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Programmes for assisted return to Afghanistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, Ethiopia and Kosovo: A comparative evaluation of effectiveness and outcomes

Arne Strand (team leader), Synnøve Kristine Nepstad Bendixsen,
Hilde Lidén, Erlend Paasche and Lovise Aalen

With Asnake Kefale, Sara Khadir, Ali Kurdistanani, Hana Limani and Akbar Sarwari



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Abbreviations

ARE	Assisted Return to Ethiopia
ARRA	Administration for Refugees and Returnees Affairs
AVR	Assisted Voluntary Return
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (used by IOM)
CMI	Chr. Michelsen Institute
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ERIN	European Reintegration Network
ETB	Ethiopian birr
EUR	euro
FSR	Financial Support to Return
HA	housing allowance
HG	headquarters
IDP	internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization of Migration
IRRANA	Information, Return and Reintegration of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan
IRRINI	Information, Return and Reintegration and of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq
ISF	Institutt for Samfunnsforskning
IQD	Iraqi dinar
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KRG	Kurdish regional government
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MORR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (Afghanistan)
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NISS	National Security Services
NOAS	Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers
NOK	Norwegian kroner
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSD	Norsk Samfunnvitenskapelig Datatjeneste
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
RAE	Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
RECAP	Returnee Community Assistance Programme
SEO	Socio-Economic Orientation
TOR	terms of reference
UN	United Nations
UDI	The Norwegian Immigration Authorities
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNE	Utlendingsnemnda/the Norwegian Appeals Boards
US\$	United States dollar
VARP	Voluntary Assisted Return Programme
VG	vulnerable groups
VTY	Vocational Training for Youth

Executive summary

This report is in response to a tender from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) for a comparative study of Norwegian funded return and reintegration programmes, researched by a consortium of researchers from Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), the Institute for Social Research (ISF) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

Return and reintegration programmes are set up differently from country to country and include different types of support as well as different collaborating partners in the countries of origin. This study compares a number of assisted return programmes, addressing the following fundamental themes:

- The return programmes' effects on the number of voluntary returns;
- The return programmes' importance in motivating migrants' return while in Norway; and
- The return programmes' importance for a sustainable and dignified return to the country of origin.

In consultation with UDI and an external reference group, the research team selected four countries for fieldwork: (i) Afghanistan, which has a large number of migrants and a broad range of assistance types, and was subject to a previous study in 2008; (ii) Iraqi Kurdistan, also with a large number of migrants and a broad range of assistance types, and was subject to a previous study in 2011; (iii) Ethiopia, which has increasing assisted return and reintegration support provided through a government organisation; and (iv) Kosovo, where Financial Support for Return (FSR) was the only form of assisted return available until that programme also was stopped in 2013.

An important part of Norwegian policy is to encourage assisted return from Norway for persons without legal residence permits and for those who wish to return to their country of origin. Those who apply for assisted return receive help with the application process, with transport back to their country of origin and, once returned, a cash grant and material reintegration support. For some countries, UDI has developed a specific country programme, and three of these are included in this study: Information, Return and Reintegration of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan (IRRANA); Information, Return and Reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq (IRRINI); and Assisted Return to Ethiopia (ARE). Those wishing to return to other countries can apply for FSR. UDI also has a separate return programme for vulnerable groups (VG) directed towards victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors and persons with health problems. Families with children also receive additional return support, and returnees between 18 and 30 years old are entitled to Vocational Training for Youth (VTY).

Upon return to their country of origin a range of cash and in-kind support is provided to each returnee by IOM or a local government organisation (in the case of Ethiopia). An overview of the different types of assisted return packages and support is provided in Annex I.

The team prioritised as its primary objective to highlight the returnees' own reflections about the programmes, their return and reintegration. Throughout the study, we have sought to present their individual assessments of the programme; for instance, we provide direct quotes in an effort to bring forward their voices, experiences and concerns.

Why choose assisted return while residing in Norway?

During the part of the study conducted in Norway, we found that individuals signing up for assisted return could be grouped into three general categories.

The **first category** consisted of respondents who had **mixed feelings** about their return. For these migrants, their conditions in Norway were the main reason behind their decisions to return. Experiencing that they were losing their dignity and human value and were marginalised in Norway made living conditions there hard to bear. Seeing their future dreams and hopes, in particular for their children, slowly dismantling and feeling increasingly “stuck” (physically, mentally or socially) also led migrants to opt for assisted return. For several, asking for assisted return was a way to respond to a need for a normalised life. Forced return was another factor: some feared that they would be picked up by the police and this fear added to their already marginalised living condition.

The **second category** consisted of those who had a **more outspoken, positive assessment** of their return. Conditions in the country of return played a role in the decision, particularly for those who had family living in that country to whom they had social obligations or with whom they had an emotional bond. Some of them expected to return with an increased social status, as they had remitted money during their stay in Norway. A few of them had never had any intention of staying put in Norway and had now, to at least some degree, achieved their reason for migrating.

A **third category** consisted of respondents who **very negatively** assessed their option to return. A majority of our respondents did not expect that there had been positive changes in their country of origin since they left, and most expected the same issues that caused them to leave to still exist. A few families planned to control the return by hiding members in the family when returning. For yet others, returning included plans to re-migrate either to a neighbouring country where they had family or an ethnic network, or back to Europe or to another western country. These findings may be explained by several factors. Among other things, reflections relating to security, family conditions, and structural conditions in the countries of origin influenced the attitudes and decision making process of migrants.

The period of time in which interviewees decided to request assisted return also varied. Some had considered the option over a long period of time. For others, assisted return became a way out of a difficult situation at the moment they learned about the possibility from someone else, often almost by accident. However, most made the decision after coming to the point where there was no other alternative – which also meant that it was not considered as a choice between other options. This **mental point of return** could have been triggered by something happening in the country of origin or as the consequence of a mental turnaround. All who planned to return had come to the conclusion that continuing their stay in Norway no longer constituted a viable alternative, although some remained more ambiguous than others as to whether they still hoped for a last minute opportunity to stay.

The dissemination of information about assisted return

We found variations in how much information migrants had about assisted return. Those who were living in a reception centre, or had earlier lived in a reception centre, had a generally good understanding of the assisted return programme. Those who had never applied for asylum or had only briefly lived in a reception centre lacked information about assisted return, and usually they had received information about the programme only by accident. In general, contacts with IOM were viewed as positive, although some migrants doubted whether the whole return process would really work. This doubt was exacerbated by rumours in circulation about other returned migrants who had never received the promised assistance or money.

The process of making a **decision to return** was pursued in various ways: Several had not involved their family in Norway or in the country of origin. For parents, some had not involved their children, whereas others had disagreements within the same family about the benefits of returning. Discussions with outsiders, including reception centre staff, about whether or not to return were generally not pursued because interviewees did not believe others would understand their situation. While some did ask friends or acquaintances for their opinion, they made the decision themselves.

Some migrants returned in response to factors in their country of origin or in neighbouring countries, such as family expectations or family reunification. The **role of the family** was particularly strong. The prospects that returnees would remain in the return country (versus re-migrating) seemed to depend on whether the factors that led to their decision to sign up for assisted return and leave Norway were only about conditions and lack of opportunity in Norway (“push” factors) or were about factors in the country of return (“pull” factors).

Migrants who had achieved their goals for migration from a household perspective by remitting income to the family were the most satisfied with the information given and seemed determined to return as a long-term strategy. A **strong kinship network** with the place of origin also encouraged return, as long as the place was also perceived as relatively safe. In some cases, the returnee had also achieved upward mobility due to migration and so return was viewed as positive.

Lack of preparation for the return was tied to expectations that the security, political or economic structures that they once left behind had not changed or that they were returning to what they considered to be an unknown place. What could be viewed as a lack of preparation for returning, from the position of those working on return issues, could be more a matter of the difficulty of preparing for what would meet them in the country of origin.

For a return to not imply re-migration requires prepared individuals. The level of preparedness of a migrant must be seen in light of an individual’s perception of the security situation and the political and economic conditions in his or her place of origin. Such expectations and predictability also influence how migrants mobilise and use their resources after return.

The Afghanistan case

The IRRANA programme (Information, Reintegration and Return of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan) has facilitated assisted return to Afghanistan since 2006 and was evaluated in 2008 (Strand et al.). IOM is the implementing partner in Afghanistan, with a country office in Kabul and sub-offices in major cities.

The programme worked very well in assisting Afghans **to prepare for their return, to travel back and to return** to their place of origin. Special credit from the migrants goes to the IOM Oslo office for facilitating this process. The cash support upon arrival was a very important part of the support, making the first period in the country of origin easier. The additional support for children was positively reviewed, and those who received housing support and/or VTY argued that it was very beneficial for those vulnerable groups. There are, however, major concerns regarding the way these two forms of support were handled by IOM Kabul, as well as the long term effects of the assistance.

The **resettlement and in-kind parts of the programme did not meet the expectations of the returnees** for a sustainable return, as a large majority failed to establish businesses or obtain job placements and thus were contemplating leaving Afghanistan again. This is rather different from what was found in 2008, even if some returnees already then were struggling to secure income from their businesses.

The **worsened economic and security situation in Afghanistan** was the main reason for the reduced business successes; another was the increased trend of outward/circular migration caused by the challenging situation. A third reason was that IOM does not seem to have managed to shift its orientation from the business option towards job placement and education. Moreover, returnees felt that IOM Kabul did not show a respectful attitude towards them (especially the illiterate ones), and systematic follow up and mentoring was lacking.

One might assume that if more returnees had succeeded in establishing their businesses, or had been advised and supported to pursue the education or job placement options, the **sustainability** of their return might have been higher. A question that was not sufficiently answered by IOM Kabul was why it continued promoting the business option and why it claimed reintegration success when it failed to closely monitor the business sector in general and the returnees in particular.

Still, the suggestion some returnees made of **replacing the reintegration support with only cash support** (also recommended in the IRRINI evaluation) is neither likely to secure returnees sufficient income nor to sustain reintegration. Given the present situation in Afghanistan, the probable result of changing the programme in this way would be that more returnees would re-migrate earlier, which certainly would be counter to the intention of any assisted return programme.

The Iraqi Kurdistan case

The IRRINI programme (Information, Reintegration and Return of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq) has facilitated assisted return to Iraq since 2008. The programme covers the whole of Iraq, and IOM still operates assisted return to the entire country except Nineveh (where Mosul is), Anbar, Salahaddin and some other areas.

Most respondents gave a **positive assessment of IOM**, both in Norway and in Iraqi Kurdistan, although the assessment was most positive for IOM Norway. The cash support upon arrival and being met by a high ranking IOM official were very welcome. The field where IOM received the most praise was in logistics. This is reflected in adjectives such as “punctual” and in the positive assessment of IOM’s organisation of the return journey to Kurdistan. The areas where IOM received the least praise were the provision of individual advice and follow up. As for the programme components, both the VT and the Socio-economic Orientation (SEO) seemed to correspond to the needs that returnees described post-return.

There is a concern that **some used “fixers” to help them to bypass bureaucratic procedures** and that the quotation process for business establishment was burdensome in Iraqi Kurdistan. Many felt that IOM could have done more to advise on what type of in-kind assistance would be most beneficial to them in their unique circumstances and to mentor them over the first six months (rather than merely monitoring them).

As noted, the IRRINI programme takes place **within a macro-context of war and economic instability**. These are structural constraints on IOM’s ability to ensure sustainable reintegration, and in this respect much has happened since the previous evaluation of IRRINI only four years ago. The fact that the biggest challenges to sustainable return are macro-structural should be reflected in the design and implementation of the programme.

The Ethiopia case

In January 2012, the two governments of Ethiopia and Norway signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the reintegration of rejected asylum seekers voluntarily returning from Norway to Ethiopia. In the agreement, it was decided that an Ethiopian government body, the Administration for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA), would be responsible for managing the programme in Ethiopia (both the in-kind and community assistance). IOM was to be responsible for recruitment and facilitation of the journey from Norway, as well as for the first cash grant in Ethiopia. After the signing of the MoU, it took more than a year before a specific project agreement between ARRA and UDI was signed (March 2013). This delayed the establishment of a project office responsible for implementing the reintegration programme (operational from April 2013). In the meantime, during the first year, IOM took care of distributing all of the support (cash, in-kind and community support).

A major finding is that using a governmental office to take care of its returnees may have advantages, but these **advantages do not seem to have been sufficiently exploited** in Ethiopia. Many returnees complained about the lack of advice and follow up from the ARRA project office, as well as insufficient effort by that office to facilitate contact with other government offices that could help returnees secure employment and other opportunities upon return. The project office officials claimed to have made efforts to improve this. Yet, more should be done to systematically approach authorities working on job creation or working with micro and small enterprises in order to include returnees in programmes in these areas. This also requires the relevant authorities to have a service-minded attitude vis-à-vis returnees.

The labour division between two organisations in the reintegration process, IOM in Oslo and ARRA in Addis Ababa, has also **challenged the consistency of the programme**. IOM in Oslo has not managed to keep itself updated about policy changes on the Ethiopian side, while ARRA, in cooperation with UDI, has not sufficiently informed IOM in Oslo about policy changes or – more likely – has actually lacked clear policies regarding how it should communicate to IOM, as illustrated by a controversy that arose around the RCAP funds. These **communication gaps** demonstrate that the model of having two different organisations in charge, one in the country of return and one in country of origin, increases the risks of bureaucratic fragmentation.

Despite deficiencies the **reported success in establishing businesses and the general sustainability of return is higher** to Ethiopia than in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan, though this can be at least partly attributed to a **booming economy and the absence of on-going warfare** in Ethiopia.

Only a few returnees suggested that it is a problem that ARRA is governmental and not independent. Although some complained about the office's inefficiency and bureaucracy, **the majority did not seem bothered by the potential political implications of dealing with a governmental body**. For the most part, they concluded that if the government wanted to control and persecute returnees, it could do so through an independent organisation just as easily as through a government body. This suggests that the returnees are aware of the Ethiopian government's capacity to control its population, even through non-governmental organisations. For potential returnees in Norway, however (who in many cases are part of a polarised and highly government critical diaspora community) this could add fuel to the argument of the Ethiopian diaspora that return is unsafe.

The Kosovo case

Kosovo is included in the comparative evaluation because it is a European country of origin with a long history of asylum migration to Norway. It is also a country to which Norway has long returned migrants and can provide a reference to the respective merits of cash grants versus in-kind support with follow-up and counselling. Kosovo is particularly interesting in this regard because UDI decided to terminate the FSR programme for Kosovo on 19 July 2013, after it was discovered that cash grants meant to encourage return and facilitate reintegration had an alleged perverse effect of attracting asylum seekers to Norway.

Most respondents gave a **positive assessment of IOM, both in Norway and in Kosovo**, although they spoke most positively about IOM in Norway. As a group, the returnees to Kosovo returned to quite a large extent **because of a fear of forced return**. Although as a group they were very content with the programme and would recommend assisted return to others in a similar situation, it also seems clear that the Norwegian authorities should not expect the programme to facilitate long-term reintegration. It did seem important, however, **both for the decision to return and in the initial phase of post-return reintegration**.

Kosovo differs markedly from the conflict-affected regions of Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan, but its grim future prospects do make these cases comparable on the dimension of sustainability of return. Many of the returnees wanted to re-migrate and did not see much of a future locally. While there is evidence that misuse of assistance did exist (and even some indications that it was widespread), not all Kosovars reported awareness of the return assistance programme prior to seeking asylum in Norway. Some rejected and returned asylum seekers, including minors, reported that they felt or seemed to be personally at risk upon return.

The FSR programme was cash-based and seems to have been highly functional and effective. IOM deserves particular praise for its follow-up and monitoring of underage vulnerable returnees and the in-kind support it provided to this group through the VG programme, which seems to have been attuned to needs, un-bureaucratic, swift and very important to the beneficiaries. Returnees reported receiving the cash grants without any problems, and local IOM employees took pride in the organisation's transparency and anti-corruption mechanisms.

In the end, a *highly functional* in-kind programme with needs-based and individualised support would probably outperform a *highly functional* cash-based reintegration programme. However, the former comes with a string of practical challenges, high transaction costs and a strong need for monitoring and follow up (whether internal or external). In this light, the FSR programme to Kosovo represented a feasible and straightforward alternative

Comparison between case countries

We highlight here where there are either major similarities or differences between the cases.

Asked why they had **emigrated** their country of origin, we identified two main trends. The largest group cited personal insecurity, and the majority of those who responded in this way were from Afghanistan. The second largest group cited economic reasons for emigration, and Ethiopia stood out in this group.

The majority of those who emigrated for security reasons did *not* actively select **Norway as their destination**. They were either advised by others or acted upon the advice of or had the decision made by a human smuggler. Among those who personally decided to go to Norway, the largest number cited economic opportunities for jobs and a good salary, and the majority of those respondents came from Ethiopia. The second largest group – mainly from Kosovo and Iraqi Kurdistan – already had family and friends in Norway. An almost equally large group mentioned favourable Norwegian asylum and immigration policies, followed by a group that referred to Norway's respect for human rights and its status as a peaceful society with democratic values.

The majority of those who signed up for assisted return **learned about the programme** at the reception centre where they resided, while the second largest group named IOM as the source of their information (most of this latter group were from Afghanistan). A smaller group cited friends and other asylum seekers or the media (this last group consisted mostly of Ethiopians), and a few first learned about the programme in the letter rejecting asylum.

The **processing time** for assisted return applications was in general very short, which was very much appreciated by the returnees – except for a few cases involving Ethiopians where the embassy location in Sweden delayed the process. The **return journey** came out with high ratings, except for a few challenges for return to Ethiopia, as did the **welcome and cash provision upon arrival** at the airport in the country of return. An observation here is that quite a few settled in a **different part of the country than the one they left**, leaving them with potentially weaker networks to rely on than if they had returned “home.” Length of absence was another important factor in where they resettled. Networks

might have eroded (or moved), and returnees were forced to understand and adapt to contextual and social changes in the area of return.

The **cash grant received at the airport** was regarded by returnees from all countries as important for their return and initial resettlement. The majority used it for daily expenses, to receive guests immediately following their return and for other expenses.

Returnees to Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Iraqi Kurdistan had a choice of reintegration assistance, which was implemented by IOM in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan and by ARRA in Ethiopia. The **processing time** was relatively speedy (on average 2 months), except in Ethiopia (due to the late establishment of the ARRA project office). Almost all returnees ended up with the **business option**; only 12 chose job placements, and 1 chose education. Importantly, however, not all of those who pursued the business option had chosen that option while back in Norway. More than half of those who pursued the business option reported that they created a **business partnership**, with a higher frequency of this in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan than in Ethiopia.

As many as 47 returnees did not find a business that could provide them with a **steady and sufficient income**. Out of these, 8 of these expected that they eventually would, and for 7 others it was too early to tell.

An alarming trend is that many businesses **were in operation only for a short period of time**. This negative outlook was confirmed by the fact that only 27 **businesses were still operative** at the time of the interview (22 had already closed down). The success rate was far higher in Ethiopia than in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan, with the booming Ethiopian economy being the primary factor for this success. Nonetheless, despite otherwise better business success in Ethiopia, many businesses there also closed down shortly after opening.

A housing allowance was available on application only for those returning to Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan, although the programmes in each country administered it differently. All returnees judged the assistance to be very useful, but many Afghans planned to relocate when the six-month support ended.

The respondents' reported very **high satisfaction with IOM's assistance in Norway**. However, one complaint (also after return) was that the information provided in Norway was inaccurate, especially in regard to the choice they had of in-kind assistance. The **assessment of IOM in the country of origin** was consistently high across all countries, but a number of returnees to Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan stated dissatisfaction with IOM's handling of the application process, and what they regarded as differences between the information provided in Norway and in their country of return. The interviewees' **assessment of ARRA** varied greatly and reflected the fact that the programme had only recently started up. In regard to ARRA, respondents complained of a lack of communication with returnees, a weak advisory role and a lack of follow-up and monitoring.

The majority of returnees found their **personal situation after return very different and even worse** than what they had expected it to be. The largest number of individuals responding in this way were from Afghanistan, followed by Ethiopia and Iraqi Kurdistan. In Kosovo, the majority did not find their situation any different, possibly because of the short period they had been away.

An almost equal number of returnees **expected to remain where they presently lived** versus **re-migrating elsewhere** – with 17 undecided. Most Ethiopians intended to remain, while most Afghans planned to leave. A large number from Iraqi Kurdistan also planned to leave. The group of interviewees intending to leave included returnees who planned to apply for family reunification in Norway.

Asked if the return assistance had **encouraged a sustained stay** in the country of origin, an alarmingly high number, **75%, stated “no,”** only 16% said “yes” and 9% did not respond or were uncertain. However, here is an interesting contrast: all respondents except for 3 acknowledged the **advantages of the return programme**. Some explained that it allowed them to return once asylum in Norway was no longer possible, others regarded the cash support as the biggest advantage and still others appreciated the in-kind assistance. As many as 23, particularly Afghans and Kosovars, acknowledged the benefit of avoiding a forced return with the police, despite not having opted for assisted return as an alternative to forced return.

An observation is that IOM received high ratings for its activities in Norway, the return travel and the provision of cash grants. The judgement is more mixed on the return/reintegration assistance, with a large variation between countries (both positive and negative). This could indicate a lack of a consistent organisational system across countries to guide, manage and apply lessons learned. It also could indicate that management structures are weaker (or stronger) in some countries than in others or that IOM employees manage to respond to and assist returnees more effectively in some countries than in others (as reported in Norway).

The **increase in insecurity in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan** caused worries among those planning to return. The indication is that this concern led migrants to consider re-migration after return (not just reintegration) even before they left Norway. Such concerns add to uncertainty about returning to the country of origin and reduce predictability of the return and reintegration process.

Another important finding, supported by other research, is that **strong kinship networks within an individual’s place of origin not only encourage return, but also appear to sustain return**. Returnees who have such support are better prepared for return and are to a larger degree committed to their network/family. The findings from the country cases support the conclusion drawn from interviews in Norway that expectations and predictability “influence how returnees mobilise and use their resources after return,” or in other words, how much they invest in a sustained reintegration. **Time away from country of origin** is another important factor as more time away from the country of origin may erode networks, contextual knowledge and adaptability upon return.

Motivation and preparation for return

For those who signed up for assisted return, their **conditions in Norway** were the main motivation for returning to their country of origin. Loss of dignity and their value as human beings was an explanation, as was seeing dreams and hopes coming to an end and feeling “stuck.” For some, the decision to return was a way to normalise life and to avoid a fear of forced return, and many reached the point where they realised that there were no other viable alternatives available to them. For a few who had established a family in Norway, the decision was part of a future plan to enable their return to Norway.

An important finding from the interviews in Norway is that **there is little difference in knowledge of and access to information about assisted return** between those living in a reception centre and those who have moved out of a reception centre (having previously lived there). However, those who had never lived in a reception centre had hardly any knowledge of this option. Different channels and forms of information reach different groups of potential returnees; most refer to IOM and staff at reception centres, while others refer to information on the internet.

The **accuracy of the information** provided is an important point here, although it must be acknowledged that IOM and UDI cannot be prepared for and inform returnees about all eventualities they may face. Nonetheless, one especially important point is that the organisation or government entity assisting individuals with reintegration should offer returnees the assistance choices they were informed about in Norway, but not promise them more than can actually be delivered. Moreover, there should be

flexibility in planning the return date and transfer of relevant information of vulnerable groups (including schoolchildren and students) to their country of origin. Information also needs to be provided on how returnees can receive outstanding tax returns, how they can legally transfer their savings and if and how they can maintain their bank accounts in Norway.

IOM has responsibly and efficiently managed the application process and the practical arrangements for return. While employees at reception centres are less important to the returnees' decision making processes, they do provide valuable guidance once the decision has been made. Those whose embassies are located outside Norway face more practical challenges than others.

One can conclude that the different return programmes and their components are not the main motivation for selecting assisted return for most migrants. Rather, it is the lack of future prospects and a general feeling of unpredictability the asylum seekers were faced with in Norway. Those who have returned have remarked positively about how the programme enabled them to return in an orderly and well-organised manner. To what extent forced return leads to increased assisted return is not obvious (see Brekke 2015), though avoiding forced return is regarded as a benefit of the assisted return programme. Some interviewed in Norway chose assisted return in order to escape the fear of forced return, a fear that for many adds to their marginalised living conditions.

It could be added that one finding from the Brekke study is that returnees might understate the value of return assistance as a motivation for return before actually returning, which corresponds with our analysis from comparison of case countries.

Return and reintegration

The return travel and arrival in country of origin is deemed as well-organised and appreciated by the large majority of returnees. It is when the reintegration process starts that many of them face challenges. The large majority reported a failure to establish a business or to secure employment. Some found the application process for in-kind assistance to be too bureaucratic, and in some locations the process was not in accordance with local business practice and was challenging for those with limited literacy. The returnees' differing intentions may have influenced their success, however, as some aimed to reintegrate and others planned to re-migrate (see discussion below). In any case, four contributing factors appear to determine success or failure of reintegration:

1. The **economic and security situation** in the area of return, which influences general economic prospects and the ability to secure an income over time;
2. The **professional skills and management experience/ability** of the returnee;
3. The **availability of family** (and good relations with the family) in the country of origin (this might be an important contributing factor for lasting reintegration); and
4. **IOM/ARRA's role** in providing evidence-based advice on selecting the most appropriate type of in-kind assistance (and type of business) and providing mentoring during the start-up phase when there are indications that the business or job placement might fail.

This project's TOR asks *to what extent the programme satisfies the needs of the target groups, including families with children and vulnerable groups.*

It is difficult to provide a well-documented answer, given the low number of returned families in our sample. However, all the families that were interviewed appreciated and highlighted the additional support per child and noted that housing support was extremely useful, particularly for the first period

after their return. The sustainability aspect is less clear, as many of those receiving additional support failed (as did the others) in establishing viable businesses. Some families also considered re-migration. However, several chose to stay in their country of origin because they had brought their family back or re-joined them, and they considered the cash and in-kind assistance to be a major factor in securing that ambition. Other types of targeted and means-tested assistance, such as vocational training, were highly rated by the returnees, but the research team has some concerns regarding how these types of assistance are presented to the returnees and managed, and if the returnees get the best possible benefit from them.

Sustained return

Challenges arise for sustained return when the in-kind assistance does not provide returnees with any lasting source of income, at least for those who desire or are at least open to the possibility of permanent resettlement in their area of return. For some, the in-kind assistance can still be of value, as they might use it for other investments that facilitate a smoother reintegration process. For a number of returnees, re-migrating to another area (or even country) may lead to a more sustainable return in the long term, even if this re-migration does not meet the intention of the return programme – and in-kind assistance may be converted to cash to this end. For some, cash upon return might provide more opportunities than in-kind support, which is subject to a lengthy application process that delays receiving support by at least a month. Yet, for many, external and contextual factors might influence success at reintegration more than the reintegration assistance on its own.

It is a major concern that so many of the returnees offered in-kind support failed to secure a lasting income from the assistance received, and that this to a certain extent was caused by insufficient advice and mentoring throughout the business establishment process. Returnees' aspirations and ability to reintegrate is another factor (see below). The in-kind portion of the assistance does not meet either the expectations of UDI or the returnees and needs to be reconsidered or modified. While there are particular challenges in countries with a failing economy, these kinds of local conditions might be expected in most countries emerging from or experiencing conflicts. Therefore, a thorough consideration of alternatives to in-kind assistance is warranted. Education and vocational training might be better alternatives in such contexts (both for individuals and their communities). On the positive side, those with professional skills and/or management capability tended to retain their businesses even in challenging economic situations.

For families, sustained return is often linked to a smooth process that can ensure continued education of the children upon return. The facilitation of educational continuation in this process could be improved in Norway, including a consideration of the date of return in light of differing educational systems, as well as the documentation needed to ensure a smooth transition.

The Ethiopian model – with reintegration assistance handled by a government body – has not yet distinguished itself in any positive way from other models. It does have some promising features, including the potential for coordination and cooperation with other parts of the government, which could be a crucial factor in supporting sustained reintegration. The will and ability of any national government to protect and support its citizens still might vary, but the question remains whether a government would to a larger degree be held accountable towards its own citizens over time than a project-funded organisation, whose time, responsibility and perspective is limited to six months after return.

Aspiration and ability factors

The interviews in Norway and the cases studied identified two other factors that needs to be taken into consideration: the aspiration each returnee holds for his or her future and the returnee's ability to fulfil it. This reflects the point made that the population of returnees is not a homogeneous mass. Return means different things to different people. This has led us to identify a typology of returnees, developed

and expanded from Carling's (2002) aspiration/ability model of emigration and based on our own empirical data. The distribution of returnees across the four categories will likely differ across national and local contexts:

Type of returnee	Post-return characteristic
Those who aspire for reintegration and are able to reintegrate	Sustainable return
Those who aspire for reintegration but are unable to reintegrate	Volatile return
Those who do not aspire for reintegration, but are unable to re-migrate	Unsustainable return
Those who do not aspire for reintegration and are able to re-migrate, either back to the country of previous settlement or elsewhere	Re-migration

This typology opens the opportunity for a broader discussion on how different types of assistance could be effectively used to target the needs, desires and capabilities of each group. Importantly, a returnee may move across categories with time, so the time factor must also be considered when organising the types of support to be provided. Furthermore, how return and reintegration assistance is handled not only affects the characteristics of returnees, but is also influenced by the types of returnees involved.

Main evaluation questions

This section provides a more nuanced response to the question of *whether the return programme is primarily important for a sustainable and dignified return to the country of origin or whether it is primarily a support for the first period after return.*

The assisted return programme allows for a dignified return, though some return with a higher degree of fear for their future than others. Some fear insecurity and others possible negative reactions from the government. The large majority of interviewees found the situation after return very different from what they had expected, especially those who had been away for many years. Those who have been absent from the country of return for a long period may also have a particular need for more in-depth counselling.

Likewise, there is a common opinion across return countries that the programme ensures very valuable support for the first period after the return, which for many is crucial to re-establishing their networks and preparing for their future. However, while some use the cash assistance for bridging the gap between when they return and when they receive in-kind assistance or their business investments pay off, others simply add the cash assistance to their re-migration budget.

It is less obvious how important the return and reintegration programmes are for the sustainability of the return. The majority of returnees reported that failed businesses or job placement efforts added to the challenge of sustaining their return. Some returnees opted to stay on in their place of origin, while others intended to leave. Often the choice to stay was not because their return was viewed as sustainable, but because they did not have the means to re-migrate. Many returning to Ethiopia saw their return as

sustainable due to the country's positive economic prospects and a stable (although restrictive and challenging) rights situation. Those returning to Kosovo, on the other hand, were uncertain due to weak economic prospects and were also influenced by a general trend towards outward emigration. Many returning to Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan did not believe their return could be sustained, due to increased insecurity and faltering economies. This current situation stands in contrast to returnees to Afghanistan in 2008 and Iraqi Kurdistan in 2011, when the economic prospects were better.

Thus, one cannot judge the effect of the assistance programmes in a vacuum when discussing sustainability. The present and perceived situation and developments in each country/region of return must also be considered. Returnees will perceive the situation differently based on their own skills, networks and experience. Furthermore, as we argue above, their individual decisions may be influenced by how well they are able to plan their return, how predictable the return programme seems to them, how they are met upon their return, the advice they receive on using in-kind assistance and how well-mentored they are during the first months back in their country of origin.

Which types of assistance provide the best effect for the returnees, support in cash or the more practical "in-kind" support with follow up and advice over time?

The cash grant received upon arrival is important during the immediate post-return period and facilitates social reintegration of returnees during a period that can be difficult. The in-kind assistance received little praise by many returnees, but is highly appreciated by those who have been able to use it to sustain a livelihood.

A *highly functional* in-kind support programme is likely to outperform a cash programme, but it comes with a string of practical challenges, high transaction costs and a strong need for monitoring and follow-up to provide the returnees the best possible result. In this light, the FSR programme in Kosovo represents a feasible and straightforward alternative, but it also illustrates the limits to a cash-based programme. In regards to the in-kind programmes reviewed here, on the other hand, returnees identified a lack of advice on selecting the type of in-kind support (and type of business) and a failure to follow up as shortcomings for both IOM and ARRA. Findings from Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan also indicate that returnees may be able to bypass control mechanisms through fraudulent practices. That, combined with the need for better guidance and consultancy, shows that IOM and ARRA need to come across more as helpers and advisors than controllers; they need to provide counsel on the options that are most likely to provide the best results for each individual returnee, while at the same time maintaining strong internal control and oversight of how UDI supported programmes and funding are utilised.

Vocational training could represent a new way of thinking about reintegration programmes. Evidence from Iraqi Kurdistan and Afghanistan suggests that it is very well received and in demand by returnees. Courses or internships of a longer duration could entice returnees to continue their residence in the country of return. In war-affected or underdeveloped countries with an environment hostile to setting up a productive business, improving employability by offering training post-return seems reasonable. In Ethiopia, on the other hand, the success rate of businesses suggests that there is no reason to re-allocate money away from the business model.

Both IOM and ARRA could have done more to provide effective follow up, guidance and advice to the returnees. The possibilities are many and hardly more costly. As a start, these organisations should prioritise developing a service minded attitude, staff with skills for providing advice (rather than only monitoring), a complaints mechanism, clear anti-corruption controls, a willingness to inform, the provision of correct information and efforts to coordinate with and draw on (other) government resources (including for IOM) as well as to monitor sustainability beyond three to six months. The innovative introduction of the Socio-Economic Orientation in Iraqi Kurdistan is an example of a

successful change to the programme based on local staff's observations of returnees' needs, and is one to be recommended in all countries.

The cases of Iraqi Kurdistan and Afghanistan show the importance of flexibility in terms of the generosity of support. In times of crisis, there is an increased need. If the programmes are to serve their purpose, they should offer more support during these periods. On the other hand, programme stability is important because returnees often access information about the return programmes through hearsay and may easily be confused about changes in what they are entitled to. The answer to this dilemma, we suggest, is to discretely increase the level of generosity. In Iraqi Kurdistan as well as in Afghanistan, there are strong reasons to widen the eligibility criteria for vocational training and for housing allowances. When the level of conflict and instability decreases in the future, the number of additional grants could be decreased accordingly back to normal.

Recommendations

Information and outreach in Norway

This generally works well. The primary concern is the lack of information among those who have not stayed in reception centres and among some migrants who have stayed in Norway for many years and have less knowledge of the practical aspects of everyday life in their country of origin. Therefore,

- Give particular attention to the potential needs of prospective returnees who have resided in Norway for a long time, as they may be in need of additional counselling. Consider group meetings for them to share their plans and questions.
- Improve information about assisted return on the internet: many migrants use this source of information when in Norway. The fact that those who had never lived in the reception centres had not received information about assisted return (even though they actively used the internet) suggests that agencies are not taking full advantage of the potentials of the internet.
- Inform returnees about how they can receive their outstanding tax refunds after their return.

Processing of applications in Norway

This generally works well, but it is important to ensure that the process is *predictable* and that returnees are well-informed about the situation in their country of origin. Therefore,

- Improve pre-return plans and preparations: establish more predictability for returning by going through an individual cost-of-living plan with returnees, so that migrants know better what to expect.
- Be flexible in terms of the return date; allow children and youth to complete the school year/semester in order to facilitate educational continuation.
- Specify the economic support in local currency in the country of return to avoid currency fluctuations that may cause feelings of injustice and suspicions of corruption, as well as creating an unpredictable system.

Organisation of the return journey

This is well organised, but one recommendation is to

- Provide information relevant to the return journey in English, so that the migrant can use it as documentation, if necessary, during the journey.

Delivery and design of the reintegration assistance

Here changes are needed. That stated, the cash support works well, as does the support for families and vulnerable groups. We recommend that those benefits are continued at the same levels. Continuation of housing assistance and the possibility of vocational training is recommended, though with some modifications and flexibility of rates.

- Ensure that IOM (and ARRA) provide updated advice to returnees on what in-kind assistance is likely to provide them the best opportunity for income and a sustained return. If IOM is not in a position to do so, other service providers (or a consortium of such) should be considered.
- In areas of increased insecurity and faltering business prospects, consider whether vocational training should be recommended over the business option (and also should consider the possibility of longer courses).
- If described as part of the programme, the choice of employment should be a real possibility for migrants returning. If it is not possible to implement this part of the programme in some countries, provide this information to UDI, and remove the option from the programme description.
- Rather than pursuing a monitoring role, have IOM and ARRA place more emphasis on advising, mentoring and assisting migrants who have returned. It should move from the role of controller to that of facilitator for returnees requesting assistance.
- Demand that IOM and ARRA establish a complaints mechanism separate from the management of the reintegration programme, and consider the possibility of establishing a phone complaints mechanism with local Norwegian embassies.
- Introduce Socio-Economic Orientation in all countries, and provide this component soon after arrival in the country of origin.
- Be more flexible with housing allowances (application based) when it comes to the amount provided and the number of individuals who may receive it.
- Recognise that in some countries the requirement of presenting three quotations before obtaining in-kind assistance to start a business does not reduce corruption, but rather contributes to it. Other methods for the purchase of in-kind assistance should be considered.
- Consider whether UDI should establish its own phone follow-up system to monitor the situation for returnees, either by selecting a few returnees for interviews or interviewing all who have returned.
- Have UDI budget for external and regular reviews of all assisted return programmes and apply a methodology that allow for comparison across countries.

1. Introduction¹

This report is in response to a tender from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) for a comparative study of Norwegian funded return and reintegration programmes, won by a consortium of the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), the Institute for Social Research (ISF) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

The tender document explains that the aim of the study is to gain knowledge on how return and reintegration programmes influence the target groups' motivations to select voluntary assisted return, the number of actual returns and what effect different types of support have on short as well as long term reintegration in returnees' countries of origin. This knowledge will be used to further develop and target return and reintegration programmes in Norway and in countries of return. There is a need for more knowledge on the effects and impacts of these programmes, what has functioned well, what has not done so and why.

Return and reintegration programmes are structured differently and include a variety of types of support and different collaborating partners in the countries of origin. This study compares a number of programmes, addressing the following fundamental themes:

- The return programmes' effects on the number of voluntary returns;
- The return programmes' importance in motivating return of those in Norway; and
- The return programmes' importance for a sustainable and dignified return to the country of origin.

For each programme evaluated, the study assesses the following:

- What effect the programme and its components have had on (a) the motivation to return and (b) actual carried out returns;
- To what extent the programme satisfies the needs of target groups, including families with children and vulnerable groups; and
- The strengths and weaknesses of each programme, including (a) whether the programme lays a foundation for lasting and sustainable return (or is primarily a support during the initial period after return); (b) what types of assistance provide the best effect for returnees (support in cash or the more practical "in-kind" support with follow up and advice over time); (c) what the experiences have been with means-tested support components (such as housing allowances, education and vocational training); and (d) whether these means-tested support systems have adjusted towards those needing them the most.

This study also assesses the possibilities and limitations for collaborating partners to provide programme support in relation to follow up, guidance and advice in the returnees' countries of origin.

In addition to examining whether the return programmes met the short-term goal of returnees' dignified reestablishment in the country of origin, the team also reviewed whether support systems for voluntary assisted return reached the goal of helping returnees achieve a lasting and sustainable return. This study

¹ On 1 September 2015 UDI implemented certain changes to a number of the programmes discussed in this review; these changes are presented as part of each country case study.

provides suggestions and viewpoints regarding how, and to what extent, assisted voluntary return may lead to reconstruction and development in the return countries.

In consultation with UDI and an external reference group, the research consortium selected four countries for fieldwork. These countries were chosen in an attempt to assess a variety of (i) socioeconomic contexts, (ii) types of assistance packages and benefits, (iii) implementation modes and partners and (iv) types and numbers of returnees, and to compare these factors over time. The countries selected were Afghanistan (large number of migrants, broad range of assistance, previously studied in 2008), Iraqi Kurdistan (large number of migrants, broad range of assistance, previously studied in 2011), Ethiopia (increasing assisted returns, reintegration support through a government organisation) and Kosovo (only provided FSR until this return programme was halted in 2013). We will return to this throughout the study, but it should be noted that the security and economic situation in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan deteriorated significantly throughout the period of the study.

The study was divided into two areas of investigation, and thus two reports are being produced. The first was conducted and written by Jan-Paul Brekke (ISF), *Why go Back? Assisted Return from Norway* (2015), and deals with key factors that influence assisted return. That report contains an analysis of statistical information on migration, complemented by interviews with key informants in charge of assisted return at reception centres in Norway. The report also introduces and applies some empirically based analytical concepts, including *predictability*, *expectation management*, *communication*, *motivation* and *loss aversion*.

This second report examines, first, the effect of available return programmes on the motivation and decision making processes of individuals in Norway who may consider returning to their country of origin. This part of the report is based on interviews that Synnøve K. N. Bendixsen and Hilde Lidén engaged in with persons planning to return to three of the four countries selected as case studies (not Iraqi Kurdistan), as well as individuals planning to return to countries other than these. Second, the report sets forth case studies from the four countries under review (Afghanistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, Ethiopia and Kosovo). Arne Strand, assisted by Akbar Sarwari, undertook fieldwork in Afghanistan. Lovise Aalen, assisted by Asnake Kefale, undertook fieldwork in Ethiopia, and Erlend Paasche undertook fieldwork in Kosovo and Iraqi Kurdistan, assisted respectively by Hana Limani and Ali Hussain Abdullah. Paasche was also in charge of developing the interview guide for interviews in the four countries of return and for developing the analytical framework for the cross-country comparative analysis.

The team benefited from quality assurance from Jørgen Carling (PRIO) and Mari Teigen (ISF). The external reference group consisted of Bente Scott Amundsen, Sidsel Braaten, Rachel Elisabeth Eide and Øystein Egeland from UDI; Stine Mønter from the Norwegian Ministry of Justice; Elin Hauge and Yahia Chalank from the International Organization for Migration (IOM); and Olav Strand from the Hobøl Reception Centre. The reference group met at different stages of the evaluation and individual members were consulted by phone and provided comments to the draft report.

The team wishes to thank the reference group for its valuable advice and comments on the research process and the reports. It also wishes to express gratitude for assistance rendered in Norway, Afghanistan, Jordan, Iraq, Kosovo and Ethiopia by the staff of UDI, IOM and ARRA, as well as the assistance provided by the Norwegian embassies in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Ethiopia.

2. Terms, concepts and categorisation of returnees

This evaluation contains terms that are central in the return and reintegration literature and in the presentation of assisted return programmes, but which might be applied and understood differently by governments and policy makers in countries of origin, countries hosting asylum seekers, organisations involved in assisted return, researchers and returnees themselves. This is especially the case for the questions of what is regarded as a “sustainable return”; what components can/should be in place for ensuring, or at least facilitating, such sustainability; and how returnees might be grouped into a typology based on their aspirations for reintegration in their countries of origin.

A further issue that emerges from comparing the country cases is whether there are potential advantages of different types of “implementing partners” in terms of the information, return and reintegration components of the return process, and if selecting partners based on these advantages might influence the sustainability of an assisted return programme.

Therefore, this chapter contains a systematic and in-depth consideration of key terms and concepts intended to enable a more thorough analysis and more targeted recommendations. The chapter begins by presenting and discussing key terms and issues identified in regard to these terms. It then outlines present theory and findings from recent studies, which will later be drawn upon in the country cases and conclusions.

2.1 Sustainable return

An article by Black and Gent (2006) titled “Sustainable Return in Post-conflict Contexts” broadly reviews the available literature before it presents and discusses what might constitute a “sustainable” return. Notably, Black and Gent refer to a 1999 publication by Hammond (and edited by Black and Koser), “The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugees Repatriation and Reconstruction,” where Hammond makes the assumption that by “re-rooting” refugees they will be morally, spiritually, culturally and economically better off. Black and Gent (2006, 20) draws on Black and Koser (1999) when they argue against this view, quoting that “return may not be a ‘re-’ anything but the beginning of a new cycle.” Moreover, they find the notion of a fixed and clear “home” problematic, asking the following questions: (1) Should refugees return to their home or their homeland? (2) Who should decide where they should return – the refugees themselves, governments or international organisations? (3) What are the motivation behind the decision? (4) What is the deeper meaning of “home”? Critically, they observe that “refugees can be more at ‘home’ in the country of asylum, especially if they have lived there for a long time, or if economic or social opportunities are likely to be denied to them in their country of origin” (ibid., 21).

Other research sheds further light on what is meant by sustainable return. For instance, at a PREMIG conference in August 2015, Paolo Boccagni argued that return migration is a movement across time as much as across space and argued for the use of a “temporally-sensitive approach.” In that connection he questioned the notion of “home” as a common category and suggested that the place of origin must possess certain normative requirements for a “homecoming” to subjectively qualify as successful. These include (1) cognitive requirements (what place(s) the returnee defines as home, what distinguishes that place and what attributes make it appropriate for the returnee); (2) emotional requirements (what “being at home” feels like, including the emotions associated to it); (3) rational requirements (what meaningful/important relationships are attached to the home); and (4) material requirements (how the aspiration to make the place a home is made real, e.g., through housing, investments, etc.).

When Black and Gent (2006) discuss the term “sustainability,” they identify two possibilities for measuring it – either in relation to the position of an individual returnee or in relation to the wider

context (to which the returnee returns). Based on a pilot study on voluntary return to the Balkans they defined that (ibid., 26), **“Return migration is sustainable for individuals if returnees’ socio-economic status and fear of violation or persecution is no worse, relative to the population in the place of origin, one year after their return.”**

The authors acknowledge the challenge of determining what might constitute a “place of origin” due to a high degree of internal migration and urbanisation in many countries of return, and they question whether access to services should be held up to some absolute standard or should be relative to the general population in the place where a returnee returns.

Moreover, they enquire what definitions of sustainability international organisations apply. IOM, a key actor in return migration, uses the following definition of reintegration (IOM 2004): **“Re-inclusion or re-incorporation into a group or a process, e.g. of a migrant into the society of his country of origin.”** United Nation organisations take a more developmental approach and emphasise a range of key conditions to ensuring sustainability – that “return migrants arguably need employment, housing, access to public and social services, education, public utilities and security” (Black and Gent 2006, 31).

A recent literature source (drawing on the same theoretical framework) is a 2015 IOM multi-country study covering 15 countries, conducted by Koser and Kuschminder. They define “sustainable return” as occurring when **“[t]he individual has reintegrated into the economic, social and cultural processes of the country of origin and feels that they are in an environment of safety and security upon return”** (2015, 8). This definition differs in several ways from the Black and Gent definition cited above. First, it envisions a more open-ended and process-orientated timeframe than the one year applied by Black and Gent. Second, returnees’ own feelings of safety and security have replaced a measurement of what is “relative to the population in the place of origin.” Third, the definition adds culture to the economic and social factors/processes. This definition “assumes that reintegration is a necessary precondition for meaningful sustainable return,” and it “highlights that the returnee must perceive that they are in conditions of safety and security upon return, which should remove the impetus for re-migration at least in the foreseeable future” (ibid., 49).

This literature draws two key summary findings from the multiple factors influencing sustainable return. One is that the initial reason for migrating may affect later reintegration: “[R]eturnees who migrated for economic reasons were more likely to be reintegrated when compared to returnees who migrated for other reasons including political-security factors” (ibid., 61). The other is the importance of the migrant’s sense of belonging: “returnees who both have a sense of belonging to the community prior to migration and return to the same community after migration are more likely to be reintegrated” (ibid.).²

Another important reflection of the Koser and Kuschminder report is that some returnees might re-migrate “even if their circumstances upon return are demonstrably better than when they first left, if their status in the community has decreased, or if their perceptions do not acknowledge their realities” (ibid., 15). When problematizing the terms “reintegration” and “sustainable return” the authors note that returnees (ibid.)

. . . may return to their country of origin and stay long enough to be considered sustainable but without actually reintegrating. An example is where they would prefer to leave again but face obstacles to re-migrating. Equally, some people may reintegrate fully upon return, but still consider re-migrating. An example is if better opportunities arise elsewhere.

² Details on this report’s launch and findings are available at <http://www.merit.unu.edu/return-and-reintegration-of-migrants-iom-report-launch/>.

We acknowledge the relevance of both of these definitions of “sustainable return,” especially the emphasis on the individual (which we explored in our interviews). Nonetheless, we note that for this evaluation we are not in a position to apply a one-year timeframe for assessing sustainability of a return, as in Black and Gent’s 2006 definition. Nor do we have sufficient opportunities to explore all dimensions of economic, social and cultural processes in our interviews, as suggested by Koser and Kuschminder’s 2015 definition.

Rather than developing our own definition, we start with the actor perspective and present the returnees’ own assessments of how sustainable they regarded their own individual returns to be at the time of the interview. This is complemented by a broader analysis (presented in the conclusion) that draws on the definitions outlined above.

2.2 Typology of returnees

Through analysis of the four return cases, we identify a typology of returnees, based on their different prospects and opportunities for reintegration at return. We introduce this here (rather than in the conclusion) to help inform the analysis of each case and of the overall conclusions.

This typology draws upon, develops and expands Carling’s (2002) aspiration/ability model of emigration. It groups returnees in accordance with their aspirations for reintegration (as expressed by themselves) and links these aspirations with the sustainability of return or likelihood of re-migration.

Please note that the distribution of returnees across the four categories will likely differ across national and local contexts. These categories should also be considered dynamic, as returnees may transition from one to another over time. The timing of such transitions will likely differ based on the influence of internal and external factors on an individual’s aspirations.

Table 1: Type of returnee and post-return characteristic

Type of returnee	Post-return characteristic
Those who aspire for reintegration and are able to reintegrate	Sustainable return
Those who aspire for reintegration but are unable to reintegrate	Volatile return
Those who do not aspire for reintegration, but are unable to re-migrate	Unsustainable return
Those who do not aspire for reintegration and are able to re-migrate, either back to the country of previous settlement or elsewhere	Re-migration

We discuss these categories further in the country cases and in the conclusion.

2.3 Implementing partners and different programme components

Two questions that emerge through our analysis are (1) who might be potential implementing partners for assisted return programmes and (2) whether some partners might be more competent at taking responsibility for and implementing different components of the return process. In our analysis we primarily draw on the development and humanitarian literature, as there is limited discussion and comparison of types of implementers in the migration literature. The types of actors and organisations involved in providing humanitarian and development assistance are the same as those involved in assisting returnees and include national governments that either can either be implementers or counterparts to UDI (and its selected implementer at a national level).

We broadly divide potential partners into multilateral organisations (including specialised UN organisations, such as UNHCR), intergovernmental organisations (such as IOM), international non-governmental organisations (and alliances, such as ICRC) and national NGOs (i.e., based in and operating in a given country). Some international NGOs form partnerships with national NGOs to implement projects or undertake advocacy activities in a given country, and local branches of international NGOs are present in a large number of countries (e.g., Save the Children).

Multilateral organisations are not likely implementers of assisted return programmes, given their distinct mandates, but several have roles or programmes that contribute to ensuring the rights/protection of returning returnees, especially if they end up as IDPs (e.g., UNHCR). Multilateral organisations (along with governments and intergovernmental/non-governmental organisations) may also help provide humanitarian assistance or engage in development programmes that facilitate economic, social and cultural processes that benefit returnees directly or indirectly as members of the community they reintegrate into. The mandates of these organisations lead them to work closely with national governments with an aim to strengthen governance and service delivery capacity.

Denmark provides an interesting donor case in this regard. It directs part of its development funding through a “Regions of Origin Initiative” that aims to facilitate and strengthen reintegration in areas with large expected returns.³ This practice of directing humanitarian and development funding to encourage, facilitate and sustain return is likely to increase, given the large number of migrants now seeking asylum in Europe.

The **intergovernmental organisation** that has established itself with expertise on, knowledge about and capacity to handle international migration is the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It provides a range of services within the migration field to UDI and governments worldwide. Moreover, it is engaged in research and analysis, thus helping to frame debates and policies. On its webpage, IOM states how broadly it engages on migration issues:

IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.⁴

IOM’s advantage is its international status, international presence (through regional offices and a large number of country offices) and a global management structure to sustain and develop its operations and activities. As will be detailed in the different case studies below, this allows IOM to assist in the entire

³ See <http://um.dk/~media/UM/English-site/Documents/Danida/Goals/Strategy/Regudvpol%20prioriteter%20201216%20til%20web%20UK.pdf>.

⁴ See <http://www.iom.int/about-iom>.

process of return migration from a host country to resettlement in the country of origin. A possible disadvantage of being international in this regard could be a more limited knowledge of national contexts if not secured through active involvement of national staff; as well, standardised routines might not be well-adapted to local circumstances.

International NGOs (which include some Norwegian NGOs with an international presence, e.g., the Norwegian Refugee Council⁵ in the refugee/migration context) can be classified based on those that cover broad areas of engagement/expertise and those that have expertise on a specific group (e.g., women, children, disabled, migrants) or activity (e.g., humanitarian assistance). We likewise might distinguish between implementing NGOs and advocacy NGOs (Amnesty International as one example of the latter), although a number of international NGOs do attempt to combine these two strands of activities. NGOs extensively collaborate amongst themselves through coordinating bodies, development of codes of conduct, and so forth, but at the same time they compete for funding. They argue that their advantages are flexibility, the ability to apply a rights-based approach, a far lower cost than multilateral and intergovernmental organisations, a greater level of neutrality (as they don't have governments as their members) and (at least for some) better connections to civil society organisations and communities in the countries where they operate. Some international NGOs form alliances and partnerships with other likeminded international and national NGOs; one example is the ACT Alliance,⁶ which enables international coverage, context knowledge and ability for both rapid response and sustained activities.

National NGOs are primarily registered and accredited in a given country where they recruit the majority of their staff and implement their projects. Many larger national NGOs engage in the same national and international coordination and policy bodies as international NGOs, and one frequently finds the same diverse types of organisations as among international NGOs. Still a further distinction can be made between those that operate as “contractors” without a specified mandate or developed expertise and those that hold and develop specific competence in a given area (e.g., in support of IDPs or returnees) or expertise (e.g., vocational training). Aside from having far lower operational/staffing costs than other organisations, the frequently cited advantage of national NGOs is contextual knowledge, language skills, flexibility, reduced security risks and increased access due to the use of national staff (often recruited in a given region or area), as well as better channels for communicating with governments and other groups. National NGOs are significantly varied, from large ones with national coverage that meet international NGOs standards to “family and friends NGOs” that might only work in a limited geographical area. In some countries, a lack of independence from the government may be a challenge because the government either limits their operations though legal means or co-opts them into the government structure (Dupuy et. al. 2015). Selecting an implementing partner among national NGOs will require screening of qualifications, administrative set-up and reporting systems and assurances that the selected NGO has a proven track record.

Collaboration and/or partnership between an international NGO and one or more national NGOs has proven a useful recipe for delivering humanitarian assistance and implementing development projects (Strand 2015). For example, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) implement projects in a given country though a number of (possibly rather diverse) national partner NGOs, but NCA undertakes monitoring and evaluation of projects to assure their quality. NCA combines this with support for organisational development and administrative and professional capacity building of the national NGOs, along with encouragement for them to undertake joint baseline studies, project collaboration and cross-organisational learning.

⁵ See <http://www.nrc.no>.

⁶ See <http://actalliance.org>.

Given that many return countries are ranked as highly corrupt, a discussion warranted here is whether there is a difference among these types of organisations as regards their propensity to or resilience against corruption. Based on literature and expert advice of the U4 Anti-corruption Centre, we conclude that one type of organisation is not more or less prone to corruption than the others. The difference is based on what measures an individual organisation has in place to prevent and mitigate corruption, and to what extent these are applied and followed up on if corruption is suspected or detected. One argument is that smaller NGOs might have less institutional capacity to establish corruption risk management systems than larger organisations (Trivunovic et al. 2011), but also might act more quickly if corruption is detected.

2.4 Programme phases and potential implementers

For this evaluation we need to narrow down the relevant qualifications and advantages of different organisations as facilitators of assisted return and reintegration, keeping in mind the four stages that such a process might contain (1) information and facilitation of the return in Norway; (2) return travel and reception upon arrival; (3) reintegration assistance, advice and mentoring; and potentially (in light of the above discussions) (4) monitoring and analysis of sustainability. We then must consider whether it is an advantage if one partner assumes responsibility for the returnee throughout the entire process, or if certain stages of the return process are less dependent on continuity of the process (and thus more particular skills, competence or access to resources might be an advantage at these stages). This will be discussed for each of the below components of an assisted return programme.

1) Information and facilitation in Norway

This stage requires (i) knowledge of the different assisted return programmes and the application process, (ii) skills in personal communication and providing advice, (iii) broad language skills (including Norwegian) and (iv) a constantly updated understanding of the situation in potential countries of return.

This could be handled either by IOM (through its Oslo office) or by a Norwegian NGO that has knowledge of the migration field and, ideally, also has a presence in and knowledge about the context in the country a returnee plans to return to. The advantage IOM holds as compared to a Norwegian NGO in this regard is its well-established system for organising return travel and receiving returnees in their country of origin. The UK, with the same process responsibility ensured, uses the NGO Refugee Action at this stage. Refugee Action also organises return travel for returnees and then collaborates with different national partners in providing reintegration support.⁷

2) Return travel and reception upon arrival

This stage requires (i) systems for travel planning and (ii) staff with language skills for providing information and responding to questions from returnees, including during the return travel and in transit locations. Another important task at this stage is to (iii) assist in obtaining travel documents from the returnees' respective embassies and consulates; for this last part of the process, IOM might have an advantage as an intergovernmental organisation, although it might be interesting to review the British model to see if there are disadvantages with an NGO taking on this task.

Return travel and reception upon arrival is primarily a logistics task that could be handled by IOM, an NGO or another private service provider. However, it requires contact and coordination between the organisation arranging the return process in Norway and those responsible for reintegration in the

⁷ For more details on how this is organised, please see <http://www.choices-avr.org.uk>.

country of origin (including the national government there). Facilitation might be enhanced if the same organisation assumes responsibility in sending, transit and receiving countries, although responsibility could be tasked to an NGO or a private company as long as it has access throughout the journey (including in airports). In addition, if no arrangement has been made with the receiving country, or the country has limited ability to receive returnees, will it be a requirement that returnees can be met at the point of arrival to be provided the cash grant.

3) Reintegration assistance, advice and mentoring

This is the most extensive and challenging task, as it takes place in the country of origin and the implementing partner must continually relate with the national government (and its programmes), UDI (and its return and reintegration programmes) and the returnee itself over a six-month period – and all in a potentially rapidly changing country context. The implementing partner will need the capability to handling in-kind requests from returnees, including structural capacity, skill in providing advice, and sufficient knowledge about potential opportunities for businesses (including types), education and/or on-the-job training. The organisation also must have a system for purchasing and distributing in-kind support in each country for which it is responsible, and it needs sufficient staff skilled in mentoring returnees and advising them on how they can best ensure their reintegration into society and individually maximise the in-kind assistance. Finally, the organisation needs a sound management system that can document and control the allocation and use of in-kind assistance and keep track of returnees.

This can be done by the national government in the country of return (as in Ethiopia) and become an integrated part of the state's provision of services to citizens. Alternatively, IOM or an international or national NGO with knowledge about migration and the different types of reintegration assistance could provide these services. At this stage, IOM might have fewer advantages than it has at other stages, at least when compared with NGOs that have strong national networks and structures, as well as competence and/or experience in business establishment, vocational training and other types of training and capacity building. In particular, many NGOs have experience in community mobilisation and engagement that might be an advantage in effectuating a successful "homecoming." These could include, for example, a local understanding that can help facilitate communal reintegration and re-establishment of social and family networks. A commitment to a rights-based approach and experience from assisting and advocating for refugee rights could also be an advantage; this may very well be part of the NGO expertise and a commitment to these values may be rooted in NGO staff.

One possibility that could be considered would be breaking up the components of providing assistance, mentoring and follow up into separate pieces, with one organisation holding overall responsibility for the process (including contact with, monitoring and mentoring of returnees) – while other organisations with particular expertise handle the business establishment, education and on-the-job training components (or other country specific in-kind assistance types). This would typically be the way that an international NGO (as mentioned above) would partner with a range of national NGOs and private service providers that have different competences, in order to tailor the reintegration process to each individual returnee in light of opportunities in the area of return.

