



# Children and the voluntary return

Tips for parents in view of the voluntary return with minor children



## PREFACE

As a parent, the destiny for your children is very dear to you.

But in certain situations, it is not easy to choose the best solution for your children.

This brochure can help you to prepare your children in the best possible way in view of the return towards your country of origin.

The **first part** discusses the emotions of your children in view of your return.

The **second part** will provide tips in view of the preparations of your return.

This brochure can also be used as a guideline for any person who enters into contact with the family: social aids, teaching staff, volunteers

## Emotional aspects of the return with children



**The return towards your country of origin is not only an important step for you as a parent, but also for your children.**

**The reaction and assimilation of your children largely depends of their age and their development.**

**Hereunder, you will find some tips which can help you to prepare your children in view of the return. This tips are based on scientific research about the emotions of children.**

## **Tell your children that you will return.**

Be honest towards your children, even if they are relatively young. Children don't like their parents telling them lies. Do not try to deceive them by saying you are going on a trip and that you will return to Belgium if this is not the case.

## **Do not give the impression to your children that they are jointly responsible for the decision as regards the return to your country of origin.**

Even if your children would like to return towards their country of origin, you need to avoid giving them the impression that they are jointly responsible for this decision. This would put a (very) heavy burden on their shoulders. If the reintegration towards your country of origin proves to be difficult, they could feel guilty.

## **Talk about your country of origin with your children.**

Talk about your country of origin with your children. You can ask them what they remember of their stay. It is evidently possible that your children were too young and have no recollections whatsoever. Perhaps they were born in Belgium? Tell them stories about daily life in your country of origin. Talk about the family members, the friends and acquaintances they will meet. If you have young children, you can always use photographs or drawings. Indicate the geographic situation of Belgium and of your country of origin in an atlas. You can also discover photographs of your country, of your town or village on internet.

## **Highlight mainly the pleasant aspects of your country of origin.**

Young children adopt the reaction of their parents. Even if you are unhappy, or even if you are afraid, please try to highlight the pleasant aspects of the return with your children....

For instance, tell about the reunion with members of the family, friends, neighbours. Please avoid to impose negative stories on your children. This may frighten them and cause uncertainties. Present the situation as it is.

Tell neutral stories about your country. Tell them about the food, daily life, the school in which the children will be following their courses, etc..

## **Tell your children repeatedly about your return with them.**

Children (as well as adults) do not assimilate all the information simultaneously. It is therefore important to take the time necessary to repeat the story of your return. During a next conversation, you can ask your child what he remembers from your previous conversation.

For instance, you may ask:

'Do you still know where we are going?'

'Do you still remember where we will be sleeping?'

And so on.

Repetition is crucial.



## **Try to make the return as concrete as possible.**

Children need clear and easily understandable information. Tell them about the hour of departure as well as the mode of transport (by bus, by train, by plane,.....). Inform them where you will be eating and sleeping.

## **It is not necessary to cut off any contacts with Belgium.**

It will be beneficial for your children if they are able to partially maintain the link with Belgium. It is absolutely false that your children will feel less sad if you do not mention Belgium at all or if you disrupt any contact with your friends and acquaintances in Belgium. Ask your children what they would like to take along from Belgium. Some concrete souvenirs from Belgium, such as drawings of friends, a cuddly toy, photographs,... can help your children to cope with the return.

If your children would like to maintain contacts with their fellow classmates and their friends, please do not forget to take along their personal coordinates.

Older children can remain in contact with their friends by means of Facebook or other social media.

## **It is important for your children to have the opportunity to say farewell.**

It is beneficial for your children that they can review their stay in Belgium. It is expedient to be able to say farewell. Hence, it is necessary and even important

that your children have the opportunity to bid farewell to their friends and fellow classmates.

Notify the school as soon as possible, in order to allow them to stage a farewell party. If your children are registered in a sports club or if they have other hobbies, you can also contact the management in order to stage a farewell party. This is not only important for your children, but also for their friends who remain in Belgium. If your children have the opportunity to bid farewell, they will also experience that they mean something for other persons, for other children.

### **Maintain an optimal structure in your children's life, as well prior to, during and ultimately at the return towards your country of origin.**

Your children will feel more secure in case of a regular time span. Emotions may seriously wear your children out. Please see to it that your children are able to benefit from a good night's sleep.

### **Try to be at the disposal of your children as much as possible.**

The return will bring in considerable changes in your children's life. Spend attention to your children if they feel the need. Assure them that they can ask any questions and discuss their emotions. Inform regularly how your children are feeling, in case they do not take any initiative to keep you informed. Give them the opportunity to be angry, sad, frightened and content. Tell them that intense emotions are an entire part of life and that these feelings are transitory. Reassure them.

You can also tell your children that you are both happy and sad when having decided to return.

