Chapter 8
A Case for Return Preparedness

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8.1 Introduction

"Return to the country of origin must be on the basis of free choice by the individuals concerned," concluded the Council of Europe (1987) during a conference on migration affairs organized in 1987 in Oporto, Portugal.

More than two decades later, members of the same Council (Council of Europe 2008) adopted a motion for a recommendation dated 7 January 2008. They expressed concerns regarding the implementation of "Assisted Voluntary Return" (AVR) programs, calling for an assessment of their human rights implications. Two years later, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted Resolution n. 1742 (Council of Europe 2010), inviting Member States to:

> Ensure that assisted voluntary programmes are indeed voluntary, that [returnees'] consent is not obtained under pressure or blackmail and that returnees have access to independent and impartial actors in the return process to make free and informed decisions [Point 10.1]. Ensure that assisted voluntary return should never put in jeopardy the right of an asylum seeker to claim asylum and protection [Point 10.4].

These statements correspond to two different political moments in the treatment of migration issues. The first one was characterized by the resilience of the mid-1980s' economic downturn, linked with the growing politicization of domestic concerns, such as the "integration of immigrants," citizenship and identity, and with the rise of anti-immigrant political parties in European countries. New restrictive laws on immigration and family reunification were adopted. The right to stay became subordinate to migrant workers having a job contract. These restrictions were accompanied by reinforced implementation of state-led "return" programs aimed at inducing migrant workers to leave their destination countries.

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G. Battistella (ed.), *Global and Asian Perspectives on International Migration,*
Global Migration Issues 4, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-08317-9_8,
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The second statement refers to conditions and contingencies that are markedly different. More specifically, it results from the drive for operability and securitized temporariness,[1] which today characterizes the rationale for current labour migrant schemes in Europe and elsewhere. This vision of temporariness applies not only to current (temporary) labor migration schemes and so-called circular migration programs. It also applies to the fate of asylum-seekers and refugees in European democracies. The abovementioned 2010 PACE Resolution reflected such policy developments which, over the last decades or so, have raised serious concerns from migrant-aid associations and the UNHCR regarding their implications for the fate and safety of foreigners (whether these are migrant workers, refugees, asylum-seekers and unauthorized migrants). Gradually, "the notion of return has shifted from being [viewed as a] decision made by individuals to a policy option which is exercised by governments."

The first part of this article (Blitz et al. 2005) is aimed at briefly examining this shift. It is important to realize that this shift would never have made sense without the global acceptance of a migratory regime able to enlist an array of contradictory points of view and contrasting national interests under the same umbrella: the International Agenda for Migration Management. This agenda has in turn been contingent on the production and reproduction of a hegemonic lexicon. Policy treatment and understanding of "return" have not been immune to this lexicon.

The second part considers these policy developments from the flip side of the coin. It sets out to question the exclusive policy focus on the so-called "voluntariness" of return. Then, it seeks to demonstrate that *return preparedness* constitutes an adequate prism through which the rights, choices and aspirations of return migrants should be addressed both analytically and in political terms.

8.2 Return in Policy Priorities

Like many other migration terms used by governmental and intergovernmental institutions, return has gradually acquired a different meaning. Today, in most migration countries, its understanding is all too often associated with the end of the migration cycle. It is even mixed with expulsion or removal. This understanding has become so hegemonic, if not predominant, that the reference to return would imply a form of pressure or coercion exerted by the state and its law-enforcement agencies.

"Return" stands high in the hierarchy of priorities that have been identified in the current top-down management of international migration. However, this is not because return is viewed as a stage in the migration cycle. It is because return has been narrowly defined in the current lexicon of governmental and intergovernmental agencies as the fact of leaving the territory of a destination country.

[1] I addressed elsewhere this notion, *see* Cassarino, J.-P. (2013).

