



Advanced Academic Update Overview: Return, Reintegration and Development

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Introduction

On 27 June 2012 the IS Academy: Migration and Development¹ project hosted an Advanced Academic Update (AAU) on Return Migration, Reintegration and Development. The purpose of the AAU was to provide state-of-the-art knowledge in the field of return, reintegration and development and to engage in lively debate amongst policy makers, representatives from non-governmental organizations and international organizations, and academics. The AAU was well attended with representatives from several organizations in the Netherlands working with return migrants, policy makers, and academics.

¹ <http://mgsog.merit.unu.edu/ISacademie/>

Background

At first glance return migration appears a simple phenomenon of migrants returning to their country of origin. However, further investigation reveals the complexities of return migration in terms of definitions, categorizations, reintegration, and the ability of return migrants to impact development in the country of return.

Return migrants can be categorized in multiple ways. The most evident categorization is based on notions of forced or voluntary migration and forced or voluntary return. It is important to note that return can be further distinguished as to if the return is decided – chosen on one's own initiative without coercion or persuasion- or compelled- unfavourable circumstances interrupt the migration cycles resulting in return- (Cassarino, 2008). From this perspective, assisted voluntary return (AVR) would, thus, be categorized as a form of compelled return.

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After the process of return, the returnee begins the process of reintegration and adjustment. There are numerous factors that impact the ability of return migrants to reintegrate, including both structural factors and individual factors. Structural factors include the policies of the government of the country of return toward returnees, the receptiveness of the local government, the attitudes of the local community toward returnees, and the number of people returning simultaneously (Rogge, 1994). The position of the government is critical in signifying if it is safe for refugees to return and to clarify their rights in return, such as those related to citizenship and property restitution (Kibreab, 2003). Further, although the government may have an officially welcoming policy towards returnees, the implementation of reintegration policies on the ground may be different. Stefansson (2004) found that although the government of Bosnia was officially welcoming to returnees, in practice authorities and employers privileged those who stayed in terms of housing and jobs. This led to feelings of resentment from returnees (Stefansson, 2004). Reintegration, like integration, is thus not a one way process- it requires give and take by the receiving society and the return migrant.

Individual factors that can impact the reintegration experience include the duration of the migration episode, the conditions in the country of migration, age, gender, if one is born in the

country of migration, the social networks of the individual in the country of return, and the conditions of the return (Rogge, 1994). This relates to the preparedness of the return migrant for reintegration, wherein, a decided returnee who has prepared for their return in terms of connecting with social networks, having finances, and planning for return will generally have a more successful reintegration experience.

The ability of return migrants to impact development is thus highly dependent upon the conditions of their return and their reintegration experiences. Return migrants can positively impact development in their country of return by bringing back skills and capital acquired abroad. This can lead to new business creation and economic growth. On the other hand, return migrants can have negative impacts on the country of return. For instance, delinquent deportees in Cape Verde from the United States continue to engage in illicit behaviour upon return, which negatively impacts Cape Verdean society (Drotbohm, 2011).

The resulting impact of return migration and reintegration on development is a complex process that differs for individual return migrants based on structural and individual factors. This workshop explored the challenges of return, reintegration, and development in several countries and contexts.



Overview of Events

The workshop included seven presentations from academics and organizations working on different aspects of return migration. The day concluded with an interactive panel session including policy makers, non-governmental organizations, and academics.

The workshop opened with an overview of return, reintegration, and development, discussing concepts of return and reintegration, and differing impacts of various migration flows. A key element of the presentation was exploring the various forms of return migration and recognizing that the type of return can lead to different levels of reintegration with subsequent consequences for the developmental impact of return. The ways by which we measure reintegration were also explored, looking beyond simple assessments based on employment, or returnees having attained the same living standard as the local majority. Finally, it was highlighted that limited data exists on the long-term reintegration experiences of return migrants. In the absence of significant data, many questions remain regarding livelihoods, plans to re-migrate, and the social and developmental impact of return migration.

