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INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH THE SUSTAINABLE ASSISTED RETURN OF REJECTED ASYLUM SEEKERS

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Preface

In February 2013, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Policy commissioned the Danish Institute of International Studies to conduct a review of Danish and international experiences with initiatives to promote the voluntary departure of rejected asylum seekers. The aim of the review is to contribute ideas to a catalogue of options capable of supporting future Danish initiatives within the area.

The review puts emphasis on initiatives aimed at promoting coherence between efforts to enhance departure and relevant areas of Danish development policy, in particular development assistance to neighboring areas. Recommendations therefore primarily target relevant initiatives in the countries of origin but also include initiatives initiated and implemented in Denmark when these support voluntary return and sustainable reintegration in the home countries.

The report is written by researchers Zachary Whyte and Dan V. Hirslund. Three senior researchers of the Migration Research Unit at DIIS, respectively Ninna Nyberg Sørensen, Finn Stepputat and Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen have assisted the process.

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Executive Summary

This report was commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and considers international experiences with assisted return of rejected asylum seekers from selected northern European countries. It documents lessons learned and best practices from comparable contexts and provides necessary background information for policy discussions.

The prerequisites and possibilities for creating sustainable reintegration in return contexts is provided by focusing on: (1) key aspects of sustainable return; (2) reintegration measures that facilitate sustainable return; and (3) preparation measures while prospective returnees still reside in host countries. The advantages and limitations of targeted policy instruments are evaluated.

The report follows standard definitions of sustainable return that are relative to individual and contextual outcomes. Assisted return is considered sustainable where: (1) returnees' socio-economic status and fear of violence or persecution is no worse, relative to the population in the place of origin, one year after their return; *and* (2) socio-economic conditions and levels of violence and persecution are not significantly worsened by return, one year after return.

Basic levels of security are a necessary prerequisite for sustainable return and for the protection of returnees' rights. Security levels should be evaluated both individually and locally.

An embeddedness framework is applied to guide sustainability considerations. Embeddedness measures interdependent factors of sustainable return and consists of three dimensions: (1) livelihood embeddedness, referring to the material conditions for building sustainable livelihoods; (2) social network embeddedness, which outlines access to and information on social contacts and relations; (3) psychosocial embeddedness, which is important to construct identities, to feel at home, safe and psychologically well. While most return programs focus on the first of these dimensions, expanding policy understandings of sustainability to include all three could help improve long-term outcomes of return measures.

The report recommends that
1. possibilities for international cooperation be further explored, particularly where low numbers of returnees are assisted,

2. a diversity of implementing actors be maintained to ensure a variation in approaches and a fruitful exchange of experiences,
3. a holistic approach to return is adopted, interlinking pre- and post-return assistance at a programmatic level so as to enhance return preparedness,
4. better knowledge of rejected asylum seekers should be acquired and tailoring of return programs to individual should be increased, and
5. monitoring and evaluation of assisted return programs should be improved in order to learn from past experiences, share knowledge, and ensure the safety and sustainability of return.

The report specifically recommends a more holistic approach to return that: (1) takes both individual, community and contextual factors of return into consideration through an attention to multiple forms of embeddedness; (2) uses re-integration measures strategically, based on an understanding of the capacities of individual returnees and their return contexts; (3) develops specific instruments already in host countries that prepare rejected asylum seekers for return; (4) increases and institutionalizes cooperation between states, development organizations, humanitarian actors and service partners.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of challenges to and international experiences with the implementation of assisted return programs in selected European countries. The focus of the report is on relatively concrete issues and possibilities, and its aim is to form the basis of a structured catalogue of ideas to improve future assisted return policy work in Denmark in two ways:

- Promoting the ability and willingness of rejected asylum seekers to make use of assisted return programs
- Increasing the sustainability of assisted return programs

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Approach

This report is a desk study, based on a review of relevant reports, evaluations, websites, and academic literature, dealing with issues of the assisted return of rejected asylum seekers, primarily in the Nordic countries, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, and the UK.

In categorizing these materials, a number of significant gaps have been identified in the literature. There is a somewhat surprising (given the policy attention they have attracted) lack of information about the profiles of rejected asylum seekers in European countries. This hampers useful comparison of assisted return programs, as divergences in uptake and success may relate to issues like the social backgrounds of the individuals being returned. Similarly, there is a general lack of data on the lives of returnees, particularly in the medium and long term. The time limited project span of return programmes and the tradition of subcontracting to migrant organization makes it difficult to evaluate the situation of returnees in the long term. This hampers evaluations of the sustainability of returns.

As a result the majority of the literature surveyed has been synoptic with only a few more comprehensive evaluations, involving interviews with various stakeholders. These have been weighted in the following, though the report draws on the combined literature. In addition a handful of interviews with key stakeholders and experts have been conducted.

The terms of reference call for particular focus on experiences in the following countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria. Of these countries, Syria is not currently a viable return country, because of the security situation there, and the possibilities for sustainable return in the country once the immediate security concerns are alleviated are impossible to predict. Somalia is similarly not currently a viable return country. Despite some reports of an easing of security concerns in Mogadishu, none of the countries surveyed currently have return programs for rejected asylum seekers to Somalia. Indeed, IOM reports that they do not currently have a field office there. Given this and the swiftness with which return conditions change, this report refers primarily to more general structural conditions in return contexts (e.g. the presence of viable local economies, job markets, etc.). Attempts have been made to give specific examples from especially Iraq and Afghanistan, but many of the examples and recommendations are applicable across a wide variety of return countries, and may indeed also be applicable to Syria and Somalia in the future.

1.2.2 Report structure

This report starts from the problem of sustainability and works back to the ways in which specific measures may help support returnees in the medium to long term. Starting from the return context, it examines the factors involved in sustainable return, based on an embeddedness model (Chapter 2). It then turns to some broader considerations of assisted return policy frameworks (Chapter 3), before presenting and discussing specific measures involved in assisting return in return countries (Chapter 4) and finally in host countries (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 presents thematized recommendations, based on the literature surveyed.

1.3 Terminology

This section briefly reviews and defines three key terms in the report: rejected asylum seekers, assisted return, and sustainable return.

1.3.1 Rejected asylum seekers

The category rejected asylum seekers applies to persons whose asylum cases have been finally rejected by the relevant asylum authorities in the host country. While rejected asylum seekers by definition have been determined not to have valid claims for recognition as refugees, this does not mean that they will necessarily be safe on return, nor does it end protection responsibilities of host states.

In the case of Denmark, the term refers to asylum seekers, whose asylum applications have been denied by the Danish Immigration Service (*Udlændingestyrelsen*), and whose subsequent appeals before the Refugee Appeals Board (*Flygtningenævnet*) have also been rejected. However, it is important to note that though rejected asylum seekers have no further court of appeal and are obliged under Danish law to leave the territory, they have not necessarily exhausted all possibilities for gaining legal entry to Denmark. Some, generally very ill, rejected asylum seekers may be accepted on humanitarian grounds; in some cases, the Refugee Appeals Board may re-examine particular cases leading to the granting of some form of protection without a further appeal; the rejected asylum seekers may be able to apply for residence on other grounds; and so on. This is an important point to which Chapter 5 will return, as the appeal of assisted return programs to rejected asylum seekers is not least shaped by their sense of their possible futures (regular or irregular) in host countries.

In terms of their assisted return, rejected asylum seekers face very different situations from recognized refugees or others with legal status in host countries. In particular, their return precludes legal re-migration to European countries and thus hampers the kinds of transnational networks and livelihoods described for e.g. Bosnian refugees (Eastmond 2006) and Moroccan migrants (de Bree et al. 2010).

1.3.2 Assisted return

In this report, assisted return denotes the accepted, managed return of foreign nationals to their country of origin. There is a proliferation of terminology in the reports on what we here call assisted return. IOM prefers the term "assisted voluntary return (and reintegration)", however the degree of voluntariness is heavily disputed (e.g. Black et al. 2004; Webber 2011). As these studies ask, to what extent can we speak of voluntariness if the immediate alternative is deportation? The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) summarizes the issue for rejected asylum seekers: "The freedom to decide is limited to the way in which return is to take place, in the best case this means the voluntary availment of assistance to follow the obligation to leave" (2003: 27). We have therefore chosen to follow the European Migration Network (2011) in using a general term that does not explicitly make claims as to the volition of returnees, but rather focuses on the actions of the state. This is not to brush over the question of voluntariness, but to adopt a terminology that makes no prior assumptions about it, so that it may be more objectively examined.

This question of voluntariness may help place assisted return conceptually. While there is a great deal of literature on return migration, the limited voluntary nature of

assisted return distinguishes it within the broader category. On the other hand, as will be discussed below, assisted return should also be distinguished from deportation or forced return, since it affords at least some degree of agency to the returnees.

The assisted return programs examined are aimed at rejected asylum seekers, though the individual programs often may also target other groups of migrants without legal residence in the host country (e.g. irregular migrants, stranded migrants). They all involve three distinct phases: pre-return packages in the host country, travel and logistical arrangements, and post-return assistance (also called reintegration) in the country of origin.

1.3.3 Sustainable return

As with assisted return, there is not a great deal of terminological unison in the use of the term sustainable return across the reports, we have surveyed. Broadly speaking, sustainable return relates both to *individual factors* and outcomes and to *contextual factors* of policy, society, economy and conflict (Black and Gent 2006). Ideally, the two levels support one another, as returnees establish themselves, invest in, and help develop their regions of origin. However, returnees, backed by resources from assisted return programs, may equally compete with locals for scarce resources like housing, healthcare, and livelihoods, as the UNHCR has warned about based on experiences with assisted return programs in the Balkans (UNHCR 2004).

In this report, we make use of the concept of *embeddedness* which has been developed recently from a larger comparative research project in the Netherlands to frame sustainable return (Ruben et al. 2009). Embeddedness refers to how individuals find and define their position in society upon return and consists of three interrelated dimensions: (1) *livelihood* embeddedness, referring to the material conditions for building sustainable livelihoods; (2) *social network* embeddedness, which supports access to and information on social contacts and relations, and (3) *psychosocial* embeddedness, which is important to construct one's identity, to feel at home, safe and psychologically well.

1.4 Background

Assisted return programs play increasingly important roles in the migration return policies of European countries. In Denmark, this is reflected in the implementation of the European Return Directive (Directive 2008/115/EC) in national legislation, which mandates safe and dignified "voluntary return" as the first option for rejected

asylum seekers. However, Danish rates of assisted return are very low. IOM, which is responsible for the majority of assisted returns from Europe, reports that it returned 66 asylum seekers and refugees from Denmark to their countries of origin in 2012.

According to the most recent data available from the Danish Police, there were 1,407 rejected asylum seekers in Denmark as of 2 September, 2012, who were legally obliged to leave the country after their asylum applications were refused. This group encompasses some 65 known nationalities, the largest national groups being from Afghanistan (477), Iran (182), Syria (153), Russia (72), and Iraq (59) (Danish Police 2012). The number of rejected asylum seekers has been on the rise in recent years as asylum acceptance rates have fallen. At the end of 2010, the number was 844, and by the end of 2011, it was 978. Importantly, a good proportion of these rejected asylum seekers are either impossible or exceedingly difficult for the police to deport. At the moment, this includes unaccompanied minors, those on tolerated stay, and Iranian and Iraqinationals. All told, this group amounts to 890 individuals or nearly two-thirds of the group, who are left in a legal limbo. In this context, a successful, assisted return policy is an attractive policy option.