In the European Union (EU), this vision of return has been presented as an "integral part" of the instruments aimed at dealing with unauthorized migration and at protecting the integrity of immigration and asylum systems in most destination countries (European Commission 2005, p. 2). Since the early 2000s, return policies of the EU and its Member States have been predominantly, if not exclusively, viewed as instruments aimed at combating unauthorized migration, while defining return as "the process of going back to one's country of origin, transit or another third country" (European Council 2002, p. 29).

This understanding of return is of course reflective of the normative construct that the migration management agenda has consolidated, for it not only reinforces the centrality of the state but also rationalizes its security-oriented methods and means of implementation. In the parlance of the EU, return merely refers to the act of removing unauthorized migrants and rejected asylum-seekers from the European territory. Moreover, it does not take into account migrants' post-return conditions, let alone their human and financial potential as participants in development.

It is astonishing to observe the hegemony that this approach to return has achieved over the last decades and how it is now weaving into various policy areas at national and international levels. At a national level, an array of measures, laws and infrastructures have been established to serve this design. Detention centers, fingerprint identification systems, yearly expulsion quotas, laws on preventative custody are just a few examples. At an international level, cooperation with neighboring countries (on so-called enforced return) has been justified in official rhetoric as a necessary evil regardless of whether the country of readmission already possesses the capacity to fully respect the fundamental rights and to protect the dignity of readmitted persons. Today, at the level of the 27 EU Member States, more than 300 bilateral and multilateral agreements have been concluded to facilitate the swift removal of unauthorized aliens.[2]

These initiatives have been presented as a bitter remedy or a necessary evil, turning cooperation on readmission and reinforcement of border controls into a rational solution to fight effectively against unauthorized migration. There is no question that this cause-and-effect relationship gives rationality and sense to official discourse and means of action. They also discard any alternative interpretation regarding the actual problem by monopolizing the legitimacy of specific solutions.

To understand this, we need to question why this is so and whether it could be otherwise. Why is the issue of reintegration so marginal, if not non-existent, in the mechanisms that have been implemented so far by state agencies? Various elements account for the short-sightedness of current "return" policies.

One major implication of these developments lies in having built a hierarchy of priorities aimed at best achieving the objectives set out in the migration management agenda. A hierarchy of priorities could be defined as a set of policy pri-

[2] The inventory of these agreements is accessible here: http://rsc.eui.eu/RDP/research/analyses/ra/.

orities whose main function is to delineate the contours of the issues that should be tackled first and foremost, while hiding or dismissing others. The drive for operability (in dealing with border controls and the swift and “cost-effective” removal of undesirable migrants and denied asylum-seekers) added to the drive for flexibility (in brokering flexible deals or arrangements with non-EU countries with a view to containing unauthorized migration) have been established at the top of this hierarchy of priorities. Concomitantly, such top concerns have cohabited with other priorities such as the oft-cited “nexus” between migration and development, migrants’ skills acquisition and portability, and migrants’ human rights. However, their criticality and relevance have hardly been considered by policymakers owing to their low position in the hierarchy. This does not mean that these other priorities have not been dealt with at all. It means that they have been viewed as *dismissible priorities,*[3] even if they have been presented as priorities *tout court*.

Admittedly, the reference to a hierarchy of priorities may carry to many minds a sense of discomfort. The most immediate reaction would be to identify the architect who skilfully structured this hierarchy. There is no question that its gradual acceptance results from exceptional epistemic conditions[4] that consolidated through the sharing and repetition of plausible truths and unquestioned apodictic statements shaping the perceptions, attitudes and policy options towards migrants and asylum-seekers of all actors involved, whether these were from countries of destination, or from countries of transit and origin.

More problematically, those who received and assimilated the lexicon have been dispossessed of their own contingencies and realities through a process of strategic alignment. I am not only referring to the initiatives of the European Commission which, faced with overt criticisms[5] from some EU Member States and their spin doctors, have been gradually regimented by the latter’s demands. I am also referring to non-EU countries of transit and of origin, located in the direct neighborhood of the EU, which were given a powerful mental picture of the challenges that needed to be tackled first and foremost in the abovementioned hierarchy of priorities.

