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Pay-to-Go Schemes and Other Noncoercive Return Programs: Is Scale Possible?

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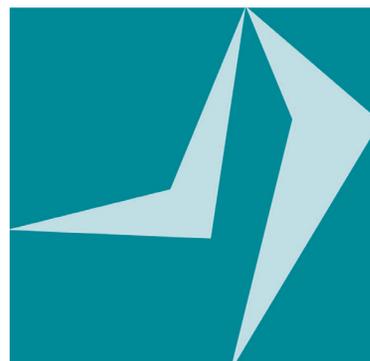


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Executive Summary

Noncoercive returns — also known as voluntary, assisted voluntary, or nonforced returns, or pay-to-go schemes — are a set of policies designed to encourage (typically) unauthorized immigrants to leave their host country without the cost, legal barriers, and political obstacles that result from removals or forced returns. Noncoercive return programs generally offer paid travel and/or a financial incentive in order to persuade target populations to cooperate with immigration authorities. Some also offer migrants assistance re-establishing themselves in their home countries, with the goal of making their return “sustainable” — that is, enabling them to succeed at home and discouraging them from returning immediately to the host country.

The term “noncoercive return” covers a number of different types of programs, ranging from those that are genuinely voluntary to those that are options of last resort, meaning that illegally resident immigrants who are facing the prospect of forced removal choose “voluntary” return instead.

Voluntary return appeals to host-country governments for several reasons. First, noncoercive return programs tend to be less expensive per person than forced returns, because they cost little more than an airfare (plus any financial incentive), while forced returnees may spend long periods in detention and must be accompanied home, often on chartered planes. Rough calculations suggest that in Sweden and the United Kingdom, for example, the per-capita cost of noncoercive return is roughly one-tenth that of removal (see Table 1). Second, while forced returns often require formal cooperation with source countries (in the form of complex and difficult-to-negotiate readmission agreements), voluntary return programs require only travel documents. Third, pay-to-go returns are considered more humane, and governments find it easier to engage nonprofit and community-based organizations in these programs. Finally, the financial incentives and/or reintegration advice sometimes offered may have development benefits for countries of origin, although their development impact has not been rigorously evaluated.

Despite the strong theoretical appeal of pay-to-go return programs, they have a long history of failure on the ground. Voluntary return programs implemented since the 1970s in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, and France, as well as more recent pilots in the United Kingdom, have persistently failed to attract substantial numbers of participants (with the notable exception of a late 1990s program returning migrants from Germany to Bosnia). Large-scale pay-to-go programs are rare, in other words. Moreover, the “sustainability” of returns (whether immigrants can be persuaded to *stay* in their countries of origin and whether they can reintegrate successfully) is also far from clear.

Despite the strong theoretical appeal of pay-to-go return programs, they have a long history of failure on the ground.

Policymakers crafting pay-to-go return programs must overcome powerful barriers in order to persuade immigrants to leave the country even despite substantially lower standards of living in their home countries and the social stigma that migrants may face when they return home from an “unsuccessful” migration effort. The most direct incentive for migrants to return voluntarily is the financial incentive — the immigrant is paid to go — although there is little evidence of what sums are needed to attract applicants.¹ On the other hand, pay-to-go return programs are only likely to be attractive to potential return migrants when backed up with the real threat of removal — a hallmark of

¹ Pay-to-go schemes include, at a minimum, the cost of an airfare and transfers. More often they include a direct financial incentive. This report also refers to noncoercive returns, which is broadly similar but includes those who return without coercion without cost to the state.



the relatively effective Germany-Bosnia program of the late 1990s. (For this reason one can, of course, argue that calling these returns “voluntary” is misleading).

In addition to these direct incentives, participation in voluntary return programs appears to increase when application procedures are simple and when sufficient information and advice are available to potential participants. Contacting failed asylum seekers immediately after their application is rejected is thought to increase participation (although not all programs aiming to do this have been successful). And since unauthorized immigrants are suspicious of government agencies, nonprofit and community groups can be critical in efforts to engage with potential returnees and mitigate concerns about social stigmatization.

Pay-to-go return programs will always face barriers to achieving high levels of participation, not least because many unauthorized migrants simply are not willing to return and are prepared to take substantial risks in order to remain in the host country. However, the experience of some countries suggests that voluntary return can reach a larger scale than is typically the case. The advantages of these programs are sufficient to make them an important part of the policy toolkit to reduce illegal immigration. However, persistent experimentation (and crucially, evaluation) will be needed in order to overturn barriers to the successful implementation of noncoercive return policies and make them more effective in the future.

I. Introduction

Over the past decade, immigrant-receiving countries struggling with high levels of illegal immigration have returned increasing numbers of the unauthorized to their country of origin. Most of the returns have been forced, increasing significantly from about 2002 to 2005 or 2006,² with subsequent declines in many countries since then.³ However, alongside rising deportations, noncoercive return programs have attracted increasing policy attention and experimentation.

At the present time, noncoercive return programs are run almost entirely by European countries, but they are increasingly being tried elsewhere, including in transit countries (such as Libya) and in other modern industrialized countries (such as the pilot being run in Canada).

The term “noncoercive return” covers a number of different types of programs, ranging from those that are genuinely voluntary to those that are options of last resort, meaning that illegally resident immigrants who are facing the prospect of forced removal choose “voluntary” return instead. Noncoercive return programs generally offer paid travel and/or a financial incentive in order to persuade target populations to cooperate with immigration authorities. There are now at least 128 such programs⁴ across the world, with most pay-to-go return programs run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Pay-to-go return policies have two types of goal. The first is simply to return immigrants, typically those who don’t have legal resident status or who have exhausted their asylum claims (especially

2 Matthew J. Gibney, “Asylum and the Expansion of Deportation in the United Kingdom,” *Government and Opposition* 43, no. 2 (2008). This most recent decline in deportations can be partly explained by the decline in the number of asylum applications, which has led — in absolute terms — to fewer rejected asylum seekers, the prime candidates for return. See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2009), www.unhcr.org/4ba7341a9.html.

3 Note that the absolute number of deportations has continued to rise in the United States, reaching a historic high in 2010. See US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), “Secretary Napolitano announces record-breaking immigration enforcement statistics achieved under the Obama administration,” (news release, October 6, 2010), www.ice.gov/news/releases/1010/101006washingtondc2.htm.

4 Authors’ database.



in Europe). The second part of the policy goal (not necessarily “required”) is to ensure “sustainable return,” where the immigrant has the opportunity to succeed in the country of return and thus contributes to broader international development goals. Current government efforts, especially in Europe, focus on sustainable return by setting effective financial incentives and making “offers” of reintegration assistance as part of a tailored package. This reduces the cost effectiveness of the intervention, but may strengthen the political case.

Voluntary return is often considered attractive by governments. Forced deportation is expensive, often requires overcoming complex legal obstacles and community reaction, and can attract negative media and public attention (for example there was significant negative attention in several European countries during the debates around the 2008 Returns Directive⁵), although this latter point is not always the case.⁶ Pay-to-go return programs, in contrast, have several advantages: in particular, they are cheaper⁷ and more humane than forced returns. They are therefore economically, politically, and morally more palatable.