The recent asylum agreement between the Danish government, the Red-Green Alliance, and Liberal Alliance mandates an increased emphasis on the assisted return of rejected asylum seekers, and the involvement of Danish development funds in establishing sustainable, comprehensive solutions for assisted return.

There are two key prerequisites, if returns of rejected asylum seekers are to make use of Danish development funds: 1. The returns must be voluntary. Deportations or forced removals fall outside the scope of Danish development policy. 2. Danish development funds may only be used in low-income countries (GNI per capita < 3,200 USD), limiting the countries in which these funds may be used to support assisted return.

While these prerequisites are tied to the use of Danish development funds, they speak to two central issues in return policies generally. Namely, the preferential use of voluntary return over forced removals or deportations, and the development perspectives of assisted return programs in countries of origin (Mommers & Velthuis 2010a; HIT Foundation 2010; European Migration Network 2011).

The review of the international literature reminds us of the importance of realistic expectations on both counts. Very few assisted return programs achieve large uptakes among rejected asylum seekers, and the development perspectives for countries of

origin are often unclear. Nevertheless, there are significant variations in the return programs examined, both as regards uptake and impact in the home countries, and there are important lessons to be learned for Danish return policy in particular, which may significantly improve existing programs.

1.4.1 Assisted versus forced return

The Danish Police are responsible for removing rejected asylum seekers from Danish territory, and they use a range of measures to do so. They organize forced returns where required, but first try to convince rejected asylum seekers to cooperate in arranging their own departure. They do so through various motivation-inducing measures, including financial sanctions, relocation to a so-called "removal center," reductions in the right to participate in courses and internships, and regular, mandatory reporting to the Danish Police.

However, existing evidence suggest that the use of sanctions to induce assisted return, not only creates resentment and suffering on the part of the potential returnees, reducing longer-term sustainability, but is also largely ineffective in terms of promoting return. This has been reported in the Danish case, based on interviews with rejected asylum seekers (Andersen 2009). In the Norwegian case, the much more radical withdrawal of all benefits, including the right to reside in asylum centers, from 600 so-called "unreturnable" asylum seekers in Norway in 2004 had no impact on their uptake of "voluntary" return programs (Brekke 2008). In the Dutch case, an extensive IOM study found that the detention of rejected asylum seekers is similarly ineffective in inducing their return (Kox 2011). And the Danish Police report that some sanctions aimed at inducing return, such as the mandatory reporting in to police stations, seem to have no discernible effect (Danish Police 2012).

While several reports suggest that the credible threat of deportation can significantly increase the uptake of assisted return programs (e.g. Black et al. 2011; Valenta et al. 2010), as Blitz et al. (2005) argue based on interviews with the Afghan community in the UK, the use of deportations also can undermine confidence in these same programs. Fundamentally, impending forced removal may encourage rejected asylum seekers to accept assisted return programs so as to gain some measure of assistance from their departure. However, forced removals simultaneously undermine rejected asylum seekers' trust in the state, thereby limiting their interest in assisted return programs, except when they feel themselves to have no choice. For those rejected asylum seekers for whom deportation is especially difficult this can prove a problematic cross-pressure, reducing their willingness to participate in assisted return programs.

In general, all the evaluation reports surveyed, advocate the preferential use of assisted over forced return. In a thorough survey, Black et al. (2011: 5-8) list the following advantages to assisted over forced return:

- *They are cost-effective.* Black et al. estimate they generally cost on the order of a tenth of a forced return. IGC (2012) has a more modest, but still significant, appraisal of the costs at 3-5 times cheaper.
- *They smooth co-operation between states* by reducing the need for political agreements and minimizing potentially fractious direct contact through the intercession of organizations like the IOM.
- *They are supported by moral and political arguments* insofar as the forced return of migrants against their will "is widely seen as morally objectionable and generates significant political opposition" (Black et al. 2011: 7). Forced return also has repercussions for cooperation with NGOs and migrant groups.
- *They offer more sustainable return and development gains* through their various reintegration programs.

Finally, assisted return is also preferable from a human rights perspective. Forced returns in Europe have been routinely criticized by human rights organizations of all stripes as demeaning and potentially dangerous. Assisted returns by contrast offer some degree of voluntariness and dignity.

A key issue to consider in weighing assisted and forced return, is that these two options by no means make up the totality of options for rejected asylum seekers. Some remain in host countries despite the "motivation-inducing" measures aimed at moving them, often citing security concerns in their homelands. Others do move on, but independently of either assisted or forced return programs. In Denmark, the single largest category of rejected asylum seekers leaving the country are those the Police call "assumed departed" [*skønnet udrejst*], meaning that they were not found at their previous residence and that their whereabouts are unknown. In 2011, 111 out of 169 departed, rejected Afghani asylum seekers fell into this category. (By comparison, IOM assisted in the return of 30 Afghanis of all legal statuses to Afghanistan in the same period.) It seems likely that not all of these rejected asylum seekers have in fact left the country, instead leading the precarious existence of irregular migrants. However, there are no hard data either way. We may perhaps think of these numbers as indicating a certain level of "voting with one's feet": a significant proportion of rejected asylum seekers consider the possibilities presented to them by assisted return programs inferior to the lives they can carve out irregularly either

in Denmark or elsewhere. On the other hand, it is well known that hopes attached to migration and the distant promises of better livelihoods may remain high despite restrictive policies. However, the significant gap between the number of rejected and the number of voluntary returnees suggest that there is an unrealized potential in current assisted return programs and in this regard the focus on sustainable return possibilities is likely to make a difference in the uptake.

1.4.2 Development perspectives of sustainable assisted return

Definitions of sustainability in key reports differ with some focusing on livelihood situation relative to the average local population, others on the absence of remigration, and yet others on returnees' own perspectives. Thus, the question of sustainability in specific cases may depend on who one is asking, since what may be sustainable for those managing migration, may not be experienced as such by returnees themselves.

This report follows Black and Gent in their definition that return is sustainable for individuals if "returnees' socio-economic status and fear of violence or persecution is no worse, relative to the population in the place of origin, one year after their return" (2006: 26) and for return contexts "if socio-economic conditions and levels of violence and persecution are not significantly worsened by return, as measured one year after the return process is complete" (2006: 28). While this may seem a somewhat minimal definition of sustainable return, it may usefully remind us that in the case of returning small numbers of rejected asylum seekers from European countries, the sustainability of return may in some cases amount to risk mitigation for individual returnees, rather than significant community development.

Without a conductive socio-economic environment, return is in any case unlikely to be sustainable irrespective of the program support. What constitutes a secure and stable environment varies but should include: (1) access to resources; (2) adequate level of infrastructure in terms of transport, energy, water; (3) a reliable health care system; (4) an accessible education system; (5) institutionally guaranteed respects for human rights; (6) absence of violent conflict. Especially in post-conflict societies, but in many other societies as well, one or more of these parameters will likely be missing, and this poses particular challenges when contemplating assisted return measures.

Finally, as the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation & Poverty (2009) noted, the development opportunities for assisted return are difficult to gauge while monitoring systems remain short-term and uneven.

2. Security, Embeddedness and Sustainable Return

This chapter considers key issues in sustainable assisted return. Fundamental questions of security must be answered satisfactorily before any rejected asylum seeker can be returned to the countries of origin. But beyond security a range of different factors speak to the possibilities for individual returnees to create sustainable lives in return countries. Drawing on the work of researchers at Radboud University Nijmegen, we adapt their concept of embeddedness, which considers the sustainability of return along three dimensions, to the situation of returning rejected asylum seekers from Denmark. Ruben et al. define embeddedness thus:

> Embeddedness refers to the ways how individuals find and define their position in society, feel a sense of belonging and possibilities for participation in society. It consists of three interrelated dimensions: (1) economic embeddedness, referring to the material conditions for building sustainable livelihoods, (2) social network embeddedness, which supports access to and information on social contacts and relations, and (3) psychosocial embeddedness, which is important to construct one's identity, to feel at home, safe, and psychologically well. (Ruben et al. 2009: 910)

Fundamentally, this points to the interlinked importance for returnees of securing livelihoods, re-establishing social relationships, and finding a footing. As described and further explicated in Chapter 4, most assisted return programs cater primarily to the first of these dimensions.

Embeddedness processes are highly individualized and highly localized, though they are of course framed by broader contextual structures. For example, while individuals may embed themselves more or less easily in local job markets, depending on a range of personal factors, the overall economic context will fundamentally shape their possibilities.

Finally, it should be noted that the notion of embeddedness should not be seen as necessarily implying an embedding in a specific place, as implied in the "durable solutions" advocated by the UNHCR. In other words, achieving embeddedness does not necessarily entail the cessation of movement. On the contrary, as Stepputat (2004) has argued more broadly for displaced populations, the "mobile livelihoods" of potential returnees should be taken into account when planning their return and

reintegration. As Monsutti (2008) has argued in the Afghan case, mobility may indeed be a pervasive and sustainable livelihood strategy in some return contexts, well-adapted to insecure and changing circumstances.

2.1 Security

Basic levels of security are a necessary prerequisite for any sustainable assisted return program. It is the primary factor identified by potential returnees, when asked about factors influencing their decision to return (Black et al. 2004), and there is thus an overriding need to consider security issues carefully in any assisted return program.

Security issues are much broader than questions of physical safety. During the asylum application procedure the safety of specific individuals in countries of origin are being evaluated. The absence of immediate safety threats, however, does not preclude wider security concerns that result from generalized conflict or regional instability and which have consequences for peoples' mobility, livelihood, clean water, health, and education facilities. Vulnerable returnees may face particular security risks. They range from psychological issues that are more difficult to treat in the return country, possibly raising questions about the mental competence of returnees to make an informed decision to return (Conze and Müller 2004), to the position of single women, returning without the support of social networks (UNFPA & IOM 2006), to challenges faced by unaccompanied minors (Crawley 2010; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012). While some forms of vulnerability are general (e.g. medical and psychological issues, being an unaccompanied minor), many forms of vulnerability are specific to return contexts (e.g. gender, sexuality, minority status) and must be evaluated in relation to specific and local situations. There is an increasing focus on targeting assisted return programs to specific vulnerable groups in European countries (VREN 2012). In Denmark this has led to specific return programs for unaccompanied minors and victims of trafficking (Rambøll 2012).

Return itself may also pose a security risk for returnees. Ceri Oeppen (*interview*), a researcher at the University of Sussex, related the case of one of her informants from a research trip to Afghanistan in 2013. The man had returned from Europe to an area in Afghanistan now controlled by anti-Government forces. Here he was accused of being a European agent, or spy, since it was considered unthinkable that he had returned there voluntarily. Faced with demands to support these anti-Government forces either financially or by joining them - neither of which he was willing to do - he was forced to flee to Kabul with severe repercussions for his possibilities for

reintegration. A recent European Asylum Support Office report on Afghanistan quotes a regional expert as saying: "Often, the level of threat for persons or institutions depends on who they are: internationals are probably more under threat than Afghans, but since Afghans always move in an environment where their background is checked (by social control), they might be in danger just for their 'wrong' connections or background" (EASO 2012: 31). The local security risks of association with Western states, NGOs, and companies is well documented in Afghanistan (Danish Immigration Service 2012), and if this identification of returnees with the country to which they migrated is widespread, it should be an area of serious concern with consequences for Danish assisted return programs.