Any scholar having worked on return migration would soon notice that this policy approach was not part of the open and recurrent debates about return migra-

[3] Of course, the reference to dismissible priorities is oxymoronic. I use it in order to address the gap between intentions and contingencies.

[4] By epistemic conditions, I refer to the role of power in knowledge construction as applied to migration and asylum, from a Foucauldian standpoint.

[5] Very succinctly, such overt criticisms became more explicit following the 1993 entry into force of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). The EU intended to play a major role by turning migration into an issue of “common interest” and by prompting Member States to better cooperate on (and harmonize their national) migration policies. Member States have expressed their concern in numerous ways regarding the capacity of the EU institutions to deal “effectively” with “migration management.” Such developments reflected the resilient contention on competence on migration affairs between the EU, on the one hand, and its Member States, on the other.

tion during the 1970s and 1980s. I addressed in detail these past debates elsewhere (Cassarino 2004). Suffice it to say that return was not mixed with expulsion, let alone with readmission, and migrants' motivations to return home, on a temporary or permanent basis, as well as their manifold patterns of reintegration, constituted at that time the main measures to be tackled as well as the research interests of scholars across various disciplines. Since the 1990s, the growing politicization of international migration movements, the ensuing adoption of restrictive laws regarding the conditions of entry and residence of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, reinforced border controls, the heightened debates on national sovereignty and identity, constitute the main ingredients that have gradually been conducive to different perceptions of migration in general, and to return in particular. Such new taxonomies as "voluntary return" and "forced return" started to shape more intensive public discourse and action by governmental and intergovernmental institutions.

The gradual pervasiveness of this dichotomy (voluntary versus forced return) in public discourse and policies on migration and return appears today unquestionable. However, the extent to which it reflects the composite nature of return flows and returnees' experiences remains highly debatable. There are two interrelated reasons supporting this argument. The first one lies in the fact that the dichotomous approach to return, as it stands now in current political rhetoric, is shaped by a receiving-country bias. The second reason is that neither conditions in countries of origin after "return" nor reintegration are properly considered.

Additionally, despite the seemingly impeccable reference to voluntariness, the frontier between "voluntary" and forced return could only turn out to be blurred, given the purposes it serves.

This blurry frontier has been evidenced over the last few years by academic institutions and research centers which carried out field surveys based on interviews with persons who were "returned" through AVR programs. The common objective of these surveys was to provide empirical evidence of the socio-economic and psychological conditions of these persons. Moreover, they set out to assess the impact of both readmission and AVR programs on the patterns of reintegration of foreigners in their countries of return. In other words, they tried to fill in a knowledge gap which has characterized so far the implementation of policies aimed at removing, either coercively or on a so-called voluntary basis, aliens who are subjected to a removal order by the authorities of a Member State.

For instance, June de Bree observed in the framework of a field survey carried out in Afghanistan with "AVR returnees" that interviewees are faced with poor employment and housing conditions back home. Her field survey showed that 93 % of the sample declared that "they are restricted in their mobility within Afghanistan, either because they or their family had personal issues with the Taliban or Mujahedeen, or because of a general feeling of insecurity due to violence, crime and (terrorist) attacks" (de Bree 2008, p. 16). Insecurity, added to economic and social instability in Afghanistan, are the most frequent factors that her interviewees mentioned regarding intentions to leave again, as 89 % of them expressed the desire to return to

the West.[6] In a similar vein, in a comparative study based on a large number of interviews carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Togo, Marieke van Houte and Mireille de Koning showed that social and political tensions in the country of return added to the lack of safety, accounting for the interviewees' desire to re-emigrate, even when obstacles to do so exist (van Houte and de Koning 2008, p. 34). These factors strongly jeopardize the interviewees' possibility of reintegrating socially and professionally in the country of return. Needless to say, such investigations are important in understanding how the voluntary dimension and the "sustainability of return," which constitute key elements supporting the adoption and implementation of AVR programs, have been addressed in concrete terms in the above case studies.

