

Press Release

New EMN inform seeking to understand incentives and motives for voluntary departure

What incentives and motives exist that impact a third-country national's decision to depart voluntarily? This EMN inform focuses on the issue of voluntary departures from EU Member States and Norway, in compliance with - or in anticipation of - a return decision.

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The EU Commission's Pact on Migration and Asylum of 2020¹ established the aim to develop effective and humane procedures for the return of individuals not entitled to stay in the EU, which led to the creation of an EU Strategy for Voluntary Return and Reintegration.² The strategy seeks to support Member States in their efforts of encouraging voluntary return, which is viewed as more humane and dignified approach than forced return. This EMN inform focuses on the incentives and motives that Member States have developed to encourage voluntary departure, following the issuance or in anticipation of a return decision, through specific assistance (including AVRR programmes), factors that contribute to an individual's decision-making process, and how these elements are interconnected.

Incentives refer to the measures offered by national authorities to encourage a third-country national to depart voluntarily, while motives refer to the personal or contextual reasons for which a third-country national may take the decision to leave voluntarily or not. Most Member States plus Norway were found to provide pre-departure and post-arrival incentives, both in-cash and in-kind. In-cash incentives vary widely depending on the Member State and on the third-country national's needs and profile. However, in-kind support was found to more significantly impact a third-country national's decision to depart voluntarily. For instance, this could include counselling, medical or psychological assistance, logistical support to organise the return journey, legal assistance, and the provision of basic needs prior to return such as accommodation, healthcare and food. While slightly less common, several Member States reported also supporting them to attend a training programme, either in the host country or the country of return.

However, in some cases, incentives may not be attractive enough to outweigh the benefits of remaining. The situation in the country where the individual would return, for instance, significantly impacts the way they will weigh their decision. Having no economic opportunities, no social circles to rely on, fear of rejection upon arrival, or stigma associated with returning are sometimes too heavy for an individual to bear. The most cited reason why a third-country national would refuse to depart voluntarily was hope. The prospect that their asylum application will be reconsidered or that they may obtain a legal residence permit with more time is a powerful motive to remain. Reasons that incentivise individuals to depart voluntarily included failure to find work, disappointment in the life in the host country, irregular status, fear of being forcibly returned, family reasons, health issues, or a change of situation in the country of origin.

¹ EU Commission, New Pact on Migration and Asylum, available here: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:85ff8b4f-ff13-11ea-b44f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_3&format=PDF?, last accessed on 17 June 2022.

² Communication on the EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration, COM (2021) 120 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0120&from=EN>, last accessed on 17 June 2022.

Given the many external factors that influence a persons' decision, return reintegration assistance can help the third-country national to make the final step once their decision to depart voluntarily is taken. Spreading information on which options are available, such as with posters and brochures, are also largely used to give potential returnees the opportunity to seek more information themselves. Some Member States engage with local authorities and NGOs to increase their outreach and trust in the return assistance programmes.

Background:

The inform

- Title: "Incentives and motives for voluntary departure".
- Period covered: The inform assesses changes that Member States and Norway have implemented and developed since the EU Commission's Pact on Migration and Asylum, with the resulting EU Strategy for Voluntary Return and Reintegration
- Subject: The impact of incentives and motives on a third-country national's decision to depart voluntarily.

The EMN

The European Migration Network (EMN) is a Europe-wide network consisting of National Contact Points (NCPs) in the EU Member States, Norway, Georgia and Moldova, providing information on migration and asylum. The EMN was set up in 2008 by the European Commission on behalf of the European Council in order to satisfy the need for a regular exchange of reliable information on migration and asylum related issues on a European level.

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