



Training in Croatia

SRC: Strengthening CSO Counselling for Effective Return and Reintegration

In both EU and non-EU countries, return and reintegration processes often lack comprehensive support to provide tailored counselling to migrants and ensure effective reintegration. Migrants frequently have limited access to accurate and impartial information, which affects the quality of their return and reintegration outcomes. The Empowering Reintegration: Strengthening Capacities for Return and Reintegration Counselling through CSOs (SRC) project, implemented with organisations from 11 countries, including both the countries where the implementing organisations were based and the target countries, addressed these gaps by reinforcing counselling practices within civil society organisations. Key activities included **training workshops** with the European Reintegration Support Organisations (ERSO) network, **study visits and the development of guidelines**. SRC aimed to establish a more comprehensive approach within the EU, improve coordination between host countries and countries of return, and help build trust between migrants and institutions.

Share understanding and practices

Training in Albania



What began as a collaborative effort to strengthen return and reintegration counselling, has now delivered a **structured programme of capacity-building across multiple countries**. The project carried out comprehensive missions to participating states, enabling civil society organisations to exchange practices in diverse operational settings. Built on a rigorous needs assessment developed with the University of Ghent, the initiative offered targeted workshops with ERSO partners to clarify key definitions, delivered online webinar reaching up to 50 participants, and organised four study visits in Albania, Croatia, Denmark and Nepal.

"I attended one training in Zagreb. It was timely. Not only to strengthen my knowledge but also to remind me of the human side of counselling. The project reminded me that counselling is not about convincing someone to return but to support the person to take an informed decision", one Croatian stakeholder explained.

A change in perspective

The project identified that Nepalese nationals represent a significant share of migrants in Croatia, yet often receive limited tailored counselling for return due to cultural and language barriers. In August 2025, Caritas International Belgium facilitated a study visit to Nepal, bringing Croatian officers to meet Caritas Nepal teams working on reintegration counselling. **The mission offered a rare opportunity to engage directly with returnees and observe the impact of reintegration support on the ground.** For the Croatian police officers, the field visit proved transformative: it fostered a deeper sense of empathy and understanding that went on to shape their counselling practices long after their return.



A network for cooperation

"The SRC was an opportunity to learn from others' experience. It made sense to explore the Caritas network and other organisations. It is important to ensure a united effort.", in the words of Moldovan stakeholder.

Beyond sharing practices and delivering training, the project played a pivotal role in bringing together CSOs and counselling actors, laying the foundations for a stronger and more connected network. **It fostered both formal and informal communication channels between organisations in host and origin countries, enabling real-time case support and more coordinated counselling.** Lasting partnerships emerged across and beyond the Caritas network, with new cooperation links established between organisations with participants and several ERSO members. The project significantly enhanced their ability to work jointly with counterparts across Europe.

Advancing CSO counselling

The SRC strengthened the role of civil society in return and reintegration by building the counselling skills of organisations that previously had limited experience in this area. Through targeted training, peer exchanges, study visits and the co-creation of a practical counselling manual, it equipped CSOs with the tools needed to deliver clear, realistic and human-centered information to migrants. In doing so, **it advanced EU priorities under the Pact on Migration and Asylum by reinforcing counselling as a core component of voluntary return systems and by promoting more coherent, rights-based practices across actors involved in the return and reintegration chain.**

About the MPF

This grant project is part of the EU-funded Migration Partnership Facility (MPF), managed by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) to support the external dimension of the EU's migration policy. Through the MPF, the EU funds projects that promote dialogue and cooperation on migration and mobility between EU Member States and partner countries outside the EU.

About the project

The action strengthens the capacity of EU and non-EU CSOs to deliver accurate and sustainable return and reintegration counselling by drawing on the expertise of the ERSO network. It pilots a structured referral mechanism linking CSOs with the authorities responsible for return processes and promotes shared learning across Member States and partner countries on effective counselling practices.

About the evaluation

Testimonies used in this document were gathered as part of a final evaluation of SRC, conducted between 2025 and 2026. The evaluation was led by Blomeyer & Sanz who makes part of a consortium of six consultancies and NGOs, namely Blomeyer & Sanz, Diversity Development Group, Migration Policy Group, Policy Impact Lab, Samuel Hall and Tandans.



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