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Counselling Manual

on future
orientation,
return and
reintegration



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Vision on Counselling
in Voluntary Return and Reintegration
- Caritas International Belgium

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Vision on Counselling in Voluntary Return and Reintegration

A humane and effective migration policy must maintain the dignity and rights of every person. This starts with individual support from the very first contact. Without early access to information, legal assistance, or social support, people without legal residence often fall through the cracks. Immediate access to independent and high-quality support must be provided. Information in the early stages reduces the risk of people getting lost in complex procedures. Receiving support early in the process helps to build trust, ensures clear communication and (hopefully) leads to long term solutions.

Our approach centres on the person's ability to make their own informed choice about the future. For Caritas International Belgium, that choice is only possible when all available options (staying in Belgium, returning to the country of origin, moving to a third country,...) are clearly explained to the person. The process begins by exploring the person's background, needs, and possibilities. When a person has not yet made a decision, the counsellor helps them explore different possibilities without steering them in any direction. If specific expertise is needed that Caritas International Belgium cannot provide, the counsellor refers them to the right services within our network.

At Caritas International Belgium, we make a clear distinction between Return Counselling and Reintegration Counselling. Return counselling being provided as first-line support and reintegration counselling as second-line support. While each type of counselling has its own focus, in practice they often overlap and reinforce each other in working towards a humane return and reintegration process.

Return counselling starts once the person is ready to talk about return. As a civil society organisation our goal is to be as accessible as possible and ensure mutual trust. People can walk in without any obligation, talk through their future options and receive guidance adapted to the individual needs, both on reflective future orientation as well as on practical matters such as travel documents, medical needs, and birth certificates. When a final choice has not yet been made, counsellors help explore options and refer to our network if additional expertise is needed.

When a person confirms their wish to return, reintegration counselling begins. This phase starts in the host country and continues in the country of return in close collaboration with local partner organizations. Reintegration counsellors help people think through what their life will look like after return, from housing and work to education and healthcare. They listen actively, create a safe and trusting environment and provide honest information about the available support.

**For Caritas International Belgium
counselling is more than only
informing people. It helps them to
understand their options, prepare
emotionally and practically, and
connect with reliable support in
their home country.**



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Introduction

This Counselling Manual is designed to support counsellors working within the return and reintegration framework. It offers practical guidance and tools for professionals who assist individuals considering, preparing for, or undergoing return to their country of return.

The manual was developed within the framework of the Strengthening Capacities for Return and Reintegration Counselling through Civil Society Organizations (SRC-project), carried out by Caritas International Belgium in cooperation with Caritas Albania, Mother Theresa Society Kosovo, Caritas Moldova, Caritas Croatia, Caritas Slovenia, and Caritas Bulgaria. Its content reflects extensive interviews with counsellors and draws upon the expertise of the European Reintegration Support Organisations (ERSO) network. This initiative is funded under the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF), an EU-funded program implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

The manual is structured into three main sections. The first presents key concepts and terminology relevant to return and reintegration, helping to build a shared understanding of this complex landscape. The second clarifies the roles and responsibilities of counsellors and other stakeholders involved in the process. The third offers practical question guidelines tailored to different counselling approaches: future orientation, return, and reintegration counselling. The guidelines help to structure conversations and respond to individual needs. A final section focuses on ensuring continuity of care in the transition from the host country to the country of return by outlining essential information to share with reintegration partners.

This manual aims to equip counsellors with the knowledge and skills necessary to support migrants in making informed decisions and navigating a possible return and reintegration process.



1. Tools

1.1 Concepts within return and reintegration landscape¹

RETURN COUNSELLING

Return counselling is a service provided to persons with or without a return order, and regardless of their legal status. Return counselling is an open-ended conversation tailored by the counsellor to the person's individual circumstances. The aim of this counselling is to provide impartial information to enable a person to make a fully informed decision about their future. In case a person expresses a desire to return, the counselling can cover practicalities of return and the first steps towards reintegration in their country of return.



REFLECTIONS ON THE DEFINITION:

What can be included in the person's individual circumstances?

- o Family
- o Legal status
- o Expectations
- o

What does it really mean to provide 'impartial information' in practice?

How can we ensure the conversation remains truly open, even when there is external pressure (e.g. procedures or policy)?

What if a person does not want to return?

- o Information about irregular stay
- o Information about legal options (regularisation, asylum application...)
- o Referral to other organisations
- o What helps build trust with the person when discussing the option of return?

What might 'the practicalities of return' entail to you? In which way do you take the person by the hand or do you keep space for the person to take agency in arranging the practical preparations?