Convince them that this is entirely normal. Your children do not need to keep up appearances and conduct themselves more bravely than in ordinary situations. And they also know that they can count on you with their feelings of sorrow. Children can be quite fearful if their parents are upset or extremely sad. Keep this in mind.

## Practical aspects of a return with children



**Children who are returning sometimes experience difficulties in their country of origin, which may be prevented by means of a better preparation in Belgium. Underneath, you will find some useful tips as well as a check list as a reminder.**

### **Talk about your children with the return councillor.**

If you are entitled to receive a reintegration allowance, it is important to enter into consideration the specific needs of your children during the interviews with the return councillor.

Your family may wish to use (a part of) the reintegration allowance to this effect.



If you are not entitled to receive a reintegration allowance, but your children are particularly vulnerable (for instance because they do not have any command of the language, are coping with serious medical difficulties, etc.), you can also broach this topic to the return councillor. In certain cases, your family may benefit from a minimum financial support.

Discuss the following topics with your return councillor(s) prior to your departure:

**Do your children (still) speak the language of your country of origin? In case of older children, do they still speak and write in the language used in education in your country of origin?**

If your children need additional training, you can try to settle this matter prior to your departure towards your country of origin. You may for instance organize additional courses in Belgium, or examine and prepare beforehand the possibility to obtain an additional training in your country of origin.

You could also use (a part of) the reintegration allowance to this effect.



## **Have your children followed any education in your country of origin?**

Do you still have written proof ?

Maybe these documents could facilitate a new registration?

## **Have your children already been at school in Belgium?**

Prior to your return, please assemble all the documents, including the reports, the certificates and school documents. Have them translated if necessary in the language of your country of origin before your departure. Ask any additional information to your return councillor to this effect.

In your country of origin, it will be extremely expensive and often quite difficult to obtain translations of a Dutch text.

Do not forget to take along the coordinates of the school in Belgium towards your country of origin. Thus, you will be able to request additional documents if necessary. There is no readily available survey, listed according to countries, of all the information/documents which are required necessary in view of a rapid and smooth reintegration as regards education. However, you can obtain further information with IOM or Caritas International.

## **Do your children have any hobbies in Belgium? Do they for instance have taken music classes or are they member of a sports club?**

Can they possibly pursue their leisure in your country of origin? What are the means that you need to this effect? Or will they be able to once again practice their pastime in your country of origin? What are the means required to this effect ? Maybe it is possible to do the preliminary enquiries in Belgium.

## Do your children have any medical difficulties, which need to be followed up in your country of origin?

Do you possess medical certificates to this effect ? If not, you can still ask for these documents with your physician. It is much easier to have these certificates translated in the language of your country of origin in Belgium.

In case of considerable medical difficulties, your family may benefit from an additional reintegration allowance.

It is also useful to take along the booklet of 'Kind & Gezin' (Children & Families), possible vaccination certificates as well as any other important medical document (such as results of medical examinations).

Please ask your return councillor if it is necessary to have these documents translated.



## Identity documents.

Evidently, it is advisable to assemble all identity documents of your children: birth certificates, ID cards, passports, etcetera. Also remember to take copies of any laissez-passers (those are also ID documents and the original copy is often being retained by the competent authorities).

## IOM and Caritas can give you more information

Do you have any questions as regards the educational opportunities of your children, the facilities to practice a pastime, the medical facilities in your country of origin, etcetera?

The organizations **IOM and Caritas International** as well as their partners are at your entire disposal.

### Caritas International

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### IOM

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## Check list



- KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGES**
  - oral
  - written
- SCHOOL**
  - in the country of origin
  - in Belgium: certificates and diplomas + translation
- HOBBY**
  - possibilities in your country
- HEALTH**
  - medical certificates + translation
  - booklet 'Kind en Gezin' (Children and Families)/ Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE)
  - vaccination certificates
  - other important medical documents such as the result of medical examinations
- IDENTITY**
  - birth certificate
  - ID card
  - passport
  - copy of the *laissez passer*
- LIST OF PERSONAL COORDINATES OF FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES IN BELGIUM**, possibly with photographs and other material souvenirs

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In the same series, we also have published a brochure:

'[Tips for the councillors of families in return.](#)'

You can order the two brochures at the Asylum Seekers and Refugees Department of the City of Ghent

Tel. 09 267 85 00 - [asiel.vluchtelingenbeleid@stad.gent](mailto:asiel.vluchtelingenbeleid@stad.gent)

You can download the brochures via the website

[www.gent.be/samenleven-welzijn-gezondheid/diverse-stad/asiel-en-vluchtelingenbeleid/project-vrijwillige-terugkeer](http://www.gent.be/samenleven-welzijn-gezondheid/diverse-stad/asiel-en-vluchtelingenbeleid/project-vrijwillige-terugkeer)

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