A general reflection here is that there is an opportunity for more extensive collaboration and common policies and operations at the international level, between different countries engaged in assisted return, and in each country of return. This would allow for comparison of experiences, harmonisation of return "packages" and level of support, dialogue with governments, monitoring of return processes and selection of implementing partner(s). The European Reintegration Network (ERIN) could be one such common arena.

4) Monitoring and analysing sustainability of return

This is not a requirement for the execution of an assisted return programme in the sense of facilitating return, but it could be an important tool for UDI, decision makers, governments and implementing partners to measure the effect (in and across countries) of reintegration support. This would enable adjustment and optimisation of assistance provided. It likewise would produce documentation of how sustainable a return can be and what factors might influence the aspiration and ability of returnees for achieving a sustainable return in a given location. This must be done independently of the organisation providing reintegration support to ensure impartiality of findings. It does not necessarily need to be an on-going process, but should be done at regular intervals to help inform UDI's follow up and negotiations of terms with selected implementers. UDI is therefore advised to budget for external and regular reviews of all assisted return programmes and to apply a methodology that allows for comparison across countries.

This task could be delegated to international research organisations in collaboration with national researchers or to researchers or consultants located in the return country. Using an international research organisation would help ensure neutrality of any cross-country comparison.

Table 2: Potential implementing partners for different activities

Activity/Actor	National governments	International NGO, IOM	National organisations, national researchers, research consultancies	National NGO
Information and facilitation in Norway		X		X
Return travel and reception upon arrival		X		
Reintegration assistance and advice and mentoring of returnees	X	X		X
Monitor and analysing sustainability of return			X	

3. Methodology and informant profile

This chapter presents the overall research methodology, specifies the methodology for Norway and the four return countries and presents basic statistics about the informants for the study.

3.1 Overall methodological design and considerations

The overall methodological design and the interview guides for prospective returnees in Norway and in countries of return aimed at including a set of common questions, but also allowed for diversification between the four country cases in order to capture differences in context and assistance provided. The methodology was developed by the team and presented and discussed with the external reference group. A number of pilot interviews were conducted in Afghanistan and Kosovo before finalising the interview guide. The interview guides are included in Annex II.

The team prioritised highlighting the returnees' perspectives about the programmes, with their return and reintegration as the primary objectives. Thus, this study emphasises their individual assessments of the programme, for instance, by including direct quotations. However, as discussed in relation to each country below, our analyses and conclusions also take a range of other sources into account in order to balance this actor perspective. Our primary sources for verification information and data checks are organisations involved in implementation of the programmes.

The methodology, interview forms and introduction letters for interviewees in Norway (by ISF), Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraqi Kurdistan and Kosovo (by CMI) were registered with and approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). Strict procedures for data handling and registration were agreed upon with NSD and applied to all researchers and consultants involved in the research. Importantly, these provided that informed consent be obtained from informants prior to starting any interview, and informants were informed both orally and in writing that their names and contact details would be deleted from our files post-interview.

These procedures furthermore ensured that private information would be kept separate from the main interview form (with a code for identification) and that all sensitive data would be stored separately. This information was deleted, as instructed by NSD, following completion of the analysis of the interviews. The information letter is enclosed as Annex V. Moreover, all national researchers signed a declaration of confidentiality before being provided with any personal information about the returnees.

The research methodology for this chapter included a review of documents and statistics relating to assisted return in each of the four countries under review in this study. It also included meetings with IOM in Oslo, as well as analysis of documentary information received from IOM offices regarding the four countries. IOM was also helpful in providing contact details of registered returnees in Norway, and contacts in IOM's local country offices provided contact details for returnees in each of the four return countries studied. To compare the cases more readily, the researchers examined the migration histories of each country and the present situation in terms of development and security status, human rights and human security.

Given the total number of those interviewed, as well as their different backgrounds and ages, we find that our findings and recommendations are based on a fairly representative selection of returnees. As highlighted in previous studies, the majority of migrants (and thus potential interviewees) are men. We therefore attempted to identify returning females and families in each country in order to build a more solid narrative of their experiences, as well as to learn about these potentially vulnerable groups. We have highlighted some of their stories in the body of the report, in addition to drawing on their responses to inform our analysis.

When analysing the interviews, it is important to recognise two distinct factors that may influence the answers provided. The first relates to time, be it current/forward looking in relation to the return (while still in Norway) or retrospective/future looking (in the country of return). Those interviewed in Norway were in the process of preparing themselves for their return and planning, for very many, a rather uncertain future. They were asked to articulate their personal decisions and to try to identify factors (including particular types of information, life events and future prospects) that had influenced their decisions. Those interviewed after their return had to a varying degree been able to “test the unknown” and could reflect on their perceptions and expectations while in Norway, as well as their experiences from the return travel and their return and reintegration. Some very interesting reflections were brought forward here that might appear as a contradiction, as different judgements were passed on the same questions, but which can be an acknowledgement of how difficult it was, while in Norway, to make predictions of how their situation would be after their return.

The second factor is that certain cultural and other factors (including biases) inevitably influenced the replies to our questions, and subsequently the reliability of our data. This includes a number of potential general factors. One was returnees’ understanding of the interviewers’ role, position and independence from UDI and IOM. A second was the returnees’ present situation and a feeling (or a wish to communicate the feeling) of having succeeded or failed in their return, or still being uncertain. A third factor was the length of time returnees had been back in the country of origin after their return, and whether they had maintained links and attachments with Norway (e.g., family members there). A fourth factor was the attitude (often scepticism) of some returnees towards their own governments and officials and an assumption or perception (in some countries) of corrupt systems and ethnic or religious biases towards the returnees. In addition, the team noted country specific factors: Returnees to Ethiopia were sceptical about being interviewed (both in Norway and in Ethiopia), given the high political tension relating to return issues in general and the diaspora’s relationship with the Ethiopian government in particular. In Afghanistan, a number of the returnees considered leaving again and were eager to relate to us the personal threats they claimed to have received after their return, while acknowledging that their first asylum applications were not accepted in Norway.

The team members consistently tried to counter scepticism and attempts to obtain responses to claims about new security risks by explaining the team’s background and independence from UDI and Norwegian authorities, while simultaneously encouraging those interviewed to express and explain their experiences and concerns. Still, we cannot be entirely certain that we managed to build sufficient trust in all interview settings that all who were interviewed spoke freely or did not present experiences or opinions that they believed could further a future asylum application in Norway. Still, the use of a semi-structured interview form, built up to follow their migration experience, was designed to shape a reflective discourse. This flow was interjected with some control questions aimed at identifying possible contradictions in responses. In addition, the interviews included a request to rate experiences by scoring organisations and types of service, which allowed interviewees to reflect more concretely on their judgement of these. Although there are methodological concerns with using ratings, as is discussed in detail in relation to the Iraqi case, asking for ratings opened a door for researchers to ask additional questions in the interview setting if the ratings diverted from the interviewee’s narrative. The interviewer could also request specific examples when interviewees cited general cultural or other factors and/or perceived biases to justify their responses. A potential bias that is likely to remain despite these attempts to quantify and identify potential biases is that memories of what went wrong or did not meet expectations inevitably seems to prevail over what went as planned or even went beyond what was hoped for. However, even that bias might highlight the issues returnees tend to agree should be improved in the programme. In any case, the issues cited in any given context suggest areas where further reflection is warranted in the analysis and recommendations.

The text contains quotations from many of the respondents, including both their positive and negative assessments of the programme. Since most of the interviews were not conducted in English, the

quotations in the text may diverge slightly from the respondents' formulations. The quotations selected shed light on the frames of mind and perspectives revealed during the interviews. All interviewees have been anonymised, and potentially identifying information has been modified or removed.

3.2 Country specific methodology

1. Norway

Interviews with 17 individuals formed the primary source of data for Norway. Due to difficulties in recruiting informants during the time period of the data collection (see below) this was fewer individuals than we intended to include. Research on this topic has previously been conducted in Norway, and our sample covers the main variations found in these studies (Bendixsen et al. 2014; Brekke 2015; Lidén et al 2011; Strand et al. 2008, 2011; Valenta et al. 2010; Øien and Bendixsen 2012).

All of the informants had signed up with IOM for assisted return – or what IOM refers to as Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR). However, not all had received a final answer on their applications.

In our study the individuals interviewed differed in terms of gender (11 men and 6 women), age (from 22 to 64 years old), time in Norway (2 months to 21 years), and family status. Some were single, others lived alone in Norway but had a family in their country of origin and yet others lived in Norway with a family there.

These interviews included informants from Afghanistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Ethiopia, Kosovo, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Iran. The informants were situated in various parts of Norway. Eleven informants lived in reception centres, while 4 had left the reception centres and lived with friends or family.⁸ Two had never lived in reception centres.

Table 7. Age of our informants in Norway

Age	<20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	≥70
Informants	0	5	6	5	0	1	0

A majority of those we interviewed were from 20 to 49 years old (see table 2) and had stayed in Norway from 1 to more than 12 years (table 3). Most had stayed in Norway between 1 and 5 years before they applied for assisted return. Other studies find that, in general, 87% of those who apply for assisted return have been in Norway from less than 1 to 5 years at the time of their application. Our respondents thus corresponded to general characteristics of those applying for assisted return in terms of how long they have been in Norway before applying.

Table 11b. Number of years in Norway

Years in Norway	<1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	≥12
Informants	1	1	3	3	2	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	1

Most of the applicants had lived for a while without legal residency in Norway. Those who had been asylum seekers waited approximately 2 years after their second rejection before they applied for assisted return. However, in 3 cases, asylum seekers decided to sign up for assisted return shortly after their

⁸ Irregular migrants are allowed to stay at the asylum reception centres and are provided with a minimum amount of subsistence money even after their asylum applications have been rejected.

application was rejected in the first instance. One person was from Kosovo and had lived 4 years in Norway as an irregular worker. Another, from the Philippines, had overstayed his visiting visa from 1989 – and has lived as an irregular in Norway since 1994.

Table 8. Civic status

Number of those alone in Norway at the time of return application	Number of those with family in Norway at the time of return application*
10	7

*The families covered 14 children all together (averaging 2 children per family).

We were able to recruit some informants through IOM, mainly those who lived outside the reception centres. We also contacted reception centres and were able to recruit some migrants through them. We found still others from former contacts and through Facebook.

Most of the interviews conducted in Norway lasted around one hour, but a few took longer. All of those we interviewed were willing to talk about their motivation for returning and about their situation leading up to that decision. They talked much less about what they envisioned their lives to be like after they had returned or about the IOM programme. We used a translator at six interviews; all except one of these was pursued with a translator through the phone. The interviews were conducted either at a reception centre, at a public office or in a café.

We encountered some difficulties in recruiting migrants from some nationalities, and a few withdrew after having agreeing to be interviewed but before the interview could occur. Explanations for the challenges that occurred during the process of recruiting informants can be explained as follows:

- *Fear of leaking the fact that they planned to return before they did so:* Migrants who had signed up with IOM had a general distrust towards talking with researchers. This was the case for all groups, but was particularly the case with people from Ethiopia. We were informed that there is a concern with keeping return plans confidential among the Ethiopian group for various reasons, including fear of being considered as pro-government. Aalen in this study and Brekke (2015) also found such *group pressure* among Ethiopians in Norway. Signing up would mean that an interviewee could be seen as a traitor to the common cause of attempting to stay in Norway.
- *Lack of trust towards the researcher:* Some migrants (from various national backgrounds) initially said they were willing to be interviewed, but then withdrew just before the interview was to take place.
- *Lack of relevant people who had signed up with IOM during this time period:* Quite a few migrants from Iraq had signed up with IOM; therefore, the number living in reception centres was limited. The number signing up with IOM nearly stopped after March 2014 when the period of data collection started, most likely due to changes in the political climate (escalation of conflict in Iraq).

On the other hand, some informants told us they were happy to know that someone wanted to listen to them. As one young man said, “I am happy to tell you about my life. Many do not want to listen to me. I have lived a very difficult life.”

The subsections below describe the methodology applied to the four case countries. It should be pointed out that except for coverage of documented transport costs no informant was paid any remuneration for his or her time spent in the interview.

2. Afghanistan

Three types of data were gathered as the empirical basis for analysis of the IRRANA programme.

The primary source of data was interviews in Kabul and Jalalabad, including 20 interviews with returnees who had arrived in Afghanistan between 2009 and 2014 and 6 re-interviews with returnees who had previously been interviewed as part of the 2008 return study. In addition, we arranged interviews with IOM staff in Kabul and Jalalabad, as well as a follow-up meeting to check and verify information gathered. We were briefed and had a continuous dialogue with the two migration attachés at the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul and presented the embassy with preliminary field findings. We sought supplementary information from the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR) and Afghans who had returned without assistance. Jalalabad, close to the border with Pakistan, was selected in order to capture the situation in a smaller town and in regards to the substantial number of returnees who return to rural areas. The data collected here included an interview with a family headed by a female.

We received contact details for 68 returnees from IOM (about 10% of returnees from 2009 to 2014) and then identified 3 additional interviewees through “snowballing,” leading to 71 total contacts. IOM explained that out of 354 returnees since 2012, the 68 for whom contact details were provided were the ones with whom they had been able to establish contact by phone.

We managed to contact 51 informants by phone (ensuring a spread over the 3 years and including all females and families that returned), of which 20 were interviewed in person. Those not available to be interviewed in person were asked some basic information about their present situation and the sustainability of the return assistance. For the analysis, we primarily draw on the in-person interviews, complementing them with the telephone interviews on some issues.

By tracing those interviewed back to 2008, we managed to get in contact with 13 individuals still residing in Kabul. We interviewed 6 of these returnees, and 1 brought his family with him to the interview.

3. Iraqi Kurdistan

Two types of data were gathered as the empirical basis for analysis of the IRRINI programme, in addition to key informant interviews with IOM Erbil. Firstly, the Norwegian researcher conducted 14 semi-structured interviews in Sulaymaniah with the aid of a local researcher who interpreted during the interviews. This material provided a depth and empirical richness that aided the analysis. Since Sulaymaniah is geographically the largest area that is covered by one IOM office, these interviews also include a considerable number of interviews with rural returnees who were invited to engage in interviews when they were in town. Secondly, 28 telephone surveys, based on a list provided by IOM of returnees verified to have returned from Norway, constituted a complementary source of data, although those interviews sacrificed depth for a broader coverage of dimensions believed to be key to reintegration and indicators of programme effectiveness. Of these surveys, 8 were conducted by the local researcher in the Sulaymaniah region of Iraqi Kurdistan, and 20 additional surveys were conducted by an Iraqi Kurd residing in Norway who called respondents in the Erbil region of Iraqi Kurdistan. The surveys thus covered two of three main regions in Iraqi Kurdistan, although they did not include the Duhok region. The Duhok area has been exceptionally affected by the security breakdown in Syria and Iraq and hosts a large number of displaced persons. This has increased the presence of IOM in the region but has also exacerbated the region’s general socioeconomic challenges and is likely to continue affecting returnees there. Not including Duhok is thus unfortunate, but was a result of budgetary concerns. The combination of semi-structured interviews and fieldwork on the one hand, and telephone surveys on the other, is a way of maximising empirical input to substantiate the analysis.

All the interviewees were selected from a list provided by IOM upon request. Female interviewees and those designated vulnerable by IOM were prioritised, and a combination of urban and rural interviewees was ensured on the basis of residence.

4. Ethiopia

Two types of data were gathered as the empirical basis for analysis of the return and reintegration programme to Ethiopia.

The primary source of data was interviews with 32 Ethiopians who had returned from Norway under the assisted return programme, supplemented by interviews with officials at IOM, at the ARRA Project Office in Addis Ababa, and with the special attaché for immigration at the Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia. From the start of the data collection, we anticipated that it would be difficult to get access to the returnees. Because the return agreement between Norway and Ethiopia is very controversial among the Ethiopian diaspora in Norway, our team's researchers in Norway had great difficulties getting access to Ethiopians who had signed up for assisted return. During our first meeting with officials at the ARRA project office in Addis Ababa, they informed us of the challenge of keeping track of returnees after they have received support. Most returnees do not have any interest in staying in touch with ARRA, we were told. Both IOM and ARRA provided us with lists of returnees, including names and contact details of 179 persons. We tried to contact all of them by phone to make interview appointments, but in the majority of the cases the phone number was out of service or returnees were unwilling or unable to talk to us. Among the 32 returnees with whom we actually talked, several expressed scepticism about the purpose of our research and were only willing to talk after a thorough explanation and reassurance of anonymity.

5. Kosovo

Three types of data were gathered as the empirical basis for analysis of the FSR programme in Kosovo. The primary source of data was 10 personal interviews with FSR returnees from Norway, who had returned during 2011 and 2012. Eight of these interviews were conducted by a Norwegian researcher together with a local researcher responsible for interpreting. The local researcher, who was thus familiar with the interview form and the analytical strategy behind it, carried out an additional 7 personal interviews in close collaboration with the Norwegian researcher. The respondents mostly resided outside Pristina. Extensive travel to rural locations and smaller towns was thus required. Moreover, 5 interviews were personally conducted with so-called vulnerable returnees who had returned through the VG programme.

Three telephone surveys were also conducted in order to gather data on those who were unavailable to attend personal interviews for practical reasons. In addition, 3 shorter interviews were conducted with forced returnees and 1 with an autonomous repatriate. The latter offered some especially complementary information about the return decision-making process. Interviews with those forcibly returned shed light on the decision not to sign up for assisted return and were therefore included in the analysis of decisions made about return. Finally, 7 key informant interviews were conducted with professionals working in the field of migration in international and national organisations. These provided background for contextual analysis.

All the FSR returnees interviewed were selected from a list provided by IOM upon request. Female interviewees and those designated vulnerable by IOM were prioritised, and a combination of urban and rural interviewees was ensured on the basis of residence.

3.3 Basic primary informants information from country cases

Below is an overview of personal data from the four country cases (thus not including those interviews conducted in Norway).

Table 4. Types of data

Number of personal interviews with returnees	Number of telephone interviews
79	33 comprehensive and 17 short interviews
6 with returnees from 2008 (Afghanistan)	

For the analysis, we primarily draw on the personal interviews. It is noted in the text when data from telephone interviews are included or drawn upon.

Table 6. Gender distribution for personal interviews

Number of male respondents	Number of female respondents
75	8 (2 by phone)

This reflects the dominance of male asylum seekers from the countries selected for this study.

Table 7. Age distribution

Age	<20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	≥60
Number of Respondents	0	19	39	14	1	2

It should be noted that a fair number of the group of individuals from 20 to 29 years old were registered as under 18 when they originally arrived in Norway. The majority of all those interviewed were in their mid to late 20s when they arrived in Norway, though there is a broader spread of age among those from Ethiopia and Kosovo.

Table 8. Civic status

Number of those alone in Norway at the time of return	Number of those with family in Norway at the time of return
67	13

A large majority of asylum seekers were alone in Norway at the time of their return to their country of origin. Some, however, returned with their family and even more had established a relationship or a family in Norway during their stay here.

Table 5. Vulnerability

Number of those with self-reported special physical or mental needs
12

Half of the vulnerable interviewees were from Ethiopia, and quite a few from this group reported during the interviews that they had experienced mental stress in relation to their return or in the situation they found themselves in upon their return.

Table 9. Education

Level of education (on-going or completed)	Number
None	3
Primary school	19
High school / secondary school / technical education (up to ca. 18 years)	43
BA/MA/PhD	16

Ethiopia had a far higher number of returnees with BA/MA/PhD degrees than the other countries, while Afghanistan had the highest number of those with only a primary school education.

4. Norway: The decision to leave their country of origin

The reasons why someone decides to leave his or her country of origin plays an important role in understanding how that person think about returning and which aspects become important for the person in the process of deciding whether or not to return. Among our informants in Norway, what were the reasons for leaving their country of nationality?

Based on our interviews in Norway, we distinguished two groups of people with different general reasons for leaving the country of origin: (1) One group explained that their decision to leave was based on the fact that they felt a lack of security and fear of persecution in their country of origin. (2) The other group left because of economic difficulties in their country of origin. People from both groups can be migrants who had applied for asylum, but have had their asylum applications rejected.

4.1 Security issues and fear of persecution

Most of our informants in Norway had applied for protection as asylum seekers. They talked about involvement with conflict, violence and episodes in their country of origin and that they had experienced insufficient protection from the local or national government. Lack of local protection for the conflict that they had faced was explained by corruption in the police or the court system, mafia-structured interest conflicts that the government had not impeded or conflicts where authorities were involved. Others talked in particular about family, kinship or clan-based conflicts, including honour-related retaliations towards both women and men. Some felt a lack of security or fear of persecution as a result of one particular episode; for others, it was part of a longer process that at one point escalated. All assessed their living situation as so serious that they had to leave their place of origin and apply for asylum in Norway.

When they arrived in Norway they thus expected to qualify as refugees based on their experienced need for protection. For some, their credibility as an asylum seeker may have been weakened during the asylum process due to, for example, missing documents or fake identification. Even if their asylum application had been rejected, most still considered themselves as refugees (see also Bendixsen 2013). They also believed that the conflictual situation in their country of origin, which they had left behind, had not remarkably changed and that return would mean returning to an uncertain situation in which they could not anticipate the outcome.

For several of those we interviewed, the situation that led them to leave was characterised by personal, family and kinship based conflicts – on the basis of which they felt the need for protection. Consequently, security and political changes at a more general level in their country of origin would not necessarily alter their living condition in that country, unless there were also changes concerning how the local government functions and the general rule of law.

4.2 Economic incentives

Another group of those applying for return came to Norway to work to ensure income for their families. They may have come from areas of ethnic and political conflicts with challenging labour and income possibilities for persons belonging to competing groups. Some also came from countries with major financial problems, or where migration has a long tradition as a survival strategy. Their stay in Norway could have been a result of overstaying a visa or the end of a journey of illegal travels to Europe and sojourns in other countries over a long period of time before arriving in Norway. Still others came directly to Norway to apply for asylum. A man in his 30s from South Asia told us how he left his country of origin at the age of 13 because the family needed income. The family was also involved in a local conflict, so he had to leave the local community. He left in 1990 and arrived in Greece in 1998. On the

road, he worked in the cotton industry in several countries. He remained at each place for one or two years before he was able to continue his travel. He crossed the borders of Turkey and Greece on foot, but explained, “I was young and managed me well.” In Greece, he had at first obtained several good jobs, but then became unemployed because of the economic crisis. He decided to move on and went to Norway to apply for asylum, after which he decided to return with IOM’s help.

4.3 The stay in Norway

The interviewees’ sojourns in Norway impacted how they thought about return, their motivations for returning and their decisions to sign up with IOM. They also influenced their access to information about assisted return. Before we discuss further how long the informants had been in Norway and where they lived in the period before signing up for assisted return, we present the number of total return applicants in the 2012–2014 period, the status of asylum applicants in Norway at the time of applying for assisted return and the length of time from asylum application to application of assisted return.

Table 14b. Status of asylum application at the time of applying for assisted return, by year of return⁹

Asylum status when applying for return	Year of return application					
	2012		2013		2014	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
TBV	38	2	23	1	12	1
Application in process (with UDI)	107	7	188	10	97	6
Rejection sent for appeal	321	20	394	21	273	17
Case dismissed/not registered	58	4	57	3	67	4
With a duty to leave	1103	67	1221	65	1165	72
Wrong	8	0	2	0	1	0
Total	1635	100	1885	100	1615	100

According to table 14b,

- The number of assisted return applications increased in 2013 (in relation to 2012), but went down again in 2014. There were also fewer applications under treatment in 2014.
- The largest share of applications came from migrants with a duty to leave. This category represented two-thirds of assisted return applications in 2012 and 2013, and 72% in 2014. A significant proportion of migrants also applied in the same period in which they appealed their rejected asylum application.
- The percentage of assisted return applications from migrants with a residence permit (TBV) in Norway was very low during this time period. In 2014 this category of applications made up only 1% of all return applications.

⁹ The numbers for figures 1 and 2 were generated for this report using UDI statistics and analysis. These numbers are slightly lower than the official numbers. The deviation is 5 percentage points for 2012, and 1 percentage point for 2013.

Table 14c. Length of time from asylum application to application for assisted return for the years of return 2012–2014

Asylum application – Return	Year of return					
	2012		2013		2014	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
0–2 years	599	37	893	47	903	56
2–5 years	842	51	755	40	446	28
More than 5 years	193	12	266	13	266	16
Application date not registered	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1635	100	1885	100	1615	100

Table 14c shows that

- The number of people applying for assisted return within the first 2 years after their application for asylum was filed, increased by almost 20% from 2012 to 2014. In 2014, this category comprised 57% of all applications.
- In 2014, there was an increase in the number of applications for assisted return from those who had lived more than 5 years in Norway. This group, however, remained relatively low and in 2014 consisted of 16% of total applicants.

4.4 Living for a longer period in reception centre

Those informants who had been in Norway for a long time and who had lived in reception centres during that entire period were all families with children. Three families had lived in a reception centre for 4–6 years. One family had lived in a reception centre 2 years before signing up for assisted voluntary return with IOM. That family had already lived in Europe for more than 10 years prior to coming to Norway. The couple expressed the need to continue their lives – and planned to go to another country in Europe after they had returned to their country of origin through IOM.

When discussing their stay in Norway the families with children appeared ambivalent, especially when it came to their children's situation. Their children had gone to school, become integrated into leisure activities and spoke Norwegian well. Yet as other parents we have spoken with in the past, these parents were very concerned about their children's ability to continue their education after completing primary school (when they would lose their rights to further education). Their ambition to give their children a good education and a better future would become difficult to realise because they lacked residency status and thus had limited rights to education. They described the situation of their children as good, so long as they could pursue an education, but extremely difficult for children who would lose the right to attend school. The children were also concerned about their families' situations, which were characterised by uncertainty and a lack of future prospects.

Another issue of concern to parents was that staying in the reception centre and not working made them passive. This, they stressed, was such a fundamental restriction that it had negatively affected their self-perception, psyche, family life and ability to be good parents. Their lives circled around concerns about how to ensure a better future. We have found similar processes among other parents living in reception centres (see also Lidén et al. 2011), and this was also the case for the young people who had come to

Norway as youngsters with high ambitions for their future (including to obtain higher education). They felt they were stuck and suffered from depression and despair.

The reason for why these families chose to stay so long at the reception centres was partly due to the length of the asylum process.¹⁰ We have found similar dilemmas among other families we have interviewed in past research (Bendixsen 2013). Several families live with a hope for a new political orientation in Norway or that something else will happen that will make it possible for them to stay in the country legally. Of significant importance for why one family stayed put was also the uncertainty that would face them in their country of origin upon return, and a feeling of powerlessness in how they should relate to this.

4.5 Living outside the reception centre

Those informants who lived outside the reception centres were all single men, although several of them were married and had families in their country of origin. Two lived in the reception centre during the asylum process, but had moved out either after the first or the second rejection. Those two had moved in with friends or girlfriends. One individual had left the reception centre rather quickly after arrival and had from then on stayed with friends. Those leaving early sought to support themselves on their own – without having to receive money from the state. They were keen to get jobs related to their work experience in their country of origin and to normalise their everyday lives. One man became an irregular migrant due to the expiration of his visitor visa and had stayed with family, with acquaintances or in other shelters for over 21 years.

Several of those who stayed with acquaintances had experienced that their situation had become more difficult as time went by and after the rejection of their asylum application was final. They had to rely on friends and acquaintances who may not have expected or wanted to support them in the long run. One man told us that the fact that some people he had met on his journey to the West or at the reception centre had been granted asylum changed their friendship, and he felt that it had become more difficult to keep a close relationship with them.

Another migrant had travelled with friends from the country of origin – all of who had been granted asylum and today live in Norway as ordinary citizens.

Several talked about experiencing a lack of self-respect and decency over time, as they became more and more dependent on friends for food and a shelter. Others talked about the great generosity of friends who were also concerned about the situation they were in.

Some of the single men who had families in their country of origin felt indecisive about returning because they had not been able to support their families economically as they had planned. The economic expectations from their families and their own desires to meet these obligations required them to stay.

The status as irregulars influenced all aspects of these migrants' lives. All had a strong desire to normalise their existence. Curtailment in working regulations was essential in their ability to survive. One person said that when he moved out of the reception centre, "It was good for me, I had a work permit and permanent job." However, he lost his work permit (two years before our interview with him), which made his life outside the reception centre very difficult. In general, migrants talked about

¹⁰ A lengthy asylum application process is the result of various factors, including waiting for their asylum application to be accessed, appealing the negative decision of their application several times, waiting for changes in policies that will increase their chances for a positive answer, etc.

the lack of opportunity to work because work in the informal labour market had become more difficult over the last years and the salaries offered were very low. We have heard several similar stories in Norway of feelings of being exploited in the informal labour market during other fieldwork with irregular migrants during the past few years.

4.6 Short stay in Norway

What is the situation that makes someone decide to take advantage of assisted return relatively soon after they have arrived in Norway? What are the characteristics of their situations and their stays? In three cases, informants in our sample had applied for assisted return with IOM after the first refusal of their asylum applications. For two of the cases, the decision to return was closely linked with dignity, and the experience of not being recognised as a refugee in need of protection, which resulted in a lack of faith in the rule of law and advocacy of human rights. This was originally one of the main reasons many interviewees had chosen Norway as a destination country in which to apply for asylum. In one case, a young woman chose to return to the political struggle she was involved with in the country of origin because she was unable to continue her political work as an irregular refugee in Norway. In the second case, a couple found it humiliating that their credibility had been questioned and consequently came to lose any belief that they would get fair treatment in Norway. They therefore looked for other solutions to their problem. The third case was a single man who (after several years in another European country) tried Norway as a last attempt for a future in the West. When this did not work out, he quickly decided to return voluntarily to his country of origin.

5. Decision making: Motivations for applying for assisted return policies

Previous research suggests that the reasons why migrants do not return are complex, and in some cases include expectations of violent situation and unbearable economic conditions in the return country. In other cases, there are cultural or social reasons why migrants do not return. Factors shaping the decision of migrants to apply for assisted return are numerous and relate to each other in complicated ways. Research also suggests the need to differentiate between the reasons migrants return, since their experiences post-return vary correspondingly (van Meeteren et al. 2014). This chapter deals with the following questions: What factors can be identified that moved third country nationals towards signing up with IOM? What has been the specific effect of the return programmes on motivations and decisions to sign up for assisted return?

5.1 Models of individual action

Which *model of individual action* is dominant for rejected asylum seekers applying for assisted return (Brekke 2015)? Should these individuals be seen as cost-benefit calculating rational individuals, or as influenced by others, driven by previous decisions or linked to an asylum journey that was supposed to have another outcome?

A few studies based on European states suggest that there is friction between the idea of return as a durable solution and a growing body of evidence of its “un-workability as a policy option” (Chase and Allsopp 2013). According to a study of the Dutch programme, efforts to prepare young people in particular as soon as they arrive in the host country for the likelihood of return have not proved successful in enticing young people sign up for assisted return – regardless of whether they have been offered cash payments, vocational training before departure or craftsman’s tools to take with them (Kromhout 2009). Rather than submitting to return processes, research indicates that in several European countries young migrants in particular tend to “disappear” once they have exhausted all their rights to appeal for the right to remain (Wright 2012; Gladwell and Elwyn 2012). Reflecting on the Dutch experience of introducing return as a “durable solution,” Kromhout (2009, 27) concludes,

The significant number of separated young people departing for unknown destinations instead of returning to their country of origin is a cause for great concern among Dutch politicians, welfare organizations, and NGOs It is feared that they run the risk of ending up on the streets and being exploited by traffickers.

In this report we argue, following Brekke (2015), that how irregular migrants are viewed as agents is crucial to understanding the underlying mechanisms behind the decision to sign up for voluntary return. The fine tuning of incentives in return and reintegration programmes supports the first, rational model. It would follow from such a model that if one increases the incentives by X amount, that Y more people will sign up. As we saw in interviews with the centre staff (Brekke 2015), the picture is clearly more blurred and complicated than such a simple rational actor model. Nevertheless, there appears to be an element of sensitivity to incentives, although there is no ready-made answer for what motivates rejected asylum seekers to sign up for voluntary assisted return. *The centre leaders* Brekke (2015) interviewed pointed to a range of factors that influence asylum seekers’ decisions to sign up for assisted return and then to actually return. They included the following:

- Changing conditions in the *country of origin* (safety, human rights, political, economic, social), including personal relationships and personal resources in the country of origin (family, housing, job opportunities, networks, ties, links, debt);

- Changing conditions in the *host country*, in this case Norway (prospects for a future in the country, asylum policies and practices, everyday life for persons without permission to stay, chance of forced return);
- *Alternatives in other countries* or in Norway; and
- Available *return and reintegration assistance*.

While the migrants we interviewed mentioned all of these factors in various ways and to different extents, most of them emphasised the conditions in the host country, Norway, as the main reason for signing up for assisted return. These conditions were not necessarily *changing*; rather, the migrants had come to a point where the *continuation* of these conditions – that is, their *changelessness* (and thus the deteriorating consequences of their living in these conditions over time) – became a reason for moving on by applying for assisted return. The wider range of factors that influenced the decision to sign up among the irregular migrants we spoke with (and that we discuss later in this report) are as follows:

- Conditions in the *host country* (losing dignity, living in unbearable conditions, feeling marginalised, seeking to normalise life, losing hope for the future, feeling trapped, fearing a forced return);
- Changing conditions in the *country of return*; and
- *Alternatives in other countries* (returning in order to re-migrate to Europe or to a neighbouring country).

We also discuss the relevance of return and reintegration assistance to the decision to sign up, although this was never mentioned as a reason in and of itself to sign up for assisted return.

5.2 Conditions in Norway

The living conditions in Norway as an irregular migrant were mentioned by most as the main motivating reason for deciding to sign up for assisted return. However, this push factor for returning was expressed in various ways by the migrants we interviewed. We emphasise here 6 main conditions and experiences that were emphasised. Some of them partly overlap, and some migrants mentioned more than one of these conditions as the motivating factor.

1. Experience of losing their dignity and human value

I die a little bit every day I'm here in Norway, I cannot work, cannot get healthcare if I need it, I cannot do anything, I'm not treated as a normal human being. [single man]

...

I have lived here without rights, without right to work and health for four years. It is really hard to live long like this. Without living a decent life, decency. [single woman]

Several explained that they had changed their outlook on Norway because they had arrived with high expectations about the possibility of staying based on their specific problems and because of their perception of Norway's reputation of protecting human rights. Some expressed disappointment about Norway's treatment of their asylum applications and Norway's failure as a country to live up to their expectations as a forerunner of human rights. One woman in her 30s explained that she had been

politically active in the last five years in her country of origin. She worked for women's rights and was a known public figure in her local society, but was convicted on account of her activities. Her aim was to draw more attention toward the political suppression of women and executions without trials in her country of origin to the world press and to the Norwegian public. However, she explained that today she is very disappointed with Norway and is returning. She stated, "I was wrong about Norway."

2. Marginalisation in Norway – difficulties living as irregular migrants

Many related that they would put themselves in danger by returning, but still intended to travel because they currently live in appalling conditions and would rather meet their fate with self-respect. One young male informant explained that the friends he had travelled with from Turkey had all been granted residence permits, and that made further contact with them difficult. He said, "It hurts me because we were together, we were friends, we lived together. They have a good life now – have houses, traveling abroad." Their different legal status shaped their relationships, and he has withdrawn from them. He felt that "everything looks down" on him. From how he talked about his social relationships, we had the impression that his self-perception has been degraded. We could surmise how social relationships break down because the experience of being "illegal" implies not only a different legal status, but also a different social status and possibilities for the present and future than for regularised friends.

Another Kurdish migrant told us that others he knew from his church community had been granted residence. Therefore, he never goes to church when they are there – but avoids them, even though he still has contact with Norwegians in various cities in Norway and in the activist environment.

Such feelings of marginalisation, the lack of opportunity to work or be part of activities that are meaningful for them and loss of hope that this situation will change also have psychological effects on many. The unbearable living conditions affect their psychological health and lead some to sign up for assisted return. This can also affect individuals in a family differently:

It will be better for my husband, because here it is psychological difficult, there [country of origin] it is physically difficult. But here he becomes crazy by doing nothing.

3. Fading away of hopes for the future

In particular, informants with a family stressed the future of their children as a main motivating factor for signing up for assisted return. Seeing that their children could not participate fully in the social life at school or in extra-curricular activities such as sports was hard for several parents. They talked about how living as an irregular, and without enough economic means, affected their children's well-being, their abilities to integrate and their future possibilities:

I have been in Norway for five years. I have six children, my oldest daughter is in high school and is 17 years. And two are slightly younger. They took my eldest daughter out of school. They said that she was not allowed to stay here, because we had been rejected and therefore she could not go to school. She became depressed, she walked around by herself, went around in parks and wept for herself. And then the two younger ones who go to school, they refused going to school because they believed they would experience being refused to go to school. That they would come and tell them that they had to stop. . . . My son is playing on a football team and he could not be there [on the team] because he did not have personal ID. If he is to travel with the team they must have personal ID. So he couldn't participate in anything. And they took out my son who was very good in the skiing team. Also he was taken out of the ski team, So it's things like that that has affected the decision. [father]

. . .

The children thrive of course most here, and they'd rather not go back. They have more freedom here, they're doing a lot of things in their free time. But we have no choice. We also have the situation where the kids ask for a lot of things that other children have, but we cannot afford, we did not work and they ask why we do not have job. And why they cannot walk or travel around freely. So we cannot go out in their homeland because it's dangerous, but also not here because we have not allowed. [mother]

Related to the fact that hope for the future has faded is the fact that many have given up hope that the situation *can* change. As one explained,

What I am thinking, I will go with IOM I have to face what happens. I am not a coward. I am not scared to go back. But it is really hard. You have to leave your hope to live in peace, in a country fronting human rights, you are a decent person. [single man]

Several talked about how they did not see a future, but felt they were wasting their lives by continuing living as irregulars in Norway. One young woman told us she came to Norway before the age of 18 and sought to continue school and education in order to become a medical doctor:

But my whole life was destroyed. Five years of my life is destroyed. . . . Now I am 22 years old. . . . My sister, she thought that when she was 18 years she would not be allowed to go to school anymore, just like me. So my sister has run away from home. . . . So I decided, I will not be in Norway. If I die at home, it's better than being here and not knowing what we should do. When I get back, then I can go to school, do all that I cannot do here. [young woman]

4. "Stuckness" – assisted return becomes a solution

Some of those we interviewed felt that their lives were not "going anywhere" and applying for return became a way out of "stuckness." Stuckness relates to the social position that they found themselves in due to their irregular status, which not only made certain social and health rights impossible to obtain, but also made it impossible to change their social status, for example, from being a young bachelor to becoming a married adult with the social duties that brings (Griffiths, Rogers and Anderson 2013; Bendixsen 2015). Experiencing such a stuckness that never seems to end meant their adult life was postponed and they were positioned in an uncertain situation where they experienced being "not yet adult." One person said, "For 10 years I have not been outside Norway, it is really hard. What do I have? I cannot sleep. What should I do?"

5. The urge to normalise life

For some it became increasingly important to marry and have a family life. For others, the unpredictability of everyday life as an irregular migrant in Norway was dragging them down and they sought to normalise their lives by obtaining a legal residency – anywhere. One young girl talked about the freedom she would get when she returned to her country of origin because she believed her life would be normalised, that is, she would be able to travel freely, to pursue more typical youth activities and to start her education. This was in sharp contrast to her current life in the reception centre where she felt that she had no opportunities. Another person emphasised that it was important "to get valid ID papers" and start life anew.

Some people signed up for assisted return because they realised they had to leave Norway and it was better to at least have the return ticket arranged and paid for. While money was not the motivating factor for them in their decision to return with IOM, the financial benefit of assisted return was an aspect influencing their decision to sign up after they had already made the decision to leave Norway. Yet, for many ambiguity remained involved in the decision to return:

I have not changed my ideas, I'm holding on to this but I have always the hope that I might have a better chance another day, another chance . . . that I get another opportunity. [man who left his wife and children in the country of origin]

6. The impact of forced return

The overhanging threat of being picked up by the police and forced to return was for many a key factor for signing up for assisted return (Brekke 2015; Bendixsen et al. 2014). The informants varied with regard to how important they held the potentiality of a forced return to be. For some who decided to return early in the asylum process, fear of forced return did not have an important impact. For those who had overstayed the date of legal stay and had lived as irregular migrants, the option of forced return was something that strongly impacted their lives and what they considered to be their life-orienting options. Brekke (2015) points out that reception centre spokespersons believe that “talking tough” about forced return (as in, “If you don’t return with assisted return then you risk to be sent back with force”) – although this in practice almost never happens – creates unnecessary stress and fear among residents. What Matthew Gibney (2008, 149) terms the “deportation gap” is relevant here: “the gap between the number of people eligible for removal by the state at any time and the number of people a state actually removes (deports).” Our informants living in reception centres related that a tangible force exists to return, especially if someone of the same nationality as themselves has been forcibly removed.

5.3 Expected conditions in the country of return

What role did conditions in the country of return play in informants’ decisions to sign up for assisted return? Various expectations of conditions can be seen as pull factors that either are the main deciding factor or contribute to a decision to return. We found four ways, in particular, of reflecting upon the conditions in the country of return: expectations of no changes, controlling the return to change changes, changed social status in return country, and seeking alternatives in a third country. Some of these contributed positively to the return decision as pull factors, while others were experienced as obstacles that did not necessarily facilitate return, but instead informed a decision to plan for future re-migration.

1. Expectations of no changes

None of those we interviewed decided to return because the situation had improved in their country of origin, for example by improved security, governmental structure, infrastructure, access to clean water or electricity, or access to welfare (health, social benefits, etc.). They believed the political situation *had not* improved much – because they did not have confidence in the political and governmental structures, many of their conflicts were personally embedded in the political conflicts and/or local authorities (including police) were not able to protect them. Distrust of government, corruption, non-functioning police and an ineffectual judicial system meant they continued to be afraid for their lives.

Several stressed that the security situation in their country of origin had not changed, and they believed they might face the same fearful situation that made them leave the country in the first place. One father said,

We have a long history. The whole family and siblings have denied us. We have no one to return to. We have nothing to go to. I cannot imagine it at all. We do not know what to do. The woman has no one – her parents are dead.

A single man who was returning to Afghanistan said,

I have not had contact with my family for three years. Because of everything that happened. They burned down the farm we stayed at. They are not there anymore. . . . I wish I had a place I could go back to. But I cannot. And I do not know who or where my enemies are. They think I'm not a Muslim anymore. I'm not welcomed back to my family. To my own childhood.

One man who had been blackmailed and experienced violence, in addition to having his business burned down because he did not give in to the blackmailer's demands, explained that he and his family could not return:

We think only of the children's future now, even if it is dangerous for us to go back, we do it anyway. My brother was killed, and I can also be exposed to that. Everyone in our village knew we fled. And it is very dangerous for us to go back. There are many cities in the [region], we come from close to A, but will be traveling to B. So we think to stay in B – and be there a few months. It will cost us 1,000 dollars. If it fails, we can always go to the village, but we do not know then what would happen. Then all that happens will have to happen.

2. Controlling the return to generate changes

For a few families, conflicts related to marriage or to a man – and the solution to return was to tell relatives that they were not returning together. As seen above, one couple would not inform their associates in the country of return that the wife was returning, but planned to hide her away. In another case, the couple would not say openly that the man would return, but only that the mother and the children would return, in order to protect the man. The woman in this couple said,

We're not going to get help from someone there, we'll tell our parents on both sides that we go back, but no one else. We say that my husband has gone to another place – and we are going to continue alone. When we fled here we said nothing to anyone.

One young girl who would return alone while the rest of the family remained in Norway expected that the situation for her would be safe and that she would not be subjected to threats because it was her father who had been politically involved. The father felt it was not safe to return, however, and remained in Norway. The girl planned to stay with relatives in the return country.

3. Changed social status in return country

For a few migrants the decision to return was a direct consequence of feeling that they had completed the task they had set out to do (which may well have changed over time) when they left their country of origin. In all these cases, the respondents had family waiting for them in the country of return. Three informants, who had all migrated for economic reasons, expressed no perception of danger attached to their return.

One of them explained that he had left his place of origin as a child and had travelled through several countries before entering Europe. Now he wanted to return to his country of origin to take care of his

parents, who were getting old, along with the wife he married a year before (in another country). For him, the future was open.

Another informant believed that the situation on the labour market had not become easier during the four years he had been abroad, but maintained that he just needed to focus on getting work. He realised that coming to Norway was not the solution he originally thought it would be.

The third man expected that his society in the country of origin had changed during the 20 years he had been in Norway. But his kids were now adults and working. He had lived in Norway for a long time, collecting bottles, but the competition for such income had increased in recent years. Still, he had financed his two children's college educations at the best universities in their country of origin with this business. Now that this task was done, he had reached his goal, he was getting old and his wife had a job, he wanted to return "home." He saw potential projects he could initiate, but did not know what yet.

Importantly, not all had succeeded in reaching the goals they had set before leaving. Two lived as irregulars in Norway, one four years and another for 20 years. Both emphasised how difficult it was to work as an irregular and that they did not see this as a real possibility or as a long-term survival strategy.

4. Alternatives in other countries

Several informants, both those with families and those who were single, expressed that they would not stay put in the country of return. Instead, for several returning with IOM meant continued migration, and this re-migration was frequently also associated with uncertainty about what to expect. Whilst many talked about facing a housing problem when returning because they had sold everything they owned when they left, this was less important for others because they would not settle in the area where they had lived earlier, but rather would continue to another district or to another country:

First, how do you travel voluntarily when you know that the police or whoever can take me when we return? My life is in danger down there. I have a sister who lives in Afghanistan and a father-in-law who lives in Pakistan. And a brother who fled because of me. And I have a brother in Iran. They left because of me. We will probably not continue to live in Afghanistan, but continue to Pakistan or Iran. [father]

5.4 Three categories of subjective experiences of signing up

We suggest from these findings that there are three types of subjective experiences of signing up with assisted return. The first category consists of respondents who have *mixed feelings about their return*. For these migrants that signed up with assisted return, their conditions in Norway were the main reason behind their decisions to return. Experiencing that their dignity and human value was being lost and that they were marginalised in Norway made the living conditions hard to bear. Seeing that their future dreams and hopes, in particular for their children, were slowly dismantling and an increased feeling of being stuck (physically, mentally or socially) also made migrants opt for assisted return. For several, asking for assisted return was a way to respond to a need for a normalised life. Forced return was another factor: some feared that they would be picked up by the police and this fear added to their already marginalised living condition.

The second category consists of those who have a more outspoken, *positive assessment* of their return. Conditions in the country of return played a role in the decision to return, particularly for those who had family living in that country to whom they had social obligations and emotional bonding. Some of them returned with an upward social status, as they had remitted money during their stay in Norway. A

few of them had never had any intention of staying put in Norway and had now, to at least some degree, achieved their reason for migrating.¹¹

A third category consists of respondents who *very negatively assess* their option to return. A majority of our respondents did not expect that there had been positive changes in their country of origin since they left, and expected the same issues that caused them to leave would still exist. A few families planned to control the return by hiding members of the family when returning. For yet others, returning included plans to re-migrate either to a neighbouring country where they had family or an ethnic network, back to Europe or to another western country.

These findings may be explained by several factors. Among other things, reflections relating to security, family conditions, and structural conditions in the countries of origin influence the attitudes and decision-making process of migrants.

5.5 Knowledge of the return programmes

Prior research examines the information critical actors can provide and how this information reaches irregular migrants living inside (Brekke 2012; Øien og Bendixsen 2012; Valenta et al. 2010; Borhan et al. 2011; Vigger et al. 2009) and outside (Bendixsen et al. 2014) reception centres. Here we briefly discuss which information channels are important according to our informants, and which sources were of relevance in their decision-making process. Are there difference between those living in reception centres and those living privately when it comes to information about assisted return?

1. Travelling with the return programme to Afghanistan (IRRANA)

The six migrants we interviewed who had applied for IRRANA were well-informed of the different parts of the programme, including the cash support (also for the children), transportation assistance, and reintegration support. They knew the amount of the cash support, and some had also reflected upon what this support might cover. How they were to use the in-kind support was less clear for most. One person knew that IOM would provide him with a place to stay in Afghanistan for the first weeks, which had been important for him, “after which you can find a place to live yourself” they had told him and he had accepted.

One of those who returned to Afghanistan and with whom we stayed in contact used the reintegration assistance during the first period post-return. He used the in-kind support to initiate a business with gemstones. One question that came up relatively soon was the availability of assistance for a deposit to rent an apartment. The owner of the apartment demanded six months as the deposit, but IOM only covered three months; nonetheless, in the end he found another place only requiring a three-month deposit.

2. Travelling with Financial Support Reintegration (FSR)

One Russian family talked about both cash benefits and travel support; both were viewed as essential to a new start. The cash support was vital to establishing themselves again in their country of origin. A second Russian family wanted, foremost, to return to another European country, where they had lived and worked for a long time, but was unsure whether they would be able to qualify for such a return

¹¹ IOM has noted that (a) illness or loss of close family members or (b) parents requesting their son or daughter to return figures among other reasons for signing up to assisted return.

scheme. They were awaiting a response from IOM. Alternatively they planned to use the cash support to return to western Europe from Russia.

For the two women from Iran it was reassuring that they were to travel together, something they were unaware of until a few days before they left – even though they lived in the same reception centre. One of them planned to use the cash support to continue the political work she was involved in. The other woman planned to use it as a start-up capital for a new life in Iran.

The people we interviewed from Bangladesh, the Philippines and Kosovo only talked about cash support for the journey itself.

5.6 Return- and reintegration assistance as a motivating factor?

Employees at the reception centres stated that, in general, the benefits of the assisted return programmes (the cash payment and later reintegration support) did not motivate people to sign up for assisted return (Brekke 2015). That did not mean, however, that the incentives were without effect. It might well be that the role of the return and reintegration assistance as a motivating factor for signing up with assisted return was under-communicated by the people we talked with. Brekke (2015)

When we discussed the role of the assisted return programme in motivating individuals to make use of assisted return, a majority argued that the programme was not the main reason or motivating factor for this action. However, when discussing the matter more in detail, there were several indications that the money still played a part. Despite their initial reactions, the informants recognised that cash incentives might have a positive effect without being the main reason for why they had signed up.

For one person the assisted return programme was considered as very important for facilitating his return. He had not left Norway earlier, he explained, because he was afraid the police would arrest him, since he had been in Norway illegally. He said,

If I bought the ticket and would travel, then the police would come to Gardemoen and arrest me and put me in jail for a long period of time. That is why I have not returned home.

For some migrants, having to call their embassy to obtain the necessary identity papers was an uncertain and uncomfortable experience that could discourage applying for assisted return.

5.7 Contact with IOM and NGOs

The quality of the contact with IOM after applying for assisted return varied. Some expressed a feeling of uncertainty in the period after which they had applied and before they had received an answer. Many had unanswered questions that affected how they felt about returning with the programme. This process must be seen in view of the fact that many are impatient to receive information from IOM when they have finally decided to apply (see also Øien and Bendixsen 2012).

One interviewee who was to return to Afghanistan had a personal friend at IOM, which made access to information unproblematic. His personal relation may also have influenced his confidence in the programme. We heard from other Afghan migrants that they did not believe that they would receive the promised cash support when they arrived in Afghanistan. This distrust was based on rumours that others had not received this support in Afghanistan. Such rumours risk becoming more credible than the official version when migrants view the official information as ambiguous or when they mistrust official spokespeople.

Yet, those who had direct contact with the IOM office were generally satisfied with the personal support they received:

Last week they called from IOM and said that there was a problem – UDI had declined the application. Then I got the telephone number to UDI and my application number and I called the UDI caseworker. They said that they had rejected the application. “What will you do now,” they asked. I said, “I don’t know.” He asked if I had money to buy the ticket. I said “no.” He said that he would look into the case and after an hour he called back and said that UDI will pay for the return ticket. IOM has arranged the ticket and now everything is clear for me to return tomorrow. Such a blessing! [single man]

5.8 Differences between those living inside and outside reception centre

In this research we found that there appear to be differences in knowledge about assisted return between (a) those who have *never* lived in reception centres and (b) those who currently live in reception centres or have lived in centres for a longer period of time. Those migrants we interviewed who had never applied for asylum and simply lived as irregular migrants in Norway had either never received information about assisted return, or had only received this information by chance.

Among the informants who lived outside of a reception centre, we found that some of them did not have any sources of information on assisted return. Three of them had lived for a long period of time in Norway, but never in an ordinary reception centre and had not received information about IOM. One of them had only recently found information by coincidence on the internet, and two of them learned about the option through acquaintances. The fourth person received information by following his case in UDI and UNE and then contacting NOAS and his lawyer. Another couple who had stayed only for a very short period of time at the reception centre did not know about assisted return programme until they learned of another family that had returned in this way. Another person had sent a message through Facebook to Norwegian migration activists to ask about information on assisted return. Many of these individuals were very interested in information about assisted return once they finally received it.

Research has shown (Bendixsen et al. 2014) that migrants who are active in a church environment have access to a network of churchgoers, including Norwegian citizens. Simultaneously, some irregular migrants are very careful about who they tell that they are irregular in Norway. This can have consequences for the information flow, in that information that might be relevant to an irregular is not provided.

For both people who had lived/were living in reception centres and those living outside, the internet is an increasingly important source of information. What we found was that many actively surfed the internet (in particular, to learn about the political situation in their countries of return), but even so they had not found information about assisted return by coincidence on the internet (except for the one aforementioned case).

Furthermore, information that is conveyed through online social networks can provide greater uncertainty for many. One migrant from Afghanistan was anxious about his return because his conversion to Christianity had been made public on the internet. He had also told his former friends in Afghanistan that he had converted, which made him worry about his safety when returning.

We also found that some migrants were ambiguous about assisted return because other sources of information (in particular, word of mouth and rumours) sometimes contradicted information provided

to them from official sources (such as IOM). Some migrants talked about how previous migrants returning with the assisted return programme had not received promised financial or institutional assistance. For some, the rumours were viewed as more believable than governmental information. This was partly a consequence of a low institutional trust towards UDI due to their asylum applications being rejected (see also Bendixsen et al. 2014).

Irregular migrants who live in reception centres are exposed to information at various stages. It is thus more likely that information will reach them at a point in time when they are more receptive to it. Furthermore, they can access information and at a later period of time also ask reception centre staff for more information or clarity about the return programme.

5.9 The role of time

We asked all our informants when and how they had decided to apply for assisted return. The period of time in their lives when they decided to apply varied, but the responses they gave can be divided into four main themes:

1. They had considered the possibility for assisted return over a long period of time.

We wait and wait and do not think that we will get a positive answer here. We have already lived here for a long time. We have four children and they have begun to speak Norwegian. . . . We have taken a long time to decide, it has been difficult, but we think most of the children: they need freedom, they need schools and education. . . . [mother]

2. While trying to find a solution for an unbearable situation, they become aware (sometimes by coincidence) of the possibility of assisted return and they started the application process.

I heard about IOM by coincident from a friend who works at the embassy. He pays attention to new regulations at UDI. He told me that he had read about IOM giving “amnesty for return” and told me that this was my opportunity to go home. [single man]

3. They came to a point where they saw no other solution.

What I am thinking, I will go with IOM. . . . I have to face what happens. I am not a coward. I am not scared to go back. [single man]

4. They experienced a mental turnaround.

While making this decision may for some take a long period of time, for others it may seem more sudden. A mental *turnaround* is needed for many of the rejected applicants who had hoped for a positive outcome. One leader described this turnaround for some people as if a switch is suddenly turned from negative to positive (Brekke 2015). We found similar reflections in our interviews: one migrant told us that he was never surprised when his irregular migrant friends would suddenly decide to return, even if for years they claimed they would “never return.”

Such sudden turnarounds were largely not motivated by any particular action from staff at the reception centre, policy changes or new information about the assisted return programme. Rather, some migrants simply reached the point where “enough was enough,” and the continued hope that their life as an irregular would change due to external actors (i.e., authorities) abruptly came to a halt. Instead, they believed the only way to change their increasingly unbearable living situation would be to take the

matter into their own hands by returning, or planning to re-migrate after returning. Sudden decisions to return can, however, also be related to a changing situation in the country of origin: serious illness or death in the family, external threats or a belief that the situation in the return country has improved (i.e., personal problems in the country of origin have been, at least partly, resolved).

5.10 The role of others in making the decision

What was the involvement of others in the decision to sign up for assisted return? How did returnees reach their decisions? We asked the informants: With whom have you discussed the decision to return? We also asked informants who were in family situations about who was involved in the decision to return and whether they had disagreed within the family. We particularly asked whether they had involved their children in the decision (and if so, how). Their answers included seven main ways of making the decision to return:

1. The decision was made without involving the family in the country of origin or elsewhere abroad.

One young man told us, “I made the decision myself, I did not talk with anyone.” Our main impression was that few involve their families in the return country or living abroad. There are two general reasons for this: (a) The feeling of returning to an unsafe place means that returnees do not wish to talk about their return before arrival. Furthermore, the fact that several intend to go into hiding upon their return means they are careful about the stream of information about their return. (b) Some believe that their family abroad or in the country of origin does not sufficiently understand their difficult situation in Norway and so their family cannot evaluate what is a correct decision. Two expressed explicitly that they were afraid that their families would try convincing them to attempt to remain in Norway. One man with his family in his country of origin had decided to return without discussing this with his wife in the country of origin, as he did not believe she would understand his situation.

At the same time, even those who had not involved their families in the decision-making process expressed the need for their families’ support in order for their future plans to be realised. In the case of the young woman returning alone, this return was only made achievable because an uncle accepted her into his family. Her return was dependent upon that family in the country of origin accepting her in its home, and this return was thus also made possible by the family’s attitude in her country of origin.

2. The parents made the decision without involving the children.

A couple parents told us,

We have taken the decision, only the two of us. We have not discussed with others. Our daughter who is 10 years understands everything anyhow. She doesn’t want to return to [the country of origin], rather to [another country in Europe].

3. The decision is not discussed because the returnees feel there are no other options.

For some, the decision to return does not feel like an actual choice, and so there is no real discussion about the decision to sign up for assisted return. In one family, the children were involved, but they did not feel they had any other options:

The decisions we took all together first. But as I said earlier: there was no choice that was voluntary. We thought all the time about how it would be to come back, when we do not have a future and no hope. And there will be someone who can take my children,

who can take revenge. I constantly think about my children. About what might happen to them. [mother]

4. The decision involves disagreement within the same family.

In some cases, one member of the family did not want the return. In this case, the decision to return was often linked to an original reluctance to leave the country of origin in the first place. For example, the wife in one couple said that she was happy to return, but the husband underscored the fact that she really never wanted to leave and has had a difficult time in Norway and that he has been worried for her health. In such situations, one of the partners (in this case the man) may feel more responsibility and ultimately make the final decision because that spouse feels he or she is better informed and can communicate better in terms of language abilities. There was also a case where the wife did not wish to return, as she recognised that her rights and possibility to work would be far less in the country of origin than in Norway. But in the end she accepted return, recognising the unbearable situation for her husband in Norway and the possible advantages he could gain from such a return.

5. The opinion of others is important, but the decision takers make the decision themselves.

As previously mentioned, in some cases migrants made different decision for different members of the family: while some of the family members would return, others would remain in Norway. The young girl in a family who was returning alone (while the rest of the family stayed in Norway) had come to this decision by herself, although first after discussing it with her parents, “because they know if it is a mistake, because they want the best for their children. But I decided in the end alone.”

In another case, a single man returning to Afghanistan was encouraged by his family to return and to live with them. His decision was made on the basis that he could continue to a neighbouring country to live with his family there. The family was thus fundamental in his decision to return. He explained, “I did not discuss with anyone – it was I myself who decided.” However, later in the interview he said:

My sister said that if it is quite difficult for me here then I should go back to Afghanistan and then to Iran – “because you are old,” she said. “We can fix a lady for you [to marry] and they are little jobs in Iran that you can get.” But I am also a refugee in Iran, since we are Afghans, so it is difficult.

