

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) in the EU¹

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental body, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration, and work towards effective respect of the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) is a core activity of IOM and has provided vital assistance to tens of thousands of migrants returning home every year. It is also a growing area of work as an increasing number of States – both host countries as well as countries of origin – recognize the value of AVRR as an essential component of an effective and humane migration management framework. IOM now implements AVRR programmes in all continents and in mainly two directions: North–South and South–South.

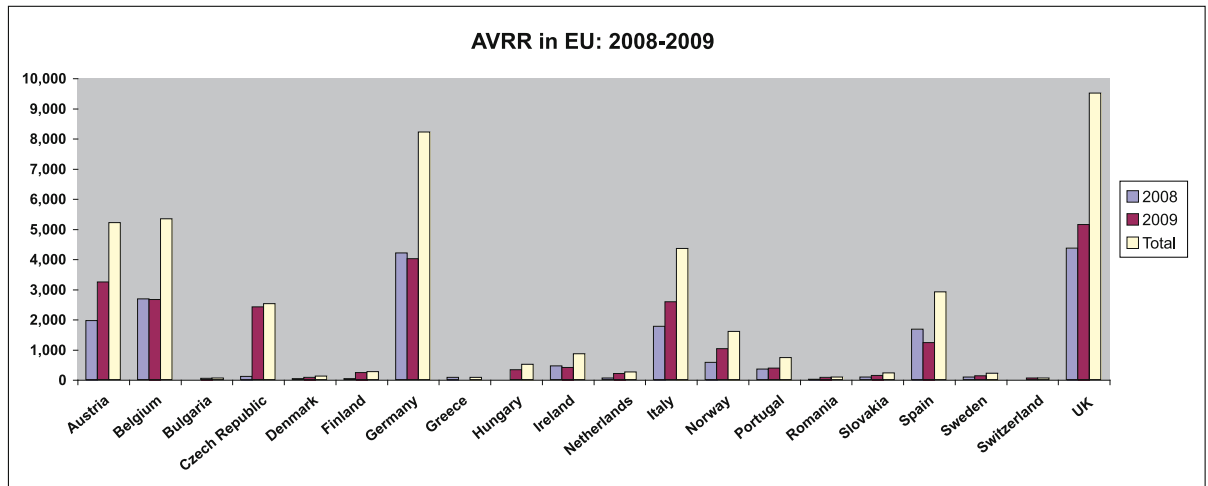
Both in host and origin countries, IOM works closely with national counterparts and a network of partner agencies to facilitate sustainable returns. Building on these experiences and a network of offices and partners, IOM provides services to facilitate a migration dialogue among destination, transit and origin countries on the same migration spectrum.

Over the last 3 years, AVRRs worldwide have assisted just over 53,000 migrants to return safely to approximately 160 countries.

Currently, IOM implements over 40 AVRR projects within 26 EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland.

¹ This information Sheet includes information covering the EU Member States as well as Norway and Switzerland.





The figure reflects the general trends of assisted voluntary returns under projects in the EU, including Norway and Switzerland.

AVRR Framework

IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes consists of three basic stages: 1) pre-departure: return information provision, health screening if required, facilitating travel documentation, and pre-departure assistance; 2) departure: movement coordination, transit assistance, escort assistance etc. and 3) post arrival and reintegration: reception and post return counselling, inland transportation, health related support and provision of reintegration assistance.

Many of IOM AVRR programmes, which started three decades ago in Europe, merely started by offering basic support to facilitate return transportation arrangements to provide the migrant with a safe and dignified return. They have since evolved into more comprehensive programmes that have integrated a range of services to meet the needs of migrants throughout the process of return and reintegration including actions aiming at the sustainability of returns. Such services includes the conceptualization of targeted country specific schemes, enhanced return counselling and information provision, networking, elaboration and implementation of tailored reintegration assistance schemes including reception and follow up assistance and monitoring in the country of origin.

Reintegration assistance is now an integral part of the IOM's AVRR programmes in the EU. Many of these programmes not only support the reintegration of individual returnees, but also address concerns of the communities of return and local stakeholders in facilitating effective and sustainable returns.

