

# TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGE **V**

Return under specific conditions –  
a European perspective on complex cases

2020 – 2022



Europäische Union



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Asyl-, Migrations-, Integrationsfonds

Dieses Projekt wird aus Mitteln des Asyl-,  
Migrations- und Integrationsfonds kofinanziert.



Caritasverband für  
die Diözese Augsburg e.V.

# ABBREVIATIONS

**AVRR** = Assisted voluntary return and reintegration

**AMIF** = Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

**BBU** = Austrian Federal Agency for Care and Support Services

**ERRIN** = European Return and Reintegration Network

**FRESO** = Forced Return Escort and Support Officers

**LfAR** = Bavarian State Office for Asylum and Repatriation

**Frontex** = European Border and Coast Guard Agency

**IOM** = International Organization for Migration

**JRS** = Joint Reintegration Services

# TEAM

## PROJECT STAFF

The Transnational Exchange project series, currently project number five, has been strongly impacted by Sarah Dillmann, the project manager from 2016 to 2021. Her maternity leave started at the end of 2021. The Caritas Association for the Diocese Augsburg is indebted to her for a long and valuable contribution to the Transnational Exchange projects. Salome Maxeiner, who had been executing the projects alongside Sarah Dillmann for several years, took over as project manager. Together with the newly hired project team member, Riikka Schenk, the remaining project activities were implemented as planned.



**SALOME  
MAXEINER**



**RIIKKA  
SCHENK**



**VERENA  
SALZ**

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# INTRODUCTION

## to the Transnational Exchange V project

### OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECT

The Transnational Exchange V project with the subtitle “Return under specific conditions – a European perspective on complex cases” is the fifth Transnational Exchange project in a row. The Caritas Association for the Diocese Augsburg leads and implements the project with the support of its cooperation partner Diakonie Augsburg. The project is co-funded under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Funds (AMIF) by the European Union and by the Bavarian State Office for Asylum and Repatriation (LfAR). The project lasted two years and three months from 2020 until 2022 with the objective to connect counsellors who work in the field of assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) on a European level through workshop, conferences and field trips.

Every European country has a different AVRR counselling system which creates different types of expertise, strategies and insights. Connecting the operational level of AVRR counselling contributes to an increase in counselling quality by exchanging best practices and discussing current challenges. The European network of counsellors is strengthened through regular exchange events. In this way, the overall objective of a more harmonized approach to AVRR counselling in Europe becomes a reality one step at a time or better said one Transnational Exchange event at a time.

### WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS BROCHURE?

This brochure gives an overview of all activities, which were carried out throughout the entire Transnational Exchange project starting with an introduction of two different AVRR counselling systems in Malta and Croatia which were presented during the conference in April 2022. The main title of the conference, however, was “Return and old age – return and reintegration counselling for elderly migrants”. Chapter two gives a summary of the findings regarding return and old age – a

relatively neglected topic in the European and national dialogue of voluntary return so far. Chapter three gives the reader insights into the topics which were discussed during the five implemented workshops. The last chapter reports about the field trips for a small group of European AVRR counsellors which took place within the Transnational Exchange V project to Switzerland, Austria and Portugal.

### COVID-19 RELATED PROJECT CHANGES

The Transnational Exchange V project was successfully implemented - not without surprises and hiccups though. The project started in July 2020, only a few months after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The project proposal had been handed in much earlier without the anticipation of the pandemic. Upon the start of the project, no one could foresee how the pandemic would unfold. That is why the planned three in-person workshops, one in-person conference and two field trips within Europe were still expected to take place hoping the pandemic would end quickly. The pandemic, however, continued to paralyze not only Germany but all of Europe and the rest of the world throughout the entire duration of the project. Closed borders, high national entry requirements such as PCR tests, quarantine rules, proof of vaccination, entry registration papers as well as social distancing in buildings rendered it impossible to host European in-person events. Therefore, all workshops and the conference were hosted online by the Transnational Exchange V team. The field trips took place in summer and more towards the end of the pandemic – last minute and with several changes even during the trips because of sudden illnesses and changing rules. The Covid-19 pandemic demanded flexibility from everyone. The project managed to save costs which were originally allocated for the conference and workshop hotels. With these savings and a delay of the post-AMIF tender, the project was extended for three more months until the 31st of September, 2022.

# PROJECT ACTIVITIES

This is an overview of all activities which took place during the Transnational Exchange V project:

DATES	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TITLE
10/11/2020 – 11/11/2020	Workshop	Assisted voluntary return to Latin America with a focus on El Salvador, Venezuela and Colombia
17/03/2021	Workshop	Update and exchange on return and reintegration counselling in Europe
14/07/2021 + 21/07/2021	Workshop	Impulses for a method-based AVRR counselling
20/09/2021 – 23/09/2021	Field trip	Switzerland
29/09/2021	Public relations	Presentation at Migration and Asylum Conference by the Caritas Association for the Diocese Augsburg
05/10/2021	Public relations	Presentation at Networking Event of the return counselling centers of the State of Baden-Württemberg at the Regional Council of Karlsruhe
03/11/2021 – 04/11/2021	Workshop	Addiction as a challenge in the return process
09/02/2022	Public relations	Presentation at 12th Expert Committee Voluntary Return under the leadership of the Federal Ministry for the Interior and Community
14/03/2022 – 17/03/2022	Field trip	Austria
05/04/2022 – 06/04/2022	Conference	Return and old age – return and reintegration counselling for elderly migrants
02/06/2022 – 04/06/2022	Field visit	Visit to strategic partner IOM Malta
05/07/2022	Workshop	Voluntary return to the Middle East with a focus on Syria, Lebanon and Jordan
12/07/2022 – 15/07/2022	Field trip	Portugal



## **AVRR COUNSELLING SYSTEMS: MALTA AND CROATIA**

The Transnational Exchange V conference in April 2022 started with the introduction of two different European AVRR counselling systems: Malta and Croatia. Malta shall be introduced first and then Croatia.



## MIGRATION NUMBERS

Malta stands out for its unique geographical position in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Despite its proximity to North Africa, the number of sea arrivals remained relatively low in comparison to other destinations for sea arrivals such as Italy, Greece or Cyprus. The peak of sea arrivals in Malta between 2015 and 2022 was 3406 migrants in 2019 (source: IOM Malta). Malta is characterized as a transit country for migrants who hope for relocation to seek asylum in a different European country. A small percentage of the arriving migrants opts for undergoing the asylum procedure in Malta. nation country, some return – planned or spontaneously – and some are deported and some ask for return assistance.

## AVRR COUNSELLING PROVIDER

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the main provider of AVRR counselling in Malta. Its AVRR counselling project is called RESTART and is the sixth successor

project by now. If cases cannot receive assistance from IOM Malta because they do not fulfill its requirements, the relatively young return unit of the Maltese Ministry for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality (MHSR) can organize the return. The MHSR donates 25 % to the RESTART project funding, the AMIF 75 %. The counselling offer includes information dissemination amongst migrant communities, identification of special needs, assistance with obtaining travel documents and taking care of the travel arrangements. Due to IOM's good partnership with other stakeholders in Malta and regular jours fixes including social workers from other NGOs, medical staff and the government representatives, vulnerable cases receive high-quality pre-departure assistance. IOM Malta assisted on average 20 returnees annually in the past six years (01.07.2016 – 22.03.2022, total number of returnees assisted by IOM Malta: 119). The main countries of return were from the sub-Saharan region such as Ghana, Sudan, Nigeria and Mali.

## RETURN BUDGET

The return budget includes 200€ cash on the client's departure day in Malta disbursed by the IOM team at the airport. In addition, the returnees have the option (on a trial basis since 2021) to choose the type of reintegration assistance. The reintegration assistance can either be up to 3800€ in-kind for a business start-up, employment subsidies, vocational training or school fees, medical and other specific assistance or 2000€ cash disbursed upon arrival in the home country. Most clients choose the in-kind assistance since it is a higher amount. The client is referred to the IOM partners in the country of return.





# CROATIA

## AVRR COUNSELLING HISTORY

Croatia was a transit country for many migrants seeking to find protection in Germany and Northern Europe on the “Balkan route” in 2015 and 2016 as a response to the Syrian civil war. As with all major migration routes, refugees quit their flight at different points of their journey for various reasons. Therefore, IOM Croatia observed a growing need for AVRR counselling in its country. The first ever AVRR counselling project in Croatia started in December 2018 with four counsellors. Upon the project initiation, the counselling structure was set up and information campaigns about this new assistance started. The Croatian AVRR services for potential returnees included for example information regarding conditions in the country of origin, referrals regarding accommodation, health, social services, and legal matters as well as assisting with the application for travel documents. Not long after the set-up of the counselling service and a special return hotline, the team faced great challenges which the Covid-19 pandemic brought along. The team shifted, therefore, from the newly established in-person counselling to virtual counselling.

