



R3CE346P1

International Comparative Working Paper “Barriers for Successful Capitalization on Returning Migrants”



IOM • OIM

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April 2013

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1 Introduction

The International comparative working paper on barriers for successful capitalisation of returning migrants has been conducted by IOM International Organization for Migration in Prague within the partner project “Re-Turn - Regions benefitting from returning migrants”. The project coordinated by the Lead partner Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig, is co-funded by the European Union from the European Regional Development Fund within the Programme for Central Europe 2007-2013.

This paper summarises activities and outputs of the Re-Turn Work Package 3 (Understanding needs and potentials of returning migrants and regional conditions for reintegration) as listed below and it should help the project partners to define their pilot actions in the Work Package 4 (Tools, methods and service concept for supporting capitalisation of return migration). The outcomes of the paper should be focused on identification of barriers and the needs for policy intervention in particular. In summary it should help to answer these crucial questions:

- What problems do returnees face?
- What barriers make return migration difficult?
- What can we learn for the project’s WP4 activities (development of tools, methods and service concepts for supporting capitalisation on return migration) and for policy measures in general?
- How can we help return migrants and businesses in home regions?

The paper is based on comparative analysis building on the following sources:

- Reports from (A) an online survey with about 2,000 Central Eastern European emigrants and return migrants, (B) a business survey among 10-20 companies and business experts in each of the 8 case study regions, and (C) from a series of regional workshops with focus groups - namely with returned

migrants (unemployed, employed, self-employed) and enterprises (focussing on shortage of qualified labour, potentials of returnees).

- Country-specific analysis of Online Survey Sub-samples for Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia.
- A Synthesis Report comparing results from regional workshops with focus groups and results from surveys.
- A series of regional workshops with decision makers and intermediaries - discussion of the needs for improvement of current framework conditions from regional perspective.
- An International Seminar in Szekesfehervar (September 2012), during which project partners and regional intermediaries discussed the specific needs of businesses and returnees & current best practices.

Surveys and workshops were conducted during 2012 in six countries (Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Slovenia) with focus on selected case study regions according to the partnership's network:

- RIC Requalification and Information Centre Most in the Ústecký Region, Czech Republic;
- Association for Social and Labour Market Integration - VSBI in Görlitz Region, Germany;
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs Saxony-Anhalt in Harz Region, Germany;
- Mid-Pannon Regional Development Company in Mid-Pannon Region, Hungary;
- UNCEM - National Union of Mountain Municipalities in Piedmont Region, Italy;
- Marshal's Office of the Lodz Region, Poland;
- Marshall Office of the Swietokrzyskie Voivodeship in Poland;
- University of Maribor in Podravska Region, Slovenia.

The online surveys were answered by more than 900 citizens of the relevant project countries with experience with emigration and more than 300 returnees.

About 75 respondents discussed their experience with emigration and return during the workshops.

At the same time more than one hundred representatives of business and multipliers shared their experience and opinion about the employment potential of return migrants.

The comprehensive sum of experience, opinions and data was analyzed and outputs were evaluated in order to define the most suitable policy to attract and encourage migrants to return and to formulate recommendations helping to take the advantage of returning migrants' potential in their home countries.

2 Outcomes

2.1 Motivation to return and expectation after return

In order to work on effective tools and policies it is necessary to know the scale of return. Numbers of migrants and returnees and their characteristics in the project countries and regions have been discovered during the initial phases of the Re-Turn project (Comparative Report on Re-Migration Trends in Central Europe; Online Visualization Platform of return migration: <http://return-platform.um.si/>).

Within the above mentioned Work Package 3 surveys, workshops and seminars additional crucial questions about motivations to return and expectations after return to home country/region were analyzed. And subsequently the real experience with return became visible.

Main reasons for the return were mentioned as follows:

- the scheduled length of stay abroad assumed in advance, implemented in a specific period;
- achieved financial plan;
- finished to study;
- starting a family;

- job offer/ growing salaries at home;
- starting a business at home.

The above mentioned reasons can be viewed as positive (planned and voluntarily) compare to negative as follows:

- health reasons;
- reasons related to private/family problems incurred by long separation;
- low earnings, unemployment abroad.