The above considerations should remind us of the importance of determining security issues individually and locally. To do so requires both a good understanding of individual returnees to assess their vulnerabilities and possibilities and an up-to-date and detailed understanding of the situation on the ground in the return country.

2.2 Livelihood embeddedness

Livelihood embeddedness speaks to the material conditions for building sustainable lives in return contexts. "In practice, a livelihood captures whether people have access to resources and services, such as income, work, housing, land, inputs, transportation, education, and health care" (Ruben et al. 2009: 915). Here reference is made to two of these factors: economic subsistence and housing.

This is perhaps the dimension of embeddedness most dependent on contextual factors in the return country. In countries like Afghanistan with weak economies and state structures and high levels of insecurity and internal displacement, achieving livelihood embeddedness is difficult for returnees and those who stay, alike. This poses significant challenges for sustainable assisted return programs both in terms of increasing uptake from rejected asylum seekers and in terms of offering sustainable opportunities in the return country. This is reflected in the relatively low number of returnees to Afghanistan from European countries.

In countries like Iraq, where some regions are relatively more secure, where state structures function to a greater degree and where economies are stronger, livelihood embeddedness is also more achievable. For returnees to northern Iraq, in particular, this means that it is possible to build viable livelihoods through various kinds of employment. Unlike Afghanistan, public sector jobs are considered very

attractive in northern Iraq, in part because of pensions and job security (IOM 2012a; Strand 2011).

2.2.1 Economic subsistence

For returnees to manage sustainable lives, they naturally need a source of income. However, this is a fundamental challenge in most return contexts, where un- and underemployment are rife. Engaging with these challenges is the primary approach for the majority of assisted return programs, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

For returnees in particular, a number of factors may hinder their access to jobs:

- *Lack of access to investment money for businesses and education.* Returnees are often weighed down by significant debts incurred for travel to host countries. In Afghanistan, this adds to a context already marked by high levels of debt (Cosgrave et al. 2012).
- *Increased secondary displacement* – often to urban settings – in return countries, may result from the inability to return to home districts for security reasons, loss of land rights, or a lack of social networks.
- *Reduced access to social capital.* Social networks embeddedness is fundamental to finding employment in most return settings and returnees are often at a disadvantage here. This has been identified as a particular problem in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- *Skills degradation while in the host country.* Prolonged, institutional waiting can reduce the capacity of returnees to find employment in return countries (Ruben et al. 2009).
- *Discrimination.* In some countries returnees face routine discrimination and humiliation, as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission reports in Afghanistan (AIHRC 2011). This impacts their abilities to access economic embeddedness, but also can be a significant obstacle to social networks and psychosocial embeddedness.

2.2.2 Housing

Many return contexts involve significant shortages of or conflicts over housing and land. This has significant impacts on the possibilities for returnee embeddedness.

For returnees in particular, a number of factors may hinder their access to housing:
- Property owned before asylum migration may be destroyed or appropriated.
- Inflated housing and rental prices in urban areas may hit returnees harder, be-

cause they lack regular income.
- Being forced to stay in the homes of relatives or friends may result in cramped, unsustainable living conditions.

2.2 Social network obstacles

Establishing or re-establishing social relationships is crucial for sustainable return, but often overlooked in assisted return processes focused on the individual returnee. "These networks add to social capital, comprising features of social organization, reciprocity, networks, information flows, and social safety nets that emerge from the relationships amongst individuals." (Ruben et al. 2009: 915). Social networks, which often underwrite the asylum migration to the host country, may play even more vital roles for returnees, particularly in the early stages of their arrival.

The return of rejected asylum seekers to their countries of origin has repercussions not only for themselves, but also for members of their kin and other social networks, and for their places in these networks. Asylum seekers, who are granted asylum, not only achieve personal safety, but can most likely support members of their networks through systems of remittances. Rejected and returned asylum seekers often find themselves drawing on the support of their social networks instead.

While social networks embeddedness is critical for the strategies of many returnees, it is also important to note that it does not automatically entail desirable outcomes from a development standpoint. Social networks may limit the possibilities of women, children, and other vulnerable returnees to pursue livelihoods, even while providing some measure of protection to them.

For returning rejected asylum seekers, social networks embeddedness faces some specific challenges:

- *Returnees may be in an unfavorable position within existing networks due to allegations of 'failed migration'.* In an anthropological study of forced returnees to Somalia, Peutz (2006) describes societal expectations of a successful and prosperous return. Her informants' empty-handed returns were failures in this regard. Local return contexts even suspected the returnees of been expelled for criminality, drug addiction or HIV/AIDS infection. This understanding of "failed migration" is evident in most return contexts, and can have serious repercussions for the place and possibilities of returnees. Arne Strand (2008) cites

the case of an Afghani asylum seeker, who having failed to secure residence in Europe, was ordered back to his home country to divorce his wife, by his irate father-in-law. "You are insane. How could you go there and return without anything? You left Paradise!" was one reaction of a returnee's relative in Guinea (Davids & van Houte 2008: 185). Returnees describe their failed migration as intensely shameful, and in some cases, this may cause them to avoid contact with their social networks, instead attempting re-migration on their own either internally or abroad.

- *Weakened social networks disproportionately affect vulnerable groups.* Minors, women, the disabled, and stigmatized returnee groups are particularly dependent on everyday support from their family and kin relations. Without these, return will not be sustainable

- *Weak state structures put extra pressure on social networks.* The absence of state institutions for creating jobs and providing basic social services, as is often the case in conflict and transitory societies, turns social networks into resources for livelihood and security. This is one finding to emerge from the Norwegian evaluation of return to Afghanistan (Strand 2008), where occupational assistance programs have had limited success with securing returnees stable, long-term livelihoods, precisely because the lack of social network integration was a major inhibiting factor in creating sustainability.

- *Returnees do not necessarily return to the same place they lived before migrating.* This has been noted for Iraqi returnees due to the fundamental restructuring of the socio-political landscape in the central and southern parts of the country. The areas around Baghdad and Basra continue to be volatile environments both from a security and a livelihood perspective and some returnees have chosen to relocate to new areas instead. In Afghanistan, urbanization processes and wider transformations of society have registered in returnees wish to return to Kabul rather than the rural areas they originated from. This displacement reduces social networks embeddedness.

2.3 Psychosocial obstacles

Social, cultural and psychological aspects of return are important factors to consider when evaluating the prospects for a sustainable return. The migration experience may have changed the individual returnee mentally, psychologically, and in terms of identity. The return context may no longer seem like "home", both because the migration experience has shifted returnees' perspectives and because of the often quite massive changes that may have taken place there in the interim. Further, the

actual process of returning after being denied asylum involves confronting and being confronted with the disappointment of a 'failed migration' with repercussions for both self-conceptions and relations to social networks (see above).

In general, psychosocial obstacles can significantly hinder the ability of returned rejected asylum seekers to participate in both local and transnational networks and to access sustainable livelihoods.
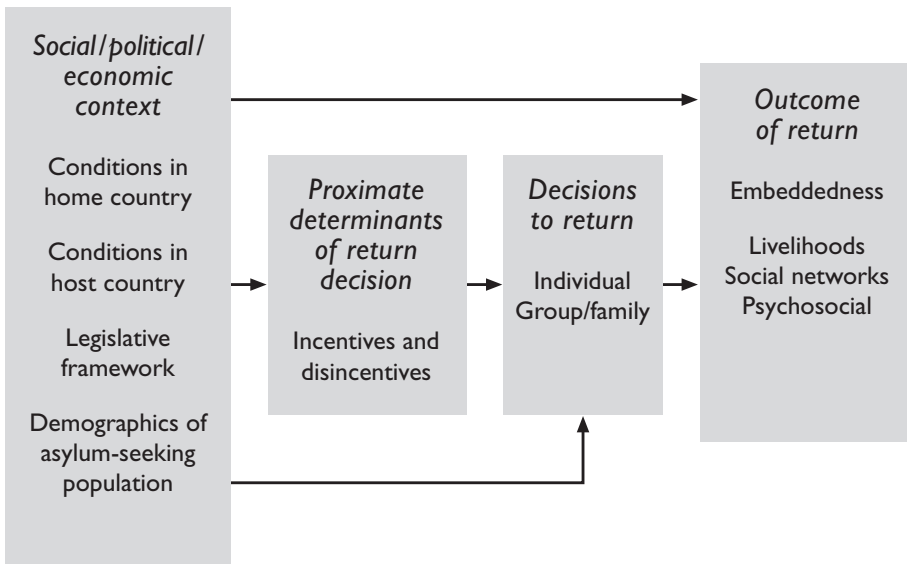
A number of distinguishing factors can be discerned:

- *Trauma and mental health.* Levels of trauma and mental health issues are significantly higher among asylum seekers than other populations. Two significant causes of this are: 1. The increased prevalence of torture experiences among this group. In a very recent study by Amnesty International, doctors found that 27 percent of rejected asylum seekers in the closed institution Ellebæk had been subject to torture (Amnesty International's Danske Lægegruppe 2013). 2. The debilitating effects of extended waits in institutional settings on mental health, which have been documented across the world (e.g. Robjant et al. 2009).
- *Institutionalization in the country of asylum.* In addition to mental health problems, extended stays in asylum centers can lead to general passivity and institutionalization (Ruben et al. 2009; Red Cross 2006). This impacts the possibilities for returnee re-embedding in the return country, but it also reduces uptake in assisted return programs in the first place (Valenta et al. 2010).
- *Mistrust of host states and associated agencies.* Rejected asylum seekers' experiences of the asylum process, especially when coupled with degrees of institutionalization, often lead to pervasive suspicion of host state authorities and associated agencies (Whyte 2009). This may have repercussions for both interactions with assisted return programs in the return country and the acceptance of them.
- *Changes to senses of home.* With exposure to a radically different social reality, cultural values will often change, and migrants may experience that they no longer "belong" in the social environment of their former peers. In Bosnia, Markowitz and Stefansson (2004) show how expectations of "home" for returnees have changed during their life in exile and how local notions and practices of home have likewise undergone transformations during conflict and post-conflict reconciliation, thus making it very challenging to return without adjusting experiences and practices for all parties involved. A group of Iraqi refugees, who repatriated from Denmark in the early 2000s, only to return within 12 months, reported similar feelings of alienation (Riiskjær & Nielsson 2008). Further,

some asylum migrants leave their countries of origin precisely because they do not feel at home there, which further problematizes the notion of "home" or "homecoming" in return contexts. This sense of alienation can have wide-ranging repercussions, both individually and in terms of broader embeddedness in return countries.

The following figure summarizes a range of factors leading to sustainable return.