Two of those living outside a reception centre had talked with friends about returning. In one case, an acquaintance informed a family man about the possibility of returning with assisted return:

I heard about IOM randomly from a friend. He said, “You can go home now. Now it’s your chance to go home.” So last month I contacted IOM.

6. The role of other asylum seekers and migrants is ambiguous.

Information about other rejected asylum seekers from the same nation-state who have returned is helpful for some migrants in forming perceptions of how successful return may be. But the opposite is also true: asylum seekers who have finally obtained permission to stay also influence the decision of whether to return or not.

While acquaintances can contribute with information, they seldom play a part in the final decision-making process. One person stressed that even if he talked with his friends, they could not understand the situation he was in and that is why he made the decision by himself.

But I think that they don't have the ability to understand how I feel. They live in a completely different situation. I have no opportunity to go to town, I do not have the opportunity to apply for a job, I have no rights. Therefore, they do not have the ability to understand me. (family man)

Additionally, for several migrants the decision was so personal that they would not share their thoughts about it outside their inner personal circle. Returning to what they viewed as unsafe surroundings also caused many to avoid talking about return before leaving. Some planned to go into hiding and were careful about the stream of information before leaving Norway.

7. The role of the reception centre staff

We found through the interviews that employees at reception centres are sources of information, but are not actors that influence decisions to return. Talks with those responsible for return at the reception centres are important to become familiar with IOM and the possibilities for assisted return and to receive answers to questions they have about the scheme. This became, for example, clear in the case of the young woman who was going to return while the rest of her family remained. Additionally, in the case of an Afghan couple it became important to their decision to return that they were informed that Afghans who have lived in the reception centre earlier had returned with IOM. Thus, although reception centre staff are not involved in the actual decision, they can be important in the early part of the process when the migrants are learning about their opportunities.

5.11 Sticking with the decision to return

Were there aspects that made returnees consider not returning, even after they had signed up for assisted return? Did they change their mind in the process?

Several expressed living with the hope that the situation would change and that they would still receive permission to stay. The ambiguity of signing up with assisted return, but still hoping for a last minute change was present among many we interviewed. One man with a wife and children in the country of origin said,

I haven't changed my mind, I will stick to this, but I have the hope all the time that perhaps one day I will have a better possibility, another possibility.

Several continued to hope that a political change would take place that would allow them to remain in Norway – even after they had applied for assisted return. In one family the father was unsure about the decision to return, and he believed he should wait to see the outcome of the public discussion and political process on conditions for residence for his children, who had been in Norway a long time. This could also be tied up to the concept of “loss aversion” Brekke (2015) uses to describe the reluctance of migrants to give up hope of one day obtaining permission to stay in Norway. They cling to the hope of seeking asylum and thus have an aversion against acknowledging that the hope may be gone and that the “loss” of the dream of asylum is all that is left.

For some, the expense of the return journey was also a barrier to returning earlier (i.e., before they knew about the assisted return program); the fact that their return would be covered made return a real option. For example, one migrant who had come to Norway for economic purposes said there were no possibilities other than assisted return; he had neither the money to return nor could imagine how to manage safe travel back alone.

Yet, one mother said that she would rather stay in Norway in spite of her living situation and without a residence permit. She emphasised the security and freedom she and her children experience in Norway.

However, the limitation on her ability to take advantage of the possibilities and values she appreciates in Norway (such as democracy) by living irregularly is the reasons she nevertheless decided to return. She is also returning because her husband is unable to live as an irregular.

For others, the decision was final, and they felt a relief when it was taken. From then on, they just waited to be able to travel.

5.12 Conclusion

Experiencing marginalisation, the lack of opportunity to work or pursue meaningful activities, a loss of hope that the situation will change and generally unbearable living conditions led some to sign up for assisted return. Others talked about how their return was a response to factors in their country of origin or in neighbouring countries; the role of the family (including family expectations and family reunification) was particularly strong. The prospect that returnees would remain in the return country – or re-migrate – seemed to depend upon whether the factors that influenced the decision to sign up for assisted return were only about conditions and lack of opportunity in Norway (push factors) or also included factors in the country of return (pull factors).

Migrants who had achieved their goals for migration from a household perspective by remitting income to their families were the most satisfied with the information given and seemed determined to return as a long-term strategy. Return for them was an expected and predicated outcome of the migration journey, particularly if their family had remained in the return country. Reintegration would potentially be facilitated by the fact that these individuals had kept continued contact with family in the place of return. Strong kinship networks with the places of origin also encouraged return, as long as the place was also perceived as relatively safe. In some cases, the returnee had also achieved upward mobility due to migration and so return was viewed as positive.

We found variations in how much information migrants had on assisted return. Those who were living in a reception centre, or who had previously lived in a reception centre, had a generally good understanding of the assisted return programme. Those who had never applied for asylum or had only briefly lived in a reception centre lacked information about assisted return and discovered information only by accident. In general, returnees viewed their contact with IOM as positive, although some migrants doubted whether the whole return process would really work (i.e., that they would receive the entitled money when returning). This doubt was exacerbated by rumours that circulated about other returned migrants who had never received the promised assistance or money.

The period of time in which interviewees decided to request assisted return also varied. Some had considered the option over a long period of time. Others made the decision quickly in order to get out of a difficult situation – deciding to apply soon after they learned about possibility. Most came to the point where there was no other alternative – which also meant that they did not consider the situation as a choice between other options. Something happening in the country of origin or a mental turnaround could have triggered this decision. All had come to the conclusion that continuing their stay in Norway no longer constituted a viable alternative, although some remained more ambiguous than others as to whether they still hoped for a last minute opportunity to stay in Norway.

The process of making a decision to return was pursued in various ways: Several had not involved family in Norway or in the country of origin. For parents, some had not involved the children, whereas others had disagreements within the same family about the benefits of returning. Discussions with outsiders whether or not to return were generally not pursued because interviewees did not believe others would understand their situation. While some did ask friends or acquaintances for their opinions, they made the decisions themselves. Although other migrants and asylum seekers might provide information about the possibility of assisted return, their opinions about assisted return varied; some

other migrants suggested applying for assisted return while others suggested “waiting a little longer.” Finally, many migrants were not interested in discussing their return with the reception centre workers who were supposed to discuss and promote assisted return with them.

6. The idea of return: Predictability or uncertainty

Considering the different views and social realities of the migrants' return begs a question: What does return mean for various segments of the population? The assisted return programme is set up with the idea in mind that the migrant will make plans for a return and successful reintegration. However, return for many migrants is not about going back to their country of origin – many spent years on their way to Europe and have not been in their “home city” or “home village” since they were children or at least young. Additionally, their current life situation is sometimes substantially and existentially different: living in a place as a young person is different than living there as a parent or adult. Their situation may also have changed mentally – the way they view their country of origin, life and the future may also have changed and informs their understanding of return. While assisted return is fronted as a way to make life more predictable, this is not how it is perceived by most of the migrants we interviewed.

6.1 Predictability in the return process

Predictability is a term derived from the interviews with the centre staff (Brekke 2015). The processing and outcome of asylum cases was characterised as unpredictable to asylum seekers, the centre staff and everyone else directly affected by the process. In particular, it is difficult to know when the next step will be taken, which complicates the decision about return.

In earlier research, Brekke (2004) suggests the introduction of “way-points,” fixed points in time for the next step in the processing of cases, which would create obligations for both parties and increase predictability. Such reforms would strengthen the applicants' understanding of the process, give them a sense of ownership and increase their acceptance of assisted voluntary return. According to the centre staff, applicants today do not experience a feeling of ownership of the process, and they often see the outcome as random (Brekke 2015).

For asylum seekers and irregular migrants, the asylum process appears generally unpredictable. They do not know when the decision on their application will arrive – it may take several months – and after the first rejection they have the option of appealing the decision to UNE (Utlendingsnemda, the Norwegian Appeals Boards). Although they receive a date of exit together with the second rejection from UNE, they can also appeal that decision. In this research we examine how migrants discussed the idea of predictability and the context in which return takes place. Which resources do they make use of in order to create more control and predictability? The question of predictability in a return context is related to what return mean for various actors. Our empirical material revealed large variations.

6.2 The various meanings of “return”

We found various ways of understanding what *return* is about during our fieldwork. The Norwegian government's view on return is that a person returns to the place where he or she lived before, and thus is expected to be familiar with that situation. There is an expectation from the government that migrants should be able to establish predictable frames for returning when they sign up for assisted return. It seems rational, from the point of view of the government, that migrants should actively make plans and preparations for the situation in the country of origin before leaving Norway for the return to be predictable.

For migrants who have had their asylum applications rejected, assisted return is generally not considered as “return with dignity,” as the government calls it. There are clear variations in our data concerning the extent to which migrants follow government strategies to manage predictability in the return process. For some, return is a process quite similar to that envisioned by the government. Some migrants have worked in Norway, reached their goal here and return to their family in the country of origin. But others

return without having set up any frame of return, which may tremendously affect the return process and the sustainability of return. Only one of the migrants we spoke with talked of his future return as representing a predictable situation. While a few others had made arrangements for their return (e.g., contacting family), others felt it was impossible to plan much before arriving in their country of origin.

For several, the housing situation when returning was a source of unpredictability and viewed as a problem because they had sold everything they owned when they left the country of origin. Yet, since many did not intend to settle where they came from, this was of less importance to them. Instead, they expected to move on to another city or even another country, although with few economic resources other than those received from IOM to use when they settled down. Indeed, some of those we talked to planned to return to a geographical place where they had never before lived and one may question whether issues similar to those that occur in the case of internal displacement may take place in this setting. Reasons behind plans to re-migrate included having a family in another area, or that another area felt safer than their “home” district or country. Others, such as young Afghan migrants, had left Afghanistan for Iran when they were children. While some had broken ties with their families, others still had family members in Iran. However, their return destiny with the assisted return programme would be Afghanistan, since this was their nationality, even if they had not set a foot there since they were children and had no family or social network available there. We asked one 22-year-old Afghan what he would do when returning to Afghanistan with assisted return. He jokingly said that he would probably buy some potatoes cheap up the road, then walk down the road trying to sell them with some profit. He added that after having received the repatriation money he would continue to Iran, where his sister and her husband lived, and try to find work there. Thus, although he signed up to return to Afghanistan, he planned to continue to a third country after he had received the repatriation funding. To him, return was possible only because family in a *third* country would welcome him back there.

For others, signing up with assisted return was not about making their future more predictable because they viewed the place where they would return with uncertainty: Would they be safe? Would they get work? Would their children manage to accommodate themselves in the new situation with a different school system, language and other children? Some had given birth to their children after they left their country; thus they had never been a parent in the return country. This added to a feeling of unpredictability.

Some did not consider it dangerous to return. While they expected that society in their country of origin had changed since they had been away, they had family waiting for them – a family they had economically supported during their time abroad. Thus, return was part of their migration plans and represented something more predictable and positive: return meant returning to a family that was for the most part economically better off than before, a financial situation to which they were an important contributor – which also meant that their status when returning would be that of a migrant who had supported his family by being abroad.

6.3 Expectation management

Expectation is a key concept in understanding the process leading up to a asylum seeker making a decision to return (Brekke 2015). Migrants’ expectations regarding the consequences of having their applications rejected by the Norwegian authorities appears to have been set before they arrived in Norway. They expected to be accepted. Managing these expectations is a task for authorities, including the Directorate of Immigration and the staff at the centres. The staff members interviewed for this study pointed to the need to help applicants develop realistic expectations about their chances at obtaining asylum. The means being used included providing facts about acceptance rates along with group relevant information, preferably involving persons in their country of origin.

What do we mean by “expectation management” when it comes to irregular migrants signing up for assisted return? The idea of expectation refers to different levels and is related to the following:

- *Knowledge*: of opportunities and possibilities in Norway
- *Individual understanding*: understanding or knowledge about the person’s own situation and consequences of a rejected asylum application
- *Management of the situation*: the scope of action a person believes he or she has

In addition, the preparedness for returning includes a willingness to return and the ability to mobilise resources that could facilitate the return (Cassarino 2004, 2008). Potential returnees’ knowledge and individual understanding can be considered as a frame of understanding their own life situations. But the term also draws attention to agency – the ability to act in relation to beliefs about how you can act. The migrants’ agency, we recognise, is situated in a very structured frame of the living conditions in which they find themselves (see also van Meeteren et al. 2014; van Meeteren 2012). Their scope of action is thus limited in various ways by their economic and legal situation, border control mechanisms and socio-cultural expectations. But it is also structured by their living situation: living in a family versus as a single person may influence how they think about return and predictability.

Expectation management for returning must be understood in relation to the expectation with which they left their country of origin and the expectation they had when arriving in Norway. Migrants arrive in Norway with certain expectations, including a hope of being granted asylum, establishing a new life for themselves, attaining a better future for their children or improving the life situation for their family in their place of origin or in neighbouring countries through money remittances.

Slowly, during the asylum process a certain ethos of hopefulness and optimism disappear. Some realise that these expectations will not be fulfilled in Norway. There is a loss of faith that things will turn into something better. This loss of faith could also contribute to creating new expectations that shed light on new ideas of action. “Returning” thus becomes both a way of dealing with lost expectations and with the new expectations that have been shaped while in the state of applying for asylum (e.g., becoming parents, becoming of marriageable age, educational ambitions, family in the country of origin becoming ill or death of close family). Signing up for assisted return is also about taking hold of existing opportunities for action. Loss in expectation can deprive migrants of the potential for certain actions, but it can also create new scopes of action not imaginable before, or previously considered impossible or undesirable.

Managing expectations by returning is also shaped by the expectations migrants had when first arriving in Norway and how these were met. There is an expectation gap between how they expected to be treated as asylum seekers and their personal experiences in the system. One father told us that the letter rejecting his application for asylum had said that UDI had not emphasised his explanation/testimony because UDI did not believe the family conflict was real. This had upset him. He knew of many who had told untrue stories and had been granted asylum, but he had wanted to be honest and was not believed. This meant that he now – whether or not he should have been granted asylum based on the complaint he then filed – did not want to stay in Norway.

Expectation gaps can also be shaped by parents’ perceived obligation to provide their child(ren) with certain rights otherwise taken for granted, due to the living conditions as a rejected asylum seeker. When children’s expectations towards their parents are seen as impossible to fulfil, due to social, legal or economic circumstances of an irregular migrant parent, this played an important role:

The children enjoy it of course most here, and they'd rather not go back. They have more freedom here, they're doing a lot of activities during their free time. But we have no choice. We also have the situation that the children ask for a lot which the other children have, but we cannot afford it, we do not have a job and they ask why we don't.

And why they cannot walk or travel around freely. So in the home country we cannot go out because it is dangerous, but not here either because we are not allowed. [mother]

One family decided to return because of the psychological effects on the husband of staying in Norway as an irregular. The wife however was not happy with the decision:

I don't want to, and I find no joy in this, but he is my husband and I must follow him.
I don't want to go back, I want to be here.

This indicates what we have found in other interviews, namely, that there can be different possibilities in the country of return depending on gender, and thus the consequences and expectations of return can be very different for women and men. Expectations concerning the opportunities that await returnees in the country of origin (e.g., freedom in the public sphere, employment opportunities, social expectations towards women versus men) were addressed in several interviews and were also important factors in terms of how potential returnees discussed return and their expectations about the possibilities post-return.

6.4 Conclusion

For a return to not imply re-migration requires that the individual is prepared. The level of preparedness of a migrant must be seen in the light of the individual's perception of the security, political and economic conditions in his or her place of origin. Such expectations and predictability also influence how returnees mobilise and use their resources after return.

In chapter 5, we saw that lack of preparation for the return was often tied to expectations that the security, political or economic structures that they once left behind had not changed. In cases where their social status also had not changed or had even deteriorated (e.g., lost capital, lost social position or/and position in the labour market) after leaving their country of origin, planning the return did not seem to make any difference in expectations about how returnees would reintegrate. What could be viewed as a lack of preparation for returning from the position of those working with return issues could be more a matter of the difficulty of preparing for what would meet them in the country of origin. It can be especially difficult to prepare for a journey to the country of origin in situations involving, for example, poor physical health or worries about an uncertain future. However, those who were returning to places where their family awaited them had often had an opportunity to prepare for return over the last years, in the sense that they had achieved the purposes of their migration and were now ready to return.

In short, there are different ways of returning. It appears that an individual is more able to prepare for the return, the more he or she individually feels that he or she has accomplished his or her goals for migration or the more he or she perceives that there are existing opportunities in the country of origin. For others, the planning process is often not about returning to the country of origin, but about planning re-migration. For several migrants we interviewed, return seemed to be just a stage rather than the end of the migration process. In these circumstances, predictability and efforts to control the return for the migrant become, if not impossible, then at least difficult. What this reveals is the necessity of understanding return as a dynamic process that means different things for different individuals.

7. Afghanistan

7.1 Introduction

The IRRANA programme (Information, Return and Reintegration of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan) has facilitated assisted return to Afghanistan since 2006 and was evaluated in 2008 (Strand et al.). IOM is the implementing partner in Afghanistan, with a country office in Kabul and sub-offices in major cities.

Afghanistan has been at war since 1979, giving rise to subsequent waves of migration as powers have shifted and different groups have fled the country or returned. Millions of Afghans sought refuge in neighbouring countries following the Soviet invasion in 1979 and some migrated all the way to Europe and the US (especially those with a higher education). While 2 million returned from Pakistan and Iran in 1989, many affiliated with the Soviet Union left Afghanistan at the same time. The civil war that raged during the early 1990s and destroyed the capital city Kabul, as well as the Taliban rule that followed, spurred a new wave of migration. In particular, many young boys left during this time, fearing recruitment to the warring parties. Many arriving in Norway and other parts of Europe claimed to be under the age of 18. For a number of years they constituted the largest group of such asylum seekers going to Norway, and in 2014 they were the second largest group.¹²

More than 5 million Afghans have returned to their country of origin since international military intervention overthrew the Taliban regime in 2001 – constituting almost 20% of the estimated Afghan population. Many opted to stay in the cities rather than returning to the countryside from where they originally migrated. As a result, in the last decade Kabul's population has increased from 0.5 to more than 5 million. Many come to Kabul in order to seek jobs, education and a larger degree of security than what prevails in some other parts of the country.

However, continued warfare and the re-emergence of the Taliban since 2005 have led to new waves of migrants leaving the country. Some have again crossed the border into Pakistan and Iran, but more now try to reach Europe, the US and Australia. The general increase in income until 2014 and a large black economy has allowed new groups to consider migration. Families prioritise investing in their future by sending their youth out of the country. Research on children engaging in unaccompanied travel are, according to a recent study (AREA and UNHCR 2014, 1), motivated by “a combination of interrelated factors, including poverty, insecurity, inadequate opportunities for education and employment, and family and peer expectations.”

The withdrawal of the majority of international military troops at the end of 2014, combined with the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan National Army, has increased insecurity in the country. A reduced international presence has also decreased investments and financial flows. Combined with a contentious presidential election, this has led to political instability, high inflation and reduced trust in a peaceful future.

When interviews took place in October 2014, there were frequent suicide and bomb attacks in Kabul, and the Taliban and other groups in opposition to the Afghan government were gaining influence in many parts of the country. 2014 ended, according to the UN, as the year with the highest number of civilian casualties since 2001. This had a strong negative impact on the Afghan economy and made it very difficult to set up or sustain businesses. Moreover, it made many Afghans consider whether this

¹² Data available at <http://www.udi.no/statistikk-og-analyse/statistikk/asylsoknader-enslige-mindrearige-asyloskere-etter-statsborgerskap-og-maned-2014/>.

was the time to leave the country (again), as they feared increased political and ethnic tensions and possibly full warfare.

This pattern of continuous migration, influenced by a mix of poverty and conflict, has taken place in a country scoring low on nearly all development indicators, despite major investments and improvements since 2002. The country is ranked as no 169 on the Human Development Index, which is low in light of the massive international support received over the last decade. A part of the explanation is found in the large black/drug economy, weak and highly centralised governance structures and a high degree of corruption. Much of the development assistance has been directed towards areas with a high degree of conflict, and thereby has yielded limited results. Unemployment is estimated to be at 35%, and 8 out of 10 men of working age are unskilled.

The human rights situation is a significant worry, despite efforts to strengthen the police and the judiciary. Human rights organisations point to attacks on women's rights, growing internal displacement and migration. Impunity for abuses is the norm for government security forces and armed groups. Kidnapping for ransom has increased, and Amnesty International has reported a high number of threats and abuses against human rights defenders. There is strong gender segregation, and Afghanistan was in 2011 labelled "the worst country in the world for women," with one of the highest rates in the world for maternal and infant mortality.¹³

As a consequence of increased warfare and reduced security, limited development and weak governance, Afghanistan scores low in almost all aspects of human security, defined to be "protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression, and environmental hazards." In 2010, the Deputy Minister of Health stated that "only 27 percent of Afghans had access to safe drinking water, 12 percent access to adequate sanitation and just 9 percent [could] depend on steady supplies of electricity"; he went on to say that "8.5 million, or 37 percent of the people, [were] in the borderline of food insecurity and thus hunger."¹⁴

7.2 Data and profiles of respondents

Table 4. Types of data

Number of personal interviews with returnees	Number of basic telephone interviews
20	17
Number of personal interviews with returnees from previous evaluation	
6	

The data analysed below is primarily drawn from personal interviews with returnees between 2009 and 2014, supplemented by phone interviews on some topics.¹⁵ By using snowballing methods, we also were able to track some returnees who arrived between 2009 and 2010. In addition, we conducted personal interviews with 6 returnees who had been interviewed for the 2008 evaluation. When contacting returnees by phone, we asked some basic questions for those not available for longer interviews, including their present status and how sustainable their business, job placements and reintegration had been. These findings are reflected in the text. The majority of those interviewed were living in Kabul and Jalalabad; only a few lived in rural areas, even if they lived there before leaving Afghanistan. This follows a general trend towards urbanisation, as towns provide better security, education and job opportunities than rural areas. Many returnees, including from neighbouring

¹³ Report at <http://www.trust.org/item/20110615000000-na1y8/?source=spotlight>.

¹⁴ Available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62246>.

¹⁵ Data regarding contact information of returnees was received from IOM Kabul on 29 September 2014.

countries, prefer to remain in Kabul, Jalalabad and Herat rather than go to their original areas of habitation. Many have the opportunity to (re)connect with relatives and/or tribal or ethnic networks that have moved to the cities from the countryside.

Only 2 individuals reported having special physical or mental needs, but these were not so severe that they required medical attention. One case of physical need was an old war wound that caused irritation but was not a source of major hindrance for the returnee. The mental need identified by the other returnee was his increased distress over the general situation in Afghanistan after his return. Many interviewees had similar concerns, though they did not see a need for mental care or guidance.

Table 6. Gender distribution

Number of male respondents	Number of female respondents
18	2

The numbers above illustrate the gender division among returnees, despite our efforts to seek out families and women to interview. Only 12 families (consisting of 41 total individuals) had returned from Norway between 2012 and mid-2014. Both female cases are quite unique. One returned with 2 children before her application was processed (see box 1 below), and the other had her work permit in Norway revoked.

Table 7. Age distribution

Age	<20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	≥60
Number of Respondents	0	8	10	2	0	0

Several of the returnees claimed to be under the age of 18 when they arrived in Norway, and were thus eligible for additional reintegration assistance.

Table 8. Civic status

Number of those alone in Norway at the time of return	Number of those with family in Norway at the time of return
17	3

The issue of civic status was nuanced. Those interviewed included 15 married individuals, and all except 1 (married after his return to Afghanistan) had children. Yet, only 1 of these individuals had family members with her when she arrived in Norway. The majority had family back in Afghanistan, but a few had married or formed cohabitation relationships in Norway before they returned. Most of these explained that they had returned to Afghanistan to “follow the Norwegian rules” and planned to apply for family reunification. They were frequently, if not daily, in contact with their family members on the phone or via Skype.

Table 9. Education

Level of education (on-going or completed)	Number
None	2
Primary school	12
High school / secondary school / technical education (up to ca. 18 years)	6
BA/MA/PhD	0
Other education	0

It should be mentioned that it was evident from the interviews that some of the interviewees who reported having received a primary education had a very limited ability to read and write. Several

indicated they could not read the letter explaining the confidentiality of the interviews. We will return to this, but those without or with limited education were frequently especially critical regarding how the reintegration process was handled by IOM, potentially due to difficulties relating to the written information and their poor ability to fill in forms.

Table 10. Type of activity upon departure from country of origin

Activity	Number
Unemployed	1
Part-time or sporadic employment ("odd jobs")	6
Full-time employment	10 (mainly shopkeepers)
Student	2
Other	1

The majority of returnees had been running different types of shops or working in their fathers' shops when they departed their country of origin. This likely provided them finances/access to loans for the travel, as well as business experiences to draw on when selecting in-kind options upon their return. Some also defined themselves as labourers or farm workers, and some of these individuals had financed their travel to Europe by taking on work in Iran and elsewhere along the journey.

Table 11. Year of arrival in Norway

Year	Pre-2008	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number	7	8	2	2	0	0	1	0	0

The majority had been in Norway for quite a few years before applying for assisted return. The length of their journey to Norway varied considerably, from two days of air travel (the shortest) to 4–5 years (the longest, during which they "worked their way" to Europe and later to Norway). Many returnees had been away from their country of origin for up to a decade before returning (including the travel time).

There was some variation in travel routes, but the majority went through Iran and Turkey before entering Europe. Their travel was organised by smugglers in one way or the other.

Table 12. Reasons cited for migration from country of origin

Reasons cited for migration	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Generalised insecurity / unspecified security reasons	0
Personal insecurity / persecution / involvement in conflict / etc.	18
Medical reasons	0
Economic reasons	1
Improve general quality of life / aspiration to travel / adventure / change of environment	0
"No future here"	0
"Saw others doing it"	0
Unspecified	0
Other	2 (had employment in Norway)
Multiple answers	0

With the exception of the (to be) family that went to work in Norway, everyone explained that they left Afghanistan due to concerns for their personal safety. Many referred to the general increase in insecurity in the areas where they lived, but in addition several mentioned personal threats from the Taliban or

other armed groups or a fear of being forcibly recruited into such groups. Some explained that their families were involved in conflicts and other members of their family/tribe posed a threat to their lives. The details of the threats varied considerably between those interviewed, though some presented the threats as serious enough that they had required their immediate departure from Afghanistan.

In addition, several returnees mentioned the difficulty of securing income and livelihood in Afghanistan or in neighbouring countries (several had been labourers in Iran before departing for Norway), but only one stated that he had opted for Norway due to the possibility of securing himself a job there.

Table 13. Reasons cited for coming to Norway in particular

Reason	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Norwegian asylum or immigration policies perceived as favourable / expectations of asylum	0
Political reasons (including "peace," "respect for human rights," "democratic values," etc.)	0
Economic reasons (including "good economy," "good job chances," "good salaries," etc.)	1
Family/friends in Norway	2
Advised to go to Norway (while on the road)	9
Human smuggler decided	6
By chance	0
Unspecified	0
Other	2
Multiple answers	0

Only a few returnees with family or friends already in Norway had planned it as their destination. Some had been advised in Afghanistan by the smuggler organising their travel. The majority had taken advice from other Afghans or from smugglers on the road (many mentioned receiving such advice in Greece or France) that they should head to Norway as it was "a good country" where there was a possibility of obtaining asylum. Very few appeared to have had any specific knowledge about Norway before they left, although some had learned about the country in school. The exception was a returnee who said he had selected Norway because it was known to respect human rights and provide protection for those in danger. He further explained that he decided to return when his asylum application was rejected, as he did not wish to stay in a country that did not honour its commitment to human rights.

Many were able to find jobs in Norway, at least until their asylum applications were rejected, though some reported to have earned income in the black labour market. Some secured savings they were able to bring with them in cash when returning. One had been unlucky when he put the money in his luggage (as it was above the legal amount to bring out of Norway); his bag disappeared in transit in Dubai. Another had maintained his Norwegian bank account to receive his outstanding tax return after he arrived in his country of origin, but he then found out that his account had been closed when he returned to Afghanistan; he was not able to obtain the tax return or find out why the account had been closed. Neither IOM nor the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul had seen it as their responsibility to assist him, referring him to the Embassy of Afghanistan in Oslo.

Box 1. FEMALE ASYLUM SEEKERS AND CULTURAL PRACTICE

Mira Gul was 34 years old and had six children (two of them partly disabled) when her husband was killed in a road accident.¹ Her brother-in-law suggested that he could take her as his second wife and include her and the children in his family. She resisted the offer. She expected a grim future and feared he was more interested in the US\$ 15,000 she had received in compensation for her husband’s death than in her and her family. It was very difficult situation to handle; refusing a remarriage within the close family would have been regarded as going against her culture.

After discussing her options with her father and brother, they decided that she should leave the country and bring some of the children with her, as many as her money would allow. The father contacted a smuggler who suggested Norway as a country where the family could seek protection. She and the two youngest children left, one boy and one girl under school age.

She was in the middle of her asylum application process in Norway when an earthquake hit the part of Afghanistan where her family lived. Soon her brother-in-law’s family contacted her to tell her that two of her children had been killed in the earthquake. When she called her own family they told her that this was not true; her family had not been harmed. However, she did not dare believe them, fearing they were trying to spare her – the children’s mother – the bad news. She saw no other option than to return. She ended her asylum process and immediately applied for assisted return for her herself and the two children.

When coming back she found that all her children were still alive and the brother-in-law again asked her to marry him and join his household. She was in an even more difficult situation than when she left for Norway, since she had spent the compensation money on the journey; however, she still resisted the marriage offer. Her dilemma is now whether she, as a widow with six children, can manage on her own with only the income from milking cows that she got through the assisted return programme.

Table 14. Year of return to country of origin

Year	Pre-2008	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number	0	0	1	2	0	9	4	4	0

Except for a family, all those interviewed received 2 rejections of their asylum applications before they decided to return, and in the end it was the bureaucratic process that determined when they left. One mother and her 2 children did not complete the application process before returning (see box 1 above).

7.3 Decision making: Motivations for applying for assisted return

Table 15. How returnees learned about the programme

IOM	At reception centres	Friends or other asylum seekers	Media	Letter of rejection	Other
13	7	3	0	0	0

Most of the returnees obtained information from IOM at reception centres and then either asked for further information from staff there or contacted IOM Oslo directly. Some used the internet to look up information about the programme or were assisted by friends or cohabitants to do so.

With a few rather special exceptions, all had had their asylum applications rejected twice. There were different responses for why they chose assisted return. Responses included “We had no choice but to

leave,” “There was no other option,” “We need to respect the rules,” or a request from family to return or saying that they were missed. One preferred Kabul over being returned to Greece where he first was registered. One spoke of the mental distress associated with waiting for the asylum decision. Another saw no other option when there was “no permit and no job.” Yet another returned “for love, to be able to return back to my family in Norway.” The last argument of potential returnees – that they “respected the Norwegian rules” – emerged in a number of interviews. Some that had established a family in Norway explained that they hoped this would later allow them to return. This was probably an additional driving force for choosing assisted return.

It was difficult to obtain a clear understanding of how each individual’s deliberation and decision-making process took place in Norway. Several referred to discussions with family in their place of origin and in Norway, as well as with fellow asylum seekers at reception centres. They all, however, projected that they in the end they had made the decision by themselves, and at times against the will of their family back in Afghanistan.

There was no mention of the *threat* of forced return when asked about the main reason they registered for assisted return. But several responses referred to the inevitable option of being forcibly removed from Norway (for example, being forced to move to Greece) and the wish to avoid what they regarded a non-dignified return that could include police and handcuffs. A general realisation emerged in the interviews that a forcible return was an option and that there was no point of avoiding return for them once “the second rejection” had arrived in the mail. The fact that they were no longer permitted to work, at least legally, was mentioned by some as a contributing factor for considering assisted return.

7.4 Logistics: Processing time and travel

Table 16. Processing time in months from application to departure

Time period	<1 month	1 month	2 months	3 months	4 months	5 months	≥6 months
Frequency	0	11	8	1	0	0	0

All returnees describe the process in Norway as being swift and without any difficulties, just taking 1 or 2 months from the time of application to them leaving Norway. Only in 1 case did it take 3 months due to a more lengthy process of obtaining documents.

Many explained that this went so smoothly due to an Afghan staff member at the IOM Oslo office who had been very helpful to them. What they needed to do had been very well explained and they were assisted when they did not understand something or asked for advice.

However, the information received in Norway was subjected to criticism. Several returnees claimed that they either had received no information or had received incorrect information about the possibility of applying for a housing allowance (introduced in 2012). In 2 cases, this related to the individual’s inability to obtain a job placement in Afghanistan, a possibility that IOM Norway had informed the returnee about before he left Norway.

Table 17. How well organised was the return journey?

Very well	Fairly well	Badly	Do not know
15	5	0	0

The majority had only praise for the return journey. It appears that air transfer through Istanbul was much preferred over transfer through Dubai (which had been used by returnees some years ago), and had been the stopover for some of the interviewed on their return travel. Including the case with the returnee that had lost his luggage and cash. Those travelling through Istanbul used the same airline the

entire journey, had relatively short connections with no need to take out the luggage and had flights that were mostly on time. They also only had positive experiences with IOM staff at the Istanbul airport, although very few reported to have needed any assistance there.

7.5 Reintegration starts at the airport: The first encounters with IOM in the country of origin

Table 18. Assistance at the airport

Type of assistance	Medical assistance	Help through customs	Onward transportation to region of origin	Short stay at hotel
Frequency	0	13	9	0

The Kabul airport has recently been upgraded with improved staffing and organisation of passport and customs control, as well as swifter handling of arrivals. The process of getting through the airport was reported to go smoothly, with IOM assisting many with clearing goods through customs. Those who were not from Kabul had received onward transport support to their place of origins. They all recalled how much they had received for their transport costs in afghani and the amount corresponded well with the distance they had to travel.

The only concern raised was that 1 that felt easily singled out as a returnee, as he had been provided with an IOM bag for his travel (“everyone will know that I have returned from abroad”). This concern can be explained by fear among some returnees that is noted in the interviews in Norway of being harassed, targeted or kidnapped if it is assumed that they have become “westernised” or have accumulated wealth while being away.

Table 19. Expenditure of cash grant/check received upon arrival in the country of origin

Expenditure	Daily expenses	Investment in business/education	Pay debts	Hosting guests	“Nothing special”	Other
Frequency (multiple answers allowed)	14	3	2	0	0	2 (one for marriage, the other for housing and rental application)

All returnees except 2 told us they received US\$ 1,800 in cash upon their arrival without any trouble. The exceptions included one case where the returnee had to wait for 2 weeks before receiving the cash, with no clear explanation of why that happened. In the other case, the returnee had to wait for 2 days as there was no IOM staff at the airport when he arrived on a Friday morning.

They each knew from the information they received in Norway what they were entitled to, including transport funding, and they all appreciated the opportunity to receive it upon arrival.

The majority had used the cash grant for their daily expenses upon their return. Three of them had used it for a further investment when they established their businesses (but none of these businesses succeeded), and 2 had used it to pay debts they had incurred when they initially travelled to Norway. One male returnee had married after his return and the cash had then come in handy. The couple returning used the money for renting accommodations while they waited for approval of their application for a housing allowance as well as for purchasing household appliances.

Table 20. Cited importance of money received at arrival

Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Do not know
17	3	0	0

The cash received at arrival was rated as very important by most returnees, even if some had brought back savings from their time abroad. The first period back in the place of origin emerged as important for returnees; many had been away for several years and some had received a mixed welcome. While their closest family (e.g., wife, children, mother) appreciated their return, they had often received criticism from the rest of their family. They had been grateful to have some money for presents, meals and tea for family and relatives that came to see them.

We see from the interview data that the majority of the returnees chose to live in a different location or in a different home than where they resided before they left Afghanistan. Some cited security reasons, others that the family had moved or that family conflicts caused them to decide to establish themselves separately. In these cases, the cash was important and allowed them to make their own decisions and not depend on family and relatives. It should be noted that many said they left their rented accommodation when the housing allowance ended.

7.6 Reintegration assistance after the first meeting

Table 21. Which type of support did returnees choose?

Type of assistance	Business	Job placement	Education	Have not yet received it
Frequency	19	1	0	0

With 1 exception (a returnee with job placement) all chose the business option, which for most returnees did not succeed over time. There were complaints from 4 individuals interviewed that there was no real choice between options. These 4 had wanted job placement or education, but IOM staff in Kabul had informed them that this option was not available and had advised them to go for the business option. All 4 had very limited work experience before leaving Afghanistan, and it was their opinion that they could have strengthened their opportunity in the labour market with more practical work experience or further qualifications.

That stated, many opted for the business option because of their previous work experience, or they regarded it either as their best option to get a long term income or as the quickest way to get cash. One returnee who was interviewed during his application process said,

We were 20 waiting in line at the IOM office this morning. We were all eager to get our money as soon as possible so we can leave Afghanistan again. No one plans to stay here.

We will revert to this and link it to a typology of returnees and their intentions for reintegration. In short, it is apparent that a fair number started business partnerships to obtain cash in the shortest possible timeframe. This resonates with findings from the 2008 evaluation, but the number expressing this view was higher in this study, as was their urgency to leave Afghanistan again. Some told us that they had sold their share of the stock to their business partners quite soon after opening the business, but were present when IOM provided them the second instalment. Others said they waited until the second instalment was received and then were “bought out” by their partner. At the time of the interview, many of these individuals were already planning to leave Afghanistan again.

IOM staff, on their side, argued that the likelihood of a “sustained return” (see separate discussion on the term in chapter 2) depended on the time the returnee spent back in the place of origin in Afghanistan.

Their opinion was that the longer the returnees waited to receive the second in-kind instalment, the greater the chance was that they would remain. However, they admitted that this was just an assumption. They had no documentation to support their statement and no data from the follow up of returnees following the second instalment to document sustainability of the business assistance (or other types of assistance for that matter). Their argument for not doing any structured follow up of returnees from Norway beyond the reintegration phase (covered by the agreement with UDI) was that there was no funding available for such monitoring activities. IOM had no opportunity, they argued, to do that on its own. According to IOM Kabul staff, the worsened security situation had not influenced their ability to follow up on returnees in Kabul, but had caused some limitation on travel to neighbouring provinces.

The timing of the second instalment from IOM varied considerably. Several returnees said they had received it much earlier than 6 months. We requested a clarification from IOM Kabul, and it responded via email, “Regarding the time period between the first instalment and the second instalment, the soonest it is one to two months . . . and the late one is ten months.” This has implications for what advice and mentoring IOM staff can provide the returnees if they are left on their own after just 2 months into their business establishment, or have to wait up to 10 months before receiving the second instalment of goods (and no mentoring is taking place during this period).¹⁶

One observation here is that many returnees did not necessarily make a very conscious choice regarding what type of in-kind assistance they chose, particularly concerning whether their choice could make their reintegration more sustainable. When IOM seems to encourage the business option over the other alternatives this limits the opportunity of each returnee to select the option that is most suitable for him or her. It is interesting here that the returnees from 2008 indicated that the business option worked relatively well; at that time there were better economic prospect in Afghanistan – or at least returnees had the ability to engage in other businesses or find job opportunities if their original businesses failed, which occurred in several cases.

However, the businesses failed for the large majority returning in the latter years. IOM Kabul was asked in our follow-up interview why it had continued to promote the business option and had not tried to a larger degree to steer returnees toward other in-kind options when it became evident that the businesses were failing due to weakened economic prosperity – and even discouraging those who had signed up for education in Norway to pursue that option. We received no concrete answer to this question, although IOM acknowledged it had an advisory responsibility towards the returnees as part of its contract with UDI. IOM staff suggested from their part a need to ensure that returnees had what they considered to be a realistic understanding of the situation in Afghanistan, though they felt that Skype talks introduced as part of return preparations while returnees were in Norway had improved this understanding.

Several returnees who had failed in their business criticised IOM for not having asked them about how their businesses were progressing when they received their second instalment. IOM Kabul was, as several recalled, “only providing goods and taking my picture.” Thus the opportunity to actually receive necessary advice for how they could address a dwindling income was lost. We mentioned this criticism to IOM staff in Kabul, and they referred to the fact that they have solid monitoring skills and should be in a good position to provide such advice. However, monitoring skills does not necessarily equate to skills in advising and mentoring returnees on how to establish, develop and sustain their businesses or jobs or which educational pursuits might be most beneficial for returnees’ skills development. Instead, monitoring skill more frequently relates to a control of physical presence and on-going activity.

¹⁶ IOM, in its comments to the report, explains that its procurement unit closely monitors procurement of goods and services in line with IOM procurement rules and procedures to make sure that the best value for money is acquired and that the returnees benefit the most from the reintegration packages available.

We did not receive any clear indication from IOM Kabul regarding why it seemed to steer returnees towards the business option. One guess is that this option required less involvement from IOM staff and was what they had the most experience with. However, the limited dialogue with the returnees, IOM's emphasis on monitoring, and the lack of an opportunity for returnees to make a formal complaint to IOM (since such a system was not in place) create an image of IOM as distancing itself from the reality returnees are faced with and then not enabling the full potential of the return assistance for each returnee in a fragile return and reintegration process.¹⁷ Increased security measures for IOM offices and staff (in light of the deteriorating security situation) might be creating additional challenges, but it is important to ensure easy access to staff by telephone and to be flexible and responsive to requests for meetings.

Table 22. Processing time from stated preference of support until it was received

Time period	>1 month	1–2 months	3–6 months	>6 months
Frequency	2	12	6	0

In most cases, the processing time was very short, typically 1 to 2 months, and thus did not constitute a challenge to the re-establishment and reintegration process. Some of the cases that took a longer time seem to have been handled by IOM offices outside Kabul or to have been particularly complex.

However, concerns were raised about how the application and planning process was handled by IOM. Some referred to the many visits they had to make to the IOM office, difficulties in contacting IOM staff or having to come to Kabul when living in other provinces. Those with limited or no reading and writing abilities found it very challenging to obtain business quotations and to complete the required paperwork. One specified that he felt offended by IOM staff who had pointed out mistakes he himself was not able to notice and had asked him to correct them before the application was processed. One returnee claimed to have paid US\$ 800 for a “business package application” that included all IOM forms and supporting documents, in order to avoid the paperwork and speed up the process. He said he knew several other returnees who had done the same. This was brought up in our discussions with IOM staff in Kabul whom were not aware of such a system or of whether IOM staff might be involved in providing such documents.

7.7 Business

There were three different types of business establishments. Most returnees selected business plans for shops with a limited variety of goods that would (for the most part) require limited space for storage beyond the outlet. These included the following:

- Rice/wheat shop (2),
- Auto parts shop (4),
- Plumbing shop (1),
- Computer/mobile shop (2),
- Cosmetic shop (1),
- Photo shop (1), and
- Household goods shop (3).

¹⁷ IOM has informed us that by March 2016 there would be a designated staff member responsible for answering phone calls from returnees in order to reduce travel time to and from the IOM office. IOM has also explained that since January 2016 there has been a complaints mechanism on the IOM Afghanistan website, as well as a dedicated phone number for complaints; complaints are then handled by a three member complaints committee at the IOM Kabul office.

Only 3 returnees had previous experience or knowledge about the type of business they planned to engage in; those 3 ran the computer/mobile shop, one of the auto parts shops and the plumbing shop. Of these 3, the first reported success, the second continued his business for over a year and the third closed after only 5 months. The remaining shopkeepers had no particular skills or experiences to draw on for the type of businesses they established, except two who had worked in their father's shops before leaving the country.

The second type of businesses established were shops combined with work/service – *metalwork shops* (2) and a *mobile oil sale/change shop* (1). All 3 individuals who set up these types of businesses had previous experience to draw on, and these were the shops that stayed open the longest before closing down (between one and one and a half years).

The third type were businesses that produced goods (rather than merely selling them). Two business were in this category – a bakery and a small milk supplier (for a female returnee living in rural area). The returnee running the bakery had a strong management background and had already opened a second bakery; this was probably the returnee with the best financial outcome among those interviewed. The milk cows had been purchased rather recently, and while they provided milk and milk products to the family there was so far limited income from sale of dairy products.

One observation is that those with a specific knowledge of the trade they enter or strong management skills have a far better ability to succeed than those without such skills. However, even with particular skills the failure rate among returnees interviewed is high. This must also be seen in light of the economic downturn Afghanistan has been through in recent years, and particularly in 2014.

Table 23. Characteristics of businesses

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Did you have any own savings you could use for business investment?	7	12	0
Do you have a business partnership?	16	3	0
Does the business give a steady and sufficient income?	3	16	0
Is the business still operative?	6	13	0

If we assume as a starting point that returnees had a demonstrated interest in and commitment to their business (i.e., a desire to keep them running by investing their own money), the results are mixed. Those with the best businesses at the time of their interview had invested their own savings in the enterprise, but there were also those who had failed in their business (primarily due to negative market changes).

Most had opted for a business partnership; only 3 established a business on their own and 1 was the female returnee who invested in milk cows. Those interviewed provided different reasons for entering such partnerships, though some of the reasons could reinforce the others: (1) Many highlighted the convenience of the application process when a partner was involved. An already registered business partner would hold the necessary rental agreement and licence from the municipality; otherwise, a business owner would need to apply for these. A returnee with a partner only needed a partnership agreement and three quotations for the goods to be sold. (2) Another reason was that the returnee could join an already established business (often run by a relative or friend) with existing customers. (3) A third reason for using the partnership model was the idea of a “convenient partnership,” explained by some when they were asked further questions about why and when their shops were closed. Returnees who cited this reason had no intention of running a shop but only aimed to access cash in the shortest possible time and with limited efforts. In reality, they sold their stock (received from IOM through the in-kind support) to an established partner and were merely present when IOM came to provide them the second instalment. We have not been able to verify how many of the 16 opted for this option, but those who admitted to it described it as a “known strategy.” We will come back to this when discussing

whether those interviewed planned to stay in or leave the country again. As IOM is not undertaking any post-project follow up, it is impossible to measure the extent of such a practice or the actual sustainability of the business establishments. This concern is reflected in a Samuel Hall (2014, 6) evaluation of IOM's return and reintegration activities in Afghanistan. The report draws the overall conclusion that IOM's ability to address the immediate needs of returnees "is not matched by a similar ability to respond to the longer-term challenges of reintegration." One of three aspects identified to explain the weakness of IOM assistance is insufficient monitoring and follow-up mechanisms, which is "preventing IOM from assessing the impact of its programme in the mid-and long run" (ibid.).

Most of the returnees from our sample were of the opinion that their businesses ended in failure and (at least for some) economic loss. Only three reported having a steady and sufficient income (the bakery, computer/mobile shop and auto parts shop) and these were located in Jalalabad, which has a more thriving business environment due to its closeness to Pakistan.

This observation is supported by returnees' responses to the question of whether their business was still in operation. Only 6 answered "yes," and this included those who had very recently started their business. As many as 13 reported to have closed their business, which is highly troubling even if we take into account that some might have had an aim to close when they received their support.

Table 24. How long were businesses operative, if closed at time of interview?

Time period	1–3 months	4 months	5 months	6 months	7–9 months	10–12	>12 months
Frequency	1		1	2	3	5	1

The majority of the businesses remained open until after the second in-kind instalment was received, but the maximum time the closed businesses in this sample have remained open (so far) was 1.5 years. Several of the businesses that stayed open more than a year were run by returnees with a specific skill in their trade.

There is, as noted above, criticism of IOM staff for not providing returnees adequate business advice or taking an interest in how the businesses evolved or if they provided sufficient income for the returnees.¹⁸ If we draw on the four main categories of returnees the team developed (see chapter 2), one might argue that category 4 (returnees who primarily wanted cash to leave Afghanistan again) would not be interested in any advice or closer follow up. While that might be correct, the concern remains with those who wished to establish a successful business but did not receive sufficient guidance to help them succeed. Equally worrying is that those who aspired for reintegration but struggled to reintegrate were unable to utilise the assistance in a manner that could help sustain their aspiration. And, arguably, even those who might consider leaving again, but lack the means, might reconsider if they were able to secure themselves an income and thereby a better prospect for remaining in Afghanistan.

Many returnees described the IOM staff as bureaucrats handling their application and not advisors guiding them on what might provide the best reintegration result for each returnee. This perspective likely weakened the important role staff were able to take towards the different categories of returnees. Continued promotion of the business option rather than advising/allowing returnees to select job placement or education also could indicate a disconnect from the returnees and the actual situation and challenges they faced, which then could have resulted in an erosion of returnees' trust towards IOM staff.

¹⁸ IOM, in their comments to the report, acknowledges a lack of sufficient market information in country, in particular in insecure provinces of return, and that programme improvements can be made.

Many returnees argued that increased cash support could be a way to ensure better business success. While for a few of those interviewed, this might have secured a larger volume for their trade, it is not apparent that it would have resolved the challenges the majority of those with smaller businesses faced. For some, it likely would have only sped up re-migration. It was notable that several suggested US\$ 15,000 when asked what amount would have made a difference for their business, the same amount presently required to be smuggled to Europe and thus probably part of the calculation many take when deciding whether to remain or re-migrate.

The Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR) criticised IOM for its lack of contact with the ministry and for not sharing information with it. There were meetings between IOM Kabul and MORR, but according to IOM Jalalabad it never contacted the MORR Jalalabad office or shared any information with it. MORR's suggestion was for Norwegian authorities, represented by the two Norwegian migration attachés in the meeting, to directly support the Afghan government in implementing reintegration projects if IOM did not become more transparent. A second option could be to implement the reintegration components through Afghan NGOs that have the required types of on-going activities and a presence throughout Afghanistan.

7.8 Employment

Only 1 returnee had selected job placement, and – while he was very satisfied with his choice of job – he had ended up jobless because the business closed. He, however, argued for more returnees to seek this option, as it would provide them with necessary on-the-job training and better qualify them for other jobs.

This option could be very valuable for returnees with limited previous work experience or low or no literacy, as there could be a wider range of options for them to gain work experience and establish networks they later could draw on. There are a number of donors, UN agencies, and international and Afghan NGOs that have gained experience over the years from providing a combination of vocational training and job placement/apprenticeship opportunities (including for women) and have prearranged agreements with smaller businesses (factories and carpentry shops, to mention a few). Many are now collaborating with different Afghan ministries and departments, in line with Afghanistan's national strategy. One example is an on-going project funded by the German GIZ that has national coverage, and includes opportunities for illiterate students.¹⁹ With well-established training centres throughout Afghanistan and teachers who have received professional training, students can become well-prepared for an increasingly challenging job market.

7.9 Education and VTY

None of the returnees interviewed (as well as none of the other returnees who had returned from Norway since 2011) had opted for education, despite some having it as their primary choice in Norway. Returnees between 18 and 30 years old were entitled to Vocational Training for Youth (VTY), an additional training component for vocational training or training courses, for example, English language or computer courses. In addition to the course fees, which were a maximum of US\$ 2,700 (to be approved by IOM Oslo on application), the programme provided additional support for living costs (US\$ 200) and housing (US\$ 300) if this was not supported through the housing allowance.

According to information from IOM Oslo, a total of 77 returnees to Afghanistan received VTY in 2014. All listed had received the total amount of US\$ 1,200 (US\$ 200 x 6 months) for living costs; the support

¹⁹ For details of the German funded TVET programme, see <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/14616.html>.

for housing varied but averaged US\$ 2,265 (or US\$\$ 377.5 per month); and the average for tuition fees was US\$ 1,450 per person.

There was great variety in the number and types of courses/classes each person registered for. Some only registered in 1 course, but as many as 23 were registered in 3 or 4 courses – all to be completed over a 6-month period if the regulation for this type of assistance were followed. While returnees were positive about the opportunity for training, although it seems that it was quite difficult to take part in and complete a large number of courses, especially given that these returnees were at the same time trying to establish and run their businesses. One might also question the value of the courses they enrolled in – for example, Dutch and Arabic language courses or a 6-month course at the faculty of medicine. The latter seems rather impossible to complete if not pursued as a full-time study.

Furthermore, if we divide the total training costs by the actual number of courses reported by IOM the average fee per course was US\$ 644 (US\$ 110,161 divided by 171 courses).²⁰ This appears to be far higher than prices we obtained for similar courses in Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad, though prices varied between institutions. We received different explanations from returnees about whether these amounts were paid by IOM to the returnee or to the course providers. A comparison of course prices indicated that prices in the market were far less than the returnees claimed they received and IOM reportedly paid. The price difference for a combination of comparable English and IT courses was US\$ 800.²¹

Having only taken a partial check on these course prices, we strongly advise UDI to initiate a full review of how the VTY system is managed and quality controlled by IOM. In addition, UDI should question whether it is practical and advisable for students to take on more than one course over a 6-month period, why IOM has approved this practice, and how reported prices compare against those charged by the listed institutions.²²

7.10 Housing allowance

Table 28. Housing allowance

	Yes	No	Did not respond / did not know
Received housing allowance	12	0	3 did not respond 3 waiting 2 not informed
Housing allowance considered useful	12	0	0

IOM Kabul can provide housing allowances to three vulnerable groups upon application and approval of the IOM Oslo office (since 2012, previously approved by UDI). Vulnerability can be based on (1) the returnee's age, (2) the inability of the returnee to join his or her family due to security or internal family

²⁰ This is assumed to include the cost of admission, examinations, monthly tuition fees and books.

²¹ We raised these findings with IOM Kabul, which referred us to IOM Norway, as it was responsible for approving VTY and housing support. Upon request, IOM Norway provided a list detailing VTY courses and payments.

²² On the background of the findings in the Comparative Study of Assisted Return Programmes regarding the Afghanistan programme, UDI decided to undertake an investigation of possible misuse of funds regarding the two components – VTY and HA. Deloitte Norway was commissioned to undertake this investigation. The findings of this investigation is available at <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/revisjon-av-returprogrammet-til-afghanistan/id2476323/>. IOM informed on their side that they had started their own internal review and are awaiting the results from this report before commenting on the findings in the Deloitte report."

matters or (3) humanitarian grounds. According to IOM Kabul, the approval process takes an average of 2 weeks.

Of those interviewed, all who received housing assistance (or were waiting for it) provided the security/family reason as the explanation for why they had not returned to their previous location or moved back in with their family. The total amount received by those interviewed varied between US\$ 2,500 and 3,000; some thought the support was to last 6 months, while others thought it was to last 1 year.

All who received the housing allowance found it useful, but many explained that they had, or intended to, stay in the rented (or possibly better) housing only while they received the financial support. IOM has no monitoring of whether the returnees actually live in the housing they receive support for.

This brings up a concern regarding whether these rental agreements are real, or are just paperwork to secure some additional financial support. As a related matter, this raises the issue of whether UDI's implementing partner has sufficient control mechanisms in place to detect fraudulent practices as one might expect in a country that is ranked as one of the world's most corrupt.

The returnees explained that to obtain the support they were required to either provide a property agreement with an official serial/registration number from the Ministry of Justice or, more simply, a rental agreement for the property that was stamped by the Ministry of Justice. When we questioned IOM Kabul about further details of this practice, its email reply (of 29 October 2014) was as follows:

In fact, one is issued by the Ministry of Justice and that has a serial number and the second one is issued by the property dealer office and that is presented by the relevant property office to the Ministry of Justice for stamp and based on our information both of them are valid.

When we contacted a property dealer in Kabul, however, we received a different explanation. He explained that the Ministry of Justice would not be in a position to stamp any rental agreement issued by a property dealer, since the ministry would treat such a document as illegal. Stamping the document would be an act of corruption.

This goes against the established IOM understanding and practice and is highly troubling if correct. This means that the practice has either been systematically overlooked or accepted by the IOM or has not been clarified with the Ministry of Justice. Given the possibility of misuse or incorrect allocation practices, which is frequently found in Afghanistan and should be known to IOM, UDI is strongly advised to initiate a full review of how IOM manages housing support. A review could check whether IOM's understanding of what is an acceptable contract is correct and verify whether IOM has sufficient control mechanisms in place in Kabul and in Oslo to determine the validity of rental claims.

7.11 Actor assessment

Table 29. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Norway (6 is best)²³

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score ²⁴
Total frequency	1	2	1	1	2	13	0	4.76 = 5

This was overwhelmingly positive and Afghan staff at the IOM office in Oslo especially mentioned for the high level of service provided. Those providing a low score argued that they received inaccurate or insufficient information (particularly regarding the reintegration option and tax issues; see further details below). The speed of the process and the support received by IOM Oslo was highly appreciated.

Table 32. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Afghanistan (6 is best)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Total frequency	1	6	2	2	2	7	0	3.76 = 4

Many were satisfied with IOM in Kabul and the regional office in Jalalabad, but some presented more mixed reviews and some very negative ones. Those in the latter group referred to the attitude they (especially those with limited literacy) were met with from IOM staff. They complained about the length/extent of the application process, that there was no support or advice for how to deal with outstanding matters in Norway (neither from IOM nor from the Norwegian Embassy) and that the type of in-kind support they had signed up for was not made available for them.

Some living in areas outside Kabul complained about the need for frequent visits to Kabul and difficulties in getting access to IOM staff on the phone, which cost them a fair amount of travel time and money to see their application process through. Those interviewed in Jalalabad who had their applications handled there were more positive about the sub-office than the main office in Kabul, assuming that the Kabul office caused the delays in their cases processing.

Table 35. Was the information about the return programme in Norway accurate?

Yes	No	Partly	Did not respond / did not know
14	6		0

The majority found the information provided in Norway accurate. Most who disagreed were negative towards IOM Kabul for not delivering on support information they had received in Norway – such as housing support or the possibility of education or job placement. One claimed having received incorrect information from IOM Oslo about the possibility of receiving his outstanding tax returns after returning to Afghanistan. In general, the responses reflected more negatively on IOM Kabul than on IOM Norway.

²³ The actor assessments were excluded from the Afghan cases, as there were no conclusive findings that could be drawn for a comparison of education and present returnee activity.

²⁴ Although the average score (in all case studies) is not built on a large-N sample, it is consistent with the qualitative impressions based on the interview data. The distinction between “active” and “inactive” is blurred in practice. “Part-time” and “sporadic employment” is here classified as active, but will in some cases mean “unemployed” (and thus inactive). Moreover, some of those in employment were self-employed and made little profit.

Table 36. Is your personal situation after return very different from what you had expected?

No	1
Yes, better	0
Yes, worse	17
Did not respond / did not know	2

With 3 exceptions (including 2 who were uncertain), all the returnees found their situation very different, and worse, from what they had expected. The explanation in all cases was that the deteriorated security and economic situation influenced their personal security and their ability to gain and sustain an income through the reintegration programme. It was less a criticism of what information they had received in Norway concerning security than a reflection of how difficult it was to understand all aspects of the situation in their place of origin and how conditions there had deteriorated over the last years. This calls attention to the lack of predictability and difficulty in planning for return while in Norway, as discussed in chapter 7. Given how some areas are characterised by unpredictability, it also calls attention to what kind of preparation it makes sense to suggest that returnees engage in while yet in Norway.

7.12 Present situation and future

Table 37. Will you remain where you live now or go somewhere else?

Remain here	Go somewhere else	Do not know
6	13	1

While many returnees were negative about the situation, it was a surprise that only 6 planned to remain in Afghanistan (while 1 was uncertain and 13 said they planned to leave). The majority mentioned Europe or Norway as a possible destination. Those who planned to stay had either succeeded with their business, recently married or asserted that they needed to remain with their family. This confirms what our interviews in Norway also indicated, namely, that returns appear to be more positive and more of a long-term strategy for those who have family waiting for them in the country of origin. All who said they aimed to leave asserted threats to their personal security, against a backdrop of the generally negative economic development and major uncertainty over future stability. The disputed presidential election and increased ethnic tensions were mentioned by several as an indication of the likelihood of future negative developments.