## RETURN NUMBERS

In 2019, eight returnees were assisted by IOM Croatia. In 2020, 40 persons from countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Lebanon, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Turkey, and Vietnam returned with the help of the AVRR counselling team. In 2021, 38 persons received return assistance (source: IOM Croatia). The characteristics from the beneficiaries changed between 2018/2019 and 2021/2022 drastically. In the first two years, irregular migrants and migrants under the legal obligation to leave the country and (former) international protection seekers were the main target groups. In the following two years, visa overstayers due to Covid-19 and labor migrants with expired visa requested help from the IOM Croatia team.

Returnees receive pocket money for the return journey and, if eligible for reintegration support, 1500€ per adult and 500 - 750€ per child. In vulnerable cases, the reintegration budget can be tailored and expanded to the individual needs.





# ONLINE CONFERENCE

Return and old age

05.04.2022 - 06.04.2022

Vincent Horn, PhD

# RETURN OF OLDER MIGRANTS: WHAT DO WE KNOW SO FAR?

Vincent Horn, PhD, is a Research fellow at the Institute for Comparative Education of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz in Germany. He started the Transnational Exchange V conference by introducing the topic of return and old age. What kind of drivers does return migration in old age have and what needs to be considered for a successful reintegration?

## OLDER PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the number of forcibly displaced people surpassed 84 million in the middle of 2021. Nearly half of them sought protection as refugees or asylum seekers abroad. The vast majority of these 84 million people were children and younger adults; only few had already reached the age of 60 (3%).

Still, several hundred thousands of older people are currently on the move because of war and humanitarian and economic crises in countries like Syria, Venezuela or Ukraine. Older refugees are particularly affected by processes of forced displacement and face greater challenges to adapt to their new social and cultural environments (Bolzman 2014; Olbermann 2019; WHO 2018).

Older refugees are still an “under researched” group in forced migration studies as well as in gerontology and mental health research (Omata 2021). They are often overlooked by policy makers and other actors involved in the development of support programs and social services.



Nevertheless, older refugees are a highly heterogeneous group and not per se part of the vulnerable group. Not all arrived at advanced age but instead have spent a substantial part of their life in the destination country. Mr. Horn calls this “ageing in place”. Most stay in the destination country, some return – planned or spontaneously – and some are deported and some ask for return assistance.

## According to the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in Germany (2016, N=4,527), refugees aged 50 years and older report:

- » To rather arrive with others (esp. spouses)
- » Stronger decline in health (before vs. after flight)
- » More mental health issues (e.g. depressive disorders)
- » Lower levels of education (esp. women)
- » Lower levels of German language proficiency
- » Fewer social contact to people from host society



### OLDER PEOPLE IN AVRR PROGRAMS

Age has an independent effect on the likelihood to participate in AVRR programs: The likelihood to participate increases until the age of 60 and decreases later on.

Whether older refugees are eligible for AVRR programs depends on three factors: their residence status, their country of origin or nationality and their country of residence. Eligibility criteria and assistance, for example cash benefits, differ from one EU country to another and change over time.

Mr. Horn also points out that data on return migration - forced or voluntary - are scattered across different data sources, often incomplete or only partially available for the public. This means there is often limited information about returnees, usually only age, gender and nationality or country of origin. There are, however, initiatives to improve data situation for example by IRMA (Integrated Return Management Application) and European Commission.

### OLDER MIGRANTS - A BLIND SPOT IN AVRR PROGRAMS AND POLICIES?

According to Mr. Horn, older people do not receive specific attention within the European return policies and AVRR pro-

grams as they are only mentioned as part of the definition of vulnerable persons like in the EU Return Handbook 2018. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is key for the legal and policy framework on return and integration, whereas the UN Convention on the Rights of Older Person is still in its proposal stage.

Another factor why the group of older migrants is ignored, is the income-centeredness of the AVRR programs. While reintegration is understood as a multi-dimensional process, economic self-sufficiency is often seen as the principal objective of reintegration. The focus lies on business start-up coaching and counselling, vocational training and job placement, often in cooperation with local entities.

### DRIVERS OF RETURN MIGRATION AND OLD AGE

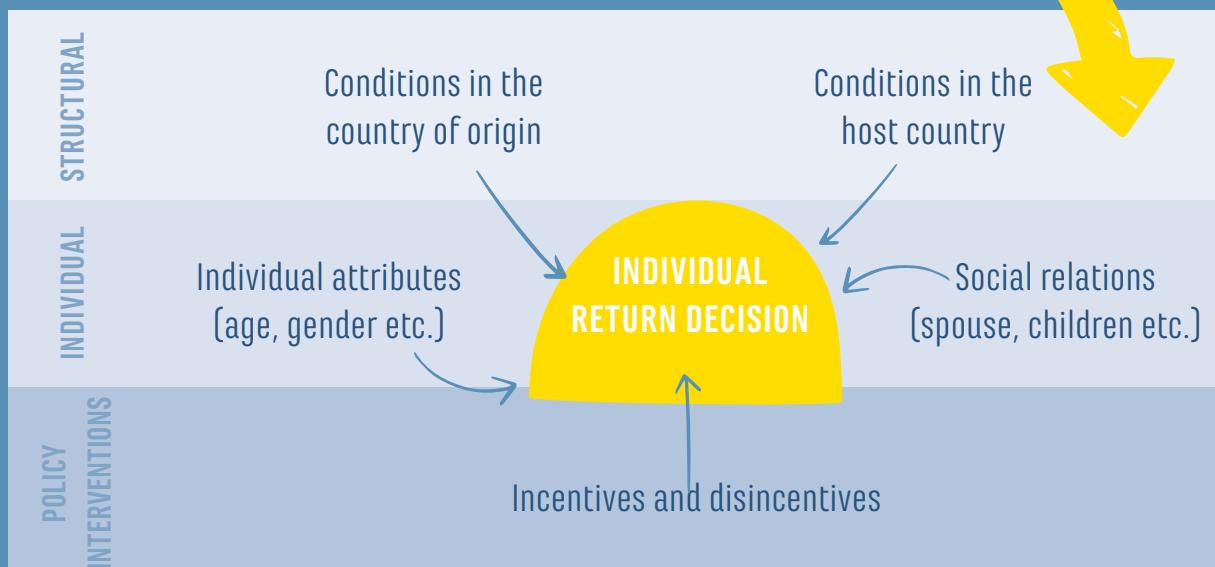
Return migration started to come into the focus of migration studies in the mid 1970s (Bovenkerk 1974; Cerase). In the 1980s, return migration became a topic of international debates involving intergovernmental and supranational organizations. Several theories of return migration have been developed such as the neoclassical approach, the structural approach and the social network approach (Cassarino 2004). Most research focuses, however, on labor migrants, whereas there is quite ample literature on return of retired labor migrants.

## ELIGIBILITY FOR FLIGHT COSTS AND CASH ASSISTANCE

COUNTRY	MIGRANTS WITHOUT PERMISSION TO STAY	MIGRANTS WITH PERMISSION TO STAY	ASYLUM SEEKERS, PENDING CLAIM	ASYLUM SEEKERS, REJECTED APPLICATION	REFUGEES AND THOSE WITH SUBSIDIARY PROTECTION	COMMENTS
Belgium	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	
France	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Norway	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	
Sweden	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	
Switzerland	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
United Kingdom	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	only administrative support (flight cost)

OECD (2020): Sustainable Reintegration of Returning Migrants: A Better Homecoming

## UNDERSTANDING RETURN IN OLD AGE



## REINTEGRATION

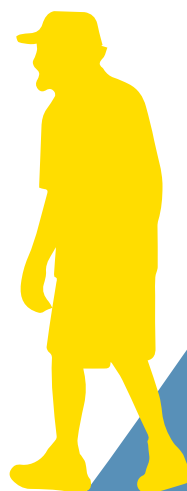
Reintegration support has become a central instrument to incentivize “voluntary return” and achieve “sustainable reintegration”. According to the IOM definition “reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers” (IOM 2017, p. 3). Economic self-sufficiency is indeed a major objective of AVRR programs; therefore, financial support is granted for income-generating activities (IGA). This leads to the outcome that older people may be excluded from financial support because their projects are not sufficiently business oriented or they do not feel capable to run a business due to their age and/or health situation.

## SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING

Social networks both drive the return decision and facilitate social reintegration. The non-existence of social networks can put older returnees at risk of social isolation and/or developing mental health issues. How free are older returnees to construct their identities and are these identities accepted by the wider community? What is “a home” after sometimes many years of absence? Are older

returnees perceived (and do they perceive themselves) as deserving members of community or rather as a burden to others? These are some of the questions we have to ask when talking about or with older returnees.

Vincent Horn ends his presentation by asking how sensible counselling, case management and assistance actually is to the needs and projects of older people. Knowledge about the context for older people in countries of origin, including images of ageing, housing, mobility and social services would be crucial for successful reintegration.