Factors leading to the sustainability of return

Social/political/economic context Conditions in home country Conditions in host country Legislative framework Demographics of asylum-seeking population	*Proximate determinants of return decision* Incentives and disincentives	*Decisions to return* Individual Group/family	*Outcome of return* Embeddedness Livelihoods Social networks Psychosocial

3. Policy Frameworks for Assisted Return of Rejected Asylum Seekers

As the development of assisted return programs have intensified in the past decade, the need for a strengthened framework for developing assisted return policies has increased. This chapter looks at some of the central recommendations for policymakers in thinking through the implication of different program designs. It deals with general concerns and approaches in planning assisted return and lays the ground for the more detailed discussions in chapters 4 and 5 of the advantages and limitations of specific return instruments in the different phases of the return process.

3.1 Institutional and legal framework

Return measures for rejected asylum seekers take place within a set of general EU directives but are subject to a wide variety of national legal frameworks outlining the possibilities and limitations of actual return policies. All the states surveyed in this report maintain targeted, country-specific, and time-limited programs for return. These generally arise in response to particular policy pressures. For example, in Denmark, there have been three specific programs targeting Iraqis (operating in 2003-4, 2005, 2007-9). In addition to specific programs, some countries maintain broader, continuous return frameworks, such as the Return and Emigration of Aliens from the Netherlands (REAN) in the Netherlands, Return and Emigration of Asylum Seekers Ex-Belgium (REAB) in Belgium, and Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) in the UK.

The establishment of the European Return Fund was an attempt to create a more generalized approach to dealing with assisted return in Europe, and the European Convention on Human Rights forms an important binding instrument in this regard. But as return measures have so far mainly been developed within individual nation-states, this has made it difficult to create a supranational framework for formulating return assistance policies. In addition, member states have in many cases developed temporary directives targeting a subgroup of asylum seekers and thereby complicated the development of long-term approaches to return issues. This has obvious implications for a sustainable return approach, which requires a sustained commitment to return contexts and seeks to ensure that return policies do not breach states' human rights obligations.

The Dutch Hit Foundation (2010) has made a useful distinction between a "justice" and a "development" approach to assisted return. Member states' return initiatives, they explain, can be distinguished according to whether they focus on "regulating unwanted migrants" or on "enhancing the resources of the returnee for personal development and the development of the country of return". *Justice* initiatives are characterized by programs that focus on the individual returnee, on persuading people to return, on fast results, and that migrants quickly leave the host country. By contrast, a *development* approach focuses on mid- and long-term impacts of a return situation, takes the specific circumstances of the country of return into consideration, looks both to the individual returnee and the social network they are returning to, and attempts to convince rather than persuade returnees by offering a prospective for the future.

> *Developing a binding, transparent framework for effective, safe and dignified return is best served by political initiatives that follow international guidelines, have general applicability and focus on 'development' rather than 'justice' issues.*

3.2 International cooperation

The majority of assisted return programs are implemented by individual states, though reports regularly call for increased levels of cooperation between host states. Particularly in contexts of low numbers of returnees, cooperating with other states may make return programs more viable. This was a key recommendation from the Austrian ICMPD in their study on different forms of incentives to promote the return of rejected asylum seekers (2003). As the HIT Foundation point out in their study on European cooperation on the sustainable return and reintegration of asylum seekers (2010), current cooperation is still very limited and largely takes place at three levels: (1) Information exchange at the ministerial and technocratic level; (2) Pragmatic alliances between states that share particular interests, e.g. in arranging joint flights to countries of origin; (3) Indirectly within large organisations like the IOM, which transfers information between its various country offices. 93 percent of funding from the European Return Fund is transferred back into national return programs, rather than used for cooperative endeavors (HIT Foundation 2010).

Nevertheless, certain initiatives have been taken at the European level (e.g. the RANA - Return, Reception and Reintegration of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan - program, which provided a European framework for the return of Afghan nationals from 2003-2007), largely financed by the European Return Fund. In addition, a number of initiatives are currently starting up. Thus Belgium, France, Germany, the

Netherlands, and Sweden are exploring the possibilities of joint assisted return efforts through a structure called the ERI (European Reintegration Instrument). The aims of this instrument include eventually jointly subcontracting reintegration programs in specific return countries. Ideally, this might allow the provision of more comprehensive, diverse, and sustainable reintegration measures simply through increases in the total numbers of returnees and thereby the resources available in individual return contexts. In addition, some attempts have been made to coordinate measures aimed at vulnerable groups, like the European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors (ERPUM), which is a joint program between Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, the UK, and Denmark aimed at arranging family reunification and return for unaccompanied minors.[1] However, concerns have been expressed about the implementation of ERPUM, and whether it conforms to the best interests of the child (UNHCR The Netherlands 2012), underscoring the need for careful consultation when implementing assisted returns. Cross-national return measures have also appeared, such as the Magnet job placement project run by the IOM on behalf of the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Austria.

> *Denmark's lack of participation in the European Return Fund should not preclude participating in some of these forms of cooperation.*

3.3 Implementing partners

Assisted return programs are almost universally implemented – at least in part – by international and non-governmental organizations, rather than directly by states. The IOM is the single largest global actor in the arena of assisted return of rejected asylum seekers but is often supplemented by other organizations that are involved in the different stages of assisted return programs. The outsourcing of migration management from local governance structures can have a number of negative consequences for sustainability (Nyberg Sørensen and Gammeltoft-Hansen 2013). These include questions about the distribution of legal responsibilities in handling assisted return and the protection of returnees' rights, possible unintended consequences of the commercialization of return assistance, and the long-term impacts on return contexts. However, strong guidelines, effective monitoring, and clear lines of communication can help mitigate some of these risks.

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[1] http://www.migrationsverket.se/info/4597_en.html

Managing the different coordinating actors is key to a successful and sustainable assisted return program. There is an underutilized opportunity for institutionalizing the cooperation between states, humanitarian organizations and service providers that could be strengthened.

Implementing partners of selected European countries

Country	Pre-return	Travel	Post-return
Belgium	>60 local partners	IOM	IOM Caritas
Denmark	Danish Refugee Council IOM	IOM	IOM (Danish Refugee Council) (Care4You) (AGEF)
Finland	IOM	IOM	IOM
Germany	Länder IOM Caritas UNHCR Local NGOs	IOM	Länder IOM Caritas UNHCR Local NGOs
Netherlands	Platform for sustainable return (10 organizations, incl state, NGOs, IOM)	IOM	Platform for sustainable return (10 organizations, incl state, NGOs, IOM)
Norway	IOM BIP	IOM	IOM BIP
Sweden	IOM Red Cross Country-specific NGOs	IOM	IOM Red Cross
Switzerland	Cantons Red Cross Caritas IOM	swissREPAT	IOM FIZ Advocacy
United Kingdom	Refugee Action	Refugee Action	Refugee Action

3.3.1 IOM

Founded in 1951, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the most influential organization in the field of migration management with more than 470 field offices, 149 member states, 7,800 staff, 2,300 projects and a budget of USD 1.3 billion worldwide. The majority of European countries use IOM to facilitate the return of rejected asylum seekers in some capacity, including the pre-return, travel and post-return phases. IOM is also present in the field of refugee assistance in several of the countries that returnees return to, including Iraq and Afghanistan.

IOM's strengths lie in their highly-developed institutional infrastructure and their long experience with assisted return (IOM has facilitated return migration since the early 1970s). Importantly, however, IOM is first and foremost a service provider (logistics, advice, border management, and so on), and not a humanitarian organization. While it to quite an extent is involved in humanitarian assistance, the services it provides in terms of return and reintegration are largely determined by the wishes and funding of donors. This is relevant when considering rights and long-term needs of returning migrants that might not be targeted by partners unless specifically stated in the program.

3.3.2 Humanitarian organizations

Various humanitarian organizations are involved with assisted return programs in the countries surveyed. While the majority of them work in the pre-return phase, especially with information dissemination and counseling, a few also provide or have provided reintegration programs in return countries (e.g. Danish Refugee Council in Denmark, Caritas in Belgium and Austria, Refugee Action in the UK). In the pre-return phase, humanitarian organizations may enjoy higher levels of trust from and greater knowledge of rejected asylum seekers, allowing the organizations to better inform and counsel them. In the post-return phase, humanitarian organizations often have broader commitments to development and humanitarian assistance in the return countries, which can be drawn on in implementing repatriation programs. These can arguably better cater to psychosocial and social network embeddedness. Further, the linking of return programs with development frameworks enhances outcomes for both returnees and return contexts (see 4.5 below).

3.3.3 Cooperation among implementing partners

While some countries maintain only one implementing partner, particularly in the reintegration phase, others make use of multiple partners. Belgium, for instance,

strategically uses Caritas to handle more humanitarian cases of return and IOM for occupational assistance. As they operate on the basis of service fees and implement the same repatriation packages, this involves no extra expense for the Belgian state. This has distinct advantages insofar as it offers individual returnees more choices in terms of tailoring their returns, and may also provide certain advantages of "competition" among partners.

Reports suggest that there is great value in maintaining a diversity of partners involved in pre-return assistance, as this increases the possibilities for rejected asylum seekers to access these programs. Often individual partners may be met with suspicion by rejected asylum seekers, reducing their effectiveness (see Chapter 5.1). This approach, however, presents some challenges, particularly to do with information management. Lacking coordination between informational and counseling actors and repatriation actors can result in inability to answer basic questions about the return program. This is unsatisfactory for all parties, and should be addressed in all assisted return programs featuring multiple actors.

Coordination and cooperation between partners should be institutionalized so that information is shared and assistance coordinated between governmental organs, development actors, humanitarian organizations and service providers.

3.4 Interlinking preparation and reintegration measures

Interlinking pre- and post-return assistance is a topic of increasing interest to host countries and implementing partners, because it creates a better grounding of return programs (Matrix Insight 2011; IOM 2012c). Returnees also report a strong appreciation of a coherent return program stretching from pre- to post-return (Strand et al. 2011; Danish Refugee Council 2008). While there may be a tendency to think of pre-return programs as being primarily about information and counseling to promote uptake and post-return programs as being mainly about sustainability, this division does not stand up to scrutiny. In fact, the literature shows that much important information to returnees is generated in the return countries from other migrants. Similarly, the sustainability of post-return programs often has its foundation in the pre-return context through training programs, reestablishment of social networks, job matching, and so on.

The Matrix Insight report on best practices with return assistance (2011) suggests that interlinking should include:

- Providing reintegration assistance both pre-departure and post-arrival
- Tailoring of reintegration measures to individual returnees and specific return contexts
- Cooperation between providers of assistance in sending and returning countries
- Monitoring the progress/success of reintegration measures

In addition, the felt presence of organizations working with return both pre- and post-departure would reassure rejected asylum seekers. The Danish NGO Refugees Welcome suggests that a sense of follow-through from those, who had made promises to them, might help quell the (sometimes groundless) fears of rejected asylum seekers. Refugees Welcome reports that representatives from the Danish anti-trafficking NGO Hope Now sometimes literally travel back with formerly trafficked returnees, providing a familiar face to help navigate the immediate arrival. This is hardly feasible in general, but could prove a useful approach in individual cases.

A holistic approach to return will benefit from interlinking pre- and post-return assistance at a programmatic level so as to enhance return preparedness and outcomes.