From the interviews, it is difficult to make any firm judgment on whether a decision to leave Afghanistan again would be based on the failure of returnees' businesses. This also goes for whether they planned to leave again from the start and thus began with a plan to obtain funding for their future migration through the reintegration support programme (as other interviewees in the Norwegian sample discussed). It is not possible from the interviews to determine how many might be in either group. Some hinted that they had a plan for re-migration already when they left Norway, a situation in which assisted return was a way to respect Norwegian legislation and later apply for family unification or asylum based on increased threats to personal security. We should here acknowledge that plans to re-migrate (whether within the region or back to Europe or Norway) formed part of a general trend that some had considered before returning. Among those who responded to the question about whether their friends and family had left Afghanistan since they returned, 10 answered "yes" (though 6 answered "no").

Table 39. Is the programme seen to allow for a sustained stay?

No	Yes	Did not respond / did not know
14	3	3

The same alarming pattern emerged when returnees were asked about the sustainability of their return, from their perspective, with 14 answering that the return programme had not allowed this.²⁵ This is in contrast to those interviewed in 2008, where the majority had been able to sustain their return and where in-kind support was regarded as an important factor.

Table 40. Biggest advantage of the programme (multiple answers allowed)

Type of advantage	Frequency
To come back once asylum was no longer possible	13
To avoid forced return with the police	11
To receive cash support	7
To receive non-cash support (i.e., in-kind assistance)	3
There is no advantage	0
Other (e.g., family reunification)	1
Did not respond / not applicable	5

The advantage of a variation in questions on a theme is that it allows for comparison of responses provided; reflecting on one question might bring out different answers from those provided in response to another one. It is here interesting to note that when we explored the reason for choosing assisted return no one specifically mentioned the threat of forced return as a *main reason*. Here, however, as many as 11 specified that one of the *biggest advantages* of the programme was that they avoided forced return with the police – even though they did not initially view this as a motivation for selecting assisted return. The advantage of the cash support is likewise more prominent in these responses and needs to be factored in as one of the issues returnees had at least reflected over as a major benefit of the programme following their return.

Despite negative opinions about the future and the fact that several returnees were considering leaving again, many did have a high appreciation for the return and reintegration programme and said they felt it allowed for what many (as in 2008) labelled a “dignified return.” Family reunification was mentioned as an advantage by 5, including the possibility to be with their family when times were becoming more difficult in Afghanistan.

Table 41. Do you advise or recommend that your friends in Norway return through assisted return programmes?

Yes	No	Did not respond / did not know
4	11	5

Those who said they would recommend return through assisted return programmes argued that return would be possible for men with established networks back in Afghanistan, but not for families. The majority referred to the general uncertainty over development in Afghanistan and had recommended that their friends wait and see if the situation would improve and if there might be better options in other countries.

²⁵ We have not identified any other reports or evaluations that have comparable figures on sustainability of return to Afghanistan. The 2014 Samuel Hall IOM evaluation discusses it as a concern, but does not provide statistics on numbers of returnees planning to stay or re-migrate.

Table 45. Type of activity at time of interview

Activity	Number
Unemployed	8
Part-time or sporadic employment ("odd jobs")	4
Full-time employment	8 (mainly shopkeepers)
Student	0
Other	0

When comparing their status when leaving Afghanistan with their stated status at the time of the interview (where most had received assistance to set up a business) the findings are quite alarming. Eight interviewees were unemployed at the time of interview, compared to 1 when leaving Afghanistan. Similarly, 4 reported part-time work, as compared to 6 before leaving. Eight were in full-time employment, mostly as shopkeepers (which was also the occupation many had before leaving Afghanistan). The same pattern emerged from the 17 short telephone interviews, where 2 of the returnees were in placement, 10 had closed their businesses due to lack of income and 5 were still running their business.

The situation was better for those who had returned in 2008, that is, the 6 previous returnees with whom we were able to carry out interviews. Of these, 3 were still running the businesses they had initially started, while the 3 others had closed their businesses. However, none were jobless, as they had all managed to secure themselves other jobs when their original businesses failed.

7.13 Families, children and gender

With only 1 family (with a very special case, as described in box 1 above) and 1 very recently returned individual in the sample, it is difficult to make any assessment of either the returnees' decision-making process in Norway or how they were received and integrated in Afghanistan. The mother's assessment was very positive of IOM and the return process, not the least how quickly and smoothly her application processing had gone. Living in the countryside, the ability to obtain milk cows was a welcome support, especially since her brother allowed her the use of his pasturelands. Still, she said she was considering leaving again as she weighed her and her children's personal difficulties and cultural limitations against the possibilities of protection and better educational opportunities for her children in Norway.

We discussed these matters with a family that had returned in 2008 (and had recently lost a child). That family highlighted the low quality of education, the limited availability of professional doctors and the high cost of medical care for the children. When faced with these challenges the family had been through trying to save their child – challenges that exhausted their savings and led to the decline of their business – they explained that "the memories of Norway get very close." They had discussed leaving Afghanistan again, but had not yet made up their mind or decided where to go.

7.14 Conclusion

The programme worked very well in assisting Afghans to prepare their return, to travel back and to begin the first reintegration period back in their place of origin. Special credit from the migrants goes to the IOM Oslo office for facilitating this process. The cash support upon arrival was a very important part of the support, easing the first period back in their place of origin (a period that is rather challenging for many returnees). The additional support for children was likewise positively reviewed, and those in vulnerable groups who received housing support and/or VTY argued that it was very beneficial. There are, however, major concerns regarding the way these two forms of support have been handled by IOM Kabul. While housing support and VTY emerge as beneficial for returnees shortly after arrival, the

longer term effects may be questionable if the housing is only temporary or the training does not provide returnees with adequate skills and knowledge.

The resettlement and in-kind parts of the programme do not meet the expectations for a sustainable return, meaning to remain in country of origin, as a large majority failed to establish their business/job placement and/or have contemplated leaving Afghanistan again. It is important here to question why this has been such a failure for the large majority and why this outcome is so different from what was found in 2008 (Strand et al. 2008).

One part of the answer is the worsened economic and security situation in Afghanistan that has reduced the prospects of securing an income that would ensure a lasting reintegration. Another answer, influenced by the first, is the increased trend of outward/circular migration. The third is that the IOM does not seem to have shifted its orientation from the business option towards job placement and education. This was the preferred choice for some of the returnees and was suggested as a better option by many when asked about recommended changes to the programme. IOM Kabul also did not seem to show a sufficiently respectful attitude towards returnees (especially the illiterate ones) to gain their trust or to be committed to providing sufficient follow up and mentoring that could have assisted those struggling with their businesses. The lack of a complaint mechanism is unacceptable for any organisation assisting vulnerable groups. The concern raised about the VYT payments and housing assistance begs questions of how well IOM is organised in Afghanistan and whether sufficient control mechanisms are in place in Kabul and in Oslo to deal with a highly corrupt environment.

One must assume that if more returnees had succeeded in establishing their businesses, or had been advised and supported to pursue the education and job placement option, the sustainability of the return could have been higher. Here we note that those who succeeded in their business had a high degree of either technical knowledge/experience and/or management skills. The majority of those who failed entered a type of business they were previously unfamiliar with. A question that was not sufficiently answered by IOM Kabul staff was why they continued promoting the business option and why it was possible to claim success when they failed to closely monitor the business sector in general and the returnees in particular.

Still, the suggestion some returnees made of replacing the reintegration support with only cash support (as also recommended in the IRRINI evaluation) is neither likely to secure returnees sufficient income nor to sustain the reintegration. Given the present situation in Afghanistan, the likely result is that more returnees will leave again earlier, which certainly is counter to the intention of any assisted return programme.

7.15 Recommendations

Information and outreach in Norway (IOM and UDI)

- Provide information in Norway about obtaining tax returns and savings held in Norwegian banks and how this can be organised upon return.

Organisation of the return journey (IOM)

- Continue with a fixed amount of cash upon arrival, travel support to the place of origin and additional support for children.²⁶

Delivery and design of reintegration assistance (IOM and UDI)

- Consider providing a fixed amount per person for housing support to avoid an exhaustive documentation and monitoring requirement, with an option of additional support for large/vulnerable families.
- Consider investigating the present VTY and housing schemes to ensure there is no misuse of funds and that IOM has sufficient management and anti-corruption systems in place.
- Consider a partner (or partners) other than IOM for the reintegration component of the programme (see discussion on types of partners in chapter 2). Possibly, this could include a combination of organisations (international and/or Afghan) that could offer returnees (within a fixed budget) a blend of (a) business training and establishment, (b) vocational training and job placement and (c) primary or higher education, depending on the level of education already completed (possibly for two years). The support could also include structured follow up and advice to returnees during the establishment phase and with an option of shifting between the three options within six months if progress is lacking.
- If continuing with IOM, UDI is advised to demand including training/capacity building components before the initialisation of the selected in-kind option, a detailed plan for follow up and advice from qualified personnel, a service guarantee towards the returnees (especially those who are vulnerable/illiterate), an overview of anti-corruption measures and a complaints system handled by people other than staff handling the reintegration support.
- IOM is strongly advised to invest in a thorough and methodologically sound system to document the sustainability of any return programme it is responsibility for.
- The Norwegian embassy is encouraged to continue to facilitate regular dialogue between MORR and the selected service provider for reintegration, to ensure maximum coordination between the return/reintegration programme and national policies and priorities.

²⁶ The team has been informed that starting on 1 September 2015, additional support per child of NOK 10,000 will only be provided to those who apply for assisted return before the return deadline. If returnees do not apply by this date, the amount will be reduced to NOK 2,000 per child.

8. Iraqi Kurdistan

8.1 Introduction

The IRRINI programme (Information, Return and Reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq) has facilitated assisted return to Iraq since 2008. The programme covers the whole of Iraq, and at the time of fieldwork IOM still operated assisted return to the entire country except Nineveh (where Mosul is), Anbar, Salahaddin and some other areas. There have been six different phases of IRRINI so far. Phase four was evaluated by Strand et al. (2011) and ended in 2012, phase five then operated from January 2013 until phase six began in its place in January 2014. The returnees approached as part of the current evaluation were scattered across these phases. The number of IRRINI returnees is decreasing, partly because the number of asylum seekers moving from Iraq to Norway has decreased in recent years. The IRRINI programme was dismantled 1 September 2015 and replaced by the more limited FSR programme (the deadline for departure for those who signed up for IRRINI prior to this date is 1 January 2016). This was not known by UDI at the time the evaluation was commissioned; neither was it known to the research team at the time of doing fieldwork or at the time of analysis and writing. The continued relevance of this case study thus derives from the general analytical points that can be inferred from it.

IOM reports that it has internal monitoring and evaluation in place in Iraq. In phases five and six, IOM monitored 30% of the returnees, emphasising vulnerable individuals and families. IOM has written thematic reports as part of these internal evaluations, focusing on specific reintegration components. These reports are 10–12 pages each and allegedly identify programme weaknesses and strengths. Three have been written for the UDI so far. However, the IOM HQ has informed us that it has operational objectives but does not have overall success criteria for sustainable return. It also offers monitoring for a shorter period than in Afghanistan, as explained by one IOM staff employee when he referred to the most popular option of reintegration assistance – business support:

For business, we follow up with a physical visit after three months of business start-up. After these three months there is no monitoring. After one year I think 60–65% of businesses are operative. But we don't have data. It's difficult also to define success criteria, because they might change their business strategy, start another business, move to employment, etc. That wouldn't mean that they "failed."

This evaluation thus offers some unique insights into what has happened with these businesses and on the general sustainability of return. For our report, the IOM thematic reports have not been a source of information; this has been to ensure an independent analysis based on the team's own empirical data only.

8.2 Country background

Iraqi Kurdish migration to Europe and Norway can be divided into three stages. The initial wave of highly educated political elites, from 1975 until 1991, included pioneers of Iraqi Kurdish asylum emigration to Europe. (Although a small handful of individuals had undertaken international migration prior to 1975, these were mostly international students.) Migrants from the first wave left at a time of unprecedented insecurity, due to brutal repression by the central regime in Baghdad, and in most cases they also fled personalised threats of violence and persecution. This period ended with the establishment of a semi-independent Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 and the expulsion of Saddam Hussein's military troops from Kurdish territory.

Rather than peace and prosperity, however, the 1990s witnessed both internal strife between the two dominant political factions, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

(PUK), and desperate impoverishment, as the region was exposed to the crippling dual sanctions by the UN in Iraq as a whole (including on the Kurdish regional government) and of the Saddam regime, meant to penalise the polity and demoralise the population. During this period, an intricate web of economic and security pressures was the major driver of migration for asylum, which grew exponentially. This is when asylum migrants started coming from Iraqi Kurdistan to Norway in substantial numbers for the first time. Interestingly, Iraqi Kurdish asylum migration to Europe, and particularly to Norway, continued unabated throughout this decade, although 1998 (in retrospect) marked the beginning of a new era. Not only did a ceasefire mediated by the US establish a cessation of internal armed conflict between the KDP and the PUK, but also the UN Oil-for-Food programme finally secured a source of national revenue.

At the turn of the millennium, the general situation started to improve, but slowly. It was not until the mid-2000s, after the US-led invasion and toppling of Saddam Hussein, that the KRG started to experience rapid, oil-fuelled economic growth that would catapult it forward in terms of urban development. The political elites managed to maintain political stability and turn the country from the agrarian laggard it had been in preceding decades to an increasingly influential regional player. Macroeconomic growth, however, has not yet led to fair redistributive policies and equitable growth. While the regime does have some democratic credentials and opposition parties exist, family dynasties continue to rule with a firm grip on power.

Why then did asylum migration continue in large numbers until the late 2000s? Social inequality is likely part of the explanation. There are systematic social inequalities between urban and rural regions, and between those with access to informal networks of power and patronage and those without. While a governmental job is associated with social security and a non-demanding work life, public employment is to a significant extent only available to those with “wasta” – social connections with friends in high places that they can draw on illicitly. It seems likely that blocked socioeconomic mobility for large swathes of the population is one of the reasons why asylum migration to Europe continued to increase during the 2000s. This also means that although the KRG has, until recently, experienced economic growth, this does not necessarily translate into a willingness to return among those who are not socially or economically positioned to take part in it.

Another reason is the very culture of migration that had emerged by the 2000s. The initial pioneer migrants had done extremely well in Europe compared with local realities with regards to wealth accumulation and living standards. Once success stories started to circulate in Iraqi Kurdistan during the 1990s and 2000s, this seems to have created a bandwagon effect, whereby a different demographic of young, single men with low education aspired to emulate the success of past migrants and increasingly had to finance the journey through progressively sophisticated smuggling networks. It seems likely that the majority would not necessarily have applied for asylum in Norway and Europe if there had been other channels of immigration available to them.

Today, three factors challenge a decade of Iraqi Kurdish progress and development in many fields. Firstly, a tense relationship persists with the central government in Baghdad. The semi-autonomous KRG depends economically on receiving its constitutionally established share of 17% of the national oil revenues. However, due to political disagreement over KRG’s bilateral oil exports to Turkey, *inter alia*, Baghdad has withheld those monthly instalments to the KRG’s budgets since early 2012.

Secondly, the KRG is facing an economic and humanitarian crisis as a result of the influx of close to 230,000 Syrian refugees since early 2012 and, more recently, a staggering 1.35 million internally

displaced Iraqis from the rest of the country.²⁷ At a time when national revenue has thus diminished, a small country with roughly the same population as Norway (ca. 5.2 million residents) must bear the costs of hosting a displaced population close to a third of its own population. Thirdly, since August 2014, the KRG has been at war with the group that calls itself the Islamic State (IS) (at times referred to as ISIS). This war further strains the country's resources and hampers its ability to promote development. It is also a source of insecurity and instability in the region. Although the KRG forces have managed to push IS back from its borders, the group came within 40 kilometres of the capital Erbil.

Combined, these are staggering structural challenges to sustainable return. Security-wise, conflict developments are difficult to predict and leave returnees concerned about the future. Economically, most of the returnees from Norway opt for in-kind assistance to establish a business in spite of an investment climate that is not conducive to it. The economic and security crisis has very adversely affected the conditions for sustainable return in Iraqi Kurdistan for those coming back from Norway, and has limited the capacity of the IRRINI programme to foster it. Living costs and unemployment have increased, while at the same time the number of livelihood opportunities and salary levels have decreased. Local and international investment has declined, and supply lines and transportation routes have been disrupted. Economic growth contracted by five percentage points as a consequence of these developments, and the poverty rate more than doubled (from 3.5% to 8.1%), according to a World Bank (2015) study.

The intractable political and armed conflicts that work against sustainable return are also likely to produce a renewed exodus of Iraqi Kurds to Europe in the near future, migrants who may in turn lack motivation for return. The prospect of a new "wave" of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers over the next years – not all of whom will necessarily be granted protection in Norway – renders some urgency to having a well designed return policy in place for this national group. Whether or not it was wise to dismantle the well-known IRRINI programme, operative since 2008, at a time of particular migration pressures and challenging conditions for returnees in Iraqi Kurdistan, remains to be seen.

8.3 Data and profile of respondents

Table 4. Types of data

Number of personal interviews with returnees	Number of telephone interviews
14 (Sulaymaniah only)	28 (8 in Sulaymaniah, 20 in Erbil)

Since each personal interview yielded more empirical detail than the telephone survey, most of the data here is based on those 14 interviews. However, the main analytical questions regarding sustainability of return, success rates of businesses and quality of information about the programme additionally draw upon the telephone survey data. When this is the case it is made clear in the text and table titles. The decision to limit fieldwork to Sulaymaniah was partly due to budgetary constraints and partly due to security concerns, as the region was embroiled in war with IS and Sulaymaniah for various reasons was considered the safest urban location.

Three reported special physical or mental needs. One of these 3 complained of health problems without offering relevant detail. Another almost lost a limb due to an improvised explosive device while he was doing military service *after* his return. While this affects his health and job opportunities detrimentally,

²⁷ See <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/unhcr-s-protection-chief-visits-iraq-calls-more-support-protect-displaced-iraqis-and>.

it is hardly a responsibility of the IOM, since it occurred post-return. The third was an elderly returnee with multiple health problems who lived alone. Her case is discussed further below.

Table 6. Gender distribution

Number of male respondents	Number of female respondents
12	2

While there is a predominance of male interviewees, this also reflects the empirical reality that many more males are migrants and have returned through the IRRINI programme.

Table 7. Age distribution

Age	>20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	≥60
Number of Respondents	0	4	8	1	0	1

The age distribution is not surprising; again, this roughly reflects the higher disposition of adult working age males to migrate to Norway in the first place. Note, however, that (as opposed to in the Kosovo case) no underage minors were interviewed.

Table 8. Civic status

Number of those alone in Norway at the time of return	Number of those with family in Norway at the time of return
9	5

The inclusion of 5 returnees who were with family at the time of return allows for some data on the challenges specific to families and children upon return. This is discussed further below.

Table 9. Education

Level of education (on-going or completed)	Number
None	1
Primary school	3
High school / secondary school / technical education (up to ca. 18 years)	9
BA/MA/PhD	1
Other education	0

While “on-going” and “completed” are collapsed here, it should be noted that 5 of those in the tallies for primary school or high school said they did not complete their education. In other words, the levels of education are even lower than the table indicates. This is relevant to the IRRINI programme. Those with low levels of education are more prone to misunderstand information about the programme, are less confident about the bureaucratic requirements for in-kind support and generally face greater obstacles to securing a livelihood upon return. In general, the exponential growth of graduates in Iraqi Kurdistan, combined with the influx of unskilled East Asian labour immigrants, reduces the employability of low-skilled Iraqi Kurds.

Table 10. Type of activity upon departure from country of origin

Activity	Number
Unemployed	1
Part-time or sporadic employment ("odd jobs")	6
Full-time employment	6
Student/pupil	2
Other	0

The low number of those who were students/pupils upon their departure from Iraqi Kurdistan perhaps reflects the generally low level of education in the region. Many of those who reported to have had "odd jobs" could also have been classified as unemployed. Yet 6 were in full-time employment at the time they originally left their country of origin.

Table 11. Year of arrival in Norway

Year	Pre-2008	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number	4	5	1	2	1	1	0	0	0

The table shows that most of the respondents came to Norway a long time ago. One even reported to have come to Norway during the 1990s. We will return to the implications of this later on, but it is sufficient to say here that those who have stayed abroad for so long may need extra follow up when they return to their country of origin. This does not necessarily mean extra financial support (long-resident migrants may in some cases be better off than those with shorter stays), but support in terms of consultation and planning prior to return and follow up after return. This seems to be generally valid, but is especially important in a fast-changing society such as that of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Table 12. Reasons cited for migration from country of origin

Reasons cited for migration	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Generalised insecurity / unspecified security reasons	1
Personal insecurity / persecution / involvement in conflict / etc.	3
Medical reasons	1
Economic reasons	6
Improve general quality of life / aspiration to travel / adventure / change of environment	5
"No future here"	0
"Saw others doing it"	0
Unspecified	1
Other	0
Multiple answers	3

As indicated here, security pressures were not the main reason the interviewees reported to have made the journey to Norway. Economic reasons and the aspiration of improving life chances and living standards were more central to the initial migration decisions of respondents. This possibly affects the programme if the reasons why these respondents wanted to leave initially still remain in place when they return and hamper their reintegration.

That few cited security reasons for leaving Iraqi Kurdistan also resonates with the observation that security was not a main driver of asylum migration, at least until the recent clashes with the group that calls itself IS in July 2014.

Table 13. Reasons cited for coming to Norway in particular

Reason	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Norwegian asylum or immigration policies perceived as favourable / expectations of asylum	2
Political reasons ("peace," "respect for human rights," "democratic values," etc.)	3
Economic reasons ("good economy," "good job chances," "good salaries," etc.)	4
Family/friends in Norway	4
Advice to go to Norway	2
Human smuggler decided	2
By chance	0
Unspecified	4
Other	0
Multiple answers	4

The most common reasons for choosing Norway as the destination country were economic reasons and having friends and family there. We know from social network theory that having friends and family to rely on in the destination location reduces the costs and risks of migration and facilitates migration through practical know-how and assistance (Massey et al. 1993). There was a sense of surprise among several of the returnees that Norway did not live up to their expectations, while at the same time interviewees often seemed to have a hazy idea of how the asylum system was meant to work. Some mentioned that while Norway's record as a human rights champion was a pull factor, it was also a source of disappointment not to receive asylum by such a state. "Because we hear that Norway is good for giving asylum. Besides, human rights are protected there. But we didn't get asylum." It is also worth noting that the decision to seek asylum was not necessarily an autonomous decision, but may have been made by a human smuggler on the migrants' behalf. As one female respondent noted, "It wasn't my choice. The guide said 'there it's good for you.' Wherever they'd take me I'd go. It wasn't until I talked with the police that I found out where I was."

While a sense of disappointment was clearly expressed, it was not clear from the data whether or not these migrants seemed to have realistic expectations of life in Norway upon their arrival. Inflated expectations of life in Norway and chances of asylum among asylum migrants from Iraqi Kurdistan are identified in Paasche's doctoral research (forthcoming).

Table 14. Year of return to country of origin

Year	Pre-2008	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number	0	0	0	0	1	1	9	3	0

The majority had already had time to establish themselves back in the country of origin before the economic and security crisis of 2014. Yet the crisis also affected them and influences the advice they now give potential returnees in Norway, as is described later in this report.

8.4 Decision making: Motivations for applying for assisted return

Table 15. How returnees learned about the programme

At reception centres/IOM	Friends or other asylum seekers	Media	Letter of rejection	Other
4	8	0	2	0

The response of interviewees to the question of how they learned about the assisted return programme did not always clearly delineate between the categories of information. For example, it did not always appear clear to the returnee and was therefore sometimes unclear in the interview data whether those who reported to have first heard of the IRRINI programme at reception centres were informed by an IOM employee or by a staff employee at the reception centre. The fact that 8 respondents reported to have heard of the programme through friends or other asylum seekers suggests that the programme is well known in Iraqi Kurdish migrant networks. This is confirmed by former research as well (Bendixsen et al. 2014). Since it has been an institutionalised country specific programme since 2008, this is not surprising. This result can also be interpreted to mean that the respondents were already knowledgeable about the possibility of return before they received letters rejecting their asylum applications. On the other hand, 2 respondents actually first heard about the programme through that letter, illustrative of its importance.

A more complex question regards the decision-making process, which varied a lot. None of the respondents cited security factors as relevant to their decision, but the on-going conflict between KRG and IS can safely be expected to influence the decisions of today's rejected asylum seekers from this region. Several of those interviewed said they would not have returned today, given the situation with IS. For instance, one respondent explained, "When we returned there was no ISIS situation. Now if there was such a war going on I wouldn't have come back. Basically ISIS affected many things here. There's insecurity and risk."

One person did not find it difficult to make the decision to return: "Even before the rejection I was a bit bored there and thought of going back already." Two saw themselves as forced to return due to the threat of forced return: "It wasn't my motivation, all the time they sent me warnings that I'd be arrested and sent back. That's how they made me make the decision. Otherwise, I'd have stayed longer there." Adding to the pressure was the perception that there was no future in Norway because all the doors to Norwegian society closed with the letter of rejection: "Because after my application was denied, I thought I couldn't work in Norway and couldn't move freely. My rights were not protected, that's why." Another version of the "I had no choice" explanation arose when moral obligations to non-migrants made return imperative, for instance, when a migrant could no longer work and send funds to the country of origin and thus had to return to feed the family left behind, or when a non-migrant in the country of origin requested the return. As one respondent explained, "It was definitely because my son wanted me to go back. I was there two and a half years but the application was denied. And my son cried for me to come back."

While making the decision to return was a gradual process for some, for others it was a matter of certain key events occurring that motivated the return. One observed another rejected asylum seeker commit suicide and lost the desire to get asylum. Another was suddenly able to return when a family member was released from captivity by extremists in Baghdad, and did so willingly. In general, it seems fair to say that there was little degree of autonomous "choice" in assisted return, but that "force" came in different forms. None of the respondents described any peer pressure from the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora however, as was the case with the Ethiopian rejected asylum seekers. Around half of the respondents said that family and friends reacted with happiness when they heard of the decision to return, while the other half reported a negative reaction.

The threat of forced return was generally seen as credible and the risk high, but here, too, there was a diversity of ways of thinking about forced return. For some it was clearly the decisive factor: “Of course, if there hadn’t been a threat of forced return, I’d would have stayed in Norway. For example, you’re from Norway. If they shut the door and lock down electricity and tell you ‘if you don’t go back to Norway we’ll deport you’ – what would you say?” One respondent’s narrative indicated that forcible return through Baghdad was seen as an extra threat: “As a deportee I would have landed in Baghdad and they would imprison you in Baghdad for one to two months before freeing you.” Two cited fears of how their children would react if the police came in the middle of the night in Norway. Fear of forced return was combined by several with loss aversion, as being forced to return would be to lose the incentives one is entitled to if one signs up and is found eligible for the assisted return programme. One also mentioned that “deportation means that it will always be on your mind,” implying that the decision to go back through assisted return is a way of closing a chapter in one’s life.

Others took it for granted that they would comply with the law in Norway: “If the country doesn’t want me to stay I don’t stay.” Consistency with past behaviour was reportedly part of such a rationale for one person. He related, “I had been living in Norway for four years and for three of them I had worked legally and with a work permit. I decided that in the end if they’ll deny me, I’ll return without waiting.” Finally, a few respondents feared forcible return not per se, but because of its implications for re-immigration to Norway. Those who are forcibly returned are obliged to pay for the costs incurred by the Norwegian state in doing so (transportation costs, salary costs for the police, etc.) if they ever are to come back to Norway again. Since this amount can be substantial, not infrequently around NOK 50,000–100 000, this makes it practically unfeasible for most to ever do so.

8.5 Logistics: Processing time and travel

Table 16. Processing time in months from application to departure

Time period	>1 month	1 month	2 months	3 months	4 months	5 months	≥6 months
Frequency	3	3	3	3	2	0	0

There was a surprisingly even distribution of processing times from the moment an application was signed until departure, from less than 1 month to 4 months. Among those who had to wait 2 months or more, most had no idea why the process took so long. Not understanding processing time can lead to despair and aggressive behaviour, as illustrated by one respondent whose processing time was two months: “They did it in a couple of months. I told the UDI I’d break their windows if they wouldn’t let me return soon.” One who returned after 3 months counted himself lucky, since, according to him, “sometimes it can take more than a year.” According to the IOM, however, this has never happened with Iraqi applicants. Birth certificates for children born in Norway posed a potential problem for one person, since an Iraqi passport requires the father’s name on the identity papers, but this person also praised IOM for a speedy facilitation of the bureaucracy. Two also asked for a delay (by 1 week and 1 month, respectively) and received it, while 1 – who had a Norwegian passport – reported a processing mistake by the IOM that led to a serious delay. Overall the data indicates a general desire for speedy processing once the decision to return has been made. Speedy processing can also foster the returnee’s sense of autonomy, which is important for preparation and mobilisation of resources for reintegration (Cassarino 2004).

Table 17. How well organised was the return journey?

Very well	Fairly well	Badly	Do not know
10	3	0	1

Overall the respondents were very satisfied with the return journey. This must be seen in the context of their journey to Norway, which was often hazardous, unpredictable, slow and involved a great deal of

uncertainty. Not a single respondent would have described the return journey as badly organised, and no one reported having problems getting internal travel costs in Norway reimbursed by the IOM.

However, for some there were irregularities in the return journey. One respondent could not understand why he had to wait for 3 hours at the airport in Iraqi Kurdistan: “[We] landed at 14:00 and I left the airport at 17:00. I don’t know why they kept us there for so long. We were eight persons. The other seven left early. So in the end I waited alone.” Potentially more disturbing, geopolitics and ethno-political tensions between Turks and Kurds seem to have been at play for one respondent, who claimed to have received humiliating treatment by the employee who oversaw his transit flights in Istanbul.²⁸

The person who received me during the seven hour transit in Istanbul treated me badly because he was a Turk and I a Kurd. Turks don’t like Kurds, and there shouldn’t have been a Turk there receiving Kurds. I felt imprisoned when this person prevented me from moving around freely. I got angry . . . , but he wouldn’t understand and treated me differently than the other two passengers I was with who were not Kurds. I hope this will change, as I felt the whole transit in Turkey was humiliating.

A history of regional conflict means that staff employees in Turkey need to be well trained to deal with such situations. Whether it is by chance or not, another negative experience of the journey was also reported in Turkey: a returnee missed his corresponding flight in Istanbul and was not content with the journey.

These stand out as exceptional negative experiences, however, and are not consistent with the overall score, although they deserve mentioning. What seem to be trivial events are remembered for quite a time. Several respondents praised IOM staff for helping them with checking in their luggage during the travel, for instance. Inversely, a staff member reportedly told one returnee that it was not his job to do so. The returnee complained, “I have a big family and had a lot of luggage, but he wasn’t willing to help us and said it was not his job to help with practical matters.” The event was still remembered two years later.

There are complex logistics involved in organising the return journey for several hundreds of returnees from Norway to Iraqi Kurdistan on an annual basis. The overall positive assessment of the journey is an important accomplishment by the IOM.

8.6 At the airport: The first encounter with IOM in country of origin

Table 18. Assistance at airport

Type of assistance	Medical assistance	Help through customs	Onward transportation to region of origin	Short stay at hotel
Frequency	0	0	0	0

The IOM claims to provide the following services to returnees free of charge at the airport in Iraqi Kurdistan.

- Reception at the airport by IOM staff, including border and customs processing;
- Referral to medical assistance if needed;

²⁸ IOM Oslo informs that it is not present at the airport in Istanbul but has subcontracted TAV Güvenlik to assist with transit assistance. It also notes that it prefers to schedule good time for transit connections.

- One-night temporary accommodation if the returnee is unable to reach the final destination on the day of arrival in Iraq; and
- Onward transportation to the returnee’s final destination (although this must be requested in advance).

That none of the 14 returnees personally interviewed reported to have received any of the above services is not in itself alarming, since only a relatively small number of returnees were interviewed. More worrying is the fact that among the total of 42 respondents there were several indications that the above was *not provided upon request*. Only 1 respondent informed the research team that he had been offered 1 night at a hotel and onward transport, but declined the offer. Several seemed not to have been offered onward transport and reacted with surprise when they learned about that possibility from the research team. One person observed other returnees on the flight with him who had to privately pay for their own onward transport. Two persons paid for their taxis themselves. One person even requested onward transport from IOM, but did not receive it.

I did not receive any of these things. Some guy gave me 17,000 Iraqi dinars and said goodbye. I had to take a taxi to a hotel and had to pay 20 US dollars for the hotel, or maybe a bit more. I asked at the airport; I told them I had no one here in Sulaymaniah. The guy from IOM said that “most people, they have relatives who come to pick them up,” but I had no one. But the guy told me, “That’s the only thing you get, those 1,700 US dollars.” In Oslo, the IOM told us that IOM could pay for one night at a hotel and for travel expenses. When I came back I didn’t see any of this.

While onward transportation to the final destination must be requested from the IOM in advance (i.e., in Norway), this is of no help to returnees if they are not actively asked whether or not they requested it or do not receive it when they do request it. IOM Oslo has a role here. It is possible to infer from the quotation above that the respondent had been informed about the offer on a general basis and that he had not personally requested it or been given the chance to request it. Either way, there is room for improvement, as the system of requesting onward transportation in advance seems unnecessarily complicated. Two practical solutions come to mind. Firstly, the IOM could explore the possibility of making an agreement with a taxi company willing to invoice the IOM retrospectively in exchange for bringing returnees to their “final destination” – in the sense of a home address. Alternatively, the IOM could bring extra cash to the airport and pay the taxi driver directly for onward transport, to prevent fraudulent requests.²⁹ Compared with the cash grant already brought to the airport, this would be a negligible amount.

Table 19. Expenditure of cash grant/check received at the airport

Expenditure	Daily expenses	Investment in business/education	Pay debts	Hosting guests	“Nothing special”	Other
Frequency (multiple answers allowed)	12	0	0	0	0	2

The IOM head of sub-office (HoSO) is the IOM senior representative in a geographic region, and this high-ranking official is the one in charge of handing over the cash grant to the returnee upon arrival at the airport. Whether or not this is an anti-corruption policy, it seems to work very well to ensure a smooth transfer. All but 1 returnee reported that this was a hassle-free experience. This one individual

²⁹ IOM has informed us that this has been practised before, but that there were incidents when a taxi would wait in vain because returnees were picked up by the family and that the current practice “is more to provide a lump sum to cover transportation costs.”

reported that he did not receive his cash grant at the airport “because the guy who comes to the airport had not brought money with him.”

I had to get [it] after a week because the guy who comes to the airport had not brought my money with him to the airport. But he did, however, bring money to my friend who came with the same plane. I felt humiliated when I arrived to Kurdistan without any money whatsoever for one week.

Some cultural context is necessary here, as there is a social expectation in Iraqi Kurdistan that migrants can demonstrate some form of wealth when returning. This is not only caused by a collective (though no longer uniformly shared) expectation that international migrants successfully accumulate wealth abroad, but also by a tradition for “homecoming” ceremonies where kin and friends are welcomed to eat and drink at the expense of the returnee to mark the event and demonstrate re-entry into the society. Several returnees spent part of the cash grant on such ceremonies. To not receive the cash grant at the airport as promised is thus a very serious issue. This only happened once, however. The meeting with the IOM representative at the airport was described in neutral terms as short and business-like. While only 1 person directly complained about the experience, the meeting was generally not described in positive terms either – with one exception. For one returnee it was more than a mere procedure: “[The IOM HoSO] warmly welcomed me back and was good with me.” This demonstrates that the process can be more than effective; there is potential to even make it a positive experience.

As for the expenditures made with the cash grant, 12 of the 14 respondents in face-to-face interviews reported that they had spent the grant on daily expenses such as clothes, food and their housing or rent. This can be interpreted in at least two ways. On the one hand, it shows that the returnees generally did not bring much capital with them from Norway and needed to spend the cash grant on necessities. On the other hand, it demonstrates that the returnees in general reported spending the cash grant in a responsible way. This latter point is relevant to the in-kind assistance. An IOM staff employee argued that if the in-kind assistance were given as a cash grant it would be spent on consumption within a few weeks. Inversely, if the cash grant is observed to be well spent, this weakens the argument for in-kind assistance (Strand et al. 2011).

Table 20. Cited importance of money received at airport

Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Do not know
4	9	1	0

The importance of the money is probably *underreported* because saying that it is important would indicate (in the minds of a returnee) that he or she has “failed” to be a successful migrant and is dependent on external support. Such “failure” is sensitive because it can be attributed by non-migrants to personal characteristics (e.g., “perhaps he did something wrong”) rather than systemic ones (e.g., “it is very difficult for Iraqi Kurds to get asylum in Norway”). One person said the cash grant was somewhat important to himself, “but maybe for some people it was more needed.” Others were clear that the money was very important: “Of course it is important. My mother and I rent a little house . . . I could help my mother to pay the rent.” As the example in the above paragraph shows, the cash grant has an important social function, too. The fact that only one out of 14 interviewees called it unimportant also indicates that the cash grant is important.

8.7 Reintegration assistance after the first meeting

Table 21. Which type of support did returnees choose?

Type of assistance	Business	Job placement	Education	Have not yet received it
Frequency among personal interviews	11	3	0	0
Frequency among telephone respondents	20	8	0	0
Total	31	11	0	0

A striking finding here is the predominance of the business option of reintegration assistance. Almost 3 times as many opted for business than job placement, and not a single returnee opted for education. This could be because returnees prefer an income-generating activity. It is hard to say on the basis of this data if this is because business is what the returnees preferred, or if it was what the IOM prefers in practice (in spite of its stated aim of neutrality as to which in-kind assistance the returnees should choose). One returnee wanted to study upon return because he found the support offered too limited to be useful for setting up a business, but he reported that IOM discouraged him from doing so:

I asked the IOM to help me to go back to the university. When I went to Norway I had a high-school diploma. But when I came back, I asked the IOM if they could help me. But they wouldn't help me with studying.

He consequently set up a business instead, which failed after a few months. Another respondent, who was asked whether the information he had received about the programme in Norway before returning was correct, answered in the negative, pointing to the education component:

Regarding the education they said I would be helped to go back to school. They didn't help me. They never helped me with this.

These 2 quotations could potentially refer to exceptional cases or be based on misunderstandings, but they are worrying in light of the fact that *none* of the respondents received assistance for education. As noted in the introduction, the number of graduates from Iraqi Kurdish universities steadily increases. While not all students graduate for employment, the chances for those with low education can be expected to deteriorate with increased competition over jobs. This in itself is an argument for promoting education even for returnees who are impatient to re-establish themselves and secure an income, although the returnee should of course feel free to choose. There are also practical obstacles involved, as the timing of return must coincide with the beginning of a study term. One returnee seemed to have not planned for this. "I told IOM I wanted to go back to school, but this was in the middle of the study term so it was not possible for me to go back to do my education. Then, they asked me to start a business to get the money [i.e., in-kind assistance]." One way of facilitating the option of education would be to prepare returnees for such practicalities. In general, there is no or limited administrative costs of enrolling in public education. Returnees may still choose business support even if they enrol in education to have a livelihood.

Table 22. Processing time from stated preference of support until it was received

Time period	>1 month	1–2 months	3–6 months	≥6 months
Frequency	3	2	8	1

A processing time from 3 to 6 months is a long time and could plausibly be considered a challenge to sustainable return. On closer scrutiny, however, it turns out that at least 6 of the 8 respondents reporting 3–6 months of processing time were partly or fully responsible for such a protracted period of

processing. Some took full responsibility and attributed it to external events and conflicting obligations, for example, “Because I had to take my mother to Iran to get medical help, it was my fault that it took so long.” Others took the task of developing a business strategy very seriously and needed months to prepare for it: “It took at least five months, maybe more, but this was my decision. I wanted to set up the business in a very organised way.” Confusion about bureaucratic requirements led to a cumbersome process in other instances.

Sometimes it takes time because there is a mistake in the papers. This affects the time, makes it take longer. For example they wanted a contract with the shop. I wasn't familiar with the idea. I brought a contract for the lease. So when they asked me to bring the quotes I misunderstood what they told me. I thought the property registration card was enough, in order to bring something official like that. Because of that misunderstanding, I had to bring the actual contract with the shop owner.

In such an instance it is not necessarily clear whether the fault for slow processing (here 3–6 months) lay with IOM or with the individual returnee. We return to the challenge of bureaucratic requirements below.

8.8 Business

Reflective of the limited amount of in-kind assistance available, the businesses that returnees set up were typically small, as follows:

- Shop for electrical appliances (2)
- Livestock
- Minimarket
- Shop for brake pads
- Clothing shop
- Plumbing company
- Chicken shop
- Restaurant
- Auto repair shop
- Metal sheet factory
- Bakery
- Construction company.

As in Afghanistan, most of these were microenterprises. While a few respondents could build on previous experience, or were referred to favourable markets for their goods or services, most of those who could explain their choice of business mentioned the availability of a business partner as the main criteria for the choice of business. IOM is contracted to give counselling and advice upon return; however, with 1 single exception, IOM was never actually cited as a source of advice and assistance in setting up or developing the business. The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but this still seems as an area where the IOM could improve. Although some returnees would not be interested in IOM's business advice, it seems a stretch of the imagination that no one would be interested. Even in Norway, only a minor fraction of businesses succeed,³⁰ and the challenges are on an entirely different scale in Kurdistan's conflict-affected economy. In addition, the region has changed dramatically in terms of daily life, institutions, markets, infrastructure and so forth – and only during the last 5 to 10 years. The transformative effect of these changes to development and the way of life is hard to overstate. For someone who was away during these transformative years, coming back did not necessarily feel

³⁰ See <http://www.aftenposten.no/okonomi/Det-gar-galt-for-de-fleste-grnderne-7984045.html>.

like “coming home,”³¹ and this affects business. Most of those interviewed personally had spent 5 years or more in Norway, often in addition to 1 or 2 years getting there. As one of them said,

The fact that we didn’t succeed with the minimarket is that . . . I didn’t have a clue about the new Kurdistan and I had no advisor who could guide me. Kurdistan has changed enormously and it’s no longer as it was when we lived here.

Good advice from advisors knowledgeable about market dynamics, and with experience about what works and does not, could thus be expected to be valuable. It could perhaps increase the sustainability of the business and thus the sustainability of return. As mentioned a caveat here is that not all returnees may be interested in such advice, and their partners may be even less interested. The option should nonetheless be available. As it is, the data indicates that the IOM does not significantly facilitate or help to optimise the design and management of the business set-up.

Table 23. Characteristics of businesses

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Did you have any own savings you could use for business investment?	6	5	0
Do you have a business partnership?	9	2	0
Does the business give a steady and sufficient income?	2	9	0
Is the business still operative?	4	7	0

Among the 11 returnees interviewed personally who had set up a business, 9 had business partnerships. Moreover, only 2 reported that the business gave a steady and sufficient income. More than half (7) of the businesses had failed, often within a few months of being established. We will return to this point, but “failure” only refers to the returnee’s own share in the business, not to the business partner’s share. The latter frequently bought out the former. Combined, these numbers indicate the difficulty of establishing a business in today’s harsh investment climate, and especially starting one’s own business. They also suggest that external assistance in setting up the business could be useful.

Table 24. How long were businesses operative, if closed at time of interview?

Time period	1–3 months	4 months	5 months	6 months	7–9 months	≥10 months	Did not respond / did not know
Frequency	3	0	1	0	2	0	1

Not one of the failed businesses lasted even 1 year, and most of them failed within a few months.

³¹ Throughout this report, we have avoided using the term “home country” and instead used “country of origin” instead. The term “home country” essentialises migrants’ identities as fixed and static. It also masks such transformative changes in the country of origin, as well as the fact that migrants themselves may have multiple “homes” or see Norway as their “home country,” in spite of its policies or negative asylum decisions.

Table 25. Characteristics of businesses (based on telephone interviews only)

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Is the business on-going?	8	12	0
If not on-going, are you currently active either with education or at the labour market?	5	5	2

The telephone interviews were much shorter and provided less specific data, but two key questions were included. Again, more than half the businesses failed and of those that failed less than half of the involved individuals reported that they were currently active in the labour market.

The IRRINI website of IOM Oslo makes the following statement:

Monitoring and follow up is an important component of the programme that is conducted by IOM Iraq. This is to ensure sustainability of the programme and to work with returnees in helping them decide the best option for them.³²

Since business is the most frequently chosen type of reintegration assistance, this evaluation provided an opportunity to assess whether this statement conforms with the experienced realities of returnees. The answer is negative. Very few reported any serious follow up at all, and only 1 person reported positive follow up:

Yes, they did follow up. They visited me once in the shop. After three months they gave me 2,500 US dollars and they called me and arranged for a visit, asking about the job and if the income was good. So I came to the office and they offered help for me in planning and in thinking about the business.

This narrative was highly atypical, however. The following narratives were more typical of the responses and contrast sharply with the one above:

IOM came to take a photo of me, once. They wanted to have a look at the place, check out the stuff, see what was written in the contract. They didn't give any advice or help. They came after one month. That was the last time I saw them.

...

I don't deny that I got this support. But the IOM don't do well for people here in [this city]. They never made any follow up with me, they never consulted with me about the job or anything, I want to be frank with you and tell you the truth, that the IOM they are like trading in people. It's a business for them this programme. I have other friends who also came back, they also regret it. Because the IOM doesn't do anything for them.

The picture that emerges on the basis of these and many other narratives is that IOM is experienced as a *controller* rather than as a *facilitator*. In this way, the Kurdish case study differs from the Afghan case study where IOM may seem to lack control mechanisms. The local IOM office came to check the value of goods and inspected that everything was as it should be in terms of technicalities, but it seemed indifferent to the sustainability of the business and how it eventually could be improved. The ambitious statement by IOM Oslo above on monitoring and follow up, which prospective beneficiaries would not

³² IOM Oslo's homepage is at <http://www.iom.no/en/varp/irrinj>.

likely interpret as merely consisting of control, is at odds with this impression. Illustratively, the staff that came to visit the businesses after approximately 3 months were “IOM monitoring staff” and not “IOM reintegration staff.”

So far, the discussion has concerned IOM’s function as controller after a business was set up, but IOM plays a similar function in the preparation phase for setting up a business. IOM demands documentation for a business set-up that many returnees viewed as a serious obstacle and that is somewhat alien to local business culture. A key issue here is that 3 price quotes are needed before the IOM will purchase any goods for a business, although other documents are also required (including a leasing contract, business partnership contract, certain certificates (in some cases) and documentation of residence).

Firstly, several returnees reported that obtaining 3 price quotes was problematic, especially when they lived in rural settings and getting these quotes right might necessitate multiple trips to the IOM office in urban areas.

I partnered with a friend who owned a [shop]. I had to bring quotes to the IOM, but since I don’t live in the city I had to spend money on transportation back and forth from where I live. So it took about 2–3 months, although I don’t remember exactly.

...

IOM here is very strict with regards to documentation and receipts and the presentation of the quotes. It’s not realistic for Kurdistan because Kurdistan isn’t so developed that you get a written offer if you want to buy something. This practice means that many get tired of contacting IOM for help and support to run their own business. People are tired of routines and bureaucracy

...

I [opted for job placement because] IOM could not manage to help me establish a business because it took too much time for me to get a lease contract and I couldn’t get good quotes. It’s not easy to get these quotes and stuff like that because people are not used to that routine and some suppliers don’t have a receipt or a stamp at all.

In addition to such direct quotes, adjectives such as “bureaucratic” and comments that “IOM is asking for a lot” also referred to the IOM’s routines for verification and documentation, and were among the criticisms made in the returnees’ assessment of IOM. IOM has a global set of procurement procedures in order to prevent abuse and these apply world-wide. In Iraqi-Kurdistan, some demonstrated a better understanding of the rationale for such procedures than others, but on the whole the bureaucratic requirements tended to prevent the returnees from seeing IOM as a facilitator. This is problematic enough in itself, but another consequence of these complex requirements is the potential for fraud. Although one may expect underreporting of fraud, several returnees reported that they had “cheated the system” and that this was common practice that they had also observed others doing. In some narratives this came across somewhat ambiguously, for instance, “Most people chose businesses, like livestock, just to get the support.” Other interviewees explicitly referred to this issue. For example, one related the following:

You need to buy something for a shop, for 4,500 US dollars. You have to bring quotations. I chose livestock. I got three quotations from three different persons, until I reached 4,500 US dollars. When I come back from Europe, what to do with livestock? I asked someone to get livestock for me, to do the procedures, to take care of everything. He charged me 500 US dollars. He was someone who was working with

animal farming, and he did this for many other people in [the place where I live]. He charged them in order to do this. It was the easiest option to do it with a fixer, and no other business can be done for 4,500 US dollars. And other people do that, it's common. The fixer gets to buy the animals. In front of the IOM he's the guy who receives the cash, pretending to sell the animals to us. Then afterwards he buys the livestock and we share the money. I sold it back to the same guy who helped me fix the papers. The IOM took a photo to send it to IOM Norway to show that "Look! He is busy now." That was right afterwards. IOM arrived, took the photo of me on the pick-up truck. Then I never saw them again. . . . They never called me again or asked how I was. . . . I heard that for each person going back the IOM receives 18,000 US dollars, and they just give 8,000 US dollars to the returnee *and keeps the rest to themselves. This is what I heard from many returnees.*

This narrative is instructive for two reasons that illustrate the practical limits of the verification system and the extent to which it is seen as difficult. Firstly, it shows that no matter how complicated the verification procedures are, returnees manage to bypass them to convert the "business" into cash – at a high transaction cost. IOM staff admitted in an interview that programme beneficiaries can get the in-kind assistance through fraud: "Quotes can be subject to bribes. Deals with suppliers can be made. We are aware of this. But the logistics unit checks the quotes." A second analytical point to make note of here is the fact that this returnee, who did not seem affluent, was willing to pay more than a 10th of the value of the in-kind assistance for a fixer to help with the quotes. Moreover, he reported this to be common. Not only has a small illicit side industry of "fixers" grown out of the IOM reintegration programmes, but people also see the bureaucratic procedures as overwhelming to the extent that they are willing to pay hundreds of dollars to avoid them. Finally, the accuracy of the interviewee's perception of IOM as profiting unduly is not the issue here. Rather, the issue is the practical implications of such a perception. The interviewee seemed to partly justify his fraud with regards to what he saw as an unfair distribution of the money involved.

Alternatively, returnees can also cheat the system without the help of a fixer:

I will tell you the whole story. We needed to get the quotation, so I picked it up from a friend to set up the partnership. This friend was not a real business partner, but he just played his part so I could get the money. I don't think with such an amount you can really start a business here. So it's just like this. That's the rule they have. I chose the stuff, the [goods]. IOM came to visit the shop and value the [goods], and then I sold the [goods] to the "partner."

In other words, *while the requirement of three price quotes has the effect of slowing down the process of delivering reintegration assistance and frustrating returnees, the same requirement cannot effectively prevent fraud for returnees who can make that request from a partner who has little to lose and much to gain if he or she concurs.* Another returnee, who likewise established a mock business, confirmed that this practice is widespread:

That money isn't enough to establish anything as Kurdistan has changed now and everything is more expensive than it used to be. I know a lot of people who have come back and cheat with the papers to get the money from the IOM that is meant for business. You have to bring three price quotes to get the money. The people I know contact companies to get some make-belief quotes and then give it to the IOM to get the money.

Note that the returnee referred to the in-kind support as "money," not "goods." *This was a common way of referring to the goods*, indicating something important about how some returnees view the

reintegration assistance – as something that inconveniently and inefficiently needs to be converted into cash. This was not the case for all: some businesses were still operative and their owners had invested time and money in them and clearly wanted them to thrive. But it was the case for many. This is a major challenge for the efficiency of the in-kind component.

8.9 Employment

A total of 10 respondents chose the employment option, and 4 of these expected to be hired in the job on a long-term basis, although several indicated that the general economic climate might prevent any new hires where they work. There is little data on why they chose the type of job placement they did. Two reported that they themselves quit the job after the job placement period, respectively, due to a low salary and a hazardous work environment. Terms such as “long-term basis” and “steady and sufficient” income were here open to the respondents’ interpretation.

Table 26. Characteristics of employment

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Did you get the job you were looking for?	2	1	0
Were you hired / will you be hired by the employer on a long-term basis?	1	2	0
If so, does it / will it give a steady and sufficient income?	2	1	0

Table 27. Characteristics of employment (based on telephone interviews only)

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Were you hired / will you be hired by the employer on a long-term basis?	3	4	1
If so, does it / will it give a steady and sufficient income?	1	4	0

The data on employment are insufficient to draw firm conclusions, but it is a positive finding that some did get fixed employment, given the current economic hardships in the KRG. As with the returnees who opted for business, those who opted for employment did not describe the IOM as giving useful advice and help in the process. There is a limit to how much the IOM can guide the job-seeking process beyond the practicalities (e.g., creating a CV). Most recruitment in Iraqi Kurdistan is in the public sector and hiring processes there are often not meritocratic. It may also be generally easier to provide advice on business establishment than to guide a returnee on matters of employability. In any case, only a few returnees indicated that the IOM provided meaningful follow up during their job placement.

As opposed to the business in-kind support, job placement involves 5 monthly payments. This means that each month the returnee needs to be given a salary. According to the IOM Oslo office the returnees have two options in this regard – either to receive it where they live (but without knowing exactly when it will be handed over to them and often with significant delays) or to go and pick it up at the regional IOM office in Duhok, Sulaymaniah or Erbil. None of the respondents made any indication that they understood the former to be an option available to them, and several complained that having to go to the regional office was a challenge. Firstly, it was an economic challenge. The monthly salary instalment was US\$ 900, and one respondent spent roughly 5% of this sum simply on this travel:

IOM gave the money directly to me, but each month I had to go to [the regional office] to pick up the money. I had to pay 50 US dollars for travel. [The place where I live] is [more than an hour] away from Sulaymaniah.

The more remote and rural the location, the further a returnee would need to travel to get the monthly instalment. Added to this inconvenience was the security risk associated with travelling from some locations in Iraqi Kurdistan because of the current conflict. The region as a whole is considered relatively stable, but there are several conflict “hot spots” where the KRG has limited territorial control and where travelling is best avoided. This is exemplified in the following narrative:

[Getting my salary instalment] was like taking a car from [rural location where I live] to [small town] and then to Sulaymaniah and then to the IOM office; the travel costs were about 100 US dollars altogether. Five times I had to do this to get the salary. [Other returnees should] avoid the travel I had to make to the city. People in Khanaquin or Jalula, why should they have to go to IOM? The roads are dangerous. Why do people have to go there? Why not give all the support at once?

Urban life is known worldwide to provide more opportunities and better living standards than rural locations (Glaeser 2011). While city dwellers in Erbil, Sulaymaniah and to some extent Duhok can enjoy a greater range of livelihood opportunities than their counterparts in the countryside, they also can travel to the IOM regional office much more quickly and easily. In addition, those relatively disadvantaged returnees in rural locations – who may be more vulnerable, on the whole – not only need to adapt to a lower level of development than what they were used to in Norway (or spend a higher percentage of their relatively more scarce monthly salary on transportation), but they are also comparatively exposed to more risk. These are all reasons why monthly instalments are not a good idea, particularly for rurally resident returnees and especially nowadays when Iraqi Kurdistan is in a state of war. This aspect of the programme should be modified accordingly, acknowledging that travel time, transportation costs and security risks should be factored into the design of the programme. Depending on the ratio of rural versus urban beneficiaries and the perceived need for and effectiveness of monitoring, one possible solution would be to decrease the number of instalments for everyone to avoid frustration among the group of urban beneficiaries.

8.10 Education

Not a single respondent received support for education, although there was at least 1 case where a returnee asked for it but reported to have been discouraged from pursuing it by IOM. In general, the social pressures on returnees to quickly make a living upon return and shake off the stigma of a failed return, as well as the economic pressures to pay back debts, can deter returnees from pursuing an education.³³ There is also a general perception in Iraqi Kurdistan these days that there is a huge backlog of unemployed graduates, so education is not seen as a guarantee of work. As noted previously, over time the disadvantages to low education will likely accumulate in a society where higher education is increasingly the norm. In addition, easily exploitable unskilled labour immigration from East Asia is often seen to outperform local employees in terms of productivity and cost-effectiveness. Returnees with low education are thus squeezed both from above and from below in terms of the educational attainments of competing job seekers. As noted above, some returnees also reported that the local IOM office did not encourage the education option.

³³ There are some signs that this stigma is starting to become less severe in Iraqi Kurdistan, partly due to a large number of deportees and returned rejected asylum seekers, but it still persists among large segments of the population.

8.11 Other types of reintegration assistance

Housing allowance

Table 28. Housing allowance

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Received housing allowance	1	0	0
Housing allowance considered useful	1	0	0

Providing a housing allowance (HA) is a way of accommodating the basic needs of those considered especially vulnerable, but the number of potential grants is low (a maximum of 30 per year), and they must be distributed across the fiscal year. The HA is equal to US\$ 3,600. This could equal 9–12 months of rent, depending on location and living standards. This offer is mainly for families, but not exclusively. It can cover rent, household items and renovation. The 1 returnee who said he received the support reported no hassle in getting it and found it useful and fair: “Because I had children they gave it to me.” To apply for it, returnees have to fill out a form to indicate that they are eligible for such support. Another returnee reported that others overstated their need to get such support:

Regarding the housing support I didn’t get any. They told me that after submission of the form, if you don’t get an answer within one week, you don’t get it. They told me that only about 10 persons get it, so it’s kind of limited. A friend of mine told me that when you fill out the form for the housing allowance you need to really prove that you need it and then you might get it. But I just filled in what I need, I didn’t exaggerate. I didn’t say, “I’m really poor and need the housing support.”

While self-reporting needs may be exaggerated, IOM informed us that it does make house visits prior to handing out the HA and can make an assessment on the spot. An IOM employee explained the procedure as follows:

We ask them to write down their needs, then we make an assessment. This works like the business support, they need three quotes for material and documentation of the rental agreement with a landlord, registration documents that this is their property. IOM goes with the returnee to the vendor to purchase the materials after the approval. With rent, IOM pays it directly to the landlord or real estate agency.

A more serious issue is if someone underreports a need or seems unaware of the availability of such support. Individual counselling is supposed to cover eligibility criteria for the HA, but 1 returnee who appeared vulnerable due to a combination of health and housing issues was not aware at the time of our interview that such support might have been available. That this returnee seemed confused about the programme itself is not surprising: it can generally be expected that the most vulnerable are not necessarily those best informed about or most understanding of the programme components. This person had spent parts of the cash grant on renovating a house, which may be seen as indicative of an acute need. This person was furthermore a returnee who returned without family, which could partly explain the lack of information. As an IOM staff employee in Iraqi Kurdistan noted during an interview, “Our impression is that the families are very well informed about the housing allowance, that they are informed about the possibility to apply for this through the IOM Oslo. Individuals might also be eligible, but they are less informed.” Since individuals are eligible, however, they should be as informed as families. Another returnee complained that the housing allowance was only available to finance a renovation of the returnees’ private property.

I asked the IOM to help me with a housing allowance when I got married. My father's house could be renovated to allow for two more rooms, but IOM told me that since it wasn't my own property but my father's property, they couldn't help me.

It is questionable whether such a policy is optimal. It is quite common in many societies to live with the extended family and for the most vulnerable such arrangements may not only be valuable, but also may be the only way to get by in everyday life. Those most vulnerable will be more prone to engage in such practical arrangements precisely because they are vulnerable and tend to neither own their own real estate that they can spend the housing allowance on developing, nor wish to spend the housing allowance on rent. More flexibility could allow for more fraud, but also for more effective assistance to returnees designated as vulnerable. The same principle goes for furniture. This can be easily sold and is no longer available for IRRINI returnees who receive the HA, though the local IOM has informed us that there continues to be a need for it.

There is no data on processing time for the housing allowance, but on a general basis it makes sense to reduce it to a minimum to reach those in need as soon as practically possible. Since 1 January 2014 it is IOM Oslo that approves applications for HA, forwarded by IOM Erbil.