REINTEGRATION COUNSELLING (PRIOR TO RETURN)

Reintegration counselling aims to support people who return to navigate the challenges in re-establishing life in their country of return. Through conversations between a counsellor and the returnee, focus is laid on the economic (services such as skills and employment), social (relations), and psychosocial (individual well-being) dimensions of reintegration, always considering the specific context of the country of return. The counselling process is tailored to the individual, addressing their unique needs and perspectives, and managing expectations realistically. This continuous counselling process begins in the host country and proceeds in the country of return.



REFLECTIONS:

Could you elaborate more on the different dimensions of reintegration?

How can we realistically manage expectations about reintegration when returnees face structural challenges in their country of return (e.g. limited job markets, stigma)?

What strategies can help maintain continuity in counselling across both the host and return country?

REINTEGRATION

Reintegration is a process that begins before a person returns to their country of origin. It involves helping returnees rebuild their lives by addressing key areas such as economic stability, social connections, and emotional well-being.

Reintegration includes both internal factors, like personal beliefs and attitudes, and external factors, such as access to services, resources, and community support. It is shaped by individual experiences, social relationships, and structural conditions throughout the entire migration journey.

While the word “reintegration” suggests going back to a place someone has lived before, this isn’t always the case. Some returnees go back to unfamiliar places or communities they’ve never known. As a result, return and reintegration are rarely simple or linear — they are complex journeys, not just a matter of going from a host country back “home.”

FUTURE-ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS

Future-oriented conversations are dialogues aimed at supporting individuals to make informed decisions about their future, for instance by exploring their background, needs, desires, and realistic expectations and possibilities. These conversations focus on understanding the person’s situation by opening the dialogue and giving relevant information for the person to find their own solution, the best interest of the person is always at the core of these dialogues.

These conversations are offered at all stages of the migration process, not just after a negative decision. Future-oriented conversations are not limited to return and reintegration but encompass exploring all future perspectives and all potential pathways, including staying in the host country, returning to the country of return, or moving to another country.



BUILDING TRUST IN CONVERSATIONS

Talking about someone's future starts with building trust. It is about creating an open-ended conversation without imposing your own agenda, respecting the individual's needs and goals, and to prioritise the person's interest. Time is an important factor, allowing to develop trust at the individual's pace. Clear communication is essential, with the conversation flowing according to the demands and needs of the person. Openness is another key element, ensuring that the individual feels comfortable and respected in expressing their needs and concerns.

AUTONOMY/AGENCY IN RETURN COUNSELLING

Autonomy and agency refer to the migrant's right to make informed and independent decisions based on their unique needs, circumstances, and preferences. This involves supporting the migrant's reflections on their opportunities and capabilities by providing them with impartial information and building on their confidence and belief in their own abilities. Our aim is to ensure that the final decision always rests with the individual.



REFLECTIONS:

How would you use "affirmations" and "recognizing strengths and capacities" to build on self-confidence?

.....

How do you approach the influence of external factors on autonomous decision-making? What if you feel the person is heavily influenced by family, diaspora...

NON-DIRECTIVE COUNSELLING

Non-directive counselling is a process where the counsellor provides guidance and support without directing the individual towards a specific decision or outcome. The counsellor adopts an individual approach focusing on supporting the person to explore all available options in a neutral and supportive way. This allows them to make informed decisions based on their own needs, values, and circumstances, all within a safe space.

1.2 Roles and stakeholders within the return and reintegration landscape

This non-exhaustive list provides a brief description of key actors involved in the return and reintegration process.

RETURN COUNSELLOR

A return counsellor is a professional who provides impartial information to individuals considering or preparing for a return to their country of return. The counsellor offers support to the person's individual circumstances, helping them to make informed decisions and support with the practical aspects of return and the first steps towards reintegration.

REINTEGRATION COUNSELLOR IN THE HOST COUNTRY

A reintegration counsellor is a professional who supports returnees in the preparation of their reintegration in the country of return. They do this by exploring the needs, challenges and expectations on different domains (economic, social, psychosocial, etc.) depending on the context. They make the first contact with the reintegration partner in the country of return.



FUTURE ORIENTATION COUNSELLOR

A future orientation counsellor supports individuals in making informed decisions about their future. They try to understand the person's situation by opening the dialogue. The counsellor provides impartial information based on the person's background, needs and realistic options on pathways such as staying, returning, moving to a third country or starting a procedure.

RETURNEE

An individual who decides (voluntarily) or is obliged to return to their country of return after staying in another country.

REINTEGRATION PARTNER IN COUNTRY OF RETURN

A locally anchored organization that offers support through reintegration programs to the persons returning. They offer support across economic, social, psychosocial domains, etc.

