

Practical Guide on Information Provision Regarding Return and Reintegration in Countries of Origin





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on Information Provision
on Return and Reintegration
in Countries of Origin



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Unless otherwise stated, whenever the masculine gender is used, both men and women are included.

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INTRODUCTION

Many of IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes started out three decades ago (1979) by offering basic support to facilitate return transportation arrangements, but have slowly evolved into more comprehensive programmes integrating a range of services to promote the sustainability of returns. Such progression is a reflection of the evolution of return migration and its incorporation into the migration management strategies of many governments.

The Communication from the Commission to The Council and the European Parliament on a Community return policy on illegal residents in October 2002¹ recommended that priority should be given to voluntary return over forced returns, not only because of humane reasons, but also due to cost-efficiency and sustainability. It called for more efficient ways to promote voluntary return. Furthermore it recommended that information on the possibilities for voluntary return



to the country of origin should be available as early as possible for potential returnees.

The provision of return information has been key to IOM's implementation of the AVRR programmes in various European Member States such as the UK, Ireland, Switzerland, Netherlands, and Belgium- countries where IOM and outreach partners have been developing large information activities within diaspora communities; local municipalities, and consular sections of embassies at the national level.

A number of evaluations undertaken in Europe – by the UK Home Office, a special Norwegian MOI working group, the Swiss Federal Office for refugees, the Danish Refugee Council and the European Commission, have confirmed the importance of information and the role it plays in the preparation of the potential returnee, assisting with voluntary return and contributing to the returnee's sustainability in the country of destination².

The purpose of this report is to provide the reader with a brief understanding of what constitutes 'return information provision' within the framework of return programmes. It will outline the key elements that return information provision activities often exhibit, and in doing so, will focus on a particular IOM project, namely the "Enhanced and Integrated Approach Regarding Information on Return and Reintegration in Countries of Origin" (IRRiCO II).

This report is divided into two main sections: the Section I will provide an overview of the AVRR process and the concept of return information. The Section II looks into the IRRiCO II project specifically, with an overview of recommendations.

1. COM(2002) 564 final 14.10.2002, recommends: "To every extent possible, priority should be given to voluntary return for obvious humane reasons, but also to costs, efficiency and sustainability. More efficient ways to promote voluntary returns should therefore be developed and implemented" (p.8); "information should be made available – as early and possible – for potential returnees on the possibilities for voluntary return to the country of origin. Such information should comprise information on return programmes, vocational, or other training available, on the situation in the country of return and on possibilities for establishing a new life". (p.22)

2. 2004, Return Migration, Policies Practices in Europe, IOM, Jan 2004, p.16



Acronyms and Abbreviations

AVRR – Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration

CRI – Country of Return Information

EU – European Union

FOM – Swiss Federal Office of Migration

IOM – International Organization for Migration

IRRICO – Information on Return and Reintegration in Countries of Origin

IRRICO II – Enhanced and Integrated Approach regarding Information
on Return and Reintegration in Countries of Origin

NGO – Non governmental organization

REAB – Return and Emigration of Asylum Seekers ex Belgium

REAG – Return and Emigration of Asylum Seekers from Germany

REAN – Return and Emigration of Aliens from the Netherlands

RIF – Return Information Fund

UAM – Unaccompanied Minor

U.K. – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations



The Concept of Return Information Provision

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)

Since 1979, with the establishment of the German ‘Reintegration or Emigration of Asylum Seekers from Germany (REAG)’ programme, through nearly thirty years of experience, AVRR has developed into an area of expertise for IOM. IOM’s AVRR activities have grown to more than 100 projects, helping individuals return to approximately 160 countries throughout the world. In the

past decade alone, IOM has assisted upwards of 3.5 million migrants to return voluntarily and safely to their home countries.

The Organization’s approach to return stems from a broader and more comprehensive migration management perspective, which takes into account all migrants – both regular and irregular - in need of return assistance. These may include not only failed asylum seekers, but also other categories of migrants such as persons currently in



Returnees arrive at the airport of Pristina

the asylum determination process, persons on temporary protection status, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors and regular migrants who wish to return to their countries.



Flyer of the Irish Assisted Voluntary Return Programme

of origin either on a temporary (e.g. to contribute to development or reconstruction efforts, through a return of qualified nationals programme) or permanent basis³.