3.5 Tailoring of assisted return programs to individual returnees

Despite best intentions, many evaluation reports document cases where returnees do not benefit from the return assistance due to the lack of relevance of the offered assistance for particular individuals. Examples range from vocational training programs that have little relevance in the return context, over offers of kinds of business creation in non-conducive socio-economic environments, to social networks or psychosocial challenges that overshadow and stall reintegration programs. Taking the profile, history and particular needs of individual returnees into consideration is an important factor in program success. This presupposes the early involvement of the prospective returnee in the details of planning the assisted return program, so as to better fit the programs to their needs and wishes. This has the advantage of ensuring interlinkage in the return process and increasing the potential returnees' sense of ownership of the return process.

To successfully guide this process, it is necessary to know more about the profiles of individual rejected asylum seekers. This knowledge is surprisingly scarce in the reports surveyed, but could help in developing and focusing instruments to become more attractive to potential returnees, as well as to effectively communicate to them the content of return programs. One of the few examples found comes from Finland,

where three mapping exercises have recently been carried out, surveying Somali, Afghan, and Iraqi nationals in Finland (IOM Finland 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). The aim of these exercises was primarily to locate diaspora communities and to map channels of communication, though some basic data on the migrants was also collected. These kinds of surveys could usefully be expanded to include more detailed information about education, professional background, social networks in the home country, and so on, which could serve to create more attractive return programs for these groups.

Some studies report that returnees are disappointed at the lack of follow-up on them, once they have returned to their countries of origin (Lietaert et al. 2013; Strand et al. 2011). This is related to the understanding that Lietaert et al. (2013) document among rejected asylum seekers returned from Belgium to Nepal, that return measures are not adequately adapted to their individual circumstances. Ceri Oeppen (*interview*) similarly described the sense of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to reintegration assistance among returnees from Norway and the UK to Afghanistan. Returnees across these different return contexts suggest that this lack of tailoring negatively impacts their possibilities for a sustainable return.

Finally, tailoring allows for an earlier and better monitoring of vulnerabilities among potential returnees, so that return instruments may take account of them. This could also preempt the risk of wasting time with extensive informational and consulting efforts, if the rejected asylum seeker cannot in fact manage a sustainable return.

> *Better knowledge of rejected asylum seekers and tailoring of return programs to individual needs dramatically increases the efficacy and attractiveness of assisted return programs.*

3.6 Monitoring and evaluation

Despite the rapid growth in return programs for rejected asylum seekers from Northern Europe in the past decade, surprisingly little evaluation and monitoring has been carried out on the many different programs implemented (Thiel and Gillian 2010; Strand 2011). This is a problem with respect to developing best practices and long-term reintegration programs. It seriously hampers the possibilities for evaluating the sustainability of existing return programs and therefore the ability to suggest how to make improvements. It limits the possibilities for providing potential returnees with accurate, up-to-date information on return conditions. Finally, it reduces the ability to monitor risks of human rights abuses.

Evaluation is hampered by the difficulty of maintaining contact with returnees beyond the relatively short durations of assisted return programs and perhaps by a state focus on the "justice" rather than "development" perspective discussed in 3.1. In addition current systems of monitoring are often cumbersome.

In an extensive study on best practices in forced return monitoring, Matrix Insight (2011) recommends that organizations entrusted with monitoring forced returns should be different from the enforcement authorities. This might also be useful in assisted return monitoring, where NGOs and other organizations involved in pre-return information and counseling could commit more fully to following up with individual returnees.

Alternate means of monitoring could also be explored. IOM Netherlands has staff monitoring and participating in online discussion fora, where returnees share and discuss their experiences of return (IOM Netherlands 2013). This could be a cost-efficient way to gather knowledge and might also be a useful avenue for disseminating information about assisted return programs to potential returnees.

In general, new technologies could usefully be incorporated in evaluation and monitoring, where possible. Communication technologies could potentially reduce the need for returnees to travel to local offices, just as the collection of relevant data to a centralized system, accessible by donors, would also save partners time and effort, allowing them to focus more time on servicing returnees.

Monitoring and evaluation of assisted return programs should be improved in order to learn from past experiences, share knowledge, and ensure the safety and sustainability of return.

4. Reintegration Assistance

This chapter highlights key findings from international experiences with re-integration assistance. Effective return and reintegration imply that returnees will successfully settle back in their country of return and become self-reliant. Reintegration assistance has become the preferred tool to create a sustainable return process, since it allows an investment in returnees' social, cultural and economic embeddedness. Reintegration assistance vary from cash-in-hand allowances given to refugees in full upon their return journey to longer-term financial assistance comprising job placement, vocational training, business start-up support, as well as housing and medical support, often paid in-kind. Most recent programs surveyed make use of a combination of the two, varying from a combined sum of EUR 700 per returnee (Belgium) up to EUR 3,500 in some cases (Austria) (European Migration Network 2011: 72). While the size of these sums are important to the creation of sustainable return programs, data does not suggest that they are deciding factors in the uptake of programs (Black et al. 2011).

Return assistance requires careful considerations about the context of return and the situation of the individual migrant. Any reintegration tool, no matter how well designed, will fail to lead to a sustainable integration if there are consistent security threats, rampant levels of unemployment, or if individual returnees are unable to become re-embedded in society for cultural or psychosocial reasons.

Overall findings can be summarized in the following four points:

- Reintegration assistance has a *positive impact* on sustainable return when measuring subjective as well as objective conditions.
- However, the most important factor for the positive effect of reintegration assistance lies in a *conducive socio-economic environment,* rather than with the assistance program itself.
- There is a great deal of *variety in how reintegration assistance performs* across countries, population groups, and historical cases.
- Sustainable return is often *hampered by the design and performance of the return program,* resulting in fragmented and inflexible instruments that do not adequately place returnees' specific needs at the center of attention.

4.1 Overview of the four primary types of assistance

We have identified four different aspects of reintegration assistance that are usually offered in combination, but which are relevant to distinguish due to their different effects on sustainable return and their relevance to individual returnees, based on qualifications.

- *Financial Support;* usually given as cash in connection with the return journey to allow returnees not to return empty-handed. This is the most widely-used instrument of reintegration and has several advantages: It is easy to implement and transfers responsibility for creating embeddedness directly to returnees. Yet, cash allowances are often insufficient to invest in livelihood measures and would benefit from being considered along with other initiatives.
- *Occupational assistance;* comprises job placement, vocational training, business start-ups, cash-for-work, and micro-loans. These are complex devices and far from always successful because of their reliance on the wider financial and political environment, and the need to prepare migrants for economic activity after long periods of absence (and passivity). Nevertheless, they are important and increasingly popular tools for sustainability. They could be strengthened by making them more flexible and suited to individual needs.
- *Material Support;* comprises a number of specific forms of in-kind support, from the purchasing of medicine for vulnerable migrants over materials to rebuild houses to legal aid. While they are important elements to mitigate against poverty and to address specific or unusual needs, they mostly operate in the short term. In addition, reminiscent of humanitarian relief, they might fail to address questions of empowerment that have been identified as central to a sustainable return experience.
- *Community Development;* investing in infrastructure, welfare services or programs that benefit local communities has been used to prevent conflicts between returnees and locals in areas they return to, in particular in connection with large-scale return of refugees. However, it also carries a significant potential for strengthening the return process for rejected asylum seekers but requires more thorough and culturally sensitive planning. It is a particularly useful strategy in post-conflict areas where social and material reconstruction efforts are already under way, and where occupational assistance is unlikely to yield significant results. There is a potential for linking it up with existing programs in order to increase the scalability of return assistance.

4.2 Financial support

Cash has been a longstanding feature of relief to refugees and internally displaced people in a wide variety of contexts, and the effectiveness for assisting vulnerable populations has been amply documented (see Harvey & Bailey 2011). Direct and unconditional financial support also dominates return assistance to rejected asylum seekers and is provided as start-up aid in the first phase of the return process. Cash grants are easy to implement and if given as a one-off payment require little or no institutional setup. They are furthermore very popular among returnees, and a recent evaluation of returnees from Finland to Iraq has shown that unless the in-kind assistance (for housing or business start-ups) was significantly higher than the cash allowance, returnees would choose the latter (IOM 2012: 32). In other words, returnees will rarely accept in-kind assistance instead of cash assistance unless there is a substantial difference in the actual support level between the two different kinds of assistance.

> *Financial support gives individuals strong power over how to best create sustainable return and is a highly flexible reintegration tool that can be adapted to many different circumstances.*

4.2.1 Dignified return

Cash grants allow returnees to return in dignity by mitigating the shame connected with failed migration. Returnees spoke of the difficulties of returning empty-handed to family and friends and wanted to be able bring small presents. Gifts can be seen as symbols of the reunification with communities left behind and are important tools for sustaining social networks as they allow returnees to honor the trust and investments they received by neighbors and family members when they left. In this regard, cash grants can play an important role in enabling social networks and psychosocial embeddedness, as it helps returnees become reintegrated in local communities. This aspect of the relationship between cash grants and return has been well documented with respect to Iraqi and Afghan returnees from Scandinavia. One telling example concerns an Afghan man who had pleaded with the local partners to pay him his allowance so that he could buy a suit before returning to his village. He wanted to make sure that he dressed up as befitting men in his area who were financially independent, and it was an important symbolic act to create a dignified return after many years away from home (Strand 2008). Ceri Oeppen (*interview*) reported that a number of her informants had used their cash allowance to get married. While this may help them return in greater dignity, it also can help to re-embed them in wider social relations, which they depend on for housing, employment, and even safety.

4.2.2 Flexibility and empowerment

Cash grants are the most flexible form of assistance surveyed. Since they can be given as a one-off payment, they require little institutional set-up and allow programs to kick-off quickly. This is particularly an advantage if return journeys are scheduled soon after potential returnees decide to travel back to their country of origin where it might be cumbersome to carry out additional preparatory programs. Instead, supplying returnees with a grant can help people prepare for the journey. The other reported benefit of grants are their flexibility, since it allows returnees to allocate money based on their specific needs, rather than on program categories. This may have the simple, positive benefit that it reduces returnees' incentives to use other assistance measures only to convert them to cash.

An example of an area where cash grants are beneficial is in repaying debt. Debts spiraling out of control can easily generate vulnerability, and starting to pay off debt can help individuals become accepted back in their communities. The flexibility that comes with cash allowances has an obvious benefit in terms of empowerment, as individual returnees are placed at the center of decision-making processes. Given the prolonged waiting and passivity in the asylum process, cash grants can signal to returnees that it is also their responsibility to make the best out of the return process.

4.2.3 Not a long-term solution

Despite the many benefits of cash grants, they have little documented effect on long-term embeddedness. This can be explained by two factors. On the one hand, the grants are rarely sufficient for investing in businesses or education and therefore quickly disappear. IOM recently reported that daily living costs in the Kurdistan region of Iraq were almost comparable to Europe and that allowances were too small to make a long-term impact. The same conclusion was reached by the evaluation report on Iraqi returnees from Norway (Strand et al. 2011), based on interviews with returnees. Suggestions for an appropriate amount were in the range of 5,000 to 10,000 USD per person. On the other hand, cash grants seem to be used by returnees to cover initial living costs on arrival and to make the first few months after return much easier. A survey of returnees from the UK by IOM UK (2010), for example, found that 79 percent of returnees used the cash grant to pay for rent, utility bills or food; another 15 percent invested it in their chosen business activity. The remaining 6 percent used it to settle debts, buy house furniture, or gifts for the family. However, in cases where migrants had stronger family support or other savings, the money could instead be spent on investing in businesses, rather than on living costs. A specific recommendation thus concerns the need to adjust grant

size to expenditure level in the returning country and to integrate it with other, more durable, forms of assistance.