## QUOTES

FROM A PILOT STUDY  
CONDUCTED BY VINCENT  
HORN IN 2018:



“My situation was stable in Syria before, I had a permanent job and worked there for 17 years, but then I left everything behind to come here. If I returned now, I would no longer be able to work there. What else can I work in Syria? No one will hire me. It is better for me here now and I hope to stay here forever. I wouldn't even mind if I had to work here as a cleaner. That was my original job.”

(Syrian man in his 50s)

“I cannot carry out any kind of business. I am too old, my health is bad. I do not have confidence in doing business. You need to know the right people; you need to pay them [informally]. You cannot start a business just like that. But can't they use this money to maintain me? A little bit of money each month, so I can live?”

(Armenian woman, 62 years old)

“I want to buy a cow, because we are two old women here and we can use the milk. When we have milk, I can make cheese, it is very important for us to eat that. Only one cow will make a big difference... I don't think, with one cow, it will be possible to sell any milk. But for me, it is very important.”

(Georgian woman, 67 years old)

Dr. Jan Brommundt

# PHYSIOLOGY OF AGING MIGRANTS

Dr. Jan Brommundt is a cardiac and general anesthesiologist working at the University Hospital in Bonn. He also works as a medical escort for vulnerable returnees. In his presentation, he talked about the physiology of aging migrants and the most common diseases that might affect the return. How it was to escort a patient with severe cardiac condition on a flight and what is crucial when handing over a patient to the return country?



## THE HEALTH

The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined health in 1946 as following: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Even with an infirmity like a missing arm, Dr Brommundt points out, one can lead a healthy and good life. One can also not determine the risk for an elderly migrant by looking at his or her birth year. Family genes and individual lifestyle will have a huge effect on biological age.

When talking about diseases, we should distinguish between infectious and non-infectious, chronic and acute. It is worth

noting that chronic diseases can still acutely kill during travelling. Some typical examples of chronic conditions include hypertension, heart rhythm problems, diabetes, dementia, cancer or mental diseases like schizophrenia and depression. It is very important to be familiar with the health status and disease history of the returnee when planning the return trip. AVRR counsellors shouldn't disregard significant diseases concerning the heart, the lung or the brain. It is important to seek an expert opinion, whenever there is uncertainty about the health status. For example, the correct treatment of diabetes during travelling is extremely important. The changes in blood sugar can cause serious conditions, if the insulin level is not kept stable.

## RETURNING WITH A CARDIAC DISEASE

There are many types of heart diseases which all affect travelling in a different way. The vital parameters that are stabilized through medication during normal circumstances can easily deteriorate during the transport. Each returnee with a heart condition should be examined by a medical expert. There are three important questions to be asked by the physician: Is this a steady condition? How should it be treated during the transport and what kind of treatment is available in the country of return?

Dr Brommundt gave an example of a patient, who he escorted during the return flight. The older woman, a professor in mathematics, was returning to her home country Egypt. She had suffered a stroke ten years prior to returning. Since then she had been living with a ventilator in a private facility. The family had been trying to get her back home for many years, but there was always a medical reason not to do it. Dr Brommundt examined the patient and eventually, with cardiac support and oxygen, they were able to fly to Cairo. Getting past the security at the airport was a challenge, but they managed to get to a private hospital, where she was handed over to the hospital staff with a detailed description of the patient's condition both written and orally. Nevertheless, after twenty hours Dr Brommundt received a phone call about the returnee's death. The hospital staff did not follow the suggested treatment from the medical escort. Even though the returnee was severely ill, her death could have been avoided with the correct treatment. Dr Brommundt continued to emphasize the importance of a good medical handover.

## NEUROLOGICAL DISEASES AND CANCER

It is not unusual to suffer from a neurological "event" during travelling. The most common conditions are cerebrovascular problems, "strokes", dementia and schizophrenia. In these cases, it might be needed to have more than one person escorting the returnee and giving stronger tranquilisers to keep the patient calm.

With returnees suffering from cancer, the most important thing is to have an existing plan of what will happen once the person has returned to his or her home country. It needs to be made sure for example that an equivalent medication is available in the return country.



## FLIGHT PHYSIOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ELDERLY

Inside the plane, the partial pressure of oxygen is reduced. This might cause problems in relation to various sicknesses. Hypoxia, low oxygen pressure at high altitude, affects the amount of oxygen in the blood and results in increased breathing and heart rate for example. It is very easy and cheap to get a blood saturation measurement machine to check the oxygen level in blood during the trip.

It often happens that people get confused about taking their medication right, when time zones change. Many are used to taking their pills during or after dinner, and when the regular meal times get disrupted, people end up taking too much medicine on the plane. The solution is to work on a very clear medication plan beforehand. It is also very important to stay hydrated, so providing enough water for the flight is essential.

The speaker's suggestion for a successful medical return case is to have a good – but simple - handover in written form and in the correct language as well as a medical follow-up after handover. Contact information should be left for the medical staff in the country of return for clarifications and questions. After return, Dr Brommundt advises a simplified, home-based treatment approach whenever possible. For mental illnesses, the return can even be beneficial; returning home can calm the mind in some cases.



Uwe Johansson

# ELDERLY (RE)MIGRATION – IMPACT ON THE PSYCHE

**Uwe Johansson is a head physician in gerontopsychiatry at the LWL Clinic Dortmund in Germany. He talked about the impact of return and remigration on the psyche. As the brain, mind and feelings are interconnected and impinge each other, every change in one's environment has an effect on one's well-being. Due to age-related alterations in the brain, the elderly have more problems coping with changes.**

## THE FOUR STAGES OF CHANGE RESISTANCE

It is known that even a simple task like rearranging our desk items can cause resistance and annoyance. This is because our brains are prone to react negatively to change. In the same way when a person's social environment changes, it challenges his or her sense of stability and causes the mind to change into "fight or flight" mode. Human beings tend to avoid change as much as possible.

The change resistance can be divided into four stages: denial, anger, exploring and acceptance. First, people usually deny the need for change. That's why it is important to create a vision for the future and communicate it well, repeating the message and engage the people in a dialogue. In the second phase, people usually turn angry and bitter and tend to blame others. It is important for caretakers to stay empathetic and give space for negative feelings regarding the change. In stage three, people try to negotiate and get creative with alternative options. Here one should stay open and let people offer their ideas. In the last stage, people accept that the change is necessary and they finally engage in the decision-making process or solution.

## THE ELDERLY BRAIN – HOW DOES IT CHANGE?

There are several changes which take place in the brain when a person grows old. Certain parts of the brain shrink, especially those important for learning and other complex mental activities. In certain brain regions, communication

between nerve cells may also not be as effective as before. Blood flow in the brain may decrease and inflammation, which occurs when the body responds to an injury or disease, may increase.

How do these changes in the brain affect thinking and behavior? Older adults may for example be slower to find words and recall names. Some have more problems with multitasking, others have mild decreases in their ability to pay attention. However, research shows that older adults are able to acquire new skills, form new memories and improve vocabulary and language skills. Moreover, the vast life experience can help elderly people cope with change.

## IMMIGRANTS' PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

First and second generation immigrants and re-immigrants report higher rates of mental disorders like psychosis, depression, anxiety or traumatic stress disorder. In addition, suicide risk and suicide rates are bit higher than average. Studies show that high ethnic density in the host country can be a protective factor for the elderly's psyche. People with a migration background are also more prone to develop dementia. Elderly migrants are often cared for at home by family members in the host country and in case of remigration this support may get lost. In addition to this "care-gap", there are also higher risks of stigmatization and discrimination. These challenges have to be considered when dealing with migration and remigration in older age.



Sarah Hampel, PhD

# RETURN COUNSELLING IN THE CONTEXT OF OLD AGE AND CARE AND THE ROLE OF INFORMAL CAREGIVERS IN THE RETURN DECISION

Sarah Hampel, PhD, works as a Project Manager at the KDA (Kuratorium Deutsche Altershilfe). Her task at KDA is to provide a network for self-help and empowerment for care-dependent people and informal caregivers in North Rhine-Westphalia. Mrs. Hampel informed the audience about the role and influence of informal caregivers in the return decision. Understanding the dynamics between caregivers and care-dependent persons can improve the AVRR counselling quality for elderly returnees.

## WHAT IS OLD AGE?

How is "old age" defined? According to Mrs. Hampel, one can distinguish at least between calendric age, biographical age, functional age, social age, psychological age and cultural age. Nevertheless, counsellors should try to avoid aging stereotypes, which exist on an individual, institutional and societal level. Additionally, the "welfare state bias" affects the perception of aging migrants. The modernization theory in scientific discourse suggests, namely, that the more "modernized" a society is, the more social loss of status the elderlies face. It is estimated that in the future elderlies will suffer an even greater loss of power and agency in society. Subsequently, they will become a bigger target group of social policy.