The case of Samuel

The following case serves to illustrate the different roles and stakeholders involved in the return and reintegration landscape. Samuel's story highlights how various actors with distinct mandates and perspectives can become relevant at different stages of the process. Some are directly involved at this point, while others may play a role later, depending on the decisions Samuel makes.

Samuel from Guinea has just received a negative decision on his asylum application in Belgium. He is currently within the 30-day period to file an appeal or leave the country. During this time, he still has a legal status on the territory. Samuel is uncertain about his future options and expresses a deep distrust in governmental institutions. As a result, he turns to Caritas (an NGO) for information about return possibilities. He makes it clear that he does not want to remain in the country irregularly.

Which roles come into the picture in Samuel's case? What is the interpretation of these roles?

Samuel's case brings multiple actors into the picture, some directly involved at this stage, others relevant later in his trajectory. These roles can be divided into three categories: immediately relevant roles, potentially relevant roles and indirect roles.



IMMEDIATELY RELEVANT ROLES

FUTURE ORIENTATION COUNSELLOR

SOCIAL ASSISTANT (NGO)

LEGAL ADVISOR

IMMIGRATION OFFICE

SOCIAL ASSISTANT IN A RECEPTION CENTRE (IF APPLICABLE)

INTERPRETATION

See previous page

A professional who offers guidance, psychosocial support and referrals to appropriate services.

If Samuel chooses to appeal the decision, a legal advisor will/might guide him through the legal process and help evaluate his chances.

Manages the administrative process related to Samuel's asylum application and his status in Belgium. They issue (status/return) decisions and handle procedures.

A professional who provides practical daily support to residents and helps connect them with relevant external services.

POTENTIALLY RELEVANT ROLES

RETURN COUNSELLOR

REINTEGRATION COUNSELLOR

REINTEGRATION PARTNER IN COUNTRY OF RETURN

EMBASSY

INTERPRETATION

See previous page

See previous page

See previous page

May assist with issuing travel documents if Samuel lacks identification papers required for return.

INDIRECT ROLES

FAMILY MEMBERS

DIASPORA COMMUNITY

NETWORK AFTER RETURN

INTERPRETATION

May influence Samuel's decision emotionally, financially or socially, whether they are in Belgium, Guinea or elsewhere.

Offers informal advice or support. They may help shaping perceptions on returning or staying.

Will be important for Samuel's reintegration if he returns to Guinea. Includes community structures, local contacts and support networks.

1.3 List of questions for counselling

There are three question guidelines:

1.3.1 FUTURE ORIENTATION COUNSELLING

1.3.2 RETURN COUNSELLING

1.3.3 REINTEGRATION COUNSELLING

Each focusing on a different role. Ideally, these roles are divided among different counsellors. However, it is also possible for one counsellor to take on multiple roles. If your role is different from other professionals involved, make sure to clearly explain your specific responsibilities to the migrant. It's important for the migrant to understand who is responsible for what throughout the counselling process, so they know what to expect and whom to turn to for each type of support.

These guidelines are intended as a practical tool and should be adapted to meet the specific needs of the migrant. Be aware that every counselling session is different, so try to adapt to the person sitting in front of you. Clearly state why you are asking certain questions, as your questions may trigger emotions and/or raise certain expectations. If you are unable to answer certain questions, try to refer the person to other organizations.



GOOD PRACTICES

- **Use the person's name**
this shows respect and personal attention right from the start.
- **Offer something to drink**
a simple way to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere.
- **Create a bond of trust by maintaining a warm and open attitude** show through your body language and tone that you are approachable.
- **Explain the reason and purpose of the conversation**
clarity creates a sense of safety and prevents confusion.
- **Use knowledge about the return context**
this shows that you are prepared and understand the situation.
- **Speak clearly.**
- **Ask open-ended questions (avoid yes/no questions):**
encourage the person to share their story.
- **Use affirmative statements:** for example 'that sounds like a difficult situation.'
- **Listen actively!**
 - Make eye contact.
 - Be aware of body language.
 - Dare to drop silence (to give space for thinking and talking further).
 - Paraphrase and summarise.
- **Try to involve children as much as possible** (depending on their age)

1.3.1 Future orientation counselling

This questionnaire is designed to guide future orientation counsellors in their conversations with individuals who are considering different migration scenarios and making a decision about their future. The aim is to explore the person's story, talents, obstacles and aspirations, while identifying potential future options in a supportive and realistic way.



QUESTION GUIDELINE TO USE IN COUNSELLING ON FUTURE ORIENTATION



WELCOME THE PERSON

Start with an opening question so people feel more comfortable.

- How are you?
- What is your name?
- Is it your first time coming to this office?
- Were you able to find it easily?
- Where are you coming from today?
- What is the meaning of your name?
- Do you like tea, coffee or water?