4.3 Occupational assistance

As an effort at ensuring livelihood embeddedness, many contemporary return programs operate with a combination of financial grants and occupational assistance. Livelihood embeddedness is an important concern for returnees, and over the years different types of programs to support this goal have been implemented. Occupational assistance is complicated by its reliance on a conducive socio-economic environment, and success is furthermore conditioned by more specific criteria, such as the situation of the individual returnee, the ability of implementing partners to find possible routes of employment for returnees and to access local networks for matching returnees with the job market. Two general shortcomings that appear in the return programs surveyed are therefore important to highlight:

- Due to the difficulties of matching returnees to actual jobs, there is a tendency for business start-ups to be recommended by implementing partners as a preferred employment tool, regardless of their sustainability or disregarding the fact that it is not a well-suited option for all categories of returnees.
- The success rate of job creation is not very high. Though a rising number of returnees are included in occupational assistance programs, there is room for improvement in actually securing people a stable income source upon return.

  Occupational assistance is a central aspect of sustainable return and there is a consistent demand among returnees for better employment skills and assistance to secure income.

4.3.1 Job matching

Job matching programs seek to match individual returnees up with companies in returning countries based on existing skills. A look at the IOM's data on the job referral category for Afghan returnees from Norway, for instance, shows a very broad spread in types of jobs selected by returnees. Yet, of the 31 job categories they had been referred to, the majority worked within four categories, such as "salesperson" (28 percent), "worker" (12 percent), "assistant" (7 percent) and "driver" (6 percent). Only a few appeared to have been able to secure jobs that required higher education (there was one doctor and one lawyer). Jobs had not been secured within the government and there were no teachers, though this has been given as a preference by returnees.

While 30 percent of the interviewed returnees said they had been informed that IOM would help them to get jobs in Iraq, only one person explicitly stated that IOM helped him get his old job back. The newly started Magnet Project, coordinated by IOM with several European asylum countries as partners, is an example of an effort at improving the matching of returnees to existing jobs. Clearly, job matching works best for educated returnees or where there are labor shortages in the return country. A further interesting development involves a pilot program being started in Belgium, which attempts to match returnees with Belgian companies currently investing in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. This will likely not be relevant for the majority of returnees, but may prove particularly useful to some.

4.3.2 Job placement
Job placement has the added benefit over matching that it pays part of the returnees' salary for a period of time, thus making it more attractive for firms to hire them. Returnees to Kosovo, for instance, received a subsidy for 6-8 months for contracts of minimum a year, and the employer was then required to pay for the remaining months. The now-defunct German return organization, AGEF, made a point out of starting the reintegration process before departure from Europe. Details of the returnees' background and qualifications were forwarded to the AGEF office in the return country. If the returnee had sufficient qualifications, AGEF would send requests for work to relevant institutions, such as ministries. Their job referral service also included several job centers, run in cooperation with the International Labor Organization (ILO) and local ministries. For more vulnerable returnees, the cash-for-work option used by the UNHCR in Afghanistan has been an important way for people without access to jobs and few marketable skills to gain access to steady employment. It pays returnees' salary in full for a longer period with the hope that it can work as a skills training and matching process at the same time.

4.3.3 Vocational training
On-the-job skills training or qualification courses can help returnees with acquiring skills necessary for reemployment. This has the benefit that it can generate new skills in the returnee population for jobs that add to, rather than compete with, existing skills sets in the return situation. Currently, vocational training rarely leads to jobs and one obvious problem has been the difficulty of upgrading returnees in the skills that are actually in shortage. Yet, the potential benefits are worth mentioning: (1) it can be commenced in the host country and thus prepare returnees in advance (this was the idea with the Want2Work project in Denmark); (2) it can be targeted at

solving specific problems related to the area of return; (3) it can be combined with matching and job placement as a preparation to get access to specific industries. With a detailed knowledge of return contexts and an increased focus on pre- and post-return interlinkage this measure has clear room for improvement.

4.3.4 Business start-up

Business start-up is not immediately as dependent on the job environment and may allow entrepreneurs to set up new and interesting businesses in their area. It is a more flexible option than the other employment options since it might not require much capital to get started. There are, however, a number of important caveats to bear in mind. Firstly, evaluations of actual cases are not encouraging. A general evaluation of return to Afghanistan from several western societies found that in many cases business assistance did not lead to businesses at all (de Bree 2008). And in cases where businesses are set up, many disappear within the first year of existence. The changing socio-economic environment may be partly to blame for this, but only partly. Another study has shown how returnees to Afghanistan opted to set up small, short-lived businesses just to gain access to the 1500 USD worth of goods available through the business start-up program (Strand 2008). After setting up the businesses, they could sell their assets and free up the cash. This points to the danger of not tailoring return measures to the actual wishes of returnees.

The second caveat has to do with the tendency to promote business start-ups without attending to the individual and social circumstances of returnees and the society they are returning to. Business start-ups are not for everyone and may be best suited to young, proactive returnees. Depending on the return context, it may also be more difficult for women to set up businesses than for men, particularly in countries with a dominant patriarchal culture. This is partly related to another important finding from the reports on returnees from Europe. Whereas assistance programs are designed around the individual returnee, social networks show up as extremely important for people when accessing jobs. This was highlighted specifically in a report on Afghan returnees (de Bree 2008). Comparing the success of six returnees a year after their return, there seemed to be a tendency for those with the most useful networks to be employed and two out of the three stably employed returnees obtained their work through family. Remarkably, the remainiang three entrepreneurs did not receive any help from relatives during their business start-ups, and they were found to be running losses. The support of local, social networks for setting up businesses and for keeping them running should thus not be understated.

Thus, business start-ups seemed to fail for three reasons: (1) socio-economic conditions make it difficult to run enterprises; (2) the viability of the business idea has not been adequately assessed by the relevant partners; (3) businesses are set-up 'proforma' to access cash.

Start planning occupational assistance already in the host country. Encourage the use of local employment resources, when integrating returnees on the job market. In situations where occupational assistance is unsuccessful, give return-ees additional financial assistance instead. This prevents wasting resources on non-efficient trainings or business ventures.

4.4 Material support
Assistance to returnees occasionally has to address individual short-term needs that have not been satisfactorily covered by the cash allowance. Returnees may be in need of health services that are not available to them in the return country. Other examples of in-kind assistance include the purchase of building materials to repair or extend houses. These are types of assistance germane to conflict and post-conflict societies where soci-etal reconstruction is missing or underway. Material support was for instance used as a return measure to rebuild houses in Bosnia. Similarly, in areas where land shortage is an issue, like Afghanistan, materials to build new wings to existing houses of kin may be desirable. They are hardly long-term measures but may shield against poverty and cater to basic levels of livelihood embeddedness that must be addressed before sustainable return can be contemplated. Material support should be seen as a way to temporarily assist special groups of returnees *in addition* to more long-term integration.

Material support could also include less tangible services like legal aid. In some return contexts, land conflicts are a significant obstacle to re-embedding processes, and returnees may benefit from legal aid in moving claims for land they previously worked or owned through local judicial systems.

Material support is an important supplementary return tool, particularly for vulnerable groups, and for tackling non-monterary types of reintegration efforts.

4.5 Community development
While the majority of reintegration assistance is targeted at individual returnees, a more community-based approach holds real advantages, not least for returnees'
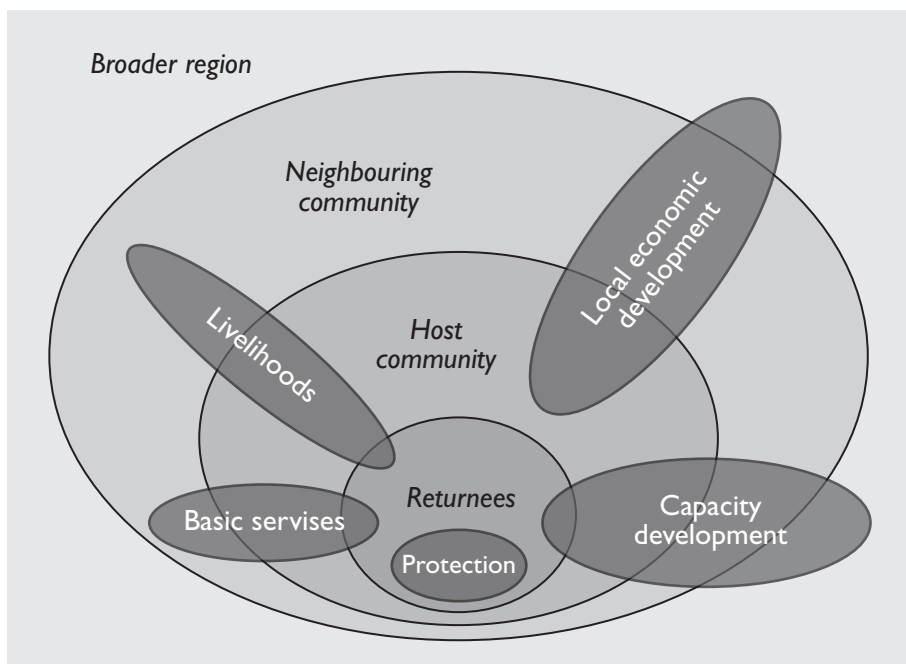
social network and psychosocial embeddedness. Various return measures may target different communities, as shown in the model above.

This can work at two levels. At one level, reintegration assistance measures of the kind discussed in this chapter could potentially be provided more broadly in the returnees' kin network, addressing a tendency to target return measures overwhelmingly to individuals. For returnees who have been provided a livelihood through kin networks, it may make more sense to offer vocational training to other members of these family networks, rather than the returnee him- or herself, thereby improving the livelihood prospects of the returnees' broader social network while strengthening their own position in them. De Bree (2008: 25) reports that in Afghanistan, IOM and AGEF provide financial assistance to male kin members of female returnees, who are not allowed to work by their family members. This could be expanded along the lines mentioned above, but also illustrates a potential weakness in this approach, insofar as it may serve to entrench lines of domination (e.g. patriarchal structures) inherent in existing social networks.

At another level, local communities can benefit from more broadly aimed measures, which in turn may ease the process of return for individual returnees, in part by

mitigating some of the obstacles to social networks and psychosocial embeddedness. It has been acknowledged that return assistance can sometimes lead to local resentment against returnees due to their privileged access to money or jobs. It is far from clear that returnees are better off than the local population. It has for instance been noted with regards to returnees to the Kurdistan region of Iraq that due to the rapid development of the region in the past years, returnees return to find that those who did not migrate run successful businesses today, while the returnees have difficulties settling back. In many other places, as already noted, returnees experience that they are failures and are sometimes treated as such. Irrespective of these objective conditions, the *perception* that returnees are privileged can be an obstacle to create embeddedness. Moreover, as the societies that returnees come back to have in many cases undergone rapid changes and may be recovering from conflict, return assistance can favorably be used to create opportunities for communities and not just for individuals. This would create the conditions for a better overall embeddedness of the returnee into society as well, since his or her return depends to a very large extent on the family and community reception.