In recent years, many of IOM's AVRR programmes have evolved to provide more comprehensive return assistance with a range of services. Such services includes the conceptualisation of targeted country specific return assistance schemes, enhanced return counselling and information provision, networking, pre-departure job-training, elaboration and implementation of tailored reintegration assistance schemes including reception and follow-up assistance in the country of origin. 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. Together, IOM's AVRR programmes offer a comprehensive approach to return migration, which is key to the effective, overall migration management.

Each of IOM's assisted voluntary return programmes consists of three basic stages⁴.

IOM's experience shows that the earlier information, on assisted return programmes, can be given to asylum seekers, the more effectively the programmes operate. The **pre-departure stage** may consist of information dissemination and return counselling, provision of return-related, origin country specific information, health (medical screening and documentation, health care), and transport assistance (pre-departure assistance, travel allowances and reinstallation grants).

The **transportation stage** may include transport (movement coordination, transit assistance, escort assistance, unaccompanied baggage, documents and formalities) and health-related assistance (pre-embarkation medical checks and medical escorts).

³ IOM's Comments on the EU Green Paper on a Community Return Policy on Illegal Residents, 2002

⁴ IOM Council document MC/INF/236, *IOM Return Policy and Programmes: A Contribution to Combating Irregular Migration*, 5 November 1997, p. 4.



The **post-arrival stage** may consist of reception, inland transportation, health-related support, and provision of reintegration grants and further reintegration assistance (e.g. referral to available services, support for vocational training, income-generating activities etc.).

Return Information Provision

One activity that is constant throughout the three stages is that of information provision related to return and reintegration opportunities. The ability to provide information to migrants on their options of return is indispensable within the return process for the following reasons:

- ▶ Return information and counselling (at any stage of the migration or asylum process) can inform migrants

about their current status in the host country and future options;

- ▶ Gathering of return-related, country-of-origin information as the basis for providing return counselling to potential returnees can help the migrant take a decision on the outcome he/she wishes to pursue. It should be highlighted that within the process of gathering information under AVRR schemes, Information gathered and provided is not for refugee protection purposes;
- ▶ Return information provision can assist in the assessments of situations relevant to the assistance including surveys in origin countries and profiles of potential returnees and;
- ▶ Reintegration assistance such as information on possible employment/healthcare / social support opportunities is strongly supported by return information.



Return counselling at the IOM Lisbon office

IOM AVRRE 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 governmental, local and other actors to provide the relevant return and reintegration assistance. This includes information on the situation of the labour market, on housing conditions, educational

possibilities, legal aspects etc, prior to departure, as well as upon return, with the setting up of referral systems and information centres providing migrants access to information and communication means with those left behind and remaining in the diaspora.

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.



Flyers and poster of Swiss, Belgian, Portuguese, Dutch and U.K. Return programme



Project Key Components

Projects on information provision that have been implemented in the past have generally included the following key elements:

- ▶ Country fact sheets
- ▶ Individualised queries
- ▶ Communication strategies based on Research Focus Activities within the diasporas in the Host countries such as, mapping exercises

Country Fact Sheets

Country fact sheets aim at giving an overview of the situation in a specific country of origin. Information within country fact sheets are of a general nature and may touch upon a number of issues such as education, health facilities, local transportation and social services.

For the compilation of the country fact sheets, different procedures can be envisaged. With the development of the mass media, centralized desk research can be a possible method of information collection. However, this poses a number of challenges: firstly, information is often only available in the local language of a country and secondly, it is difficult to assess from a distance the reliability of such information.

Country sheets should be presented in English or in the local language of the country of origin and in the language of the host country. They should be in a narrative form.

Country sheets should generally include information on:

- ▶ Health care
- ▶ Housing
- ▶ Education
- ▶ General Economic Situation and Employment
- ▶ Banking system and Business set-up opportunities
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Telecommunications
- ▶ A list of available services (e.g. names, addresses, telephone numbers etc.) can be annexed to facilitate regular updating of both the main body of the Country Sheets and the annex section.

Individualised queries

Most of the existing projects regarding information on return and reintegration also provide the possibility to ask individual queries. Providing this opportunity is crucial as the country sheets aim to provide rather general information, but persons considering returning may have very specific questions about a specific region or subject.