However, our analysis finds that pay-to-go return programs do not attract large numbers of migrants, do not result in major development gains for countries of origin, and have limited impact on the behavior of returned migrants (i.e. that they may re-migrate). The first point is the starkest: Although there are certain exceptions, such as returns to Bosnia, it is unusual for any individual return program to result in the return of more than a few thousand individuals a year. The third point has the weakest evidence base, due to the very limited number of postreturn studies.⁸

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Nevertheless, for some countries, pay-to-go returns form a relatively substantial proportion of overall returnees while for other countries they form a relatively low proportion. We do not fully understand the reasons for the differing proportions and whether it relates to country context, program design, or target migrant group.

5 The 2008 Returns Directive creates common standards for EU Member States returning illegally resident third-country nationals. See Anneliese Baldaccini, “The return and removal of irregular migrants under EU law: an analysis of the Returns Directive,” *European Journal of Migration and Law* 11, no. 1 (2009).

6 Some governments (e.g. the United States and France) are keen to publicize their record on forced removals to indicate enforcement prowess.

7 They are less expensive in direct comparison to forced returns and, for European countries, may attract European Union (EU) partial funding, further “subsidizing” the cost.

8 An evaluation of the United Kingdom’s Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) for 2004 was carried out in 2006 in Sri Lanka and involved interviews with 31 returnees. Twenty-nine returnees were reported to be optimistic about the future, though they were not asked about remigration; seven (23 percent) said in answers to other questions that they would consider leaving again. In contrast, a study of 25 returnees, mostly to the former Yugoslavia, found very high levels of psychological stress; 22 of the 25 (88 percent) were diagnosed with at least one psychiatric disorder and 16 (62 percent) reported that they did not feel integrated. No mention was made of future migration intentions. See Russ Bryan, Ben Cocke, Kirsty Gillan, and Darren Thiel, *The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) 2004 and 2004 extension: monitoring report*, Home Office Research Report 30 (London: Home Office, 2010), <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/horr30a.pdf>; Ulrike von Lersner, Ulrike Wiens, Thomas Elbert, and Frank Neuner, “Mental health of refugees following state sponsored repatriation from Germany,” *BMC Psychiatry* 8, no. 88 (2008).



This report investigates the effectiveness of pay-to-go return measures using the available academic and policy literature, as well as interviews with government officials. The goal is to establish what policy ingredients make them successful and what the limits are to their large-scale application.

Box 1. Definitions of Pay-to-Go Return

Pay-to-go return programs, also referred to as *voluntary return*, *voluntary assisted return*, *noncoercive return*, or *nonforced return*, describes programs that give immigrants incentives to return to their country of origin or to another country, through means that are noncoercive. The vast majority of programs offer paid travel to return home, and most also offer a financial incentive or stipend of some kind. Increasingly, many programs offer reintegration assistance (which sometimes comes under the rubric of co-development).

Assisted voluntary return programs typically target one or more of four distinct groups of migrants and asylum seekers:

1. **Legal migrants.** Migrants with valid residence and/or work permits, or ongoing permission to remain for humanitarian reasons, which would allow them to continue living legally in the country beyond the time when they choose to return.
2. **Asylum seekers whose claim is under consideration.** Asylum seekers whose claims have not yet been resolved, who choose to leave before a decision has been made or before they have exhausted all appeals.
3. **Undetected unauthorized migrants.** Migrants who are illegally resident but have not come into contact with relevant authorities, and asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected but are not the subject of deportation or removal orders, who choose to return without deportation orders being issued.
4. **Unauthorized migrants in removal proceedings.** Migrants who are subject to active removal proceedings, including asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected, who may or may not be in detention, and who decide to leave before they are forcibly removed.

The European Council for Refugees and Exiles considers that only those in the first category are capable of genuinely voluntary return and for other groups this process should be labelled mandatory return. The European Returns Directive (2008) labels the choice of those in group four “voluntary departure” rather than “voluntary return.” Others argue that the term “voluntary” should be abandoned entirely for groups three and four as it gives individuals a misleading impression of choice (Crawley 2010). We use the term “noncoercive return” to examine the return of all four groups. It encompasses all return that does not involve physical force.

Pay-to-go return measures may also include support for reintegration and “sustainable return.” This may simply be to ensure that individuals do not immediately come back again, but it may also involve an international development component. While there is no consensus on the definition of sustainable return, we follow the IOM definition: that migrants remain in the country to which they have been returned for at least one year and that they are generating financial income to support themselves.



II. The Appeal of Pay-to-Go Return

There are three key rationales for governments to choose pay-to-go return: it is cost effective; it does not require bilateral cooperation between states; and it offers a more humane alternative to forced return, which ensures greater political support. The cooperation of individual returnees is the critical variable in each of these rationales.

A. Cost Effectiveness

Voluntary returns are widely considered to be less costly per person than forced returns, although comparative data are limited (see Table 1). There are two main explanations: Agencies must charter special planes for forced returns due to difficulties using commercial flights for this purpose (returned migrants must be accompanied by guards, medical personnel, and translators, which further increases the cost and may lead to tremendous inefficiencies)⁹ and secondly, forced returnees have often spent prolonged periods in detention, further increasing the cost to the state. Pay-to-go returns, on the other hand, incur few costs other than the price of a flight on a commercial carrier and the cost of program incentives.

Table 1 illustrates that the cost of forced returns is likely to be about ten times greater than that of pay-to-go returns, although exact figures are hard to calculate, as most data are either confidential or cannot be used to extract an average per capita cost.

Table 1. Available Data on Costs of Coercive and Pay-to-Go Returns

Country	Year	Average Cost of Coercive Return per Individual	Average Cost of Pay-to-Go Return per Individual
Belgium	2008	N/A	1,250 euros
Germany	2008	N/A	1,288 euros
Norway	2009	8,700 - 9,950 euros	1,300 euros*
Sweden	2009	6,500 euros	600 euros
United Kingdom	2009-10, inflation-adjusted figures from 2003-04	14,500 euros	1,450 euros

*Excludes reintegration package of 1,200-4,400 euros.

Sources: Authors' analysis based on interviews with officials and European Migration Network data.

The costs cited in Table 1 do not include all the financial assistance or noncash equivalents as part of the reintegration process. In practice, these vary substantially, from 153 euros per adult and 46 euros

⁹ Spontaneous opposition from other passengers to the presence of distressed forced returnees on commercial flights is one explanation for the widespread shift from the use of commercial carriers for forced returns to the more expensive option of specially chartered planes. One flight that was specially chartered to return two migrants from Germany to West Africa in 2006 reportedly cost between 40,000 and 80,000 euros for the flight alone; see Jan Schneider and Axel Kreienbrink, "Return Assistance in Germany: Programmes and strategies fostering assisted return to and reintegration in third countries" (Working Paper 31, German European Migration Network Contact Point, May 2010), www.integration-in-deutschland.de/nr_435122/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Migration/Downloads/EMN/EMNselbst/emn-wp31-return-assistance-en.html.



per child for the French Assisted Humanitarian Return program,¹⁰ to as high as 3,600 euros per person for the United Kingdom's Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP),¹¹ and up to 4,400 euros for Norway's reintegration support measures.¹²

An additional cost advantage for EU Member States is that pay-to-go returns programs may also be eligible for supplementary funding under various EU-wide financial arrangements. The most recent of these is the European Return Fund, which has allocated 676 million euros for the period 2008 to 2013 and prioritizes support for voluntary return.¹³ The availability of such additional funding streams has also boosted interest in pay-to-go returns.

