



## Exchange Visit to Measures to Address Return and Reintegration of Migrants Returned from the EU

France, Netherlands & Belgium

17-26 October 2016

### Summary Report

In close coordination and cooperation with the Bureau of Exit and Entry Administration (BEEA) of Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and the International Department of Ministry Foreign Affairs (MFA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted a ten-day visit, from 17 to 25 October 2016, for high level Chinese officials to France, Netherlands and Belgium to exchange information on the return and reintegration of irregular migrants, as well as the characteristics of readmission agreements. The visit was carried out within the framework of the “EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Support Project”, funded by the Partnership Instrument (PI) of the European Union (EU). The delegation was led by Mr. PANG Shuqiang, Deputy Director-General (DDG) of MPS BEEA, and included Deputy Directors of Division of Exit and Entry Administration for Chinese Citizens, Division of Exit and Entry Administration for Aliens and Division of International Cooperation. In addition, two officials from the Department of Consular Affairs and the Department of International Organizations and Conferences of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was part of the delegation.

Building on the successful workshop on *Practical Cooperation on Return and Readmission of Irregular Migrants* and an *Experts’ Meeting*, held in Beijing in November 2015, this exchange visit offered the Chinese delegates in-depth understanding of the European implementation and operation of return and readmission agreements with non-European countries. Detailed introductions of EU regulations and policies on handling irregular migration, identification of irregular migrants, as well as the implementation of Assisted Voluntarily Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes were shared.

The Chinese delegation visited the following institutions in the three European countries:

- **France:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Interior - Directorate General of Foreigners in France (DGEF), International Cooperation Directorate (DCI), Central Direction of the French Border Police (DCPAF) and Paris Police Prefecture; French Office of Immigration and Integration and Mesnil-Amelot Repatriation Centre.
- **Netherlands:** Ministry of Security and Justice - International Affairs Directorate (Repatriation and Departure Service, Asia, Middle East and North Africa Division), Immigration and Naturalization Service; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the European Migrant Smuggling Centre of EUROPOL.
- **Belgium:** Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) and Federal Public Service of Home Affairs - Immigration Office.



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#### France

In **France**, both the Chinese delegation and French authorities made reference to the good bilateral relations and the dialogue on people-to-people exchanges. France is an attractive destination for Chinese nationals, with an estimated 800,000 Chinese visitors to France every year. France highlighted the intern programme, with the objective of promoting



French graduates' internships in China. Extensive discussions and exchanges were held in relation to France's experience and practices on managing foreigners; entry and residence policies for foreigners; policies and approaches on return and repatriation of irregular migrants; challenges of handling return and repatriation of irregular migrants; and in-depth exchanges on best practices as well as challenges on Assisted Voluntarily Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme. It was noted that there were around 100,000 regular Chinese migrants in France. During 2015, some 600 Chinese were repatriated, which represented an increase of 50% compared with the previous year. Further, it was noted that at the EU level, France repatriated the largest number of irregular Chinese migrants. The Chinese side expressed their reciprocity to the French authorities, also highlighting the strong level of collaboration

towards enhanced mobility, and at the same time stronger prevention for irregular migration. Both sides recognized that they faced similar challenges when identifying irregular migrants. France indicated their strong wish for strengthening cooperation with the Chinese Embassy on identifying irregular Chinese migrants, since approximately 40% of the cases of Chinese irregular migrants are not identified. Officials from the Directorate General of Foreigners in France also emphasized that the cooperation with the country of origin was very important in order to increase the efficiency of returns and repatriation. It was highlighted that bilateral cooperation is an effective measure to prevent irregular migration and both sides also agreed that using biometric information is essential for a speedy identification process of irregular migrants.