Communication Strategies based on Research Focus Activities within the diasporas in the Host countries - Mapping Exercises

Mapping Exercises are useful tools to determine the most adequate and effective **communication strategies** to follow when raising awareness on



assisted voluntary return programmes within diaspora communities living in the Host Country.

Usually mapping exercises are conducted through in-depth interviews with diaspora members or organisations, and the dissemination and collection of questionnaires. Extensive networking activities are carried out to identify media, organisations, businesses, religious venues and other key contacts interacting with people from the mapped communities.

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,
- d) local communities and agencies providing counseling and advice services

As an example, IOM has produced a significant number of mapping exercises within different diaspora communities in the UK. Another example is the close cooperation on outreach work with diaspora communities carried out by the *Country Return Information* project implemented by the Flemish Refugee Council in Belgium.

Key Considerations when dealing with Information Provision

Disclaimers

While efforts are made to provide reliable, accurate and up-to-date information, all information displayed in the form of country fact sheets should include a disclaimer on the liability of the publisher regarding the information given.

As a good practice, a disclaimer on the (limited) liability of the publisher can also be added when transferring answers to individual questions to the initial requester. This is especially the case for questions related to health care.

Authorization by the source of information

In case the information transmitted is not publicly found, the authorization of the source institution or person should be sought prior to transmitting the information to third parties.

Data protection

Confidentiality of individual information should be observed at all times. There may be additional considerations to take into account, such as the privacy laws in the concerned country. Consent provided in writing by the assisted individual should be obtained for disclosure of his/her personal data to a third party.



Protection of migrants' personal data must be ensured at all time

All personal data, such as personal information received from migrants, shall be collected, used, transferred, and stored securely in accordance with the international standards on the protection of personal data⁵.

Personal data should only be transferred to third parties with the explicit consent of the data subject, for a specified purpose, and under the guarantee of adequate safeguards to protect the confidentiality of personal data and to ensure that the rights and interests of the data subject are respected.

Information provision should involve clear, thorough and objective infor-

mation based on facts collected in the country of origin and provided by representatives of, and credible partners in, the States of origin, transit and intended destination.

Vulnerable Groups

When dealing with vulnerable groups (i.e those with health related concerns, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors, elderly etc), it is even more important to make sure that the procedures and information that such individuals seek is appropriately tailored to their circumstances.

⁵ United Nations Guidelines for the Regulation of Computerized Personal Data Files (1990), European Directive 95/46/EC on the Protection of Individuals with Regard to the Processing of Personal Data and on the Free Movement of Such Data (1995), Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (1981)



While the first part of this practical guide has provided an overview of the procedures and mechanisms linked to return information provision, this section aims at presenting the IRRiCO II project which was implemented by IOM from 2008-2010. This project follows a transnational approach to return information provision.

The Pilot Project IRRiCO

IRriCO (Information on Return and Reintegration in Countries of Origin) started as a pilot project in 2007 to streamline the information network amongst AVRR programmes which IOM implements within EU Member States and Switzerland. It allowed for a joint approach towards the collection of data, and to share this information with return counsellors and a variety of relevant governmental and non governmental actors across the EU.

The approach used an efficient web based platform system. A wealth of targeted information was collected, updated and processed by IOM in countries of origin in terms of reintegration opportunities (i.e housing, banking, training facilities, etc) and fact sheets were produced by the participating countries of origin.

The IRRiCO project comprised six European countries, namely Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK, Portugal, and Switzerland. It offered information to twelve countries of origin, namely Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Cameroon, Guinea, Iran, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Ukraine and Zimbabwe.

The project enabled cooperation between European countries that worked with similar diaspora to produce country sheets and exchange individual questions about common countries of origin, so as to avoid duplication of efforts and enhancing cooperation between national initiatives.

Given the enhanced access to information for all parties involved through the success of the web-based platform it was decided to enlarge the scope of the project by including more European countries and countries of origin. This extended scope was reflected in the second phase of the approach called IRRiCO II.