B. Smooth Cooperation between States

Governments are able to manage voluntary returns outside the framework of formal bilateral agreements, making them easier to implement than forced returns, which require the agreement and ongoing cooperation of the state to which individuals will be returned. Securing that cooperation has usually been one of the most significant barriers to policies of forced returns, typically requiring readmission agreements (through which countries of origin and transit countries agree to admit removed migrants). The number of bilateral readmission agreements has increased dramatically since the 1990s,¹⁴ but these agreements are difficult to arrange and are usually subject to lengthy negotiation. For example, the European readmission agreement with Pakistan — the twelfth readmission agreement negotiated by the European Commission since 2004¹⁵ — only entered into force in July 2010 after ten years of negotiations.¹⁶ Negotiations with other key states, such as Morocco, are ongoing after years of discussion.¹⁷

Pay-to-go returns, on the other hand, usually operate outside any agreement with the state to which migrants are returning, if individual returnees already have valid travel documents. Where travel documents are missing or out of date, the relevant embassy will have to issue the necessary documentation before travel. Most pay-to-go return programs also offer facilitated service to obtain emergency travel documents, which is an attractive service for many people. Furthermore, agreement with countries of origin (where it is necessary, perhaps, in the case of large numbers of returnees) to return migrants through pay-to-go means is easier to realize than through forced returns.

The vast majority of pay-to-go return programs are managed by IOM (see Appendix). Such programs minimize direct contact between states in their day-to-day operations. Forced returns come much closer to infringing upon core issues of sovereignty, and inevitably involve a range of state officials in their planning and execution. Minimizing interactions between states over matters as delicate as the transfer of populations in favor of a more disinterested, internationally recognized agency such as IOM is arguably a further factor smoothing the progress of noncoercive returns.

10 European Migration Network, *Programmes and strategies in France fostering assisted voluntary return and reintegration in third countries* (Brussels: European Migration Network, 2009).

11 Transparency Research, *The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) 2006: a process and impact assessment*, Home Office Research Report 39 (London: Home Office, 2010).

12 The United States offers no equivalent of such programs or financial assistance.

13 Council Decision 575/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of May 23, 2007 establishing the European Return Fund for the period 2008 to 2013.

14 Jean-Pierre Cassarino, ed., *Unbalanced Reciprocities: Cooperation on Readmission in the Euro-Mediterranean Area* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 2010), www.mei.edu/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=y0UGbA6b01A%3D&tabid=541.

15 Others are: Albania (entered into force in 2006); Hong Kong (2004); Macao (2004); Sri Lanka (2005); Russia (2007); Bosnia and Herzegovina (2008); Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2008); Moldova (2008); Montenegro (2008); Ukraine (2008); and Serbia (2008).

16 Statewatch, "EU: Readmission agreements with third countries," *Statewatch News*, July 4, 2010, www.statewatch.org/news/2010/jul/04eu-readmission-agreements.htm.

17 European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, *Readmission Policy in the European Union* (Brussels: European Parliament, 2010), www.statewatch.org/news/2010/sep/ep-study-eu-readmission.pdf.



C. Moral and Political Arguments

The use of physical force to return individuals against their will to a country where many fear inhuman or degrading treatment or imprisonment is widely seen as morally objectionable and generates substantial public opposition. Migrant community groups, whose cooperation is essential in pay-to-go returns programs, are almost universally hostile to the idea of forced returns. Organized public campaigns against forced returns are widespread and have a significant effect on the numbers of expulsions that are able to take place.¹⁸ In contrast, civil society may actively support noncoercive programs, and even play a critical role in their success by helping to disseminate information to migrants and sometimes even providing services.¹⁹

Opposition to pay-to-go return is not unprecedented (depending on how the program is organized), although even activist groups such as the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) publicize the United Kingdom's VARRP program, including information on their website on ways in which migrants wishing to return can get in touch with IOM London.²⁰ Such examples provide a valuable way of disseminating information about these programs to individuals who may potentially be interested in voluntary return. This is important, because these groups are trusted, respected sources and their provision of the information generates confidence amongst migrant community organizations that are often in the best position to publicize information to potentially interested migrants. In general, the main role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) has been to refer migrants to (typically) IOM-run programs. In some cases, however, IOM has subcontracted program elements (such as provision of advice) to NGOs, which receive payment.

D. Sustainable Return and Development Gains

Most noncoercive return programs now provide a financial incentive in addition to the cost of the flight and any administrative matters. This aims to increase the attractiveness of noncoercive return but also to ensure sustainable return. The financial incentive may be a small sum, such as the 153 euros given to returnees under the French Assisted Humanitarian Return, or it may be much more substantial, targeted at supporting individual reintegration projects after return, such as the United Kingdom's VARRP.

Increasingly, many programs offer reintegration assistance beyond the financial incentive. Such reintegration assistance may be termed development aid, or in a term popularized by French policymakers, "co-development." Such assistance may take many forms, but examples include: business start-up advice and cash, vocational training or education subsidies, additional travel allowances (for baggage, etc.), medical assistance, and help with home or community improvements.

There are three reasons for providing such support beyond cash transfers: it provides an added incentive for individuals to take advantage of voluntary returns, it ensures that the return of those who do participate is "sustainable" (i.e. they do not leave again within a year), and it can effectively channel development support.

There is no widespread agreement on the definition of sustainable return. For policymakers, the goal

¹⁸ In France, the *Réseau éducation sans frontières* was established in 2004 to coordinate opposition to the forced return of children from schools. Its website lists more than 100 returns a year which have been effectively prevented by public campaigns. In the United Kingdom, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) fulfills a similar coordination and publicity function and other groups around Europe, such as Germany's Pro Asyl are now effectively networked in pan-European coalitions and able to draw on widespread public support around particular campaigns, including occasional involvement from elected representatives.

¹⁹ The *Retour et Émigration des Demandeurs d'Asile de Belgique* (REAB) program in Belgium, one of the oldest currently operational return programs in Europe, relies on a network of 61 civil-society partners. See International Organization for Migration (IOM), *REAB, Return and Emigration of Asylum Seekers Ex-Belgium, Annual Report 2009* (Brussels: IOM, 2010)."

²⁰ NCADC, "Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme," last updated December 5, 2009, www.ncadc.org.uk/archives/resources/HC321.html.



is usually not simply to return the largest number of migrants, but also to modify their behavior to ensure that immigrants who leave do not immediately come back (though it is unclear whether there is a distinction between temporary and permanent migration). For others, such as IOM, it means ensuring that immigrants who return are able to become financially independent within a certain time period, which is usually considered as one year after return. There have also been some efforts to “cluster” support for returnees in the country of origin, so that it may have a positive influence on the economy of an area of significant outmigration, with the possibility of encouraging others not to leave.