According to the online survey only among Czech returnees, if compared to respondents from East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, people prevailed who **planned actively their return** (more than 80% of Czech compared to about 15% in average among other nationalities). Actions taken towards the preparation for return can be classified as organizational (such a packing, ticket purchase) and informative (such as acquiring information on the situation in the home country and on labour market). And very often it was mentioned that financial preparation was crucial. The decision to come back to the country has been made once a specific amount of money was collected and a specific plan for investment at home was developed.

As important factor it was also mentioned that **migration networks play a role**. Networks are assumed to be a collection of interpersonal (not related only to a family or a partner) links between migrants abroad and returnees (as well as non-migrants) in the country of origin. Networks can be very important push but also pull factors for migration and return, as well as a facilitator for the reintegration after return. They provide support during the “new beginning” at home.

Respondents of the surveys and workshops also uncovered their **desires and expectations towards life after the return**. Most of them highlighted that the main desire after the return is to find a better paid job. The majority also stressed the desire to find employment in their profession. Other frequently mentioned expectations were:

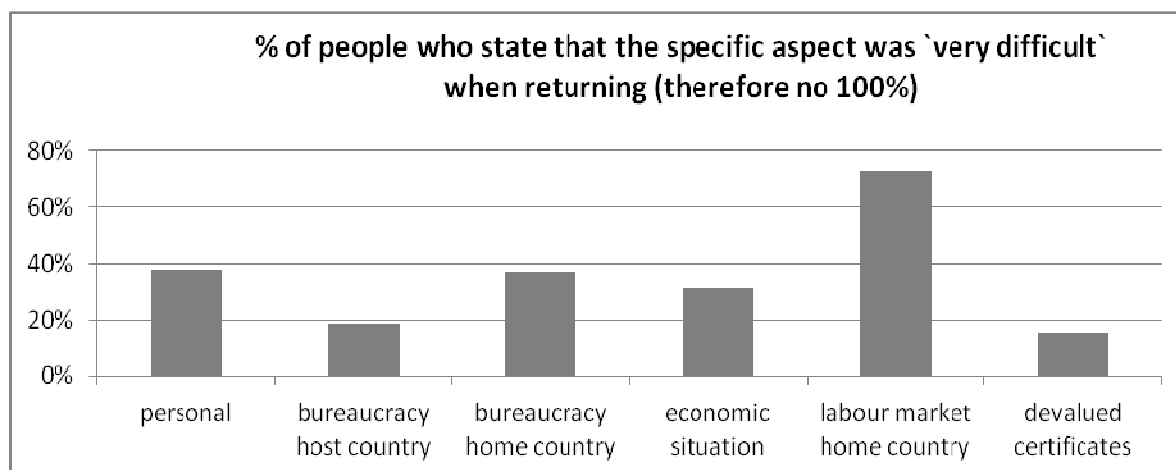
- to utilise the qualifications and skills gained abroad;
- to refresh their contacts with family and friends;
- to broaden and deepen the skills and qualifications acquired abroad.

For the complex understanding of the returnees, their situation and in order to find ways to limit the barriers it is also important to know opinions of respondents about their own **potential gained abroad** which they plan to use after return. These points were mentioned among the respondents:

- Languages;
- Financial capital (potential for investment);
- Contacts (in country of emigration but also to other returnees back in home country);
- Open mentality (foreign experience, new ideas, courage to risk, loss of prejudices);
- Intercultural behaviour;
- Flexibility (in work, in time, part time jobs...);
- Spatial mobility.

2.2 Reality and experience with return

According to the answers in the online surveys in the six project countries about 25 per cent of returnees evaluated their return as „difficult“, plus another almost ten percent who indicate it as „very difficult“. At the same time there were identified many problems which own citizens face after return to home country/regions. Online survey respondents mentioned problematic aspects summarized in the chart:



Source: Results from the online survey amongst emigrants and returnees (Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography)

The lack of suitable jobs in the labour market back at home has been the main problem for returnees in all the six countries. Besides, the personal problems were also often mentioned, as well as bureaucracy at home. These aspects were similar for all the countries and they had been confirmed also during discussion in regional focus groups, workshops and seminars.