Vocational training

Returnees from 18 to 30 years old may benefit from vocational training, and all returnees in this age group are generally eligible. The vocational training (VT) can last for a maximum of 3 months, with US\$ 200 paid monthly to the returnee as subsistence allowance. Another US\$ 200 maximum can be paid monthly in fees for courses, or to shop proprietors and factory owners that allow for on-the-job-training. In other words, half of the support goes to the returnee and the other half goes to the instructor or instructing institution. The total amount of a potential grant for VT is US\$ 1,200 (3 months times US\$ 400 per month). The IOM visits the beneficiary 3 times to give him or her the subsistence allowance.

Typical examples of training courses are English language, hair dressing and computer courses. VT is a way of activating the returnee and improving employability through competence building. It may also reasonably be seen as a way of reducing the shame of coming back empty handed as a "failed" migrant, since vocational training is a future-oriented project and has a low-threshold offer to keep returnees active. It also represents a second chance for those who fail in their businesses. In 2 cases, respondents reported that they first received business assistance and then, when their businesses failed, they received VT. They were hence allowed to remain active and invest efforts in their reintegration. This illustrates another positive point about the VT, its usefulness as a fall-back option.

Moreover, as opposed to the in-kind assistance, returnees almost uniformly expressed enthusiasm about the VT. In contrast to the in-kind assistance, VT seems to be demand-driven reintegration assistance. For a limited amount of money, it serves the dual purposes of improving economic and psychosocial reintegration.

UDI has imposed an age limit on VT that limits eligibility and prevents older returnees from obtaining it. While this was 18–23 years in a previous phase of IRRINI,³⁴ in 2013 it was changed to the current range of 18–30 years. A local IOM staff member asserted that this unreasonably limits the number of beneficiaries of a popular component of reintegration assistance, since most returnees are over 30 years old.

³⁴ This is according to UDI. IOM's local office cited 18–35 as the previous age limit.

This seems unfortunate, as VT is a low-cost offering with some positive effects. It is also a source of frustration for unskilled older returnees or returnees whose skills are location-specific to Norway. In terms of catering to the needs of vulnerable groups, training could be especially important for older returnees with low education:

They offered courses, but they said it's only up to 28 years or 30 years or whatever; I was too old. If I'd been offered the chance, of course I'd like to do a course. It would have been free.

For those with little education it is also important that they can access VT that does not require literacy. One person complained, "They offered vocational training but I don't have an education. What can I do?" This is a particular challenge in rural settings, as there may be few courses available or transportation costs and time may be disproportionate to the perceived gains:

I was told that they could offer training for 200 US dollars a month. Training would be in addition to business, but I lived too far away to come to Suleymaniah for courses.

Next to age, place of residence can limit access to VT, as time, cost and risks of transportation may make it practically unfeasible for otherwise eligible candidates. Moreover, some returnees reported that they were not considered eligible for certain VT if it was considered irrelevant to their current occupation. For instance, one returnee who had opted for business in the form of livestock was not deemed eligible for an English language course. This practice was confirmed by a local IOM employee. UDI informed us that "the underlying motivation behind this was to coordinate VT, background, interests and type of in-kind project in a holistic manner" (our translation). Yet what is holistic or not may not be easy to assess and the practice is unfortunate for two reasons. Firstly, although livestock may be a current business, it may not necessarily be the final one a returnee intends to pursue. Returnees who fail in their business frequently report that they start a new one, so this is a dynamic process. If English language skills are not relevant to the current occupation, they may well be relevant to the next one. Secondly, there are good reasons why the IOM should avoid coming across as second-guessing the needs of returnees. If a returnee wants a course in the English language, this should be accommodated, not questioned, if it has the potential to add to future employment opportunities. The IOM needs to avoid coming across as a controller and rather should seek to come across as a facilitator that is there to serve the needs of each returnee as identified by the returnee.

Socioeconomic orientation

Another new component in IRRINI since the last evaluation of the programme by Strand et al. (2011) is Socio-Economic Orientation (SEO). This is a one-day session where returnees are gathered in a group, typically 4 to 5 at a time, for an interactive type of communication. The maximum number of beneficiaries is 125, but not all returnees need it according to IOM staff, who described the sessions as "very useful." Although returnees did not offer detailed opinions about their experiences with SEO, their statements did seem to correspond with the needs returnees more or less directly reported to have, in general, for psychosocial support, not feeling alone upon return, and being able to ask questions and share experiences with others in the same situation.

The one-day session consists of three parts. During the first part, there is a conversation about the documents and paperwork that are needed to get the reintegration support. It seems plausible that returnees can benefit from being informed about this in a small group, where it may be easier to ask questions and reveal imperfect understanding than in a one-on-one setting. During the second part, the group talks about psychosocial needs, based on the IOM's observation that many returnees struggle particularly with this dimension of reintegration. Finally, the last part concerns the labour market and different strategies for improving one's chances of obtaining a good livelihood. Given the lack of

detailed interview data from beneficiaries it is impossible to assess how well this component works in practice. Here is a quote from one IOM staff employee who organises such SEOs:

There is one thing we see about the returnees, that they are socially discontent. This has led us to make a change to IRRINI. We do group SEO sessions now, “Socio-Economic Orientations.” We find it very useful, the SEO. We talk with 4–5 returnees at a time on issues of education, employment opportunities, business set-up, how to get the documents, psychological issues. In this session we encourage interactivity and need to flexibly adapt to the needs of the group. SEO is also about social support, about networking, and it’s better for the relations between IOM staff and returnees. We invite, they come here to our main office. We encourage them to teach each other. They can then also understand what they don’t understand, they see that others might have problems understanding some issues too. Sometimes communication is difficult. Sometimes they approach us very late, long after their actual return.

IOM also covers up to US\$ 50 for the transportation costs and provides lunch free of charge. If experiences with the SEO continue to be positive and if IOM find that there is demand for it, it may be useful to consider upgrading this new programme component. This could be done through various ways. Firstly, today the component is a one-off event, but it could be made a regular event with repeated meetings on an annual or biannual basis. This could strengthen the networking function that seems so key to this process. Secondly, it could be held in rural as well as urban settings. Rather than inviting returnees to IOM’s regional office, the IOM could go to some of the remote locations where returnees live and conduct SEOs there. This would decrease traveling costs and time of transportation for rural returnees and could potentially be perceived as a positive gesture towards them. Such a step would require some additional funding, and a pilot could eventually test feasibility and demand. As is discussed below, returnees in rural settings are disadvantaged in a number of ways, and it is possible that an SEO could be particularly useful for these returnees. Alternatively, the transportation allowance could be increased to better serve this group, since intraregional journeys (such as traveling from Kirkuk to Suleymaniah) can easily exceed US\$ 50.

8.12 Actor assessment

IOM Norway

Table 29. Respondents’ assessment of IOM in Norway (total of 42)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	4.5	5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Total frequency, telephone interviews (28)	2	2	0	1	1	5	15	2	5.2 = 5
Total frequency, personal interviews (14)	0	0	3	3	0	1	5	2	4.7 = 5
Total	2	2	3	4	1	6	20	4	5

The overall assessment of IOM in Norway among returnees was very positive. Moreover, only four individuals gave IOM Norway a very negative assessment (score 1–2). Such quantifications should not be approached uncritically, but to the extent that this number gives an accurate indication – or even just a rough approximate – it indicates that returnees are more than content with how they see IOM Oslo fulfil its part of the programme.

Table 30. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Norway by activity (6 is best), both telephone surveys and personal interviews (42 in total)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	4.5	5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Frequency among the inactive	1	0	3	1	0	2	8	1	4.8 = 5
Frequency among the active	1	2	0	2	0	4	11	2	5
Frequency among "other," "don't know" or "did not respond"	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	4.8 = 5
Total	2	2	3	4	1	6	20	4	4.9 = 5

(inactive = currently unemployed and not studying, active = currently employed or studying)

It seems reasonable to expect that those who were inactive would give a worse assessment of IOM Norway than those who were active, but this was not the case. In the absence of larger numbers of respondents this finding should be considered tentative, however. Both the inactive and the active gave an average score of 5 as their assessment. It is thus not only those who were currently employed or studying who gave a positive assessment of IOM Norway, but also those who did not manage to get employed or to undertake an education. Note that the distinction between "active" and "inactive" is blurred in practice. "Part-time" and "sporadic employment" is here classified as active, but will in some cases mean "unemployed" (and thus inactive).

Table 31. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Norway by education (14 personal interviews only)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Frequency among those with low education	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	4.3 = 4
Frequency among those with high education	0	0	2	2	1	4	0	4.7 = 5
Total	0	0	3	3	2	5	1	4.5 = 5

(low education = either no education or primary education only, high education = high school or higher)

It would also seem reasonable to expect that those who had a low level of education would have had more problems understanding the bureaucratic procedures for accessing the in-kind support and thus given a poorer score to the provider of pre-return information. Again, this is not the case in the data, although the scarcity of data actually prevents meaningful analysis. Future research may fruitfully look into how educational level interacts with satisfaction with the reintegration assistance, as well as other aspects of the experience of being a rejected asylum seeker.

Strengths of IOM Norway

Among the good things about IOM Norway, returnees stressed punctuality, responsiveness, good and respectful treatment, accurate and honest practical information about departure time and transport and the provision of valuable help if the returnee did not have family or friends in Norway who could interpret and inform. Here are some quotes to illustrate these points:

They are very good. Pretty good. On time, at their office and at the airport. Any question I had was answered. For most Kurds this guy at IOM organised it.

...

They answered quickly to my questions, very quickly. For example, “When can I go to my home country?” “In one month,” they said. They treated me well.

...

Because they were quite good with me in terms of providing information and transport to the airport and received me at Vienna airport and at Hawler [Erbil] airport. When we had transit in Vienna there were IOM people there helping us to re-board. At Erbil airport too there was one IOM staff member there. Also, we didn’t have family or friends in Norway so for us they were very good to have the IOM.

Weaknesses of IOM Norway

Among the negative perceptions of IOM Norway, returnees stressed errors made in processing the application for assisted return and delays in the date of return, a negative experience with one of the staff members, and, perhaps most seriously, not being sufficiently helpful and proactively informing someone who had spent many years in Norway.

It was very bad. For example, it took [roughly half a year] for me the process to return. It was too late. Sometimes they said, “Your case disappeared.” So they had to start from scratch. And they said, “This happens sometimes to some people.” And they were not on time, always I had to call them to follow up with my case.

...

They have a problem. When you apply there you have to always ask them a lot of questions. I always had to ask questions: “What if this . . . ? What if that . . . ?” I asked them, “What if I can’t manage to live here, then what?” They said, “We don’t know.” Some stay in Norway for one year. Some stay for five years. Some stay for 15 years. Now I don’t know a living soul here, and have nothing. It’s difficult for me.

...

They promised to solve the problems I would get when I came back to Kurdistan. But it’s not right – they did not manage to find a job for me in Kurdistan. They have many jobs at the IOM in Kurdistan but they don’t give me one.

...

They showed no understanding that I lived in [a place far away] and could not come to Oslo. I asked them to arrange my return journey, so that when it is ready I can come to Oslo. I was afraid for the police because I didn’t have the residence permit and that’s why I didn’t want to come to Oslo to talk with the IOM.

We can see here efforts from the part of the migrants to create some kind of predictability and control of the situation upon their return. As discussed in relation to Norway, establishing predictability is not just a challenge for the returnee but also for IOM Oslo, requiring its assistance and involvement.

Finally, a few gave a seemingly neutral assessment that could in fact be interpreted as a negative one. For instance, one returnee stated the following:

They only registered my name. The IOM guy said, “I’ll put you in the queue.” Then, after a while, he called and said, “I got a ticket, you can return in a week.” So there’s not much to say about it. They were OK.

Whether or not this is a positive, negative or neutral assessment depends on the standard one chooses. If the objective should be to implement the return as a smooth logistical operation this could be considered a positive assessment. This narrative and others like it, however, do fall short of the IOM’s stated objective of providing information and individual counselling in Norway.

Table 32. Respondents’ assessment of IOM in Iraqi Kurdistan (total of 42)

Assessment	1	1.5	2	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Total frequency, telephone interviews (28)	3	1	1	2	0	4	0	2	0	13	2	4.9 = 5
Total frequency, personal interviews (14)	2	0	0	1	2	2	0	2	1	3	1	4.1 = 4
Total	5	1	1	3	2	6	0	4	1	16	3	4.5

The overall assessment of IOM in Iraqi Kurdistan as expressed *in these numbers* is again very positive. There are, however, methodological concerns here and the numbers should not be taken at face value. Sometimes respondents gave a numerical score that did not seem to reflect his or her experience. The Norway-based telephone interviewer and the local interpreter in Kurdistan (next to the local consultant in Afghanistan) both confirmed that it was difficult to get across the purpose of this numerical assessment. Several struggled to understand how to give a score, possibly related to low levels of schooling or limited experience with questionnaires. There were also conceptual issues. What if someone wanted to assess the work of IOM as very well in *principle* but not in *execution*, or vice versa? What score to give then? Thus, the numerical score should not be seen as definite and must be complemented by the qualitative component of interview data analysis. Note that the telephone interviews were somewhat more positive than the personal interviews. Seven of the 42 total individuals interviewed (in person or by telephone) gave a very poor score (1–2). While many more gave a very positive score, it is nonetheless worth noting that a significant number (more than a 10th) gave a negative assessment.

Table 33. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Iraqi Kurdistan by activity (6 is best), both telephone surveys and personal interviews (42 in total)³⁵

Assessment	1	1.5	2	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Frequency among the inactive	4	0	0	1	1	3	0	1	1	4	1	3.8 = 4
Frequency among the active	1	0	1	2	1	3	0	3	0	10	1	4.7 = 5
Did not respond / did not know / other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	4.5 = 5
Total	5	1	1	3	2	6	0	4	1	16	3	4.4 = 4

(inactive = unemployed and not studying, active = employed or studying)

While the overall assessment of IOM in Kurdistan was somewhat less positive than that of IOM Norway, it was still positive. Here the findings conformed more to the expectation that the responses of those individuals who were inactive would be more negative. The average score among those who were inactive was 4, while the average among those who were active was 5. More returnees from the inactive group cited the worst possible score of 1.

Table 34. Respondents' assessment of IOM in in Iraqi Kurdistan by education (14 personal interviews only)

Assessment	1	2	3	3.5	4	5	5.5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Frequency among those with low education	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	5
Frequency among those with high education	2	0	1	1	2	2	0	2	0	3.9 = 4
Total frequency	2	0	1	2	2	2	1	3	1	4.1 = 4

(low education = either no education or primary education only, high education = high school or higher)

Again, findings about education conformed to the expectation that those with less education had a less positive view about IOM in Iraqi Kurdistan. Returnees with higher educational levels can be expected to have better chances of procuring a livelihood, a differing socioeconomic background on the group level and a greater understanding of the bureaucratic process of obtaining IOM's reintegration assistance. A possible conclusion is that the IOM needs to make extra care that those with low levels of education understand the criteria for getting in-kind assistance and to make extra efforts to follow up on this group.

³⁵ Some respondents were uncomfortable with stating one single number. If a respondent cited "3 or 4," for instance, it was converted to 3.5.

Table 35. Was the information about the return programme in Norway accurate?

Type of data	Yes	No	Partly	Did not respond / did not know
Personal interviews	7	3	3	1
Telephone interviews	17	2	8	1
Total	24	5	11	2

The information provided in Norway was considered accurate by a majority of the returnees (24 out of 40), and only 5 said it was inaccurate. But quite a few (11) said that it was only partly accurate.

One regular complaint about the information is particularly serious. Many signed up for the IRRINI programme thinking that IOM would provide jobs for them once they were back in Iraqi Kurdistan. This was also a finding in the previous evaluation (Strand et al. 2011). On the basis that some returnees returned expecting the IOM to provide jobs to them, Strand et al. (2011, 77) recommended clarifying the content of the reintegration package and “explain[ing] the limits to what IOM Iraq can do for the individual returnee upon return. IOM cannot provide jobs except in rare circumstances.”

The fact that some returnees still suffered from the misconception that IOM would provide jobs upon return indicates either that they were unable to properly assess the information provided or that IOM failed to proactively eliminate this misunderstanding. As the quotes below indicate, this led to disappointment and frustration with IOM for some. It is also plausible, however, that some respondents may wish to blame their current hardship externally and then direct their frustration unfairly to IOM, or engage in wishful thinking that makes it challenging to provide accurate information. Having said that, it would be wrong to disregard narratives such as those below. Firstly and most alarmingly, some expected the IOM to provide jobs to them upon return:

First, [IOM] said, “Go back to Kurdistan – they’ll give you a job.” It was untrue.

...

I got information that they would help me find a job since I know the [Norwegian] language and stuff like that, but it’s not the case. They don’t manage to find a job that matches my qualifications.

Secondly, some thought that IOM Oslo gave an overly rosy description of the situation and the job opportunities in Iraqi Kurdistan, for example, “The IOM in Norway said that I would do well in Kurdistan and that I would get a job here. But it’s so difficult to get a job here.”

It should be noted that the situation in Kurdistan has also changed for the worse in a rather drastic way since the summer of 2014 (prior to data gathering), and this macro-structural change is important for a contextual understanding. *Worsening conditions made the return situation less predictable and might have created stress and hardship that could be unfairly attributed to the IOM.* Failure to re-establish can well be misattributed externally to the IOM. This is rarely easy to unpack.

First minute I landed there I regretted coming back. When they said Kurdistan is nice and good, this was not good by them. They [unclear whether this referred to visiting IOM staff or reception centre staff] said this, in the camp. When the application was denied, they talked about our country. They cheated us.

Another complaint about inaccurate information related to the exact date of the flight back to Iraqi Kurdistan:

I was asked about my preferred date for the journey home, but IOM had bought a ticket that was dated one week later. This was very unfortunate because I was mentally prepared to travel that particular day.

Finally, one complaint concerned the quality of IOM's information about the possibility of re-migration to Norway. This is an important issue that was veiled in a large degree of uncertainty among those interviewed, especially those who had family or partners in Norway. Any information about this needs to be absolutely clear and correct:

When I got the letter of rejection, I asked IOM if I could come back to Norway. They said it would be no problem for me to come back. But on my letter it said that I would have to wait for two years. I can't understand how they can say different things.

I thought that if I was deported by the police I thought that legally I wouldn't be able to return until five years had passed. I didn't know that, going back voluntarily, I would still be banned for five years. I thought I would only be banned for two years. Had I known, I would have refused to return at all costs. The way I interpreted it from the IOM guy on the phone, he said that if you return back to Norway within one and a half years you'll have to give back the money you've received from the IOM. But he said, "If you come back to Norway within three years you won't have to pay back the money." So the way I understood him I thought it was possible to return after two years and not have to pay back the money. I didn't check it with anyone else. He was the one organising everything, all these procedures.³⁶

What about those who were more positive to the IOM's information? Only those who responded that the information was either "partly accurate" or "inaccurate" were asked to elaborate on why this was the case, so data on positive respondents is much more limited. However, if they elaborated unprompted their answers were recorded and offer some further information. For instance, one respondent who was overall negative to the IOM's office in Iraqi Kurdistan – saying "They trade in people" – was positive to the accuracy of pre-return information:

At the airport they gave me cash and later they gave support for the job placement. Otherwise when I was informed about how much I'd get at the airport and later on, they said you'll get so and so much cash and then later the 4500 USD, and this was true.

Other responses corroborated this:

The information was accurate, the information given to us about the programme – what we would get when we returned – was right.

³⁶ This regulation was known to many returnees, but as the quote illustrates there was little actual knowledge on how long returnees had to remain outside of Norway before they would have to repay some or all of the return support. According to the regulation, returnees who remain outside of Norway under 12 months must repay the full amount, those remaining outside 13–18 months must pay 2/3, those remaining outside 19–24 months must pay 1/3, and no repayment is required for a stay outside of Norway of over 24 months. However, those who re-migrate to Norway due to threats against their life in their country of origin can apply for exemption from repayment. For details, see <https://www.udiregelverk.no/no/rettskilder/udi-rundskriv/rs-2009-042/>.

...

What they said about the support was true [describing the cash part of the reintegration assistance]. But I didn't care much about this programme and what they say about it.

One made a distinction between information about the programme and about the region, saying that the former was accurate and the latter not.

Table 36. Is your personal situation after return very different from what you had expected? (14 personal interviews only)

No	1
Yes, better	3
Yes, worse	8
Did not respond / did not know	2

These were given categories and not much elaborated upon by respondents, so there is not much data on how exactly the situation of any given individual was better or worse than expected. As noted above, it is not surprising – given the financial and security crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan nowadays – that a clear majority reported that their personal situation after return has been worse than expected. There is a striking parallel here with the findings from Afghanistan, though there was it a combination of personal insecurity and worsened economic prospects. For those who complained about inaccurate information, this result could be linked to that perception. However, the overall positive assessment of IOM, combined with the observation that many face a situation worse than they expected, also demonstrates the limits of what an assisted return programme can do to alleviate hardship. With few economic opportunities and concerns about on-going war, many returnees will come back to their place of origin to face hardship. Those affected the most by return may well be those who came back to their country of origin before the onset of the crisis. As remarked by a local IOM employee,

When it comes to sustainable return, our main concern is not those who return now with the current situation. They know what they are facing. Our concern is with those who returned before all this happened with the IS. They didn't know.

However, while there is no data to infer it, the opposite could also be conceivable. Those who returned during the pre-crisis period may have had more time and opportunity to establish themselves before the onset of the crisis and therefore may display more resilience.

8.13 Present situation and future

Table 37. Will you remain where you live now or go somewhere else?

Type of data	Remain here	Go somewhere else	Do not know
Personal interviews	5	6	3
Telephone interviews	7	13	8
Total	12	19	11

As a logical corollary to the fact that many returnees faced hardship and impoverishment in Iraqi Kurdistan – and the fact that many already have migration experience and know-how – it is not surprising that many have questioned whether to stay in an economically struggling and war-affected region or to move elsewhere. Almost all of those who said they have considered the option indicated that they would attempt to move back to Norway or other parts of Europe. However, the number who have considered the option (30 out of 42) is strikingly high, especially when one takes note that those who said “remain here” may not have said so because they wished to but because they lack the resources

for re-migration. Answering that they intended to “remain here” may thus reveal more about their inability to move on than it does about their aspirations for investing in local reintegration:

I was thinking of going back to Norway. But I couldn't. Why? Because I didn't have asylum. Now I will stay here. I have a family here, so I cannot leave them here.

...

I'm happy to be back here. Although I say I don't want to be back to Europe, you know the security situation is not good here. I can't go out. Just last day there was an explosion.

On the other hand, temporarily going somewhere else could be a step to sustainable return. A local IOM staff member made a note of this: “Sometimes when we call to monitor, returnees have spent weeks in Turkey or another regional country. We see this as a consequence of the security situation. No one knows exactly what is going to happen and when, so there is safety in being abroad if something happens.” When the IS attacked the KRG in August 2014, it was almost impossible to book outwards flights because they were sold out at once to international companies. The situation is in general unpredictable. For some, the lesson learned is to stay abroad but to be ready to try to return, rather than to stay in KRG and be ready to try to leave.

This also has a practical implication for eventual changes to the programme. It strongly suggests, among other things, that if Norwegian authorities wish to avoid financing re-migration to Europe (whether to Norway or to another destination), they should avoid handing out the reintegration support as a one-time cash instalment similar to the universal FSR programme. Since the IRRINI programme and its in-kind support was replaced by an FSR programme as of 1 September 2015, it seems prudent to conduct a mapping exercise over the next year to register how many of those who return through the FSR programme end up back in Norway and the Schengen area. Such a mapping would either verify or falsify the recommendation made here, and would inform policy.

On the other hand, if Norwegian authorities wish to promote sustainable return they may also need to invest more in the programme. We shall return to this implication below.

Immobility is also caused by obstructions to travelling through Turkey and Iran, which both deport irregular migrants back to Iraqi Kurdistan. One respondent had tried to migrate but had already failed 3 times at the time of the interview, a couple of years after his return from Norway: “So far I tried three times. But it didn't work. Once I was in Iran, arrested and deported. Secondly, it was the financial crisis. This was the third time. As soon as I get the money I need I'll leave again.” Five of the 42 respondents reported that they had partners or family in Norway and were merely waiting for the quarantine period to end so they could go back to Norway. On the whole, these were the most adamant about re-migration, and correspondingly the least interested in making efforts for sustainable return beyond this timeframe. For them, the waiting game of applying for asylum in Norway is upon return converted to a waiting game of family reunification to Norway, and there is limited interest in long-term reintegration. None of these individuals flinched in their own determination to re-migrate to Norway, but some were uncertain about the procedures they would have to follow:

Since I have my family in Norway, my lawyer said that according to Norwegian law, when the application is denied you can't go back to Norway within the next five years. But, because you have a family and children there in Norway, after two years you can apply for the Norwegian visa again, submit another application, in one of the Norwegian embassies in the region, either in Amman or Turkey. But I don't know what is going to happen with this application when I submit again. Recently my family came

to [a third country] to see me there. I got a visa to go [there] and then they came to meet me there.

It is worth noting that these 5 respondents also seemed to view the IRRINI programme in the context of future re-migration to Norway. Assisted return leaves that option open (after a quarantine period), but forcible return makes it prohibitively expensive and not a real option. Ironically, given the aim of sustainable return, the option of coming back to Norway “tomorrow” is not an insignificant selling point for returning through IRRINI today.

Table 38. Re-migration plans among those who have a friend/relative who has left after their return (out of 14 personal interviews only)

Remain here	Go somewhere else	Do not know
0	4	1

Social network theory postulates that the likelihood of migrating generally increases with the number of migrants in one’s personal network (Massey and Espinosa 1997). Out of the 5 respondents who had a friend or relative re-migrating after their own return, 4 wanted to re-migrate themselves. This is not necessarily a (small-n) network effect; it could also be related, for instance, to the location of residence, since some locations or residences (where the returnees’ social networks tend to be concentrated) are under more socioeconomic pressure than others. In the absence of larger numbers of respondents, however, these remain theoretical speculations.

Table 39. Is the programme seen to allow for a sustained stay? (out of 14 personal interviews)

No	Yes	Did not respond / did not know
9	4	1

Again, while most of those interviewed personally gave a positive assessment of the programme, this does not mean that this is sufficient for long-term settlement upon return in Iraqi Kurdistan. Neither is this necessarily an aspiration, as noted above. One may reasonably expect that more persons would have answered “yes” to whether or not the programme allows for sustained stay (however understood by the respondent) had the interviews taken place prior to the advance of IS in the summer of 2014 and the withholding of national oil revenues by Baghdad from April that same year. Finally, the telephone interviews also included a lot of phone calls to people who could not or did not want to be interviewed, and it is possible that a desire to re-migrate was one of the reasons for that. At least 2 or 3 of those who were called were back in Norway already.

Table 40. Biggest advantage of the programme (14 personal interviews only, multiple answers allowed)

Type of advantage	Frequency
To come back once asylum was no longer possible	3
To avoid forced return with the police	3
To get the cash support	9
To get the non-cash support (i.e. the in-kind assistance)	2
There is no advantage	1
Other	1
Did not respond / not applicable	0
Multiple answers	3

Note that only 2 cited the in-kind assistance as the biggest advantage and 9 cited the cash support. This is consistent with the fact that returnees often refer to the in-kind assistance as “yet to be monetised.” A few returnees did indicate that the programme was a *sine qua non* for return, however, and this needs to be factored into the larger picture. The programme receives great praise among some and can be viewed as vital to enabling return. “If it wasn’t for the programme, I’d not have come back. The journey as well as the task of restarting my life would have been impossible.”

Table 41. Do you advise or recommend your friends in Norway to return through assisted return programmes?

Yes	No	Did not respond / did not know
6	6	2

Several returnees noted that each individual has individual circumstances that play into the decision-making process. One stressed the financial incentive:

Yes. Those who don’t have asylum can return here with a little money, 8,000 US dollars, and with that programme assistance they can get some money back for the taxes they’ve paid in Norway.

One triangulated his own positive experience against the positive experience of others:

I’ve already told them to return through this programme. I have some friends who also did so, and they are also positive about the programme.

One referred both to the lack of alternatives and the undignified existence of irregular migrants accustomed to an “oriental” culture, and suggested that the Norwegian authorities fund a TV programme on Kurdish satellite TV to provide information about rationales for return and perils of emigration alike. He claimed to have convinced many people not to emigrate after his return:

Yes. It is better for those whose applications are denied. This is the only way. But for those with citizenship it’s different. The idea of my TV programme is to show the reality of people who go to Europe. I would give examples of people who were respected here before they left but now they have to steal there in order to make a living. . . . In spite of the explosions here, life could be better here than in Europe.

The reasons given for not recommending return generally often had little to do with the programme and more to do with the status quo in Iraqi Kurdistan as a region. This corresponds with a well-established finding in the literature that the macro-situation in the country of origin tends to be more decisive than a return and reintegration programme. The following narrative shows how that status quo may deter a returnee from recommending return to others:

No. If I had known how it would turn out for me here I would not have come back. There's no life here. If I ever go back I'd rather spend 20 years there in a camp rather than living here. If I sell the house for sure I'll leave. Even if I'm imprisoned there. The Iraqi situation . . . recently when I was in [a small town near where I live] they said there was a bomb under the bridge. We had to wait for three hours before the security forces dismantled it. Recently I heard a friend was killed while he was in the Peshmerga. His salary was nothing, 500,000 Iraqi dinar a month. This is the value of two pizzas in Norway. Every day it's getting worse. This year is worse than the last year. Money-wise it was better last year, and there was no war and there was work. Everything was better last year.

It is also clear from the data that many returnees have advised their Kurdish friends in Norway against returning these days, and that this advice seems to be taken seriously:

If a friend of mine wants to return I advise him not to. I tell him to sleep on the street rather than come back.

. . .

I can't recommend it. Always my friends in Norway and I tell them don't return. Iraq is no good. I tell them to stay in Norway. They call me and I tell them not to return. I convince them.

The 2 cases in the boxes below provide further insight in the challenges vulnerable returnees experienced for themselves and members of their families upon their return, and moreover how the cask assistance upon return enabled them to cover their medical bills.

Box 2. VULNERABILITY, PLACE OF RESIDENCE AND SECURITY

There are people who come back to this country who commit suicide, they have psychological problems, social problems, the lack of services, water, other things And in this war situation . . . one child of mine, he's two and a half years old when he sees police in the street, and he thinks it's ISIS. So yeah, he's affected by the war. My understanding is that you evaluate the programme just to send more people back to Kurdistan. There are differences between KRG on the one hand and places like Kfri, Jaluwla, Khanaquin, Saadya, Mandale, Kirkuk [conflict zones]. Life is different there than in the KRG provinces. And usually in these places, there are problems with mixed populations where the majority are Arabs. Problems in terms of security [for Kurds], but also when you go to ask for a job and the head of office says you won't get one because you're Kurdish. I hope you don't leave these interview forms to be ignored and gather dust.

Box 3. VULNERABILITY, HEALTH AND GENDER

I have diabetes, blood pressure, heart problems, and went to Norway first and foremost to get medical treatment there and to be with my family there. I fell and broke my leg the other day, and the doctor says it will easily break again. There is no local medical treatment for me here. I'd have to go to Europe to get it. I was there for years before I went back, and when I did it was definitely because my son wanted me to go back. The application was also denied. And my son cried for me to come back. Now my son tells me to return to Norway again. He thinks I can easily go back and forth as if I'm in my father's house. It was a long journey. My children in Europe wanted me to stay in Europe. Only my son here wanted me to come back but now he no longer want it.

Since I came back I regret it. I was more happy there. It was because of my son. For example, I'm here but this country didn't do anything for me. In Norway I broke my hand and Norway gave me treatment. When I had problems with my health I got treatment, for free. I'm thankful for that. I received some 10,000 kroner at the airport but my son spent the money on daily expenses and necessities and renovation of the house [old building, next to no isolation]. And also on medical expenses. We had to spend money on health issues and had nothing left to invest in the business. I don't know how much money I spent on medical treatment. And I'm renovating the house but didn't get any help to do this. We have to pay for these bills, for the medicine, that's not available here. They need to send it to me from [Europe].

For the business I had to partner with a relative, being a woman, but it was useful only for 6–7 months. It was a good idea to partner with him, but I couldn't continue with it after I fell and hurt myself. The IOM came 1–2 times to the shop. There wasn't much to talk about. Such an amount of money is nothing if you want to invest it in a shop. Two to three months after I started it was the last time I saw them. They could have helped me in many ways. For me, for instance, they could help me with my health issues, provide me with medical support. [Q: Did you ask for this?] How can I ask for it? They didn't tell me anything or ask how I can be helped, so how can I ask them if I don't know it exists? In many ways they have to help the returnees, not just a few or one. When I want to renovate my house they have to help me with this, but I didn't get any.

8.14 Families and children

There is not extensive data on the challenges of bringing children back from Norway to Iraqi Kurdistan. The IOM reported that all families are visited by IOM reintegration staff. Some returnees cited their children's future as a reason to opt for assisted return, implying that school-to-school transitions and recognition of foreign-earned education are important to get right upon return:

I was thinking about my daughter, her future. If she goes to school in Norway and we wait for asylum and she goes to school for several years and then we're suddenly meant to go back, she'll get problems with the school here. That's why we returned.

School-to-school transitions came up as a challenge in another interview. A local IOM staff member stated that documented schooling in Norway is normally enough to enrol children back in the Kurdish educational system, but this one narrative contradicts this:

Our daughter studied for two years at the primary school, so when we came back she's supposed to go back to the third level. But she had to go to the second level. So she had to repeat one year. She didn't finish the second year in primary school. Here [in

Kurdistan] they didn't ask for her documents, but they gave them a test and it was in Kurdish. But she studied in English and Norwegian. We helped her to learn the words in Kurdish, so that she wouldn't have to redo the level, but she failed. Because we registered with IOM and IOM said "no, you have to travel," we couldn't wait for the two last months of her schooling and let her finish the term. But even if she had, she'd still have had to do the test.

Two implications are important here. First of all, any prospective returnee needs to be informed about the requirements for re-enrolling one's child in the Iraqi Kurdish school system. Secondly, any prospective returnee with a child could potentially be given some flexibility as to the date of the return. If it is considered important for the child to finish the school term in Norway, the timing of the return should be adjusted accordingly. One may reasonably speculate that this could facilitate sustainable return. The same applies for cases where a young adult completes the school year during the year he or she turns 18 years of age. Allowing him or her to complete the school year could serve the same function pre-return as a post-return course in vocational training, only more effectively since foreign-earned educational degrees are generally of a higher quality and higher in demand.

This is for UDI to decide, and clear guidelines would facilitate IOM's work in this regard, since IOM needs to balance the need for general flexibility vis-à-vis families against the need for swift application processing times. In either case, it should be a standard operational procedure that IOM Oslo puts any parent returning with a child in touch with the local IOM office in Iraqi Kurdistan before the return takes place. The local IOM office should then inform prospective returnees on how to avoid problems related to children's re-enrolment in the Kurdish school system.

8.15 Gender

There is not enough data on women's situations after return to this region. Although it was a priority to gather data on this, there were practical obstacles to it. For instance, it seemed inappropriate in some cases for the male researchers to ask for a personal interview with a woman. As for telephone interviews, in several cases a male answered the telephone and again it was thought to be inappropriate to ask to talk with the female returnee, especially in rural contexts. Yet it is clear that women face some challenges specific to women. There are few female business owners in Iraqi Kurdistan, although they do exist. Most women who want to access reintegration assistance need to engage in a business partnership with a male relative, which creates added dependency. It is also a general observation that women might not be involved in the return decision making to the same extent as the male heads of household, reducing autonomy in preparing for return and in mobilising resources for it.

8.16 Conclusions

Most respondents gave a positive assessment of IOM both in Norway and in Iraqi Kurdistan, although the assessment was most positive for IOM Norway. At the same time, this numerical measure should not overshadow that there is room for improvement for the IRRINI programme. The field where IOM received the most praise was logistics. This was reflected in adjectives such as "punctual" and in the positive assessment of the IOM's organisation of the return journey to Kurdistan. The fields where IOM received the least praise were individualised advice and follow up. As for the programme components, both the VT and the SEO seem to correspond with the needs that returnees described post-return.

As noted, the IRRINI programme takes place within a macro-context of war and economic instability. These are structural constraints on the ability of IOM to ensure sustainable reintegration, and in this respect much has happened since the previous evaluation of IRRINI by Strand et al. (2011) only four years ago. The fact that the biggest challenges to sustainable return are macro-structural should be

reflected in the design and implementation of the programme. There are also some fields where the IOM could improve.

8.17 Recommendations

What follows are some recommendations for how the programme can be modified in light of the data analysis.³⁷

Information and outreach in Norway (IOM and UDI)

- Give potential returnees an accurate and informed impression of the general situation in Iraqi Kurdistan, including major economic and security challenges, and be clear that IOM will not be able to find returnees employment.
- Acknowledge that returnees who have stayed in Norway for 5–10 years or more have particular needs in terms of information and a need for more intense counselling and advice.
- Consider whether there are ways of providing irregular migrants with a one-time temporary guarantee against deportation to facilitate their journey to IOM Oslo. Also consider whether there are ways of avoiding having to make that journey, for example, whether things could be arranged online.
- Make sure all families are put in touch with the local IOM office in Iraqi Kurdistan and given detailed information about how to prepare for a hassle-free enrolment of children in local schools, including information about required documentation of foreign earned education and the dates of the local school term.

Processing of applications for IRRINI in Norway (IOM and UDI)

- Reduce average processing times for applications for return further and avoid time-consuming mistakes reported in the processing of such applications.
- Acknowledge that the date of return can be very important and should be discussed with the returnees. If a returnee is mentally prepared for a particular date, changing it comes at a cost. Some flexibility with reference to the return journey is desirable, within reason, particularly for families with school aged children.

Organisation of the return journey (IOM)

- Try to ensure that staff members in transit locations, in this case Turkey, are trained to handle potentially sensitive issues pertinent to a history of conflict.
- Help ensure that all returnees are informed about the availability of onward transportation and one night of accommodation, and specify whether onward transportation will be provided to

³⁷ These recommendations were written without knowledge that the IRRINI programme would be dismantled. There are two reasons why they were not revised accordingly. Firstly, other countries with country-specific return and reintegration programmes to Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan can draw on them. Secondly, UDI can use them as input in the process of designing and implementing future country-specific programmes and the process of any eventual modifications of the FSR programme.

the home address or only to the wider area. Consider changing the practice that returnees need to book onward transportation pre-return.

- Consider the first encounter with the returnee in his or her country of origin as less of a logistical operation and more of a chance to establish good relations from the start of the post-return period.
- Avoid incidents where the cash is not available to the returnee. If this nonetheless occurs, make sure the returnee gets the cash grant as soon as possible, as this is important for the individual's return and reintegration.

Delivery and design of the reintegration assistance (IOM and UDI)

- Establish reasonable success criteria for return, and follow up on returnees to see if set targets have been met. Not having fixed success criteria makes internal evaluation and monitoring difficult.
- Change routines so that all returnees are systematically offered information about all three options of reintegration assistance, especially education, and encourage each returnee to take the time needed to develop a business strategy.
- Improve drastically on the business advice available to returnees, as a good business strategy is especially imperative in the context of the currently unfavourable investment climate, and on the monitoring of returnees.³⁸
- Proceeding from the previous point, IOM needs to be less of a controller and more of a facilitator of business. The main imperative is to do everything possible to improve the chances of a sustainable business, conducive to a sustainable return.
- Provide the vocational training with a minimum of bureaucratic requirements, on a demand-driven basis.
- Acknowledge that certain anti-corruption measures (e.g., the requirement of three quotes for payment of a business expense) are unlikely to effectively prevent fraud and may come at a high cost – both in terms of transaction costs, verification costs, interaction with the returnee and the returnees' reintegration. Paradoxically, they can also lead to fraud. These costs are too serious to be ignored. There are dilemmas involved in moving from a role as controller to a role of facilitator, but if the ability to control is very limited, this is a powerful argument to do so.
- Proceeding from the previous point, change the overall design of the programme accordingly. Some returnees use the in-kind assistance to establish sustainable business that provide them a livelihood. This must be continued. But others cheat the system, for example, through hiring people who specialise in fraudulent practices. This must be stopped, but not by stricter measures. Rather, Iraqi Kurdistan could be used as a test case to allow the returnee to freely choose between receiving the support in-kind and receiving the support as a cash transfer. Such

³⁸ As a minimum requirement, the IOM needs to provide, on the basis of telephone surveys, a clear indication of how many businesses fail and how many succeed at a given time, e.g., one year after set-up. The contact information should be shared with UDI for occasional replication and further inquiries if needed.

a cash transfer would need to be made in several instalments to avoid financing onward migration, for example, over a six to eight month period.

- Increase the number of housing allowances available to IOM so that the number reflects the current crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since needs are higher in times of crisis, it makes sense to maintain a discretely flexible level of generosity in the reintegration assistance.
- Consider whether the criteria for delivery of the housing allowance negatively impacts those who may need it the most. It may be relevant also for those who wish to invest in a relative's real estate to live there. Housing allowance is needs-based, so reaching the vulnerable should trump avoiding fraud.
- Remove the age limits to vocational training as this might improve employability and help activate returnees to orient themselves towards a sustainable return. This also may potentially impact positively on vulnerable groups and increase accessibility to a fall-back option. The latter is important given the small number of businesses that succeed and the importance of preventing apathy if they fail.
- Acknowledge that place of residence (e.g., rural areas, conflict zones) can be a determinant of vulnerability. Reducing the number of instalments of salaries for returnees in job placement to trimonthly could be one option; another might be to organise socioeconomic orientation sessions in rural areas and conflict zones. A third would be to consider organising vocational training in rural settings, as well.
- Consider scaling up the socioeconomic orientation component, which seems well-designed to meet returnees' needs in a cost-effective way, by turning it into a regular event and by offering it in select rural areas.
- Allow female returnees to choose whether they want the reintegration assistance as a cash grant or in-kind. Their limited range of options for business set-up and dependency on male relatives makes it important to allow for more flexibility, although there is a risk too that the larger cash grant could then be controlled by a male relative.

9. Ethiopia

9.1 Introduction

In January 2012, the governments of Ethiopia and Norway signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the reintegration of rejected asylum seekers voluntarily returning from Norway to Ethiopia. It was decided that an Ethiopian government body, the Administration for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA), would be responsible for managing the programme in Ethiopia (both in-kind and community assistance). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) was to be responsible for recruitment and facilitation of the journey from Norway, as well as for the first cash grant in Ethiopia. After the signing of the MoU, it took more than a year before a specific project agreement between ARRA and UDI was signed (March 2013), delaying the establishment of a project office responsible for implementation of the programme (operational from May 2013). In the meantime, during the first year, IOM took care of distributing all of the support (cash, in-kind and community support). Some of the implementing problems faced by ARRA in the first period are now solved. It is nevertheless important to consider these starting challenges, as they can bring out important lessons for new return programmes in other countries.

The Ethiopian return agreement is of particular interest in an evaluation of assisted return for two reasons. Firstly, the MoU on reintegration was the first such agreement that the Ethiopian government had ever signed with any country. The MoU also opened up the possibility of forced return of people who were unwilling to return under the assisted return programme. Secondly, the fact that a governmental body, and not an international organisation such as IOM, has the responsibility for implementing the reintegration programme makes it different from other return programmes, where IOM normally has the entire responsibility for return. Questions this evaluation intended to answer were therefore as follows: Does the Ethiopian reintegration programme provide an alternative model of return that can serve as an example for other programmes? Or does Ethiopia's experience indicate that the government model should not be duplicated elsewhere?

The assessment of the experiences of returnees and the implementation of the programme in this report does not, however, give clear answers. While the role of ARRA appears to be less controversial than what might be expected in a polarised political environment, the potential advantages of being part of the governmental apparatus for a sustainable return do not seem to have been sufficiently exploited. A fundamental challenge in evaluating the programme was the lack of monitoring. Although ARRA has attempted to keep in touch with returnees after they have received support, there is no mechanism for following up on returnees, and the only way UDI and ARRA can measure the success of the programme is based on the number of returnees who actually receive the support. It is therefore difficult to conclude whether the programme actually has contributed to a sustainable livelihood for Ethiopians returning from Norway or not. However, measured by the relatively high number of returnees employed at the time of interviews, our research suggests that Ethiopian returnees have been more successful in gaining an income after return than returnees in the three other programmes evaluated in this report.

9.2 The Ethiopian migration context

The Ethiopian rate of international migration is even lower than the generally low rate of international migration from Africa. But during the last two to three decades there has been an upsurge in this migration. A number of factors have contributed to this.

First, because of the violent political upheavals that followed the 1974 revolution, a large number of Ethiopians fled the country as refugees. Tens of thousands of Ethiopians are now living permanently in

Europe and North America. The growing Ethiopian diaspora communities have political and economic influence. Economically, there is a substantial flow of remittances back to Ethiopia. Socially, the diaspora phenomenon has created the impression that one can become prosperous and successful in life if he or she leaves Ethiopia and settles in North America or Europe.

Second, after the downfall of the military regime in 1991, the government of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) recognised a right to move. Restrictions on Ethiopians who wished to move outside the country were dramatically eased. It became easy to get passports, and the requirement for an exit visa was lifted. In fact, the EPRDF government could be considered as pro-migration. It has instituted a diaspora policy where it seeks to increase remittances to and investments in Ethiopia from the diaspora community. By and large, it has refused to sign readmission agreements. It normally provides travel documents to Ethiopian asylum seekers only if they by their own free will return back to Ethiopia. This diaspora-friendly policy is interesting, as there is strong vocal opposition to the government from sections of the Ethiopian diaspora. Since the controversial 2005 elections, where the EPRDF for the first time allowed the opposition to compete in a more open field and was challenged by the opposition, the government has actively worked to develop a constituency of support within the diaspora. One way to achieve this has been to use patronage – by dedicating land, investment licences and so forth to returning Ethiopians. In addition to the diaspora policy, the Ethiopian government has also allowed and encouraged labour migration. In this respect, laws have been enacted to allow private employment agencies to operate. The government has also entered into labour exchange agreements with countries such as Kuwait and Qatar.

Third, with expansion of education, media and infrastructure, there is a growing awareness about opportunities abroad. Ethiopia's population is approaching 90 million, and it will soon be the second most populous country in Africa. Half the population of Ethiopia is under 18 and the median age is 16.8 years old. Together with high rates of unemployment among youth, awareness about opportunities abroad has made migration popular particularly for young Ethiopians.

Particular events, such as the government's banning of the Oromo Liberation Front in 1992 (an organisation representing the largest ethnic group in the country) and the Ethiopian–Eritrean war from 1998 to 2000, also led to waves of migration by Oromo people or people with an Eritrean background who were in danger of being deported from Ethiopia during and after the war. The clamp down on opposition supporters, independent media and civil society after the controversial 2005 elections also induced migration.

9.3 Data and profile of respondents

Table 4. Types of data

Number of personal interviews with returnees	Number of telephone interviews
30	2

Six of the interviewees reported special health problems, ranging from epilepsy and cancer to shoulder injuries. None of these had been offered special follow up under the reintegration programme. All except 4 had resettled in the capital of Addis Ababa. One of these 4 was interviewed in the regional town of Hawassa in South Ethiopia, while the 3 others were interviewed while they were on visits in Addis Ababa.

Table 6. Gender distribution

Number of male respondents	Number of female respondents
30	2

A large majority of those interviewed were male. This reflects the male dominance among the returnees.

Table 7. Age distribution

Age	<20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	≤60
Number of Respondents		6	17	6	1	1

The largest age group among the interviewees was individuals in their 30s. This may not be representative of the general pattern of migration *from* Ethiopia – where it is likely that younger people dominate. As mentioned above, over half of the Ethiopian population is below the age of 18, and unemployment is most prevalent among youths.

Table 8. Civic status in Norway

Number of those alone in Norway at the time of return	Number of those with family in Norway at the time of return
31	1

While only 1 of the interviewed returnees was accompanied by children when returning from Norway, at least 4 of them had established a family and/or married while in Norway. Most of their partners had residence permits, so the return to Ethiopia was temporary in order to wait for a family reunion upon their return to Norway. This group belongs thus to the fourth category of returnees in our typology – those who have limited aspiration for reintegration and are able to re-migrate.

Table 9. Education

Level of education (on-going or completed)	Number
Primary school	1
High school / secondary school / technical education (up to ca. 18 years)	17
BA/MA/PhD	14

Among migrants leaving Ethiopia, there is a clear difference in their socioeconomic position and their destination country. The majority of Ethiopian migrants to Western Europe and North America appear to be from the middle and upper part of the socioeconomic ladder and have a relatively better education. Some go to Europe for higher education and decide to stay. Others go to Europe after paying exorbitant sums for a Schengen visa and covering their expenses, revealing a relatively privileged access to money in Ethiopia.³⁹ In contrast, Ethiopian migrants to the Middle East and to South Africa come from the low income group and from the countryside and have little formal education. The relatively privileged position of migrants to Norway was also clear in our survey of returnees *from* Norway, both in terms of education and employment at the time of migration. Still, we may have to consider a selection bias here, as the well-educated, who generally may be more confident in speaking for their interests, may be overrepresented among the returnees who were willing to be interviewed, while returnees with less education may have tended to decline invitations to be interviewed by the research team. There may also be selection bias when it comes to employment, as the large majority of those who were interviewed had work. As with those with higher education, those with employment may be more willing to share

³⁹ The ARRA project office officials told us that a person could pay up to 300,000 Ethiopian birr (ETB, approximately US\$ 14,000) at the black market for a Schengen visa.

their opinions in interviews than the unemployed/uneducated. Still, those who are employed may tend to be more self-censoring, as they have more to lose if they speak their minds.

Table 10. Type of activity upon departure from country of origin

Activity	Number
Unemployed	4
Full-time employment	22
Student	6

It is worth noting that the majority were in full-time employment at the time they originally left Ethiopia.

Table 11. Year of arrival in Norway

Year	Pre-2008	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number	15	1	7	7	2				

The majority of the interviewed returnees arrived in Norway before 2008 and had thus lived more than four years in Norway before returning (the first returnee who benefitted from the return agreement arrived in December 2011).

Table 12. Reasons cited for migration from country of origin

Reasons cited for migration	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Generalised insecurity / unspecified security reasons	0
Personal insecurity / persecution/involvement in conflict / etc.	10
Medical reasons	1
Economic reasons	11
Improve general quality of life / aspiration to travel / adventure / change of environment	1
"No future here"	0
"Saw others doing it"	1
Unspecified	3
Completed studies	5

Considering the politicised nature of the Ethiopian diaspora in Norway, and the authoritarian nature of the Ethiopian regime, we would have expected that a larger share of the interviewed returnees would have cited persecution as their main reason for migration. While 10 of those interviewed cited personal insecurity/persecution, 11 of them gave economic reasons for migration. The relatively low share of political reasons cited may, however, also be a result of returnees' self-censorship. Living in a society where the ruling party, through the local government apparatus, keeps control of citizen's political engagement (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Di Nunzio 2014), it is likely that people would downplay their political affiliations or sympathies in an interview situation. The political reasons cited were connected to major political events in the post-1991 period and included being in danger because of relatives engaged in the banned Oromo Liberation Front, being imprisoned after the controversial 2005 national elections, escaping the pressure/harassment to become member of the ruling party EPRDF or having an Eritrean identity. The economic reasons were often linked to the idea that people in the diaspora were economically successful and to their being influenced by others leaving for Europe, including peers who encouraged them to go. A statement from a young male returnee illustrates this well: "Everybody is going to Europe, so I wanted to try it, too, to have a better life. People say, try your luck."

A minority, five out of 32, cited academic studies as the reason for going to Europe/Norway. Among these, some had no intention of remaining in Norway after they had finished their studies. One of them

explained how he got a scholarship to study in Norway (under the NORAD quota programme). When he finished his studies, he used the opportunity to ask for asylum in order to get the return assistance. Others had won study scholarships to Sweden that covered only the student fees, and due to the high costs of living and the difficulties of getting part-time jobs, they stopped studying and went to Norway to apply for asylum.

Table 13. Reasons cited for coming to Norway in particular

Reason	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Norwegian asylum or immigration policies perceived as favourable / expectations of asylum	9
Political reasons ("peace," "respect for human rights," "democratic values," etc.)	4
Economic reasons ("good economy," "good job chances," "good salaries," etc.)	7
Family/friends in Norway	2
Advised to go to Norway	3
Human smuggler decided	4
Other (received study scholarship)	5

As we see in the table above, the largest group of the interviewees chose to come to Norway because of the perception that it would be easier to get asylum here. It also seems that some decided to go to Norway after they arrived in another European country and were advised to go to Norway, for example, "When in Sweden, an Eritrean advised me to go to Norway" or "First I went to Greece. In Greece, Ethiopians encouraged me to go to Norway, saying that I will have better opportunities there." The second largest group were those who thought Norway would provide the best economic opportunities, either through work or welfare support.

Table 14. Year of return to country of origin

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number	1	12	9	10	0

As shown in the table above, the number of returnees increased abruptly just after the readmission agreement was signed in 2012 and remained fairly constant through 2014.

9.4 Decision making: Motivations for applying for assisted return

Table 15. How returnees learned about the programme

IOM	At reception centres	Friends/ other asylum seekers	Media	Letter of rejection	Other (lawyer)
5	14	2	8	1	2

Overall, the reception centres were the most important source of information about the assisted return programme. Some told about regular return meetings in the reception centres that were compulsory for all residents to attend. Others told of IOM coming to the reception centres to inform them of the possibility to return under the MoU. Still, both IOM and UDI staff experienced plenary information meeting with Ethiopians in the reception centres as difficult and inefficient, stating that this group displayed resistance against return. This may indicate that although plenary meetings are cited by the

returnees as important sources of information, individual counselling may be a more efficient means of sharing information potential returnees need to make the decision to go back.

As mentioned above, the MoU between Ethiopia and Norway was signed in January 2012. The MoU's opening for forced return was a controversial issue in the Norwegian media, leading to protests from the Ethiopian diaspora in Norway, Norwegian activist groups and opposition parties. For those who returned in 2012, the media was a particularly important source of information about the possibility of assisted return: "When the return agreement was signed, there was a lot about it in the media. So I got the information through media and friends." Although media debates centred around the issue of forcible return, they indirectly induced people to find out more about the possibility of assisted return: "It was announced in Norwegian media that Ethiopians whose application was denied should go home."

The main reason for deciding to return was that the rejected asylum application gave no opportunity to work or learn. Some applied for assisted return immediately after the rejection letter came, while others decided after hearing from Ethiopians who lived illegally in Norway that there were no opportunities here. Feelings of frustration about being idle in the reception centres and the lack of job opportunities without a permit were often mixed with a feeling of longing to return to family in Ethiopia: "When they did not accept my application, there was no more to wait for me there. It was also difficult to live alone there when all my family was in Ethiopia. It is better to die here [in Ethiopia] than go mad there [in Norway]." Others saw assisted return as an opportunity to follow legal procedures and be eligible for a reunion with family in Norway. Very few stated that the opportunity to get reintegration support was the reason for signing up for assisted return, although one mentioned that after he realised his asylum case was lost he "also liked to take the opportunity of assisted return." Another explained, "I already had decided to return, but the assisted return programme gave me an incentive to apply."

Since the signing of the MoU in 2012, only one Ethiopian migrant has been forcefully returned to Ethiopia. In other words, many Ethiopian asylum seekers do not fear deportation. Although the Ethiopian government agreed to receive deported returnees from Norway, it has no tradition of providing identity (travel documents) unless the returnee (the migrant) consents. To receive deported returnees is against the country's diaspora friendly policy, as mentioned above. In this situation, it is difficult to conceive that migrants would decide to apply for assisted return because they feel threatened by forced deportation. The hesitation of the Ethiopian government to actually issue documents for those who are not willing to return has caused some headaches for Norwegian immigration authorities. The special attaché for immigration at the Norwegian Embassy in Addis for instance, argued that many more Ethiopians in Norway could have signed up for assisted return. He claimed that the assisted return programme was going to enter into full force only when the deportation element started.⁴⁰ He was, however, also pessimistic about the possibility for a change in the Ethiopian government's approach to forced return. Some returnees were nevertheless aware of the fact that they would not be issued reintegration support if they were deported, and stated that this had an impact on their willingness to sign up for the programme. Others were afraid of losing the chance to reunite with their families in Norway or of being separated from family that had a residency permit if deported. For others, neither the threat of deportation nor a lack of opportunities without a permit made them decide to return. One male returnee said his decision to return was abrupt and personal at a time when he had been tinkering for a long time about his future in Norway and about returning to his country of origin. Once he decided to return, he did not want to stay any longer in the country.

⁴⁰ Research shows that forced return does not increase the number of assisted returns. Jean Paul Brekke, in his report *Why go Back? Assisted Return from Norway* (2015) states that "there was seemingly no direct correlation between forced return and assisted returns to Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo or Russia."

9.5 Logistics: Processing time and travel

Table 16. Processing time in months from application to departure

Time period	>1 month	1 month	2 months	3 months	4 months	5 months	≥6 months
Frequency	4	7	9	5	1		6

The most common reason for delays in departure from Norway after signing up for assisted return was that it took time for returnees to get their travel documents. While most of the interviewees who needed travel documents got help from IOM and the Ethiopian embassy in Stockholm, some explained that the Ethiopian embassy in Stockholm did not have the capacity to provide the necessary documents, so their embassy in the UK had to help. Others said that they had to go to Stockholm and get the documents without the help of IOM. For those with a passport, they could go as soon as the air tickets were booked or (if they had worked and paid taxes in Norway) as soon as things were settled with the tax office and their place of work.

Table 17. How well organised was the return journey?

Very well	Fairly well	Badly	Do not know
19	8	5	0

A majority of the interviewees were satisfied with the help they received during the return journey. They were content about the assistance given by IOM at the airport and in transit, and viewed the IOM officials as professional and efficient.

Among those who thought the return journey was badly organised, some complained about a lack of information from IOM about the problem of taking cash through customs and out of Norway; because of this, money was confiscated. Others, who were travelling with temporary travel documents, complained that IOM had not helped them when they could not get out of the airport for an overnight hotel, so they had to spend a whole night at the airport when their flight was delayed. Another returnee complained about a lack of respect from the IOM official helping the returnee at Gardermoen.

9.6 Reintegration starts at the airport: The first encounter with IOM/ARRA in country of origin

Table 18. Assistance at airport

Type of assistance	Medical assistance	Help through customs	Onward transportation to region of origin	Short stay at hotel
Frequency	0	0	0	0

None of the returnees received any assistance from IOM when they arrived at Bole international airport in Addis Ababa. Many did not ask for such assistance, either because they did not know about the possibility, or because they did not need it. Even a pregnant mother with one child did not ask for assistance, although she received help from flight attendants and airport personnel. This indicates that the returnees may not have had information about the availability of such assistance.

Table 19. Expenditure of cash grant/check received from IOM

Expenditure	Daily expenses	Investment in business/education	Pay debts	Hosting guests	“Nothing special”	Other
Frequency	27	3	1	0	0	1

After arriving in Addis, the returnees had been told by IOM in Oslo to go to the local IOM office close to the international airport. The local IOM was assigned to distribute the cash grant of NOK 15,000. A large majority of the interviewed returnees were happy about the procedures for receiving the cash grant. They described IOM as efficient; many received the grant the day they arrived or as soon as they went to the IOM office.

A majority of the returnees interviewed used the cash grant for daily expenses.

Table 20. Cited importance of money received at arrival

Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Do not know
13	16	3	0

A majority of the returnees also valued the money as relatively important. Still, when they talked further about the importance of the grant, many complained about how little they were able to get for the amount (due to conversion rates) and how expensive everything was in Addis Ababa (due to inflation). Still, they related that what they received was better than nothing. The relative importance of the cash grant contrasts with statements of motivations for return – where the return assistance is quoted as less important for the decision to go back. This may indicate that returnees do not want to present themselves as driven by money, but that in actuality they are highly concerned with the amounts they receive.