Arguably, it is the aforementioned drive for operability that has supported this shift, just like, as noted by Jon Sward (2009), it has so far exempted AVR programs from any comprehensive and independent assessment of their impact on the conditions of persons in their countries of return.

Furthermore, the dichotomous approach to return would not have been predominant without the production of knowledge reifying the managerial centrality of the state, as mentioned before, and turning the state and its administration into the legitimate producers of this form of knowledge. The selective allocation of public funds to research projects viewed by civil servants and the state bureaucracy as being "concretely useful" to their "actions" is a direct offshoot of the desire to produce and to legitimize a form of top-down knowledge about migration, in general, and return, in particular.

Never before has the production of knowledge about migration issues become crucial in political terms. By obstructing any alternative interpretation of a given problem ("we cannot do otherwise"), the production of top-down knowledge does not only pave the way for dealing with a given problem, it also strays from the causes of the problem and subtly justifies a unique technical solution as the necessary evil.

Admittedly, the identification of priority actions and their unquestioned "necessary" solutions has consolidated so far a migratory regime aimed at dealing with consequences more than causes, and overlooking the actual conditions shaping migrants' patterns of reintegration after return. In a similar vein, these developments have had a certain bearing on the vision of migrants often represented as having little if no agency at all.

However, beyond the strength of any paradigms, there are inescapable facts and characteristics that cannot be dismissed when it comes to dealing with the return of migrants. The next section sets out to address them while highlighting their policy implications.

[6] An evaluation report directed by Arne Strand, based on interviews with Afghan "voluntary returnees," confirms their desire to re-emigrate for abroad owing to harsh insecure conditions and poor economic prospects in Afghanistan. *See* Strand et al. (2008, pp. 46–47).

8.3 The Ethos of Return Preparedness

Return migration occurs all the time. We know that return migrants constitute a highly heterogeneous group of actors in terms of migration experiences, length of stay abroad, patterns of resource mobilization, legal status, motivations and projects. Over half a century, an array of studies across various disciplines has explained the manifold factors shaping migrants' patterns of reintegration in their country of origin (*see* Cassarino 2004). They all share the basic assumption that migrants' patterns of reintegration are shaped by three interrelated elements: (1) context in home countries (the most obvious factor); (2) the duration and type of migration experience lived abroad; (3) the factors or conditions (whether favorable or not) in the host and home countries which motivated return, i.e., the pre- and post-return conditions.

Taking into account these three interrelated elements (place, time as well as pre- and post-return conditions) is indeed critical in showing that different variables combine in shaping migrants' patterns of reintegration in their country of origin. There exists, however, a basic and too often overlooked condition that intimately connects any person who returns home from abroad, regardless of the place of origin, social background, motivations, prospects, skills and occupational status and that is, return preparedness.

Return preparedness is not a vague notion. It refers to a process which, by definition, takes place in a person's life, through time, and is shaped by changing circumstances (i.e., personal experiences, contextual factors in sending and receiving countries) in their broadest sense. It is not only about preparing for return. It is about having the ability, though not always the opportunity, to gather the tangible and intangible resources needed to secure one's own return.

Additionally, return preparedness calls for a twofold question. Why do some migrants have a stronger degree of preparedness than others? How is the issue of return preparedness dealt with or taken into consideration in the framework of contemporary migration management policies?

Willingness and readiness. Willingness and readiness to return are the two fundamental elements that compose return migrants' preparedness. Willingness pertains to the act of deciding or choosing, on one's own initiative, to return and without any pressure whatsoever. It refers to the subjective power to choose to return at a certain time, because it is part of a person's migration cycle. Admittedly, that person will necessarily have to weigh the pros and cons as well as the costs and benefits of the decision to return. However, what matters is the subjective feeling that the decision to return was neither dictated by others nor by external circumstances, regardless of whether it is justified in absolute terms or not. Willingness refers to whether it is the time, and whether it is right, to choose to return or not.