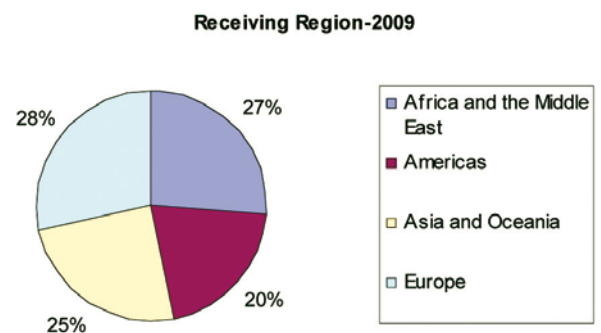
AVRR beneficiaries

The trends similar to the past few years continued with respect to an increasing diversification of beneficiaries. Besides the assistance of migrants whose asylum claim was not successful there has been a significant increase in the number of migrant beneficiaries outside the asylum system and are living in an irregular and vulnerable situation in the host country. Very often AVRRs is seen by this category of migrants as an alternative to a possible deportation or forced return by the authorities of the respective host country.

AVRR programmes have assisted also an increasing number of vulnerable migrant groups such as unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking as well as migrants with medical needs.

Brazilian, Serbian and Iraqi nationals continued to represent the major nationalities assisted in the last three years.

The figure below shows the percentage of returns in 2009 from the EU area (including Norway and Switzerland) to the regions of Africa and Middle East, Americas, Asia and Oceania, and Europe.



AVRR Communication and Outreach

Return Related Information

Return Related Information is a key element throughout the different stages of AVRRs in the EU.

IOM AVRR programmes systematically provide information in host countries to assist potential returnees to adequately prepare for their return, and make an informed decision. This process allows migrants to decide if return is the best option for them, and addresses any concerns related to return and reintegration based on up-to date information on conditions in the country of origin. In doing so, IOM cooperates with the relevant actors in both, host countries and countries of origin to provide the necessary information to those willing to benefit from the AVRR programmes. Such information involves the provision of clear, thorough and objective information based on facts collected in the country of origin and provided by representatives of, and credible partners in, the countries of origin, transit and intended destination, where feasible and appropriate.

While IOM's direct involvement differs from country to country, exchanges of experiences among AVRR programmes have been found useful with the implementation of multilateral initiatives such as IRRICO. "Information on Return and Reintegration in Countries of Origin (IRRICO)". IRRICO was funded by the EC RETURN Preparatory Actions in 2005, developing the basis for a new project "Enhancing Integrated Approach and Cooperation in the EU through Return and Reintegration Information Gathering" aimed to further contribute to the joint efforts in the enlarged EU in facilitating sustainable voluntary return and reintegration of irregular migrants from 10 host countries to 27 countries of origin. (<http://irrico.belgium.iom.int/>)

Research Based Strategies

Diaspora, mapping exercises have been a crucial research tool used by projects in the UK, Belgium, Portugal to determine the most adequate and effective communication strategy to follow when raising awareness about AVRRs within the diaspora communities in the EU.

Mapping exercises seek to establish: a) estimates on the size and geographical spread of particular diaspora communities; b) preferred media channels used by the diaspora –TV stations; radio stations; newspapers and magazines; c) key languages used by the diaspora to read information material, and

d) which institutions (libraries, health centres, churches etc.) are key to ensure awareness raising within the local communities and agencies providing counselling and advice services.

Reintegration Assistance

Reintegration considerations are intrinsic to the individual return process and need careful attention by IOM and partners when planning for any return and reintegration assistance for a category of migrants (vulnerable group, stranded migrants, rejected asylum seekers, irregular migrant family, irregular individual migrant etc) or for a specific diaspora in the host country. Two issues of core importance are a) addressing the feasibility of both, a safe dignified return and reintegration assistance provision in the country of origin and b) the need to generate and analyse data on those who have returned to monitor and evaluate the impact of AVRRs on the individual's return and reintegration process in the respective country of origin.

IOM in close cooperation with partners and national and local stakeholders in both, host countries and countries of origin have supported the migrants who have returned in: developing income generating projects, (consisting of feasibility assessments, basic business training, financial support); helping with access to vocational training, employment and education and help in generating positive impacts on local communities in countries of origin.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular monitoring has proved to be effective in assessing the impact and appropriateness of return and reintegration assistance, by identifying best practices and addressing any unforeseen obstacles encountered in order to offer more appropriate solutions in making returns more sustainable.

IOM has conducted a number of specific evaluation exercises in both countries of origin and host countries to analyse the impact of specific AVRR programmes (e.g. UK, Belgium, Norway, and the Netherlands).

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