Officials from the Central Direction, French Border Police, provided details about national operations and processes of return and repatriation of irregular migrants as well as various identification procedures with non-European countries. In response to the time-consuming identification process and delays, the Chinese delegation emphasized that in most cases, the migrants held irregular identity documents, which makes the domestic identification process more challenging. Moreover, China does not yet have a fixed setup national identification team and the identification process requires the involvement of ad-hoc teams of central and provincial exit and entry administrations. Further, it was noted that the Chinese Police faces similar challenges when cooperating with foreign embassies in China regarding foreign irregular migrants in China. The Chinese called for the good practice of building mutual trust between French police with consuls of foreign embassies in providing new ideas and reflections. China provided a brief introduction to the model of sending Chinese identification expert teams on regular basis to the UK, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Austria, and how this approach has been helpful in establishing a working mechanism to identify irregular Chinese migrants. The Chinese side felt that this approach might provide a template for better collaboration on identification of irregular Chinese migrants in France. However, the French side immediate reflection was that this approach might not be as useful in the French context, as France has a very short detention period.



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At the meeting with Paris Police Prefecture, the French General Police Director gave a brief introduction to the functions and organizational structure. Information was shared on the investigation process, coordination and cooperation with the country of origin on identifying and returning the irregular migrants. Regarding the repatriation of irregular Chinese migrants, it was noted that for Paris, the proportion of repatriated Chinese was low, with only 15 irregular Chinese migrants returned until October 2016 while only 23 Chinese migrants during 2015. The irregular Chinese migrants were mainly involved in illegal work and victims of exploitation. Two main trends were found in relation to irregular Chinese migrants in Paris: 1) victims of organized crime groups; and 2) some had entered as students by enrolling at fake educational institutions. The French side expressed their willingness to strengthen cooperation with the Chinese Embassy to increase the efficiency of identification of irregular Chinese migrants within time frame of 45 days, as required by French law. China responded by emphasizing that both sides share the same priority in the field of migration management. DDG PANG emphasized their willingness to provide assistance and help on repatriation and receiving irregular Chinese migrants.

The French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII) presented an overview of French migration policies and developments, including Assisted Voluntarily Return (AVR) and AVRR programmes at national and EU levels, existing bilateral agreements on return and reintegration with foreign countries as well as the structure of OFII. The Chinese delegation shared that China was currently piloting an AVRR programme in Guangdong province. Therefore, the experience shared by France on AVRR was very useful in order to further improve the AVRR programme in China.

During the visit to France the Chinese delegation also had the opportunity to visit an administrative detention centre in Paris, Mesnil-Amelot Repatriation Centre, which receives foreigners in an irregular status awaiting deportation to their



country of origin. There are 23 similar centres in France including 4 in overseas territories. Each centre can receive 120 people. In 2016, the centre received 35 Chinese nationals. The Deputy Director gave a detailed presentation about the centre including its functions, responsibilities, operation, budget, facilities and security. Moreover, the Chinese delegation was able to tour the facilities and get an insight to the operating procedures. Since China is planning to set-up similar facilities for processing irregular migrants, this visit was very helpful for Chinese officials.



## The Netherlands

In **the Netherlands**, the Chinese delegation held high-level meetings with Dutch counterparts and engaged in detailed discussions on migration policies, measures on handling irregular migration, management of foreigners, implementation of AVRR programmes, etc. Both sides highly recognized the well-established bilateral relations and high level of cooperation on irregular migration, including the arrangements on identification and return of irregular migrants. The Division at the International Affairs Directorate of the Repatriation and Departure Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Ministry of Justice, provided detailed information about the functions and responsibilities of their respective agencies, focusing on responding to migration issues; operational procedures on return and readmission; functions of Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs); residence permit and Netherlands programme to attract skilled talents. The Chinese delegation also shared information about their patterns, trends and challenges of irregular migration in China. Irregular migration from China's neighbouring countries has increased and the identification process is also a major challenge for Chinese officials. China introduced the role and function of BEEA including its procedures on repatriation of irregular migrants without legal travel documents.



Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) introduced the admissions procedures in the Netherlands and the migration inflows of 2015. Netherlands emphasized that they welcome skilled talents to strengthen its competitive position and knowledge-based economy. According to the provided statistics, Chinese ranked third in the top three nationalities providing highly skilled immigrants and Chinese students were the largest group of non-EU students in the Netherlands. The Chinese delegation showed specific interest in the function and tasks of the Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs). INS mentioned that via the ILOs it can act quickly and take appropriate action on migration concerns, including presence in airports to provide assistance to airlines, assist in the detection of fraud travel documents, and facilitate repatriation from the country where they are assigned. It was noted that there were 95 requests of Repatriation and Departure Service to the ILO-assistance unit until August 2016, while 143 requests in 2015. IOM Netherlands gave a presentation on IOM role as a direct implementing partner of the government of Netherlands, a program that amounts to Euro 13 million in 2016.



During the visit to EUROPOL presentations were given on the European Migrant Smuggling Centre and Trafficking in Human Beings, followed by extensive discussions. As a newly established unit in 2016, the European Migrant Smuggling Centre is proactively supporting EU Member States in dismantling criminal networks involved in organised migrant smuggling. In response to increasing organized crime activities in smuggling of migrants to Europe, Europol's official highlighted that intelligence and information-sharing were very important element in preventing smuggling activities. The Chinese delegation enquired about the possible modalities for sharing information between Europol and China on Chinese irregular migrants for further investigation. DDG PANG explained that Chinese nationals with a potential terrorism link were acquiring another citizenship and returned back to China to conduct terrorism activities as irregular migrants.



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China regards this kind of information sharing and cooperation with other countries as a priority. Concerning trafficking in human beings, Europol, explained its role to support investigations affecting at least two European Union Member States in the field of combating trafficking in human beings; Analysis Work File (AWF) Phoenix provided data on suspects, adult and underage victims, witnesses, contacts, associates, means of transport, bank accounts, etc. For the trafficking cases related to labour exploitation in Europe, the Chinese delegation also shared China's trends on illegal employment of foreigners. Europol explained that the European police have a good system of cooperation with the labour monitoring authorities to detect illegal recruitment activities.

The final meeting in the Netherlands was hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and focused on the return and repatriation of irregular migrants. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced its policies, procedures and cooperation mechanism on return and repatriation with various stakeholders, also on an international level. Both sides expressed the importance of inter-agency coordination and cooperation in the field of managing irregular migration. The Dutch side shared information about its readmission agreements, AVRR programme and the agreement of forced returns which Netherlands have signed with third countries.

#### Belgium

In **Belgium**, the Chinese delegation met with the Director of Policy Department and Head of Assisted Voluntarily Return (AVR) Unit of the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (FEDASIL) to learn about the evolution and challenges of reception policy in Belgium, the mandate of FEDASIL, reception network structure and organization, collaboration with reception partners, and FEDASIL's role in Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR). Chinese sought further clarifications about the different functions and roles of FEDASIL compared to the Immigration office particularly during the process of return. The Head of the AVR Unit provided an informative introduction about the vision and mission of AVRR, the referral system in Belgium, different steps of the AVRR programme, and its cooperation with NGOs and private sectors to assist the return and reintegration of foreign migrants. The Chinese delegation shared its practical experiences in piloting an AVRR programme in China and discussed the possible communication techniques to pursue potential migrants to accept voluntary return.



During the meeting with the Immigration Office of the Federal Public Service, Home Affairs, hosted by the Director General, Mr Freddy Roosemont, DDG PANG emphasized that the cooperation with the Belgian Immigration Department was very fruitful and the bilateral cooperation was the most successful model amongst all the EU MS. The Belgian side highlighted the trends of illegal foreign migrants and procedures of forced return and deportation. The Chinese delegation mentioned that both China and Belgium had similarities in identifying irregular migrants and relevant repatriation procedures. Both sides expressed that identification of irregular migrants was difficult, a process which requires close cooperation and support from foreign embassies. Both sides agreed that inter-agency coordination and cooperation mechanism on return and repatriation was paramount.



