

## Transnational Exchange VI

### 2. Workshop: New tools for AVRR counselling in Europe

**Date:** 02. – 04. May 2023

**Location:** Augsburg, Germany

**Organizers:** Salomé Maxeiner and Riikka Schenk, Transnational Exchange VI

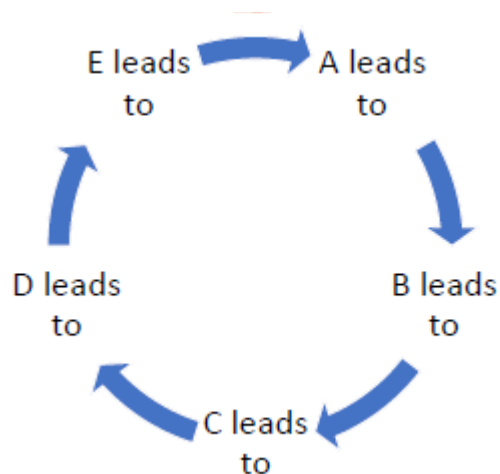
**Participants:** 34 return counsellors from Belgium, Austria, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Kosovo, Germany, Denmark and Luxembourg



The second workshop of the Transnational Exchange VI project took place in Augsburg on the 2<sup>nd</sup> until 4<sup>th</sup> of May, 2023. The topic was “New tools for AVRR counselling in Europe”. 34 return counsellors from 9 different European countries travelled to Augsburg for the 3-day workshop.

## Systemic counselling approach

The first input for the topic, new tools for AVRR counselling in Europe, was given by Anabel Escoffié-Duarte, a psychologist working for the Systemic Counselling Center in Augsburg. Her presentation was an introduction to the systemic counselling approach and new developments. The starting point for systemic approach is working with and within human systems (even when working with individuals). In systemic thinking, human behaviour only makes sense when seen in context, which means for example the beliefs and inner rules of an individual, the relationships one has, situation, time and learned experiences. The systemic thinking distances itself from linear causality, where A leads to B. Instead, it embraces circular causality, where everything affects everything and the movement is circular.



*The circular causality principle in the Systemic approach*

Mrs. Escoffié Duarte was highlighting the theoretical approach with various examples. If “Max”, a young man from Nigeria, is not attending his meetings, the easy linear explanation would be that he is lazy or he doesn’t care. And because he is lazy, he doesn’t show up. But if the counsellor looks more deeply to the case, she/he might notice that there are several factors influencing Max’s behaviour and these factors work in interplay. Max might be depressed and traumatized because of his earlier experiences in his home country and frustrated because of his situation in host country. Additionally, he might be scared of stigma and exposing his “failure” in Europe to his family in his home country. His inability to decide is deriving from all the mixed feelings and tearing tendencies and that’s why he doesn’t show up at the appointments.

The central insight which intellectually united the pioneers of the systemic movement was that human problems are essentially interpersonal not intrapersonal, and so their resolution requires an approach to intervention which directly addresses relationships between people. People are always part of systems and in relation to other parts of that system. A counsellor is also part of the “client’s system” and can thus never remain totally distant and will always have an impact on the client’s system. What is beneficial for a counsellor, is holding a curious stance. Curiosity leads to exploration of alternative views. By understanding the wider context and its

factors, the counsellor will be able to help to client make the best possible decision in her/his situation.

The systemic premises are:

- Every individual is an autonomous being
- Every individual decides his/her inner self organisation
- Every individual creates his/her own perspectives on reality
- Every individual makes the „right“ decision for him/her at any given point in time
- Every individual makes decisions in relation to his/her social environment
- Every individual has the potential to restructure him/herself as well as to grow and to solve problems
- Every individual is able to integrate and learn from life experiences
- Every individual changes when it is worth for him/her
- Every individual behaves to fulfil unmet needs: belonging, recognition, autonomy, safety etc.

The method to apply systemic counselling approach is circular questioning. It is a method by which the counsellors can create curiosity within the client by bringing forward information to highlight difference and thus create change. It is about exploring the past and the future as well as the context of the problem. In the end, it's also about exploring change. Systemic approach is solution-focused rather than problem-saturated – it is important to find out what are the client's hopes for the future and how could she/he build a bridge towards this vision. Everybody is equipped with resources and competences, which need to be brought to light.