## FAMILY AS INFORMAL CAREGIVER

In Germany, four out of five care-dependent persons (3.31 million) live at home. Families are still a huge resource in

the care for care-dependent persons: two out of five households do not use care counselling although they would have the legal right to do so. The informal caregiving starts insidiously: In the beginning, the burden is low and the engagement is high. The caring for a frail older person also usually takes longer than informal caregivers expect. Thus, the informal caregivers represent a physically and psychologically burdened target group, which suffers for example from insomnia, depression and nervousness.

## DISTANT CAREGIVERS

15 - 26% of all informal caregivers are long distance caregivers, who mostly take care of their parents. Long distance is usually defined as at least 10 miles or 30 minutes trip to the care-dependent person, whereas in some situations the distant caregiver is even living in another country. Often these long distance caregivers, however, do not see themselves as informal caregivers. This fact can be often seen in

counselling situations that children take it for granted, that they have to take care of their parents.

There are of course many challenges related to distance caregiving. Living in another country makes it impossible to reliably and consequently take care of the elderly. Travelling costs can become a burden. Additionally, there can be a lack of information on site as well as a big emotional and mental load supporting the care-dependent person from distance.

How do these changes in the brain affect thinking and behavior? Older adults may for example be slower to find words and recall names. Some have more problems with multitasking, others have mild decreases in their ability to pay attention. However, research shows that older adults are able to acquire new skills, form new memories and improve vocabulary and language skills. Moreover, the vast life experience can help elderly people cope with change.

## COUNSELLING CARE-DEPENDENT PERSONS

Mrs. Hampel explains how understanding the roles and influence of informal caregivers helps in the counselling process. The explicit and implicit wishes of the older clients need to be understood. In other words, how does the position of being a care-dependent person affect the decision making? The counsellors have to be aware of the changing family rules and roles — and of the fact that it is a continuous trade-off when the body responds to an injury or disease, may increase.



Richard Staring, PhD

# PROFILE OF A SPECIAL TARGET GROUP: UNDOCUMENTED ELDERLY MIGRANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Richard Staring, PhD, is an endowed professor of Mobility, Control and Crime at Department of Criminology at the Erasmus School of Law and Erasmus University Rotterdam. He is also a program director in ESL research Program 'Monitoring Safety and Security'. Professor Staring conducted a qualitative study among undocumented elderly migrants in the Netherlands. The topic has gained more importance, since there is a growing number of undocumented migrants who have lived in Netherlands already for 20 to 30 years and who might be potential returnees.

## THE FIRST PROFILE: ASYLUM SEEKERS

For his study, Professor Staring and his research team interviewed 56 elderly long-term undocumented migrants from 20 different nationalities. He was able to create three different profiles based on these interviews. The first group which Professor Staring was able to identify, were the "asylum seekers". These people are embedded in asylum and humanitarian networks, which provide housing, income and a wide range of support. Other social networks are often lacking. Therefore, this group is very dependent on NGOs and social support. The "asylum seekers" suffer from various problems like mental illnesses and difficulties with housing and income.

The "asylum seekers" have legalization aspirations in the Netherlands and multiple contacts with the authorities.



They have often received multiple rejections for a legal permission to stay in the Netherlands but still feel that it is impossible for them to return, because they don't have con-



tact to their countries of origin. Thus, they stay in a limbo and suffer from a lack of perspective. Even though they do not have a legal permission to stay in the country, the authorities are not able to return them to their home countries.

regarding the change. In stage three, people try to negotiate and get creative with alternative options. Here one should stay open and let people offer their ideas. In the last stage, people accept that the change is necessary and they finally engage in the decision-making process or solution.

## THE SECOND PROFILE: INVESTORS

Professor Staring calls the second profile “investors”. These immigrants have been able to improve their living conditions immensely. They have strong social networks and are relatively independent. They are part of social communities with other “investors” and often share housing with them as well. They are working in the informal sector - often in the service industry - and are less vulnerable than the first group. Only when this group falls ill, the migrants have seek social assistance by NGOs and often are registered again. The investors have also strong ties with their home countries

and — over time — to the Netherlands as well. For this group, return is an option, for example in case of unemployment.

## THE THIRD PROFILE: ADVENTURERS

The third group of elderly undocumented migrants in the Netherlands identified in the study of Professor Staring were the “adventurers”. Their motive for migration is often their will to explore the world and try their luck somewhere else. Nevertheless, they have failed in the attempt to improve their living conditions and are marginalized. The people in this group have generally weak social networks and have fragmented work and housing careers. They are often using shelters for homeless people and have multiple health concerns and problems like addictions. They have many contacts with the authorities, but are non-deportable, according to Professor Staring.

The adventurers have also many contacts with NGOs. However, as Professor Staring points out that the policies in Netherlands are changing. In many cases, migrants in need have to cooperate and discuss return to home country in order to get access to NGO’s services.

Inka Lehtonen

# PRACTICAL TIPS FOR COUNSELLING ELDERLY MIGRANTS

**Inka Lehtonen works as a Diversity Work Expert at the Jade Activity Centre in Helsinki, Finland. The Jade Activity Centre is a non-governmental organization that promotes inclusion and well-being of elderly migrants. In her presentation, Inka Lehtonen shared some insights from her job and practical tips for working with elderly migrants.**

Many older migrants are grateful for the safety and security in their new home countries. But at the same time, they often state that they would love to return to their country of origin. Inka Lehtonen highlights that in counselling situations individual life stories play a bigger role than a certain ethnicity or religion. The counsellors should thus always remember to meet every person as an individual and not as a representative of a certain group. There are many factors in addition to culture and religion which determine a person such as social status, education and life experiences. When one moves to a new country, the status can change drastically. Being unemployed or living on social benefits can be extremely hard for somebody who used to have a high professional status in the country of origin. This all affects the self-esteem and feeling of agency of a person.

## TYPICAL CHALLENGING SITUATIONS IN COUNSELLING

In counselling situations, there is often a certain mistrust in the beginning. The people needing help come from societies where you cannot trust the authorities and it often takes time to build trust. The possibility to get counselling

with in the mother tongue is essential. In the case of using an interpreters, it is very important, though, to make eye contact with the client and not to look at the interpreter. Being empathetic and friendly is very important in making a person feel welcome and more willing to open up.

Often there are cases, when a person comes to counselling with one issue, but other issues pop up during the sessions. Sometimes the raised topics are really complex matters which take time to solve. Not all information is shared at first since it takes time to build trust. The elderly person might also refuse help if she or he thinks it will worsen the life situation. In counselling, the counsellors should tackle one worry or one fear at a time and to make sure that all issues are addressed. The elderly person should not be left to solve the issues alone.

## INVISIBILITY IN SERVICES

Elderlies with diverse backgrounds are not equally represented in (elderly) services and there are many gaps and barriers. Services are often created for standard users not taking into account social, physical, cultural and psychological factors. In the elderly's case, there can be a lack of knowledge about

the service system and how the host society works. There can be false information inside migrant communities and distrust in unknown systems. Filling forms can also be challenging for older migrants and the support cannot be accessed, therefore.

## ROLE OF INFORMAL CAREGIVERS

According to Inka Lehtonen, children or other relatives should not be used as interpreters in counselling situations, since the elderly persons have the right to privacy as well. There might be issues which the elderly do not feel comfortable addressing in front of their children.

There is also often an assumption that family members will take care of the elderly. This is not always the case, since many families are dispersed around the world and the younger generation lacks the chance to support their elderly.



Robert Schuetz

# INTRODUCING FRONTEX: JOINT REINTEGRATION SERVICES AND FORCED RETURN ESCORT AND SUPPORT OFFICERS

Robert Schuetz, Operational Officer in the Post Return Unit at Frontex, gave an overview of the new reintegration program called Joint Reintegration Services (JRS). The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) is now offering reintegration support in various countries. Frontex offers a success project of the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN) project. The new services were tested in JRS Pilot project, in which six member states participated with 51 cases. Based on these experiences, the JRS program was created.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

