

**Forum:** General Assembly 1 - Social Committee

**Issue:** Addressing the ethical and humanitarian impacts of remigration policies

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## Introduction

In order to deal with the continuous challenges of migration, while some nations try to directly cut the numbers of refugees coming into their countries, other nations have taken steps for returning migrants and refugees to their countries of origin. With this, remigration policies have grown to be a major issue in international affairs in the recent decade, with many concerns raised upon their morality, legality, and long-term effects on the refugees. Although these remigration flows are presented as voluntary or incentivized, actually they are frequently driven by implicit oppression, discrimination, or deteriorating living conditions. The moral and human rights dilemma lies in the balance between a state's sovereign interest to regulate migration and the protection of the safety and autonomy of refugees. As the subject gathers more and more momentum especially across conflict zones, it is a must to examine the deeper causes, real life cases, and humanitarian implications of such policies.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Remigration

The process by which a person returns to their country of origin after having previously migrated to another country, either voluntarily, under incentive-based schemes, or due to political or legal oppression, can also be seen as "Return Migration".

E.g. Increased restrictions in Iran led to the remigration of thousands of Afghan people who had previously sought refuge there.

### Non-refoulement

A core principle of international refugee and human rights law that prohibits states from returning individuals to a country where there is a risk of being subjected to



persecution, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or any other human rights violation, or where their lives or freedom may be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

E.g. In 2012, the European Court of Human Rights declared that Italy had violated the principle of non-refoulement by intercepting and forcibly returning migrants to Libya, where they faced torture and inhumane conditions in detention camps.

### Reintegration

The economic and social re-establishment of the migrants upon their return to the home country following a period of displacement or migration, including access to housing, employment, health, education, and acceptance by the local community.

E. g. A refugee who repatriates to Afghanistan through an International Organization for Migration (IOM) programme receives shelter assistance and vocational training with a view to reintegrating into the local labour market and rebuilding a durable livelihood.

### Refugee

A person who has been forced to flee their country due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of reasons such as race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees are protected by international legal instruments, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

E.g. A Syrian refugee who was given asylum in Germany after fleeing targeted violence in their home country.

### Migrant/Immigrant

An individual who moves to a foreign country for any reason, e.g., in search of better living conditions, who do not flee persecution and therefore do not qualify for the special legal protections provided to refugees under international law.

E.g. An Indian immigrant who moved to Canada for economic reasons/better living conditions can be called a migrant/immigrant.



## Irregular Migration

The movement of individuals that takes place outside the legal frameworks established by states, including entering, staying in, or working in a country without the necessary authorization or documents.

E.g. A person who enters a country without a visa or overstays a legal permit is considered an irregular migrant.

## Repatriation

The process of voluntarily sending or returning someone to their country of origin, allegiance, or citizenship, ideally conducted with full, informed consent and often facilitated by international organizations to ensure the return's safety.

E.g. The repatriation of Syrian citizens who voluntarily chose to return home from Türkiye following improved security conditions.

## Deportation

The forceful and involuntary removal of a person from a host country, typically due to legal violations, often conducted by state authorities and may raise human rights concerns, especially if it violates the principle of non-refoulement.

E.g. The deportation of an undocumented immigrant by U.S. authorities near the Texas-Mexico border, without regarding humanitarian considerations.