Imagined in this way, return programs may also have a positive impact on the reintegration of individual returnees and ultimately on the overall development of the country of return. In fact, several temporary return programs explicitly aim to ensure a positive developmental impact. While these investments will inevitably increase the overall cost, it has the benefit of yielding more valuable outcomes for public investment than simple return. Attention to the positive elements of sustainability may increase support from countries of origin and facilitate the negotiation of international agreements.²¹ It may also enhance the moral case for supporting return, generating greater support among civil-society groups and migrant community organizations. Both of these developments may allow return to operate more effectively and perhaps reach larger numbers of people.

The evidence base on the impact of reintegration support is extremely limited.²² Existing evidence suggests that postreturn reintegration support is rarely the deciding factor in any return decision, though it may encourage individuals who are already thinking about return.

The financial incentive is likely to have some impact, though there is no evidence that increasing the sum offered leads to greater participation. This is partly because returnees do not expect to receive any money, as they do not trust agencies or the state to deliver the cash transfer.²³ Policy experimentation on financial incentives has been significant but little good evaluation evidence on impacts exists. More recent experimentation focuses on adjusting the financial incentive over time. For example, a new approach in Norway seeks to incentivize early return by allocating the maximum reintegration grant (around 2,500 euros) for those who return within two months of an asylum rejection, falling to 1,250 euros for those who return more than four months later.

*Existing evidence suggests that
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The focus on business support (a popular part of many programs) is also problematic. Failure among business ventures using reintegration support is high²⁴ and as a result its development impact is limited²⁵ according to the very limited number of postreturn studies.

21 A recent study by the Hit Foundation found limited involvement of countries of origin in the cases of Georgia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Iraq/Kurdistan. See Hit Foundation, *European cooperation on the sustainable return and reintegration of asylum seekers* (Amsterdam: Hit Foundation, 2010), http://hitfoundation.eu/docs/EU_Cooperation_Return_final_report.pdf.

22 Ruerd Ruben, Marieke Van Houte, and Tine Davids, “What determines the embeddedness of forced return migrants? Rethinking the role of pre and post-return assistance,” *International Migration Review* 43, no. 4 (2009).

23 Bryan et al, *The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) 2004 and 2004 extension: monitoring report*.

24 Von Lersner et al found that only two of the 25 individuals (8 percent) they interviewed following participation in voluntary return from Germany had a regular income. See Von Lersner et al, “Mental health of refugees following state sponsored repatriation from Germany.”

25 Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, *Assisted Voluntary Return: An Opportunity for Development?* DRC Briefing 20 (Brighton, UK: Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, 2009).



III. History and Data

Voluntary return programs have a long history, especially in Europe. European return programs emerged for the first time in the midst of the economic recessions of the early to mid-1970s. Early return programs were established in the Netherlands, France, and Germany. All early schemes focused on legally resident foreign nationals. In the Netherlands, the Reintegration of Emigrant Manpower and Promotion of Local Opportunities for Development program (REMPLOD) was introduced in 1974 and was targeted at guest workers from Turkey, Tunisia, and Morocco, who were encouraged to return home and start entrepreneurial ventures in their country of origin with Dutch government support. The French, meanwhile, established the *Aide au Retour* program in 1977, which offered migrants cash payments to return to their home countries. Similarly, Germany passed the Act to Promote the Preparedness of Foreign Workers to Return in late 1983, which offered migrants 10,000 marks²⁶ to voluntarily return to their countries of origin.

None of these initiatives lived up to the expectations of policymakers. REMPLD, which focused on supporting reintegration efforts once migrants returned to target countries, was disbanded in the mid-1980s after reviews of the costly program revealed that its success had been minimal. *Aide au Retour* targeted unemployed migrants in France, offering them 10,000 francs²⁷ to return to their country of origin definitively. Portuguese and Spanish migrants dominated take-up, though participation by migrants from North and West African countries, who were the main targets of the program, was minimal. In total, 60,000 migrants returned between 1977 and 1981 and only 3,515 Algerians (5 percent of the total) took advantage of the program.²⁸ These outcomes were mirrored by the German program, which persuaded only a small number of the country's large foreign-born population to return home and was discontinued in the early 1990s.

Current programs have similarly failed to achieve their objectives. Piotr Plewa suggests that — in a direct echo of the 1970s programs — the recent French attempt to persuade unemployed immigrants to leave in the wake of the 2008-09 recession was underused.²⁹ Similarly, the countries that embarked on pay-to-go schemes for unemployed immigrant workers as a result of the recession — including Spain, the Czech Republic, Denmark, and Japan — found that in practice, few immigrants took up offers to return. For example, the Spanish scheme, the Voluntary Return Plan, targeted unemployed foreign nationals and was launched in November 2008 with a target of 87,000 returnees. An estimated 11,400 immigrants had agreed to leave Spain under the country's pay-to-go program as of April 2010 — about 10 percent of potential participants and a tiny fraction of the total immigrant population.³⁰ Furthermore, most of them returned to Latin America, whereas the intended target was assumed to be Moroccans, the largest foreign national group in Spain.

These initiatives have two factors in common which could explain their failure. First, they targeted legally resident labor migrants who were (perhaps temporarily) unemployed during a financial crisis, either in the early 1970s or since 2007. Second, they required an agreement that migrants would not return, at least for a specified period of time. The programs assumed that individual migrants would exchange a future in a European country where the economy had historically been buoyant, despite recent difficulties, for a small amount of money and a future in a country where the economy was in a similarly poor state but gave few reasons for optimism, with no possibility of changing their mind. It was assumed that those who took assistance to return were those who had been planning to return anyway.

26 The equivalent of about US \$3,922 at 1983 exchange rates; see Harold Marcuse, "Historical Dollar-to-Marks Currency Conversion Page," accessed April 11, 2011, www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/projects/currency.htm#tables.

27 The equivalent of about US \$2,012 at 1977 exchange rates; see St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank, "France/U.S. Foreign Exchange Rate," accessed April 11, 2011, <http://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/data/EXFRUS.txt>.

28 Patrick Weil, *La France et ses Étrangers* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1991).

29 Piotr Plewa, "Voluntary Return Programmes: Could they assuage the effects of the economic crisis?" (COMPAS Working Paper No. 75, University of Oxford, 2009).

30 Ruth Ferrero-Turrion, "Migration and Migrants in Spain: After the Bust" in *Prioritizing Integration*, eds. Bertelsmann Stiftung and Migration Policy Institute (Guetersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010).



In contrast to this approach to return, the majority of recent pay-to-go programs have focused on migrants without legal residence, primarily failed asylum seekers and those awaiting forced removal. This includes those transiting to countries (such as unauthorized immigrants in Libya or Calais). Even with these programs, where legal residence is unlikely to be secured, the numbers of people returning has remained relatively low, compared to total target populations. Even when a program is well resourced, widely publicized, and offers substantial reintegration support, such as the VARRP, annual returns are in the low thousands.