Introduce yourself as a future orientation counsellor + explain your organization broadly.

- I am [professionally] + [personally].
- This organization is...

Let the person(s) introduce themselves.

- Who are you?
- What can I do for you?
- What are your expectations for this conversation?



GIVE SOME CONTEXT OF THE CONVERSATION.

Explain the aim of today's conversation.

- This conversation is meant to explore possible pathways for your future. Together, we will look at different options based on your current situation and needs.
- I don't have any impact on the law and procedures but I am here to understand your situation better in order to give you information.

Explain which type of questions will be asked by clarifying the final outcome of the counselling (= to collect and give information that is needed so the person is able to make an informed decision about the future).

“During this conversation, we will ask you various questions to better understand your situation. This will help us to provide you with the right information and support, so you can make an informed decision about your future. You are not obliged to answer every question and please don't hesitate to ask for clarification if anything is unclear.”

Explain to what extent the personal information will be kept confidential and with whom or which services/persons it will be shared. Also indicate that the person can explicitly indicate whether certain specific information should not be shared with others.

“Everything you share with us will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your personal information will only be shared with the professionals or services directly involved in supporting you, and only when this is necessary. You can always let us know if there is specific information that you do not want to be shared, and we will respect your wishes.”



UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF THE PERSON

Ask about the past and current situation of the person.

- Can you tell me a bit about your story?
What brought you here?
- What are some important events that shaped your current situation?
- What challenges are you currently facing?
Are there specific barriers (legal, personal, financial, medical) that impact your decisions?
- Do you have currently a place to stay?
- Do you have any health problems I should be aware of that might be relevant to take into account during or after return?

Possibilities & Talents.

- What are your strengths or talents?
- What have you done in the past that you are proud of (things like work, education, family roles etc.)?
- What are things you enjoy doing or would like to do more?
- Have you received any education or training? What kind of work experience do you have?
- Are there things you would like to learn or do more of?



Network.

- Do you have family, friends or other people you feel close to here or elsewhere?
- Who do you turn to for support, advice or just to talk to?
- Do you feel supported by people around you or do you often feel alone?

Setting goals.

- Are there any goals or dreams you would like to work towards (short-term or long-term)?
- What does a good or stable future look like for you?

Research and orientation.

- Have you already started looking into possible options or plans for your future?
- Have you looked into any programs, legal possibilities or support organizations?
- Do you feel you would still need more information on a certain issue?
- Is there something specific you would like that I help you to explore further?
- Are there any other organizations or lawyer who has been/is implicated? Is it useful to reach out to them?



FOUR POSSIBLE PATHWAYS

After exploring the person's situation, you can start to discuss the four possible pathways. Depending on the person's situation and the available options, one pathway may be more useful to discuss than another.

1. POSSIBLE PROCEDURES IN THIS COUNTRY.
2. IRREGULAR STAY IN THIS COUNTRY
3. MIGRATION TO ANOTHER COUNTRY
4. RETURN TO THE COUNTRY OF RETURN

1. POSSIBLE PROCEDURES IN THIS COUNTRY.

Ask for all documents they received from the immigration service or their lawyer to try to have an accurate overview.

Are you currently in any legal or asylum procedures? YES/NO

YES

- What is the status of your case at the moment?
- Do you have a lawyer or someone helping you with your case?
- Have you received any recent updates from the authorities?
- What do you expect will happen next?
- Are there specific concerns you have about your procedure?

2. IRREGULAR STAY IN THIS COUNTRY

- How do you think staying in this country without a legal status will be like for you?
- How do you think this would impact your daily life, health, work or family?
- Can you tell me more about your family? Who are you still in touch with? Where are they living? Are they aware of your situation?

3. MIGRATION TO ANOTHER COUNTRY

- Have you ever lived or applied for asylum in another country before?
- Have you considered migrating to a third country?
- Do you have any connections (family, friends, network) or knowledge of another country?
- What attracts you to the idea of moving to another country?
- Do you know if you would have legal possibilities to stay there?
- What skills or languages could help you in another country?

NO

- Do you think there are any possible procedures for you in this country?
- Have you ever spoken to a lawyer or received legal advice?
- Would you be interested in checking if there are still legal options available for you?
- Do you know where to go for legal help or information? (refer the person)

4. RETURN TO THE COUNTRY OF RETURN

- Have you ever thought about returning to your country of return?
- What are your feelings about returning?
- What are your main concerns about return?
- Do you like more information about this option? Do you like to speak one of our return counsellors to get some more information?
- What are the main factors influencing your decision to stay or return?
- Are there any personal, family, or financial reasons that make returning difficult for you?