Clearly, given the heterogeneity of return migrants' experiences and profiles, the notion of willingness is far from being a constant, for it might not happen all the time in the return process. Sometimes, unexpected events or obstacles may disrupt the migration cycle and compel migrants to return home at shorter notice than ex-

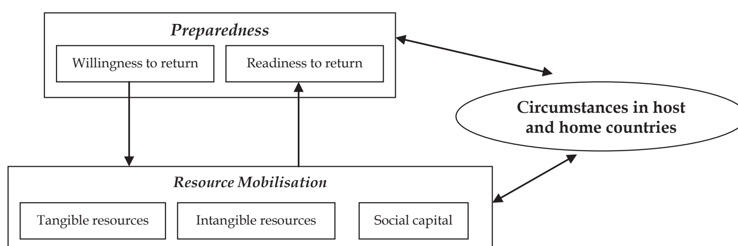

Fig. 8.1 Preparedness to return. (Source: Cassarino 2004, p. 271)

pected. In this case, return is not chosen having potential implications for the post-return conditions of the migrant.

Readiness to return reflects the extent to which migrants have been in a position to mobilize the adequate tangible (i.e., financial capital) and intangible resources (i.e., contacts, relationships, skills, networks) needed to secure their return, whether it is temporary or permanent. This notion allows the manifold resources mobilized by migrants to be analyzed. It also stresses the need to view return as an ongoing process which requires time. As mentioned above, migrants have different capacities for readiness. Some may be optimal, others may be insufficient. Time, resources, experience, and conditions in the host and home countries constitute the main factors which, combined together, shape their readiness to return.

Willingness and readiness to return reflect the ability of a person to decide how, when and why it is time to go back home. This ability is not a given, for the conditions of return may vary substantially, leading to various degrees of preparedness. In other words, not all migrants choose to return on their own initiative, nor do they have the readiness to do so. Such various degrees impact on their propensity to reintegrate back home.

Preparedness pertains not only to individual choice, but also to the readiness to return. In other words, to be optimally prepared, return is an issue of individual capacity to decide to return and to mobilize the tangible (i.e., financial capital) and intangible (i.e., contacts, relationships, skills, acquaintances) resources needed to secure return (i.e., readiness). At the same time, readiness to return varies with the types of experience of migration and with migrants' context of return. This is illustrated in the graph below (Fig. 8.1).

The emphasis on the willingness and the readiness of the migrant to return (i.e., the returnee's preparedness) yields various analytical benefits:

It argues that return is not only a voluntary act. Return also pertains to a process of resource mobilization that requires time. Moreover, migrants may manifest their wish to return without necessarily being ready to do so;

With regard to the link between return migration and reintegration, it shows that, irrespective of their legal status in host countries, returnees differ from one another in terms of levels of preparedness and patterns of resource mobilization;

It regards various types of migrants ranging from labor migrants to refugees. In other words, returnees differ from one another not only in terms of motivations, but also in terms of levels of preparedness and patterns of resource mobilization;

It shows that returnees' preparedness is not only dependent on the migrants' experience abroad, but also on the perception that significant institutional, economic and political changes have occurred at home. Of course, these circumstances have a bearing on how resources are mobilized and used after return;

It highlights the fact that returnees' preparedness is shaped by circumstances in host and home countries, i.e., by pre- and post-return conditions;

It takes into account migrants' preparedness to return while arguing that the returnees' impact on development at home is also dependent upon his/her level of preparedness.

In previous works (Cassarino 2004), I tried to identify different degrees of return preparedness, regardless of the diversity inherent in the experiences of migration and return conditions. Table 8.1 illustrates these three degrees.

Table 8.1 schematically illustrates three different conditions as well as three degrees of return preparedness which differ from one another in terms of resource mobilization, as pre- and post-return conditions, length of stay abroad, willingness and readiness. All impact on returnees' patterns of reintegration back home.