Danish return assistance to Kosovo can provide an example. Since six returnees were all going to the same village, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) opted to involve the entire community in cooperation with the local municipality in bettering the water supply to the village. Money was given to improve the piping of the existing water system, which would both benefit the returnees and the rest of the villagers, while creating a positive event out of the return scenario. The earlier RANA return program in Afghanistan aimed at something similar by extending an offer of skills training to 1,500 local Afghans. The philosophy behind this, as with the DRC program, was to support returnees by building up the community around them, thus effectuating a general uplifting of socio-economic services and preventing the development of hostilities between the returnees and non-recipient locals. On a smaller scale, but along the same lines, can be mentioned the Community Assistance Projects implemented by IOM in Iraq, where they have helped refurbish a local school and a playground as well as purchased medical equipment for a hospital. IOM highlights that the cost of such projects may be as little as EUR 3,815-19,075 but that they have a large impact on the local infrastructure and services in returnees' areas of return.

This is an area in which integrating return assistance with existing developmental initiatives could be highly relevant. In-place development programs often possess the knowledge and resources to ensure that specific initiatives match local conditions

and support the large-scale improvement of society. Three immediate advtantages follow from integrating return assistance with developmental efforts:

1. Sustainability of return assistance is more likely as programs becomed embedded in projects designed to and sensitive to the needs of particular persons, groups and areas
2. Cost-effectiveness when operating low numbers of returnees. Building an institutional return program around few returnees can be costly. Linking up with already existing reintegration or development efforts can save money.
3. Duplication efforts are avoided. Multiple assistance programs can create confusion and resentment among the recipient population and eventually hamper sustainability efforts. Cooperation with various reintegration and assistance initiatives, whether humanitarian, developmental, financial etc, can prevent counter-productive measures.

Community development supports the long-term development of the local areas where returnees come from and not just the position of individuals in society, which follows from overall development commitments by the international community for countries in need of assistance.

5. Preparing for Return in the Host Country

This chapter provides an overview of major pre-return instruments, highlighting best practices in selected countries. The pre-return phase of assisted return programs is a significant aspect of all the cases examined, though the extent and type of pre-return assistance varies significantly. All the surveyed assisted return programs included some form of practical travel assistance and some degree of information and counseling. Some return packages further included capacity maintenance and development systems and pre-departure cash grants.

Effective pre-return assistance can increase the attractiveness of return programs to rejected asylum seekers, but can also be a vital component of reintegration packages in the country of origin. By deploying and developing the resources of potential returnees, higher degrees of embeddedness can be achieved. Indeed, the major evaluation reports all advocate a comprehensive approach to assisted return with strong pre-return components providing foundations for successful reintegration.

5.2 Overview of the four major pre-return instruments

- *Information and counseling.* This instrument is used in some form in all assisted return programs we have examined. Without prior, trustworthy information about the return programs, the conditions in their homeland, and their other legal options, rejected asylum seekers are dramatically less likely to agree to return voluntarily.
- *Practical travel assistance.* This instrument was also in place in all the programs we examined. While it fundamentally involved making travel arrangements, the logistics involved can be extensive. This instrument also includes things like arranging for the transport of excess baggage (an important issue for some returnees), as well as temporary accommodation and onwards travel in the country of origin.
- *Capacity maintenance and development.* The swift and sustainable reintegration of returnees in their homelands depends on their ability to establish viable livelihoods. This in turn at minimum requires the maintenance of asylum seekers' skills in the host country and maximally their active development. It also requires attention to the health of potential returnees.

- *Pre-departure cash grants.* These usually small cash grants before departure allow returnees to buy gifts for family and social networks in the home country, though they may also be used to make the returnee more presentable and so reduce the stigma of failed migration on return. These are often of great importance to the returnees.

5.3 Information and counseling

Best practices collated from various European countries, suggest that for rejected asylum seekers to make an informed decision to return voluntarily, they need to have up-to-date and comprehensive information about the situation in their home countries, detailed knowledge of reintegration schemes available to them, as well as individual counseling tailored to their particular circumstances. They should further be fully aware of their legal options in the country of asylum as well as possible other destinations, where appropriate. Reports show that there is a premium on the trustworthiness of the sources of this information, its availability in a format that is easily accessible to them, and the timing of its delivery.

5.3.1 Aim of the instrument

Information and counseling are key components of all pre-departure programs, we have examined. This information and counseling can serve a number of purposes:

- Providing the basis for the returnee making an informed decision
- Determining the viability of return for vulnerable, potential returnees
- Adjusting expectations for the program to realistic levels
- Preparing the rejected asylum seeker mentally for the return
- Giving them time to prepare and organize their remaining social networks, if any
- Helping the rejected asylum seekers claim ownership of the return process

However, there are significant pitfalls in their implementation, reflected in their frequent mention in the major evaluation reports. Key issues include quality and scope, trustworthiness, and timing. These issues interlink significantly, but are presented individually in the following.

5.3.2 Quality and scope

Information and counseling should be up-to-date and accurate and should include both conditions and possibilities in the country of origin and the precise legal options

in the host country. And should of course also be understandable to returnees and available in a form they can easily access and interact with. Inaccurate or insufficient information can be a serious problem for returnees, but it also has consequences for the reputation of return programs, which can be quickly communicated through social networks, resulting in increased mistrust and a lower rate of acceptance of assisted return among other rejected asylum seekers.

Paasche and Strand quote a returnee to Iraq complaining about the information IOM gave him in Norway: "They informed us that they were going to help us with everything. They will try to help us find jobs in Iraq, and that they are going to sort out all our problems. They were lying to persuade people to return. They have separated me from my family, they have made me sick" (Paasche and Strand 2012: 217). As the authors point out, this is a concern not only because the experience of poor or misleading information makes it more difficult for returnees to prepare for their return, but also because it has repercussions for their broader view of the IOM and thus for their interactions with local IOM offices. Van Houte and Davids (2008) similarly report widespread disappointment among returnees with the quality of information provided by NGOs in a range of return contexts. This disappointment may also add to a general hostility to the country of asylum, as documented in a series of interviews with returnees to Afghanistan from Austria (Ghousuddin 2007).

In Germany, IOM's ZIRF database provides both up-to-date country reports, derived from IOM's international network of regional offices, and the possibility to ask individual questions through an online system.[2] Through country offices, potential refugees can be provided with answers to quite specific questions about the local cost of renting accommodation, the availability of specific medicines, or the location of schools. While the extent to which rejected asylum seekers avail themselves of this resource is unclear, the possibility of receiving information on very precise questions is potentially promising.

In Belgium, the REAB program implements a flexible network of information sources on voluntary return through 84 return partners across the country (IOM Belgium 2012). These partners include NGOs, local authorities (some cities and communes), governmental structures for reception of asylum-seekers (Fedasil and Red Cross reception centers), migrant associations, and the Immigration Office. The heterogeneity of the network allows the system to cater to a diversity of asylum

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[2] https://milo.bamf.de/llde/livelink.exe?func=LL.getlogin&NextURL=/llde/livelink.exe?Redirect=1

seekers and stranded migrants. Return counselors participate in regional working groups focusing on areas of current interest, and there is a budget for the counselors to go on annual informational visits to visit countries of origin and return projects. This ensures that they have up-to-date and detailed hands-on information about the return programs, they advise on.

In addition to their livelihoods prospects, returnees should be advised about the difficulties they may face in terms of social networks and psychosocial embeddedness in their return countries. This sort of counseling is provided by some Spanish organizations with reportedly very positive outcomes (Matrix Insight 2011).

While the provision of detailed information about return programs and contexts is important, a precise understanding of their current legal situation and prospects is equally crucial for rejected asylum seekers to make an informed decision about assisted return. Absent this, they may be less likely to participate in return programs. However, it is vital that this information is both accurate and considered trustworthy by rejected asylum seekers. They are not likely to respond to state authorities insisting on their legal obligation to return, as studies from Norway have shown (Valenta et al. 2010).

All this information is useless, if rejected asylum seekers do not understand it. Interpreters are pivotal, though often overlooked, actors in the information and counseling process. In general, any informational and counseling work by speakers not fluent in the language of potential returnees is predicated on the quality of the interpretation. This means that examples in Denmark of Dari-speaking Iranians interpreting for Farsi-speaking Afghanis (Bendixen 2011) must be avoided.

While Denmark has established hotlines for potential returnees to call for information in their native language in the past, these sorts of measures could usefully be expanded to include easy-to-navigate websites in multiple languages with information on the programs and the procedures for accessing them, similar to the ones established in Finland (http://www.assistedvoluntaryreturn.fi/) and the UK (http://www.choices-avr.org.uk).

5.3.3 Trustworthiness
The source of information and counseling is fundamental to its reception by rejected asylum seekers. As noted in Rambøll (2012), regarding unaccompanied minors from Iraq, the direct sourcing of information from the Danish Immigration Service can be counterproductive, as both the minors and their personal representatives were

skeptical of the information they were given and concerned at a lack of accountability. This speaks to asylum seekers' general levels of mistrust towards state authorities, documented in both reports and the academic literature.

A number of states subcontract the information and counseling they offer rejected asylum seekers to various partners, including the IOM. The purpose of this subcontracting is two-fold: On the one hand, the partners often have extensive and up-to-date experience from the countries of origin, which they can provide potential returnees with. On the other, NGOs are often likely to be considered more trustworthy sources of information by the rejected asylum seekers. This is in part the logic of the Belgian REAB partner system, mentioned above.

It should be noted that whatever the formal source and quality of information, many asylum seekers will place their greatest trust in information provided by their own social networks, especially their extended kin networks (Strand et al. 2008). This should be actively considered when providing information and, where possible, incorporated in the counseling process.

- In the Netherlands, the Beyond Borders project run by Maatwerk bij Terugkeer[3] explicitly aims to create a network of "returnee alumni" to advise and provide information to potential returnees. For this to be successful, it naturally requires a high degree of participation, which is not yet evident.
- Another possibility might be "send and see" programs, modeled on the "go and see" programs used by refugees, e.g. in Kosovo (Danish Refugee Council 2008), which were considered largely successful. Instead of the rejected asylum seeker going him- or herself, small grants could facilitate persons chosen by the rejected asylum seeker to investigate the local situation in the homeland, including the state of property, quality of local schools and hospitals, etc. These could then report back directly to the rejected asylum seeker, providing credible and up-to-date information useful in making concrete plans for return.
- A third possibility is to better make use of new technology to facilitate communication with social networks in the home country. Videochats and the use of mobile technology, digital photos and live streaming may enable potential returnees to obtain up-to-date information on conditions at home and may be used for documenting the status of specific assets, such as land and housing.

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[3] http://www.maatwerkbijterugkeer.nl/en/organization/beyond-borders-project

5.3.4 Timing of information and counseling

The timing of the availability of information and counseling can be critical to its effectiveness. Host states – and indeed some returnees – are often eager for an early departure, once the decision to return has been made. This creates a challenge for the tailoring of the return process to the needs and ambitions of individual returnees, and limits the preparations the returnees' themselves can effect for their return.