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EVALUATE AND DISCUSS THE DECISION

Respecting the pace of the person is important. Often a long-term accompaniment is needed to reflect on all the above elements.

- What option feels more realistic or safe to you right now?
- What would you need to move forward with this option?
- What do you think that the next steps are?
- Is there anything you would like to reflect on or share before we end the conversation?



WRAP UP THE CONVERSATION

Summarise shortly what you have talked about (if needed give something on paper, like things you discussed, date of a follow-up conversation, action points etc.).

Check if there are still any questions:

- Do you have any remaining questions or uncertainties?
- How do you feel about this conversation?
- Thank you for your time! If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out.

→ If needed, provide your contact details.

→ If needed, plan another appointment.

→ If needed, provide additional information or refer to other organizations.

Wish the person all the best and show that you are reachable for any type of questions.

1.3.2 Return counselling

This guideline is intended to support return counsellors in conversations with individuals who have (almost) decided to return to their country of return. While some doubt may remain, the focus is on exploring the option of return and facilitating the necessary preparations. If the individual is still broadly exploring different future options, the 'question list - Future Orientation Counselling' may be more appropriate.



QUESTION GUIDELINE TO USE IN RETURN COUNSELLING.



WELCOME THE PERSON

Start with an opening question so people feel more comfortable.

- How are you?
- What is your name?
- Is it your first time coming to this office?
- Were you able to find it easily?
- Where are you coming from today?
- What is the meaning of your name?
- Do you like tea, coffee or water?

Introduce yourself as a future orientation counsellor + explain your organization broadly.

- I am [professionally] + [personally].
- This organization is...

Let the person(s) introduce themselves.

- Who are you?
- How do you feel?
- How does it feel for you to come to this office?
- What can I do for you?
- What are your expectations for this conversation?



GIVE SOME CONTEXT OF THE PROGRAM.

Explain the role of your organization in setting up return.

“The aim of our organization is to support people who are considering returning to their country of return.”

Explain the aim of today's conversation.

“This counselling is designed to explain the return process, identify your potential needs and see what support you need to return.”

Explain which type of questions will be asked by clarifying the final outcome of the counselling (= to collect information that is needed to set up the return or the information that is needed for the person to make an informed decision).

“During this conversation, we will ask you various questions to better understand your situation. This helps us to provide you with the most relevant information and support. You are not obliged to answer every question and you can always ask for clarification if anything is unclear.”

Explain to what extent the information the person shares will be kept confidential, and with whom or which services it will be shared. Also highlight that the person can explicitly indicate whether certain specific situations should not be shared with others.

“Everything you share with us will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your personal information will only be shared with the professionals or services directly involved in supporting you, and only when this is necessary. You can always let us know if there is specific information that you do not want to be shared, and we will respect your wishes.”

Explain the return process and the possibilities of the return program.

- The return program is entirely voluntary. This means that you can stop the process at any time. We only ask you to inform us if you decide to discontinue so we can close your case.
- If applicable for your country: If you decide to return, any ongoing procedures will discontinue upon departure. This may have consequences for your residency status.
- Our organization is not able to intervene at border controls or customs.
- Reintegration support is offered upon return by the reintegration partner. This support may include assistance with employment, housing, education etc. after returning.



FIND OUT WHAT THE PERSON'S EXPECTATIONS, QUESTIONS OR NEEDS ARE.

Discuss the wish to return (give space and recognition to obstacles the person faces).

- Will you return alone or are there others who will return with you?
- What are your main reasons for considering a return?
- How do you feel about returning? Are there any concerns you would like to share?
- Do you have any doubts, or do you see any obstacles to return? Why or why not?
- Do you feel ready to return?



If the person is still unsure about their future and considering different options, it's best to return to the “Question list – Future Orientation Counselling.”



ADMINISTRATIVE LOGISTICS.

Go over the administrative requirements (+ scan all necessary documents). Before organizing your return, we need to ensure that all necessary administrative steps are taken and that the required documents are available. We should also check eligibility criteria for return support, such as arrival date in host country.

- Are you still involved in any legal or asylum procedure?
- Do you have an order to leave the territory?
- Do you currently have a valid passport or other travel documents?
- Do you have any medical conditions? Would this affect your ability to travel?

Practical arrangements for the return.

“To ensure a smooth journey back, we will discuss some practical aspects of your return”:

- To which city or town in [country] would you like to return to? Is it to the capital city or another location?
- Imagine you arrive now at the airport in [country]. What will you do and who is the first person you will contact?
- Will someone be able to pick you up from the airport upon arrival?
- Have you thought about when you would like to return, or is the timing still uncertain?