One central tool in the Systemic approach is the usage of “Miracle question”. It helps to highlight the resources the client has as well as the hopes for the future. It goes as follows:

“Imagine that tonight while you are asleep a miracle happens and the reason why you have come here has resolved, but because you are asleep you don't know that the miracle has happened. What are you going to notice different when you wake up, that begins to tell you a miracle has happened?”

### **Introduction to IOM Return Counselling Toolkit**

The second day of the workshop was all about IOM's launched IOM Return Counselling Toolkit in 2022. The introduction as well as the Modules one to three of the Toolkit were presented by Maria Voica, AVRR Thematic Officer from IOM Regional Office for the European Economic Area, the European Union and NATO. Mrs. Voica's colleague Dafina Aliji from IOM Serbia presented the Module four of the Toolkit. Two working group sessions invited the participating counsellors to discuss the toolkit further.

Maria Voica started by presenting the framework and background for the new Return Counselling Toolkit. Return, readmission and reintegration have become a policy priority for

the migration governance and development strategies of many governments worldwide. IOM's policy stems from the need to adopt a holistic approach to the full spectrum of return, readmission and reintegration in a changing global migration landscape.

The four strategic objectives of IOM's work on return, readmission and reintegration are the following:

- Ensure that return and readmission occur in a safe and dignified manner and that migrants are able to make an informed decision and can take ownership of their choice(s)
- Support returnees, communities and authorities through holistic and sustainable development-oriented approaches to sustainable reintegration at the individual, community and structural level
- Act as an honest broker to provide advice and support, foster cooperation, as well as capacity development to governments and other stakeholders, on developing rights-based RRR policies and processes
- Ensure accountability and evidence-based programming throughout the RRR spectrum

The Return Counselling Toolkit arose from the need to operationalize the RRR (Return, Readmission and Reintegration) Policy. It works as a capacity-building instrument offering a coherent and harmonized approach to return counselling. It strengthens the knowledge of other actors as well: national/local authorities and civil society. One guiding principle is an openness for cooperation and exchanges with actors involved in return counselling. For example embracing partnerships in cases needing specialized guidance with UNICEF or Save the Children.

The Return Counselling Toolkit consists of six modules (of which the first four were introduced in the workshop):

1. Understanding return
2. Return counselling methodology
3. Identifying and addressing migrants' vulnerabilities in the context of return
4. Delivering return counselling in different settings
5. Key elements of an accountable counselling programme
6. Counselling children and their families (UNICEF and Save the Children)

### **Module 1: Understanding return**

Module 1 introduces the concept of "return" and familiarizes the reader with the principles guiding return-related activities. It also introduces the concept of return counselling as an evolving practice that has proven to be essential in the context of migration management and that can also enhance approaches to migrants' protection.

IOM's approach to return counselling is "migrant-centred". This means empowering migrants to make informed decision and increasing their agency. The aim is neither to convince the clients to make a specific decision nor to influence. It is about providing timely, unbiased and reliable information on existing and available options and informing migrants about their rights and/or providing them access to legal counselling. Migrant-centeredness means building a trustful relationship to explore migrants' personal situation and feelings regarding the option of return. The counsellor should manage the migrant's expectations and refer them to relevant services based on their needs and identified vulnerabilities.



*Maria Voica, AVRR Thematic Officer from IOM presenting IOM Return Counselling Toolkit*

## **Module 2: Return counselling methodology**

Module 2 focuses on describing in detail the return counselling methodology, starting from counselling principles and its objectives, and analysing how these principles can be practically applied and achieved in the counsellors' daily work. This module also provides useful guidance regarding the preparation and delivery of return counselling sessions and includes key case management elements (such as record keeping, coordination and case closure) and references that are relevant for return counsellors.

### Module 3: Identifying and addressing migrants' vulnerabilities in the context of return

Module 3 provides guidance on how to assess migrants' vulnerabilities and protection needs in the context of return, in order to ensure that they are not overlooked and that the return process does not cause any harm to migrants or to the staff providing support during the counselling and return process. Additionally, this module contains recommendations on how return counselling should be delivered to specific groups, including victims of trafficking and migrants with health-related needs, who enjoy specifically dedicated protection standards.



*The Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability model (DoMV): Four levels of analysis and intervention*

### Module 4: Delivering return counselling in different settings

Module 4 focuses on five different scenarios where return counselling can take place, which are introduced by a brief description of the context, followed by challenges and proposed solutions, as well as counselling red lines, based on IOM's expertise and direct observation. Finally, each setting is also complemented by examples of IOM practices from the field and a list of useful resources.

