

REINTEGRATING RETURNEES IN THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN: FUNDAMENTAL ADJUSTMENTS RECOMMENDED

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) supports migrants who have returned to their countries of origin in order for them to gain economic and social stability. The aim is to ensure that returning results in sustainable reintegration. The German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) examined the efficacy of the BMZ's measures between 2017 and 2023 (Erlor et al. 2025), with the findings showing that these support services barely, or at best partially, improved returnees' economic and social participation. DEval therefore recommends fundamental adjustments to the BMZ's reintegration support.

Background

Return migration continues to be highly politically relevant.

Many migrants in Germany are considering voluntary return to their countries of origin (Kosyakova et al. 2025). At the same time, the number of individuals required to leave Germany remains high. The coalition agreement of the current federal government seeks to strengthen support for voluntary return and identifies development cooperation as a "central lever in migration management".

Since 2017, an interdepartmental approach has been in place to facilitate the departure of people in Germany without the intention or prospects to stay, and to support their sustainable reintegration in their countries of origin. The dimensions of sustainable reintegration are shown in Figure 1. Responsibility for implementing reintegration support lies with the BMZ.

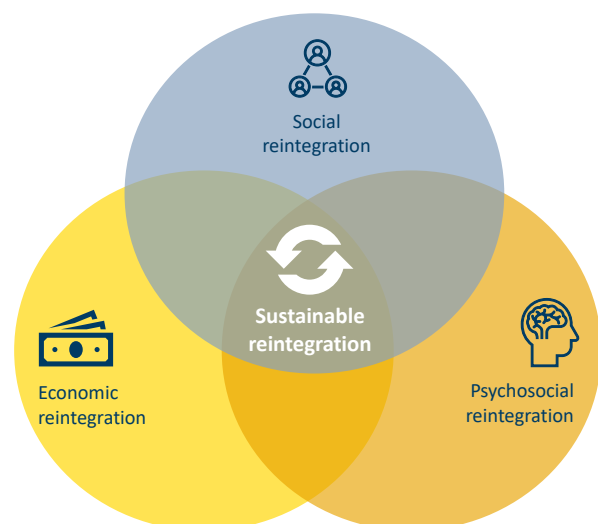
By establishing counselling centres in 13 partner countries, the BMZ broke new ground within this highly demanding field of action. Returnees were to be supported individually and referred to appropriate measures based on a needs assessment conducted during the initial consultation. At the same time,

counselling and training were envisaged to promote institutional capacity development among state partner organisations.

Data basis

The evaluation draws on case studies in Ghana, Morocco and Northern Iraq (interviews with 120 returnees and 98 experts), as well as cross-case data from online surveys, interviews with additional experts, monitoring data, and both project-related and external studies. The period under examination runs from July 2017 to July 2023.

Figure 1 The three dimensions of reintegration



Quelle: DEval, own visualisation

Results

The evaluation shows that the objective of turning return into sustainable reintegration was achieved barely, or at best partially, through individual support.



- **Only a small proportion of the returnees surveyed benefited from improved economic participation as a result of the measures.** While most received material support and training to help them start a business, just one in seven managed to establish a profitable enterprise. More than two thirds struggled to earn a living independently. Beyond contextual factors that make economic success difficult, the evaluation identified systematic shortcomings in the design and implementation of the support as contributing factors. These include overly short support periods, insufficient preparation for new business creation, and a lack of coordination between measures.
- **The measures focused primarily on economic participation, while social and psychosocial support was not offered to the required extent.** Successful reintegration requires an approach that takes all three dimensions – economic, social and psychosocial – into account.

The results are more encouraging at the institutional level.

Counselling and training for the national employment agencies in the partner countries helped raise awareness of returnees' needs. At the same time, political decision-makers in most partner countries consider this task a low priority. Substantial support for returnees is therefore likely to remain possible only through externally supported measures for the foreseeable future.

Literature

Erler, J., L. Heller, L. Jechel, F. Leßke, G. Camacho Garland and M. Bruder (2025), *Return and Reintegration. Evaluation of the BMZ's Support to Promote Sustainable Reintegration of Returnees from Germany in Their Countries of Origin*, German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), Bonn.

Kosyakova, Y., L. Olbrich, K. Gallegos Torres, L. Hammer, T. Koch and S. Wagner (2025), *Deutschland als Zwischenstation? Rückkehr- und Weiterwanderungsabsichten von Eingewanderten im Lichte neuer Daten des International Mobility Panel of Migrants in Germany*, [Germany as a stopover? Return and onward migration intentions among immigrants in light of new data from the International Mobility Panel of Migrants in Germany], IAB research report 15/2025, Nuremberg.

The German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) is mandated by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to independently analyse and assess German development interventions. Evaluation reports contribute to the transparency of development results and provide policy-makers with evidence and lessons learned, based on which they can shape and improve their development policies.

Recommendations

DEval recommends fundamentally realigning the support if the ambitious objective of turning return into sustainable reintegration is to be achieved more effectively in future. To this end, the evaluation sets out three fundamental recommendations for the BMZ.

- 1. Support should be aligned with the overall reintegration process.** Individuals should be reached as early as possible and accompanied for at least a year.
- 2. The measures should address all groups of returnees – including those who have been deported – and be tailored to their specific needs.** These often extend beyond economic assistance to include social and psychosocial support.
- 3. An integrated impact monitoring system should be used to steer the measures more precisely in future and adjust them where necessary.**

The recommendations indicate that the previous objectives can only be achieved through more consistent and individualised support for returnees. The infrastructure established around the counselling centres in the partner countries could be used to deploy existing resources in a more targeted and effective manner. The alternative would be to revise the political objectives. This fundamental political consideration must be made against the backdrop of discussions about the return of larger groups of refugees to their countries of origin while, simultaneously, funding for development cooperation is being reduced.