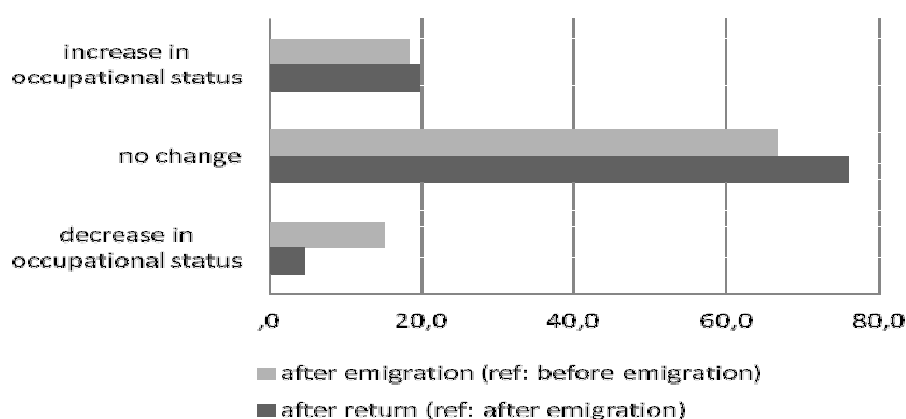
For example research made by the Office of the Marshal of Swietokrzyskie Voivodeship (PP11) showed similar findings regarding the difficulties with employment. In this Polish study, other important aspects were counted as lack of help and support by local authorities, which make return migrants re-emigrate again. Re-emigrants' main problems after the return to Poland were (see Chart below; values in %):



Source: Compilation based on the conducted “Analysis of barriers to effective capitalisation of the returning” research in Swietokrzyskie Voivodeship

The migration experience contributes to the professional situation after return both in positive and negative ways. The improvement of the professional situation after return to the home country may comprise the variables such as ease of finding a job, working at a higher position, higher income. On the other hand living abroad often excludes emigrants from the orientation and local social networks in domestic labour markets. This concerns especially persons who have been living abroad for a longer period. The impact of migration to occupational status is shown in the following chart (in %):

Returnees: objective change in occupational status



Source: Re-Turn Online survey among emigrants and returnees

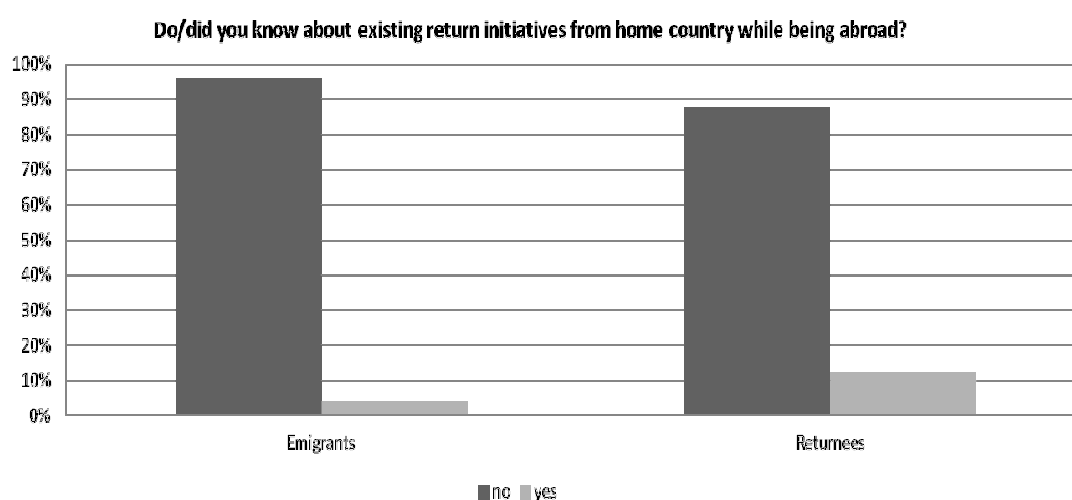
In the chart it is visible that there is a generally positive impact. The capitalisation on qualifications and skills obtained abroad was evaluated as more problematic. More than twenty per cent of the respondents mentioned that they were not able to utilise the skills and qualifications. It concerns both hard skills (professional qualifications, foreign language, communication skills etc.) as well as soft skills (for instance problem solving skills, readiness for changes, adaptation skills and self-confidence) gained abroad. For example in Poland more than a half of returnees answered negatively (54.5%) to the question of “whether the qualifications and skills gained abroad are respected and taken as a source of innovation on the local market”. As little as 15.2% confirmed that their qualifications and skills are capitalized to a sufficient extent, whilst 30.2% of respondents were uncertain and replied with “difficult to say”.