Overview of the IRRiCO II Project

PART 2

Building on the above mentioned pilot project from 2007 and being very often complementary to return information provision initiatives implemented at the national level, the IRRiCO II project aimed at creating a mechanism to provide adequate, neutral and timely information relevant to return in support of voluntary return and reintegration of migrants. The gathering of information was conducted in countries of origin identified by IOM offices in the European participating host coun-

tries. Such information was collected and stored in an online database via a web-based approach accessible to all IOM offices allowing for an efficient information service. A key strength of the project was the ability to work in close collaboration with all relevant national authorities and partners working with migrants, reinforcing their capacities in assisted voluntary return and reintegration counselling and practices. IRRiCO II included three additional European countries and a further 8



From 29 countries: the IOM team working on the IRRiCO II project



CEMILATAVANG© IOM 1995 AHT1001

countries of origin in comparison to its predecessor, with the aim of providing as much information as possible about the availability of services in countries of origin.

In countries of origin, IOM offices assigned country of return information focal points whose duty was to collect all data relevant to the purpose of the project. The nature of the information collected focused on various facets relevant to return and reintegration, such as housing, health, transportation, social security, and labour market.

The gathered information was published in the form of “country sheets” on the website of the project. Individual queries asked by potential returnees were responded to and stored in a database accessible by IOM participating missions.

The countries which participated in this particular project included:

Countries of origin

- Afghanistan
- Albania
- Angola
- Armenia
- Brazil
- Cameroon
- Cote d'Ivoire
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Georgia
- Ghana
- Iraq
- Iran
- Kosovo⁶
- Moldova
- Nigeria

- Ukraine
- Pakistan
- Russian Federation
- Serbia
- Sudan

European countries

- Austria
- Belgium
- Greece
- Ireland
- Malta
- The Netherlands
- Portugal
- The United Kingdom
- Switzerland

⁶ “United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 Administered Kosovo”



Overview of activities

The Website

One of the centrepieces of the IRRiCO project was its website (www.iom.int/irrico), where the public could access information related to return and integration. The purpose of the website was to provide the general public with an interactive and informative tool that would share the information gathered with respect to the participating missions.

The website allowed for the following functions

- ▶ provided an overview of the project's goals and activities
- ▶ allowed for the display of the 20 country fact sheets and their translations into local languages of the country of origin, and into French, German, Dutch, Portuguese, and Greek, that could be downloaded
- ▶ provided the user with a list of service providers (i.e schools, health facilities, etc) in the countries of origin



Front page of the IRRiCO II website



IRRiCO
Enhanced and Integrated Approach regarding Information on Return and Reintegration in Countries of Origin

Home About IRRiCO Country sheets IOM Offices Contact lists Other projects Contact search...

You are here: Home Country sheets Ukraine

Ukraine

COUNTRY SHEETS: UKRAINE CONTACTS: UKRAINE DETAILED MAP

When migrants consider returning to their country of origin, they usually have a lot of questions.

The country sheets give an overview of relevant information for persons that are thinking about returning. The information given covers various areas, for example health care, housing, education, employment, business opportunities, and transportation.

The country sheets also contain information for vulnerable migrants such as victims of trafficking, persons with medical problems, single parents, and unaccompanied minors.

Below you can download the country sheet in different languages.

- [Ukraine country sheet English](#)
- [Ukraine country sheet French](#)
- [Ukraine country sheet Portuguese](#)
- [Ukraine country sheet Dutch](#)
- [Ukraine country sheet Ukrainian](#)

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Sub-page "Ukraine" of the IRRiCO II website

- ▶ provided an update on other information provision projects of the same nature
- ▶ gave an overview of the AVRR programmes of each participating European country

Country sheets

The country fact sheets constituted another core element of the IRRiCO II project and were published on the project's website. For each of the 20 countries of origin, one fact sheet was produced in English, and then translated in one or more local languages of the country of origin. In addition, the country sheets were translated and published in French, German, Dutch, Portuguese, and Greek.

The main challenge was to collect neu-



tral, timely and reliable information and to be transparent about the sources. At the beginning of the project, a set of guidelines and a template for the country sheets was drafted.

The challenges of information collection and ways to tackle those were exchanged at an internal working meeting of all involved IOM offices in June 2009. Each IOM staff from the participating countries of origin presented her or his view on information collection and the challenges linked to it, and it was tried together to find ways to mitigate these.