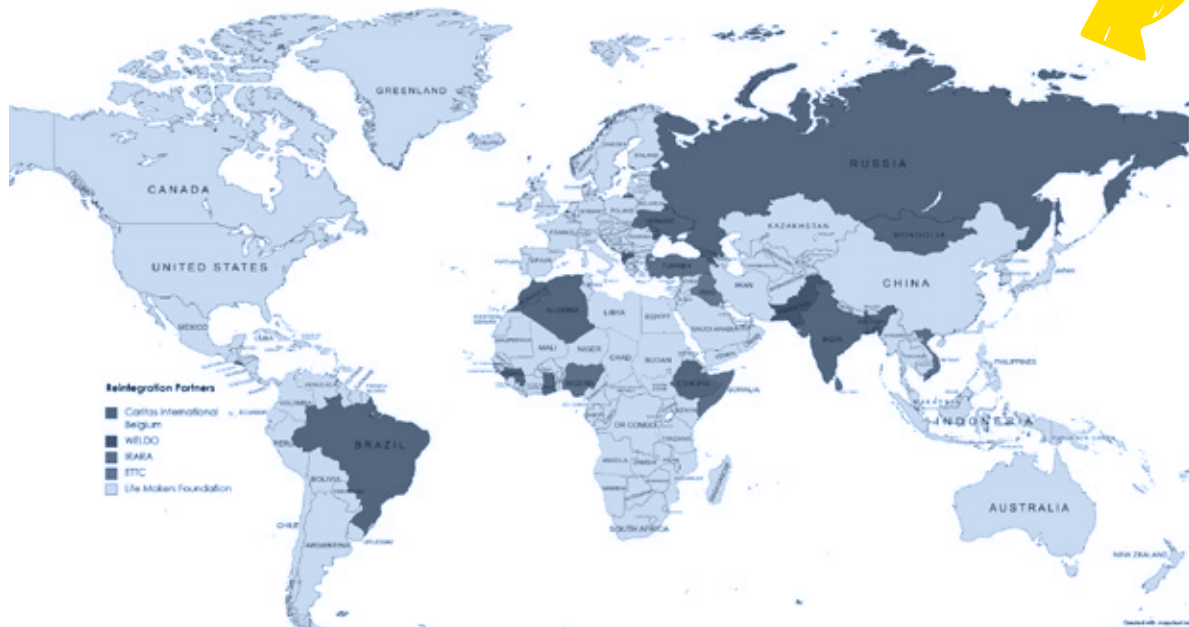
In 2019, a new regulation extended the mandate of Frontex in many areas (Regulation EU 2019/1896). Frontex has the mandate to support member states in „[...] providing assistance to returnees during the pre-return, return related and post-arrival and post-return phases, taking into account the needs of vulnerable persons [...]“.

## JRS REINTEGRATION PACKAGES

One of the biggest changes compared to ERRIN is that JRS program has two reintegration packages. The first one is Post-Arrival Assistance, which covers the costs for most urgent needs up to 3 days after arrival. This can include cash, airport pickup, housing upon arrival and medical assistance of altogether 615€ per person.

The second package is called Post-Return Assistance and it can be used up to 12 months after arrival. This long-term reintegration assistance can be used for example for long-term housing, education, assistance in setting up a small business or psychosocial or legal support. The amount of this support is 2000€ for voluntary return for the main adult applicant and 1000€ per additional family member or 1000€ for forced returnees. The member states of the program can choose if they use only one or both packages and to what extent they use eligible activities in alignment with national law and requirements. In order to apply for the reintegration support, counsellors need to use the Reintegration Assistance Tool (RIAT), an online platform, for case entry, case management and case closing as well as quality monitoring and support in counselling. Frontex also runs a service desk that can be reached via phone or email with questions and feedback.

## THE GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE OF THE JRS PROGRAM



### FRONTEX RETURN ACTIVITY AND FRESO

Kevin Brouwer from Frontex Return Operations and the Voluntary Returns Unit shared a presentation about the Frontex return activity and deployment of Forced Return Escort and Support Officers (FRESO). FRESO consists of Standing Corps of officers and supports both voluntary and forced returns. FRESO officers can either be deployed at member state airports or take part in ad-hoc return operations. They are under instructions of the member states, but the member states share no costs. More than half of the FRESOs are deployed at airports, permanently in Rome, Vienna, Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Paris and they are only doing forced returns.

### GROUND AND ON-BOARD SUPPORT VS ESCORT IN FORCED RETURN OPERATIONS

One of the activities of FRESO at airports is ground and on-board support. This is done on both forced-return operations as well as voluntary return/departures. The tasks of FRESO include assisting and accompanying departing or

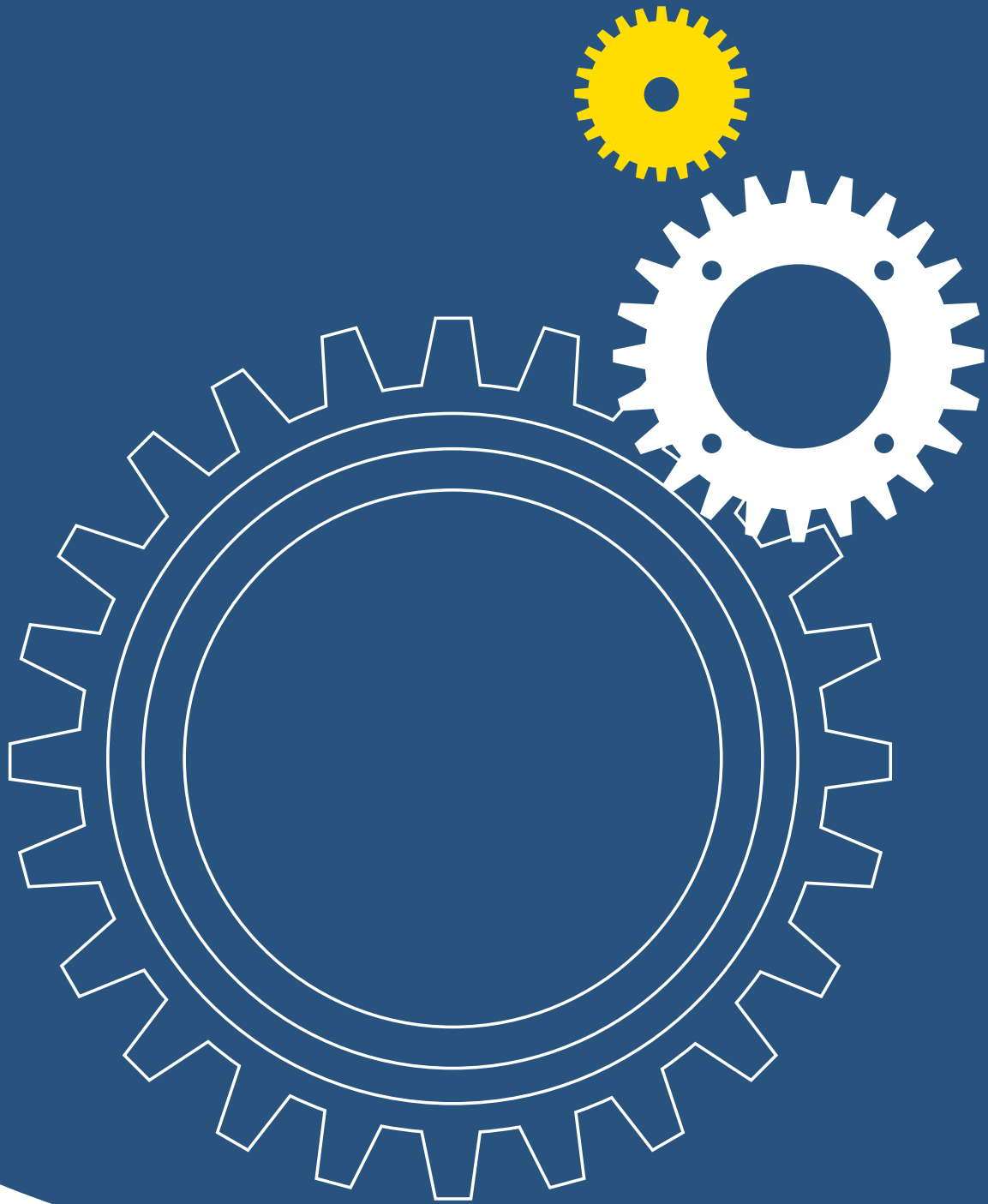
transiting forced-return escorts and returnees (DEPA) on scheduled flights. Other tasks are to provide assistance on returns by scheduled flights and to offer ground support for return operations and voluntary return activities. This can mean anything from checking-in to carrying luggage and is especially meant to support more vulnerable groups.

The second entity of FRESO's activities is to escort the deportees in forced return operations. In these cases, FRESO is acting during the return operation, supporting in the implementation of all phases of the return operation.

### FRESO AND VULNERABLE GROUPS OR RETURNEES

One of the most important aspects with this type of operations is to identify and take necessary actions to assist vulnerable groups. All the standing corps get a basic training and a specialized training for FRESO. The trainings involve code of conduct, dynamic risk assessment, communication (for example body language, tone of voice, eye contact etc.), cultural awareness, evaluation of physical state and situation of the returnee as well as ensuring that fundamental rights and human dignity is always respected.





# ONLINE WORKSHOPS

## WORKSHOP 1

# VOLUNTARY RETURN TO LATIN AMERICA - FOCUS ON EL SALVADOR, VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA

### SELECTION OF WORKSHOP TOPIC

The workshop took place online in November 2020. Prior to the workshop, the Transnational Exchange V staff got in touch with its strategic European partners, who are offering AVRR counselling, in order to discuss relevant topics for the first workshop. Belgium, Spain and Portugal experienced a high influx of asylum seekers and labor migrants from Latin America especially since the political crisis in Venezuela started in November 2018. The pandemic contributed to the emigration flows from the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region with a majority of Salvadorans, Colombians and Venezuelans because many of the day-workers could not find work in the informal sector anymore. An increasing influx of certain nationalities to European countries usually results in time-displaced increase of returns to the same region. The two main countries of return from Belgium were in 2020: Brazil (480 returnees), and El Salvador (140 returnees). Therefore, a workshop focusing on return to Latin America with a focus on El Salvador, Venezuela and Colombia was organized.