As Monika, a Polish accountant who came back from England says: *“I was working in my profession abroad, so for me it was an ideal situation. I saw you can apply new solutions, also technological. Not everything proved useful after return to Poland, due to different work methods, but certainly I manage to apply some of the skills.”* The following factors were mentioned as the main barriers for capitalisation of qualifications and skills:

- Incompatibility of qualifications and skills gained abroad with the character of work performed after the return;
- Lack of document and certificates as proof of the qualifications and skills gained;
- Lack of interest in qualifications and skills gained abroad on employers’ side.

The limited acceptance of qualifications and skills obtained abroad influences also the often mentioned feeling of deprivation of social capital - being “a foreigner” in one’s own country. A longer stay abroad brings changes of values, attitudes and individual perception of the society at home. *Magdalena, an Italian cook in her 30s, mentions: “Frankly speaking, I need to say that I felt a little bit lost. When you’re abroad for such a long time, you eventually get used to the different lifestyle.”*

Even more negative were the findings about **knowledge and access to information** which can make return easier and enhance effective integration into labour market and society back at home. As visible in the chart below only a very small share of returnees in the six project countries knew about any initiatives which assisted return migrants.



Source: Re-turn Online survey amongst emigrants and returnees

From the perspective of the project's case study regions - most of them face problems with limited development and high unemployment - the above mentioned social and culture capital is an important possibility to capitalize **economic capital of the returnees**. Mainly cash and deposits on savings accounts were mentioned by respondents. Most of the savings were spent on daily life before finding new job and accommodation (plus furnishing). Part of the respondents (7.4% in Polish Swietokrzyskie Voivodeship e.g.) decided to invest in their new own businesses.

In general according to the online survey returnees are three times more likely to be self-employed than before emigration. And they mentioned that skills obtained abroad were useful in running own businesses: firm management standards, team management, HR management methods and innovative solutions in

particular. On the other hand **with respect to business activity after return also the following barriers were mentioned:**

- excessive bureaucracy at home;
- complicated and often changed regulations;
- difficult access to bank loans;
- problems with access to technological base;
- high taxation.

3 Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 Barriers for successful capitalization on returning migrants

Despite the fact that economic structure, migration history and political background also play a role, the outcomes of the analysis are very similar for all of the project regions and there is no possibility to find significant differences between for example Italian or German regions as compared to Czech or Polish ones.

As for the desires and expectations towards the new life after return, re-migrants most frequently named finding a job (preferably in their profession) and to apply the skills and qualifications gained abroad. Unfortunately, the outputs show that re-emigrants rather do not have a large chance to capitalize their potential and they have in some cases problems with finding suitable employment. At the same time a source of problems and frustration for the re-migrants seems to be the lower level of earnings. Also different working culture back at home causes problems.

With respect to the loss of cultural capital resulting from the stay abroad, it can be stated that re-migrants do not think they have lost this capital during their time abroad. However, the new social and cultural capital obtained abroad is rarely

used within their professional lives after the return. According to the interviewed re-migrants, the skills and qualifications gained abroad are not recognized nor applied as a source of innovation on the local market in their home countries. On the other hand these skills and qualifications are more often and successfully used by returnees for running own businesses.

In conclusion, these three main barriers hindering successful capitalisation of returning migrants were identified:

- **Information deficiency;**
- **Bureaucracy;**
- **Prejudices towards returnees.**

At first, many re-migrants are not in possession of sufficient information about their duties (registration, social/health/pension insurance system etc.) and their possibilities (situation in the region in terms of job or accommodation, assistance with employment etc.).

The lack of information is interlinked with the bureaucracy when returnees must communicate with many different bodies with huge administrative workloads. And since they have not sufficient information and experience they are in even more difficult situations as compared to other local non-migrant citizens.