The country sheets gave an overview of the present state of health care, housing, education, employment opportunities, banking system and business opportunities, customs, transportation, and telecommunications in the countries of origin. Special attention was also paid to vulnerable migrants, for example persons with medical needs, pregnant women, the elderly, single parents, and unaccompanied minors. The IOM staff in the countries

of origin were responsible for collecting the required information and drafting the country sheets.

The country sheets were drafted for the first time in April 2009 and updated in December 2009.

For the editing of the country sheets, the general principles agreed upon were the following:

The information therefore needed to be relevant, reliable, balanced, accurate and up-to-date. Information reported should be non-sensitive and non-protection or security related.

When considering sources or organisations, the following factors should be taken into consideration:

- ▶ The mission or mandate of the organisation
- ▶ The source of funding for the organisation
- ▶ The reputation of the organisation
- ▶ The amount of time the organisation has been operating

Questions: Prices of coffee plants and fertilizer in Brazil

Edit Question View Change Log

Return to List (25 of 492)

827 CLOSED Category: Business

From Country: Portugal Requester: maria

To Country: Brazil Assigned to: alme

Created on: 19/11/2009 Closed on: 20/11/2009

Title: Prices of coffee plants and fertilizer in Brazil

Question: Could you please tell us how much a coffee plant and a bag of fertilizer would cost in Brazil? The person is interested in working in coffee plantation in the state of Espírito Santo

Answer: A coffee plant ("catuca vermelha") costs: 0,25 reais (0,25x1000=250 reais)
And a bag of fertilizer costs (1kg): 4,5 reais.

An example of a question asked through the database. Questions about prices were amongst the most frequent ones.



PART 2



Questions about health care were the most frequent ones in the IRRiCO II project

- ▶ The geographic area in which the organisation operates
- ▶ Is the organisation willing to have its information published? Information that has already been published, either on the internet or in leaflets, news stories or otherwise may be considered as public domain, and therefore, may be used. Information not already in the public domain should be considered private until written consent, including by e-mail, is obtained stating clearly that the organisation agrees to the inclusion of information in IOM materials.
- ▶ In general, the information should be verified from more than one source.



Contact lists

The importance of identifying appropriate service providers such as social centres, ministries, schools, hospitals and employment agencies in the countries of origin was also crucial for the success of the project. Information from the field on the following types of societal actors was collected:

- Banks and micro-credits
- Business
- Education
- Employment
- Governmental institutions
- Healthcare
- Housing
- International organizations and NGOs
- Social support
- Telecommunications
- Transportation

The contact lists was based on information compiled by the IOM focal points in the country of origin, in cooperation with a network of partners and contacts in each country (local NGOs and the local administration as well as other international organizations). The contact lists were updated every three months.

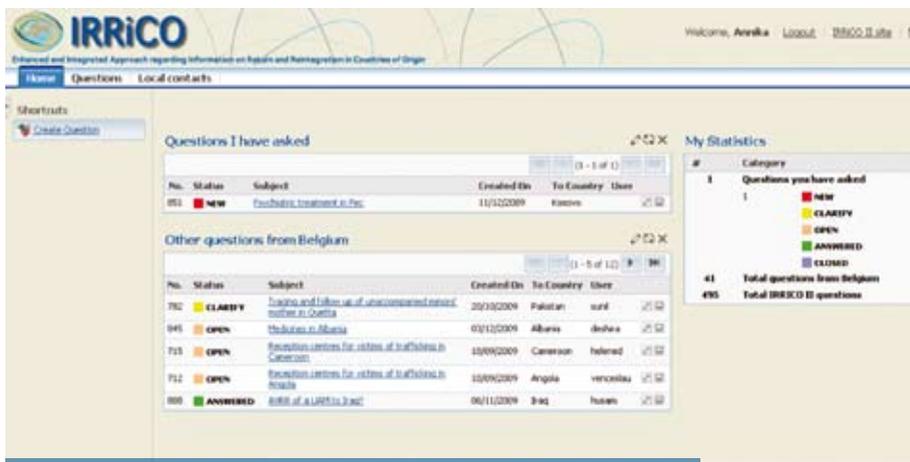
Database to exchange individual questions

While migrants and social workers could find general information on the return and reintegration possibilities in their respective countries of origin very often migrants presented specific questions to be addressed individually. The project aimed at providing the opportunity to migrants to ask individual questions that would be answered by the responsible IOM staff in the country of origin.