## Background Information

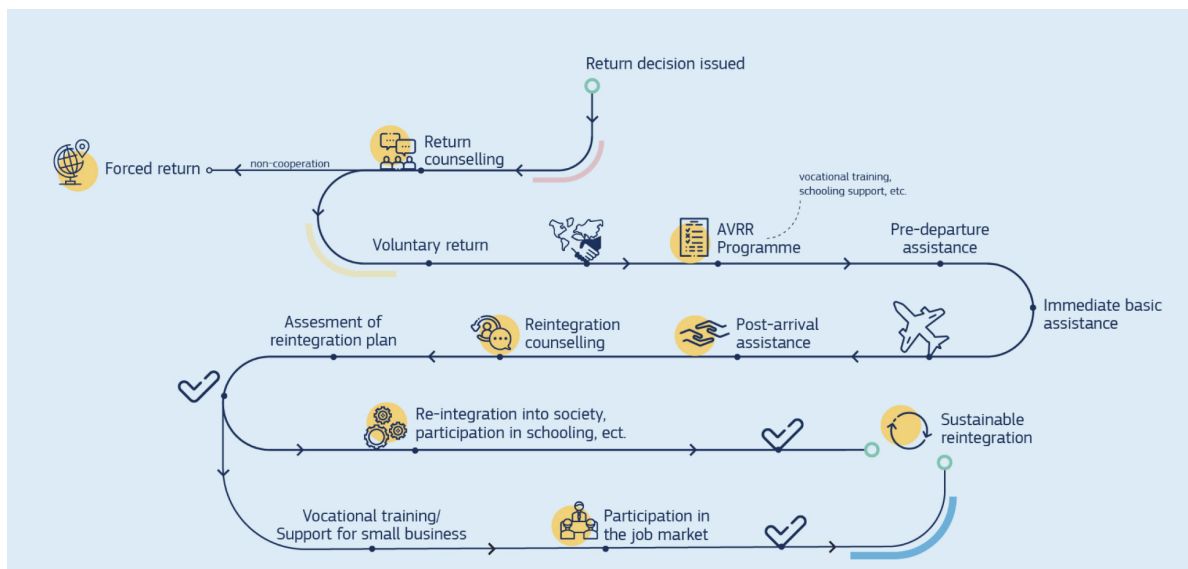
### Historical context

Ongoing conflicts, deteriorating living conditions, economic instability, and political unrest have drastically changed global migration patterns in recent decades. Faced with growing pressure on their social and economic infrastructure, host nations have started to give migrant and refugee return top priority. Remigration policies have thus taken front stage in international affairs as a major concern. Although some policies are presented as voluntary repatriation, they are often shaped by problematic elements including legal precarity, social exclusion, or indirect discrimination, therefore generating major ethical and humanitarian concern upon them.

Remigration is deeply intertwined within global legal norms and the norm of non-refoulement – the forbidding of forced return of individuals especially to countries in which they may suffer serious harm. Yet many countries still use forced repatriation or so-called “voluntary” return programs with no transparency or without free consent of individuals. The 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol provide the structure for safeguarding people displaced by persecution. However, the line between legitimate migration control and human rights violations has become increasingly blurred.

### Humanitarian and Social Aspect

Beyond legality, remigration presents serious humanitarian issues, particularly in cases of returns to areas seen as dangerous or fragile. Lack of access to housing, work, healthcare, and social services among other things makes many returnees reintegration challenging. Sometimes returnees go through secondary displacement—that is, they have to flee once more because of instability or social rejection back home. These hazards highlight the need for reintegration support, including programs such as Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) under coordination by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).



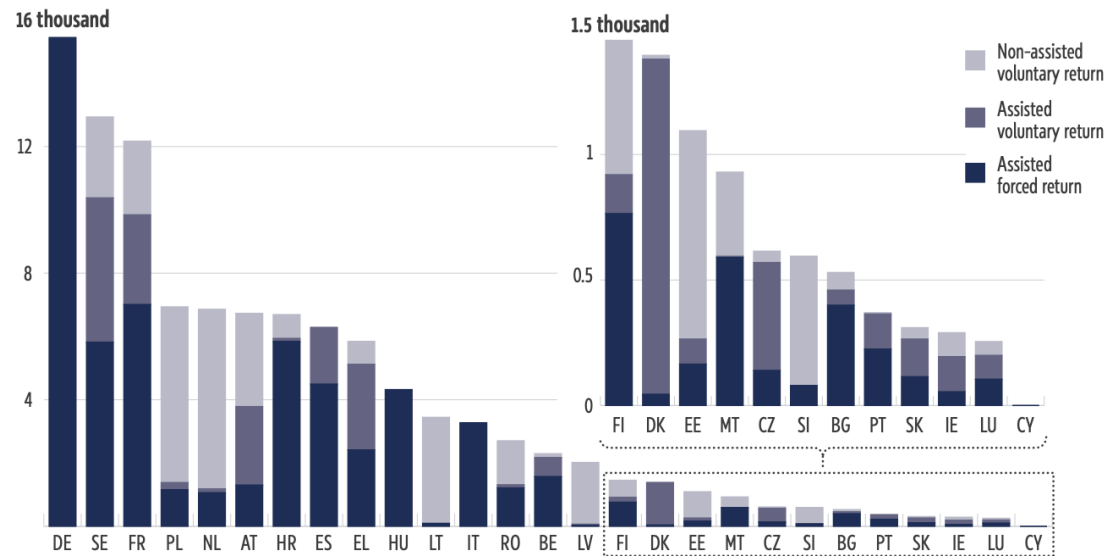
Visual 1: Return Migration Strategy Scheme, provided by the European Union (EU).