Information needed for the application.

- Do you need assistance upon return?
- Do you need transportation to the final destination?
- What is the closest airport to your destination?
- Are there any travel requirements (like wheelchair, medication, escort...)
- What is the easiest way to contact you? If necessary, is there a contact of a family member?



SIGNING THE DOCUMENTS RELEVANT FOR RETURN (IF APPLICABLE)

Explain everything that is in the registration document (if applicable) and make sure that the person understands before signing.

“Before signing the registration document, we will go over it together to ensure that everything is clear. We will explain all the details in the document and answer any questions you may have.”

Repeat that the return program is entirely voluntary and that this means that the person can stop the process at any time.

Let the person sign and provide a copy to the person.

Give your contact details.

Make another appointment if necessary.



WRAP UP THE CONVERSATION

Check if there are any questions.

→ If needed, provide additional information or refer to other organizations.

- Do you have any remaining questions or uncertainties?
- How did you feel about this conversation?
- Once the departure date is confirmed, I will contact you to provide further details.
- Thank you for your time! If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out.

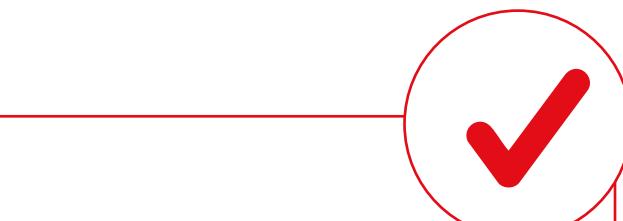
1.3.3 Reintegration counselling

This guideline is intended as a support tool for conducting reintegration counselling conversations. It is not a fixed structure or step-by-step plan that should always be followed. Each conversation is unique and shaped by the person sitting in front of you, their story, needs and context. The questions in this guideline are suggestions and starting points to structure the conversation. They are meant to inspire, not to serve as a checklist.



WELCOME THE PEOPLE

Start with an opening question so people feel more comfortable.



QUESTION GUIDELINE TO USE IN REINTEGRATION COUNSELLING.

- How are you?
- What is your name?
- Is it your first time coming to this office?
- Were you able to find it easily?
- Where are you coming from today?
- What is the meaning of your name?
- Was everything clear at the return counselling with my colleague [name]?
- Do you like tea, coffee or water?

Introduce yourself + your role as a counsellor + explain your role broadly.

- I am [professionally] + [personally].
- This organization is...

Let the person(s) introduce themselves.

- Who are you?
- Have you heard about the reintegration support programme before? What do you already know about it?



GIVE SOME CONTEXT OF THE COUNSELLING.

Explain the role of your organization as a reintegration partner and why an appointment with your organization is organized.

“At the end of the counselling, the aim is to have an insight into your migration trajectory and the things you need after returning. We consider it very important only to focus on the information which can be (directly or indirectly) relevant for facilitating the reintegration process.”



Explain to what extent the shared information will be kept confidential and with whom or which services/persons it will be shared. Also indicate that the person can explicitly indicate whether certain specific situations should not be shared with others.

“Your personal information will only be shared with the professionals or services directly involved in supporting you, and only when this is necessary. You can always let us know if there is specific information that you do not want to be shared, and we will respect your wishes.”

Explain the reintegration process and the possibilities of the reintegration program + explain what you don't do as a reintegration counsellor.

- You have already discussed the practicalities of your return. We will discuss the support after your return, the reintegration support. We are not responsible for all the practicalities of your return itself (such as booking flights, travel details), that is what the return counsellor does.
- We work with partners around the world and in [country of the person] we work with [name of the partner organization]. We are a kind of bridge figure between here and there. Our colleague there is [name of employee].
- This partner is independent from the government and they give tailored support.
- The budget will be transferred to the reintegration partner and will be spent based on the local procedures of the project (for example: majority of the budget cannot be given in cash).
- As soon as you arrive in [country of return], call our colleague [name].



FIND OUT WHAT THE PERSON'S EXPECTATIONS, QUESTIONS OR NEEDS ARE.

Explain which type of questions will be asked by clarifying the final outcome of the counselling. In general, the questioning part of a reintegration counselling can be split up in three parts: before migration, during migration and after return (future plans). The aim is to have an insight on these three parts.

“During our conversation, I will ask questions about your past, your current situation and your future plans. This helps me to better understand your situation and to collect information that is needed for the reintegration process. This helps us to provide you with the most relevant information and support. You are not obliged to answer every question. If there are certain things that are too personal or that you prefer not to go into detail, you can always indicate this or you can always ask for clarification if anything is unclear.”

