

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Immigrants who are no longer allowed to stay in the Netherlands because they do not (or no longer) have a valid residence permit are encouraged to depart from the Netherlands. To promote the actual departure of immigrants who are obliged to depart, the government may use several different measures. In the first instance, the government endeavours to encourage the independent (voluntary) departure of immigrants who are obliged to depart. Immigrants who refuse to cooperate with their departure may be forced to depart or face immigration detention. The Return and Departure Service (DT&V) supervises the organisation of the departure, as orchestrator. The service works with organisations such as IOM and other NGOs which support people who want to depart independently prepare for their departure. Support includes financial assistance, training and education, and help with reintegration in their country of origin.

The return of immigrants who are obliged to depart is intractable in practice. Ideally, all immigrants without valid residence documents would depart from Dutch territory. In practice, however, this is not always the case. To promote the voluntary return of immigrants who are obliged to depart, an exploratory study was conducted into behavioural interventions in other social spheres that could be used in the return process. It looked for behavioural interventions that encourage people to exhibit other behaviour, which they were not initially prepared to exhibit. It looked at both behavioural interventions that focus on conscious behaviour modification and the possibility of using nudges that engage automatic and unconscious thought processes. The study's target group was immigrants who are obliged to depart and are able to do so, but do not want to depart.

The study's most important findings are presented below.

Obstacles to return

An important prerequisite for effective interventions is that they fit well in the problem of return. Based on studies that have been carried out in the last ten years on barriers to return for migrants who are obliged to depart, the perceived barriers to return have been systematically identified. The studies show that a number of complex factors underpin whether or not someone returns and that these factors are located both in the countries of origin and the host countries and also depend on the personal circumstances of the immigrant who is obliged to depart.

In order to organise the various factors that play a role in return and to situate them in an overarching conceptual framework, the theory of planned behaviour

has been employed. This theory assumes that behaviour is largely determined by the intention to exhibit that behaviour. The intention, in its turn, is determined by the attitude towards the behaviour, the social norm, and perceived behavioural control (the degree to which one feels able to exhibit the behaviour). This method of organisation also offers practical guidance for making a directed search for alternative behavioural interventions in other sectors, which are in line (at meta-level) with the identified barriers. Applied to the issue of return, several major obstacles have been identified, based on the studied sources.

The attitude towards return is significantly influenced by the perceived insecurity in the country of origin. These perceptions often lead to intense emotions and fears causing people not to want to return. Another factor which influences the attitude towards return is the perception about the chances of a self-supporting life in the country of origin. Emotions such as shame, disappointment and mourning also play a role; shame towards family members in the countries of origin because the migration project has failed, disappointment and mourning because the expectations with regard to a new future in the Netherlands have not been fulfilled.

Perceived health is also an important factor that influences the attitude towards return; but the relationship with the intention to return is not clear, according to the sources consulted. Perceptions of poor health may hinder the intention to return, but in some cases - for example when someone blames their poor health on their stay in the Netherlands - it may also be a reason to want to depart.

Finally, satisfaction with the judicial process and treatment during the (asylum and) return process affects the attitude towards return. Migrants obliged to depart who feel they have used all legal means and feel that their case has been properly considered and that they have been well and properly guided in the process, have a greater willingness to return.

Besides obstructing cognitions and emotions that affect the attitude towards departure negatively, the experience of practical obstacles also makes the immigrant who is obliged to depart feel that they are not able to return, even if they have a positive attitude towards return. This involves things such as not having travel documents, no longer having social contacts in the country of origin, lacking financial resources or lacking basic needs such as proper housing. It is not so much the actual existence of such practical obstacles (practical solutions are often offered in the form of financial support, establishing contacts in the country of origin etc.), but above all what the perception regarding the practical obstacles does to the extent to which the person feels they have control of the situation (perceived behavioural control).