There is one obvious historical exception to this trend. Between 1996 and 1998, over 250,000 Bosnians returned from Germany, immediately following the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Box 2). This was primarily due to two reasons: First, a substantial number of people were motivated to return; and second, returns were boosted by the withdrawal of temporary protection status in Germany and the rapid establishment of a credible forced returns program as an encouragement for individuals to take voluntary options.

Pay-to-go returns from Germany to Kosovo briefly rivaled the substantial numbers of individuals returned to Bosnia, exceeding 50,000 in 2000, though this decreased rapidly to a few thousand returns a year, a total more typical of other programs. The policy lessons from the Germany-Bosnia return

Box 2. Returns to Bosnia and Herzegovina

Some 2.2 million people were displaced as a result of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An estimated 700,000 individuals were given temporary protection in the European Union, almost half of them in Germany (see Walpurga Englbrecht, “Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo: voluntary return in safety and dignity?” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 23 no. 3: 100-48). Return was guaranteed in Annex 7 of the Dayton agreement, signed in December 1995, and although the principal group targeted for return under this agreement were those displaced internally within Bosnia and Herzegovina, EU Member States also began organizing return soon afterwards.

In the three years following the signature of the Dayton agreement, an estimated 250,000 individuals returned from Germany to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Global IDP Database, *Profile of Internal Displacement: Bosnia and Herzegovina* [Geneva: Norwegian Refugee Council, 2001], www.ecoi.net/file_upload/dh1359_01694bih.pdf). In November 1996, the German government signed a bilateral readmission agreement with the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina; in 1997, just over 1,000 individuals were returned by force from Germany and in 1998 this had increased to almost 2,000 (International Crisis Group, *Minority Return or Mass Relocation? Bosnia Project*, Europe Report No. 33 [Brussels: International Crisis Group, 1998], www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/balkans/bosnia-herzegovina/033-minority-return-or-mass-relocation.aspx).

Particular concern was expressed about return of individuals to areas in which they formed part of the minority ethnic group, and where adequate security measures were not in place to protect them (Richard Black, “Conceptions of ‘home’ and the political geography of refugee repatriation: between assumption and contested reality in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Applied Geography* 22, no. 2: 123-38). An IOM survey found that 60 percent of these individuals were returned to situations of internal displacement (IOM, *Back to Bosnia and Herzegovina: initial findings of a survey of refugees* [Sarajevo: IOM, 1998]), often because they were unable to return to their original place of origin because of security fears. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also expressed concern about “induced” returns and the significance of internal displacement for those returning voluntarily. According to the German government, 160,296 individuals returned under the targeted assisted voluntary returns program between 1996 and 1998; see Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) cited in Schneider and Kreienbrink, “Return Assistance in Germany.”



program seem to be that for pay-to-go return to lead to substantial numbers of people returning, individuals' rights in the settlement country must be withdrawn and a credible forced return program established. Yet this is essentially the context in which most other current voluntary return policies operate, targeting illegally resident migrants and failed asylum seekers without achieving anything like that scale (see Table 1). The Bosnian return program is distinguished more by the size of the initial migration to Germany, which facilitated the dissemination of information and the administration of returns.

Data

There are now a significant number of pay-to-go return programs around the globe. We have identified no fewer than 128 programs³¹ (see Appendix for a selection of country programs), with more in the pipeline (Canada plans to implement a pilot program in 2012, for example). There is very little available evidence on the numbers and volumes of those who are returned by pay-to-go means.³² IOM data for the year ending December 2009 (the most recent available) indicate that there were 22,830 assisted voluntary returns in Europe. This figure refers only to IOM-run programs, but this covers the large majority of returns and gives an indication of the total scale of pay-to-go return in Europe. This figure comprises all IOM-run programs in the 20 European countries in which IOM manages voluntary return programs and there is significant variation among countries (see Table 2). Most countries have very low figures and where returns per country are higher, such as the 4,945 who returned from the United Kingdom, this represents at least four separate programs. Returns per program are generally low.

Table 2. Number of Pay-to-Go Returns Organized by IOM by Country, 2009

Country	Number of Pay-to-Go Returns
Austria	2,885
Belgium	2,661
Bulgaria	39
Czech Republic	1,102
Finland	228
France	0
Germany	3,126
Hungary	102
Ireland	405
Italy	131
Latvia	10
Malta	29
Netherlands	2,582
Norway	1,005
Poland	1,564
Portugal	381
Spain	740
Sweden	176
Switzerland	695
United Kingdom	4,945
Total	22,830

Source: IOM, *Assisted Voluntary Return – EU Year Report 2009* (Brussels: IOM, 2009).

A key indicator is the proportion of returns that are pay-to-go. Partial analysis on a country-by-country basis can be drawn together from a variety of sources (see Table 3). These data are best seen

31 Authors' database

32 European Migration Network, *EMN Synthesis Report: Return Migration* (Brussels: European Migration Network, 2007): 11-6.

as an indicator of relative proportions, as collection methods and definitions of coercive and pay-to-go returns vary between countries and from year to year. Where data are published by governments (which is rare) there is no indication that a higher proportion of pay-to-go return is interpreted as a success.

If anything, the data indicate the political sensitivity of return between countries. Since 2002, the United Kingdom has had specific targets on return and the release of statistics is typically greeted by newspaper headlines. The government therefore interprets any increase in total returns, regardless of the means (including refusal at the border), as an indicator of success. The biggest difference between the United Kingdom and Sweden is the number of coercive returns, but this may be explained by the obvious political incentive to increase this number in the United Kingdom.

Table 3. Comparison of Coercive and Pay-to-Go Return Rates in Six European Countries

Country	Year	Absolute Number of Noncoercive Returns	Absolute Number of Coercive Returns	Pay-to-Go Return as Proportion of Total Return (%)
Austria	2005	1,406	6,172	19
	2008	2,725	2,045	57
Belgium	2005	3,741	6,565	36
	2007	2,593	4,313	37
Germany	2005	7,465	23,697	24
	2007	2,799	N/A	N/A
Sweden	2005	6,900	2,200	76
	2009	7,495	3,800	66
Netherlands	2005	5,966	20,274	23
	2008	1,767	7,200	20
United Kingdom	2005	3,655	54,560	6
	2009	16,685	48,065	26

Note: Before 2008, UK data on coercive returns included those who returned voluntarily once removal proceedings had been initiated. In 2008, this figure was separated for in-country removals.

Sources: European Migration Network (EMN) and European Reintegration Support Organizations (ERSO)

The data should be interpreted carefully, particularly for the United Kingdom, where coercive returns have been interpreted broadly, including those refused at the border. For Belgium, Sweden, and the Netherlands, the data suggest a relatively consistent pattern among the years presented. The data also reveal the extraordinarily high levels of voluntary returns achieved by Sweden. This proportion has been consistently high, reaching 82 percent in 2008.³³ Assuming that increasing pay-to-go returns is the key goal, the high proportion makes Sweden an important case for policy study.

