

## European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN) - Inaugural Meeting

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Check speech against delivery

*Brussels, 13 June 2018*

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues,

Let me start my intervention with a simple remark: A credible and functioning policy on return of foreign nationals who do not - or no longer - fulfil the legal conditions for entry or residence on the territory of a state is a crucial element of any migration policy. The European Union and its Member States have to be in a position to decide whether a foreign national is legally entitled to remain or not. In the latter case, they have to be in a position to ensure the return, if the person concerned does not leave on his or her own accord.

The absence of a functioning return policy deprives migration management of assuming one of its main functions – the control of entry and residence of foreign nationals. This in turn leads to a situation, where it is more or less up to the migrants' decision whether they stay on the territory of a host country or not, irrespective of their legal entitlement.

In practice, however, things are not that simple. Normative and structural constraints make it difficult to have fully effective return policies. It is an undisputed European position that removal and return must be carried out in “a humane manner and with full respect for the human rights and dignity of returnees”. Notwithstanding this, from the concerned individuals' point of view, removal and return are likely to be perceived as threats to their personal safety. In the many cases where there are no security concerns, concerned individuals still worry about an uncertain future and about coping with the harsh realities of failed migration projects once they have returned. Their return is not always supported by their home communities and their governments, as it adds to existing challenges and deprives countries of origin from the benefits of migrant remittances.

All of this makes return, readmission and reintegration such challenging fields. A quick look at available figures confirms this quite vividly. For 2017, Eurostat reports a total of 189,000 returns from European Union Member States to third countries. Measured against the 516,000 leaver orders for 2017, this translates into an overall return rate of 41.5 percent. But when we look at the effective returns to third countries, the rate lowers to 36.6 percent. And when we leave out the returns to Western Balkan countries, the return rate to remaining third countries stands only at 29.2 percent. We can discuss now, whether the glass is half-full or

half-empty when it comes to returns. But we cannot challenge the fact that - statistically speaking - about two thirds of third country nationals who are under the obligation to leave and to return to their home country don't do so. Against this background, it will be very difficult to reach our ultimate goal of a functioning and beneficial European migration and asylum system. When we want to ensure protection to those who need it; enhance responsibility and burden sharing; provide channels for legal migration *and* find the support of our populations and voters, we have to become better at controlling our borders and at returning those foreign nationals who do not fulfil the legal conditions of staying here.

Return policy alone cannot solve the European migration challenges. For this it needs a broad range of measures ranging from enhanced crisis responsiveness; support for countries hosting large refugee populations; economic cooperation and investment; more pathways to legal migration and improved border control not only in Europe but on a global scale. But without functioning return, these policies will also not work.

And this is what makes ERRIN so important. It is a Member State driven initiative, it seeks for knowledge-driven and innovative solutions, and it addresses the entire return process, ranging from pre-departure to post-arrival activities. It directly responds to the call of the "Renewed Action Plan on Return" on pooling resources, mutual learning and implementing new solutions, taking into full account the enlarged mandate of Frontex. ERRIN will reinforce the capacity and expertise of Member States to manage return-related programmes. But it will also reinforce the capacity of third countries to readmit and reintegrate their citizens. It will embed return into a broader set of mutually benefitting relations. It will provide returnees with credible offers for functioning reintegration; and it will provide countries of origin with the prospect that the return of nationals does not turn into a detrimental burden for them.

All of this made us happily agree, when we were invited by the Member States to support ERRIN as an implementing partner. We are equally happy and very proud that we will continue to act as a facilitator for a successful implementation of ERRIN in the coming years and I look very much forward to this cooperation. Let me conclude by thanking all of you and especially the Netherlands as ERRIN lead Partner for the trust you have shown to our organisation.

Thank you very much.