In the current method employed by the partners involved in the return process, there are different ways in which the guidance responds to the obstructive attitudes and perceptions in relation to practical obstacles. The starting point in

this is a tailor-made approach. Obstacles are often resolved in a very practical manner. For example, information is provided about the return process and organisations that can provide assistance with voluntary return; financial support is offered; contact is sometimes made with the family members in the countries of origin to restore contact; people are given space to express their emotions, et cetera. These are mostly practical solutions, which are certainly helpful in stimulating departure. Often the reason for not wanting to return is deeper, however, and has to do with (dysfunctional) attitudes and a lack of perceived behavioural control.

Although assistance does respond to obstacles to return, it does not yet work in a systematic or methodical way to change the underlying attitudes and perceived behavioural control. The professionals of DT&V do not work with protocolled methods or conversation techniques that attempt to change a negative attitude towards return and give immigrants who are obliged to depart the feeling that they are actually able to shape their return. It is precisely with regard to these aspects that it seems possible to make headway with regards to return assistance. Incidentally, DT&V is currently working on the development of new assistance methods ('working in a mandatory context'), in which particularly the working alliance between the professional and the returnee is central and in which work is also being done on a standard way of conducting conversations and procedure.

Deployment of behavioural interventions

Attempts are also being made in other social spheres to encourage people to behave in ways they were initially not prepared to. The search for interventions looked at proven effective interventions in spheres where there is also a mandatory governmental decision about the direction of the desired behaviour (specifically in the areas of child welfare, the judicial system and reintegration). It specifically looked for interventions that appeal to people's conscious thought system and focus on changing attitudes and increasing empowerment. On meta-level, these interventions tie in with the obstacles to return. A total of six interventions were selected and studied in more detail for their usefulness in the return process. Although the situations in the selected areas do not translate one-to-one to the issue of return, interventions are available in these domains (or elements of interventions) that could potentially be used in the return process. Per intervention, a brief description is given of the approach and the active ingredients that could be deployed in assisting the voluntary return. Then we identify the key insights on a general level that can be derived from these interventions.

- *Customised Aggression Regulation*

Customised Aggression Regulation (ambulatory adults) is aimed at reducing distorted and dysfunctional cognitions, increasing self-control, impulse control and self-control skills; improving social cognition; enhancing coping skills and

problem solving skills. The intervention is suitable for people of various ethnic groups. The programme includes components aimed at motivating people to participate in assistance, on changing attitudes and improving problem-solving skills.

In particular the components aimed at motivating people to participate in the intervention and increasing responsiveness look promising. People who do not want to return are often not willing to participate in an assistance process focused on return. Motivating them to participate is therefore an essential first step.

- *Individual Rehabilitation Approach (IRB)*

The primary goal of this intervention is to help people with serious, long-term disabilities function better, so they can live, work and learn successfully and satisfactorily, and have social contacts in the area of their choice with minimal professional assistance. The intervention primarily focuses on empowerment and is offered as an individual coaching process. The method is now applied to various target groups, including refugees (in the context of mental health care). Self-esteem and empowerment are central to the intervention.

The IRB method does not ultimately seem to be very promising for immigrants obliged to depart who can return but do not want to, because the method assumes a certain amount of willingness to consider behavioural change. If there is not at the very least some willingness to consider return, the method is not very useful. The reason is that people set their own goals in the IRB approach and then set about achieving this goal. If people do not want to return, it is unlikely that they will become intrinsically motivated to work on their return in this approach.

- *VrijBaan Empowerment method*

The primary objective of the intervention is to enhance people's empowerment (inner leadership) in order to enable them to participate actively in society and to find and retain work. The method is suitable for various target groups, but is currently not used specifically for people with a different cultural background. The reasoning behind the method is that empowerment leads to greater autonomy and to making independent and more conscious choices. The VrijBaan Empowerment method fits well with approaches that are currently already being used by various partners involved in the return process for the benefit of people who indicate they (probably) want to return. Just as in the IRB approach, this method also assumes that participants are at least somewhat ambivalent about changing their behaviour. If immigrants who are obliged to depart are not motivated to do so this approach will not succeed. It is unlikely that people will actively cooperate on voluntary return.