There are even fewer data available on pay-to-go return programs in transit countries, or “upstream” returns. Table 4 presents data from established programs. The Stranded Migration Facility, an IOM initiative that seeks to respond flexibly and rapidly to sudden flows of irregular migrants with humanitarian assistance, has since 2005 offered more ad hoc support for individuals wishing to return, decided on a case-by-case basis, usually with the involvement of the relevant embassy.

³³ Centre for Social Justice, *Asylum Matters: restoring trust in the UK asylum system* (London: Centre for Social Justice, 2008): 14, www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/FINAL%20Asylum%20Matters%20_Web_.pdf.



Table 4. Assisted Voluntary Returns by IOM in Morocco and Libya, 2006-09

Transit Country	2006-09
Morocco	1,850
Libya	4,167

Source: Personal communication, International Organization of Migration (IOM)

IV. Strategies to Improve Pay-to-Go Return

There are several factors that influence the success and sustainability of pay-to-go return programs. While some are beyond the remit of policymakers — such as the individual motivations of migrants — there are certain sticks and carrots that policymakers can use to increase the numbers of participating migrants. There are four main strategies that can encourage migrants to take advantage of pay-to-go returns: the existence of credible threats to a person’s ability to legally remain in the country of destination; financial incentives encouraging return, including reintegration assistance; the policy design of the program itself; and the strength of migrant networks and community engagement with programs of pay-to-go return.

There is very little useful evaluation evidence on pay-to-go return and reintegration. Most research consists of monitoring data with a limited number of evaluation studies. Research into the postreturn situation has been even more limited, yet this is critical to properly assess the impact of return programs on the sustainability of return.

A. *Disincentives and Credible Threats*

The success of pay-to-go return programs is likely to be closely linked to other parts of a country’s immigration system, particularly existing regulations concerning illegally resident migrants. First, any form of regularization, amnesty, or backlog-clearing exercise will massively reduce the incentive to participate in pay-to-go return programs. Second, voluntary return is usually dependent on an effective coercive return policy, particularly where pay-to-go return is targeted at those individuals threatened with enforced removal. It is widely believed among enforcement officials that a greater effort in forced returns leads to greater numbers of people leaving through pay-to-go return programs. Third, the quality of the initial asylum or admission decision or the generosity of any broader humanitarian consideration also plays an important role, as those factors influence the level of fear an individual may experience at the prospect of return, and hence their willingness to take up pay-to-go options.

B. *Financial Incentives and Reintegration Assistance*

There are many potential program variations in pay-to-go return.³⁴ This report argues that three crucial sets of policy design measures are critical to the success of pay-to-go return programs in developed countries: simple and transparent application and payment procedures, the type of financial incentive and reintegration assistance on offer, and thirdly, the level of community engagement. The same principles would likely apply to pay-to-go programs in transit countries, although such questions must be seen through the prism of a very different institutional context.

³⁴ For an overview of program elements and the frequency of their application, see Ruben, Van Houte, and Davids, “What determines the embeddedness of forced return migrants? Rethinking the role of pre and post-return assistance,” 918-19.



Financial incentives range significantly. The key policy question — to which the evidence does not provide any convincing answers — is whether there is a cash threshold under which policy is less effective. There appears to be little policy consideration of the level of incentives. In the United Kingdom, there is a significant range between programs (GBP£1,500 to £5,000). Indeed, even individual programs have not been consistent over time. Public spending retrenchment has seen the VARRP reduce incentives from 4,600 euros to 3,400 euros to 1,700 euros in the space of 18 months, for example.

One element that makes return programs more attractive is whether immigrants are offered tailored aid packages.³⁵ However, it is not evident that the content of all tailored packages work better, as many immigrants choose *not* to avail themselves of particular types of reintegration assistance. Those who do often choose options (most obviously business start-up) that come closest to cash assistance, and the failure of many of such start-up businesses (as revealed by monitoring evidence) indicates that financial rather than entrepreneurial assistance may be preferred.

Nevertheless, some literature indicates that reintegration assistance does encourage return in and of itself, particularly if it builds on a desire to improve the political and economic structures of the source country, and if it complements migrants' individual motivations and goals.³⁶

C. Program Design

The application procedure appears to work better if it is simple and if there is referral by a trusted intermediary.³⁷ However, there are a number of policy questions that emerge in thinking through applications and payment procedures:

- **Information and outreach.** This refers not just to the availability and targeting of information in languages that often differ from the host country's but also to the required office infrastructure in both host and source countries. Should application be made in-person? Will applicants have access to information and advice in the source country?
- **Skills of advisers.** There has thus far been little analysis of the level of training and responsibility assigned to front-line advisers. This is important as such street-level bureaucrats (whether they be government or contracted by government, such as IOM, or done on a voluntary basis) are critical to the success of such programs. Moreover, there has been little exploration of the training required for advisers, again likely to be critical in a job that requires trust, integrity, and psychological insights. The lack of thinking on this issue stands in stark contrast to the development in other public services (for example, the personalization agenda in welfare and employment services).
- **Simple application procedures.** The simplicity of application procedures may appear to be an obvious goal, but it should be weighed against two other considerations: (a) the more tailored a program, the more complex the application (as there is a menu of reintegration options, for instance); and (b) the more precise the target group (e.g. asylum seekers from Iraq who have exhausted their appeal rights), the more complex the eligibility process and the marketing and outreach that go with it.
- **Re-migration.** Early programs for legally resident migrants included an agreement that individuals would not return. Recent programs are more varied. The possibility to come back if the return decision proves to be the wrong one is a substantial incentive, hence the

35 Darren Thiel and Kirsty Gillan, *Factors affecting participation in assisted voluntary return programmes and successful reintegration: a review of the evidence*, Research Report 29 (London: UK Border Authority, 2010): 8.

36 Ibid, 7-8.

37 It is not possible to be absolutely certain of this, since there are no comparative studies of referrals by community groups and government agencies, but a characteristic of well-established programs, such as Belgium's REAB, is the involvement of a large number of community partners; see IOM, *REAB, Return and Emigration of Asylum Seekers Ex-Belgium, Annual Report 2009*. Other studies have highlighted the confusing combination of different programs targeted at overlapping groups; see Hit Foundation, *European cooperation on the sustainable return and reintegration of asylum seekers*.



attraction of “go-and-see” visits in postconflict situations. Evidence from VARRP suggests migrants were well aware of the option to return to the United Kingdom,³⁸ in contrast to the UK AVRIM program, which forbids return for five years and attracts significantly fewer returnees. Belgium’s REAB program simply specifies that migrants cannot use the program twice in any three-year period.³⁹ In practice, however, even though there is no ban on migrants coming back again, to do so they would have to apply for a visa and it seems likely that previous voluntary return would reduce their chances of getting a visa. They could of course return again without a visa but, depending on the journey, smuggling costs are often prohibitively expensive.