BEFORE MIGRATION

Don't dive straight into the details. Start with broad, open-ended questions to get a better understanding of the returnee's life before migration and the reasons behind their decision to migrate. While this part may in some cases not be directly relevant, it's important to give space to the person's past (especially if they are currently in a vulnerable or challenging situation). Acknowledging their story can help build trust and provide valuable context for the reintegration process.

- When did you leave your home country?
- How was your life at that moment?
 - Were you living alone/with your family at that moment?
 - Were you earning an income at that moment?
- What was the reason that made you leave your country (medical-economical-security-social-other)? Has this situation changed? This is definitely not an asylum application so I certainly don't need to know all the exact details but it is important to have a general picture of the context to which you return.

DURING MIGRATION

Depending on how open/closed a returnee is (often depending on the initial reason for migration), the counsellor has to feel which information linked to the stay in this country (or another EU country) is relevant for facilitating the reintegration process. Returnees who are disappointed with their stay in this country are sometimes less willing to share experiences, or vice versa.

- When did you arrive to [this country]? Did you ask for asylum?
- What was your life like in recent years after arriving in [this country]? (Living situation? Work? Integration courses? Medical situation? Schooling for children?)
- Did you gain any relevant experience in [this country or another country] which could help you back home (e.g. professional training, work experience, or other)?
- Were you alone here in [this country]?
- What is your situation in [this country]

AFTER RETURN (FUTURE PLANS)

Depending on the time of migration, the returnee will have a very specific or very vague reintegration idea. In case a returnee already has a specific idea, the counselling questions can also be more specific depending on the desired reintegration aims. A clear envision of the reintegration project before returning will facilitate the preparation of the local reintegration partner.. However, the reintegration partner can also assist a returnee from scratch and start a joint thinking process.

Read more after return 



Begin with very open-ended questions so you can find out what the person considers most important and how realistically they view their own return. Then gradually move to more specific questions.

Where do you plan to live once you arrive? (Depending on the answer of the person, try to gain an understanding of the possibilities) (If there are more people returning together, ask if they also will live together.)

Do you have a social network you can rely on? (Depending on the answer of the person, try to gain an understanding of the possibilities)

Why do you now choose to return to your country?

- Are you sure about this decision?

How do you see your return?

- What kind of plans do you have upon arrival?
- What do you think your options are?

- Is there a possibility of living with family or friends for a while?
 - If so, is it possible to stay there for a period while searching for a place to rent yourself?
 - If not, why is it not possible to live with family or friends?
- Will you live in the same city/village as before?
- Do you have any idea how much it costs to rent in [city of return]? (Explain already the budget and possibilities with the budget to make realistic expectations!)

- Are you still in touch with people there?
 - With whom?
 - How often do you speak with them?
- Does your family know that you will return?
 - What is their reaction?
 - Do they know the reason(s) why you want to return?
 - Do you expect support from them when you return? What kind of support can they give?
- If you are not in touch, why are you not in touch with family or friends anymore?
 - Are there reasons (emotional, personal, safety-related) why you are not in contact anymore? What happened?
 - Would you like to reconnect with someone back home? If yes, who?
- What would help you to feel more connected or supported when you return?

What would you like to do there to earn an income? (Depending on the answer of the person, try to gain an understanding of the possibilities)

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- Do you have any professional experience which can help you to find a job after return?
 - Would you like to continue this in [country of return]?
- What do you think the options are for work?
- Would you be interested in following a professional training?
- What kind of qualities do you have to find a job? (For (young) people without higher education / secondary education: explain the option to finish studies)
- If they already have an idea of the work they would like to do:
 - Why exactly do you want to do this kind of work?
 - What are the advantages or possible disadvantages of doing this work?
 - What do you need to make this possible?
 - Where would you like to start this work?
- Do you have an idea to start a business?
 - What do you need to start this business?
 - Do you know how much this will cost?
 - Do you already have the needed skills?
 - Do you have some money saved that you could put together with the reintegration budget to invest in the start of a business?
 - Can you get financial help from family or friends?

if the person has no realistic idea about starting a business, dare to suggest ideas based on the knowledge you have as a counsellor, on the conversations you had with the local reintegration partner, on having been in the country, on experiences of previous returnees).

- Give an explanation about the use of the budget (if applicable)
- Are there any other goals you would like to achieve once you return back to your country?

Are there any other goals you would like to achieve once you return back to your country?

Make space and time to discuss the health/medical problems of the person (if needed). If the person is not aware of the possibilities in the country of return, check with the local reintegration partner.