Local, national and international institutions, organizations, and even private companies and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can play vital roles in shaping and monitoring remigration practices. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides frameworks to ensure that returns are safe, voluntary, and dignified. Simultaneously, the European Union's Return Directive (2008/European Commission) and bilateral readmission agreements attempt to coordinate member states' return strategies—although these are frequently criticized for overlooking reintegration support and potentially pressuring migrants into "voluntary" returns. Thus, that is exactly where local and private organizations come into action, in enhancing post-return reintegration practices for the displaced refugees. Inadequate coordination between host states, international bodies, and origin countries can exacerbate conditions, undermining the sustainability of return programs.

### A Question of Balance

Ultimately, the debate around remigration policies is conflicted between state sovereignty and individual rights. National governments possess the authority to control migration but they must respect international rules and ethical principles that protect the welfare and dignity of refugees while ensuring their proper and informed consent. During this era of increasing displacement, the international community needs to develop new return policies which no longer function as deterrents but serve as pathways for sustainable reintegration and human safety.

Figure 7 – Difference in types of returns by Member State in 2023



Country codes: Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czechia (CZ), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Ireland (IE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Croatia (HR), Italy (IT), Cyprus (CY), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Hungary (HU), Malta (MT), Netherlands (NL), Austria (AT), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Finland (FI), Sweden (SE)..

Visual 2: A bar graph showing the number of forced returns versus voluntary returns in Europe in 2023 by country.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Since the very start of migration issues, UNHCR has taken key roles in helping refugees who are subjected to remigration and in guiding nations for this goal. UNHCR sets international standards for refugee protection and is also responsible for coordinating voluntary repatriation operations. The agency emphasizes the key point that remigration must be voluntary in every situation and occur in secure, humane, and transparently communicated circumstances and also criticized dehumanizing forced returns to life threatening situations..

### International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The IOM is an intergovernmental organisation with a focus on migration practices around the world that has a very active part in AVRR. The programme provides returning individuals crucial reintegration support. IOM works with host and origin countries to ensure that returnees receive the necessary social & vocational training and provide post-arrival assistance to reduce the risk of secondary displacement.

## European Union (EU)

The EU aligns return operations across Member States through the EU Return Directive (2008/115/EC), third-country readmission agreements, and joint return operations facilitated by Frontex -EU border and migration agency-. While it promotes returns that are both humane and effective, the EU has been accused of inadequate reintegration and pressure on partner countries to accept back returns.

## Türkiye

Host to the world's largest refugee number, consisting almost entirely of Syrians, Türkiye sits at the forefront of regional flows of remigration. Both mandatory and voluntary remigration back towards northern Syria have been conducted under the remigration policies of the Turkish state, raising concerns of the conditions for return safety, especially with the 2016 EU-Turkey migration deal.

## Germany

Germany has pursued a twin-track policy by offering voluntary return programmes as well as enforcement deportations. Through the "REAG/GARP" programmes, the state encourages voluntary returns through material assistance and logistical assistance, often in collaboration with the IOM. Meanwhile, Germany deported individuals whose asylum claims were rejected, creating controversy over the legitimacy of removals to unstable regions.

## United States (US)

The U.S. has historically operated one of the largest immigration enforcement systems in the world as it combines deportation and voluntary return policies and uses the measures to enforce a departure. The U.S. removes undocumented migrants and failed asylum seekers using the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, and has faced nearly constant human rights criticism for their actions, particularly when that involved returning them to countries affected by conflict.