At the same time re-migrants have to face in some cases lack of help and understanding due to an unwelcoming and closed culture in public institutions and prejudice. Within the workshops it was repeatedly stated that the public as well as employers sometimes view returnees as failed migrants or job-hoppers. On the other hand there was concrete case of bad experience in Poland as one Polish employer explained during the workshops: *“People who are returning from abroad work in Poland for a short time, because the foreign employer informs them that they can go back to work abroad again; they do not value stability of employment.”*

But in general employers do not have negative attitudes against returnees. It is obvious that return migration does not play a significant role for the business sector (comparing with multipliers who already see them as important source with special knowledge and social skills). Some entrepreneurs and managers still think that it is enough to offer potential employees a work place to make them stay in the region. Companies do not have special policies for returnees in their HR development strategies.

On the other hand, in case that company employs returnees, the experience is mostly positive. They are considered a valuable workforce, mainly due to their language skills and up-to-date technological knowledge. Companies appreciate the language skills, intercultural knowledge and flexibility of these candidates.

3.2 Recommendations for better policies

Summarizing the outputs from the Re-turn online surveys, workshops, seminar and other project as well as non-project sources these measures can be recommended in order to mitigate the above mentioned barriers and to help a capitalisation on the potential of return migrants in home regions:

1. Joint pro-active regional strategy containing pro-return policies;
2. Information strategy including tools and services tailored to the needs of returnees;
3. Communication and PR strategy improving image of home region and image of returnees among local employers;
4. Infrastructural and technical conditions;
5. Pro-investment and pro-business strategy.

1. Joint pro-active regional strategy containing pro-return policies

An active immigration policy focused also on returnees should be part of restructuring and modernization of national and regional development strategies.

There is a necessity to establish a structure that would cause a synergy effect of all the activities that take place in the region. It must aim at developing a framework for cooperation between current institutions and it must indicate clearly divided its powers in accordance with the exercise of its roles.

Such structure should **involve experts, decision makers and intermediaries representing all actors** like:

- state administration - ministry of foreign affairs, ministry of labour and social affairs, ministry of education;
- labour offices, recruitment agencies, etc;
- academia - research institutes of labour and social affairs;
- statistical office;
- municipalities;
- representatives of business - chamber of commerce;
- representatives of nationals abroad or even returnees.

As already mentioned, multipliers are today much more aware of the potential of returnees compared to employers. But unfortunately as mentioned for example in one of workshops in Slovenia, there is often a “lack of response of businesses to ideas from multipliers”. At the same time many **multipliers which focus today on brain drain activities (cooperation with universities, scholarships) in particular, should also be more oriented to the returnees.**

The crucial task is to **support the matching of needs of entrepreneurs/employers and of returnees.** For example according to Świętokrzyskie entrepreneurs, the most desirable features of a candidate for a job are: professional experience, field/branch education, programmers and specialist entitlements, an ability to handle machines and devices (inclusive of computer software), driving license and social competencies (soft skills).

At the same time there are many people with these abilities who have difficulties to find a job. State labour policy should link both groups. With respect to returnees it is the task to facilitate contacts with employers (e.g. through institutions such as Chambers of Commerce), to create a database/portal of candidates with special

skills and experience. Despite the current high unemployment in most of the regions there is a potential for skilled people. And multiplication effects can create new vacancies. As the data shows:

- **Returnees are relatively well educated** in all project partner countries.¹ Especially Hungary (43%) and Germany (34%) received a large number of tertiary educated returnees in 2005-2008. The majority was with secondary education and only Italy had large proportion (45%) of low skilled returnees (contrary to only a few percent among Czechs);
- In terms of labour market success, **the share of managers and professionals is higher among returnees than non-migrants** (nationals without migration experience). This is true for Austria, Germany, Hungary and Italy (contrary to Czech Republic and Poland);
- The majority of recent **returnees are employed in the service sector** when most of the regions need to increase its share in the service sector compared to current traditional industries.
- The vast majority of the **returnees are in an economically active age**, meaning that they have enough power to pursue their goals and use their capital to foster knowledge-based development in the home country.

Qualifications and skills gained abroad by returning migrants could be important factors in boosting the labour market and revive local economies. In the long term perspective all the regions face negative demographic prospect with a severe reduction of the population in working age. And immigrants are able to fill emerging shortages in the coming years.

2. Information strategy including tools and services for returnees

The findings from the project activities confirmed that re-migrants are not in possession of sufficient information which actually would be important for a successful return. It would be reasonable to allow them easy access to information

¹ EUROSTAT data in Comparative Report on Re-Migration Trends in Central Europe (see <http://www.re-migrants.eu/Result.php>).

sources. As recommended for example at a workshop at the Czech Republic it would be welcomed to establish **one point (One Stop Shop) with all necessary information**.