Questions about education were frequent in the IRRICO II database

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The database was accessible by the participating IOM offices

To this end, an online-database was created whose aim was to allow for an exchange of information that would be stored and easily searchable. All questions asked in the framework of the project were stored in the database and could be viewed by the participating IOM offices thereby avoiding duplication.

The database was accessible exclusively to IOM staff for reasons of data protection and confidentiality.

Social workers and other persons in contact with migrants were informed about the database and about the possibility to pose questions in the participating European countries. Counselors could contact an IOM office who would then enter the question in the database and relay the answer back to the social worker. All participating IOM offices had access to the information in the database.

Exchange visits in countries of origin

Several exchange visits took place in the framework of the project aimed at the exchange of best practices regarding assisted voluntary return and return information provision. These exchange visits gave the opportunity to officials from the participating European countries and IOM staff to visit participating countries of origin and refine their knowledge on the general situation in the selected country.

The exchange visits served as capacity building exercises to encourage the practical involvement of officials in the project while stimulating their direct contact with practitioners from different European countries. The exchange visits also gave the opportunity for the officials to receive feedback on the current situation in the countries of origin including the different types of 'reintegration packages' provided



to returning nationals assisted under different programmes from the EU. The visits highlighted the need for centralized and consolidated information on AVRR possibilities.

Officials from the Netherlands and Ireland visited Georgia together; a delegation from Belgium went to UNSC Resolution 1244-Administered Kosovo, Portuguese officials went to Brazil and a Maltese delegation visited the Ivory Coast. Finally, a joint delegation from the United Kingdom and Austria visited Nigeria.

Outreach in host countries

In order to inform migrants and return counsellors, information sessions were held in all the participating EU countries. Furthermore, leaflets and posters were produced and distributed to associations and institutions where migrants were likely to find them, such as NGOs, cultural associations, Embassies, Consulates, and social centres.



Learning how to use the database: training in Brussels in April 2009

Good practices identified during the IRRiCO II project

During the implementation of the IRRiCO II project, several aspects emerged as good practices that could be replicated in future projects.

For example, the attendance at workshops and conferences of all IOM staff and the presence of officials from different European Member States, illustrated how cooperation can be enhanced between stakeholders from different countries of origin and destination, and how exchange between the different EU Member States can be facilitated.

Furthermore, the joint study tours for officials from different EU Member States to countries of origin, organized within the framework of the project, were considered worthy of future duplication.



The working seminar in Dublin in June 2009 allowed for direct exchange between IOM staff from countries of origin and the EU



Key Recommendations

PART 3

1. Information provision through a web-based system

The provision of information via a web-based platform should be envisaged, giving an overview of all the European AVRR programmes and an overview of activities and budgets of the national Return Funds with its access restricted to European officials. The platform could also give an overview of each country of origin and the AVRR and reintegration programmes provided by each European Member State and local partners. A summary could be given of the activities of the Member States, of IOM and of NGOs. Furthermore, the addresses of Embassies of countries of return in European countries could be displayed.

2. Combination of information provision with reintegration assistance

Another recommendation stems from the findings of the exchange visits in the framework of the IRRiCO II project. One of the findings was that return related information can be effective insofar if it is part of a wider reintegration approach. On that note, IOM

recommends an assessment of potential groups of interest that are or might be in need of specific reintegration schemes. These schemes can comprise return related information, if available, in a structural manner (accessible for wider groups). Return related information can then be considered as an integrated part of return and reintegration assistance. Together with adequate information provision, reintegration assistance can contribute to a sustainable reintegration of returnees in their country of origin.

3. Information provision based on individual needs- Vulnerable groups

For specific groups of migrants, especially persons with medical problems, victims of trafficking, and unaccompanied minors, information must be provided according to the specific individual needs and should be highly detailed. For unaccompanied minors, for example, information provision must include a social assessment of the return possibilities and/or family tracing and must be coordinated with the legal guardians representing the minor. For victims of trafficking, the risk of falling victim again to the traffickers



after returning must be assessed in detail to enable the concerned person to make a truly informed decision. Furthermore, information about the local infrastructure in support of victims should be provided

As for migrants with physical or mental health problems, not only the existing health care infrastructure in the country of origin must be assessed, but also the actual availability and affordability of medicines and treatments, and the needed medical follow-up.