This analytical framework includes three levels of preparedness which are consequential on how resources, if any, may be mobilized before and also after return.

The first category refers to returnees whose high level of preparedness allowed them to organize their own return autonomously while mobilizing the resources needed to secure their return. This category pertains to migrants whose migration cycle was complete. They feel they gathered enough tangible and intangible resources to carry out their projects in their home countries. They have also developed valuable contacts, and acquired skills and knowledge that can constitute a significant adjunct to their initiatives. They had time to evaluate the costs and benefits of return, while considering the changes that occurred in their countries of origin, at institutional, economic and political levels. Some of them may maintain their residential status in their host countries with a view to securing their cross-border mobility. Their high level of preparedness influences their participation in cross-border social and economic networks; these convey informational and financial resources that can foster resource mobilization not only before return but also after return. Some migrants' projects at home may be responsive to public programs, promoted by the governments of their countries of origin. Although the impact of such return-friendly state-sponsored programs remains to be better estimated, their implementation may be viewed as a positive change by returnees.[7]

The second category includes returnees having a low level of preparedness. This category pertains to migrants whose migration cycle was incomplete. The length of stay abroad was too short to allow tangible and intangible resources to be mobilized, owing to major events which interrupted their migration cycle, e.g., unex-

[7] This is what Robyn Iredale and Fei Guo (2001, p. 14) observed during a survey related to Chinese returnees from Australia. The authors argue, "Although the Chinese government's incentive programs don't appear to have had a direct impact on people's decision-making processes in Australia, they have provided a positive signal from the government that the social environment and policies in China are improving."

Table 8.1 Returnees' degrees of preparedness. (Source: Cassarino 2004, p. 273)

	Types of returnees	Pre-return Conditions				Post-return Conditions	
		Status	Motivations	Resources mobilised		Reintegration process	Resources mobilised
High degree of preparedness	. Labour migrants; . Refugees; . Highly-skilled migrants; . Students.	May obtain resident status in host country. May own property in host country. Temporary	Migration objectives are reached. Migration cycle is complete. Perceived positive changes in job market or in the government at home. Perceived political and/or economic improvements at home generate new opportunities. Strong incentives in origin country induce return.	Savings. Acquaintances (address book). Contacts. Knowledge, skills, expertise. Higher education.	Return Migration	Re-discovery of the real characteristics of the origin country. Adaptation and negotiation. Distinctiveness	Resources mobilised before return are invested and re-adapted to local context. Exchange of "valued items". Additional cross-border network resources may be mobilised in order to gather other resources and information.
Low degree of preparedness	. Labour migrants; . Short-term refugees; . Highly-skilled migrants; . Students; - Refugees	Temporary	Migration objectives could not be reached as planned. The migration cycle is incomplete: disappointment. Unexpected family events in home country prompted return back home.	Few savings.		The household and relatives provide moral and financial support. Limited resources can be invested as a result of the migration experience.	Limited resources are mobilised at a local level, after return, with a view to facing the re-integration process.
No preparedness	. Rejected asylum-seekers; . irregular migrants.	None	Interruption of the migration cycle. Removal,. Rejected visa extension	Non-existent		Difficult conditions at home. Shame. Re-emigration may be envisaged.	Non-existent

pected family events, ostracism, no real opportunities for social and professional advancement in host countries. These migrants consider that the costs of remaining are higher than returning home, even if few resources were mobilized before their return. Hence, resource mobilization in receiving countries remains extremely limited and the returnee will tend to rely on resources available at home in order to reintegrate.

The third category pertains to returnees whose level of preparedness is non-existent. Their migration cycle was abruptly interrupted. Actually, they neither contemplated return nor did they provide for the preparation of return. Circumstances in host countries prompted them to leave, for instance, as a result of their rejected application for asylum or following their removal from the territory of the destination country (Table 8.2).

