistical return provisions.

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52 BE, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, HR, IT, MT, PL, SK, UK, NO and IOM.

53 AT, CY, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, PL, UK, NO.

54 BE, DE, EL, FR, HU, MT, SK, UK, NO and IOM.

55 BE, DE, UK and IOM.

56 BE, CZ, DE, ES, HU, IE, UK and NO.

57 BE, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FR, HU, NL, SK, UK and NO.

58 AT, ES, FI, IT and IOM.

59 AT, EE, HR, LV, LT, NL, SI, SE.

60 BE, CY, FR, IT, SE and IOM.

61 DE. The Swedish Red Cross has developed similar trainings in Sweden.

62 EL, SK plus NO.

63 BG, IE, MT.

64 MT.

65 This was reported by AT, BE, FR, DE, SE plus Norway.

66 BE, CZ, FI, FR, PL, SE, SI, SK, NO.

67 AT, BE, CZ, FR, HU, LU, PL, SE, SK. For Austria, this is not a legal requirement but implemented as an administrative practice.

68 BE, CZ, DE, FI, FR, IE, NL, PL, SE, SI, UK, NO. For Germany, information on AVR(R) programmes is provided alongside a negative decision; The information is provided by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees – BAMF. In Ireland, a notice providing for the option to apply for voluntary return is provided to protection applicants, protection applicants with negative decisions at first instance, and to applicants who have a final negative decision for international protection and permission to remain on non-protection grounds by the IOM country office. These notices set out the options to apply for voluntary return for these categories of persons. The form of the notices is set out in the International Protection Act 2015 (Voluntary Return) Regulations 2016.

69 BE, CZ, DE, FI, FR, SE, SK, UK, NO.

70 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, NL, PL, SE.

71 CY, CZ, EE, ES, FR, HU, LV, LT, LU, NL, SE, SI, SK, UK.

72 UK.

73 Slovenia stated that they do include forced return in their information and outreach activities..

74 AT, HU, SE.

75 DE, HR, LU, CZ, SE.

76 CY, CZ, DE, IT, MT, PL plus NO.

8.3. Accessibility of information – language

All Member States and Norway have developed tools to promote AVRR programmes in languages that can be readily understood by third-country nationals and usually in five or more languages in addition to the Member States' national language(s).[77] More than half of the Member States and Norway provided online information which was available in a variety of languages, in addition to English.[78] Written materials such as leaflets, brochures and posters were also often translated in multiple languages including English.

Finally, in cases of forced return, all Member States translated the information into at least one language the returnees would understand. The Netherlands, for example, provided no fewer than 22 different languages whilst Germany provided 31 different languages.

9. MAINTAINING CONSISTENCY OF INFORMATION PROVISION

Where multiple actors are involved in providing return information, it is important that their contributions are coordinated to ensure consistency.

While other actor(s) may have been involved in the production and delivery of information (especially in the case of AVRR), in eleven Member States specific tools were also produced and disseminated directly by the relevant national authorities [79] which had the effect of maintaining the consistency of the information communicated. Other methods included publishing common guidelines to follow or implementing common training sessions.[80] The Czech Republic and IOM maintained oversight through the employment of specific communication authorities/services to ensure that communication was consistent throughout.

Finally, a strong cooperation between all actors involved in outreach and information provision activities was considered to be a way to maintain the consistency of the information.[81]

10. FUNDING

Most of the Member States, as well as several IOM national offices, relied on a combination of both national and Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) funding to carry out their outreach and information provision activities.[82]

In France and Norway, the outreach and information activities were funded by national funds, while Bulgaria, Finland, Italy and Slovenia solely relied on AMIF funds. Conversely, Hungary relied partially on IOM funds to carry out outreach and information provision activities and on their national funds for the rest.

IOM itself relied on its own funds, AMIF[83] and partial national funding in some Member States.[84]

11. IMPACT MONITORING AND MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

Monitoring the impact of outreach and information provision activities is necessary to measure the effectiveness of these activities. However, the nature of the activities and the illusiveness of the target population made this difficult to achieve.

11.1. Monitoring the impact of the outreach and information provision activities

Only Belgium has conducted a formal evaluation to measure the impact of outreach and information provision activities. In France, an audit, whose results are expected in early February 2020, was realised to evaluate the action of the OFII regarding return and reintegration, including also activities on information and outreach. Germany has undertaken small evaluations at the local level but has not evaluated its entire outreach activities, even though some studies have been completed on this topic.

In the absence of formal evaluation, three other Member States reported that they relied on the close monitoring of activities by the authorities responsible for carrying out the information dissemination initiatives.[85] Germany and Norway relied on a close cooperation relationship with partners on the ground to monitor the impact of these activities. France and Finland relied on statistical information: France considered the total number of individuals returned from France[86] while Finland looked at the number of consultations their online or social media pages received.

