



**Doc. 12482**

24 January 2011

## Voluntary return programmes: an effective, humane and cost-effective mechanism for returning irregular migrants

**Reply to Recommendation<sup>1</sup>:** Recommendation 1926 (2010)  
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has examined Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1926 \(2010\)](#) on “Voluntary return programmes: an effective, humane and cost-effective mechanism for returning irregular migrants”, which it has brought to the attention of the members states’ governments. It has also communicated it to the European Committee on Migration (CDMG) and to the European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ), the comments of which have been taken into account in the present reply.

2. The Committee of Ministers shares the view of the Parliamentary Assembly that programmes of voluntary return programmes for irregular migrants can be a positive and effective mechanism to secure their orderly and dignified return. It recalls, as stated in its “Twenty guidelines on forced return”, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 2005, that measures should be taken to promote voluntary returns, which should be preferred to forced returns and that if necessary such programmes should be regularly evaluated and improved upon.

3. The Assembly will be aware that voluntary return programmes exist in many member states of the Council of Europe, though due to different national contexts and circumstances, these programmes vary in their structures and content. Whilst it acknowledges that there would be some benefit to be gained in sharing information and good practices on voluntary return programmes, also on bilateral bases, the Committee of Ministers does not support the proposal to prepare guidelines on voluntary return in the framework of the Council of Europe’s activities. Other organisations, such as for example the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), have worked extensively on this subject and possess considerably greater expertise to carry out such a task. The Committee of Ministers considers it preferable that the Council of Europe express its readiness to bring its expertise, and in particular a human rights perspective, to any activity in this area which may be carried out by another organisation in the future.

4. Finally, the Committee would underline that human rights must always be protected in any return process, whether it consists of readmission or voluntary return. In this respect, it would also signal that it has recently adopted guidelines on child-friendly justice which recommend special protection and assistance for the most vulnerable children including refugee, migrant, asylum seeking and unaccompanied children.

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1. adopted at the 1103rd meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (19-20 January 2011)