The five settings where return counselling can take place are:

- Arrival points and reception/transit facilities
- Immigration detention facilities
- Remote counselling
- Mobile counselling
- Emergency situations

Each of these settings were discussed in the workshop and challenges related to different settings identified.

### **IOM Return Counselling Toolkit: Group works**

The first group work to apply the IOM Return Counselling Toolkit approach was about organising different steps in counselling in logical order to create a coherent and comprehensive counselling flow:

Before the first counselling session(s)	Prepare for the counselling session
	Consider the migrants' capacity to make an informed decision
	Be prepared to provide Psychological First Aid and relaxation to migrants in evident state of distress
During the first counselling session(s)	Introduce the return counselling session and establish a relation of trust
	Understand the migrants' story
	Assess vulnerability and resilience factors
	Explore and discuss migration options (not for forced returnees)
	Jointly decide with the migrant on the next steps and close the session

The second group work was a case study. Five working groups got a different return counselling scenario. Their assignment was to familiarise with the case and then identify risk- and protective factors as well as implications on return counselling and procedures, and actors for cooperation and referral pathways, on four different levels: individual, family, community and structural level. This 4-level-perspective offered a new way of looking into complex cases and aroused a lot of positive response among the participants.

IOM Return Counselling Toolkit is available online at:

<https://publications.iom.int/books/return-counselling-toolkit>

**Lila (35 Years-old).**

Lila is a journalist. She arrived in the host country irregularly four months ago. She settled with some friends, but they were arrested at a random identity check three weeks ago. Two days ago, she received a return decision due to irregular entry / stay in the host country. The return decision informed her that she has 7 days to leave voluntarily the country or be otherwise issued a removal order.

Lila expressed her initial intention to seek asylum in the host country, but she changed her mind and did not submit the request. She wants to return to her country of origin where she has a three-year-old daughter. Furthermore, her country of origin takes tough stands on citizens if they discover they have asked for International Protection abroad. For this reason, she has spoken with a lawyer in the host country who told her that there will be no consequences for her if she returns home (i.e., she will not be arrested or detained after arrival). She was referred for return counselling by a local NGO in the host country. She is worried as some of her colleagues in her country of origin who publish articles on government corruption in the newspaper, she is working for were recently arrested. She worked with them on an investigation before leaving her country. Recently, her partner received the visits of three men who asked for her but did not tell him who they were.

Feedback table

Name of the character	Risk factors	Protective factors	Implications on return counselling and procedures	Actors for cooperation and referral pathways
Lila				
Individual	her profession as a journalist illegal entry investigation on corruption	no asylum appl. well-educated	sending her to legal advisors	ZIRF - request? legal advisors
Family	left 3 yr. old daughter back in CoO.	partner/family at home to warn her		
Community	visit of unknown persons looking after her			
Structural	repression on citizens who seeked int. protection abroad	no asylum appl.	get in touch with lawyers in CoO to evaluate the level of danger or seek int. protection in host country	

*One group work: a case study about "Lila", a possible returnee*

## Danish Refugee Council: Assuring Quality in Return Counselling

The third and last day of the workshop concentrated on Motivational Interviewing (MI) method and gave an introduction to the Danish system to maintain counselling quality long-term. Signe Søndergaard, a return and reintegration specialist from the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), hosted a great session with two additional working groups practicing the Motivational Interviewing (MI) method.

The DRC was founded in 1956, being Denmark's largest and a leading international NGO. In the DRC's return and reintegration counselling unit, all return counsellors are trained in MI. An appointed staff member with the additional training in MI ensures the quality in the counselling approach. DRC has regular peer-to-peer observations and systematic feedback on counselling, as well as reflection sessions, supervision and access to trainings. New counsellors have a lengthy onboarding process and are appointed a mentor.

## Motivational Interviewing: The dynamics of ambivalence



Motivational interviewing is a person-centred method and supports the change process within a person. The method originates from the US, where it was developed to treat addicts. The basic assumption of MI method is that people struggle with ambivalence and get “stuck”, which means remaining in the status quo. In MI, both sides (pro and contra change thoughts) are allowed to be voiced and discussed. The arguments for change should come from the person her/himself, not from outside. The “sustain talk” and the “change talk” take turns within the client and it is up to the counsellors to encourage the client to do more change talk. The counsellor can support this process, but not offer direct solutions.