9.7 Reintegration assistance after the first meeting

The Ethiopian reintegration programme includes a cash grant of NOK 15,000, in-kind support for the value of NOK 30,000 and NOK 26,000 in Returnee Community Assistance Programme (RCAP) support for each returnee. The RCAP is aiming at assisting local communities with providing improved infrastructure, health and education services rather than providing individual support to returnees. The returnees had three options for the in-kind support: business, education or employment. Before the ARRA project office became operational – that is, from January 2013 to April 2013 – 22 people returned through the programme. While the returnees got the first cash grant from IOM, they were angry because of delay in receiving the in-kind support and asked both IOM and ARRA for it. The programme’s steering committee – comprised of representatives of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Norwegian embassy in Addis Ababa (representing the Norwegian MFA), the National Security Services (NISS), the Ethiopian immigration authority and ARRA itself – deliberated about the delay and decided that those returnees who came before the project office became operational should be given in-kind support of NOK 30,000 without a business plan. These returnees also demanded provision of the NOK 26,000 that had been allocated for the RCAP. In response, the steering committee decided that those migrants who were successful in setting up businesses using the in-kind support would be provided the RCAP grant. As of today, 15 out of the 56 people eligible to receive the RCAP grant directly have collected the RCAP money. In short, the first returnees received most of their support in cash (NOK 45,000), and the minority that also received the RCAP grant received a large sum of NOK 71,000 in cash.

Table 22. Processing time from stated preference of support until it was received

Time period	>1 month	1–2 months	3–6 months	≥6 months
Frequency	10	8	13	1

For the largest group of interviewed returnees, it took 3 to 6 months to receive the support. This was mainly due to delays in establishing the ARRA project office in the beginning. For those early returnees who came before ARRA was established, they got grants without needing a business plan. For others, it took time to gather and submit the documents necessary for receiving the support, and many in this category complained about a bureaucratic process that took too long and required them to go back and forth to the ARRA office over a long period of time to actually get the support, for which they had to pay travel expenses from their own pockets. The support was distributed in the Ethiopian currency, birr (ETB), according to the exchange rate to NOK on the day of handover. In periods where the exchange rate declined, the waiting time actually reduced the value of the support quite dramatically. One of the returnees, who waited 4 months for the in-kind support in 2014, claimed to have lost ETB 12,000 because of the NOK's devaluation during the waiting period.⁴¹

9.8 Business

Thirty-one out of the 32 interviewed returnees chose the business option for the in-kind support. In order to receive this, they each prepared a business plan and acquired the relevant contracts or licences for running the business. For those who returned before ARRA was established, however, a business plan was not required. The project office claimed that it advised and assisted the returnees about the types of businesses they could set up with the money they were provided by the in-kind support. For instance, if a returnee wished to start a retail shop, the project office would pay for rental of the house, after the rental contract had been authenticated through documentation and by the government's authentication office. The project office also purchased furniture after the returnee supplied three pro forma invoices. The remaining money would then be given to the returnee in cash, so that he or she could purchase the merchandise that would be sold in the shop. If the returnee were to buy a share in an established business, the contract (agreement) would need to be authenticated by the government office responsible for authentication of contracts. After ensuring the validity of the contract, the project office would issue the payment.

Because of the financial difficulty of renting a house for a small business and the relatively small amount of money provided through the in-kind scheme (particularly in Addis Ababa where rentals prices have significantly increased), the majority of the returnees appear to have chosen to engage in providing transportation services rather than opening shops. They used the in-kind support to purchase small taxis or *bajaj* motor vehicles (three-wheeled taxi rickshaws). The second largest group bought shares in already established businesses (retail shops, beauty salon, printing press, dairy shop). A minority started their own businesses, including a laundry, an internet café and a poultry farm.

⁴¹ While none of the returnees said they had been warned about the decline in the value of Norwegian kroner, UDI explained that IOM Oslo has informed returnees about the declining exchange rate and its consequences for the size of the grant.

Table 23. Characteristics of businesses

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Did you have any own savings you could use for business investment?	4	27	1
Do you have a business partnership?	10	21	1
Does the business give a steady and sufficient income?	3	22	7 (too early to tell)
Is the business still operative?	17	12	3

For the majority of the interviewed returnees, the businesses they started with the help of the reintegration support did not provide what they themselves defined as a steady and sufficient income. From the table below, it appears that all of the businesses that closed operated for a very short period of time. Table 35 below shows, however, that a majority of the returnees were employed at the time of interview. This indicates that they were able to get jobs through other or additional means than the return assistance.

Table 24. How long were businesses operative, if closed at time of interview?

Time period	1–3 months	4 months	5 months	6 months	7–9 months	10–12 months	≥12 months
Frequency	8	0	0	3	0	0	0

The short period of operation could be an indication that many simply received the support without opening any business at all. Quite a few told us that they never actually started a business, but registered a business plan with the ARRA project office in order to receive the amount of the in-kind support or were among the returnees who came before the project office was there and received the whole amount in cash. Many of those who never started up the business were those who bought a taxi or a *bajaj* and then sold it immediately to use the money for other purposes: “I submitted a plan to buy a *bajaj*. That was to meet the formality. I never used the money for business, but for job searching.” Others bought a share in a family business, but did not actually invest in the company: “I submitted a random proposal just to get the money: a share in a family shoe shop. They [ARRA] told me that I should do this, even if I said that I was not interested in the business, only the money.” There is however no evidence of systematic encouragement from ARRA’s side for returnees to engage in pro forma projects to obtain money. Still, the fact that the success of return assistance is measured by the number of people receiving the support may act as an impetus for ARRA to push for projects that facilitate a swift distribution process. Those who were initially committed to starting a taxi business appear to have found themselves in a vulnerable market. Many reported that due to lack of knowledge they had bought vehicles of poor quality that soon broke down or were damaged in car accidents, despite the fact that ARRA said that they had helped them in checking the technical quality of the vehicle.

The characteristics of those businesses that survived and provided returnees with a steady and sufficient income were that the returnee had savings in addition to the support, invested in an already well-functioning business and/or was able to use his or her own property for the business and did not have to pay rents, for example, this fellow: “I put the money into an already well-functioning family car import business. I had about 100,000 kroner in savings in addition the support. For others who do not have networks and such options, the money is not enough.” This illustrates that the ability to re-integrate and fit into the first category of returnees – those who are provided a sustainable return – is highly dependent on social and economic networks.

Complaints about the bureaucratic process and the assistance provided by the ARRA project office were rather common among the interviewed returnees. For example, those who wanted to get the support to buy a taxi first had to get an ownership licence, which in practice meant they had to borrow money from elsewhere to buy the taxi, then get the support to pay back the loan. Others said they did not want to criticise the ARRA office itself, but the procedures it used: “It should be easier to get support. Although ARRA received me well and seemed interested in my wellbeing, they were too bureaucratic. We should be allowed to consider/try several options before we decide which business to invest in. With the focus on all these legal procedures and documents required, this is not possible” (interview with a former civil servant in Ethiopia prior to his migration to Norway who became a poultry farmer upon his return to Ethiopia).

9.9 Employment

None of the returnees to Ethiopia chose the employment option. Some claimed that they were not aware of it, but would have chosen it if they had known. It appears that ARRA, as well as IOM Oslo, should have provided better information about this choice.

9.10 Education

Only one of the interviewed returnees chose the education option. He was one of the first returnees after the return agreement was signed (April 2012). ARRA was not established at that time, so the IOM took care of distributing the first and second instalments, both in cash. When ARRA was established, it spent the RCAP money of NOK 26,000 to cover laboratory costs for the returnee’s MSc course at Addis Ababa University. ARRA informed us that several others not among those interviewed also had used the return assistance for education.

9.11 Reintegration assistance for the vulnerable

None of the interviewed Ethiopians received housing assistance or were even aware of the existence of such a support opportunity. The MoU between ARRA and UDI states that children and vulnerable groups are eligible for reintegration assistance, both in cash and in-kind. Although it also states that adequate reintegration measures will be made available, the MoU itself does not specify the arrangements for these groups. ARRA officials told us that an individual with children will receive the normal support for him or herself. His or her child will also get the normal cash and in-kind support, plus an additional amount of NOK 10,000. The extra child grant is distributed by IOM, independent of the parents’ business proposal. The one returnee interviewed who came with a child received the additional cash and in-kind support for the child.

9.12 The Returnee Community Assistance Programme (RCAP)

The RCAP is unique to the Ethiopian reintegration programme and has proved to be difficult to administer. The head of the ARRA project office explained that the idea of RCAP is to provide some support to the community to which the migrant is returning. It may also help the migrant to establish a good relationship with members of his community. In particular, it could help the returnee to overcome the potential shame and stigma of returning from abroad. But, according to the ARRA official, the money allocated for this programme is too small to make an impact – NOK 26,000. It is inconceivable what type of meaningful community development work could be done with such a small amount, particularly in large cities like Addis Ababa, the official maintained. So, he explained, “We had a big challenge in the implementation of this aspect of the programme.”

Another challenge with the RCAP fund is that the criteria for distribution have been changed twice since the start of the reintegration programme, creating uncertainty and frustration both for ARRA and the returnees. As mentioned above, the RCAP money was given to a selected group of returnees who returned before April 2013, on the basis of receiving and utilising the in-kind support. This was not in accordance with the intention of the fund, as it did not benefit those returnees' communities. But the practice came as a result of the delay in establishing the ARRA project office and the lack of apparatus to follow up on implementation of the RCAP. After its establishment, the project office agreed with the UDI that the RCAP money should be dedicated to local projects within Addis Ababa. Thus, instead of spreading the NOK 26,000 among all the returnees' communities, they decided to pool the money into one pot, choosing projects within the three sectors of education, water and health, which could benefit low income people at the grassroots levels. The project office approached three different NGOs that had good reputations in delivering services to local communities in Addis Ababa and asked them to submit project proposals. An NGO called Developing Families Together was chosen for the educational component. The NGO constructed a library for a public elementary school in the Yeka subcity of Addis Ababa. The total amount of money used for the construction of the library was ETB 2.3 million birr (approximately NOK 1 million). ARRA's library project was accepted by UDI in February 2014, and the library was finalised in March 2015.

Another project suggested by ARRA included support for the construction of health clinics in six regions around Ethiopia. It was also accepted by UDI, but was stopped when a majority of the steering committee for the return programme decided that distribution of the RCAP should be halted. The Ethiopian MFA and NISS argued that the RCAP money should be used on small-scale projects in the returnees' communities, rather than on larger projects. The Norwegian Ministry of Justice, however, claimed that small-scale projects proved too difficult to administer, and in urban areas like Addis Ababa, small projects would have little impact in the communities. Due to the disagreement, no RCAP support has been transferred to ARRA since March 2015, and as of September 2015 UDI and ARRA are still awaiting a new decision from the steering committee on the use of RCAP funds.

Several returnees raised the changing criteria for the provision of the RCAP money as a concern. A number of the interviewees who returned after establishment of the project office expressed that IOM Oslo had promised that they would personally receive the additional NOK 26,000 as cash. One returnee asserted, "The issue of the 26,000 Norwegian kroner should be solved. It was promised by IOM in Oslo, but rejected by ARRA." Another returnee argued that the IOM had told him that the RCAP funds would be donated to a charity or to the community of the returnee's choice, "but this did not happen, and the ARRA did not say anything." Yet another pointed out that the RCAP fund was only being used for projects in Addis Ababa, rather than benefitting returnees who settled outside the capital:

The IOM in Oslo did not give me the right information. They told me that there would be three instalments: 15,000 [cash], 30,000 [in-kind] and 26,000, which the IOM told me would be for community development. This last amount was never given, and it appeared later that it was only for Addis Ababa.

Another returnee related that IOM in Oslo promised that returnees would get 26,000 NOK if they were engaged in a business that was benefitting the community. But this did not happen.

The various interpretations of the objectives of the RCAP money may not reflect the actual information that returnees received from IOM and ARRA, but they do illustrate the problem of unclear and changing policies in the distribution of funds and how easily this problem can create frustration, misinterpretation and irritation for all parties involved. Still, the issues raised about the use of RCAP money in the interviews actually led some of the returnees to contact the ARRA project office again after our interviews to enquire about the status of a decision about the use of these funds. We were told in the aftermath that this caused some irritation among project officials, who suspected the evaluation team

(the authors of this report) of inciting the returnees to nag them about the RCAP funds, which was not the case. In the aftermath of our interviews with the returnees, we were told that IOM Oslo had actually distributed a form to every returnee, informing them that those who returned after the ARRA project office was established could no longer individually receive RCAP funds. This form, which had to be signed and returned by each returnee, specifically indicated that the RCAP was not a form of personal support.

9.13 Actor assessment

The returnees' assessment of actors involved include three different institutions: IOM in Oslo, IOM in Addis Ababa and the ARRA project office in Addis Ababa. Unlike the other reintegration projects in this report, IOM in the country of origin (Ethiopia) had a small role, limited to the distribution of cash grants after arrival. A substantial number of the interviewees therefore did not provide any assessment of IOM in Ethiopia (see tables 32 and 33).

Table 30. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Norway by activity (6 is best)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know
Total frequency	2	1	4	7	7	10	1
Frequency among the inactive	0	0	1	1	1	2	0
Frequency among the active	2	1	3	6	6	8	1

(inactive = currently unemployed and not studying, active = currently employed or studying)

Table 31. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Norway by education

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know
Total frequency	2	1	4	7	7	10	1
Frequency among those with low education	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
Frequency among those with high education	2	1	4	7	5	9	1

(low education = either no education or primary education only, high education = high school or higher)

Of those who gave IOM in Oslo a low rank, some complained that IOM did not really support them in the issuance of travel documents. One stated that he covered the expenses of travelling from Bergen to Stockholm, where there is an Ethiopian embassy, while IOM only paid the costs of travelling from Bergen to Addis Ababa. Others stated that IOM did not give them detailed information about what in-kind support meant and what was required in order to be entitled to the support. The controversy about the RCAP and the apparent variety of information about this programme from IOM in Oslo shows how important it is that this IOM office is informed about policy changes in Ethiopia, so that it can provide correct information about the support available at each moment.

Still, the large majority of the interviewed returnees were happy about IOM's assistance in Oslo, saying that the IOM officials there were helpful with both practical and psychological support. This underlines the importance of pre-departure activities in Norway also including case-by-case counselling not only about the assisted return package but also about the returnees' future plans.

As mentioned above, the minimal role of IOM in Addis Ababa made many people hesitant to grade its performance in relation to the reintegration programme, thereby increasing the number in the “did not respond / did not know” category in the tables below.

Table 33. Respondents’ assessment of IOM in Ethiopia by activity (6 is best)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know
Total frequency	0	0	2	3	1	13	13
Frequency among the inactive	0	0	0	2	0	4	0
Frequency among the active	0	0	2	1	1	9	13

(inactive = unemployed and not studying, active = employed or studying)

Table 34. Respondents’ assessment of IOM in Ethiopia by education

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Total frequency	0	0	2	3	1	13	13	4.1 = 4
Frequency among those with low education	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
Frequency among those with high education	0	0	2	5	2	12	12	3.9 = 4

(low education = either no education or primary education only, high education = high school or higher)

Overall, the returnees who answered were happy about the performance of IOM in Addis Ababa and perceived it to be quick and efficient in its services, independent of the returnees’ education and level of activity.

The most important actor in the reintegration programme in Ethiopia is no doubt the project office for the reintegration of returnees from Norway at ARRA. This office is responsible for distributing the in-kind support and the RCAP funds and is UDI’s counterpart in Ethiopia. The assessment of ARRA varied greatly, both among different education and activity groups. The number of individuals in each group that were very positive (grade 6), very negative (grade 1) and in the middle (grade 4) was almost equal.

Table 42. Respondents’ assessment of ARRA by activity (6 is best)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Do not know / before ARRA
Total frequency	7	1	4	8	1	8	3
Frequency among the inactive	3	0	0	2	0	2	1
Frequency among the active	4	1	4	6	2	6	2

(inactive = unemployed and not studying, active = employed or studying)

Table 43. Respondents' assessment of ARRA by education

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Do not know / before ARRA
Total frequency	7	1	4	8	1	8	3
Frequency among those with low education	0	0	0	2	0	0	1
Frequency among those with high education	7	1	4	6	1	8	3

(low education = either no education or primary education only, high education = high school or higher)

Among those who appreciated the contribution of ARRA, many said that the officials were efficient, friendly and showed they cared for the returnees. Although many of the positive returnees also were those who had succeeded in their business or had an already established family business, there were also unsuccessful ones among those who were positive. One individual said, "I told them that I sold my taxi. So they helped me to write an introduction letter to the government authorities to introduce me as a returnee, to help me apply for governmental micro enterprises support."

Those in the middle who gave ARRA grade 3 or 4 acknowledged ARRA for distributing the allocated funds, but argued that ARRA should have had a more active advisory role. Some of them pointed out that the project office should also have followed up and monitored the returnees' business, not only requiring the initial business plan but also giving them guidance after the support was received. For example, one returnee explained, "It is very hard to start a business for those without a network or an own place to stay. So a closer follow up and advice is needed. When people are returning, they cannot reclaim their positions but have to start from scratch. So more individual follow up is needed."

The request for follow up contradicts, however, with the experience ARRA said it has had with many of the returnees, who have been hesitant to stay in touch with the project office after receiving the support. This may indicate that the returnees who say that they want a closer follow up have not communicated this to ARRA. The ARRA project officials confirmed that there was poor communication between the project office and the returnees. The officials explained that many of the returnees did not like to interact with the project office once they had collected the money – and it was difficult even to reach them on the phone. They asserted that some returnees were emotionally unstable after staying a long time in Norway without working, and it was very difficult for them to cope with the challenges of life in Ethiopia. This could be one reason for not wanting to stay in touch. In addition to this, the general Ethiopian suspicion towards government authorities, of which ARRA is a part, could also be a reason for avoiding the project office.

There were two different groups among the returnees who were negative about the ARRA project office's performance. Individuals in one group complained about problems the office had starting up, including the time it took them to receive the support and the hesitancy with which officials carried out their job. They complained, "They were not proactive. They always postpone things. They would say, 'Let us ask.'" Individuals from the other negative group said the project office's officials and procedures were too bureaucratic, for example, "The project office has not been cooperative and willing to support us from the very beginning. They didn't communicate well and do not have any good relationships with other relevant government departments." Others complained, "The officials at ARRA lack respect and are too bureaucratic. I was about to leave and not to take the support because of this."

When asked about whether it made any difference that it was a government institution like ARRA and not an NGO like IOM that was responsible for the reintegration, the answers were not clear-cut. In one

way, it could be expected that the returnees saw it as an advantage that reintegration was done by a government body, as such an institution may have better access to government support or employment schemes. But several returnees, as indicated above, were not happy about ARRA's role in facilitating a relationship between returnees and other government offices, particularly on the issue of jobs: "ARRA should have told me about the job placement option. I chose to buy a *bajaj*, [a three-wheeled taxi] but sold it quickly. What I need now is help to get a job." Others said that the programme "should have been tied to a place of work, arranged with the government."

On the other hand, one could expect that some returnees would have expressed suspicion towards ARRA, due to the fact that it was a part of the same government apparatus that they claimed to have escaped from when they applied for asylum in Norway. Both returnees and officials at IOM and ARRA agreed that if the government really wanted to control the returnees, they could have done this in any organisation, governmental or not. So for this matter, it was not important that ARRA was a governmental body. The indifference to the question of involvement with government bodies may, however, also have been an outcome of self-censorship among the returnees. Being used to a government that monitored political activities and opinions, it is likely that the interviewees were hesitant to criticise the government in a research interview. It should also be noted that none of the returnees reported any political persecution after their arrival in Ethiopia, an indication that they were not currently considered to be problematic or dangerous by the regime, or that they knew how to behave in order to avoid negative attention from authorities after their return. For other potential returnees, who still are in Norway and who fear persecution, it would probably matter a lot that ARRA is a part of the government, and ARRA's role is likely to boost the credibility and legitimacy of the argument in the diaspora that return to Ethiopia is unsafe. As seen from the table below, the majority of the returnees thought that information provided about the return programme was accurate.

Table 35. Was the information about the return programme in Norway accurate?

Yes	No	Partly	Did not respond / did not know
17	6	9	0

Still, a substantial group of the interviewees thought the information could have been more accurate, particularly regarding the nature of the available support and the process they had to go through to get it.⁴²

Table 44. How was the information inaccurate (asked in Ethiopia) (multiple answers allowed)?

The whole process was more complex than I was told	3
They gave incorrect information about RCAP	6
They should have provided more information about the in-kind support	1
They should have provided me with more information about businesses and life in general when returning	1
They did not inform about the delays in the establishment of ARRA	2
They promised that ARRA would provide mentorship for businesses, but they didn't	1

Although members of the largest group were satisfied with the accuracy of the information that they received in Norway, a majority of them experienced a worse situation upon return than they had

⁴² Officials at the IOM office in Oslo also reported that they had difficulties in getting information about the ARRA project, as well as getting information materials on the programme. They claimed to have raised this with UDI.

expected when they left Norway. This shows how difficult it is to prepare returnees for what is to come, and the unpredictability that accompanies a return, but it also underlines again the importance of providing thorough and individual counselling pre-departure.

For those who invested savings in family businesses and had maintained a large economic and social network in Ethiopia, it was easier to benefit upon their return from the increased economic opportunities that have opened up in Ethiopia during the last decade. For others, Ethiopia's flaring inflation during the same period diminished the value of the support.

Table 36. Is your personal situation after return very different from what you had expected?

No	7
Yes, better	5
Yes, worse	19
Did not respond / did not know	1

The challenging economic situation (particularly in Addis Ababa) had a great effect on how people viewed their situation after return, adding to the feeling of stigma and shame:

When I left Ethiopia, I had money to buy a house; now I have nothing. The money that I got through the programme has no value here. I have no hassle, but I lost a lot. I feel very ashamed and sad. I have no car and no house. Every day I have to deal with the question of why I returned. [man who sold his taxi immediately after buying it]

Many thought they would be able to do more with the support. For example, one returnee explained,

The living costs are high, so the money did not last as long as I had hoped for. The money for reintegration support is not enough. A major problem is housing in Addis Ababa, where the rents are so high. We are forced to use some of the support also for housing.⁴³

Although none of the interviewees reported political problems after return, many stressed that they deliberately avoided certain networks or political activities in order to avoid problems. Self-censorship seems, therefore, to be an important part of survival. One person explained, "I have to be careful to avoid old networks connected to my previous government job. People may suspect me of having other aims, and they are scared." Others also connected economic and political limitations in their lives to each other:

When I came back, I had dark thoughts about my own personal security and in the country as a whole. The country has been modernised and developed, but there are strange things happening behind the façade. The economy is controlled by one group, and there is corruption, so it is difficult to make business. But I have to keep my mouth shut to avoid problems. [man with family business waiting for family reunion in Norway]

⁴³ Unlike the other programmes in this evaluation, the Ethiopian reintegration package does not have any support for housing.

Table 45. Type of activity at time of interview

Activity	Number
Unemployed	4
Full-time employment	23
Part time employment	2
Not yet started the business (recent returnee)	3
Student	0

Despite the fact that a majority felt that the situation was worse than they had expected after return, more than two-thirds of the interviewees had full-time employment at the time of the interview. But many of these had not gained employment from businesses established with the help of the reintegration programme – as 17 of the 31 businesses that had gained in-kind support were not in operation (see table 24 above). This may indicate that the reintegration support all in all plays a smaller role in the returnees' lives than what might have been anticipated, or that it may act as an indirect contribution to reintegration in a transition period, while looking for other sources of income or employment.

9.14 Present situation and future

Table 37. Will you remain where you live now or go somewhere else?

Remain here	Go somewhere else	Do not know
22	8	2

Two-thirds of the interviewed returnees said that they wanted to remain in Ethiopia and had no plans for re-migration. This may not be representative of general re-migration patterns in Ethiopia, however, as we know that many Ethiopians (particularly those who go to the Middle East) make several migration journeys throughout their lives. The group of migrants that go to Europe, as mentioned above, is a relatively resource strong group, capable of paying high amounts of money for visas and for the journey itself. Accordingly, for most of them, it would be very costly to do such a journey again. A common answer to the question about the possibility of re-migration was “I have no money to migrate again,” indicating involuntary immobility rather than sustainable return. Relating this to the overall picture of the interviewees – that a majority of them actually have employment – still proves that most of them were able to reintegrate, although their aspirations varied.

Of the 8 returnees who said they were going somewhere else, 4 were waiting to go back to Europe to reunite with family there. They fall within the fourth category of types of returnees – those who do not aspire for reintegration and are able to re-migrate, and therefore would invest minimally in establishing themselves in Ethiopia while waiting to re-migrate. One returnee said that he wanted to go out of the country for work, but that he wanted “to follow the legal procedures this time.”

Table 38. Re-migration plans among those who have a friend/relative who has left after their return.

Remain here	Go somewhere else	Do not know
7	4	1

Only half of the interviewees had friends or family who had migrated since their return, and of these, 4 wanted to re-migrate. The relatively low number of family and friends who have migrated since the interviewees returned probably relates to the fact that most of the interviewees had been in Ethiopia for a relatively short period of time. The numbers in the table above make it difficult to conclude anything about peer pressure on the returnees to re-migrate.

As indicated above, the majority of the returnees were fully employed at the time of the interview, even though the majority of the businesses set up with the assistance of in-kind support were not operating. In other words, most returnees had managed to find employment independent of the reintegration programme. In the table below, we may find the answer to why: most saw assistance through the programme as insufficient to sustain a livelihood – and therefore had to use other means and networks to get an income.

Table 39. Is the programme seen to allow for a sustained stay?

No	Yes	Did not respond / did not know
27	4	1

For those who agreed that the programme allowed for what they themselves defined as a sustained stay, the main reason was that they invested in an already established business through business shares. Many of these interviewees argued, however, “If I didn’t already have a family business, the support would have been completely useless.” Others who managed to create a sustained stay were those who collected the largest cash amount of NOK 71,000 before the ARRA project office was established in 2013. A 2012 returnee explained, “I have now a regular income. I also collected the 26,000 crown RCAP fund.”

The large majority of the interviewees claimed that the amount they received as reintegration assistance was too small and had not been adjusted to the increasing inflation levels in Ethiopia – and particularly the growing prices of home and office rental in the capital. Many therefore had to use most of the support for renting a home or office, instead of investing in the business. One interviewee reflected, “If the programme could pay the rent for a limited period of time, it would be possible for people to focus on establishing businesses properly.” This suggests that it may be worth considering a housing allowance as part of the reintegration package offered in Ethiopia. The provision of a housing allowance especially for those without a network to rely on may provide them with what is needed to sustain the a new life after coming back – reducing the number of unsustainable returns.

Another issue raised was the lack of collaboration between the ARRA project office and job creation initiatives in other government offices, a collaboration that could have increased the chance of a sustained stay for those who were searching for employment. Some suggested that the project office should collaborate with the government to promote the establishment of cooperatives by the returnees, while others argued that the office should be more proactive in coordinating with already existing government support schemes for micro and small enterprises. The project office has apparently tried to approach other government offices with the aim of helping returnees connect to such initiatives and schemes, but, according to the officials, has had little response from other offices. One explanation for this is that returnees from Norway are seen as a relatively privileged group that does not need specific support – as compared to returnees from the Middle East (many who are abused domestic workers) and South Africa (a group that includes victims of xenophobic violence). Project officials also underlined that many returnees were negative to engaging with ARRA after receiving the support – and had little interest in getting information about government schemes.

Table 40. Biggest advantage of the programme (multiple answers allowed)

Type of advantage	Frequency
To come back once asylum was no longer possible	13
To avoid forced return with the police	2
To get the cash support	10
To get the non-cash support (i.e., the in-kind assistance)	7

There is no advantage	2
Other	10
Did not respond / not applicable	0

More than half of the interviewed returnees (17 of the 32) saw either the cash or the in-kind support as the biggest advantage of the reintegration programme, with more than half of them favouring the cash support. This probably links up with their overall assessment of the ARRA project office's distribution of in-kind support as being too bureaucratic, which caused impatience among returnees.

Still, the most single important advantage of the programme was that it made it possible for interviewees to come back once asylum was no longer possible. This could be linked to reasons for the return, and the fact that many returnees saw return as the only viable solution to the lack of opportunity to work and learn in Norway. As seen above, only a small minority decided to return because of the reintegration support. Instead, they decided to return because they could not stand being idle in reception centres and saw the support only as an additional benefit.

The 2 returnees citing "avoiding forced return" as the biggest advantage returned in 2012, the same year as the readmission agreement was signed and hotly disputed in the Norwegian media. This may indicate that the media coverage in Norway had an impact on the way they perceived the programme and their reasons for return.

A large part of the "other" category in the table above responded that the biggest advantage of the programme was to be able to return to their country of origin, join family and relatives and resume a normal life. Because they missed their families in Ethiopia, some argued that they would have returned without the reintegration support, and even if they had received a favourable decision on their asylum applications.

Table 41. Do you advise or recommend your friends in Norway to return through assisted return programmes?

Yes	No	Depends
13	9	10

The feeling of being psychologically displaced while in Norway also influenced the returnees' answers about whether they would recommend that friends and family return through the assisted return programme. Almost one-third of the interviewees answered that they would recommend assisted return – essentially because they saw no point of staying in Norway with no work or education opportunities and away from family and friends. One said, "I would recommend return, not because of the reintegration support, but because there is no reason to stay in Norway once asylum is rejected." This feeling also overpowered the feeling of loss interviewees may have felt returning as unsuccessful migrants, as one explained: "I fear that they will face the same fate as me – returning empty handed. But it is still better than to become mad in Norway, without residence or work permit, staying illegally, and in addition, Ethiopians do not trust each other in Norway."

The use of the word "empty handed" may in this context mean that the returned came back without having improved his or her life as initially hoped for, rather than claiming that the support the returnee had received was equal to nothing. The Norwegian assistance to Ethiopian returnees is among the most generous of the return programmes in Ethiopia, and the amount given equals several months of salary for an average government employee in Ethiopia. Still, among those who would not have recommended return through the programme, the majority cited the insufficient support given. They typically argued that "as returnees cannot be settled with this support, I don't advise them to come back." Others added

that the stigma of coming home empty handed also made them advise others against going back to their country of origin:

The money that we get is no argument to come. It is insufficient. People must have a family network in order to manage. It is very difficult to live in a camp in Norway. But if you come here without money, it is even worse. The programme must prevent people coming back home without dignity. People here will have bad thoughts about him, and he may be isolated.

Among those who answered “it depends,” some mentioned the political situation of the returnee – if the potential returnee had good reasons to fear political persecution when returning, he or she should not return at all. It was, however, apparent that many of the returnees had not discussed their decision to return with fellow Ethiopians in Norway, due to the politicised nature of the diaspora, as described by the following statement: “Many asylum seekers in Norway are afraid of each other, and they do not talk the reality. I didn’t tell anyone about my decision to return before I left Norway.” Others also linked this to the sense of failure while returning:

Many people paid a lot to get to Norway, and these costs are not comparable to the amount of the return assistance. There are also high social costs of return – giving people a sense of failure. My decision to return was a shock to many of my Ethiopian friends in Norway. They thought I was a spy [for the Ethiopian government], and they did not want to talk to me.

Others in the “it depends” group were concerned with the nature of the support in Ethiopia and said that the assistance needed to be improved if they were to recommend that others use it. The improvements suggested included better follow up and monitoring of returnees after they had received the support and better coordination with the Ethiopian government, in particular, efforts to link the in-kind support with government programmes for small and micro enterprises.

9.15 Families, children and gender

In the data collection for this evaluation, we only succeeded in getting interviews with 2 women, one of them with children, upon return. The latter was a mother of 2 who gave birth to one child in Norway and one upon her arrival back in Ethiopia. Her partner has a residence permit in Norway, so she awaits family reunion. Her major motivation for applying for return was to avoid being separated from her children if she was forced out. The only support she received was the extra NOK 55,000 for the child born in Norway. Her child has special health needs (asthma), which she has not received any help for. She was currently at home, looking after her children. The other woman returned in 2012, before the project office was established and therefore received the full amount possible in cash. She was also among those selected for the individual RCAP fund of NOK 26,000 and therefore had a good amount of capital for starting her business. The 2 cases probably do not represent a general pattern of female returnees or returnees with children, so it is difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of the reintegration programme on these groups based on the findings in this report.

9.16 Conclusions

What can we learn from the Ethiopian model of reintegration assistance?

Most importantly, the use of a governmental office to take care of its returnees may have advantages, but these advantages do not seem to have been sufficiently exploited in the Ethiopian context. Many returnees complained about the lack of advice and follow up from the ARRA project office, as well as

of little effort to facilitate contact with other government offices that could help returnees secure employment and other opportunities when returning to Ethiopia. The project officials, however, claimed that the majority of the returnees were not interested in keeping in touch with them after receiving the support and that their initiatives to connect returnees to other government offices were not received well by the returnees. Although the project office officials claimed to have made efforts in this regard, more should be done to systematically approach, for example, authorities working on job creation or working with micro and small enterprises in order to include returnees in programmes in these areas. This also requires a positive attitude from the relevant authorities to help the returnees. As many of the returnees appear to have used part of the support for housing rental and day to day expenses, the provision of a housing allowance for those who lack social and economic networks when returning may also contribute to making currently unsustainable returns sustainable.

The labour division between two kinds of organisations in the reintegration process, IOM in Oslo and ARRA in Addis Ababa, has also proved to be a challenge to the consistency of the programme. IOM in Oslo has not managed to keep itself updated about policy changes on the Ethiopian side, while ARRA, in cooperation with UDI, has not sufficiently informed IOM in Oslo about policy changes or – more likely – has actually lacked clear policies regarding how it should communicate to IOM, as illustrated by the controversy around the RCAP funds. These communication gaps demonstrate that the model of having two different organisations in charge, one in the country of return and one in country of origin, increases the risks of bureaucratic fragmentation.

Is it a problem that ARRA is governmental and not independent? Few returnees suggested that this is a problem. Although some complained about the inefficiency and bureaucracy of the office, the majority did not seem bothered about the potential political implications of dealing with a governmental body, or at least they did not want to express this in an interview situation. For the most part, they concluded that if the government wanted to control and persecute returnees, it could do so through an independent organisation just as easily as through a government body. This suggests that the returnees are aware of the control capacities of the Ethiopian government, even through NGOs. For potential returnees in Norway, however, who in many cases are part of a polarised and highly government critical diaspora community, the role of a government organisation in reintegration may have a negative impact upon their decision to return. Even though they may know that the Ethiopian government is also able to control an independent organisation like IOM, and that the difference between a governmental and an independent organisation in practice may not be substantial, ARRA's role may add fuel to the argument of the Ethiopian diaspora that return is unsafe. In the end, this also may make it more difficult for Ethiopians who have signed up for assisted return be open about their decision to go back to Ethiopia when talking with their compatriots.

9.17 Recommendations

For IOM

- IOM in Norway should maintain and strengthen its individual counselling of returnees, including discussing with them their plans to cover individual living costs, in addition to providing information about different kinds of support.
- IOM in Norway should make sure returnees are correctly informed about all practical aspects of their return journey, including what they can specifically expect from IOM before and during the return journey.
- Together with IOM in Ethiopia, IOM in Norway should continue making efforts in facilitating Skype conversations between returnees in Ethiopia and potential returnees in Norway and

ensure that both the returnees and the potential returnees once again understand that these conversations are completely confidential.

For ARRA in Ethiopia

- The ARRA project office should increase its efforts to inform returnees about the options of education and employment, in addition to the business option. This will enlarge the returnees' real choices and may lead more returnees to opt for solutions that are more likely to lead to permanent employment and/or capacity building than the business option.
- ARRA should increase its efforts to facilitate contact between returnees and other government offices dealing with job creation and micro and small enterprises. As well, the project office should continue informing returnees about possible government schemes for investment and employment.
- The ARRA project office should make sure that the procedures for acquiring in-kind support are transparent and apparent to all returnees, independent of status or behaviour. This will enhance the credibility and legitimacy of the office and make returnees less suspicious of possible misconduct or unfairness in the distribution of support.

For the Steering Committee and UDI

- The steering committee should agree on how to use the RCAP funds as soon as possible. When agreed, UDI should communicate this clearly to IOM in Norway, to returnees arriving in Ethiopia and to potential returnees in Norway.
- The steering committee should consider providing an initial housing allowance to returnees who come back to Ethiopia without a family or other network of support. This will allow returnees to spend the cash/in-kind support according to the plans they have submitted to ARRA, rather than using this support to cover the increasing prices of rent in a growing, but highly inflation-ridden, economy like Ethiopia. One possibility would be to reallocate the RCAP support for a housing allowance. This solution serves two purposes: it will solve the controversy around the use of RCAP funding, and the reallocation will not increase the total support allocated through the Ethiopian return programme.

10. Kosovo

10.1 Introduction

Kosovo is included in the comparative evaluation as a European country of origin with a long history of asylum migration to Norway. It is also a country to which Norway has long returned migrants. One of the aims of including Kosovo in the comparative analysis is that UDI requested information about the respective merits of cash grants versus in-kind support with follow up and counselling. Kosovo is particularly interesting in this regard because UDI has found that the cash grant meant to incentivise return and facilitate reintegration has had the allegedly perverse effect of attracting asylum seekers to Norway. It was therefore decided on 19 July 2013 to no longer offer support for returns to Kosovo. Before this, during the 2010–2012 period, Norwegian immigration authorities handled 565 applications for asylum from persons from Kosovo, none of which were successful. In 2014, a year after the termination of the programme, the number of asylum applications from Kosovo dropped markedly.

Before the change of policy most Kosovars returned through the universal assisted return programme that is called Financial Support to Return (FSR). All of the FSR returnees interviewed here returned prior to the change of policy. In addition, those considered particularly vulnerable could return through the comparatively more generous vulnerable group (VG) programme, which offered in-kind support and follow-up. Individuals participating in both of these groups were interviewed, but they are mostly kept analytically distinct here, and when they are not it is made explicit in the text. While the two programmes differ, both are implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The evaluation of Kosovo is an evaluation of how well a cash grant works in general (and indicates how well the reintegration assistance works for the few VG returnees), but also how it has worked in the particular context of Kosovo and the extent to which data supports the suspicion of misuse. Moreover, there is a historical reason to include Kosovo in the analysis, as Kosovars were the first national group to be targeted by a return programme. This programme started out as a repatriation programme for persons granted temporary residence permits, akin to a similar practice with Bosnian refugees since the mid-1990s, and remained in effect under the same name when the permits were withdrawn (Brekke 2002). As today, return was incentivised and eventually combined with deportation to ensure a credible asylum policy. Also as at present, there was a suspicion among the Norwegian authorities that the economic incentives to return were misused by individuals who did not have a genuine need for protection.

10.2 Country background

A recent report from UNDP Kosovo examines migration dynamics to and from Kosovo and how they relate to the country's development. As in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, the recent history of migration from Kosovo has involved distinct "waves" and demographics (UNDP 2014, 30):

Migration from Kosovo has occurred in four waves since the 1960s. Initially, mostly young men sought better employment opportunities abroad. From 1989, the worsening political climate and growing unemployment among Kosovo-Albanians caused a larger exodus, mainly to Switzerland and Germany. During the 1998/1999 war, many individuals sought refuge in neighbouring countries and across Western Europe; a large share of these refugees returned to Kosovo after conditions stabilised. Since 2000, there has been a steady outflow of migrants in response to high unemployment and the lack of economic opportunities in Kosovo.

In other words, the driving force of emigration has changed. While conflict and state repression were central before, extreme poverty and a sense of hopelessness and disillusion with political elites are among the main drivers today. In addition, social networks with a huge diaspora in Europe, well-established since migrants started arriving in central Europe as guest workers in the 1960s, have facilitated emigration and make the option of emigration more visible. As in Iraqi Kurdistan, it seems legitimate to talk of a *culture of emigration*.

The practice of seeking asylum in Europe persists and occasionally continues to increase, although almost no one actually obtains asylum, and many return without it. The UNDP report cites IOM data that approximately 200,000 migrants returned to Kosovo during the 1999–2000 period, which is a staggering number given the country's population of only approximately 1.8 million. Among these, around half returned from Germany (42%) and Switzerland (17%). From the total number of returnees from Europe, 70% were forced to return.

Just before the start of fieldwork in Kosovo, a mass emigration of Kosovars to the EU through the Serbian–Austrian border had suddenly occurred. During the period from September 2014 to February 2015, almost 40,000 asylum applications from Kosovo were registered in Hungary and Germany alone.⁴⁴ The success rate of these has been almost zero. The sudden mass emigration has been commonly attributed to a combination of rumours concerning asylum opportunities, a lack of faith in Kosovo's future and the extreme poverty that is especially prevalent in rural parts of Kosovo.

Poverty is widespread throughout Kosovo. There has been little improvement in this in recent years, and few redistributive policies target social inequality. Estimates of poverty in absolute figures vary between 34 and 48%, and estimates of extreme poverty vary between 12 and 18%. The ethnic minorities Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (RAE) are believed to be particularly exposed to poverty (UNDP 2012). While the average monthly salary in the private sector in Kosovo is EUR 260 (UNDP 2011), it is below EUR 120 for RAE families (ECMI/K 2013).

Along with this structural driver of emigration is a combination of extant social networks, a culture of emigration, widespread socioeconomic destitution and the short geographical distance to European destination countries. In a recent report by Freedom House, Kosovo receives the lowest democracy score in the Balkan region and is classified as a “semi-consolidated authoritarian regime.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, Kosovo continues to be one of a very small number of European countries that is not yet part of the Schengen agreement. The impoverished population governed by a weak, young and resource-poor state is thus surrounded by models of European-style governance and living standards and populations in neighbouring countries that enjoy international and intra-Schengen mobility. All of these are structural challenges to the sustainable return of individuals to Kosovo and help explain why an FSR programme is only likely to have a very limited influence on return.

⁴⁴ For a regional perspective, see <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34173252>.

⁴⁵ See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2015/kosovo>.

10.3 Data and profile of respondents

Table 4. Types of data

Number of personal interviews with FSR returnees	Number of telephone interviews with FSR returnees	Number of personal interviews with VG returnees	Number of personal interviews with other returnees (3 forced and 1 repatriated)
10	3	5	4

The main source of data was the personal interviews, but there are complementing insights from the other interviews.

Only 1 respondent cited having special physical or mental needs, but did not offer any further detail. Four other respondents reported that a family member had such needs. Some of these were related to health and some seemed to be war trauma of a psychological nature.

Table 6. Gender distribution (FSR and VG returnees)

Number of male respondents	Number of female respondents
13	2

While there was a predominance of male interviewees, this also reflects the empirical reality that many more males return through the FSR programme.

Table 7. Age distribution (FSR and VG returnees)

Age	<20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	≥60
Number of Respondents	5	1	4	5	0	0

The age distribution is differently patterned than in the analysis of return to Iraqi Kurdistan, Afghanistan and Ethiopia because so many in this small sample were younger than 20. Three of those interviewed were just below 18 years of age at the time of interview (2 were 16, and 1 was 17), calculating approximately from year of birth. This is interesting for the analysis because it sheds light on IOM's follow up on the vulnerable group of underage minors. Note that this group was eligible for the vulnerable group (VG) programme. These are distinct programmes, but both are available to almost all national groups.

Table 8. Civic status (FSR and VG returnees)

Number of those alone in Norway at the time of return	Number of those with family in Norway at the time of return
10	5

The majority were alone in Norway at the time of return (1 had divorced in Norway), either because they did not have a family at the time or because they left their families left behind in Kosovo when they initially emigrated. The inclusion of 5 returnees who were with family at the time of return allows for some analysis of challenges to reintegration for this group, discussed below.

Table 9. Education (FSR and VG returnees)

Level of education (on-going or completed)	Number
None	0
Primary school	3
High school / secondary school / technical education (up to ca. 18 years)	11
BA/MA/PhD	1
Other education	0

While “on-going” and “completed” are collapsed here, it should be noted that at least 3 of those citing “high school” said that they had not completed their studies or that their studies were on-going. In other words, the levels of education are lower than the table indicates. This seems relevant to the reintegration of these returnees. However, as opposed to in the IRRANA, IRRINI and ARE programmes (which required an understanding of bureaucratic requirements and procedures, including the presentation of several official documents), the FSR programme involves a simple cash transfer. Thus, the level of education would not be expected to affect obtainment of the cash grant, although it could well affect how the cash grant was spent and the overall reintegration process. It should also be noted that the lack of higher education in the group may also reflect the scarce availability of higher education in Kosovo, where the University of Pristina was until very recently the only university and has long suffered from limited capacity. In fact, while there is no data on this, it is not impossible that those in the younger age cohort factored this into their decisions to emigrate, as limited access to higher education combines with non-meritocratic job allocation to make upwards socioeconomic mobility through education difficult.

Table 19. Type of activity upon departure from country of origin

Activity	Number FSR returnees	Number VG returnees
Unemployed	2	1
Part-time or sporadic employment (“odd jobs”)	0	0
Full-time employment	8	1
Student/pupil	0	3
Other	0	0

Most of the interviewees were employed when they left Kosovo.

Table 11. Year of arrival in Norway (FSR and VG returnees)

Year	Pre-2008	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number	0	3	0	1	4	2	5	0	0

The table shows that most of the respondents came to Norway during the 2011–2013 period, and they generally stayed in Norway for a shorter period of time than in the case of the Iraqi Kurds. In 2013, UDI effectuated a 48-hour processing time for asylum applicants from Kosovo, asserting that Kosovo can be generally considered safe for Kosovo Albanians. This speedy processing, combined with termination of the programme, may explain why so many returned that year.

Table 12. Reasons cited for emigration from country of origin (FSR and VG returnees)

Reasons cited for emigration	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Generalised insecurity / unspecified security reasons	0
Personal insecurity / persecution / involvement in conflict / etc.	7
Medical reasons	0
Economic reasons	3
Improve general quality of life / aspiration to travel / adventure / change of environment	2
"No future here"	0
"Saw others doing it"	0
Unspecified	0
Other	2
Multiple answers	1

Some of the reasons cited for emigration from Kosovo are surprising in light of the fact that Kosovo is generally considered safe not just by Norway but by all European states, and the success rate of asylum applications from Kosovars is next to zero. Of course, it is possible and perhaps even likely that some respondents stick with the same "asylum story" they gave in Norway and which they have "tuned" to the requirements for asylum. On a few occasions, this was the impression the field researcher was left with after the interview. However, several others said they intended to remain in Kosovo and reportedly considered themselves safe at the time of the interview, even though they had cited personal insecurity and involvement in conflict as the reason they originally left Kosovo. Several others clearly indicated that their motivation for seeking asylum was economic and facilitated and encouraged by family members in Norway, suggesting that it is not considered taboo for these returnees at least to talk openly about this with a Norwegian researcher. Only one said he had "problems with the state," but several mentioned social conflict, family feuds and ethnic conflicts. This raises a question about the widespread labelling of Kosovo as a "safe country," so some excerpts are provided here in depth:

A lot of problems we had here. After the war someone in the family was kidnapped. So we left from Pristina, where we lived, because of this. We are from a village where everyone is [an ethnic minority]. When a person was kidnapped we went to the village we're from. In Pristina we had a shop and a house. They made us sell it and leave. Then we bought a new house here, our son was born The situation was supposed to get better, we thought, but they pressure us. Because my wife and daughter do not speak Albanian and we belong to a minority. We did not leave Kosovo for economic reasons.

. . .

I had some trouble in [the place I lived] . . . because of the community I belong to. Ethnic hatred I was being attacked because of that. Not once, but several times it happened. I went to the police, but they didn't do anything, so I was obliged to leave. I was severely beaten up several times; they would harass my wife in front of my eyes too. [This place] used to be very problematic for these types of attacks and harassments. Now is ok. If I had my hand dirty in Kosovo on anything, I would understand . . . but I am very clean. Always was. I would never leave otherwise. . . .

On the whole there was more evidence of conflict-induced asylum emigration among the returnees interviewed in Kosovo than there was among those interviewed in Iraqi Kurdistan. This came as something of a surprise, although these returnees emigrated some years ago and the general situation may have improved since then.

Table 13. Reasons cited for coming to Norway in particular (FSR and VG returnees)

Reason	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Norwegian asylum or immigration policies perceived as favourable / expectations of asylum	0
Political reasons ("peace," "respect for human rights," "democratic values," etc.)	3
Economic reasons ("good economy," "good job chances," "good salaries," etc.)	4
Family/friends in Norway	5
Advised to go to Norway	1
Human smuggler decided	0
By chance	0
Unspecified	1
Other	2
Multiple answers	1

UDI terminated the FSR programme for Kosovars in 2013. According to head of department, Christine Wilberg, this was done because "[there was] reason to believe that the influx of asylum seekers from Kosovo [came] to misuse the assisted return programme" and that eventually after some time "the indications of misuse became so evident that [UDI] decided to stop this programme."⁴⁶ Given the official view that the FSR has increased asylum emigration from Kosovo, it is surprising that the Norwegian embassy in Pristina does not mention termination of the programme in its online information to Kosovar asylum seekers.⁴⁷

In light of that official view, it is interesting to see what the empirical data suggests. The evidence here is mixed. Only 1 of the 15 interviewees reported that assistance to return was in fact the reason he went to Norway to apply for asylum. This 1 interviewee was interviewed by a local Kosovar researcher, potentially indicating that a higher degree of rapport with a conational researcher may provide access to more sensitive data. Responses provided in 2 other interviews could be interpreted to suggest the same, though in both of them the information reluctantly offered dealt with economic motives in general. Here is the narrative of 1 of these 2 interviewees:

I thought I could stay in Norway. I heard it is easier. I talked to people, and many were suggesting Norway as an easier place to be able to stay in. I heard that people are softer too. Well, if we speak freely, I would say that the situation was not exactly entirely how I explained. . . . I had heard about the assistance that people get when they return

⁴⁶ See http://norwaytoday.info/home_view.php?id=6014.

⁴⁷ See <http://www.norway-kosovo.no/immigration/visaandresidence/Information-about-asylumseekers-from-Kosovo/#.VTZGR5OzG7Q>. At no time since it occurred has the Norwegian embassy provided online information about the termination of the FSR support for Kosovars. The link to the embassy's home page offers 151 words of information to asylum seekers, stating twice that "Kosovo and Albania are considered to be safe countries, and applicants from Kosovo and Albania are very rarely granted protection in Norway." The embassy informed us that this text

. . . was not posted until 27 March 2015, after the increase of asylum seekers from Kosovo and Albania this winter. Prior to that we did not have any general information for asylum seekers on our website. It was hence not natural to include something [in 2015] that had not been relevant since 2013. [our translation]

Any aspiring Kosovar migrant uninformed about the policy change in Norway in 2013 would therefore remain uninformed by the embassy's website.

from Norway, and after I was denied asylum in Belgium, I could imagine that asylum in Norway was hard to get too. So I was like, if they decide to return me, at least I will get some help too . . . since I had nothing in Kosovo anymore. . . .

We see here that the person did not leave Kosovo in order to go to Norway to obtain assisted return support, but that this idea was shaped during his emigration route in Europe. This phenomenon of being rejected one place and trying again elsewhere has been referred to as “assisted return shopping” and “assisted return tourism” by key informants working with migration-related topics. The large Kosovar diaspora in Norway and elsewhere in Europe can be expected to fulfil a similar function. Since the costs and risks of applying for asylum are low for those with family and friends in Norway, the social network facilitates and promotes asylum emigration – both for those in need of asylum and for those not in need. In fact, having family and friends in Norway was the most frequently cited reason for coming to Norway, followed by economic reasons. These are not mutually exclusive.

Some of the references to economic factors could potentially be interpreted as veiled references to the FSR, although they could also simply be general statements, for example, “I heard it is a good place . . . rich and all that” (but the interviewee did not elaborate). Another returnee who referred vaguely to economic reasons was later asked how he first learned about the programme and replied, “Everyone knows about it [showing confidence that does not allow further questioning]. I always knew about it.” This indicates not only that it this may have been part of the reason for him to apply for asylum in Norway, but also that knowledge about reintegration support is widespread. Of course, it is also possible to be knowledgeable about the FSR pre-migration but not consider it important or not let it affect the choice of destination country. The sharp drop in applications after UDI terminated the programme, however, makes such a possibility seem somewhat unlikely.

To say that knowledge of the FSR assistance was “widespread” at the time of the fieldwork could mean for Kosovars as a national group, or for subgroups within the overall group of Kosovars, possibly including socioeconomically marginalised ethnic minorities. Certainly, not all were aware of the programme. One informant from Kosovo who was interviewed in Norway spent 4 years living in Norway as an irregular migrant after applying for asylum, and only came across information about the FSR programme by chance. Neither he nor his friends knew about the FSR programme before he found information about it online. In other words, knowledge of the FSR programme cannot be taken for granted. Another respondent interviewed in Kosovo reported that he himself was not knowledgeable about the programme until he was informed about it in Norway, but he had heard of others who sought to get it by seeking asylum:

I have heard about this! Now, I do not know anyone personally that did that, and I cannot say whether it is true or not, but I heard words circulating about this, that some were coming just for that. Not me though, it never crossed my mind. I did not even know about the programme up until the end, when I was told I have to come back. But yes, I heard people can do that

Yet another confirmed the suspicion of misuse when asked about it directly. On the whole, at least some had heard about such misuse and could confirm that it existed until the programme was terminated.

Table 14. Year of return to country of origin (FSR and VG returnees)

Year	Pre-2008	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number	0	1	0	0	3	2	7	2	0

Most returnees returned during the 2010–2013 period, but 1 had been back in Kosovo for 6 years at the time of the interview. The two who returned in 2014 after the termination of the FSR programme were underage at the time of return and received reintegration support as vulnerable returnees, presumably

as part of the IOM's VG programme. None of those who returned in 2013 returned after the economic incentive of FSR support was withdrawn on 10 July.

10.4 Decision making: Motivations for applying for assisted return

Table 15. How returnees learned about the programme (FSR and VG returnees)

IOM	At reception centres	Friends or other asylum seekers	Media	Letter of rejection	Other
2	8	1	0	1	3

As noted above, one returnee indicated that he “always” knew about the FSR programme and that “everyone” knew about it. Several answers provided by interviewees contradicted his assertion, however. The majority of interviewees reported that they first heard about the programme in Norway, and not from friends or other asylum seekers (almost opposite to the Iraqi Kurds, who most commonly heard about it through friends or other asylum seekers). This suggests that the FSR programme was not the reason why they came to Norway. The 3 who cited other sources were underage minors who received information either through their custodian (*verge*) or at the care centre (*omsorgssenter*), and returned through the VG programme. It appears from the narratives that several of those who first heard about the programme at reception centres were informed by IOM, adding to the 2 who cited IOM as the source of their information.

10.5 Return decision making and the threat of deportation

With regards to the process of making the decision to return, a striking feature in the data was the intense fear interviewees had of being forcibly returned by the police. While only 2 of the returnees to Iraqi Kurdistan explained their decision to return through the IRRINI programme as driven by fear of forcible return, it was a dominant theme in the majority of narratives among the Kosovar returnees (9 out of the 15 total personal interviews with FSR and VG returnees). In addition, those who discussed this used particularly more intense wording. It seems as if the possibility of being forcibly returned as a criminal not only not posed a concrete threat of removal but also was an *existential threat to returnees' self-identity as law-abiding persons*, as demonstrated by the following narratives:

I had no other options. I trusted the system, I did not want to break the laws.

...

IOM told me that if I do not go back [through the programme] I would be taken back with the police. I would die if that was to happen. Why be returned with police, I was not committing crimes there⁴⁸

Sometimes the general fear of forced return can be viewed in conjunction with something more specific. This could be the effect of living irregularly on one's children, or a combination of aversion to forced return and loss aversion – losing the economic incentive to return through the FSR programme. One returnee decided on assisted return after observing friends being forcibly returned to Albania.

Through UDI we got information that without returning ourselves we would be returned by the police. They said we would get support to go back voluntarily, but if

⁴⁸ IOM clarifies that it informs applicants about the possibility of deportation as one of the options asylum seekers can be subject to after a final rejection of their asylum application, in order to ensure that they are aware of all possibilities and can make an informed decision.

not we would be forcibly returned and get no assistance. They would come at four o'clock in the morning and have you deported anyway.

The most common fear was that of being banned from re-entry to Norway or to the Schengen zone:

The main reason was that they said if I return voluntarily I would have no entry ban in the state.

...

It was good for me to go back and not be forcibly returned and blocked from Schengen.

By opting for the assisted return, prospective migrants maintain the possibility of re-entry in Norway and Schengen areas. This illustrates two analytical points. Firstly, return is not necessarily viewed as an end to mobility. Secondly, future prospects for renewed mobility can motivate assisted return.

Finally, the decision to return is complex and typically irreducible to one single factor. There could also be a great deal of confusion because of many things happening at once or incomprehension as to how the system works or what potential consequences might be. Consider the following narrative:

My wife had and still has a lot of health issues, my wife was beating the children and the Norwegian authorities took the children away from her. Then, at the camp where we were staying some [people] started fighting among themselves. My wife was caught in the mess and got hurt, she was walking with crutches until the day we returned. We did not want to return. But I don't know what happened, we just did as we were told. I was told to sign the paper that I would return, whether I liked it or not the police would send me back. At the camp they told me, I didn't know who they were.

Besides underscoring the point that decision making is not necessarily an orderly process for rational actors processing good information, this narrative illustrates how flawed the term "voluntary return" can be (see also Strand et al. 2011; Øien and Bendixsen 2012). Although UDI no longer uses this term but has adopted the more neutral "assisted return," IOM still labels this type of return as "voluntary." That label resonates poorly with narratives such as this, which reflect fear of forcible return.

Why is the stated fear of forcible return so tangible among this group? One interpretation is that Kosovars identify as law-abiding, European citizens and thus see the event of being treated as a criminal by a European state as a threat to their identity. Moreover, Kosovo is geographically closely situated to the Schengen border, which makes emigration to an EU country (whether for a shorter or longer period of time) cheap and relatively safe. Compared to those of other nationalities for whom re-migration is more costly and dangerous, for many Kosovars it is more important to keep the possibility to leave Kosovo again open, than to stay as long as possible in Norway or another Schengen state. This is also related to the medium-to-long-term possibility of future inclusion in the Schengen area, which has been much discussed in Kosovo in recent years.

Another more historically rooted explanation can be found in the history of Serbian ethnic cleansing and police brutality.⁴⁹ Ethnic tension and armed unrest in the ex-Yugoslav country escalated into armed conflict as late as in the 1990s, when Serbian police clashed with the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Police brutality victimised many civilians in Kosovo during this period, and a lingering sense of post-war trauma associated with the police may contribute to why the fear of the police seems so important a factor for the decision to return. The experience of police brutality is not specific to this

⁴⁹ See http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/kosovoii/homepage.html.

national group, though police brutality occurred with high frequency and intensity in Kosovo during the break-up of Yugoslavia. According to Human Rights Watch, civilians in Kosovo were “the targets of war crimes and other violations of humanitarian law” in this conflict, and the vast majority of war crimes in Kosovo during an especially intense violence from January 1988 to April 1999 were committed by the Serbian police or Yugoslav armed forces.⁵⁰

This is not just an academic explanation; it raises an ethical dilemma for the Norwegian host state. The threat of forced return can be an effective measure to increase “assisted return” for Kosovars even now that they cannot receive FSR, but if there is war trauma involved Norwegian authorities should tread softly.

The same caution is needed when dealing with children. One returnee who was an underage minor cautioned the Norwegian state against exerting undue pressure on a child to return voluntarily through the VG programme, saying that he received telephone calls from IOM “all the time” and that whenever they called it was an extremely stressful experience for him. Although he could not sign the form himself, he could ask his parents to sign it and he felt unduly pressured to do so.

Finally, some unique data about decision making was gleaned from interviews with 3 deportees in Kosovo (see box 4 below). These 3 interviews provide insight into why some returnees reject the notion of deportation till the end, in spite of the above, to the point of being forcibly returned. They also demonstrate that future research and evaluation of the practice of forced return may provide valuable insight into the factors preventing larger uptake in assisted return programmes.