- *Together we have Power*

The purpose of this intervention is to teach non-Western female ex-convicts alternative conceptual frameworks, so that after they finish the training they will be able to build adequate formal and informal relations in all areas of life in Dutch society, including employment. Training is done in a group and consists

of three modules. Obstructive cognitions are dealt with via the subject's self-knowledge, autonomous action skills and learning to think and act in a solution-oriented way. This form of training connects to the participants' cultural backgrounds. Some elements of this approach seem useful for return assistance. This relates in particular to the supervisor's coaching attitude, which is based on the individual's background, emotions and cognitions.

- *Work-Wise Release Programme*

The Work-Wise Release Programme is an integral part of the Work-Wise method and aims to support young people before, during and after their return to society from a young offender institution. Cognitive interventions attempt to influence the juvenile's non-functional mindsets and attitudes. Motivational conversation is one of the techniques used with this kind of intervention. The interventions can be applied to people with different cultural backgrounds. Motivational conversation in particular is identified as a promising element in assisting with voluntary return. However, the intervention's 'old fashioned' approach is considered less useful. It is important not to 'patronize' immigrants who are obliged to depart or see them as victims, but to make people responsible for their own choices.

- *Functional Family Parole Services*

FFPS is a method aimed at families who have difficulty keeping control of their lives and have little control of their future. FFPS is not a therapy; it is a staged intensive case management method. The method is used for families who are under the supervision of child welfare and juvenile probation, including families with a different cultural background. The family and its strengths are put first. It assumes that change is a process that does not happen overnight. First and foremost, it makes clear in communication with the family that individual differences are respected and there is respect for the needs and priorities of the family. Positive attention is used to make the family take matters in its own hands. 'Power' is the starting point. Work is undertaken to create a common goal, which is agreed between the family manager and all members of the system (the family). The administrators involved in the return process consider this methodology to be especially promising for the returnees at family reception centres. In particular the focus on the strength of families and the practical guidance offered by the intervention to achieve a common (return) goal are seen as possibly being useful. The entire system needs to have a positive attitude towards return to be able to work effectively on it.

Useful elements

In assessing the usefulness of the interventions that have been studied, it is important to make a distinction between interventions that 1) aim to motivate people for assistance and encouraging people to think about returning and 2) aim to empower. Practical experience emphasizes that although both aspects affect the intention to return, the immigrant who is obliged to depart must first develop a positive attitude towards return before they can work on empowerment.

For motivating immigrants who are obliged to depart for return assistance and setting goals regarding return, a number of key operational elements can be distilled from the interventions that have been studied which are useful in the return process. They mainly have to do with the attitude of the professional and techniques and instruments to be deployed. These are elements that have been proven to be effective in other social spheres.

Firstly, the working alliance between the professional and the immigrant who is obliged to depart is essential. The immigrant must be given the space to shape their own return within the established goal (return). This is an important condition to encourage people to think about their behaviour and the steps that have to be taken. A good trusting relationship between the professional and the immigrant is an important part of a good working alliance, in which the immigrant is seen not as a victim but as an actor who can shape their own return. This requires, amongst other things, the professional to have a coaching attitude and to increase the responsiveness of the participants in the assistance programme. In several interventions, including Customised Aggression Regulation, the VrijBaan Empowerment method, Together we have Power and FFPS, good examples can be found with which to shape this working alliance.

Secondly, systematically working on motivation for assistance and creating a different attitude towards return requires the targeted use of techniques and instruments. More specifically, this concerns the use of motivational conversation (see for example the Work-Wise Release Programme) and solution-oriented coaching (IRB). Furthermore, various interventions offer instruments for promoting motivation, for example through the use of a motivation checklist (e.g. Customised Aggression Regulation) or performing various exercises to increase motivation (Together we have Power).