### STIGMATIZATION OF RETURNEES IN LATIN AMERICA

The voluntary return numbers are very small in comparison to the forced return numbers to Latin America. An extreme example for this phenomenon is El Salvador in the Central

American region. In total, 37.316 Salvadorians returned to El Salvador in 2019 (IOM El Salvador). 52.2% were forcedly returned from the United States of America and 47.5% from Mexico. Only 0.3% of the returning migrants returned voluntarily from other countries including Europe. The forced returnees did not receive any type of information on re-integration or financial assistance. IOM El Salvador handed out small arrival kits with hygiene products, food and information to returnees at the airport when they were informed about charter flights with deportees. The returned migrants often had little chances to reintegrate successfully into the labor market which left them with one choice only: to join the local gangs called "Maras". The government and NGOs have made a great effort to reintegration the returnees within the last 5 years according Swisscontact and to help them finding work. However, the lack of funding and stigmatization puts a great obstacle to the endeavor. Returnees often have to fight stigmatization of being a criminal / gang member once they start looking for jobs after return. On top of that, the local population lives of the remittances sent from the family members in the US and is dependent on Salvadorans to stay and work abroad. Every returnee means one person less who sends money to El Salvador. Since there are so few voluntary return numbers, it is impossible for the local population not to stigmatize voluntary returnees – even though they receive pre-departure counselling and often a reintegration budget to start a small business and receive medical care for several months after return in cooperation with IOM El Salvador.



## SERVICES FOR RETURNEES IN EL SALVADOR

According to the regional director of Central America Swisscontact Saúl Díaz-Ortiz, El Salvador received on average between 40.000 to 60.000 returnees from Mexico and the US per year. Swisscontact focuses its efforts on a professional reintegration of returning migrants through supporting labor insertion and entrepreneurship. The government, academia and NGOs have set up services for returnees. However, many returnees are not informed about the services prior to the return and even afterwards, they often do not self-identify as returnees due to the fear of discrimination and stigmatization.

Therefore, the State Office for Salvadorans Abroad, which belongs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has different return registration offices in 10 out of 14 states and gives out information to returnees about training and reintegration projects. This process is called "identification of returnees".

The next step after identification of returnees is the validation of their professional experience gained abroad. The main partner is the national institution for technical and vocational training, Insaforp, for issuing the certifications of competence. In the private sector, the tourism chamber Casatur and the construction chamber Casalco can also assess the returnees' skills with the help experts of the trait. An example for a typical returnee could be a Salvadoran who cooked in an Italian restaurant in New York City for 10 years. He can get the certi-

fication as a professional cook of Italian cuisine once he displays all the necessary skills and passes the exam. Afterwards he can open an Italian restaurant in an easier way in El Salvador using the certificate.

Finally, a third step can be taken by returnees either to receive help with the labor market insertion (job listings on [www.tecoloco.com](http://www.tecoloco.com)) or the municipalities and private entities like Fundemas or with assistance and guidance for a business start-up. The NGO Insert and the University of Dr. Jose Matias Delgado for example run business incubator programs. The challenge remains, though, to start a business when the returnees have little access to loans or personal savings. Mr. Díaz-Ortiz shared that the great diaspora of Salvadorans could play an active role in supporting business start-ups in El Salvador. In total, the returnees who signed up for training and coaching with Swisscontact so far could increase their monthly income to 879\$ in comparison to the base line income of 260\$ per month.

As with every good program, funding and staff is important to reach out to greater numbers of returnees. Returnees need to be willing to register as returnees in order to receive help which can cause social discrimination and stigmatization. Many countries in Latin America will continue to experience circular labor migration as long as the labor market is weak, insecurity high and natural catastrophes happen.



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## WORKSHOP 2

# OVERVIEW OF AVRR SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

The second workshop took place online on the 17th of March, 2021. The field of migration is always in motion and consequently, the services working with migrants have to face constant new challenges and adapt its work accordingly. Since the field of voluntary return has moved more and more to the center of attention of the European political stakeholders as a means to control the migration streams from Europe in the last five years, more funding has been allocated to the field and more projects were and are being planned and implemented. Therefore, updates on the AVRR counselling structure and projects are always interesting and informative for AVRR counsellors. 71 persons participated in the workshop.

The workshop agenda included nine country presentations from Germany, Denmark, Portugal, Belgium, Norway, Switzerland, Aust-

ria, France, and the Netherlands. Each country representative gave an overview of the main counselling providers, the counselling system, the most recent return numbers, the return and reintegration budget and the latest news. It ended with a presentation about upcoming changes on a European policy level and the changing role of Frontex with regards to voluntary return. The detailed report about the workshop can be found on the homepage of Caritas Augsburg.

## FEEDBACK FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

In an anonymous evaluation form, the participants were asked what were some of the main lessons learned from the workshop. In the following, a few statements shall be presented:

Although counselling structures in European countries might differ, the needs expressed by migrants and solutions to be found by counsellors are very similar.

To see we, AVRR counsellors, all deal with similar issues in Europe

Not many counsellors have much contact after the returnee is back in his or her country of origin. Why is this? Is this necessary for the returnee?

Covid-19-related travel bans/restrictions depend also on the host countries, not only the destination countries (e.g. possibility to return to Morocco from Belgium, but not from Switzerland)

For counsellors, it is very helpful to participate in such exchanges, learning about different systems and new possibilities to solve the problems. It was very interesting to learn more about Frontex.

Exchanging information between European countries is crucial

Local authorities start to play a more important role in return counselling

## WORKSHOP 3

# IMPULSES FOR A METHOD-BASED AVRR COUNSELLING

During the first and second workshop, similarities and differences of the counselling practices were discussed in the working groups. The clients portray similar characteristics and circumstances in most European countries, but the AVRR counselling methods and approaches are often not defined or vary on an individual level from European country to country. Therefore, the workshop topic was chosen to present counselling methods, which could be helpful to ensure a high quality and a uniform AVRR counselling on a European level. After the introduction to the counselling methods, the participating counsellors discussed which methods are feasible and which ones are too theoretical for the day-to-day work. In the following, the different methods shall be briefly presented:

## METHOD 1: META COMMUNICATION

It is important to create trust and transparency when talking to a client. To ensure this, the counsellor could use the Meta communication tool. It implies communication about communication. For example, the counsellor could explain to the client first when asking questions why this information is needed instead of collecting information without giving a reason.

## METHOD 2: METS

When offering return and reintegration counselling, the counsellor might work with clients who have stayed in Europe without a legal permit long-term and who lack perspective and a

sense of ownership of their future. In this case, the counsellor could apply the Method of Empowerment for Trauma Survivors (METS). The method targets seven core topics such as hope and optimism, identity, meaning, empowerment, connectedness, recognition, safety to help the client (re)discover reasons to actively manage his or her life again. This will support the client to shift from living in a victim role towards living with more self-confidence and agency. The method is complex. Therefore, it is recommended to receive training first before applying parts of it directly. Applying this method in the context of AVRR counselling does not substitute therapy.

 [Link \(https://mets.arq.org/node/6635\)](https://mets.arq.org/node/6635)