Five Member States[87] did not have a formal monitoring system.

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77 Except Portugal who only provides information in Portuguese or Russian.

78 AT, BE, CY, DE, FR, EE, HR, HU, IE, LT, NL, PL, SE, SK, UK plus NO.

79 AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, FR, HU, IT, NL, SI, UK and IOM.

80 BE and SE.

81 CZ, DE, SE, SI plus NO and IOM.

82 E.g. AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, HR, HU, IE, LU, MT, NL, SE, SK and IOM.

83 EL and IE.

84 BG, DE, HR, IE, LT, MT, SK.

85 AT, CZ, IT.

86 With respect to the "OutReach" project with Belgium, street workers (marauds) report consultations and information requests, and not only effective voluntary returns.

87 LU, MT, SE, SI, SK.

IOM used a variety of techniques, including asking returnees to fill out questionnaires, or relying on annual seminars on return programmes to monitor and measure how effective the activities were.

11.2. Measuring effectiveness: challenges and good practices

The main challenge to measuring effectiveness was to collect and analyse relevant data.[88]

However, Member States, drawing on the perspectives of practitioners and other actors involved in disseminating information on voluntary return have been able to highlight some lessons and potential good practices.

The main source of information on the effectiveness of information on voluntary return were satisfaction surveys or information gathered in other ways from participants in voluntary return programmes in many Member States.[89] Conversely, in the Czech Republic, evaluative information was provided by third-country nationals participating in voluntary return programmes only at their own initiative. In Austria and Germany, IOM collected information to assess the effectiveness of information provided to beneficiaries of the AVRR programme through structured interviews with returnees.

Despite the widespread use of questionnaires to collect data to measure effectiveness on the information and outreach activities, there were several shortcomings that emerged rendering the findings partially incomplete or not representative.

In Belgium, France, United Kingdom and Norway, information about returnees' satisfaction with information provision was gathered and triangulated with other sources (statistics, management information, service provider interviews) to evaluate programmes overall. However, such evaluations tended to focus on assessing the effectiveness of the processes and practices with the aim to support the improvement of the AVRR schemes' delivery more generally rather than focusing on which aspects of the communications strategies were most effective in reaching out to (irregular) migrants.

The perspectives of migrants gathered through satisfaction surveys of AVRR service providers and State authorities were limited in what they could tell us about the effectiveness of information dissemination. Even where the results of a survey suggested that returnees were happy with the information they received, these only covered a small range of assisted returnees. They did not cover those returning voluntarily without assistance, or those who received information but chose to ignore it or not to return. Only in Austria and the United Kingdom data was also collected from non-AVRR returnees. Furthermore, migrants responding to surveys in the context of AVRR programmes were those who had already returned and who would be unlikely to respond negatively (perhaps for fear that their assistance would be revoked). Beneficiary surveys were, however, useful for indicating through which channels migrants were most likely to learn about voluntary return.

European Migration Network (2020). Policies and practices on outreach and information provision for the return of migrants in EU Member States and Norway – EMN Inform. Brussels: European Migration Network.

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88 Most of the information was compiled in the 2015 EMN Study on Dissemination of Information on Voluntary Return (which was based on the contributions of: AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, DI, FR, HU, HR, IE, LV, LT LY, MT, NL, PT, PL, SK, SI, ES, UK plus NO.) While the study was from 2015, the information was reconfirmed or updated in 2019 in the course of drafting this Inform.
89 BE, CY, DE, EE, FR, HU, LU, LT, SE, UK.

Keeping in touch with the EMN

EMN website www.ec.europa.eu/emn
EMN LinkedIn page www.linkedin.com/company/european-migration-network/
EMN Twitter www.twitter.com/EMNMigration

EMN national contact points

Austria www.emn.at

Belgium www.emnbelgium.be

Bulgaria www.emn-bg.com

Croatia www.emn.hr

Cyprus www.moi.gov.cy

Czech Republic www.emncz.eu

Denmark https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/authorities/denmark_en

Estonia www.emn.ee

Finland www.emn.fi

France www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Europe-et-International/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM2

Germany www.emn-germany.de

Greece www.emn.immigration.gov.gr/el/

Hungary www.emnhungary.hu

Ireland www.emn.ie

Italy www.emnitalyncp.it

Latvia www.emn.lv

Lithuania www.emn.lt

Luxembourg www.emnluxembourg.lu

Malta https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/mhas-information/emn/pages/european-migration-network.aspx

Netherlands www.emnnetherlands.nl

Poland www.emn.gov.pl

Portugal https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/authorities/portugal_en

Romania www.mai.gov.ro

Slovak Republic www.emn.sk

Slovenia www.emm.si

Spain http://extranjeros.empleo.gob.es/en/redeuropeamigracion

Sweden www.emnsweden.se

Norway www.emnnorway.no

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