4. Partnerships with migrant communities, NGOs, and governmental agencies

Constant collaboration with all actors is essential when designing and implementing an information provision approach. Local NGOs in countries of return may have access to remote areas and have knowledge on the local setting which can complement other sources of information. In the European countries, NGOs and migrants' communities are valuable partners in order to reach additional migrants and to relay the word on the existence of information provision.

Government ministries are also well positioned to provide accurate and validated information in the countries of origin⁷.

5. Information quality and data protection

Return information provision should involve clear, thorough and objective information based on facts related to returns in the country of origin. There should be a clear distinction between a) information related to return and reintegration provided for migrants to assess the conditions and possibilities of their return and reintegration and b) information linked to security considerations, and aspects related to potential requests for international protection. It should avoid raising the expectations of the returnee through the information that is provided.

The confidentiality of all the data collected must be guaranteed at all times. It must be ensured that the migrant is aware that in some case information will be required to be shared with a third party, and that in this case, it is imperative to seek consent of the migrant in writing.

Encourage a participatory approach to the process. In many cases, the migrant will have first hand information on what the possibilities available are to him/her. Such an approach will assume that the migrants and communities have the experience and capacity to participate in the process.

⁷ Cf. The IOM Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking, 2007, p.4



List of sources

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Checklist on Return Information Provision

Key considerations

- Clear information should be provided so that the individual is aware of all his/her options
- Information should be tailored according to the needs of the individual. Each and every person has different circumstances and these should be taken into account
- Information should be factual and not descriptive
- Ensure that consent is acquired both from the source of the information as well as the consent provided by the individual
- Provide realistic time frames in terms of answering queries or gathering of information
- Ensure a participatory approach—where possible involve other partner agencies, community diasporas, the individual returning
- Do not guarantee that information can be provided. External circumstances can prevent this

Country Fact Sheets

- Who is the target group?
- What is the focus of the country sheets, i.e. which themes should be covered?
- In which languages should the country sheets be published?
- What are the guidelines for information collection?
- Have meetings for the setup of the guidelines been included in the project plan?

- How should the guidelines be established, centrally or in consensus?
- Who collects the information?
- Who reviews the information?

Individual questions

- Who can ask questions?
- Can individuals ask questions or are they centralized by one person or office?
- Are questions and answers open to the public?
- If not, are the questions and answers published later on, or only partially, or not at all?
- Who answers the questions?
- What guidelines are used for the information collection to answer to individual questions?
- What guidelines are used for asking a question?
- What guidelines are used for answering a question?

Outreach and target groups

- Who is the target group of the return information approach?
- How can the target group be reached in order to inform about the approach?
- What media does the target group use?
- Are there business, diaspora, religious venues or other key contacts interacting with the target group who could serve as contact points?
- Where does the target group refer to for advice and services?
- What is the preferred language of communication of the target group?





Significant Projects on Return Information Provision

Up to date, several projects have been implemented in Europe aimed at information provision on return and reintegration possibilities. These are as follows:

Switzerland, Return Information Fund (RIF)

<http://www.ch.iom.int/programme/rif.html>

The RIF project aims to provide the Swiss Federal Office of Migration (FOM) and the return counsellors in the cantons and in the asylum reception centers with adequate and timely, non-protection and non-security related information in order to prepare and support voluntary return and reintegration based on individual information requests.

The RIF project was established in March 2002 and has a worldwide coverage. Return information within RIF has become one of the components of the comprehensive Swiss return and reintegration assistance system, which also includes movement and reintegration assistance. Since 2002, around 2800 individual queries have been answered concerning about 70 countries of origin.

Up to now, the return counsellors have been more and more confronted with complex cases of persons in a vulnerable situation needing to receive very detailed and individualized information on the situation in their country of origin. By providing such information to potential returnees, the RIF project enables them to better prepare and organize their return as well as support the reintegration process as in some cases, the amount for reintegration assistance is decided by the Swiss Federal Office for Migration on the basis of the information collected through RIF.