- What do you think is needed to make these goals possible?
- Do you have physical or mental health problems?
 - Are you currently taking medication/treatment? If so, do you know if this medication/treatment is available in [country of return]?
 - Did you already have this health issue prior to migrating.
 - If yes: Do you think you can restart this treatment with the same hospital/doctor?
 - Is the required care sufficiently available?
 - Is the required care financially accessible?
 - Is the required care easy to access?
- Ask for medical certificates if applicable for the program. If it's not applicable for the program, it can be useful for the person to take this with them.

Make space and time to talk about the children's situation after returning:

- Will the children be able to attend school in [country of return]? Have you already been in contact with a school there?
- Do the children speak and write the language of [country of return]?
- Are there important differences in customs or behaviour between here and [country of return] that you want to prepare your children for?
- How do children in [country of return] make friends or connect with others? What kinds of activities can they take part in?



COLLECT REQUIRED DOCUMENTS.

Make sure that all required documents are there, often the return counsellor collected already all necessary documents.

- You can advise to collect as much documents as possible like school certificates, reports, vaccination or medical certificates.



SIGNING THE REINTEGRATION CONTRACT (IF APPLICABLE)

When you have all the necessary information, you can proceed with the reintegration contract. Explain why a contract is necessary, complete the personal and financial info, and go through the contract together before signing.

Explain everything that is in the contract and make sure that the person understands the contract before signing.

Explain the budget once again in a clear overview. Although you probably already explained the budget during the conversation, it's good to have an overview in the end.

Let the person sign, keep a copy for yourself and give the original document to the person. When signatures are needed, it's good to give people time to read through if they would like to do so. A good practise is to step away for couple of minutes.

Share contact details, exchange phone numbers:

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“Before signing the contract, we will go over the contract to ensure that everything is clear. We will explain all the details in the contract and answer any questions you may have.”

- Is everything clear for you?

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- Are you fine to share contact details of a friend/relative with whom you will be in touch after return? (Explain why: if you cannot get in touch with the reintegration partner, we can contact them)

- Do you have any remaining questions or uncertainties?
- How did you feel about this conversation?
- Thank you for your time! If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out.

WRAP UP THE CONVERSATION

Check if there are any questions.

→ If needed, provide additional information or refer to other organizations.

2. Ensuring continuity of care necessary information for reintegration partners

You've now had your conversation with the person: what information should you pass on so the reintegration partner can get started effectively? What do reintegration partners themselves consider important to know when starting a reintegration process?

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THREE CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION

1. Crucial information:
essential to initiate any form of support.

2. Important information:
necessary to properly start the reintegration process.

3. In-depth information:
not strictly required, but useful to provide a more complete picture during the hand-over.

CRUCIAL INFORMATION

Personal information

- Full name (to ensure proper documentation and personalization of support)
- Family composition (single, family, minor, elderly, etc.)
- Date of birth
- Contact details of the returnee or a relative (phone number, address, email if available)
- ID/passport/birth certificates (if available)
- Eligibility document of reintegration support (if applicable)

Return details

- Date of return
- Arrival location (airport, city etc.)
- Method of return (forced or voluntary return)

Reintegration needs

- Immediate needs upon arrival
 - Temporary accommodation, medical needs or onward transportation
 - Whether they require emergency assistance or longer-term support
 - If available contacts of relatives
- Budget details
- Potential risks or security concerns in the country of return (minority, Victim of trafficking, etc.)

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Health needs

- Physical health (disease, disability, allergies, etc.)
- Mental health: trauma, stress, anxiety (through documentation and/or observed during counselling)
- Medical needs or ongoing treatments (continuity of care)

Personal background

- place of residence (temporary housing status or permanent accommodation)
- Family composition (whether the individual is returning alone or with dependent family members)
- Duration of migration
- Language spoken
- Work experience
- Education and skills

Legal and administrative aspects

- Criminal (if shared before return)
- Securing available rights: social allowance, retirement, medical care etc (if known before return)
- Document confirming the absence of EU citizenship or social support/insurance in EU country (if applicable)

Social reintegration

- Expectations from the program
- Social support/ social network

IN-DEPTH INFORMATION

Context of the returnee

- Behaviour of the returnee
- Community acceptance
- Potential discrimination
- Cultural adaptation
- Job prospects
- Training needs
- Assistance in setting up a small income-generating activity/business
- Literacy skills

Children support

- Assistance in childcare support
- Assistance in schooling for children (school certificates)

Feedback possibilities

- Space for the returnee to provide feedback on the return process.
- Expressing if authorities have treated him/her with dignity during the procedures
- Personal experience of the counsellor

3. Credits

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Bibliography (References):

¹The definitions listed in this document are proposed for the purpose of supporting a common understanding within the ERSO network. However, they do not necessarily reflect the official positions or terminology used by each individual ERSO member organization.