While external evaluations of return policies in Norway have focused on assisted return and reintegration programmes rather than on deportation, there can be much to learn from the perspectives of deportees about migrants’ motivation – and lack thereof – for assisted return. Why do deportees not opt for assisted return? Box 4 answers in their own words.

⁵⁰ See <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/kosovo98/timeline.shtml>.

Box 4. THREE DEPORTEES ON THE DECISION NOT TO APPLY FOR ASSISTED RETURN

Deportee # 1

Elderly single man in a wheelchair, paralyzed, interviewed in a poorly furnished apartment with no heating, provided by Kosovo's Ministry of Internal Affairs:

They asked me [to sign up for assisted return] but I told them I have nowhere to go and no one to go to. My house was burned down during the war, all my children were in Norway. It was just me and my sick wife. So I said I won't go back. But now here I am, dying all alone.

Deportee # 2

Middle-aged farmer in a rural area, who expressed some hostility during interview and great bitterness about his life in Kosovo:

Why do you think people leave this place? Because it is delightful to live here? It is poverty. From the day we're born till the day we die, we struggle to survive. . . . Well, since I was already there, I thought I'd take this whole thing to the end. If they return me, they return me. Could it get any worse for me? No.

Deportee # 3

Father of three children, living in a poorly furnished apartment, with deteriorating health (barely able to walk and struggling with hopelessness after return):

They would gather us and tell us about the assisted return programme in Norway. Honestly, in my situation, that assistance and the transport back would not really make a difference. I was so desperate. And since I got half paralyzed while there, I was hoping to at least be able to get some treatment [and not be deported]. . . . In my situation, I am hopeless. So I thought it cannot get any worse whatever happens, whether I chose to return or they return me. I said, I will stay and if they want to come and bring me back with force, so be it. I did not see any advantages to "choosing" to return. To me it is the same if I die now or if I live.

10.6 Logistics: Processing time and travel

Table 16. Processing time in months from application to departure (FSR and VG returnees)

Time period	<1 month	1 month	2 months	3 months	4 months	5 months	≥6 months
Frequency	8	4	2	1	0	0	0

The logistics of the return operation appear to have been easier for the Kosovar returnees than for the Iraqi Kurdish ones. A very swift processing time of less than 1 month is laudable, and the longest anyone had to wait was for 3 months (which the interviewee said was because IOM lost his documents).

There are also here cases of those who ask for delays in the processing. A certain flexibility is indicated on IOM's part with regards to the departure date:

The delay was because we wanted it This was a good thing. The children were finished with school in June and then they gave us an extra month and 15 additional days before we left. We signed the form for voluntary return in April/March and asked to stay until June, so the children could finish their terms. Then we asked IOM to buy tickets and that took 15 days. UDI was very correct in allowing us to stay until the semester finished.

The reasonably flexible approach to the practical issues a family with small children faces allows prospective returnees to prepare for their return and reintegration and to exercise agency in their own lives. While this does not ensure maximum efficiency of departures in the short run, it builds trust in IOM, which makes the return a more positive experience and can facilitate post-return life.

Table 17. How well organised was the return journey?

Very well	Fairly well	Badly	Do not know
13	1	0	1

The Kosovar returnees gave a stellar appraisal of the organisation of the return journey. There was only one who described it as "fairly well," and his complaint is that the letter from IOM that specified his rights to excess luggage should have been in English as well as in Albanian.

Aside from this 1 complaint, the data suggests that the logistics of the return journey were to the full satisfaction of the Kosovar respondents.

10.7 At the airport: The first encounter with IOM in country of origin

Table 18. Assistance at the airport

Type of assistance	Medical assistance	Help through customs	Onward transportation to region of origin	Short stay at hotel
Frequency	0	0	3	0

While IOM Oslo does not indicate on the FSR homepage that it offers any services to returnees at the airport, 3 of the returnees reported that they received onward transportation from the airport in Pristina,

and 2 additional returnees received an offer for such transportation but declined it. The offers seem to have been made on the spot, as opposed to in Norway prior to return.⁵¹

Table 19. Expenditure of cash grant (FSR returnees only)

Expenditure	Daily expenses	Investment in business/ education	Pay debts	Hosting guests	"Nothing special"	Other	Did not respond / did not know	Multiple answers
Frequency (multiple answers allowed)	7	0	4	0	0	1	2	2

Daily expenses were the biggest expenditure, with 4 returnees saying they had to spend parts of the cash grant on paying debts. Two returnees said independently of each other that it had cost them EUR 3,000 to finance the illegal journey to Norway. It is somewhat striking that repaying debt was more frequently reported as a problem for the Kosovar returnees than the Iraqi Kurdish ones. This could be related to the fact that debt in Iraqi Kurdistan is often to family members, who may not request the money back immediately upon return or the fact that the economic growth in Iraqi Kurdistan from the mid-2000s until 2014 has meant that non-migrant creditors are less concerned about getting their money back as soon as possible. Either way, for Kosovar returnees this indicates that the cash grant was not sufficiently large to be invested in local reintegration, and, unsurprisingly, no returnees invested any part of the grant in business or education. This should not be taken to mean that the cash was unimportant, however. One returnee, who returned with several children and received additional support for each of them, said the support was a matter of life or death:

It cost me over 11,000 euros to go to Norway, so that had to be paid. The rest was for the children, as well as the private clinic where my wife is and medicines for her. If you go to a public hospital here they don't care. I survive somehow myself, but my children If it wasn't for the money I would have shot myself. The debt was a serious issue. You know how these things work here [refers to the Kosovar researcher]. Of course [the creditors] would have caused me all kinds of problems if I didn't pay them back. There is a saying here, "There are no bright days for someone in debt." People get in huge troubles for debt.

This narrative indicates the importance of the cash support, but it also demonstrates some of the advantages of giving support in the form of cash. These were all necessary expenditures and the returnee was free to spend the cash grant flexibly in accordance with his actual needs. Since this returnee's debts and medical expenses were urgent matters, it was important that he could allocate money to them immediately.

Some returnees were reluctant to specify the exact type of daily expenses they incurred, although several mentioned rent and other necessities. The expenditures as a whole suggest that the returnees faced poverty upon return and, indeed, some expressed a measure of shame about this. Asked about the expenditure one explained as follows, "I feel bad saying I needed money for the clothes . . . so maybe you can just say personal expenses."

⁵¹ IOM clarifies that all logistical assistance goes under VARP, and hence is offered to all returnees regardless under what type of reintegration support they are returning to.

Table 20. Cited importance of money received at airport (FSR returnees only)

Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Do not know
4	4	1	1

While most (9 out of 14) returnees to Iraqi Kurdistan reported that the money received at the airport in Iraqi Kurdistan was “somewhat important,” the response here seems more positive. Out of the 10 FSR returnees interviewed personally, 4 said it was “very important” and only 1 described it as unimportant. This corresponded well with how the grants were reportedly used. While the returnees generally said that the grant amount was too modest to be invested in a livelihood opportunity, the grants facilitated their needs in the time immediately after their return. One said, “It was very important because when I came I really needed it, it was crucial.”

10.8 Reintegration assistance after the first meeting: Additional in-kind support for vulnerable

The FSR programme did not offer in-kind support. Those considered especially vulnerable were eligible for such additional support through the VG programme. How well this in-kind reintegration assistance (still available today) functions is interesting in itself today, and in the sense that it complemented the FSR programme in the past. Five respondents received such additional in-kind assistance through the VG programme. Three stories are dealt with at some depth below, since UDI has requested specific information on the needs and reintegration of vulnerable returnees.

1. Qerim’s story⁵²

I left because the economic situation here [in Kosovo] is very hard, and I had someone who could help me in Norway. My brothers paid for the journey to Norway, but when I got there I felt so homesick. I applied for asylum, but then after only a couple of months in Norway I applied for help to return. I missed my family, of course, and felt very alone there. IOM came to the reception centre and told me about what they could do. They gave me information about the schools here in Kosovo. So I decided to go. It only took a few weeks before everything was ready. People at the reception centre helped me to get the photos for documents and stuff.

Back in Pristina, IOM came to meet me at the airport, offering onward transportation and a check for 500 US dollars. I later got 450 US dollars for school, some for furnishing the house, some for different things like buying eyeglasses, and about 1,000 US dollars for furniture. The support was 7,500 US dollars in total. They gave me three instalments of 500 US dollars, just until I could get back to the life I had before I left Kosovo. I don’t remember the details anymore, but in Norway they asked me what support I wanted and there it was decided that I would go to school here in Kosovo. IOM went to the university to pay for the courses I took; I didn’t have to wait for them or anything. IOM did everything correctly, and I have no problem with them. I’d give them six out of six points both in Norway and here. The support has really helped me to get back to normal here, and I don’t want to leave again even if I would get the chance. But it’s all about your economic situation. All my friends only talk about leaving, but I tell them it’s not as they think. I tell them it’s not as easy as they think and that it’s better to stay in your own country. There, no one cares about you personally. But they don’t listen. They think I have bad intentions. Everyone wants to

⁵² All names are fictional and obviously identifying information is removed. Narratives are summarized.

leave, but they don't think about the fact that you have to work there and survive there. And it's boring. Now I just want to get an education and not be dependent on anyone anymore.

The key point inferable from Qerim's story is that in some instances, the assisted return programme works out just as it has been designed to do. The rejected asylum applicant had already pondered return and the IOM's information seems to have tipped the scale. The organisation of return then worked out smoothly and the returnee, who never fulfilled any criteria for protection and asylum, understood clearly the nature of the available assistance, obtained it hassle-free and invested it in his long-term reintegration. The programme also indirectly functioned as an *awareness raising campaign*, since he could share realistic information about life in Norway with starry-eyed prospective asylum migrants.

2. Lulëzim's story

My aunt was in Norway and my parents could finance the journey. After my asylum application was rejected my family said "don't return" and that it was better for me in Norway, but my custodian [*verge*] informed me about the programme and referred me to IOM. When I was there I first refused to sign the form. Then after thinking about it, and after the custodian as well as other staff at the centre told me that it's really hard to get the documents I would need to get asylum, I eventually decided to go back. I just didn't want to go with the police. Before I came back, IOM in Norway gave me 200 euros to cover basic costs I would have. After I came back, IOM waited for me at the airport and welcomed me. I was also offered onward transportation, but I declined since my family came to pick me up. IOM told me to find an education, and that any university study would do, and then paid more than 1,000 euros for my university education and bought a laptop that I needed for the studies [EUR 2,000–3,000]. They also gave me extra cash that would cover my basic expenses at the school, like clothes and stuff [EUR 200–300]. My parents started to rebuild the house at home and IOM helped us to pay for some of the construction materials [about EUR 1,100]. IOM also paid for my general medical check-up [unsure about the value] and some medical tests I did for driving lessons [EUR 250]. They have helped me a lot. In one year I'll get a certificate from my studies and I do think it will help me get a job in the future. I'd give IOM six out of six points both in Norway and here. They were very nice to me, they called me on the phone and told me about what I could get. With this programme I have nothing to complain about, although life in general is better in Norway and I wouldn't necessarily have gone back today. I also know someone else who returned through this programme. He used to go to the university, but one day he suddenly stopped showing up. This lady at IOM who was always nice to me, she called him many times but he had changed the number and didn't show up. She's not giving up though. Now she will go home to him to check that everything is OK.

Again, the key message conveyed in this narrative is that the programme functions well. Lulëzim was well informed about the programme and IOM actively followed up on him upon his return. The observation that another vulnerable returnee also got extra follow up after he had started in education financed by IOM, and that this follow up was persistent and seems to have exceeded the minimum required, shows a general concern by the local IOM staff about the situation of the support recipient.

3. Skender's story

I don't really want to talk about the reasons why I left from here, suffice to say that we have serious problems in the family and this place where I left from and where I came back to is a small place where it's hard to avoid such problems. My uncle lent me 3,000

euros so I could go to Norway and be safe there. I had heard that it's a good country with no racism where they respect other people. When I got rejected I didn't have any choice but to go back. IOM came to the reception centre and told me about the assistance. They would have sent me back with the police if I hadn't gone back. And they would have blocked me from going anywhere in Schengen for some years. My custodian [*verge*] also advised me. No assistance and to be shut out of Schengen I thought about it and it wasn't easy to make up my mind, but I decided to go back. Maybe now I can go back some day. From the time I told IOM that I wanted to go, it only took a few weeks before I could. My family was happy to see me of course, but also sad. I am not safe here. After I've come back, I think the information I got about the programme is not entirely right. In Norway they said I could get 1,500 US dollars cash, but when I came to the airport in Pristina I only got two instalments of 500 US dollars and was told to spend the last 500 US dollars to buy something for school, like equipment or books. I can pay back my debts later. I also got some support, around 1,500 US dollars for fixing the house. They said I can get assistance of around 4,500 US dollars if I get a job in a company, and I think that this could really help me to get a fixed job. While the programme helps and is a good idea, the main problem is that I'm not safe. When I came back it took one month from when I called IOM until we could meet. The person in charge of me was on holiday. I was never told that it would take so long to get it. Moreover, IOM in Kosovo told me something else than they did in Norway, about the third instalment of 500 US dollars. That's why I'd give IOM in Norway six out of six points – I didn't have any problem with them – but IOM Kosovo five out of six. It would have been good if they gave all the cash they said they would, but I'm not bitter about this.

The insecurity that is reported here as a motivation for asylum emigration in the first place was also described as complicating reintegration. It is particularly problematic in the context of an underage returnee. During the interview the interviewee appeared to feel unsafe (as did the local researcher). A relative of the respondent called him to check on his safety and was distressed that he had been with us for a couple of hours without telling him, as it was going dark. While this data would hardly suffice to make any assessment about the asylum decision in Norway, it does illustrate that not all asylum seekers from Kosovo seem have been attracted to Norway because of the prospect of FSR. Vulnerability upon return could be related to the motivation for the initial asylum emigration.

As for IOM, it is especially serious if a vulnerable returnee must wait for 1 month until he can meet with a staff member. If the returnee had known about this prior to his return, he would have been more prepared for the delay. Especially given the fact that the returnee was underage, IOM Oslo and IOM Pristina could have coordinated the timing of return from Norway, in consultancy with the returnee, so that such a situation would have been avoided.

4. Alban's story

I left Kosovo when I was really young. My father said Norway would be good for us and that people had humanist values there. I got a good friend close to the care centre where I lived, and his mother wanted to adopt me but the state didn't allow it. I got 3–4 rejection letters for my asylum application and had to wait for ages. So in the end I couldn't stay any longer, neither in the family where I had stayed nor in the care centre, and I didn't want to live with my relative in Norway. They can't forcibly return children but they can close all the doors for them, for instance by not allowing you to go to school (although I managed to). And those who are forcibly returned can't go to Norway for many years but those who go back themselves can go back after a short period of time only. When I told my family here [in Kosovo] that I was coming back,

they were sad to hear it. My mother signed the paper that I could be returned only because I told her to, and two or three weeks later I came back. I told them to send me back as quickly as possible and they did. Everything IOM said actually happened. They have a good organisation. At the airport in Norway they gave me 50–100 US dollars, then 350 at the airport in Pristina. It was spent on daily expenses soon after coming back, but it was very important.

When I told IOM here what kind of support I wanted they first had to inform IOM in Oslo about it and get clearance. They told me that sometimes the process is fast and sometimes it is not. I decided to continue my studies that I had started but not completed at the upper secondary school in Norway. I got the 350 euros in three instalments. Every underage minor gets pocket money. It also covers medical help and other things. It's not enough money. In Norway; the standard minimum monthly salary is 2,000 euros. Compared with what I could have had in Norway the support here is nothing. It's all worked out as IOM said, but I have one problem with them. They try to help people, but they need to be aware of how easily a child can get stressed. They make a phone call, and it ruins your day. They called me time and time again, saying that I had to go back, that they would call my mother and tell her to sign the paper. That's why I'd give them four out of six points. Here, IOM has been great. There is this one person at IOM who calls often and follows up on me, asking how things are and what kinds of needs I have. I'd give them four out of six points, too. The day I turn 18, I am going back to Norway. I would recommend anyone in my situation against coming back, to do everything they possibly can to avoid it. I regret that I came back. Maybe if I'd stayed there the authorities would have given up and changed their minds and thought, "OK, we'll let him stay now."

Alban's story illustrates how emigration management often involves multiple agencies and institutions and that coordination across them can be difficult. While he was not formally allowed to go to upper secondary school, it took one phone call to arrange for that, so that the "closed doors" he described were opened. Moreover, the numerous phone calls from IOM and statements that IOM would call his mother was clearly experienced as pressure. Although IOM's official line is that it only informs about assisted return and does not encourage it, this narrative shows how the distinction can blur in practice. Another point that has been noted already is that return can be motivated by and part of a plan for future re-migration. Finally, he pointed to one factor that is well known from the academic literature on asylum seekers and resonates with the researchers' empirical experience: asylum seekers are reluctant to ever give up. He also regrets coming back. It is an agonising question for someone struggling in his post-return life to ask: What if I should have waited longer for asylum in Norway?

All in all, these 4 summarised versions of the interviews with vulnerable underage returnees indicate that IOM has done a good job for this group. In fact, there was limited room for improvement in any of these cases.

As for the vulnerability criteria in the 4 cases outlined above, the fact that they were all underage minors makes IOM's designation of vulnerability easier. A more complicated issue is whether any of the FSR returnees interviewed could have qualified as "vulnerable" without having been designated as a minor by IOM. This is difficult to assess, since the data are limited and because data could also be part of impression management on the informants' parts. One IOM employee warned, "Returnees might try to manipulate researchers. They see an opportunity when they see you. When they see a westerner they might change their responses." Those interviewed may have mistakenly assumed that the Norwegian researchers were in a position to pull strings and facilitate emigration. This came up as a possibility in 2 interviews in Kosovo; in both cases both the Norwegian researcher and the local researcher independently suspected this was the case. In a third case, it seemed unlikely that the respondent had

any ulterior motives, but possible vulnerability was considered. This returnee’s family had very serious somatic and psychosocial health issues at the time of return, and his wife received treatment in Norway at a state-run clinic. This treatment had to be continued in Kosovo at a private clinic, which was costly and a strain on the household economy. The husband explained,

There’s nothing else I can do than to stay here. If I could I would have left today and never come back. Because there’s nothing I would miss from the hard life I have here. It’s the children I suffer most from. Even the teachers here ask me what’s wrong with the children. There seems to be something wrong with them. At the school where they are going, water is seeping in. We also need to transport them to school, that’s also difficult for us. . . . It was also very problematic to get the children in and at the right level. I had brought some documents with me, but they made me go to the authorities, the municipalities, the government, they had me go here and there. And then somehow, by making a huge deal out of it, I managed to get the children to go to school again. For me it was a bigger problem with my wife, who got hurt in Norway I have had to take her to the hospital here.

10.9 Actor assessment

IOM Norway

Table 29. Respondents’ assessment of IOM in Norway

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Don’t know/ Unanswered	Average score
FSR returnees	1	0	1	0	2	3	3	4.6
VG returnees	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	5.4
Total	1	0	1	1	3	6	3	4.9 = 5

The overall assessment of IOM in Norway among returnees was very positive. Moreover, only 1 interviewee gave IOM Norway a very negative assessment (score 1 or 2). Such quantifications are not to be approached uncritically, but to the extent that this number gives an accurate indication – or even just a rough approximate – it indicates that returnees were more than content with how they saw the IOM Oslo fulfil its part of the programme. The 1 who gave a very negative assessment explained the reason to be false information given in Norway, as well as several months’ of delay due to the accidental loss of his documents. A more typical narrative is this:

With the IOM I have had no problems. Because I told you, everything they said they would do they did do. I’m struggling to live here, if it wasn’t for them I would be suffering in a serious way.

Table 30. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Norway by activity (FSR and VG returnees)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Frequency among the inactive	1	0	0	0	1	3	3	4.8 = 5
Frequency among the active	0	0	1	1	2	3	0	5

(inactive = currently unemployed and not studying, active = currently employed or studying)

It seems reasonable to expect that those who were inactive would give a worse assessment of IOM Norway than those who were active, but this was not the case. Both the inactive and the active gave an average score of 5 as their assessment.

Table 31. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Norway by education (FSR and VG returnees)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know	Average score
Frequency among those with low education	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	5.3 = 5
Frequency among those with high education	1	0	1	1	3	6	2	4.9 = 5

(low education = either no education or primary education only, high education = high school or higher)

Since there was no reintegration assistance in the general FSR programme and returnees did not face any criteria for receiving the cash check, education was not expected to affect the assessment through its effect on programme comprehension. It could have been expected to affect the assessment if those with low education fared worse and attributed this to the programme, however. Although the data is too weak to draw any firm conclusions, it does show that it was not just the highly educated who gave a positive assessment.

10.10 What returnees point to as strengths and weaknesses

Strengths of IOM Norway

Although the general assessment of IOM Norway was a positive one, respondents offered little detailed assessment and did not have a lot to say about what it was that they considered so positive. Answers were generally very short, but the positive points included clarity of information, helpfulness and correctness. One respondent offered a typical assessment: "They were very nice to me always, the programme was good. The information they gave was correct, everything they said would happen happened." Since the FSR programme was more straightforward and left less room for confusion and ambiguity than the other country specific programmes that offered in-kind support after fulfilment of certain criteria, this also left less room for discontent with IOM's advice and preparation in Norway. Most respondents had a clear idea of what they would be entitled to upon return.

Weaknesses of IOM Norway

Few of the respondents identified any particular weaknesses in IOM Norway’s dealings with them. In addition to those mentioned already (e.g., the possible loss of documents, the distressing experience of an underage migrant when IOM tried to convince him to return), only two points came up.⁵³ One migrant reported that when he needed help with his excess luggage at the airport in Norway and called the office, he did not get any help.

When I needed help they were weird. Like they told me I can call whenever I need anything, but when I called to ask for help with the luggage [to talk to the airport people] the IOM lady with I was in regular contact with was being rude. She was shouting on the phone

Another respondent felt that the IOM employee gave an overly positive assessment of the general situation in Kosovo, presumably to encourage him to return.

There was a woman from Kosovo working at IOM, she was Albanian and I’m a minority. She herself said that the situation was better in Kosovo than in Norway. That did not make sense to us. If it was so good, why did she not return herself instead of living in Norway? . . . On the other hand, they allowed us to stay for a while longer in Norway, and negotiated with the UDI, and that was very good.

The narrative suggests that those who belong to ethnic majority groups in the country of origin may need to be extra sensitive to the perception that the information they present is biased and irrelevant. In general, though, the few negative points offered were consistent with the overall positive assessment of the IOM in general.

IOM in Kosovo

Table 32. Respondents’ assessment of IOM in Kosovo

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Don’t know/ Unanswered	Average score
FSR returnees	2	0	0	0	0	3	5	4
VG returnees	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	4.8
Total	2	0	1	1	1	5	5	4.4

The overall assessment of IOM in Kosovo was again quite positive, and somewhat more so among the VG returnees than among the FSR returnees. Among the latter group, several cited that they “don’t know” how to assess IOM in Kosovo. This is perhaps unsurprising for a cash-based programme. As one FSR returnee said,

They gave the cash and there was nothing else. I don’t know [didn’t seem interested in talking about IOM at all].

One respondent answered that there was too little to assess to make the assessment meaningful, so even if he got the type of assistance that the FSR offered, he did not feel it was sufficient to make such an assessment. “They gave me the check, that was all the contact I had with them.” This was echoed by several in this category. On the other hand, those who gave the mark of 1 gave a negative assessment

⁵³ IOM clarified that it does aim to inform and not to convince people to return, and that in cases of underage minors their legal guardian is involved during the counselling sessions.

that seems more related to design of the programme and a lack of follow-up and support, than to IOM's implementation of it. Returnees may not assess implementation of the programme positively if they think it should have been radically different. This is exemplified by 1 FSR returnee who complained about the lack of help beyond the cash grant: "They never helped me with employment, or at least showed some interest in my existence. They never cared, never called, never did any follow-up with me. If I could give them a zero, I would." Another expressed a rather similar complaint: "They were not helpful. I went to ask. They didn't even consider me." Even a highly functional cash-based programme may never satisfy all returnees. Such issues are methodological concerns and complicate the use of assessment scores. This is complicated further by the possibility that the current socioeconomic situation of the returnee is likely to affect scores too.

Table 33. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Kosovo by activity (FSR and VG returnees)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Don't know/ Unanswered	Average score
Frequency among the inactive	0	0	0	0	0	5	3	6
Frequency among the active	2	0	1	1	1	0	2	2.8 = 3
Don't know / other / unanswered	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2	0	1	1	1	5	5	

(Inactive = unemployed and not studying, active = employed or studying)

It is rather striking that positive assessment of the support offered by IOM Pristina is drastically different between those who were active (i.e., either working or studying) at the time of the interview and those who were not. Out of 5 inactive respondents, all gave the mark of 6 out of 6 possible points. One possible interpretation could be that those who are the most grateful for cash support are those who may need it the most, and to simply get that support without any problem is all they wish for.

Table 34. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Kosovo by education (FSR and VG returnees)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Don't know/ unanswered	Average score
Frequency among those with low education	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	5.5 = 6
Frequency among those with high education	2	0	1	0	1	2	5	3.6 = 4

(low education = either no education or primary education only, high education = high school or higher)

All but one in the category of "high education" only had a high school education, so the label is somewhat misleading for the Kosovar returnees. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that those with "high education" were more critical of the programme and also more reluctant to giving any kind of assessment.

Finally, before moving on to a discussion of the accuracy of information, it should be mentioned here that 3 telephone interviews were also conducted in addition to the 15 in-person interviews. In the telephone interviews the question about assessment of IOM conflated IOM in Norway and IOM in Kosovo to one single question: "What is your overall assessment of the support provided to you by IOM?" The answers were 6, 6 and 4.

Table 35. Was the information about the return programme in Norway accurate?

Type of data	Yes	No	Partly	Don't know/ unanswered
Personal interviews (FSR and VG returnees)	9	2	1	3
Telephone interviews	3	0	0	0
Total	12	2	1	3

The information in Norway was considered accurate by two-thirds of the returnees (12 out of 18), and only 2 said it was inaccurate, citing that they had been promised more than they got. Of these, 1 cited promised help with employment, the other that he had been given information that the government of Kosovo would assist him in his reintegration.

Compared with the Iraqi Kurdish returnees, the returnees to Kosovo appeared to be much better informed. Again, this is likely attributable to the simplicity of the programme, which left less room for misunderstandings.

Table 36. Is your personal situation after return very different from what you had expected? (15 personal interviews only)

	FSR returnees	VG returnees	Total
No	3	2	5
Yes, better	1	1	2
Yes, worse	6	1	7
Don't know / unanswered	0	1	1

At the macro-level Kosovo has remained more or less the same, but expectations of change since its establishment as an independent state in 2008 have diminished year by year. A recent mass migration of asylum seekers, estimated at 100,000 individuals leaving every few months, illustrates that there are structural drivers that continue to impel people to leave for Western Europe. In the absence of the armed conflict and financial crisis that affects those returning to Iraqi Kurdistan, those who returned to Kosovo were surprised for the worse, mostly that their general living conditions were so bad. They complained of a lack of future perspectives and deteriorating living standards, rather than about any particular event. Compared with Iraqi Kurdistan and Afghanistan, there was a whole different degree of predictability in Kosovo. Still, a majority of returnees found that their personal situation after return was very different from what they expected. Predictability at the level of the individual returnee, in other words, can be quite distinct from national-level stability.

10.11 Present situation and future

Table 37. Will you remain where you live now or go somewhere else? (FSR and VG returnees, 15 personal interviews and 3 telephone survey interviews)

Type of data	Remain here	Go somewhere else	Do not know
FSR returnees	4	4	2
VG returnees	3	1	1
Telephone interviews	2	0	1
Total	9	5	4

Given that several respondents cited re-migration to Norway as a reason to opt for assisted return (rather than being forcibly returned), one would expect some to question whether they will remain in Kosovo. Half of the respondents did so, which was less than the case in Iraqi Kurdistan, but still a very high number. The aspiration for mobility might be higher than the table suggests, as some of those 9 who said they would remain in Kosovo asked rhetorical questions along the lines of 1 respondent's reply: "Where can I possibly go?" This questions the sustainability of return. While a few reported that they had a stable livelihood and that things were going well for them, they were in a clear minority.

Table 39. Is the programme seen to allow for a sustained stay?

	No	Yes	Partly	Did not respond / did not know
FSR returnees	8	0	0	2
VG returnees	2	2	1	0
Telephone interviews	3	0	0	0
Total	13	2	1	2

Most respondents expressed pessimism about their future prospects and categorically denied that the return assistance had allowed them to plan for a sustained stay in their local communities in Kosovo. When asked if the return assistance had allowed them to plan for a sustained stay in their local communities, 13 categorically said "no," one person was not asked because the mere question would have seemed offensive, 1 said "partly," and only 2 said "yes." Here are some citations illustrating the challenges of reintegration for those who said "no":

No. [categorical emphasis, NO]. I wake up at 5 in the morning and go to work, I come back at 8-9pm. For very little money I work all day. And it is a tough job too . . . physically it exhausts one. I never see my children. They are asleep when I leave and asleep when I come back It is a sad life.

. . .

There's nothing else I can do than to stay here. If I could, I would have left today and never come back. Because there's nothing I would miss from the hard life I have here. It's the children I suffer most from. Even the teachers here ask me what's wrong with the children. There seems to be something wrong with them. At the school where they are going, water is seeping in. We also need to transport them to school, that's also difficult for us.

Only the VG returnees indicated "partly" or replied "yes." This could be interpreted by reference to their young age, educational activity and relatively optimistic outlook, but it could also be interpreted as an indication that the VG programme fosters sustainable return more effectively.

Too few reported having a relative or friend leave for Europe after their return, so it was impossible to meaningfully explore whether they would have been more likely than others to expect to re-migrate out of Kosovo.

Table 40. Biggest advantage of the programme (15 personal interviews only, multiple answers allowed)

Type of advantage	FSR returnees	VG returnees	Total
To come back once asylum was no longer possible	4	1	5
To avoid forced return with the police	6	1	7
To get the cash support	4	1	5
To get the in-kind assistance)	0	4	4
There is no advantage	1	0	1
Other	1	0	1
Did not respond / not applicable	0	0	0
Multiple answers	4	1	5

Four out of the 5 VG returnees cited in-kind assistance as the biggest advantage of the programme. This number is higher, out of this small group, than it is among all the 14 recipients of IRRINI in-kind assistance. As per the discussion of forcible return above, it is not entirely surprising that it was the advantage most commonly cited as most important.

Table 41. Do you advise or recommend that your friends in Norway return through assisted return programmes?

Yes	No	Did not respond / did not know
12	3	0

Even though there was a clear consensus that the return programme did not lead to sustainable return and that many experienced return as worse than expected, there was also a clear consensus that these returnees would *recommend that their friends in Norway return through an FSR programme*. The most commonly given reason for this was that it would be better than forcible return. The following quote is typical: “I would recommend it. I mean, when there are no other options and you have to return, better come back by choice and get some assistance. That is always better than nothing, no?”

Among the 3 respondents who would not have recommended it, 1 referred to the perceived possibility of achieving asylum against all odds if one merely waits long enough:

I would have recommended them to do everything they possibly could in order not to come here. I regret that I came back. Maybe, if I'd stayed there, maybe they would have given up on it. Maybe they would have changed their minds, thought, “OK, we'll let him stay now.”

Another respondent noted that it would have been better to stay in Norway than to go back because the cash grant was simply not enough:

No, because the programme doesn't really help us. Cash means nothing if they can't help me to get a job. They didn't say they would, however.

In spite of the fact that the FSR received in Kosovo was more accessible to and appreciated by the returnees interviewed, the above quote points to the limits of limited cash-based return support.

10.12 Families, children and gender

There was very little data on the challenges of bringing children back from Norway to Kosovo, but the section on underage minors refers to this particular group of children in some depth.

There was not enough data on women's situations after return for an empirically informed comment on how reintegration challenges might be gendered. The narratives of the female respondents did not differ from those of male respondents in any obvious way.

10.13 Conclusions

Most respondents gave a positive assessment of IOM both in Norway and in Kosovo, although they spoke most positively about IOM Norway. At the same time, this quantification did not always seem to accurately reflect the qualitative data and may draw attention away from the richer, more contextualised analysis. As a group, the returnees to Kosovo returned to quite a large extent because of their fear of forcible return. Although as a group they were very content with the programme and would recommend return to others in their situation, it also seems clear that the Norwegian authorities should not have any expectation that the programme greatly facilitated long-term reintegration. It did seem important, however, both to the decision to return and in the initial phase of post-return reintegration.

Kosovo differs markedly from the conflict-affected regions of Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan, but its grim future prospects do make these cases comparable on the dimension of sustainability of return. Many of the returnees wanted to re-migrate and did not see much of a future locally.

Was it right by UDI to terminate the programme due to a suspicion of misuse, that is, that the reintegration support actually encouraged asylum emigration to Norway? The evidence here is mixed. While there is evidence that misuse did exist and some indications that it was widespread, there are certainly also indications in the data that it was not a reason for coming to Norway for most Kosovars. Some rejected and returned asylum seekers, including minors, reported that they felt or seemed to be personally at risk upon return.

The FSR programme was cash-based and seems to have been highly functional and effective. IOM deserves particular praise for its follow up and monitoring of underage vulnerable returnees and the in-kind support it provided to this group through the VG programme, which seems to have been attuned to needs, un-bureaucratic, swift and very important to the beneficiaries. However, the most relevant question for the general FSR programme is how well it worked. In this regard, returnees reported receiving the cash grants without any problems. A local IOM employee took pride in the organisation's transparency and anti-corruption mechanisms, and in a country where corruption is rampant it is no small feat that hardly any of the returnees suspected corruption or had any serious problems getting their money. Unsurprisingly, the limited amount did not seem to promote sustainable return in any significant way, but that also would have been a tall order and the grants were generally described as very useful.

Programme design needs to balance ambition against feasibility. The cash-based FSR programme has its limits in terms of fostering sustainable return, but leaves little room for misunderstandings and false expectations that can work counter to sustainable return. The more complex VG programme requires efforts for individualisation and accurate information pre- and post-return, but when it works well, as it seems to do in Kosovo, the extra investment brings positive effects.

In this light, the FSR programme to Kosovo represented a feasible and straightforward alternative. Although the FSR programme to Kosovo has been terminated, it remains the universal option operative to almost all the countries to which Norway returns those who choose assisted return, so this lesson is potentially widely generalizable. The empirical basis of the recommendations made here relates to Kosovo, and although the applicability of these findings will vary from country to country, none of the lessons learned are *necessarily* confined to Kosovo.

10.14 Recommendations

In addition to general advice to continue with a speedy handling process in Norway and well-organised return travel and reception in country of origin, the following recommendations are made.

Information about FSR and outreach in Norway (IOM and UDI)

- Acknowledge that – although the threat of forcible return effectively motivates assisted return among Kosovars – there may be reasons to exercise restraint towards a group where some possibly suffer from post-war trauma caused by police brutality. Avoid any *a priori* assumption that rejected asylum seekers necessarily feel safe in Kosovo. This is also relevant to individual counselling and return conversations in Norway.
- Exercise caution with regards to information provided to underage minors. Acknowledge that children may respond negatively to an insistence on return. The data tentatively indicates that custodians (*verger*) can be important advisors to irregular minors and can provide information about return in a credible and careful manner.
- Return is not necessarily seen as the end of mobility. The prospect of future re-migration to Norway and the Schengen area after return can motivate assisted return. This may be relevant to individual counselling and to return conversations at reception centres.
- Continue to provide clear information and to give a general impression of helpfulness and correctness. Make efforts to give an accurate and informed impression of the general situation in Kosovo, including the economic pressures and scarcity of livelihood opportunities.
- Make sure that any family is put in touch with the local IOM office in Kosovo and given detailed information about how to prepare for a hassle-free enrolment of children in local schools, including helping them understand the required documentation of foreign earned education and the dates of the local school term.
- Consider ways of improving communication about health and other records between the Norwegian public sector and IOM, if there is room for improvement and this is feasible in light of the sensitivity of information. Doing so could help identify vulnerable individuals who may not see themselves as such or even request additional support.
- Be aware that even a perceived possibility of future changes in asylum policy may reduce migrants' motivation for assisted return, and even play a role in post-return reintegration.

Processing of applications for FSR in Norway (IOM))

- Communicate with returnees before flexibly selecting a return date. This is especially relevant for families with children who will transition from one school system to another.

Delivery and design of the reintegration assistance (IOM and UDI)

- Acknowledge that many returnees are not interested in long-term reintegration and rather prefer to re-migrate somewhere else, including back to Norway. This is one of several reasons to take monitoring and follow up of returnees seriously. By getting an idea of how many actually re-migrate as well as why some stay, the programme can be modified accordingly. This can also help to detect misuse of the return assistance.
- The Kosovo case suggests that a cash grant of a modest size is unlikely to significantly foster sustainable return in the long term. What the cash grant does best is to incentivise uptake, facilitate the initial adjustment of the returnee, and make the immediate relocation and practical readjustment less painful. This is a realistic and valid objective in itself and can indirectly have a positive impact on reintegration in a long-term perspective as well.
- While interview data is ambiguous concerning the potential misuse of FSR support, there is some limited and tentative evidence for it. While the evaluation has not looked into UDI's procedures to detect misuse or determine when to terminate financial support, the data suggests that this might be a difficult, yet necessary, undertaking.

11. Comparison between cases

This chapter provides a summary of trends and comparison across the four countries surveyed. We point out where these are either very similar or diverse and provide, where evidence is available, an explanation for such variations – or lack thereof.

The evaluation primarily captures those returning since 2012, with a few returning as early as 2008. The set of detailed charts the comparison is based on is presented in Annex II.

11.1 Leaving the country of origin

Just above 50% of the interviewees were employed full-time **when leaving** their country of origin, though there are some interesting differences. More than half of these (22) were from Ethiopia, only a few were from Kosovo and Iraqi Kurdistan, and among the 10 from Afghanistan, the majority were shopkeepers. Almost equal numbers reported being (a) unemployed when leaving (with the majority from Kosovo), (b) in part-time employment or (c) students (where the majority was from Ethiopia).

Ethiopia has the largest number of pre-2008 **arrivals** to Norway, but otherwise there is a fair spread over years and countries of arrival to Norway. The largest number (17) arrived in 2008, then in 2009 (10) and in 2010 (12) before numbers were reduced. An important analytical point here is that many stayed in Norway for an extended period of time prior to return. While this may have given some a chance to accumulate resources and wealth, and possibly to remit those back to family in the country of origin, it also likely had an adverse effect on their preparedness for return, as they arrived to a place they have not been in for a very long time.

Asked why they had **emigrated** from their country of origin we identify two main trends. The largest group (38) cited personal insecurity/persecution/involvement in conflict/etc., including, in particular, many from Afghanistan. The second largest group cited economic reasons for emigration, and Ethiopia stands out in this regard. And a yet smaller number (8) stated a wish to improve their quality of life or to travel. Two said they had left for medical reasons, and others indicated they emigrated to take up studies or jobs (and then stayed on in Norway).

Why did they **decide to come to Norway**? Some interviewees provided several reasons, but it must be noted that the majority of those interviewed did not make the decision to select Norway as their destination on their own. They were either advised by others (15, including by other migrants met on their travel) or came to Norway because of the advice of/a decision made by a human smuggler (12). However, among those who personally decided to go to Norway, there is large variation in the reason Norway was chosen. The largest number (16) cited economic reasons, that they thought Norway had a good economy with a chance for them to find jobs and obtain good salaries. The second largest group (13) already had family and friends in Norway and an awareness of the situation there. An almost equally large group (11) mentioned favourable Norwegian asylum and immigration policies, followed by a slightly smaller group (10) that stated “political reasons” and mentioned that Norway respected human rights and was a peaceful society with democratic values.

The majority of those who gave economic reasons as the rationale for selecting Norway were from Ethiopia, including 5 who came to Norway on scholarships (arriving through channels of regular emigration). Quite a few from Kosovo and Iraqi Kurdistan had family or friends in Norway upon their arrival.

11.2 Applying for assisted return and leaving Norway

The majority (33) of those who signed up for assisted return **learned about the programme** at the reception centre where they resided, while the second largest group (20) named IOM as the source of their information. A smaller group (12) cited friends and other asylum seekers; some received information through media (8), while a small number (4) found the information in the letter rejecting their asylum application.

Ethiopia has the highest number that learned about the programme through the media, and Afghanistan the largest number that learned about the programme through IOM. This could be an indication that many from each of these groups lived privately (in the case of Ethiopia) or in reception centres (in the case of Afghanistan).

The **processing time** for assisted return application was in general very short.⁵⁴ The large majority waited a month (25) or two (21). As many as 15 had their application handled in less than a month, the majority from Kosovo. Less than 25% waited more than 3 months, though 6 had an application process that lasted more than 6 months (the majority here from Ethiopia). We assume that part of the explanation here is that the Ethiopian embassy is located in Sweden, and there might be a more extensive consultation with the country of origin government for processing documents.

The **return journey**, handled by IOM in all cases, came out with high ratings. The vast majority (57) found it to be very well organised, followed by 17 who thought it was fairly well organised. All 5 who indicated that the return journey was badly organised were returning to Ethiopia. Bringing cash through customs was a main reason for their negative assessment, followed by difficulties travelling with a temporary travel document.

When **arriving at an airport** in their country of origin returnees are to be met and provided a cash – grant, and, if required, medical assistance, help through customs and support for onward transportation and/or a short stay at a hotel. Only 13 of the returnees recalled having been assisted through customs (most frequently Afghans), and 12 (primarily Afghans and Kosovars) received support for onward transportation.

Many appear to settle in a different areas from where they left, and in these areas they might have a weaker network to rely on than if returning “home.” This was an issue not systematically pursued through the interviews, but which emerged in the dialogue with the returnees and in reflections over the findings. The plan to re-migrate or return to a different place than where they had lived in the past also frequently came up in the interviews in Norway (with those who had not yet returned). Some ended up moving within the city they had left from, while others planned to move into the city, since security and job opportunities were better than in the countryside. Some others planned inter-city or regional migration to re-join family. Those who resettle in areas separated from family and/or networks might be more vulnerable in the resettlement and reintegration phase, as there will be limited additional support, contacts and advice to draw on during what is potentially a vulnerable period for many returnees. Length of absence is another important factor here as previously noted, both because networks might have eroded (or moved) and there might have been major political, economic and social changes that returnees must come to understand and adjust to in the area they left from.

⁵⁴ IOM has informed us that it, together with UDI, undertook a LEAN process during 2013–2014 that reduced its processing time from 91 median days to 57 in 2014, and further reduced processing time to 46 average days in 2015.

The **cash grant received at the airport** was regarded by the returnees as very important (39) or somewhat important (37), and was valuable for their return and initial resettlement. The majority (44) utilised the assistance for daily expenses. These daily expenses included receiving guests upon their return and covering living expenses during the months when they were busy familiarising themselves back in the country of origin. The cash grant also helped bridge expenses before receiving in-kind assistance and other allowances they might apply for. Afghans were particularly vocal on the advantage of providing gifts to their family and receiving guests, where serving tea and food is a requirement, thereby allowed them to show hospitality and reconnect with family and networks.

11.3 Reintegration assistance and process

Returnees to Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Iraqi Kurdistan had a choice of reintegration assistance, implemented by IOM in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan and ARRA in Ethiopia. In all cases, the returnees stated their preference for assistance before returning and went through an application process upon their return. The **processing time** emerged as relatively speedy for returnees to all countries, except for Ethiopians who experienced long processing times caused by the time it took to establish the ARRA project office. As many as 15 of the total number of returnees had their application processed in less than a month, for 22 returnees it took between 1 and 2 months and for 27 returnees the process lasted from 3 to 6 months. Only 2 stated that it had taken more than 6 months; these were Ethiopians.

Choosing between **types of support** (here also drawing on phone interviews), almost all returnees chose the business option (90), 12 chose job placement and only 1 education. However, all did not end up with their predefined or preferred choice. Several reported that they had informed IOM about a preference for job placement or education before leaving Norway, but claimed they were not allowed this option or were advised against it by the IOM office in their country of return

We did ask a number of further questions to explore the business and job placement options in more detail and to obtain a better understanding of how these were established and how successful they had been.

It was of interest whether the returnees had utilised **any of their own savings** (including cash assistance received at arrival) as a supplement to the reintegration support for their business establishment. That was not the case for the majority (44), but as many as 17 reported to have used own savings. This might be regarded as a personal (financial) contribution to increase the success rate of their business and an indication of their commitment for a lasting reintegration, although for some (as discussed below) it did not help sustain the business.

More than half (35) reported to have formed a **business partnership**, while 26 had established a business on their own. There was a higher frequency of business partnerships in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan than in Ethiopia. Entering a partnership eased establishment of a business as it entailed less paperwork and registration with local authorities, time (and money) spent finding a suitable location and marketing towards potential customers. For some, the partnership model also provided an opportunity for more rapid access to cash that was then utilised for other purposes.

When asked if the business provided **a steady and sufficient income** for the returnee, the responses were much more negative. As many as 47 did not believe that their business would provide them such an income; only 8 expected a sufficient income level for their living expenses and for another 7 it was too early to tell. Some of those who had succeeded were very enthusiastic, though; they either thought they had the required skills to take their business further and/or had established a type of business with a strong income potential (such as a bakery or mobile shop).

This negative outlook was confirmed when the returnees were asked if their **business was still operative**. While 27 were still operating, as many as 22 had closed down by the time of the interview. Some of these were likely partnerships terminated for the benefit of receiving cash.

A comparison across countries provides interesting insights, as the success rate was far higher for businesses in Ethiopia than for those in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan. As many 17 of the 27 business set up in Ethiopia were still operating at the time of the interviews (including 7 that had just started up). Ethiopia's booming economy is likely a primary factor in this success, while the recent sharp economic declines in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan might explain why so many have failed in maintaining their businesses there. This assumption is supported by interviews with Afghans that had received assistance back in 2008. Several of them had managed to establish and run a fairly successful business shortly after their return, but explained that they had struggled to sustain their income over recent years. Some had therefore decided to change their type of business in an attempt to maintain their income.

Another alarming trend is that many businesses **were in operation only for a short period of time**. As many as 12 closed within 3 months, and 8 businesses closed just after 6 months (after it is assumed they received the second instalment). Some stayed on for a bit longer though: 5 businesses had closed after 7 to 10 months, while 6 businesses had continued for more than 10 months before closing.

Here we find large variation across countries. In particular, many business closed just after opening in Ethiopia, possibly because ARRA seemed to accept such a closure. Returnees there do not have to wait for the second instalment to receive the full business support, as is the practice in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Fewer selected **employment** and therefore we have a less representative number of returnees on which to judge this type of in-kind assistance. Of the 4 interviewed, 2 obtained the job they were hoping to obtain when they chose the employment option while 2 did not, so no firm conclusion can be drawn on the success of this option.

Employment was primarily selected by 3 returnees to Iraqi Kurdistan and 1 returnee to Afghanistan. It appears from the interviews that neither IOM Afghanistan nor ARRA prioritised providing information or advocating this option for in-kind assistance.

To help sustain the return over the last years, there has been an option to apply for a **housing allowance in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan**, although the system is applied very differently in the two countries. In Iraqi Kurdistan there is a cap of support for 30 cases annually, while this number was increased for Afghanistan upon IOM's documentation of demand.

Of those 13 interviewed who reported that they received a housing allowance, all judged the assistance as very useful. We did, however, note that many Afghans planned to relocate when the 6-month support ended. This could indicate that the housing support is not meeting the objective of securing the returnees a more permanent housing option.

11.4 Actor assessments

UDI had two implementing partners in the countries under study. IOM holds the responsibility for information on assisted return programmes and facilitating the application process in Norway; it likewise organises the return travel and reception in all countries of return and organises reintegration assistance in Afghanistan and in Iraqi Kurdistan. For Ethiopia, ARRA was responsible for the reintegration process and assistance. The returnees provided the following actor assessments when interviewed after their return.

They reported very **high satisfaction with IOM Norway**. As many as 35 returnees (out of 87) gave IOM the highest possible rating, followed by 19 and 13 in the second and third highest rating categories. Only 6 gave the lowest rating and 5 the second lowest, and the explanation provided in the interviews was that returnees perceived that IOM Norway had either missed or provided them inaccurate information (see below).

Respondents' **assessment of IOM in the country of origin** was again consistently high across countries, 42 returnees (out of 88) gave it the highest rating, with equal numbers (8) for the rest, except for 14 returnees who gave the local IOM offices the third best rating. However, a number of returnees stated dissatisfaction with IOM's handling of the application process for in-kind assistance, and what they regard as differences between information provided in Norway and in their country of origin. Given that the reintegration support in Ethiopia was handled by ARRA, many Ethiopians did not respond to this question.

When asked if **the information about the return programme provided in Norway** was accurate, 24 individuals responded affirmatively, 5 disagreed and 11 were only partly in agreement. This related to what returnees perceived as differences in information provided by IOM Norway and IOM in the return country about the types of available in-kind assistance.

The **assessment of ARRA** varied greatly and reflected that the programme had recently started up. While 8 returnees gave ARRA a top score, 7 gave the lowest score and 8 placed the agency in the middle of the ranking. A frequently mentioned reason for low scoring was a lack of communication with returnees, a weak advisory role and a lack of follow up and monitoring.

11.5 The present and the sustainability of return

A number of questions addressed the present status of the returnees – their perception of their personal and individual situation upon return, their reflection on the extent to which the assistance had enabled them income/job opportunities and a sustainable return and their future plans.

The first question was whether their **personal situation after return was very different** from what they had expected it to be. Of those responding, only 10 found the situation better than expected and 14 found it no different from their expectation. However, as many as 51 (out of 75) found it different and worse than expected.

Afghanistan is where the largest number of returnees found the situation very different and worse, followed by Ethiopia and Iraqi Kurdistan. In Kosovo the majority did not find their situations any different from expected. One reason could be that many of those returning to Kosovo had been away for only a short period of time.

When asked about the type of activity returnees were engaged in at time of interview (here we include phone interviews except for Ethiopia), interviewees confirmed the trend of business and employment failure discussed above. Only 58 returnees (of 129) reported that they were in full-time employment, with almost half of these in Ethiopia and a fair number in Iraqi Kurdistan. In contrast, 49 reported unemployment, notably in Afghanistan, Iraqi Kurdistan and Kosovo. The 12 who indicated that they were employed part-time are evenly spread across the four countries.

Comparing the **occupations returnees held** before departing for Norway to their occupations after return, the job situation for Ethiopians most nearly resembled their pre-departure labour profile. Afghans, though, were doing better as shopkeepers before they left the country than after their return.

A question was whether each returnee **expected to remain where he/she lived** when interviewed or planned go somewhere else (including here both personal and phone interviews). There was an almost equal number planning to remain (47) and to leave again (45) – with 17 undecided.

Here we also find very large variation between the countries. The majority of those intending to remain in their country of origin were from Ethiopia (22 returnees). The largest number that indicated they planned to leave were from Afghanistan, followed by a fairly large number of returnees to Iraqi Kurdistan. Those 17 that were uncertain about their future were fairly equally divided between the four countries. The group that planned to re-migrate included returnees who intended to apply for family reunification in Norway. They had established a family there and had returned with the assisted return programme so that they could avoid violating Norwegian law and thereby jeopardising their future opportunities for applying for a legal stay in Norway.

A key question for this evaluation is whether the assisted return programme has **allowed for a sustained stay** in returnees' countries of origin. Here as many as 61 stated "no," only 13 said "yes" and 7 did not respond or were uncertain.

These findings are alarming, given the programme objectives of assisting returnees towards a sustainable return and UDI's aim of assisting returnees in achieving a permanent stay in their countries of origin. The reasons why the programmes were regarded by the returnees as not contributing to a sustainable return differed among the countries and will be discussed in further detail in the conclusion.

When asked about the **biggest advantage of the programme**, with multiple answers possible, an interesting pattern emerged. The majority (34) thought the biggest advantage was that they were allowed to return once asylum in Norway was no longer possible. This was followed by 31 who regarded the cash support as the biggest advantage and 16 who listed the in-kind assistance; another 13 listed a range of other advantages, and 4 did not see any advantage with the programme.

In addition, 23 stated that the biggest advantage to them was to avoid a forced return with the police. This is interesting, since none of the returnees stated that they had opted for assisted return as an alternative to forced return. A possible explanation is that this answer resulted from reflection following their return, and even if forced return had not been the reason for choosing assisted return in Norway, they later recognised this advantage that the assisted return programme had provided them.

When comparing cases, Afghans and Kosovars were most satisfied with avoiding a forced return than returnees from the two other countries. Quite a few argued the advantage of following Norwegian rules and expectations, so that they could return to Norway and to the Schengen area in the future.

We posed a control question – for returnees to reflect on their own situations and say whether they would **advise or recommend that their friends** in Norway return through an assisted return programme. Here 35 said "yes," 29 said "no" and 17 did not respond or did not know.

Ethiopians and Kosovars were the most positive towards recommending that friends take advantage of assisted return programmes. Afghans were most negative, especially regarding encouraging families to return, and there was a mixed response from Iraqi Kurds. Many of those who had recently returned had not yet made up their mind.

11.6 In comparison

There are some general reflections to be drawn from this comparison that we will discuss further in the conclusion. One is that security and economic conditions and prospects in the country of return hold major influence on assisted returnees' ability to re-establish themselves and sustain their return.

A worsened economic situation, as seen in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan, has major negative consequences for business and job opportunities. In such contexts, the implementing partner needs to analyse the situation and suggest alternatives that can help ensure better utilisation of the return assistance for each returnee, given his or her particular circumstances, or possibly help returnees develop skills that will more likely lead to a successful business or a job placement and will provide returnees with more resilience in the face of economic challenges.

We note that while IOM received high ratings for providing information and facilitating return in Norway (although there was some concern about the consistency of information), the judgement is more mixed on how the return and reintegration assistance was handled in the different countries of return. This could indicate that the organisation does not have a consistent system in place across countries to guide or manage such reintegration programmes, that the staffing and/or management structure are weaker (or stronger) in some countries or that individuals in some countries are more responsive and helpful to returnees than in other countries.

One factor that appears to greatly influence the ability of returnees to re-establish and reintegrate themselves in their country or area of origin appears to be the presence of family members/personal networks they can draw on for support and advice in the first period after return – especially in fragile and rapidly changing contexts. Another factor identified is the time returnees have spent away from the country or area of origin, as this might influence their understanding of and ability to adapt to contextual changes, especially given the larger likelihood of network erosion in their place of return.

12. Conclusion and recommendations

There are quite large differences between the contexts of the four countries of return, as well as between the return assistance provided in the four countries. Therefore, in each country case study above we provide a conclusion and a detailed set of recommendations for each country. This conclusion includes shorter examples that reflect the specifics of the programme in a particular country or assistance towards particular groups. We also address here the feeling of insecurity in Kosovo, how a worsened security situation affects reintegration in Iraqi Kurdistan and Afghanistan, and early experiences with the government-managed reintegration programme in Ethiopia.

The contrasting ways of offering return and reintegration assistance in the different countries was the reason for selecting them for the comparative analysis. IRRANA and IRRINI are similar programmes, and Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan share an experience of on-going conflict and economic hardship. The FSR programme to Kosovo was distinct, not only because it was based on cash rather than in-kind assistance, but because Kosovo is a stable country where economic hardship is more of a challenge than armed conflict. Finally, Ethiopia involves IOM as a sending mission but it is the government that implements the in-kind reintegration assistance. In Kosovo, there is moreover another alternative, where the German authorities have an official presence in Kosovo (URA2) and its own official agency both in Germany to prepare and organize return and in Kosovo on the ground implementing in-kind return assistance. At the time of writing, France and Germany were considering doing this on a collaborative basis.

The way the study is structured allow for some comparison between findings from interviews in Norway and those conducted with returnees back in their country of origin. It is evident that the increase in insecurity in Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan caused worries among those planning return. The indication is that this lead them already when in Norway to considered re-emigration after return, and not only reintegration. This does then add to the uncertainty over their return, and reduce predictability of the return and reintegration process. Not least if there are rumours circulating, as for Afghanistan, indicating that they might not receive the promised assistance. This might be one reason for them neither involving their family or the staff of the reception centres in their decision making, if it was not the family from the start requested them to return.

Another important finding following from this observation is that strong kinship networks with the place of origin not only encourage return, but appear to sustain return as well. Returnees are better prepared and are to a larger degree committed to reintegration when they have a supportive network and/or family. The findings from the country cases support the conclusion drawn from interviews in Norway that expectations and predictability “influence how they mobilise and use their resources after return,” or in other words, how much they invest in a sustained reintegration.

In the following sections, we respond to the questions posed in the TOR, but first we distinguish between different stages of the return and re-migration process and draw some observations that can help us respond to the overall questions posed for this review.

12.1 Main findings divided by return phases

Motivation and preparation for return

For those who signed up for assisted return, their conditions in Norway were a main reason behind their decision to return. Loss of dignity and human value was one reason, as was seeing dreams and hopes coming to an end and feeling “stuck.” For some, the decision to return was a way to normalise life and to avoid a fear of forced return; for many, the decision came about when migrants reached the point

where they realised there were no other viable alternatives available to them or members of their family. For a few who had established a family in Norway, the decision was part of a plan to enable their future return to Norway.

An important finding from the interviews in Norway is that there is little difference in knowledge of and access to information about assisted return between those currently living in and those who previously lived in (but had since moved out of) reception centres. Those who had never lived in a reception centre, however, had hardly any knowledge of this option. Different channels and forms of information reach different groups of potential returnees; most referred to IOM and staff at reception centres, while others referred to information on the internet.

The accuracy of the information provided is an important point here, although it must be acknowledged that IOM and UDI cannot be prepared for and inform about all eventualities meeting the returnees. Nonetheless, one especially important point is that the organisation or government entity assisting individuals with reintegration should offer returnees the assistance choices they have been informed about in Norway, but not promise them more than what can actually be delivered. Moreover, there should be flexibility in planning the return date and the transfer of relevant information on vulnerable groups (including schoolchildren and students) to their country of origin. Information also needs to be provided on how returnees can receive outstanding tax returns, how they can legally transfer their savings and if and how they might maintain their bank accounts in Norway.

The application process and the practical arrangements for return have been responsibly and efficiently managed by IOM, though some returnees report that processing mistakes delayed their waiting time. While employees at reception centres appear to be less important to the returnees' decision-making processes, they do provide valuable guidance when the decision is made. Those whose embassies are located outside Norway face more practical challenges than others.

One can conclude that the different return programmes and their components are not the main motivation for selecting assisted return for most migrants. Rather, it is the lack of future prospects and a general feeling of unpredictability the asylum seekers were faced with in Norway. Those who have returned have remarked positively about how the programme enabled them to return in an orderly and well-organised manner. To what extent forced return leads to increased assisted return is not obvious (see Brekke 2015), though avoiding forced return is regarded as a benefit of the assisted return programme. Some interviewed in Norway chose assisted return in order to escape the fear of forced return, a fear that for many adds to their marginalised living conditions.

Return travel

The large majority reported that travel to their country of origin was well-organised. IOM was helpful in assisting them to prepare their documents, in showing flexibility in setting the departure date when requested and in assisting returnees in transit. Nonetheless, some struggled to get their travel documents when their embassy was outside of Norway, some unregistered migrants feared traveling to Oslo in connection with preparing their returns and a few returnees reported challenges when travels did not go according to plans.

Arrival in country of origin

Returnees appreciated being met by representatives from IOM upon arrival in their country of origin, being assisted at and through the airports and, not the least, receiving their cash assistance early on. For some, these factors might be important to instil trust in the return programme, thereby ensuring a larger degree of predictability for reintegration.

The cash assistance was important to bridge the gap until other types of assistance were made available. An interesting observation is that many, while yet in Norway, did not regard assisted return as an option for “return with dignity,” yet after having returned several described the assisted return in those terms. Especially for Kosovars, the alternative of forced return seems terrifying. But overall returnees value the opportunity to return on their own, without a police escort. And while the threat of forced return might not encourage assisted return, did returnees that had returned recognised it as a major benefit of the assisted return programme to *not* be forcedly returned.