These elements are partly present in current return assistance, but a lack of a common guidance framework means that the implementation of the assistance process is very dependent on the individual professional. The 'working in a mandatory context' methodology which is being developed at this time by DT&V seems to provide a basis for a common operational framework. This method can probably be connected to the use of interventions aimed at behavioural change (particularly aimed at motivation for assistance).

A concrete application of the interventions or parts of interventions from other social spheres requires that they are specifically adapted or developed for the benefit of return assistance. The interventions developed must subsequently be tried out in practice and evaluated for their usefulness and effectiveness. In addition, it is important to realise that many of the interventions will have to be used for a longer period in order for them to be successful.

The use of nudging

Increasingly, various policy areas explicitly use knowledge from behavioural sciences for setting policy. This does not only concern knowledge regarding the rational, conscious thought process that the above-mentioned behavioural interventions focus on, but also knowledge about the unconscious thought process. One part of the research question was whether nudges that are used to influence subconscious thought processes may also be useful in promoting the return of immigrants who are obliged to depart. Nudges intervene in the decision-making process. By means of changes in characteristics of design, layout, presentation or context that influence a person's choices and behaviour, an attempt is made to adjust the behaviour of people in a non-coercive way. Examples include adjusting the default choice on forms, or intervention in the physical environment (e.g., putting healthy food at eye level, or having the stairs more clearly in sight than the elevator), or the communication of social norms (e.g. the message “most people in this hotel reuse their towel”) which results in people tending (automatically) to make the desired choice. Nudges are deployed in many areas and they are achieving good results. This was the reason to see whether nudges can also be applied to return.

According to literature reviews and interviews with experts, we have to conclude that nudges can probably only make a very limited contribution towards promoting voluntary return. The main reason is that nudges fail to tie in sufficiently with the obstacles to return. Major reasons why people do not want to return, have to do with a negative attitude towards repatriation (obstructive cognitions and emotions) and a lack of experienced self-control (the feeling that one is not able to go back). Nudges do not change people's (ingrained) attitudes; they encourage people to do something they might already like to do but have not got around to yet, for example due to being busy or procrastination. This does not sufficiently relate to the issue of return. Certain kinds of nudges could well be used in a broader coaching process aimed at promoting voluntary return. This includes nudges that encourage a different way of thinking about the country of origin and return, for example by presenting realistic stories of returnees, posters with information about organisations that can help with return and providing current information on the country of origin. This kind of nudge may contribute towards initiating a process of self-reflection in the immigrant who is obliged to depart and they are already applied in practice. More, however, will be necessary to impel people to actually return. An important prerequisite for the deployment of nudges in the return process is that they are transparent (the intended purpose - promoting return - must be clear) and that the information provided is correct.

In conclusion

Return is a sensitive issue that has profound implications for the individual returnee. People have left their country in the hope of a better future for themselves and their children and they are now faced with the fact that this future cannot be in the Netherlands. It is difficult for many immigrants who are obliged to depart to accept this outcome, which negatively influences their willingness to cooperate with voluntary return. This means that it is difficult to encourage people to return voluntarily.

This exploratory study has shown that in other social spheres where there is also mandatory governmental control; there are interventions that may be useful in return assistance. For the target group this research focuses on, migrants who are obliged to depart and are able to do so but do not want to, there appears to be much to be gained for the partners involved in the return process in terms of methods that focus on motivating people for assistance as a first step towards starting the conversation about return. Important considerations in this are the attitudes of professionals (the working alliance and responsiveness) and the techniques and instruments deployed for motivation and assistance. In part, these elements have already been put into practice, but this should be more methodically prepared and embedded into the organisation than is currently the case. This means taking advantage of good experiences from the current practice and linking these insights to proven effective interventions in other spheres. This study gives an initial indication of the direction in which to look.

Finally, it should be noted that motivating people who do not want to return to participate in assistance and getting them to consider return is a process that takes time and requires a certain amount of knowledge and experience on the part of the professional. There probably are no 'quick wins' when it comes to promoting voluntary return; but improvements can be realised in terms of operating methodically.