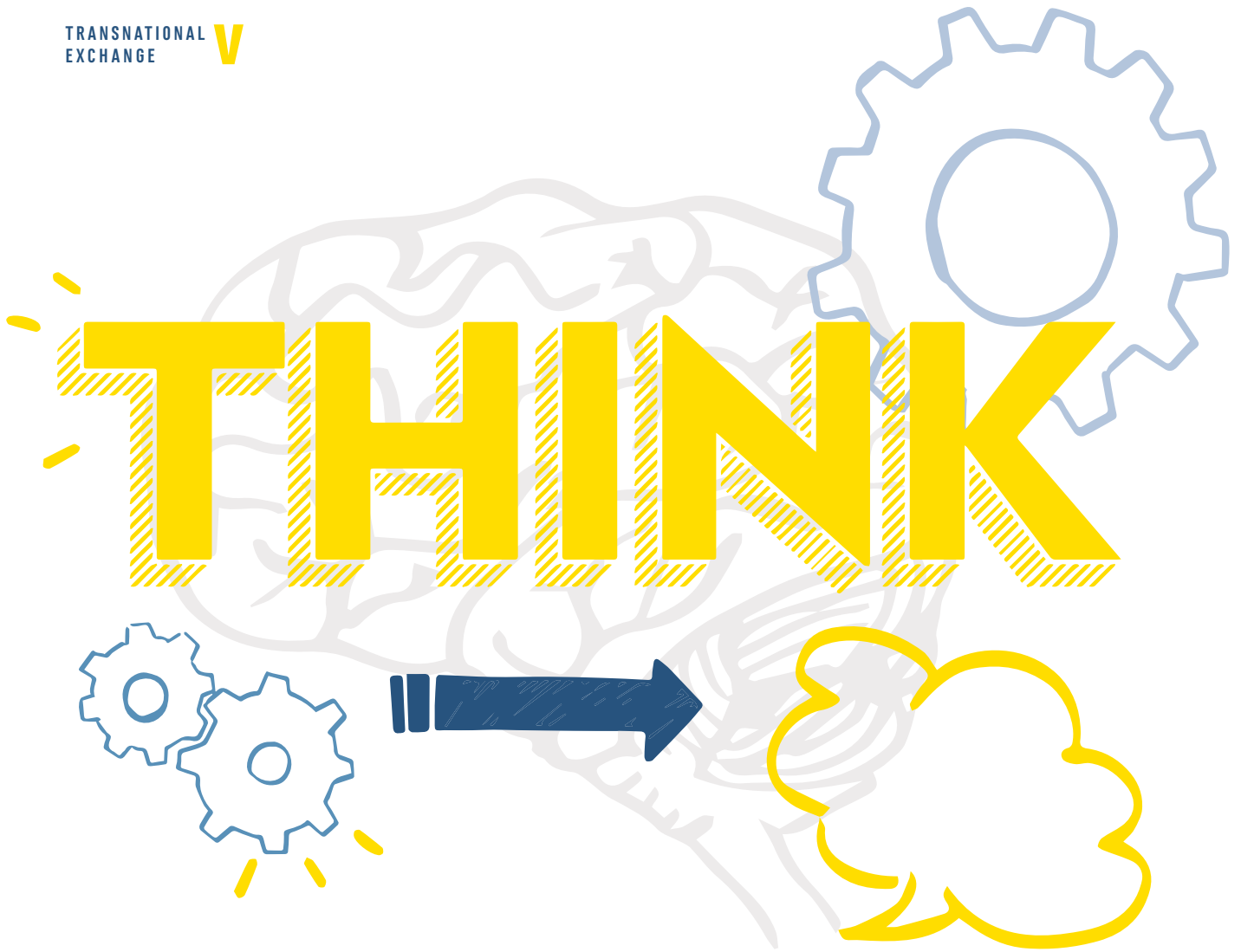
## METHOD 3: MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Clients are often struggling with uncertainty and decision-making. Motivational Interviewing (MI) equips counsellors to guide the client through the decision-making process and to encourage him or her to actively engage in the counselling session. This can be accomplished by applying the techniques of open and closed questions, reflective listening, affirmations and summarizing.

## TOOL: THE COCKATOO'S JOURNEY

In case children are returning with (single) parents or unaccompanied, the counsellor could make use of the toolkit "the

  
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cockatoo's journey" developed by Solid Road which provides material with child-friendly information about return, psycho-social guidance, support for the parents and advice on counselling children. The material is based on a return story of a cockatoo which experiences the highs and lows of the return process. By identifying with the cockatoo, children have the opportunity to talk about their hopes and concerns regarding the upcoming journey in an indirect and easier way. The material is in several languages accessible on the homepage of Solid Roads.

 **Link** (<https://www.solidroad.nl/toolkit/?lang=en>)

The workshop raised awareness amongst the European AVRR counsellors to reflect on their counselling practices and how they can at least work on a more harmonized counselling offer within their organization. The Danish refugee council can be taken as a role model. It offers training on AVRR counselling methods to its counsellors by an assigned trainer within the organization and reviews the implementation of the counselling methods on an annual basis.

## WORKSHOP 4

# ADDICTION AS A CHALLENGE IN THE RETURN PROCESS



The online workshop took place on the 3rd and 4th of November, 2021. Offering assisted voluntary return and reintegration counselling to persons struggling with addiction such as alcohol addiction, drug addiction, medication addiction, etc. holds many challenges. Nevertheless, representatives of this vulnerable group want to return and ask for help in AVRR counselling centers. The workshop started with a short medical introduction to addiction and its effects on body and mind by Dr. Dietmar Czycholl, a psychologist and psychotherapist. Afterwards the participating counsellors were assigned to online working groups in which they discussed different scenarios of addicted clients who showed more or less willingness to discuss their addiction in the return counselling process and how they would work with the clients. The findings from the working groups were completed with the input of the addiction counsellor Arthur Coffin from the NGO LogIn who spoke mainly about the counselling method “Motivational Interviewing” when counselling addicted clients throughout the lengthy decision-making process. Another round of discussions took place in the

second working group focusing on when and how to end the counselling session in case a client is too intoxicated. After addressing counselling topics of the pre-departure phase, IOM Germany held a presentation about the medical preparation for a fit-to-fly state of the returning migrant and the medical escorts who usually accompany addicts during the return flight. The return process, however, does not end after the arrival in the country of return. The partner organization, to which the returnee is referred in many cases, can inform about follow-up medical treatment and give psychosocial counseling. According to the experience of the reintegration partner Caritas Georgia, returning addicts usually do not manage to find a job or start their own business. It is rather a success, if the returnees manage to fight their addictions and reintegrate in their social networks. In a final working group session, the participants discussed the cultural influence on the willingness and openness to address addiction in the return counselling setting. The last input of the workshop focused on the nexus of (re)migration and addiction by Dr. Dietmar Czycholl.

  
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WORKSHOP 5

# VOLUNTARY RETURN TO THE MIDDLE EAST - FOCUS ON SYRIA, LEBANON AND JORDAN



The workshop took place online on the 5th of July, 2022. The civil war in Syria has been ongoing for more than a decade now, which explains why the return numbers are still very low and key actors of the return field such as IOM do not support voluntary return to Syria. The goal of the workshop was to discuss the current situation in the Middle East, analyze return options, and learn about future scenarios of the region from experts. Voluntary returns to the neighboring countries Jordan and Lebanon are equally low. In several European countries, however, Syrians, Lebanese and Jordanians seek AVRR counselling occasionally. And for this case, the AVRR counsellors should be prepared with the latest development and perspectives in the respective countries. The participants also had the chance to discuss their cases in working groups. In the following, a few highlights of the presentations will be shared:

Wolfgang Mühlberger, a renowned Middle East expert, first highlighted common characteristics of the Middle East region. Mr. Mühlberger stressed the negative effects of climate change on the region which has always had water stress regarding irrigation and access to water for a growing demographic. But now, it struggles immensely with an even greater water demand due to

droughts, higher average temperatures and less rainfall. The lack of water has again negative implications on the production of cereal and wheat. The war in Ukraine only increased the problem by stopping the wheat supply which countries in the Middle East depend on. In 2020, Lebanon received 80.4% of its wheat import from Ukraine for example (FAO, 2020). Also the health sector suffered from extreme stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. Looking at the Fragile State index, Syria ranks on 3rd place in 2021, Lebanon on 34th place and Jordan 67th place, which shows that especially Syria is still extremely far from having a functional administration and thus security for the general population. A final index to be shared here is the Freedom House Index from 2021 which depicts freedom of speech and sharing information through independent journalism: Syria 1/100 (not free), Jordan 33/100 (not free) and Lebanon 42/100 (partly free). Afterwards, he described important developments in the three countries.

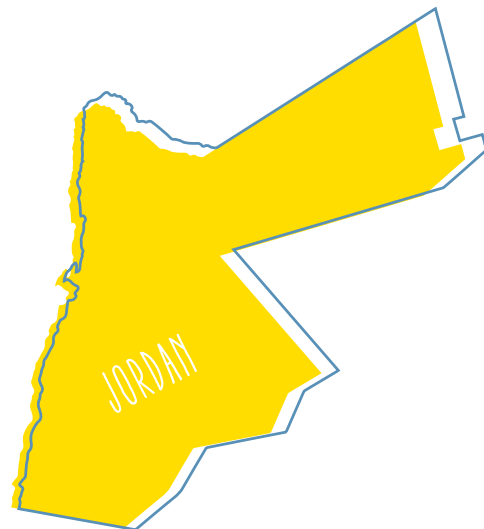
Mr. Mühlberger's presentation was followed by a detailed overview of the current political and socio-economic situation in Syria from the journalist and Middle East expert Kristin Helberg. She explained that the country continues to be divided into four different areas: the regime-controlled areas, the Kurdish controlled area in the northeast, the northern parts occupied by Turkey and the rebel/IS controlled areas. All areas struggle immensely to provide housing, electricity, security, affordable food, etc but show slight differences nevertheless. A monthly teacher salary for example in the regime-controlled areas is 24\$, whilst in the Kurdish controlled area it is approximately 65 - 75\$. Bread costs 2500 £S in the regime controlled areas, whilst 2000 £S in the Kurdish controlled areas. Regarding voluntary return to Syria, she mentioned an UNHCR report from June 2022 regarding the willingness of Syrians in the