- **Payment method.** Some programs pay in advance or in stages. The Hit Foundation identifies four common methods of delivering support:⁴⁰
 - *Allowance:* migrants are given a cash payment before leaving
 - *Predeparture counseling:* migrants are supported to develop a “return plan” enabling them to work most effectively with the resources they have
 - *Local reintegration assistance:* usually in-kind, is provided after their return, through a local partner (typically an NGO) or IOM
 - *Predeparture assistance:* some form of training is provided before individuals leave.

Several programs combine various elements of these and there is little evaluation evidence on what works. Evaluations of VARRP, where individuals are given GBP£500 in cash before leaving the United Kingdom, found that migrants did not expect to get anything more when they reached their country of origin.

D. Migrant Networks and Community Engagement

Interviews and existing literature indicate that overcoming stigma (where people are ashamed to return home or leave a community), developing effective future plans, and building trust in mediators (i.e. trusted interlocutors) are paramount to successful return. This may include involving immigrant communities in the administration of programs.⁴¹

Most of the policy literature draws on a small number of best-practice models and pilot projects that claim impressive outcomes for pay-to-go return projects embedded in the community. The three most prominent examples of projects using a more community-based approach that achieves pay-to-go return rates in excess of 80 percent are: the Failed Refugee Project in Toronto, Canada; Hotham Mission’s Asylum Seeker Project in Melbourne, Australia; and the approach of the Migration Board in Sweden, which is solely responsible for pay-to-go returns. All of them focus on asylum claimants who have failed their asylum application. Early-intervention interviews, i.e. where advisers inform people of the various options on voluntary return, and orderly departure planning are central to all three.

Despite the frequency with which they are cited,⁴² there is little recent information on any of these

38 Michael Collyer, Peshala Wimalansa, Nazeeha Ansar, and Mohammed Ali Khan, *Return Migrants in Sri Lanka* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2009).

39 IOM, *REAB, Return and Emigration of Asylum Seekers Ex-Belgium, Annual Report 2009*.

40 Hit Foundation, *European cooperation on the sustainable return and reintegration of asylum seekers*: 10.

41 Richard Black, Khalid Koser, Karen Munk, Gaby Atfield, Lisa D’Onofrio, and Richmond Tiemoko, *Understanding Voluntary Return*, Home Office Online Report 50/04 (London: Home Office, 2004), <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/rdsolr5004.pdf>; Elizabeth Clery, Nicholas Daniel, and Carlyne Tah, *The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme 2003: An evaluation*, Home Office Findings 264 (London: Home Office, 2006).

42 John Bercow and Evan Harris, *Alternatives to immigration detention of families and children* (London: All Party Parliamentary Groups on Children and Refugees, 2006), <http://idcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/alternatives-for-families-and-children.pdf>; Centre for Social Justice, *Asylum Matters: restoring trust in the UK asylum system*; Heaven Crawley, *Ending the detention of children: developing an alternative approach to family returns* (Swansea, UK: Centre for Migration Policy



three approaches. Officials of Sweden’s Migration Board report that a meeting within ten days following rejection is crucial,⁴³ and personal communications with the Migration Board in 2010 confirm that this is still the case. Hotham Mission’s approach is based around a supported accommodation scheme for families whose asylum claim has been rejected. We explore the Failed Refugee Project in Box 3.

Box 3. Toronto’s Failed Refugee Project

Toronto’s Failed Refugee Project (FRP) is regularly cited as best practice. Most references in the public domain can be traced back to a single document from 2003 (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, April Report: *Case Study 5.1 dealing with the removals backlog* [Ottawa: Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2003], www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/att_20030405se01_e_12703.html). FRP was launched in 2000 and in that year returned 725 people; 80 percent left within a few months of the (negative) decision on their asylum claim. Since then, the program has changed significantly but there remains an emphasis on “voluntary compliance.” In 2009-10, the Greater Toronto Enforcement Centre (GTEC) removed 5,798 foreign nationals (60 percent failed asylum seekers) and achieved voluntary compliance in approximately one-third of cases.

Officials point to three key elements in the Toronto program. First, the focus on meeting individuals as soon as possible after a rejected asylum claim to inform them of their options and to make them aware of pay-to-go return possibilities. Secondly, ensuring face-to-face contact and counseling as opposed to dealing by mail, as occurred prior to 2000. Third, active engagement with the communities affected, which included a message that clients will not be arrested when they appear for interviews and work with NGOs to encourage voluntary compliance.

These lessons will be taken forward in future programs. In June 2010, reforms to Canada’s refugee system were approved, including a provision to create an Assisted Voluntary Returns (AVR) program. The Greater Toronto Area Region will engage in a four-year pilot project on AVR in 2012; see Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Assisted Voluntary Returns pilot program,” accessed April 11, 2011, www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/reform-avr.asp.

Several recent projects in the United Kingdom have attempted to implement some of the lessons of these community-based projects to increase return. They have largely failed and illustrate the difficulties of replicating these lessons. The Clannebor pilot project in Leeds began in June 2007, and initially focused on intensive work with 60 families. None of these families left and the UK Refugee Council expressed serious concerns about the design of the pilot program, especially concerning how families were selected.⁴⁴ At the same time, the UK Borders Agency opened a supported accommodation centre in Ashford, Kent, where families were rehoused to consider pay-to-go return, though this also failed for similar reasons (i.e. that families were already embedded in the community and with a long and unhappy relationship with the state).⁴⁵ Lessons from these projects appear to have been learned and most recently an initiative in Liverpool uses key workers to support refugees from their arrival and initial asylum claim who then offer assistance and information on return as soon as they are informed that their claims have been rejected.⁴⁶

Research, 2010), www.swan.ac.uk/media/Alternatives_to_child_detention.pdf; Lisa Nandy, *An evaluative report of the Millbank alternative to detention pilot* (London: Children’s Society, Diana Memorial Fund, and Bail for Immigration Detainees, 2009).

43 International Centre for Migration Policy Development, *Study on Different Forms of Incentive to Promote Return of Rejected Asylum Seekers and Formerly Temporarily Protected Persons* (Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2003): 82.

44 Refugee Council, *Operation ‘Clannebor’: families whose asylum claims have been refused* (London: Refugee Council, 2007), www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/OneStopCMS/Core/CrawlerResourceServer.aspx?resource=AB8624F8-4972-4673-8CEA-395E00A7A12D&mode=link&guid=7786876aff24c2a8bbba7a9ba01129a.

45 Nandy, *An evaluative report of the Millbank alternative to detention pilot*.

46 Crawley, *Ending the detention of children: developing an alternative approach to family returns*.



The following three elements are critical:

1. **Early, regular, supportive intervention with target groups for return.** Asylum-support and refugee community organizations understandably reject any discussion of return before an individual has been informed of an asylum decision. Yet clear information on return options immediately following a rejected asylum claim is a characteristic of all examples where rates of voluntary return are high.
2. **Minimizing stigma associated with return.** The literature is relatively clear that return migration can lead to a sense of shame (that the migration “project” was not successful) in both families and communities to which the immigrant returns to *and* which the immigrant leaves. This is particularly acute if the family or extended family has invested in the migration project.
3. **Building trust between migrants and intermediaries.** The literature indicates that government funded programs are often viewed with suspicion.⁴⁷ The involvement of IOM may facilitate participation in return programs. Research with returnees from the United Kingdom in Sri Lanka found that IOM was generally seen as distinct from the government.⁴⁸ Community projects may be even more successful.