## Denmark

Denmark is one of the most well-known examples of countries with strict remigration policies. The authorities have revoked residence permits for several Syrian refugees since 2019 on account that parts of Syria—particularly Damascus—are "safe for return." These measures have been criticized internationally because they were potentially endangering

the principle of non-refoulement, as returns have been made without guarantee of safety or reintegration.

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
28 July 1951	<b>Adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention established the international legal framework for refugee rights and the principle of non-refoulement.</b>
10 December 1980	<b>UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No. 18 on Voluntary Repatriation, which set standards for safe, dignified, and voluntary returns.</b>
13 December 2007	<b>IOM Framework for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR), defined best global practices for voluntary return and reintegration support.</b>

### Relevant UN Resolutions and Other Documents

- The 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees provide the internationally recognized definition of a refugee and outline the legal rights they are entitled to, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): <https://www.unhcr.org/media/1951-refugee-convention-and-1967-protocol-relating-status-refugees>
- General Assembly Resolution, especially 29<sup>th</sup> clause on page 8, underlining migrants' rights to return, 2015: [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_70\\_1\\_E.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf)



- This publication outlines UNHCR's framework for voluntary repatriation, emphasizing that returns must be safe, voluntary, and dignified, with attention to reintegration support. 1980: <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/voluntary-repatriation-1>
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines Non-refoulement in this document: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/ThePrincipleNon-RefoulementUnderInternationalHumanRightsLaw.pdf>
- OHCHR elaborates on the protection and needs of refugees in this document: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/Protection.pdf>
- The EU Return Directive from the European Parliament on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, 2008: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2008/115/oj/eng>
- This document elaborates on EU's policies and underscores the humanitarian aspect of returns, March, 2025: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/880773/Factsheet%20-%20A%20New%20Common%20European%20System%20for%20Return.pdf>
- "Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)", International Organization for Migration (IOM), Jan. 2011, <https://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/activities/regulating/AVRR-Leaflet-Jan-2011.pdf>.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### Programs for UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation

Voluntary repatriation programs have been carried out by the UNHCR in a number of locations, most importantly Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar. These initiatives, which usually include reintegration support like financial grants, legal aid, and community outreach, contribute to safer, easier, and informed returns. Many of these initiatives, despite their good intentions, have been observed to be inconclusive when the situation in the country of origin continues to be unstable.

Through return and readmission agreements with third countries, the European Union established a coordinated framework to manage irregular migration. The framework, EU Return Directive (2008), supports both forced deportation and voluntary return procedures and is criticized for its lack of reintegration assistance and indirect pressure on migrants to accept return, despite its goal of humane procedures.

### Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) – IOM

AVRR programs are administered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to support migrants who decide to go back to their home country. These programs provide financial aid, post-return reintegration assistance, and pre-departure counseling. Despite the widespread use of AVRR throughout Europe and other regions, questions remain about whether returns are actually voluntary or discreetly forced by host-countries.

### Possible Solutions

- Establishing independent monitoring bodies or international committees to assess whether remigration is actually voluntary and aligned with human rights standards, for all individuals facing return migration.
- Creating improved, more extensive and sustainable reintegration assistance programs, including providing returning migrants with housing support, vocational training, mental health services, educational opportunities for children and business incentives to ease their transition and to minimize the risk of marginalization.
- Expanded access to legal aid for displaced individuals, particularly refugees who had to flee, for example, providing legal identity cards or temporary passports in host countries to protect and sustain their legal status under international law.
- Encouraging collaboration between host and origin countries to share responsibilities upon ensuring that returnees are not left without protection or services upon arrival.
- Adopting universal definitions of “voluntary return”, “sustainable remigration” et cetera and thus creating clear guidelines upon protecting displaced individuals rights, social and legal status and ensuring accountability everywhere in the world.

- Minimizing return to unsafe places, by implementing formal mechanisms (e.g., risk assessment panels) to prevent returns to countries or regions experiencing armed conflict, persecution, or humanitarian crises.

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