IOM Bern receives specific information requests from the authorized users (FOM, return counsellors in the cantons and in the reception centers, as well as NGOs active in the field of AVRR) and answers to these requests through the network of IOM field offices (and their local partners). IOM offices in countries of origin are remunerated for the service rendered by a service fee which varies according to the time spent on the query. The final beneficiaries of the information provision are potential returnees currently residing Switzerland.

For countries of particular interest or where a specific AVRR project is in place, fact-sheets are initiated with the IOM mission in the specific country of origin and the general information collected is shared with all the RIF users.

During the first two phases of the IR-RICO project, IOM Bern has cooperated and participated actively providing information within RIF, through the IR-RICO projects.

Germany, ZIRF Counselling

www.bamf.bund.de

The overall objective of this project is to provide individualized, detailed and up-to-date return relevant information to returnees as well as to return counselling/information centres, allowing them to prepare the returnees' travel back appropriately, thus facilitating their reintegration in the respective countries of origin. The target groups are migrants currently residing in Germany, German authorities and specialized return counselling/information centres. In order to acquire the necessary information, IOM is reverting to its network of more than 280 missions in over 100 countries worldwide. Two kinds of information are presented by ZIRF:

The so-called **Country Fact Sheets** offer detailed and up-to-date return relevant information for selected countries of return. These Fact Sheets are financed by the German federal government.

Moreover, detailed information - specific to the life situation of a returnee - can be requested in the form of **individual enquiries**. This part of the project is financed by the German federal states. The Country Fact Sheets and individual enquiries are collected in the ZIRF database, which is publicly available on the website of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).



Ireland, Doras Project

<http://www.iomdublin.org/calendar.htm>

The Directory On Return for Asylum Seekers (DORAS) research project aimed to assist asylum seekers, with both pending and rejected status, to make a more informed decision on voluntary return to their country of origin. It was also intended that this research project enhance the reintegration assistance offered by IOM in countries of return.

The DORAS research project arose as a result of reoccurring questions and concerns expressed by AVRR applicants on matters such as the citizenship of children, access to employment, education opportunities and questions on healthcare provision in their home country. In the past IOM attempted to respond to these concerns on a case by case basis. DORAS then aimed to address such needs by compiling and distributing information sheets addressing as comprehensively as possible the most frequently return related concerns of IOM applicants. DORAS aimed to provide information on service providers for a wide range of social supports and service provision.

The project provided information on the following topics:

- Information on Benefits or Entitlements,
- Healthcare,
- Social Services,
- Education,
- Accommodation,
- Employment,
- Citizenship in Countries of Return,
- Support Groups.



CRI Project Return Information Project and Vulnerable Groups

<http://www.cri-project.eu>

This joint project, coordinated by the Flemish Refugee Action (Belgium) and in partnership with Caritas International Belgium, Coordination and Initiatives for Refugees and Foreigners (CIRÉ) Belgium, Italian Council for Refugees (CIR), ACCEM Spain, and the Danish Refugee Council was active from January 2008 until June 2009, as a follow-up project of a similar initiative. The project was financed by the European Community.

This information project functioned as a network of NGOs for the collection and transfer of specific information on reintegration possibilities for potential returnees and their counsellors.

A close collaboration was set up with grass roots organizations in the countries of reception, who acted as information channels towards their respective communities.

This project was based on Country Fact Sheets providing detailed information on the Country of Return, and on a helpdesk service, answering any specific questions through a network of local partners.

Countries covered by the Cri-Project were Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Bolivia, Bosnia, Cameroon, Congo DRC, Ecuador, Egypt, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea, Kosovo, Macedonia,

Montenegro, Morocco, Russia, and Serbia.

As a follow-up of the now ended CRI project, a national Return Information Project is implemented by the Flemish Refugee Council in Belgium, called CRI-Belgium. This project is active until December 2010 and is financed by the European Return Fund. The number of countries with local information points is now extended to 25; Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Bosnia, Brasilia, Cameroon, Congo DRC, Ecuador, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Kosovo, Macedonia, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Ukraine, Russia, Romania, Senegal, Serbia, Turkey and Togo. These information points are managed in cooperation with Caritas International. A helpdesk at the Flemish Refugee Council is open to all specific questions from potential returnees and their counsellors about these countries. For more information see <http://www.vluchtelingenwerk.be/projecten/cri.php>.