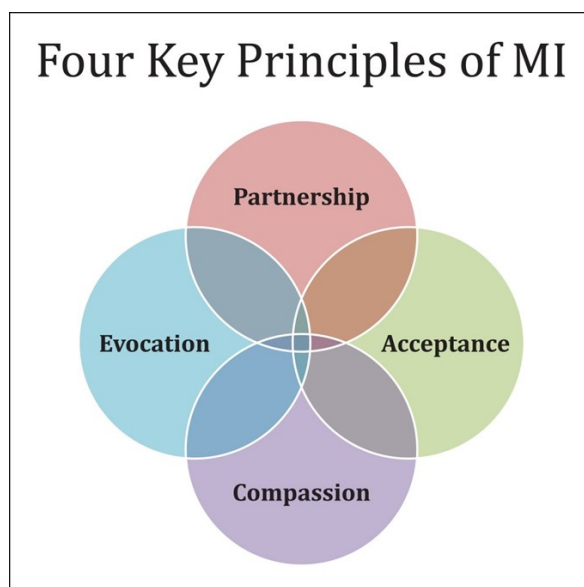
*Participants engaging in the working group practicing MI communication skills. Teams of two took turns interviewing the other about a change they would like to achieve. The advice for the group work was: “Give room, reflect rather than ask questions, if questions then only open questions. If you give information, advice, or share own experience [...]”*

## **Motivational Interviewing: skills, techniques and key principles**

MI includes following skills and techniques:

- Open questions
- Affirmations
- Reflections
- Summaries

Open questions are questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no, but require a more elaborated response. Affirmation is about strengthening the resources, which the person already has. Simply reflections occur when the counsellors notice what is happening in client and/or what he/she is saying and mirrors it back to the client. Complex reflections allow the counsellors to not mirror directly what was said but offer an interpretation of the deeper meaning of the client’s statement. Summaries help to create a narrative and take the discussion to the next phase.

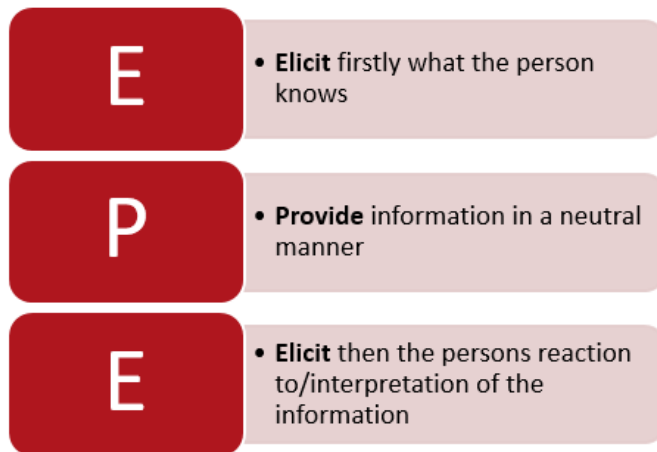


The four Key Principles of MI are partnership, acceptance, compassion and evocation. Partnership can be built up by using “alliance language”: we are here as two experts, equals, trying to find a solution together. Asking for permission is an important aspect in alliance language. A counsellor cannot just provide information assuming that the client is ready for the information. Instead, one could for example ask: “Is it ok I tell you a bit about the program?” Acceptance is respecting the autonomy and accepting the ambivalence within a person.

Compassion means keeping the best interest of the client in mind and showing empathy. Evocation stands for calling forth, instead of trying to install the change or forcing the decision.

### Information as dialogue

MI method highlights the dialogic character of any discussion or information giving taking place. A counsellor can always apply EPE model.



Principles for giving information in MI are the following:

- Ask for permission to give information before giving it
- Find out what the person knows about the topic before you give information
- Give information in a factual and neutral way.
- Give the person the possibility to relate and think about the information



*Evening activities in the Transnational Exchange VI workshop included a guided city tour in Augsburg led by Salomé Maxeiner. What a great way to get to know the city and to each other!*

#### Information on Transnational Exchange VI:

This project is implemented by the Caritas Association for the Diocese Augsburg and is co-financed by the European Union. The title of the project is called “European AVRR counsellors in training”. From October 2022 until September 2025, European assisted voluntary return and reintegration counsellors can benefit from workshops, conferences and field trips offered by the Transnational Exchange VI project to enhance their counselling quality.



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