Such a point could be for example under ministry websites - ministry of foreign affairs or ministry of labour and social affairs or regional authorities. This point should be interlinked with embassies, labour offices, health insurance companies, municipalities, etc. As declared by the respondents, they need in particular information about:

- Recognition of qualifications - special system or centre for information regarding the possibility to recognize possessed qualifications and skills through certificates and courses;
- Re-integration training courses about changes in the country (e.g. requested by Polish returnees). It could be implemented also through e-learning from abroad before return;
- Portability of social benefits;
- Taxation, health, social and pension insurance;
- Subsidy for development or setting up own economic activity - information for potential entrepreneurs;
- Vacancies and recruitment services (provided by public labour office as well as private bodies) including an active labour policy - courses, trainings, requalification programs: as recommended for example during the workshop in Italy, the special agency for tailor-made recruitment services for returnees should be established. Also the European Employment Services - EURES could be involved.

From that reasons, within the Re-Turn project in Swietokrzyskie (Poland) and Podravska (Slovenia) there will be created the **returning jobseekers website/Online social re-migration platform** offering regional targeted information and qualification profiles of returning migrants. Furthermore **Telephone Hotlines** for migrants willing to return is one of services implemented in the pilot regime within the Re-turn project.

Also successful return migrants as **Ambassadors of the home region/Internet platform connecting emigrants and home region** offering social networking is one of tools implemented in pilot regime within the Re-turn project.

3. Communication and PR strategy improving image of region and image of returnees

In order to disseminate the above mentioned important information to migrants who consider a return, an appropriate communication strategy including information and PR campaign should be planned and implemented. For the campaign **media and channels appropriate for reaching the migrants abroad** should be used. At the same time the campaign should present attractive attributes of the home regions.

Re-emigrants indicated during workshops that a **PR campaign and advertising campaign may encourage investment** in Swietokrzyskie region for example. *“The region would need to be more widely advertised, so that more people would hear about it and then it would become ideal for the local entrepreneurs.” (Arkadiusz, 42, driver, returned from Germany).*

In combination with the campaign it is also necessary to **work on friendly and welcoming policy**. The aspect of a regional “culture of welcome” and the creation of a return-migration and immigration friendly culture was often mentioned by German respondents. This should include offering different services and support as well as a continuous information about the region. Welcome culture in public institutions should be built for example through special trainings focused on biases, myths and clichés among administration employees (e.g. tackling the cliché that most returnees failed abroad and only return for their failure).

Positive (unbiased) media and PR campaigns about migrants and returnees among public should decrease the finding that some re-migrants suffer from the feeling of alienation in their own country. For example in Hungarian Mid Pannon workshops also the idea of free psychologist visits to help to deal with problems faced during re-integration was discussed. They also proposed the creation of a

club of returnees and foreign employees who work in the region and organizing joint leisure activities: it can bring back the multi-national, multi-cultural environment that the returnees had left when they decided to turn back. They can also share success stories of returnees and assist the ambassador spirit.

Increasing the attractiveness of the regions should also help to organize more **culture events interesting for returnees** (to make special program for them). The lack of entertainment was mentioned among migrants as one of negative factors after return and improvement in this respect can also help them with reintegration. Also in Poland it was often mentioned that the project should help **to change the negative image of migrants** and change the negative attitude of the Polish society towards people returning from abroad.

Special attention should be given to assistance of young families: According to the answers in the online surveys 50% of returnees have children (and 70% of returnees were in stable partnerships which can lead to new families in home regions). Assistance for smooth family return and **family friendly policy** in general (child care, jobs for partners, education infrastructure) is important in that respect.

4. Infrastructural and technical conditions

Within the framework of the above mention promotional activities it should also be highlighted good technical and infrastructural conditions of the home regions.

As was for example mentioned during the workshop in German Görlitz Region, there is an urgent need for the expansion of free WLAN **internet networks** in the rural areas which will enhance communication and also allow for **modern working conditions** as shared working places, home offices etc.