Admittedly, the abovementioned three levels of return preparedness roughly plot a plurality of conditions faced by return migrants. At the same time, however, the identification of various levels of return preparedness lies precisely in emphasizing that, regardless of the heterogeneity characterizing return migrants' experiences and profiles, willingness and readiness to return constitute key elements in understanding why patterns of reintegration vary so much.

Clearly, there exists an interrelationship between the completeness of the migration cycle and the level of return preparedness which, as shown in the foregoing, is contingent on the willingness and readiness to return (both being shaped, in turn, by

Table 8.2 Levels of preparedness and migration cycles

Level of return preparedness	Migration cycle	Return motivations
High	Complete	Decided owing to favorable conditions
Low	Incomplete	Decided owing to adverse circumstances
None	Interrupted	Compelled/forced

different patterns of resource mobilization and by circumstances in host and home countries). These considerations have concrete and practical implications when it comes to defining policy measures aimed at offsetting the incompleteness of the migration cycle and migrants' low level of return preparedness. Particularly, in the current context marked by the resilient economic crisis, many migrants have opted to return to their home countries to escape unemployment in destination countries. This option results from adverse economic circumstances that negatively impact on their readiness to return to their countries of origin. This individual option also results from a pondered evaluation of such circumstances. Public authorities in countries of origin will necessarily have to respond to the social and professional reintegration needs of their returning nationals, as is the case with Filipino returnees hit by the crisis in Western countries.

Likewise, these considerations are of paramount importance to understand that the abrupt interruption of the migration cycle (e.g., as a result of removals or the so-called "voluntary return" of unauthorized migrants and rejected asylum applicants) has consequences on the reintegration of migrants that are too severe and disruptive to be dealt with credibly through state-sponsored assistance programmes.

8.4 Conclusion

Again, return refers to a *process* that can be optimally prepared if it is reflective, among others, of the aspirations of individual migrants and of their readiness.

Emphasis on three different levels of preparedness has clear policy implications. Any state administration in the world wishing to sustain the social and professional reintegration of return migrants, regardless of their skills, will necessarily have to factor in its policy measures the issue of return preparedness.

Against this backdrop, one is entitled to wonder how the drive for temporariness, which is part and parcel of current circular migration programs, can optimally ensure temporary migrants' high levels of return preparedness, and under which conditions.

For it is precisely the drive for temporariness, not the repeated to and fro movements of migrants, that has configured the rationale for circular migration programs in Europe. If it were the opposite, the issues of return and reintegration would have been dealt with more substantially by policymakers in both countries of destination and of origin[8]. Admittedly, return has often been referred to as a key component

[8] For a comprehensive analysis of circular migration schemes, *see* Piyasiri Wickramasekara (2011).

of circular migration programs. However, return has not been dealt with as a stage in the migration cycle; rather as the end of the temporary stay of migrants. Unsurprisingly, and given the receiving-country bias mentioned in the first part of this chapter, reintegration—i.e., the process through which migrants take part in the social economic, cultural and political life of their countries of origin—continues to be glaringly overlooked. Moreover, since the early 2000s, the 'return' policies of migration countries have been predominantly, if not exclusively, viewed as instruments aimed at fighting against unauthorized migration. This limited approach has been detrimental to the exploration of the link between return, reintegration and development. This may also explain the reluctance of many countries of origin to adopt and implement mechanisms aimed at sustaining the temporary or permanent reintegration of their nationals.

Making a case for return preparedness is crucial in realizing that current migration policies have disregarded so far the implications of various levels of return preparedness. It could even be argued that, having focused exclusively on the securitization of temporary labor migration, many migration countries find themselves with inadequate instruments aimed at supporting the permanent and temporary return of migrants, let alone their reintegration needs.

Finally, making a case for return preparedness is also, if not above all, an attempt to raise awareness of the evidence that, beyond established paradigms, a lot remains to be done in order to respond concretely to migrants' rights, including their aspirations for stability and advancement in their lives.

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