While there may be advantages in offering the information during the asylum application period itself, as it may give asylum seekers more time to digest the possibilities on offer and prepare for the possibility of return, the Danish Refugee Council and the Danish Police suggest that asylum seekers, whose status is yet to be determined, are generally unreceptive to this kind of information (Danish Refugee Council and Danish National Police 2009). At worst it may erode trust in the organizations offering the information, as asylum seekers may suspect their motivations. In general, survey reports suggest that best practice involves providing information as soon as possible after formal rejection of the asylum application (Black et al. 2011).

Returnees from Denmark to Kosovo reported the need for a reasonable amount of time from their agreement to return to their actual departure (Danish Refugee Council 2008). This allowed them to prepare both mentally and practically (gathering necessary documentation, selling off those material possessions that are not brought with them, etc). This is in line with Cassarino's (2004) understanding of return preparedness among return migrants more broadly as being about both the willingness and readiness of migrants to return. The opportunity and time to mobilize resources of various kinds is crucial to this endeavor.

While extensive preparation time may not always be possible, a balance must be struck between the interest in a swift return and allowing the time necessary for the returnees to ready themselves for return.

5.4 Practical travel assistance

Practically all return programs include logistical travel assistance, which minimally involves arranging for the travel back to the homeland. IOM is heavily involved in most of these programs. There are however significant differences in the level of assistance between European countries, which maximally includes the following:

- Arrangement of transport (including to the airport in the country of asylum)
- Procurement of travel documents
- Excess baggage allowance
- Meeting at destination
- Temporary accommodation in country of origin
- Medical assistance and screening
- Precise information on the travel arrangements

The purpose of this travel assistance is to ensure the safe and dignified return of the rejected asylum seeker. It is run by IOM in almost all cases we have examined, though Refugee Action has taken over the work in the UK as of 1 April, 2011. The evaluations of the travel assistance offered are generally positive, though it is fair also to say that this component is not decisive in either returnees' acceptance of the offer of assisted return or their general experience of the return process.

5.5 Capacity maintenance and development

Capacity building – or at minimum maintenance – in the host country can be a key factor in promoting a sustainable return for rejected asylum seekers. It has been argued that degrees of freedom and autonomy for asylum seekers significantly increase their participation in voluntary return schemes (Koser and Van Hear 2003; Valenta et al. 2010), while longer stays in asylum institutions – particularly once their claim has been rejected – generally reduces participation along with health, independence, and viable skill sets (Andersen 2009; Coakley 2011). Based on extensive empirical data, Ruben et al. further show that asylum seekers held passive in asylum centers "faced clear disadvantages in their prospects towards embeddedness" (2009: 932) on their return. These negative tendencies have been observed across a wide variety of host contexts and correlate particularly with asylum systems that involve a high degree of institutionalization.

However, host states require certain measures of control over asylum seekers and are often concerned at the appearance of potential "pull factors" resulting from relatively "attractive" asylum systems. Though research has shown that asylum destinations are not generally chosen based on the details of the asylum system (e.g. Brekke & Aarset 2009; Crawley 2010b), this may remain a political concern for states. There is thus a balance to be struck between the requirements of states for the management of asylum seekers, and the maintenance of them in a manner that allows their continued development of capacities and networks that would allow them to embed themselves in either the host or home countries.

In a report for the Norwegian government, Valenta et al. (2010) find that following courses for asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers generally helps motivate them to participate in assisted return programs. This is in part because of the content of the courses, which they imagine may be useful to them on return, but also in large part through counteracting the passivity and torpor that comes with the institutionalized rounds of life available at asylum centers.

While the tailoring of assisted return programs to individual returnees is of general importance, it is absolutely critical in capacity maintenance and development. Skills audits can therefore be useful tools in determining appropriate pre- and post-return assistance packages for specific returnees. Skills audit programs developed to prepare asylum seekers for integration in host countries (e.g. ETG5 2004) may also be useful in ascertaining skills and qualifications of use in return countries. This has a number of advantages: It allows for the precise targeting of assistance instruments; it involves the returnees at an early stage in their return program; it ensures cohesion between the pre- and post-return assistance provided.

Koser (2001), reporting on two projects in the Netherlands (GTAA) and France (CRPO), suggests that vocational training in the country of asylum has beneficial effects, not least for the viability of small businesses in the country of origin. In addition to the direct training that returnees receive, the time it takes to complete the course also allows them to mobilize the resources that they are going to invest in their new business.

The opportunity to implement capacity development programs in the pre-return phase can be hampered by the generally short time between the acceptance of return on the part of the rejected asylum seekers and their actual departure. This often leaves little time to implement relevant courses or internships. One solution to this problem is to allow asylum seekers access to capacity development schemes before the final rejection of their asylum applications. The now-defunct Danish Want2Work program (want2work.dk) was an example of one such approach. It was funded by a grant from the EQUAL program of the European Social Fund and is considered a successful program of this type. Altai Consulting (2009) reference it as a best practice for the UK. Interestingly, Strand et al. (2008) report that the IOM-Kabul reintegration manager was a returnee from Denmark, who had participated in the Want2Work program. "He spoke very highly of the initiative, saying that it had equipped him with qualifications enabling him to land his current job. Moreover, he said he knew

of other returnees from Denmark that had participated in the scheme and were equally successful" (ibid.: 57). Originally envisioned as a pre-integration program for asylum seekers, Want2Work was increasingly retooled to include a strong repatriation dimension (AOF 2005; Cubion 2008). Following European Commission terminology, this was termed "option neutral" activity, meaning that it could benefit asylum seekers no matter the outcome of their asylum applications. This shift entailed changing the language of instruction to English and producing courses that would also be useful to asylum seekers, who returned to their countries of origin. These included short courses teaching e.g. basic IT-skills, entrepreneurship, driving, communication and journalism, and food hygiene.

Though the want2work program no longer operates, the logic of maintaining and developing asylum seekers' qualifications continues to inform both recent changes in Danish asylum policy and Red Cross implementations of arranging internships of various kinds for asylum seekers. Currently, these are not available to rejected asylum seekers, however, and their implementation and content is in any case uneven. The Red Cross has few resources to arrange external internships, though some, particularly well-educated, asylum seekers do draw great benefits from them. Internal internships teach skills like bicycle repair, hairdressing, and beekeeping. This is an area that could be developed.

5.6 Pre-departure cash grants

A number of reports advocate the distribution of cash grants in the pre-departure phase (Strand et al. 2011; Koser 2001). This allows rejected asylum seekers to buy gifts for their family and social networks and even potentially new clothes and the like for themselves. These items may be crucial for returnees' senses of the dignity of their return and for the degree of embeddedness they can establish in the early phases of their return. Apart from ameliorating the stigma and shame of returning from Europe with nothing, being able to (re)establish social connections quickly may be crucial to processes of embedding and for the establishing of viable future livelihoods (see 3.3 Occupational assistance). As one Kurdish Iraqi rejected asylum seeker told a UK researcher (Griffiths pers.comm.), he did not want or need assistance once he was back in Iraq, as he was confident that his family would be able to support him. But he was very concerned at returning to them looking like a failure, and very much preferred a pre-departure grant to allow him to purchase gifts and new clothes.

Valenta et al. (2010) and Strand (2008, 2011) report similar findings in talking to rejected asylum seekers. Valenta et al. (2010) doubt that pre-departure cash grants on their own would induce rejected asylum seekers to return, but they suggest that they confirm potential returnees in their decision to return.

IOM reports that they are reluctant to provide pre-departure cash grants beyond small change for use at the airport, as they are concerned that rejected asylum seekers will take the money and not follow through on the return. While this may be a risk, we have found no concrete evidence that the practice is widespread, and the potential benefits to social networks embeddedness of these sorts of grants in any case seem to outweigh the risks involved.

5.7 Phasing Return Preparedness

As discussed in 5.3.4 above, the timing of information and counseling on return is a balance. Unsurprisingly, The Danish Red Cross has reported that aslylum seekers do not respond positively to preparations for return when the asylum application is still ongoing, while some of the recommendations for pre-return discussed in this chapter require more time to be effective. A solution to this dilemma is to phase the different aspects of preparation measures. During the prolongued asylum process, individuals should be kept active and their skills strengthened through capacity development, while institutionalization and passivity should be combated (5.5). Counseling with regards to return, on the other hand, should not be obtrusive before it is immediately relevant. Note that this does not preclude providing asylum seekers with information on their return options, which they may access themselves, e.g. through informative homepages. In addition, the time-consuming work of gathering knowledge on persons' social and professional background, which forms the basis for individually tailoring return programs, should be performed in this phase. All of this work is "option-neutral" in the sense that it remains useful for integration programs in Denmark, should the asylum seekers be recognized as refugees.

For those asylum seekers whose applications are rejected, information and counseling on return should be made available very quickly so concrete plans for return may be formulated (5.3). It is in this phase that practical travel assistance (5.4) and pre-departure cash grants (5.6) become relevant.

The asylum phase focuses on:

- Capacity development
- Gathering of information about professional background, social networks, aspirations, and overall life situation

The post-rejection phase focuses on:

- Information and Counseling
- Planning of return assistance
- Practical travel assistance
- Pre-departure cash grants

6. Recommendations

1. A sustainable approach to assisted return creates opportunities for the *embeddedness* of returnees in their countries of origin. Return contexts need to be physically secure and to provide an adequate level of services with respect to livelihoods. Security issues should be evaluated individually and locally. The situation of returnees in return contexts should be enhanced by catering not only to their economic, but also to their social network and psychosocial embeddedness. This multi-dimensional concern with embeddedness should run through the entire return process, starting in the pre-return phase.

2. Program packages designed to assist the reintegration process of returnees should be tailored to individual returnees and return contexts, enhancing their possibilities for success. This presupposes the early involvement of the prospective returnee in the details of planning the assisted return program, so as to better fit the programs to their needs and wishes. It has the advantage of ensuring interlinkage in the return process and increasing the potential returnees' sense of ownership of the return process. A flexible combination of cash grants, occupational assistance, material support and community-focused projects is recommended to target opportunities and challenges in return contexts and to build on the capacities of returnees.

3. Sustainable return starts in the pre-return phase through trustworthy, understandable, and up-to-date information and counseling. Documenting and enhancing asylum seekers' capacities ensures that their skills are relevant to and included in return plans. To combat institutionalization, it is imperative that asylum seekers' are kept active and that returnees are empowered to take a leading role in the return process. Phasing pre-return measures allows for their deployment throughout the asylum process, preparing asylum seekers for either return or possible integration in Denmark.

4. Cooperation between states, development organizations, humanitarian actors and service partners should be increased and institutionalized to share knowledge across organizational divides and coordinate activities. A diversity of implementing partners increases possibilities for tailoring return programs to individual returnees and return contexts. Cooperating with humanitarian partners allows for the linking of return programs with existing development frameworks, improving outcomes for both returnees and return contexts. Cooperating with other states may be cost effective, particularly in contexts of low numbers of returnees.

5. Sustainable return requires specific knowledge of returnees and return contexts. This is lacking from many assisted return programs. The social profiles of potential returnees should be better understood to enhance return programs and to better allow comparisons with the experiences of other returning states. Monitoring and evaluation should be improved and prioritized in order to learn from past experiences, share knowledge, and ensure the safety and sustainability of return.

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