Necessary is, of course, to offer good **transport services**. Some respondents for example in Poland complained that living in the rural countryside is a serious problem in terms of commuting to the city without using a car. Similarly important is the already mentioned possibility to find **reasonable accommodation and public services** (e.g. for children, cultural and social).

5. Pro-investment and pro-business strategy

The modernization of the region comprising the above mentioned measures will activate the local labour market but it should also include the support of local enterprises and invite new investors. One step should aim at supporting entrepreneurs in the employment of returnees. For example **taxation counseling** was discussed within workshops in Italy and Poland. In Poland it was proposed the implementation of **tax (labour costs) free temporary period for employment of returnees** as part of the state's activation policy. Employment costs (social insurance etc.) are very high and discourage employers here.

A second step should be to **support returnees who are planning to start own business**. Self-employment is definitely another option in the case study regions. As these regions all lack entrepreneurs (and entrepreneurial spirit), the absence of jobs matching the qualifications of returning migrants could lead them into trying to set up their own businesses, thus making best use of the knowledge they gathered abroad. This could definitely be a major impulse to the local economy. To be successful, this would nonetheless require support in business start-up and financing, and perhaps also in specific entrepreneurial qualifications.²

Programs assisting to implement migrant's ideas including non-repayable loans were discussed in several regions. In some countries Business Incubators, Special Economic Zones with tax relief and technical equipment and Foreign Investment Agencies already exist. The task should be to inform migrants about these opportunities as well as to explain to these institutions that migrants could be a very interesting target group.

² Comparative Report on Re-Migration Trends in Central Europe ((see <http://www.re-migrants.eu/Result.php>).

Regions benefitting from returning migrants

After 1989 Central Europe has gone through important political, economic and social changes. The entry of many CE countries to the European Union during first decade of 21st century enhances the European integration. Joining European space accelerated economic growth of these countries and opened work migration flows, mainly from Central Europe to North-Western Europe.

Economically motivated migration of in particular young and well educated people from the New Member States to high-income countries is currently dominating international migration flows in Europe thanks to the free right to work in any other EU Member State. This is intensifying a brain drain process for many regions in Central Europe and certainly for the Re-Turn case study regions.

On the other hand statistics show the willingness of these people to come back to their countries. However, this process is often associated with significant problems of reintegration. Often the home regions

Project message:
“Re-Turn perceives returning migrants as a key factor for innovative regional development and therefore it creates new services and tools in order to facilitate their return and reintegration in their home

neglect the returning migrants’ contribution to regional economic development of these countries, and they do not support migrants in their return. It is estimated, that up to 50% of these outmigrants would return to their home countries within 5 years after emigration -

a huge potential for regional development as these people gained new social, cultural and professional competencies while being abroad.

Re-Turn’s main objectives are linked to the development and implementation of services needed to support migrants in their wish to return, the promotion of returning migrants as a human capital resource for innovative business development, the creation of framework conditions for reintegration into their home countries’ labour markets and social communities. The project aims at developing, testing and implementing joint strategies, new support policies, tools and services in the participating regions.

Target groups:

1. decision takers, senior officers from regional authorities and labour market organisations
2. training and qualification organisations
3. business associations and economic development organisations
4. social groups representing migrants
5. returning migrants

Further information:

www.re-migrants.eu

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The project seeks to gather original knowledge on the specific situation of returning migrants. Therefore an online survey is available under <http://return.ifl-leipzig.de>

until July 2012 addressing emigrants who have already returned home, or who want to do so in the future. This knowledge will be used to push the topic of ‘return migration’ on the political agenda, providing an account of the specific motivations and problems of returning migrants, and offering solutions for regional stakeholders to support them in their return.

Project information:

Project partners:

Countries involved: Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, and Italy

Case Study Regions:

*Ústí Region (CZ)
Görlitz Region (DE)
Harz Region (DE)
Mid Pannon Region (HU)
Lodz Region (PL)
Swietkrzykie Region (PL)
Piemonte Region (IT)
Podravska Region (SI)*

Main outputs:

1. CE remigration online visualisation platform
2. Toolkit with methods and instruments of success stories
3. Handbook with Transnational joint planning and management tools
4. Tools and services to re-attract emigrants
5. Transnational Strategy for attracting and reintegrating migrants

Project duration: 5/2011 - 4/2014

ERDF funding: 1.774.160,56 €