Reintegration

This is where the challenges started for many. The large majority reported a failure to establish a business or secure employment. Some found the application process for the in-kind assistance to be too bureaucratic, and in some locations the process was not in accordance with local business practice and was challenging for those with limited literacy. Aspirations for reintegration differ among returnees, and ability does not always match these aspirations. Some aim to reintegrate and others planned to re-migrate (see discussion below). In any case, four clear contributing factors appeared to determine success or failure:

1. The economic and security situation in the area of return that influenced general economic prospects and the ability to secure an income over time;
2. The professional skills and management experience/ability of the returnee;
3. The availability of family (and good relations with the family) in the country of origin (this might be an importing contributing factor for lasting reintegration); and
4. IOM/ARRA’s role in providing evidence-based advice on selecting the most appropriate type of in-kind assistance (and type of business) and providing mentoring during the start-up phase as well as if/when there were indications that the business or job placement might fail.

The TOR asks *to what extent the programme satisfies the needs of the target groups, including families with children and vulnerable groups.*

It is difficult to provide a well-documented answer, given the low number of returned families in our sample. However, all families that were interviewed appreciated and highlighted the additional support per child and noted that housing support was extremely useful, particularly for the first period after their return. The sustainability aspect is less clear, as some of those receiving additional support did fail (as did the others) in their business establishment. Some families also were considering re-migration.

However, several opted to remain in their country of origin because they had brought their family back or re-joined them, and they assessed the cash and in-kind assistance to be a major factor in securing that ambition. Other types of targeted and means-tested assistance, such as vocational training, were highly rated by the returnees in Iraqi Kurdistan, but the team has some concern regarding how these types of assistance are managed in Afghanistan and whether the returnees there obtain the best possible benefit from them.

Sustained return

Challenges arise for sustained return when in-kind assistance does not provide the returnees with any lasting sources of income, at least for those who desire or are at least are open to a permanent resettlement in their area of return. For some, the in-kind assistance might still be of value, as they might use it for other investments that facilitate a smoother reintegration process. Cash on hand early after

return might for some provide more opportunities than a lengthy application process where it takes at least a month to receive in-kind support. For many, however, external and contextual factors might influence success at reintegration more than reintegration assistance on its own.

It is a major concern that so many of the returnees offered in-kind support failed to secure a lasting income from the assistance received, and that so few reported receiving much-needed advice and mentoring throughout the establishment process. This part of the assistance is not meeting either the expectations of UDI or the returnees and needs to be reconsidered or modified. While there are particular challenges in countries with a failing economy, this is a likely scenario in many conflict-affected and poor countries, and therefore warrants a thorough consideration of alternatives. Education and vocational training might be better alternatives in such contexts (both for the individuals and their communities). On the positive side, those with professional skills or management capability were more likely to retain their businesses, even in challenging economic situations.

For families, sustained return is often linked to a continuation of the education for their children. The facilitation of educational continuation in this process could be improved in Norway, including a consideration of the date of return in light of differing educational systems, as well as of the documentation needed to ensure a smooth transition.

The Ethiopian model – with reintegration assistance handled by a government body – has not yet differed in any positive way from other models, but it does have some promising features if adjusted. Not the least of these is the potential for coordination with and drawing on assistance from other parts of the government, which could be a crucial factor supporting sustained reintegration and places the government model at an advantage. The will and ability of any national government to protect and support its citizens might still vary, but it could to a larger degree be held accountable towards its own citizens over time than a project-funded organisation such as IOM, whose time and responsibility perspective is limited to six months after return. UDI could also consider other implementing/service partners for different countries, or a combination of such, that can best facilitate the reintegration process.

Definitions on sustainability of return, and a finding from the Norwegian part of the study that “return seems to be a stage rather than the end of the migration process,” hold important implications for how we understand sustainability. The perspective of most returnees, as referred above, is that the **assistance** provided through the return programme has not allowed them a sustainable stay in their community of return. This primarily relates to what they regard as limited possibilities for securing an income from a business or a job placement that is sufficient to cover their/their family’s need. In countries as Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan, returnees’ economic prospects are strongly influenced by an external factor the programme hold no influence on: the security situation in the country/place of return. On the other hand, a factor that might increase sustainability of return is the presence of or responsibility towards a family.

Turning to the definitions discussed in chapter 2, the 2015 Koser and Kuschminder study explained that “sustainability of return” means that “the individual has reintegrated into the economic, social and cultural processes of the country of origin and feels that they are in an environment of safety and security upon return.” Few of the returnees to Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan would agree that they live in an environment of safety and security, even if they to a varying degree might have reintegrated into the economic, social and cultural processes. Many returnees argued that the worsened economic conditions had not allowed them to take part in the economic process and that their returns were thus unsustainable for the time being. Ethiopians and Kosovars, in general, were to a larger degree able to fulfil these sustainability criteria, but were in varying degrees able to become reintegrated in the economic, social and cultural processes of their communities of return. Applying the Koser and Kuschminder definition for sustainable return supports the returnees’ self-assessment of an un-

sustainable return, while it recognises that the return assistance was just one factor among several that influenced whether or not a return was sustainable.

What we moreover have to ask is if sustainability should be captured within the geographically defined borders of the home the migrant once left, or if that might confine some returnees in an unsustainable reintegration process? There are examples cited in this report of returnees with families in neighbouring regions or countries who's return will be better sustained (economic, social, cultural and security wise) by moving there than by them remaining in country or region of origin. Other examples could be that the returnee might move on to take up jobs outside his or her country of origin (legally or illegal), to ensure that the family/network can sustain their lives at home. Or, as there was several cases, that for an individual with established family outside the country of origin will sustainable (and actually also then) re- integration be to join up with that part of their family rather with the one they emigrated from initially.

While we acknowledge the country-specific resettlement aim of the Norwegian assisted return programmes, we caution that a return is regarded as unsustainable, for an individual returnee, if it is not taking place in the country or area that the returnee regards as "home." This is especially the case if relocation to a different area would help ensure that the individual become part of an "economic, social and cultural processes," in an "environment of safety and security," or would secure such a process for the returnee's family.

However, a conclusion emerging from this discussion is that while assistance is not the only factor that affects the sustainability of a return, it does have some effect in whether a returnee secures a sustainable stay in the place/region of return. It also matters how returnees are received, guided and mentored to make the most out of the assistance provided (which always will be less than returnees hope for) and to rebuild their personal relationships. Some returnees will be inclined to engage in the reintegration process more than others; however, in any case *how* assistance is provided, and how helpful it actually is, will influence returnees when they reflect on whether to remain in the area of return or to continue the migration process. The ultimate decision will require balancing a range of factors, including issues beyond the return programme (such as personal security and access to networks). Nonetheless, how the return process is facilitated from the very start in Norway may influence whether a return is sustained in the area of return or migration is continued (whether locally, regionally or internationally).

12.2 Aspiration and ability factors

The interviews in Norway and the cases studied identified two other factor that needs to be taken into consideration: (a) the aspiration each returnee holds for his or her future and (b) his or her ability to fulfil it. This reflects the point made that the population of returnees is not a homogeneous mass. "Return" means different things to different people. This has led us to identify a typology of returnees, developed and expanded from Carling's (2002) aspiration/ability model of emigration, and based on our own empirical data. The distribution of returnees across the four categories outlined in table 1 (see chapter 2) will likely differ across national and local contexts.

However, acknowledging differences in aspirations and abilities among returnees enables a discussion on how the return assistance, and the entire return process, might influence or alter the outcome of the reintegration process for each individual returnee. This should be factored in when UDI and their implementing partners agree on types of reintegration assistance and operational staff is recruited and trained for advice, mentioning and follow-up processes and procedures.

The first group of returnees is well-placed and will make the most out of the assistance they receive. Although they might not be the most in need of reintegration support, any assistance is likely to help them in ensuring a more permanent return.

The second group has the aspiration to reintegrate, but may lack the personal relationships, skills and opportunities for a successful reintegration. They might be very dependent on additional financial support as well as advice regarding the type of in-kind support to select. They also may require mentoring and follow up as they seek to re-establish themselves in their country of origin. A combination of assistance, additional assistance and advice might enable a shift from an unsustainable to a sustainable return.

The third group has neither the aspiration nor the ability to reintegrate and might look upon the assistance as short-term "emergency relief" while they consider their options. The assistance might still be important if it enables a dignified return, and with positive development prospects returnees in this group might decide over time to remain. Housing assistance and support for vocational training and other targeted types of assistance might add to their ability to reintegrate. Re-joining or establishing family and networks might be factors that influence and sustain a decision to remain in the country of return, as might how they as individuals are met, advised and mentored upon their return.

The last group is the one most likely to attempt to get as much of the assistance as quickly as possible to enable re-migration at the earliest opportunity. Additional support will just add to that likelihood, and they will be the most prone to use fraudulent practices to quickly monetise the in-kind support to finance their onward migration.

There are, however, other important differences within the groups, including the importance of time as an additional factor. Those who aspire to emigrate locally, including those whose family might be in a neighbouring country or who aim to move to other areas in the return country where security and/or the labour/business market might be better, will aim to leave the earliest. Those who aim to return to Europe might require a longer time to ensure sufficient funding and organise the travel. This latter group is more likely to seek to receive all possible benefits of in-kind assistance. In particular, those who plan to return to Norway will frequently have a two-year time horizon in their country of origin (or at least in their region of origin) to ensure they have obtained the full benefit of any in-kind assistance (but do not lose money on a business establishment). They also will not want to return so early that they are required to repay their return/reintegration assistance. Their final decision to re-migrate might still be influenced by developments and prospects in their country and area of origin, as well as the extent to which they have maintained their contacts in Norway.

12.3 Main evaluation questions

This overview enables us to provide a more nuanced response to the question of *whether the return programme is primarily important for a sustainable and dignified return to the country of origin or whether it is primarily a support for the first period after return.*

The programme allows for a more dignified return than forced return, though some return with a higher degree of fear for their future than others. Some fear insecurity and others possible negative reactions from the government in the country of origin. The large majority of interviewees found the situation after return very different from what they had expected, especially those who had been away for a long time (potentially a vulnerable group).

Many returnees reported that the situation to which they returned was worse from what they had expected, for example, they were surprised at the high level of living costs. While it is difficult to prepare returnees in Norway for everything that might be different when returning, it should still be possible to provide them with updated living costs. Long-resident migrants may be advantageously positioned, with certain capital and skills, but may also have a particular need for more in-depth counselling, broken in spirit and alien from the country of origin. It could be a good idea to do this in a small group (e.g., 3 or more depending on logistical feasibility) of long-resident prospective returnees

in Norway *prior to* their return, These sessions could be modelled on the SEO assistance provided in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Likewise, there is a common opinion across the return countries examined that the programme ensures very valuable support for the first period after the return, which for many is very crucial to re-establishing networks and preparing for the future. However, while some use the assistance for bridging the gap before other assistance arrives or their business investments pay off, others simply add the return assistance to their re-migration budget.

How important the return and reintegration programmes are for the sustainability of the return is less obvious. The majority of the returnees reported that failed businesses or efforts at job placement have added to the challenge of sustaining their return. Some of them opted to stay in the country of return, while others intended to leave again. A range of factors seems to influence this decision, as outlined above. Many returning to Ethiopia saw their return as sustainable due to the country's positive economic prospects and a stable, although restrictive and challenging, rights situation. Those returning to Kosovo, on the other hand, were uncertain due to weak economic prospects; they also were influenced by proximity to Schengen and European expectations of living standards. Many returning to Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan did not believe their return could be sustained, due to increased insecurity and faltering economies.

Thus, one cannot judge the effect of the assistance programme by itself when discussing sustainability; one also needs to consider the present and perceived situation and developments in each country/region of return. Returnees will judge this differently based on their own skills, networks and experience. And, as we argue above, their individual decisions may also be influenced by how well they are able to plan their return, how predictable the return programme appears to them, how they are met upon their return, the advice they receive on using in-kind assistance and how well-mentored they are during the first month back in their country of origin.

A methodological lesson learned in this study is that telephone surveys with standardised questions can provide valuable information about the lives of return migrants. Though short and not as informative as face-to-face interviews, this is a cost-effective way to gather information about key dimensions of reintegration. That methodological insight is something we advise UDI to draw on and benefit more from, as it will allow UDI to learn more about the returnees' experiences and perspectives of the return assistance, which will allow UDI to better tailor future programmes and components to countries and groups. For more than a decade, more monitoring and evaluation of assisted return programmes has been called for (Paasche 2015). This can be done by contacting some of the returnees through a basic selection process and asking if they would answer a few questions, modelled on the telephone interview guide used in this study. Or, even better, establish a system where all assisted returnees are called after four months to inquire about the progress of their reintegration and the extent to which they have received and utilised the different components of their assistance. This could be done in-country by a reputable consultancy or survey organisation that reports directly to UDI or by specially selected and trained UDI interpreters.

In the same vein, we strongly recommend a complaints mechanism for returnees who experience that they do not receive the support they expected to receive. IOM/ARRA should certainly have such a mechanism in each country, but in addition UDI could consider involving the local or regional Norwegian embassy as a contact point if assistance is not forthcoming. By simply registering the amount and type of complaints, the complaints mechanism itself would enable UDI to gain an idea of

how well each programme works over time and if there are any suspicions of irregularities in the service delivery to returnees.⁵⁵

Which types of assistance provide the best effect for the returnees, support in cash or the more practical “in-kind” support with follow up and advice over time?

The cash grant received upon arrival is important for the immediate post-return period and facilitates social reintegration of returnees during a period that can often be difficult. The in-kind assistance received little praise by many returnees, but is highly appreciated by those who have been able to use to sustain their livelihood. All in all, the data indicates that in-kind assistance is highly problematic for a number of reasons. One can assume that a *highly functional* cash-based reintegration programme would probably be outperformed by a *highly functional* in-kind support programme (that included needs-based and individualised support). However, in-kind support comes with a string of practical challenges, high transaction costs and a strong need for monitoring and follow up (whether internal or external); therefore, such support is challenging to design and implement. In this light, the FSR programme to Kosovo represents a feasible and straightforward alternative, but it also illustrates the limits of a cash-based programme. Regarding the in-kind programmes reviewed here, on the other hand, returnees identified a lack of advice on selecting the type of in-kind support (and type of business) and a failure to follow up as shortcoming for both IOM and ARRA. Findings from Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan also indicate that returnees can bypass control mechanisms through fraudulent practices. These facts, combined with the need for better guidance and consultancy, show that IOM and ARRA need to come across as more as helpers and advisors than controllers; they need to provide counsel on the options that are likely to provide the best results for each returnee. At the same time, IOM and ARRA need to maintain strong internal control and oversight of how UDI-supported programmes and funding are utilised. We can assume that there would have been a higher degree of success and sustainable for some (or even many) of the returnees if this has been the case, that is, if IOM had focused on achieving full reintegration (though weak markets do constitute a challenge and limit the capacity of return programmes to foster sustainable return).

Vocational training could represent a new way of thinking about reintegration programmes. While capacity building in Norway pre-return is recommended by Strand et al. (2008), it is discouraged in a statistical analysis conducted by Deloitte (2014). Evidence from Iraqi Kurdistan and Afghanistan suggests that vocational training after the return is very well received by returnees. Improving returnees' skills may also be more positive for local development than setting up businesses that ultimately fail. In war-affected or underdeveloped countries with an environment hostile to setting up a productive business, improving employability by offering training post-return seems reasonable. This links to the issue of monitoring business and job opportunities and advising returnees on what might provide them the best financial outcome. In Ethiopia, the success rate of businesses means that the sustainability of business is no reason to re-allocate money away from the business model. Now that UDI is aware of the poor sustainability of businesses in Iraqi Kurdistan and Afghanistan, however, it is worth considering the diversion of more of the funds for these countries into vocational training. The length of the courses would also promote a longer sojourn in the country of return. Given the high number of those who wish to re-migrate, this is worth considering.

The extent to which IOM and ARRA provide effective follow up, guidance and advice regarding the programme support in the returnees' countries of origin is discussed in detail in the country cases. However, the short answer is that both IOM and ARRA could have done more. The possibilities are

⁵⁵ IOM Norway has informed us that when it receives a complaint from returnees this is immediately communicated to the receiving mission and feedback is given to the returnee. It notes that getting feedback from returnees, even through complaints, has been helpful in identifying bottlenecks within its internal processes.

many and hardly more costly. To begin with, these organisations should prioritise embodying a service-minded attitude, developing staff with skills for providing advice (rather than only monitoring), providing a complaints mechanism, implementing clear anti-corruption controls, providing correct information and making efforts to coordinate with and draw on (other) government resources (including for IOM) as well as to monitor sustainability beyond 3–6 months. It is more difficult to pinpoint limitations, though IOM staff explained that more financial support could help ensure a longer timeframe for follow up. The case of Ethiopia also shows the risks of having different partners tasked with pre-return and post-return arrangements; a failure of the organisations to coordinate and communicate with each other can easily contribute to confusion among returnees.

The innovative introduction of the Socio-Economic Orientation in Iraqi Kurdistan is an example of a successful change to the programme based on local staff's observations of returnees' needs, and is one to be recommended in all countries. There are also opportunities in Iraqi Kurdistan for scaling the programme up, both spatially and temporally.

Finally, how can Norwegian authorities respond to the onset of crisis in a country with an assisted return programme? The cases of Iraqi Kurdistan and Afghanistan show the importance of flexibility in terms of the generosity of support. In times of crisis, there is an increased need. If the programmes are to serve their purpose, they should offer more support to accommodate these periods. On the other hand, programme stability is important because returnees often access information about the return programmes through hearsay and are easily confused about changes in what they are entitled to. The answer to this dilemma, we suggest, is to increase the level of generosity discretely. In Iraqi Kurdistan as well as in Afghanistan, there are strong reasons to broaden the eligibility criteria for vocational training and for housing allowances.

12.4 Recommendations

This lead us to present a set of general recommendations, based on the findings and our analysis.

Information and outreach in Norway

This generally works well. The primary concern is the lack of information by those who have never stayed in reception centres and for some migrants who have stayed in Norway for many years and have less knowledge of the practical aspects of everyday life in their country of origin. Therefore,

- Give particular attention to long-resident prospective returnees, who may be in need of additional counselling. Consider group meetings for them to share their plans and questions.
- Improve information about assisted return on the internet. Many migrants use this source of information when in Norway. The fact that those who had never lived in the reception centres had not received information about assisted return even though they actively used the internet suggests that agencies are not taking full advantage of the potentials of the internet.
- Inform returnees about how they can receive their tax refunds after their return.
- Initiate further research on the gendered attitudes and possible consequences towards return.

Processing of applications in Norway

This generally works well, but it is important to ensure *predictability* of the process and that returnees are well-informed about the situation in their country of origin. Therefore,

- IOM should improve pre-return plans and preparations. Establish more predictability about the return by going through an individual cost-of-living plan, so that the migrants know better what to expect.
- IOM should also be flexible in terms of the return date; allow children and youth to complete the school year/semester in order to facilitate educational continuation.
- Finally, IOM should specify the economic support in local currency in the country of return to avoid currency fluctuations that may cause feelings of injustice and suspicions of corruption, as well as creating an unpredictable system.

Organisation of the return journey

This is well organised, but one recommendation is to

- Provide information relevant to the return journey in English, so that the migrant can use it as documentation, if necessary, during the journey.

Delivery and design of the reintegration assistance

Here changes are needed. That stated, the cash support works well, as does the support for families and vulnerable groups. We recommend that those benefits be continued at the same levels. Continuation of housing assistance and the possibility of vocational training is recommended, though with some modifications and flexibility of rates.

- IOM (and ARRA) should provide updated advice to returnees on which type of in-kind assistance is likely to provide them the best opportunity for income and a sustainable return. If IOM is not in a position to do so, other service providers (or a consortium of such) should be considered.
- In areas of increased insecurity and faltering business prospects IOM or other implementing partners should consider whether vocational training should be recommended over the business option and also consider the possibility of longer courses.
- If described as part of the programme, the option of job placement should be a real possibility for migrants returning. If it is not possible to implement this part of the programme in some countries, this information needs to be provided to UDI and the option should potentially be removed from the programme description.
- Rather than pursuing a monitoring role, IOM and ARRA should place more emphasis on advising, mentoring and assisting migrants who have returned. They should move from a role as controller to one of facilitator for returnees requesting assistance.
- UDI should demand that IOM and ARRA establish a complaints mechanism separate from management of the reintegration programme and should consider the possibility of establishing a phone complaints mechanism with local Norwegian embassies.
- Socio-Economic Orientation should be introduced in all countries, and this component should be provided soon after arrival in the country of origin.

- IOM or implementing partners should be more flexible with housing allowances (based on application) when it comes to the amount provided and the number of individuals who may receive it.
- IOM should recognise that in some countries the requirement of three quotations in order to obtain the business package does not reduce corruption, but rather contributes to it. Other methods for the purchase of in-kind assistance should be considered.
- UDI should consider whether to establish its own phone follow-up system to monitor the situation for returnees, either by selecting a few returnees for interviews or interviewing all who have returned.
- UDI should budget for external and regular reviews of all assisted return programmes and apply a methodology that allows for comparison across countries.

Annex I: Overview of assisted return packages and support

Previous evaluations of the Information, Reintegration and Return of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan (IRRANA) programme and the Information, Reintegration and Return of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq (IRRINI) programme have provided comprehensive introductions to the literature on migration and assisted return. Therefore, such a literature overview is left out in this study, though relevant literature is referenced as relevant in each chapter. The team prioritized a thorough (and thus longer) presentation and analysis of each case, in order to better facilitate a qualitative cross-country comparison, which is one of the main objectives of this study. Portions of the data collected, along with analysis from Norway, are presented in a separate report (Brekke 2015). This introduction presents the different types of assistance and an overview of what is provided in each of the country studies.

UDI presents the rationale for the return assistance on its home page, stating that “those staying in Norway without a valid stay permit or citizens from selected countries with a residence permit can apply to be assisted to return home by Norwegian authorities.”⁵⁶ Key aims of such assistance are to motivate assisted return from Norway, assist in the application processes, provide transport back to country of origin and, once returned, provide material support to reintegration in the returnees’ community. For some countries, UDI has developed a specific country programme and three of those programmes are included in this study: IRRANA, IRRINI and Assisted Return to Ethiopia (ARE). Those wishing to return to other countries can apply for Financial Support to Return (FSR). UDI also has a separate return programme for vulnerable groups (VG) directed towards victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors and persons with health problems. Families with children also receive additional return support.

The types of assistance and amounts provided vary between countries and are described in detail as part of each country case, but the next two subsections outline the basic types of support.

In Norway

Information about the possibility for applying for assisted return is directed towards asylum seekers living in reception centres and those living in private accommodations. The IOM has a major role in providing general and country specific information at reception centres, where reception staff also hold mandatory advisory meetings with all asylum seekers regarding assisted return. The IOM also provides information to those seeking details about returning to specific countries, or about the assistance available to different groups of potential beneficiaries.

When an individual decides to apply for assisted return, the IOM or the staff at the reception centres can assist in the process. The IOM handles the application process, but UDI makes the final decision and verifies the applicant’s eligibility for the support and for leaving Norway.

If approved, the IOM will proceed with assisting returnees with their travel documents and arranging their return travel. This also includes eventual travels within Norway. The IOM’s country offices will also be informed about the returnee(s) and their potential need for medical attention, preference for in-kind assistance and eligibility for other types of support. IOM staff will also be at the airport when the returnee leaves Norway and available to assist in transit countries.

⁵⁶ See <http://www.udi.no/en/return/>

In country of return

Upon their return to their country of origin, the kinds of assistance returnees can apply for and receive will differ. Cash on arrival is, however, common in all programmes.

Financial Support to Return (FSR) is the general return programme for asylum seekers and irregular migrants of various nationalities. The cash grant varies between 10,000 and 20,000 Norwegian crowns (NOK), depending on the legal status of the person applying for the support. Those who apply for assisted return within the deadline of assigned departure stipulated by the Norwegian authorities (or before one has been set) can receive NOK 20,000. Those who apply within two months after the deadline can receive NOK 15,000. Those who apply after that can receive NOK 10,000. Moreover, migrants with Dublin status may receive NOK 10,000 upon return to country of origin, and all families travelling with children are eligible to receive an additional cash grant of NOK 10,000 per child. The purpose of the cash support is both to incentivise return and to facilitate reintegration into the local community. The IOM implements the programme and offers follow up and monitoring for 4–6 weeks after arrival, though UDI can upon application and in exceptional cases approve to extend the follow-up until 1 year.

Country-specific assisted return programmes (such as IRRINI, IRRANA and ARRA) together include a range of different types of support, which may include any of the following:

- **Cash support at arrival**, aimed at assisting the returnees for the first period at place of origin.
- **Transport costs** to cover the returnees' in-country cost of return to the region of origin. In addition, upon arrival in the country of origin the returnee may be lodged for a period of time and receive medical attention before travelling to his or her final destination.
- **Housing support** for six months after return upon approval of an application to IOM Oslo. There is a difference between countries when it comes to the applicable vulnerability criteria, funding amounts and numbers of beneficiaries supported per year.
- **Vocational training** for six months upon approval of an application to IOM Oslo, aimed at returnees from 18 to 30 years old. These individuals might also receive a housing allowance (if not otherwise covered) and "pocket money" for the same time period.
- **Support for vulnerable groups** provides assistance to trafficking victims, unaccompanied minors and those with health problems.
- **In-kind assistance** where the returnees can select between different types of reintegration supporting activities for a six-month period, such as assistance for establishing a business, on-the-job training or education. Beneficiaries of this type of assistance may receive goods needed to operate a business, salary while in a work placement or paid education or course. The organisation in charge of the reintegration (generally IOM, but ARRA in Ethiopia) should provide returnees with advice on choosing an option for in-kind assistance, provide returnees the in-kind assistance and monitor and follow up with returnees for a six-month period. Business assistance, in the form of goods, is provided in two instalments, while salaries for returnees in job placements are paid monthly to the returnee and educational fees are paid directly to the institution or university offering the training.
- In some countries, an additional amount may be offered per **per minor or young person** returning.

- Ethiopia also has a **Returnee Community Assistance Programme (RECAP)** that allocates a fixed amount allocated to selected projects of benefit to the communities to which the returnee returns.
- **Socio-Economic Orientation (SEO)** is a one-day session organised by IOM in Iraq, where a group of returnees meet with an IOM staff employee to discuss what documents and paperwork the returnees need, their psychosocial needs, how the local labour market works and strategies for improving one's chances of a livelihood.

The chart below provides an overview of the types of assistance the team has identified through the document review and interviews in each of the countries included in this study.

Table 3: Type of support by country

Assistance Country	In-kind support	Cash support at arrival	Housing allowance*	Vocational training*	Transport cost (in country)	Support per minor	SEO	Support per young person	RCAP**	VG
Afghanistan	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Ethiopia	X	X				X		X	X	
Iraqi Kurdistan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Kosovo***		X				X				X

* On application, decided in Norway, vocational training only for those from 18 to 30 years old

** Support for the communities of the returnees

*** Not part of FSR after 2013, from then on only cash support

Annex II: Comparison between cases (tables)

Here are tables generated from the findings in different countries, however, the listing of them does here not strictly follow table numbers but in accordance with how tables and findings are presented in the country chapters and discussed in chapter 11.

Leaving from home

Table 10. Type of activity upon departure from country of origin

Activity	Number by country				
	A	IK	E	K	(T)
Unemployed	1	1	4	8	14
Part-time or sporadic employment ("odd jobs")	6	6	0	1	13
Full-time employment (including shopkeepers)	10	6	22	3	41
Student/pupil	2	2	6	3	13

Table 45. Type of activity at time of interview (note: no phone interviews in Ethiopia)

Activity	Number, personal interviews				Number, telephone interviews			
	A	IK	E	K	A	IK	E	K
Unemployed	8	7	4	8	10	9		3
Part-time or sporadic employment ("odd jobs")	4	1	2	1	0	4		0
full-time employment	8	5	23	3	7	12		0
Student	0	1	0	3	0	0		0
Other	0	1	3	0	0	2		0

Table 11. Year of arrival in Norway

Year	Pre-2008	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Number	26	17	10	12	7	3	6	0

Table 12. Reasons cited for emigration from country of origin

Reasons cited for emigration	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Generalized insecurity / unspecified security reasons	1
Personal insecurity / persecution/involvement in conflict / etc.	38
Medical reasons	2
Economic reasons	21
Improve general quality of life / aspiration to travel / adventure / change of environment	8
"No future here"	
"Saw others doing it"	1
Unspecified	4
Other	9 (2 terminated contract and 5 completed studies)

Table 13. Reasons cited for coming to Norway in particular

Reason	Frequency (multiple answers allowed)
Norwegian asylum or immigration policies perceived as favourable / expectations of asylum	11
Political reasons ("peace," "respect for human rights," "democratic values," etc.)	10
Economic reasons ("good economy," "good job chances," "good salaries," etc.)	16
Family/friends in Norway	13
Advice to go to Norway	15 (many "on the road")
Human smuggler decided	12
By chance	0
Unspecified	5
Other	9 (5 scholarship and 2 jobs)

Table 14. Year of returning to country of origin

Year	Pre-2008	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Number		1	1	2	5	24	29	19

Applying for assisted return and leaving Norway

Table 15. How returnees got to know about the programme

IOM	At reception centres	Friends or other asylum seekers	Media	Letter of rejection	Other
20	33	12	8	4	5

Table 16. Processing time in months from application for assisted return to departure

Time period	<1 month	1 month	2 months	3 months	4 months	5 months	6+ months
Frequency	15	25	21	10	3		6

Table 17. How well organized was the return journey?

Very well	Fairly well	Badly	Do not know
57	17	5	2

Table 18. Assistance at airport

Type of assistance	Medical assistance	Help through customs	Onward transportation to region of origin	Short stay at hotel
Frequency		13	12	

Table 19. Expenditure of cash grant/check received at the airport

Expenditure	Daily expenses	Investment in business/education	Pay debts	Other
Frequency (multiple answers allowed)	44	6	7	5

Table 20. Cited importance of money received at airport

Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Do not know
39	37	5	0

Reintegration assistance and process

Table 21. Which type of support did returnees choose (Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Iraqi Kurdistan)?

Type of assistance	Business	Job placement	Education	Have not yet received it
Frequency among personal interviews	70	4	1	0
Frequency among telephone respondents	20	8	0	0
Total	90	12	1	0

Table 22. Processing time from stated preference of support until it was received

Time period	<1 month	1–2 months	3–6 months	6 + months
Frequency	15	22	27	2

Table 23. Characteristics of business

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Did you have any own savings you could use for business investment?	17	44	1
Do you have a business partnership?	35	26	1
Does the business give a steady and sufficient income?	8	47	7 (too early to tell)
Is the business still operative?	27	22	3

Table 24. How long were businesses operative, if closed at time of interview?

Time period	1-3 months	4 months	5 months	6 months	7-9 months	≥10 months	Did not respond / did not know
Frequency	12	0	2	8	5	6	1

Table 26. Characteristics of employment (not applicable for Kosovo)

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Did you get the job you were looking for?	2	2	0
Were you hired / will you be hired by the employer on a long-term basis?	1	3	0
If so, does it / will it give a steady and sufficient income?	2	2	0

Table 28. Housing allowance (Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan)

	Yes	No	Did not respond
Received housing allowance	13		
Housing allowance considered useful	13		

Actor assessment for IOM and ARRA

Table 29. Respondents' assessment of IOM in Norway

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know
Total frequency, personal interviews	4	3	9	12	13	34	6
Total frequency, telephone interviews	2	2	0	1	6	1	2
Total	6	5	9	13	19	35	8

Table 32. Respondents' assessment of IOM in country of origin

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Did not respond / did not know
Total frequency, personal interviews	5	6	6	10	6	29	19
Total frequency, telephone interviews	3	2	2	4	2	13	2
Total	8	8	8	14	8	42	21

Table 35. Was the information about the return programme provided in Norway accurate?

Type of data	Yes	No	Partly	Did not respond / did not know
Personal interviews	7	3	3	1
Telephone interviews	17	2	8	1
Total	24	5	11	2

Table 42. Respondents' assessment of ARRA by activity (6 is best)

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	Do not know / before ARRA
Total frequency	7	1	4	8	1	8	3

The present and sustainability of return

Table 36. Is your personal situation after return very different from what you had expected?

No	14
Yes, better	10
Yes, worse	51
Did not respond / did not know	6

Table 37. Will you remain where you live now or go somewhere else?

Type of data	Remain here	Go somewhere else	Do not know
Personal interviews	40	32	9
Telephone interviews	7	13	8
Total	47	45	17

Table 39. Is the programme seen to allow for a sustained stay?

No	Yes	Did not respond / did not know
61	13	7

Table 40. Biggest advantage of the programme (14 personal interviews only, multiple answers allowed)

Type of advantage	Frequency
To come back once asylum was no longer possible	34
To avoid forced return with the police	23
To get the cash support	31
To get the non-cash support (i.e., the in-kind assistance)	16
There is no advantage	4
Other	13
Did not respond / not applicable	5

Table 41. Do you advise or recommend that your friends in Norway return through assisted return programmes?

Yes	No	Did not respond / did not know
35	29	17

Annex III: Terms of Reference: Oppdragsgivers beskrivelse av oppdraget

Bakgrunn for prosjektet

Retur har vært et satsningsområde i utlendingsforvaltningen flere år. Program for assistert frivillig retur ble startet opp i 2002. Programmet gjennomføres av International Organization of Migration (IOM).

Ordningen med assistert frivillig retur innebærer at personer uten lovlig opphold i Norge returnerer til hjemlandet med ulike former for reintegreringstøtte. Frivillig retur er basert på at personene selv beslutter å returnere til hjemlandet. En sentral oppgave i dette arbeidet er derfor å iverksette tiltak som har til hensikt å motivere personer til å velge denne formen for retur. I løpet av de siste 5 årene har 7145 personer returnert frivillig. Irakerne er den største gruppen. Andre store nasjonalitetsgrupper de siste 5 år er Russland, Kosovo, Afghanistan og Nepal. Nesten alle (97 prosent) som returnerer frivillig har søkt asyl.

Pr 31. juni 2013 bodde det 5286 utreisepliktige personer i mottak. I tillegg anslås det at det bodde ca 3800 personer på privat adresse. De største gruppene utreisepliktige kommer fra Afghanistan, Irak, Iran, Etiopia, Eritrea og Somalia. Det er for øvrig stor bredde i nasjonaliteter blant de som har utreiseplikt. Vi finner et stort antall barnefamilier blant utreisepliktige i mottak. Ca 26% av de utreisepliktige er lengeværende i mottak. De største gruppene kommer fra Irak, Etiopia, Iran, Afghanistan og Somalia.

Det er iverksatt en rekke ulike tiltak for å motivere og legge til rette for verdig og bærekraftig frivillig retur:

Returstøtte

Norske myndigheter har iverksatt flere retur og reintegreringsprogrammer de senere år. Hensikten med programmene er å legge til rette for at flest mulig skal velge å returnere frivillig til hjemlandet og å bidra til en planlagt, verdig og bærekraftig retur. Det er etablert landprogrammer bla til Afghanistan (IRRANA), Irak (IRRINI) og Etiopia (ARE). Retur med landprogrammene innebærer en variasjon i støttetiltak, med en kombinasjon av kontantstøtte, rådgivning og individuell oppfølging og praktisk støtte til videre reintegrering i hjemlandet i en 6 mnd periode. Det er i hovedsak IOM som er norske myndigheters samarbeidspartner i hjemlandene.

De som returnerer frivillig til land hvor det ikke er et landprogram returnerer med programmet Financial Support Reintegration (FSR). Programmet skiller seg fra landprogrammene ved at de som returnerer får returstøtte utbetalt i kontanter. Størrelsen på den økonomiske bistanden avhenger av når personer søker retur i forhold til utreisefristen.

Det er også etablert et eget returprogram for sårbare grupper (VG) som retter seg mot ofre for menneskehandel, enslige mindreårige og personer med helseproblemer. Videre er det iverksatt et program for ekstra returstøtte til barnefamilier. For oversikt over de ulike programmene støtteordninger vises til UDIs hjemmeside.

Informasjons- og motivasjonstiltak

Asylsøkere i mottak får informasjon om retur gjennom hele asylprosessen. Det gjennomføres veilednings- og retursamtaler og det er utviklet særlige tiltak rettet mot familier, kvinner og barn og

enslige mindreårige. Det er iverksatt hjemlandsorienterte kvalifiseringstiltak som skal lette reintegrering i hjemlandene.

En betydelig andel av personer uten lovlig opphold befinner seg utenfor mottak. IOM og andre frivillige organisasjoner gjennomfører returinformasjon til denne gruppen. UDI har nylig satt i gang et forskningsprosjekt som skal foreslå tiltak for hvordan disse på best mulig måte kan nås med informasjon om retur. Det er Uni Rokkansenteret i Bergen som er ansvarlig for prosjektet. Prosjektet skal etter planen ferdigstilles august 2014.

Formål med prosjektet/problemstillinger

Formålet med studien er å få kunnskap om hvordan retur og reintegreringsprogrammene virker på målgruppens motivasjon til å velge frivillig assistert retur, antallet faktiske returer og hvilken effekt støtteordningene kan sies å ha for kortsiktig så vel som langsiktig reintegrering i hjemlandene. Kunnskapen fra studien skal brukes i det videre arbeidet med utvikling og målretting av retur- og reintegreringsprogrammer i Norge og hjemland. Vi trenger mer kunnskap om effekter og virkninger av programmene, hva som fungerer og ikke fungerer, og hvorfor.

Retur og reintegreringsprogrammene er sammensatt på ulike måter med forskjellige støtteordninger og samarbeidsaktører i de ulike hjemland. Studien skal sammenligne disse og ta for seg følgende grunnleggende temaer:

Effekten av returprogrammene på antallet frivillige returer

Returprogrammenes betydning for motivasjonsarbeidet i Norge

Returprogrammenes betydning for bærekraftig og verdig retur i hjemland

Problemstillinger som skal dekkes i studien

- Hvilken effekt har de ulike programmene og komponentene hatt for a) motivasjonen til å returnere og b) faktisk gjennomførte returer?
- I hvilken grad tilfredsstiller programmene målgruppens behov, herunder barnefamilier og andre sårbare grupper?
- Hva er programmenes styrke/svakhet? Legger programmene til rette for varig og bærekraftig retur eller er de i hovedsak en støtte den første tiden etter retur? Hvilken form for støtte gir best effekt for de returnerte, retur støtte i kontantutbetaling eller en praktisk "in kind" etablerer støtte med oppfølging og rådgivning over tid? Hvordan er erfaringene med behovsprøvde komponenter slik som boligstøtte, utdanning og yrkesopplæring etc. Er de behovsprøvde støtteordningene tilpasset de som trenger det mest?

Studien skal også gi en vurdering av samarbeidspartneres muligheter og begrensninger for effektiv oppfølging, veiledning og rådgivning i programarbeidet i hjemlandene.

I tillegg til det mer kortsiktige mål om planlagt og verdig reetablering i hjemlandet, har støtteordningene for frivillig assistert retur også en målsetting om at returen skal være varig og bærekraftig for de returnerte. Det er ønskelig at denne studien skal komme med innspill og synspunkter på i hvilken grad og evt. hvordan frivillig assistert retur kan føre til gjenoppbygging og utvikling i hjemlandene.

Metode

Det legges opp til en kombinasjon av kvalitativ og kvantitativ metode. Vi stiller oss for øvrig positive til andre kvalifiserte innfallsvinkler.

UDI vil innledningsvis stille til disposisjon aktuelle retningslinjer, praksisdokumenter, rapporter, notater som er utarbeidet av Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet og UDI og som kan være av betydning for prosjektet. Kunnskap og erfaring fra tidligere evalueringer og prosjektrapporter bør også ligge til grunn for analyser og sammenlikninger. Det kan i tillegg være aktuelt å innhente oppdatert kunnskap gjennom lokal underleverandør fra hjemland hvor det tidligere er gjennomført evaluering

UDI vil bidra med statistisk materiale i den grad det lar seg gjøre. Det forutsettes at prosjektet aktivt bidrar til å identifisere det materialet som er aktuelt for prosjektet å få tilgang til.

I tillegg til feltarbeid i ett eller flere land med landprogram, ønskes feltarbeid blant en av de store grupper som har returnert med det generelle returprogrammet FSR (Financial Support Reintegration). Det vil også være aktuelt å gjøre intervjuer i utvalgte mottak i Norge samt innhenting av informasjon fra sentrale samarbeidspartnere på returfeltet slik som IOM.

Våren 2013 initierte Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet en studie som skal evaluere effekten av returprogram/returstøtteordninger. Prosjektet, som er planlagt ferdigstilt desember 2013, skal i hovedsak vurdere om ordningen med returstøtte har ført til økt antall frivillige returnerer. Totalt sett vil disse to prosjektene kunne gi et helhetlig perspektiv på sammenhengen mellom antallet returnerer, iverksatte tiltak, hvordan de ulike tiltakene virker som motivasjonsfaktor og som faktor i reintegreringsprosessen etter retur.

Relevante litteraturhenvisninger:

Viewed from the other side: Media coverage and Personal Tales of Migration in Iraqi Kurdistan (UiO 2012)

Return in Dignity, return to what? Review of the voluntary return programme to Afghanistan (IRRANA) (CMI 2008)

Between two societies. Review of the information, return and reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq (IRRINI) (CMI 2011).

Det riktige valget? Motivasjon og beslutningsprosess når avviste asylsøkere velger frivillig retur. (FAFO 2012)

For barnas skyld - en undersøkelse av returforberedende arbeid med barnefamilier på asylmottak – forslag til nye metoder og arbeidsformer (NOVA 2010)

Frivillig retur fra Norge – en historisk gjennomgang (ISF 2010)

Relevante pågående studier:

Evaluering av effekt av returtiltak i mottak, ansvarlig: Deloitte v/ K. Haarberg

Informasjon om retur til personer utenfor mottak, ansvarlig: Uni Rokkansenteret v/ S. Bendixen

Godkjenninger

Tilbyder er selv ansvarlig for å innhente nødvendige godkjenninger for å få innsyn i personopplysninger/ foreta intervju på mottak/ foreta feltarbeid i mottak, inkludert meldeskjema til NSD eller Datatilsynet der det er aktuelt.

Alle prosjekter skal gjennomføres i tråd med forskningsetiske retningslinjer fra Den nasjonale forskningsetiske komité for samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora (NESH).

Rammebetingelser

Det er ønskelig at arbeidet igangsettes høsten 2013 med en planlagt tidsramme på 18 måneder. Studien bør kunne avsluttes primo 2015. Vi er imidlertid åpne for senere fullføringstidspunkt.

Prosjektet har en samlet kostnadsramme på maksimalt NOK 2.000.000,-. Det presiseres at alle utgifter, inkludert merverdiavgift, tolv, reise og oppholdsutgifter, skal dekkes innenfor prosjektrammen.

Referansegruppe

UDI vil danne en egen referansegruppe for prosjektet. Referansegruppen vil ha en rådgivende rolle og møtes tre til fire ganger i prosjektperioden. Møtene skal ta for seg prosjektplan, fremdriften i prosjektet, funn underveis i prosjektet/midtveisrapport og utkast til sluttrapport. Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet vil bli invitert til å delta med en representant. Andre aktuelle personer vil bli invitert i samråd med den/de som utfører prosjektet. UDIs lokaler kan brukes til møtene i referansegruppen. Tilbyder vil ha ansvar for å innkalle referansegruppen til møter og å føre referat fra dem.

Produksjon, sluttrapport og presentasjon

Prosjektet skal utarbeide:

- En detaljert prosjektplan i startfasen av prosjektperioden, som gjenspeiler kontrakten med UDI.
- En sluttrapport
- Rapportene leveres i 50 kopier og elektronisk (pdf og Word/OpenDocument). Den elektroniske versjonen må tilfredsstillende tilfredsstillende kravene til universell utforming, jf. <http://standard.difi.no/hjelp-og-veiledning/universell-utforming-av-elektroniske-dokumenter>

Sluttrapport skal skrives i et klart og forståelig språk, på engelsk, med et fyldig sammendrag på både norsk og engelsk.

Inntil seks måneder etter at oppdraget er avsluttet, skal tilbyder være disponibel for å kunne holde foredrag med presentasjon av sentrale funn i prosjektet, ved inntil tre anledninger som del av prosjektet for oppdragsgiver.

Annex IV: Interview forms

A – Interview guide for Norway

Temaliste for prosjektet "Return and reintegration programmes, Norway»

- Bakgrunnsinformasjon
 - Alder og kjønn?
 - Familie situasjon: ugift/samboer/gift?
 - Barn? (Antall og alder)
 - Annen familie i Norge?
 - Familie i andre land/hjemland
 - Når søkte de om asyl i Norge
 - Fylke/mottak
 - Når søkt om retur (år, mnd)
 - Status ved søknad om retur
 - IOM status: (i søknadsfase, returnert, avvist, trukket)
 - Iverksatt dato
 - Returland
 - Region i hjemlandet returen går til
 - Statsborgerskap
 - Hvilken returavtale?

- 1. Fra flukt, ankomst, saksbehandling og venting frem til avgjørelsen
 - a. Hvordan har du opplevd de siste månedene før du tok avgjørelsen om retur
 - i. Har de levd en periode uten oppholdstillatelse i Norge?
 - ii. Når fikk de første avslag og 2. avslag?
 - iii. Har de sendt omgjøringsanmodning i UNE?
 - b. Hvor har du bodd i Norge (mottak el. privat)?
 - Hvordan opplevde du livet på mottaket
 - Evt. Hvorfor flyttet de fra mottakene? (mulige årsaker: arbeid, ha et mer "frivillig" liv, orker ikke, noen flytter inn igjen, regulær – irregulær prosessen og fordi de ønsker frivillig retur, mye snakk om frivillig retur på mottakene)
 - c. Hva har skjedd i perioden mellom avslag og de bestemmer seg for å returnere (tid, hva skjer i denne perioden i deres liv).

- 2. Beslutningen om å søke om «frivillig retur»

- a. Når og hvordan kom du fram til avgjørelsen om å søke frivillig retur?
- b. Hvordan ble avgjørelsen tatt?
 - i. Dersom dere er i en familie: hvem bestemte at dere skulle returnere? (Var det enigheter?) Hvordan har dere involvert barna i bestemmelsen?
 - ii. Har ulike familiemedlemmer ulik status? Har alle valgt frivillig retur eller skal noen bli/ har noen blitt igjen i Norge?
- c. Hvem har du diskutert avgjørelsen med?
 - i. Bekjente i N, hjemland
 - ii. Familie i N, utland, hjemland
 - iii. Mottaksansatte
 - iv. Andre asylsøkere
 - v. IOM
 - vi. Andre organisasjoner
 - vii. Ambassaden
 - viii. Andre
- d. Forteller de det samme? Hvem har du tillit til? (Tillit i forhold til hva)
- e. Kjenner du andre som har valgt å returnere eller som har blitt sent ut av landet?
 - i. Hvorfor ønsket de å returnere?
 - ii. Har du kontakt med disse?
 - iii. Hva vet dere om deres erfaringer?
 - iv. Tror du at du også vil få de samme erfaringene?
 - v. Har kunnskapen om andres retur bidratt til deres eget valg eller gjorde dette dem usikre på om de skulle velge retur?
- f. Har forholdene bedret seg i hjemlandet?
 1. sikkerhet
 2. familie/-nettverk
 3. arbeid/utdanning
 4. bolig
 5. Infrastruktur
 6. tilgang til rent vann, elektrisitet
 7. tilgang til velferd (helsetjeneste, sosial stønad etc)
 8. politiske endringer
 9. personlige endringer (i forhold til problem(ene) som gjorde at de forlot landet opprinnelig
- g. Hva var viktig for avgjørelsen din/deres?
 - i. Hva talte for å dra:
 1. økonomi
 2. savner familie
 3. kan få støtte av familie og andre
 4. Barnets framtid
 5. sikkerhetssituasjonen
 6. Levemåte/forhold i hjemlandet
 7. politiske forhold
 8. få gyldige ID papirer
 9. IOM programmets spesiell støtte som er mulig å få for familien/deg
 10. Livssituasjonen i Norge
 - a. Boforhold

- b. Manglende tilgang til velferdstjenester i Norge (helsetjeneste , sosial stønad)
 - c. helse
 - d. arbeidsmulighet
 - e. utdanning
 - f. fremtidsutsikter
- h. Hva talte for å bli i Norge?
- 1. Fremtidsmuligheter i hjemlandet
 - 2. Situasjonen i hjemlandet
 - a. helse
 - b. boforhold
 - c. arbeidsmulighet
 - d. utdanning
 - e. tilgang til velferdstjenester
 - f. politiske forhold
 - 3. familie og nettverk i Norge
 - 4. barnas framtid
 - 5. barnas skoletilbud og vennenettverk
 - 6. sikkerhetssituasjonen
 - 7. livssituasjonen i Norge
 - a. helse
 - b. boforhold
 - c. arbeidsmulighet
 - d. utdanning
 - e. tilgang til velferdstjenester
 - f. politiske forhold
 - g. Økonomi, sende penger hjem
- i. Skiftet du mening over tid? Har du skiftet syn på forholdene i Norge og hjemlandet?
- j. Hva har vært viktigst for at du søkte om retur? (ranger)
- i. Hadde ingen alternativer, har prøvd alt for å få opphold
 - ii. Økonomisk støtte
 - iii. IOM ordner og betaler transport til hjemlandet og hjemsted
 - iv. Annen praktisk tilrettelegging for reisen
 - v. At noen møter deg og hjelper deg den første tiden
 - vi. Hjelp til å skaffe/bygge opp bolig
 - vii. Hjelp for å få utdanning
 - viii. Hjelp til å skaffe arbeid/starte foretagende
 - ix. Annen praktisk støtte i hjemlandet
 - x. Annet
 - xi. Ingenting i avtalen var viktig for avgjørelsen
- k. Hvordan har dere forberedt dere til retur? (kurs, websider/internet/kontakter i hjemlandet/boforhold/arbeid)
- l. Hvordan fikk du vite om frivillig retur? Hvilke ulike kilder har du hørt om ordningen fra? Hvordan har informasjonen fra norske myndigheter, IOM og eventuelt organisasjoner vært i forbindelse med disse forberedelsene? Hvor fornøyd er du med denne?

3. Hvordan får du informasjon om situasjonen i opprinnelseslandet?

1. gjennom bekjente i Norge,
2. gjennom bekjente i hjemlandet
3. via Internet
4. norske myndigheter, UDI,
5. mottaket
6. via telefon
7. via sosiale medier
8. via internasjonale organisasjoner
9. ambassaden
10. andre

- b. Hvilke av disse kildene har du mest tiltro til?
- c. Har dere besøkt opprinnelseslandet noen gang etter at dere søkte om asyl i Norge?

4. Kunnskap om retur- og re-integreringsprogrammene

- a. Vet du hva du har rett på når du søker om retur gjennom IOM? Hva får du?
 - i. Kontantstøtte
 - ii. Reisetøtte/assistanse
 - iii. Reintegreringsmidler/assistanse
- b. Er kontaktstøtten viktig for at dere valgte å returnere hjem? Er hjelpen til reisen vikti? Hva med reintegreringsstøtten?
- c. Hadde du reist hvis dere bare fikk dekket reisen?
- d. Har du fått tilstrekkelig informasjon om hva programmet går ut på?
- e. Vet du at andre land har andre pakker? Snakker dere om det?
- f. Hvordan skal du bruke pengene, kontant, re-integreringsstøtten...
- g. Hvis de skulle endre tilbudet i noen retning, hva ville du endre?
- h. Hvordan har kontakten med IOM vært? Er det noe du mener IOM kunne gjort bedre for å hjelpe folk til å returnere?
- i. Er det noe du mener norske myndigheter kunne gjort bedre for å hjelpe folk til å returnere?
- j. Er det noe myndighetene i hjemlandet ditt kan gjøre bedre for de som returnerer? For å få flere til å returnere?

B – Interview guide for Country of Origin

Recruitment channel

Via IOM Via snowball sampling Other, how?.....

Via personal network of interviewer Background

1. Gender Male Female

1.1 Year of birth:

1.2 Current town/city of residence:.....

1.3 Ethnicity:.....

1.4 Religion:.....

1.5 Married?

Yes No

1.5.1 No. of children? 0 1 2 3 4 More

1.5.2 If yes, were your wife/husband/children in Norway? Yes No

1.6 Do you have any special health needs? Yes No

1.7 When did you leave this country? Year:

1.8 When did you arrive in Norway? Year:

1.9 Type(s) of residence in Norway at time of departure? Private Reception centre

1.10 What is your education?

None Primary school High School/secondary school/technical education (up to ca 18 yso) BA/MA/PhD Other education, specify duration

1.11 What was your occupation before leaving for Europe?

1.12 What is your occupation today?

1.13 Did you work in Norway?

If yes, what type of job(s)?

Flight and return

2. Why did you leave from here?

2.1 How did you finance your travel?

From savings Loan

Otherwise, please specify:

2.2 Why did you choose Norway?

2.3 What was your asylum/refugee status in Norway?

Asylum status Humanitarian Protection Application denied

2.4 Why did you choose to return?

2.5 How did family and friends react to your decision to return?

2.6 How long time did it take from you applied for return with IOM until you left Norway?

Information in Norway

3.1 How did you get to know about the return programme?

Media Friends IOM Internet At reception centres

From other asylum seekers Differently, please specify:

3.2 Was the information about the return programme accurate? Yes No Partly

3.2.1 If 'No' or 'Partly', how was it not accurate? (multiple choice allowed)

Waiting time to leave Norway turned out longer Support after return was less generous than I was told It was more and it is not my fault ~~Other~~ ~~Specify~~

3.4 Some refuse to return with the assisted programmes and are returned forcibly by the police. Could you explain why you thought differently and opted for the assisted return?

Assistance for return

4.1 Did anyone in Norway help to prepare you for your return? If so, who?

IOM Staff at reception centres Other migrants Others

4.1.1 How useful was this for you?

Very useful Somewhat useful Not useful Don't know

4.2 How well organized was the return travel from Norway to here?

Very well Fairly well Badly Don't know

4.3 What kind of housing do you have now?

With family Own property Rented property Elsewhere, please specify:

4.4 Did you return to where you lived before leaving for Norway? Yes No

If no, why did you decide to stay in a different location?

Reintegration assistance

5 When did you return to here? Year:

5.1 How much cash support (preferably in USD if possible) did you receive upon arrival?

5.1.2 What have you spent the cash support received at arrival on? (multiple choices allowed)

Daily expenses Investment in business/education Paying back loans

Nothing special *Receiving guests* *Other: specify.....*

5.1.3 How important has the money received at arrival been for you?

Very important *Somewhat important* *Not important* *Don't know*

5.1.4 Did you receive any of the following types of support from IOM at the airport? (multiple choice allowed)

Medical assistance *Help through customs* *Onward transportation* *Hotel*

If so, please specify why/why not

5.2. Which **one** of the following types of support did you choose?

Help to set up business Help to get employment with someone Education/courses

Haven't chosen yet, if so why not

5.2.1 How much time passed from you told IOM about your preferred type of support until you received it?

Less than 1 month 1-2 months 3-6 months More than 6 months

Have not received it yet. Please specify why not

5.3. Have you received any additional financial support?

Housing allowance Vocational Training for Youth Other

BUSINESS OPTION

5.2.2 For those who chose business support only

5.2.2.1 What business did you select, and why?

5.2.2.2 How useful was IOM's assistance to you in choosing your business?

Very useful *Somewhat useful* *Not useful* *Don't know*

5.2.2.3 Did you have any savings you could use for business investment?

Yes *No*

5.2.2.3 Do you have a business partnership? *Yes* *No*

If yes, who is your partner?

5.2.2.4 Does the business give a steady and sufficient income? *Yes* *No*

5.2.2.5 If you closed your business, for how long time did you run it?

EMPLOYMENT OPTION**5.2.3 For those who chose help to get employment with others only**

5.2.3.1 Did you get the job you were looking for? Yes No

5.2.3.2 Is it a long term job? Yes No

5.2.3.3 Does the business give a steady and sufficient income? Yes No

EDUCATION OPTION**5.2.4 For those who selected educational vocational training only**

5.2.3.1 What education/training did you select?

5.2.3.2 Why did you select this option?

5.2.3.3 What kind of job/business do you hope to start in?

OTHER ASSISTANCE

5.3. Has the **housing allowance** been useful for you? yes no not sure

5.3.1. How much did you receive in assistance?

5.4. What **vocational training** did you select?

5.4.1. Did you find the training useful?

5.4.2. Have you managed to secure yourself a job, and in case what job?

5.5. **Other assistance**, type and if meeting the returnee need

Actor assessment

6.1 What is your overall assessment of the support provided to you by IOM in Norway (information, advice, transport) on a scale from 1-6 where 6 is the best possible?

1 2 3 4 5 6 Don't know Unanswered Please explain

6.2 What is your assessment of the support provided to you by IOM here (information, advice, cash, non-cash support), on a scale from 1-6 where 6 is the best possible?

1 2 3 4 5 6 Don't know Unanswered Please explain

6.3 Have you received support from the authorities or from other organizations than IOM?

No Yes

6.4 In your opinion, can the programme better satisfy the needs of returnees?

Present situation and future

7.1 Will you remain in the area where you live now or go somewhere else?

Remain here *Go somewhere else* *Don't know*

7.4.1 If 'somewhere else' or 'don't know', please specify where and what it depends on

7.5 Have any of your relatives/friends left for Europe after your return? *No* *Yes*

7.6 Is your personal situation after return very different from what you had expected?

No *Yes*

If yes, how is it different? *Better* *Worse*

7.7 Which of these do you regard as your biggest advantage from the programme? (multiple choice allowed)

To come back once asylum was no longer possible

To avoid forced return with the police

To get the cash support

To get the non-cash support (i.e. the in-kind assistance)

There is no advantage

Other, please specify.....

7.8 Has the return assistance allowed you to plan for a sustained stay at your home location?

7.9. Do you advise or recommend your friends in Norway to return through assisted programs?

If yes, why?

If no, why not?

Are there any others you know that have returned that you can advise us to contact?

Any other things you like to add?

Thank the interviewee for time and cooperation

Annex V: Information letter



INFORMATION

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) has commissioned the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) to undertake a comparative study of Norwegian supported programmes for assisted return. These programmes are meant to facilitate and promote return and reintegration, especially for those whose asylum applications have been rejected. The country studies will take place in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Ethiopia and Iraqi Kurdistan.

The objective of the comparative study is to gain knowledge on how the various components of the programme work or could be improved. The aim is to learn more about how the assistance influences on the motivation to decide on assisted return, the number that actually returns and what effect the different types of support hold for the short term as well as for longer term reintegration in the returnees home countries.

Mr. Arne Strand from CMI will be leading the evaluation and be responsible for the Afghanistan case, Mr. Erlend Paasche from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) for the Kosovo and Iraqi Kurdish cases and Ms. Lovise Aalen for the Ethiopian case. They will be working with national researchers from the different countries.

Further information about the research in Ethiopia, please contact Dr. Lovise Aalen, by email at lovise.aalen@cmi.no, by international phone number (+47) 41087082 or by local phone at _____.

Further information about the study as a whole can be provided by Bente Scott Amundsen (UDI), available at bsa@udi.no.

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Norway encourage assisted return for persons without legal residence permits in Norway and for those who wish to return to their country of origin. Those who apply for assisted return receive help with the application process, with transport back to their country of origin and, once returned, a cash grant and material reintegration support. For some countries, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) has developed a specific country programme, and three of these are included in this study: Information, Return and Reintegration of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan (IRRANA); Information, Return and Reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq (IRRINI); and Assisted Return to Ethiopia (ARE). Those wishing to return to other countries can apply for Financial Support for Return (FSR), as for Kosovo that is included in the study.