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## Outcomes:

This exchange visit was very successful and productive in strengthening mutual exchanges, understanding and dialogue on return and readmission between the EU and China. Through active and detailed discussions, Chinese and European officials enhanced their knowledge and deepened their understanding on respective policies, approaches, systems related to identification and return of irregular migrants, as well as readmission agreements with third countries. Further, it created a very good network and platform for future information sharing on irregular migration between European and Chinese immigration organizations. Moreover, it provided a good opportunity for the Chinese delegation to reflect on China's needs to strengthen its network and inter-agency cooperation to handle the issue of irregular migration.

The Chinese side demonstrated interest and willingness in further cooperation and exchange on the topics covered by the exchange visit. European good approaches and operations on identification and return of irregular migrants, and readmission agreement will become very helpful for developing Chinese approaches and measures on handling identification and return of irregular migration, particularly the operation and implementation of pilot AVRR programme in China. Both sides jointly recognized and agreed that the following measures should be taken to improve the identification process and return of irregular migrants:

- To strengthen cooperation of relevant organizations on return and readmission of irregular migrants between the country of origin and country of receiving;
- To build mutual trust on identification of irregular migrants between the police with (consuls of) foreign embassies;
- To improve inter-agency coordination and cooperation mechanism on return and repatriation;
- To develop the biometric technology to support identification process of irregular migrants between China and Europe; and
- To strengthen information-sharing on organized crime groups.

The Chinese delegation, especially benefited from this exchange visit since it will further build their capacity in view of the upcoming establishment of a new Chinese immigration entity.

The Chinese delegates expressed satisfaction with the results and provided very positive feedback. They felt that the discussions and exchanges with European counterparts were high-level and well-targeted. They grasped helpful, practical and comprehensive information about European practices in migration management, especially on return, reintegration and readmission of irregular migrants. They also highlighted additional information and topics to be further discussed and exchanged with the European side, which covered following aspects:

- Speed up the identification process by developing the existing biometric technology of two sides and combining EU system with the Chinese system;
- Role of governments during the reintegration process of migrants and how to evaluate the integration policies from the perspective of long-term;
- Role of foreign Embassies and Consulates during the implementation of AVRR programmes;
- How European countries design and implement the national projects on return and reintegration including its specific cooperation formats?
- How to prevent irregular migrants from abuse of reintegration policies and specific measures of handling this issue?



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Through this exchange visit, the Chinese delegates expressed their interests to learn and draw from the following specific European approaches:

- Advantages of French policy on issuing visa were helpful to improve the Chinese management policy of issuing passports.
- Structure and system of Dutch Immigration Department will provide useful references to the establishment of Chinese immigration agency.
- Expanding on the current China-Belgium expert working group on identification of irregular migrants

The Chinese side also emphasized that this visit helped them better understand European policies, system and approaches on return and reintegration, which laid a very good solid foundation for future cooperation in implementing the return and readmission agreements.

On the other-hand the European authorities, all expressed their appreciation for the high-level of knowledge, preparation and engagement by the Chinese delegation. All three countries expressed the importance they attach to their relationship with Chinese authorities on issues of migration and mobility.

**Activity 1.4.2: EU-China Policy Seminar – Experts Meeting – 25 October 2016**

Following the model previously used in the project, IOM facilitated the organization of a back-to-back meeting as *Activity 1.4.2: EU-China Policy Seminar* between the Chinese delegation and the European Union, represented by DG Home and the European External Action Service and two EU Member States (Netherlands & France) for an *Experts Meeting* on more political discussions on regular and irregular migration and mobility, in Brussels on 25 October. Director-General for DG HOME, Mr Matthias Ruete also had a courtesy meeting with DDG Pang on the same day.