In other words, immigrants’ willingness to return depends on much more than hard financial incentives and the threat of removal. Any strategy to make pay-to-go returns more appealing must take into account returnees’ inevitable fears about returning home as well and their suspicion about agents implementing return programs. While these problems are inherently difficult to overcome, civil-society actors in both host and origin countries could be engaged to alleviate the social stigma associate with return. Greater involvement by NGOs and the community as brokers in the return process could also help to overcome the low trust in government, especially where staffers are not paid through official funding.

V. Conclusions

Pay-to-go or noncoercive returns are an important element in the policy mix that can reduce illegally resident populations. If successful, sustainable return programs could also help to reduce illegal inflows by discouraging returned migrants from leaving their countries of origin once more. Including sustainability as an explicit policy goal could, moreover, improve the potential for constructive cooperation with sending countries (even if it increases the cost for individual returnees). However, it is extremely rare for pay-to-go return programs, sustainable or otherwise, to be implemented on a large scale and while there is potential to increase participation in such programs, they are unlikely to be an answer in and of themselves.

Despite the many uncertainties and the lack of evaluations that still hinder the understanding of pay-to-go return programs, it is nonetheless possible to identify some promising practices. We point to five areas that policymakers should bear in mind as they experiment with these programs.

- **First, pay-to-go return programs need to be supported by a credible threat of removal if migrants do not choose to leave.** This requires concerted efforts to make the systems for forced return more effective and fair. Reliable and rapid initial decisions on asylum applications could mean that greater numbers of rejected asylum seekers are willing to return, for example.
- **Second, policies must be crafted carefully in order to create a sufficient incentive to return.** This does not just mean increasing financial incentives; creating a simple and comprehensible package (including travel, financial incentives, and additional assistance from a menu of options)

47 Brad Blitz, Rosemary Sales, and Lisa Marzano, “Non- voluntary return? The politics of return to Afghanistan,” *Political Studies* 53, no. 1 (2005): 182-200.

48 Collyer et al, *Return Migrants in Sri Lanka*.



would also help. In addition, it is worth considering how rules about re-emigration comply (i.e. whether returnees can come back to the host country or whether they are barred, like many forced returnees) influences the incentive to participate.

- ***Third, NGO engagement has great potential to increase participation by fostering a more trusting relationship between program staff and participants.*** NGO involvement in both host and source countries may also be able to reduce the social stigma attached to returning home, especially in programs that include a sustainable return focus. It is also important to look at whether NGOs receive financial compensation for involvement in pay-to-go return programs, which often works against trust.
- ***Fourth, more cooperative policy approaches deserve greater attention.*** For example, pay-to-go return programs in transit countries could potentially reduce the initial inflows of unauthorized migrants. Working with key return countries on human-rights issues could help to address concerns about migrants' ability to reintegrate.
- ***Finally, policymakers could explore how to make better use of partners and/or international funding sources to improve knowledge and use of programs and to reduce upfront costs.*** There is for example, potential to work much more closely with other governments and/or international agencies. For example, governments could explore options to run joint pay-to-go return programs (especially in European countries) and/or draw down funds from international institutions and agencies to create more effective programs (for example from international financial institutions), especially those that offer reintegration support.

In many cases, significant barriers simply make pay-to-go return unattractive to potential participants. Where immigrants have spent a long time in the host country, or where the source country still experiences political instability or very low levels of economic development, they may be unwilling to return even under the most efficient and well-funded return program. As a result, pay-to-go return is not a silver bullet for governments or for advocates, and should be best seen as part of a package of measures. However, while it may be difficult to implement the programs on a large scale, their effectiveness could be substantially increased.

*Pay-to-go return is not a silver bullet
for governments or for advocates, and should be
best seen as part of a package of measures.*



Appendix: Pay-to-Go Return Programs, Select Countries

Country	Program	Agent	Target Group or Country/ Eligibility Criteria
France	Return and Reintegration Assistance Program (ARER), launched in 2009	Financed by the French Office of Immigration and Integration and run in cooperation with IOM France and IOM partners in source countries	Country-specific but flexible list: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Djibouti, Ethiopia, India, Iraq (three territorial Kurdish representations in the North), Iran, Kosovo, Pakistan, Serbia, Sudan, and Sri Lanka
	Global Calais Project, launched in 2007	IOM France	Illegal immigrants caught in Calais
United Kingdom	Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP)	IOM UK	Asylum seekers
	VAARP special packages, 2009	IOM UK (subcontracted elements to Refugee Action and three other NGOs until summer 2010)	VARRP special packages established for Iraq, Afghanistan, and Zimbabwe
	Assisted Voluntary Return for Families and Children (AVRFC), launched in 2009 NB. Separate program on Unaccompanied Minors (UAM), 2009	IOM UK	Asylum-seeking families with children, illegally resident migrants with children, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
	Assisted Voluntary Return for Foreign National Prisoners	IOM UK	Foreign national prisoners
Belgium	Return and Emigration of Asylum Seekers ex Belgium (REAB), 1984	IOM Belgium	Current asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers, other illegally resident migrants
Austria	Program of assistance regulated by Asylum Act 2005 and country-specific programs	IOM Austria, Caritas Austria for some reintegration programs	Asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers. Country-specific programs for Moldova and Afghanistan
Finland	Developing Assisted Voluntary Return in Finland (DAVRiF)	IOM Finland	Third-country nationals with resident permit, failed asylum seekers



Netherlands	Return and Emigration of Aliens from the Netherlands (REAN), 1992	IOM Netherlands	Foreign nationals of eligible countries (most non-EU countries) who agree to leave the Netherlands permanently
	Return and Reintegration Regulation (HRT)	IOM Netherlands	Foreign nationals who applied for asylum before June 15, 2006 (financial incentive supplementary to REAN)
	Assisted Voluntary Return from Detention (AVRD)	IOM Netherlands	Irregular migrants currently in detention
Spain	Voluntary Return Plan, 2008	National Public Employment Office and Ministry of Labor and Immigration	Unemployed migrants from one of the 20 countries with which Spain has a bilateral social security agreement
Germany	Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum Seekers in Germany (REAG) Government Assisted Return Programme (GARP)	IOM Germany	Foreign nationals unable to pay for return themselves
	Special Migrants Assistance Programme (SMAP)	IOM Germany	Migrants not eligible for support under REAG/GARP
Norway	Voluntary Return Assisted Return Programme for Migrants in an irregular situation in Norway	IOM Norway	Irregular migrants
	Information, Return, and Reintegration of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan (IRRANA 2)	IOM Norway	Afghan nationals
	Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme for Victims of Trafficking	IOM Norway	Victims of trafficking
	Assisting Voluntary Repatriation from Norway	IOM Norway (in coordination with Norwegian Refugee Council)	Those with a residence permit willing to repatriate to their country of origin

Source: Authors' analysis.



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