The second session focused on an evaluation of the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) in Sri Lanka. The evaluation was conducted in 2008 with 55 returnees from the UK, at one year after return. It was emphasized that the social and political implications of AVR programs are important when developing policy, as are decisions regarding the context and type of post-return assistance offered. For example, in Sri Lanka 98% of returnees receiving AVR support elected for business support, of which 80% failed. Those who were successful already had business contacts and experience. Although few opted for the training programmes, those that did were successful, suggesting a need for further exploration as to the potential success of training support. Discussion following this focused on the appropriateness of differing forms of support, contextual implications for policy and research - especially in post- or ongoing-conflict areas such as Sri Lanka, and assumptions made by both migrants and policy makers in the return migration process.

The third session discussed return and reintegration challenges in Afghanistan, providing an overview of return migration flows and reintegration in Afghanistan, drawing largely on the IS Academy: Migration and Development survey conducted in Afghanistan in 2011. This data shows that return flows to Afghanistan have changed from primarily repatriating refugees between 2002-2006, to primarily being labour return migrants since 2006. It also showed that the majority of return migrants to Afghanistan appear to be successfully reintegrated based on subjective indicators. The data further showed that

repatriating refugees to Afghanistan are indeed the least vulnerable group of returnees to Afghanistan, indicating a need to define those populations most vulnerable in the country in order to target policy interventions appropriately. This is currently particularly relevant with regard to the earmarking of support provided by government and non-governmental organizations.

The fourth session focused on the critical importance of effective monitoring and evaluation of migration-related programmes in assessing reintegration processes, their possibilities and limitations. Discussion of the lack of concrete data in this field and subsequent lack of adequate policy analysis concluded that in its absence EU policies have come to be based on ambiguous comparisons of 'best' practice models. Beyond this, it was made clear that many assumptions are made when developing and analyzing policy, and that this filters into their evaluations. It is essential to clearly define evaluation objectives from the beginning, to understand what an evaluation can and cannot achieve, and to recognize that one evaluation cannot do it all. The impaired validity of self-evaluation was discussed, as was the need to recognize the goals of government programme evaluations that sometimes do not ask the right questions, that is, focusing the assessment on whether a programme was implemented, rather than its effectiveness or how it could be improved.

The fifth session questioned whether origin states must cooperate in voluntary and forced return, reassessing the obligation to readmit, and questioning the applicability and validity of international legal frameworks with regard to the obligation of states to readmit citizens forcibly removed from another state. There are several methods a state can employ to deny the readmission of their own nationals. For instance, a state can just ignore the request and not do anything. Or they can find ways around it, for example declaring a lack of proof of the migrant's citizenship. A particular challenge to the global migration management system comes from origin states that only readmit those who purportedly return "voluntarily", or that might deny the existence of an obligation to readmit as such. In light of this, many western countries are trying to quickly board up all legal holes with treaties, but we are seeing signs that they are forced to take into consideration the needs and wishes of the country of origin. What usually happens is a quid pro quo situation, where one state will take the returnees, but the other will have to pay for it. This is an interesting direction in terms of development of the origin country, and one that provoked discussion as those present sought new ways to navigate these processes.

The sixth session presented findings regarding return preferences of migrants in the Netherlands, based on the IS Academy: Migration and Development surveys conducted in

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the Netherlands. Data presented related to migrants living in the Netherlands who originated from Afghanistan, Burundi, Ethiopia or Morocco, and their intentions regarding future permanent return, temporary return, or participation in temporary return programmes. The data showed that when integration and transnational involvement of migrants are accounted for, there is no significant difference between migrants originating from different countries with respect to their intention for permanent return, except for Ethiopians who are the most likely group to return permanently. It was also found that individuals who migrate to the Netherlands on a student visa are more likely to plan for permanent return in the future as they are limited by the duration of their student visa. The data also showed that individuals of Afghan and Ethiopian origin are more likely to want to participate in a temporary return programme. Home country language use within the home is also positively linked to the potential for permanent return, but not for temporary return. Finally, social contact with homeland is important for all types of return, but slightly more important for permanent return.

The final presentation of the workshop made an assessment of return and reintegration projects and policy in the

Netherlands: Past experiences and the way forward and drew from a recent evaluation of the Dutch migration and development policy commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as other evaluations conducted regarding return from the Netherlands. The discussion concluded that the impact of return and reintegration policy on large-scale development is as yet unconvincing, and any relationship remains thus far unqualified. Development efforts associated with AVR programmes should instead focus on the micro level, meaning the individual or household, not the macro. Given this, the essential question regarding AVR in this context is whether it should be included in migration and development policy. More broadly, there is a need for clarity regarding the objectives of AVR programmes, which essentially encourage humane pathways of return for migrants, and as such do not necessarily inherently link to development.

A closing panel discussion about return and reintegration from the Netherlands focused on ways that returnees' chances of success, particularly with regard to entrepreneurship, can be enhanced; the role, motivations and obligations of countries of origin to accept returnees; and finally the role of AVR programs in development.



Main Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Through the lively discussion of the day several conclusions were reached regarding effective policy in the area of Assisted Voluntary Return, Reintegration and Development:

1. **Definitions** regarding return, reintegration and development are often ambiguous. There is a need to clarify terms across all stakeholders to enhance discussions and ensure that actors are using the terms with the same intentions. For programme development, monitoring, and evaluation, it is essential to be clear regarding the use of these terms.
2. There is a need for increased **flexibility** in AVR reintegration and development programmes. Programme flexibility should incorporate options for returnees, as there is no “one size fits all” solution to reintegration for AVR. Programmes should thus allow for multiple choices in reintegration grants. Returnees must also have the ability to **change their mind** within the options available in the programmes. It is recognized that it is difficult to make a decision regarding your reintegration while still in the Netherlands. If an individual returns to their country of origin and realizes that their initial decision regarding their reintegration strategy will not work, there must be the opportunity for them to change their reintegration strategy in order to increase success in the programme.
3. There is recognition that six months reintegration assistance is a short time period to return, reintegrate with family, readjust to the current country conditions, and utilize reintegration assistance- such as starting one’s own business. The allowance of an **increased time period, such as two years**, for utilizing reintegration assistance, combined with the flexibility noted above could increase reintegration success.
4. There is a critical recognition that returnees **return to communities**. One potential option that may enhance the development effect of AVR and reintegration assistance, is to provide **community level assistance** to communities of return. This option needs to be further explored and evaluated to understand its contribution to development.
5. The debate regarding the impact of AVRs on **micro-level development** (such as human development) is still in progress as there is little evidence to support either side of the debate. Further **research and evaluation** is critical in order to understand key questions, such as: What are the characteristics of AVRs that are able to contribute to development? Under which conditions do they contribute to development? What is the role of reintegration assistance (and the type of reintegration assistance) in this contribution to development? In order to answer such questions, decisions must be made as to the definitions of development being utilized and the indicators that define successful development (as in point 1).
6. In follow-up to the previous point, there are key questions that need to be explored regarding the **purpose and objective of AVR programmes**. It is consensual that AVR is essential to provide to returnees and return is often a better situation than remaining in detention in countries of migration. However, there is a question as to the appropriate funding venue of AVR: is it really migration and development or is AVR better suited to be funded by a different government priority?
7. Questions also still exist as to **best practices** in AVR and reintegration programmes. In order to identify best practices or promising practices, comprehensive and effective external monitoring and evaluation of programs must be conducted, along with comparative analysis of several programmes over the long term. **Longitudinal research** on AVR and reintegration is virtually non-existent, which means it is impossible to know the impact of reintegration assistance at two to three years after return, as the majority of evaluations do not go beyond six months post-return. It is recognized in the academic literature that **reintegration is a long-term process** that extends well beyond six months and in order to understand if reintegration is successful one must go beyond examining short-term reintegration.



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