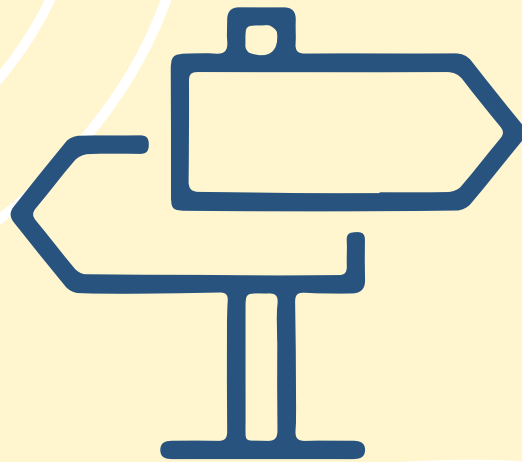
Middle East to return to Syria. 93% of the interviewed Syrians stated that they are not planning on returning to Syria within the next year. In 2017, the same survey was executed with the result that 78% of Syrians were not planning on returning to Syria. The willingness to return has decreased parallel to the destabilization of the country. Reports from Amnesty International describe extortion and imprisonment for many returnees to Syria. Her conclusion was that the most likely scenario for Syria is that it remains in this dire, fragile state in the next years and voluntary return to Syria cannot be recommended.

Nevertheless, a few returnees decided to return from Europe in the last few years – mainly due to family reasons. Germany, Austria and the Netherlands started an ERRIN pilot project for reintegration support in Syria. The implementing reintegration organization was ETTC Iraq with local staff present in Syria. 24 returnees were assisted in 2022.



The afternoon session of the workshop dealt with the topic of blood revenge and voluntary return to the Middle East. Robert Ermers (PhD) gave an input first. Afterwards, the participants discussed in working groups return cases with this particular issue. The afternoon ended with an input from Sawsan Sakhel, the project coordinator of Caritas Jordan. She described the reintegration assistance Caritas Jordan provides and gave some examples of successful business start-ups.

Voluntary return to Syria, Lebanon and Jordan remains a difficult endeavor and AVRR counsellors are asked to have in-depths talks with the clients before supporting the voluntary return. In the end, however, it is always the client who makes the final decision about his or her future and not the counsellors.



# FIELD TRIPS

Switzerland, Austria and Portugal



Field trip to

# SWITZERLAND



The field trip to Switzerland was the first attempt of an in-person activity within the Transnational Exchange V project while the Covid-19 pandemic was ongoing. The participants were selected and asked to book the train or plane tickets only two weeks in advance. The agenda continued to change due to new Covid-19 regulations and cancellations until the last day prior to the trip. Nevertheless, the whole group of seven AVRR counsellors from six different European countries met up in Bern successfully on the 20th of September, 2021, in the evening for a first meet and greet. After two full days of program, the counsellors returned with new information about AVRR in Switzerland and good connections with other European counsellors. In the following, a few highlights and special aspects of the AVRR counselling system in Switzerland shall be presented:

## RETURN COUNSELLING IN DETENTION CENTERS

The first topic on the agenda was a visit to the Swiss Red Cross Bern which offers counselling on prospects and return in deten-

tion centers in 1 of the 26 Swiss cantons. In total, return counselling in detention centers is only available in 3 out of 26 cantons in Switzerland. Naturally, the question arose amongst the participants whether a voluntary return from the detention center can actually be called voluntary return. The Red Cross Bern counsellors agreed that it was not voluntary return but rather assisted return.

In 2009, the Red Cross Bern saw a special need amongst rejected asylum seekers in detention centers and launched therefore the detention counselling project. It has been running ever since with the objective to preserve human dignity in the return process. Two thirds of the clients, who receive counselling, are in administrative detention. Only one-third serves a sentence. The counselling includes the assessment of personal circumstances, future prospects counselling and preparations for return. The returnees can receive a similar financial assistance as well as participate in the same reintegration programs as voluntary returnees. In 2020, for example, 227 clients returned with the help of the Red Cross Bern.



## LEGAL COUNSELLING FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS IN SWITZERLAND

The second appointment took place at the Federal Asylum Center (Bundesasylzentrum). The Bern Legal Counselling for People in Need team received the Transnational Exchange V group to talk about its work. Every asylum seeker in Switzerland has the right to receive legal counselling free of charge during the asylum and the appeal process. The team continued to explain the asylum system with a detailed overview of the expedited procedure for asylum seekers from so-called safe third countries. With the revision of the Asylum Law, in effect since the 01st of March, 2019, the accelerated asylum procedures will be conducted and completed within 140 days for applicants from safe third countries.

## LEGAL ESTABLISHMENT OF AVRR COUNSELLING IN SWITZERLAND

The main host of the field trip was IOM Switzerland. IOM Switzerland offers counselling inside the six federal reception centers in Switzerland. Once the asylum seekers enter the normal asylum procedure and are distributed to the cantons, the local AVRR counselling provider (either the migration authority or an NGO) continues to work with the clients on a potential return. Voluntary return assistance is legally established in the Asylum Law (Asylgesetz): Article 92 determines the funding for the return travel expenses and Article 93 the funding for the AVRR counselling. This legal setting provides a strong foundation upon which the counselling providers can base their work. It allows for a stable, uninterrupted offer of AVRR counselling.

## SIM FLIGHT BOOKING FOR RETURNEES

In Switzerland, two return flight booking agencies, swissREPAT and IOM, signed the cooperation contract "swissREPAT-IOM-movements" (SIM) with the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) in 2003 and

renewed it in 2016. After the return decision of a client and the organization of the travel documents, the AVRR counsellors request a SIM plane ticket from the SEM. SEM needs to be informed about existing vulnerabilities and special needs of the returnee. In case the client is vulnerable, the SEM forwards the request to IOM, which then works closely with the counsellor on the return organization. All other flight requests are forwarded to swissREPAT, which books the flights and meets the clients inside the airport for the disbursement of finances.

## EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM "EMERGENCY AID" BY CARITAS GOLDAU

On the second day of the field trip, the group met up with AVRR counsellors from Caritas Goldau who had arranged a visit to a special employment program - also open to returnees. The work within the employment program mainly consists of menial, physical tasks beneficial to the local communities such as cleaning hiking trails or pulling up weeds in the high moor in order to preserve it.

Once the asylum request and a possible appeal at the court are rejected,



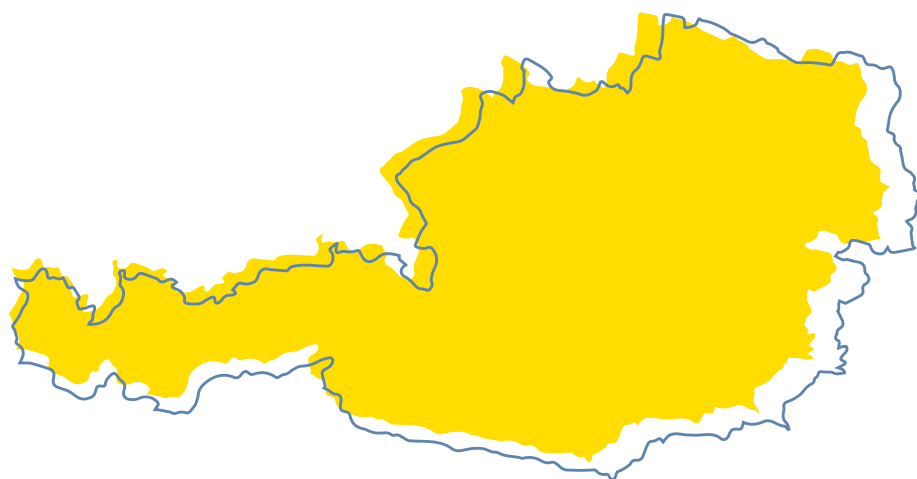
rejected asylum seekers do not receive social benefits anymore after a certain period allotted for voluntary return. Migrants without permission to stay often end up sleeping in night shelters and are not allowed to work.

Caritas created an employment program in the canton Schwyz, also for potential returnees, which allowed participants to earn 30CHF total per day with up to 60 days per year and a maximum of two years. One day of work is compensated with 15CHF cash for food and the other half is transferred to a locked bank account with Caritas dedicated to return. The savings from the employment program is given on top of the financial return assistance granted by the SEM. When the group visited the employment program, it was still in initial stage. At that point in time, the leaders of the project could not make a statement about the impact of the additional return budget on the return decision.



Field trip to

# AUSTRIA



The second field trip of the Transnational Exchange V project took place in Vienna, Austria, on the 15th and 16th of March, 2022. Austria has undergone a major change with regards to the AVRR counselling provider structure in the past two years. Exploring the new structure and innovative changes was an interesting endeavor for the group of six counsellors from six different European countries. The following article shall introduce the Federal Agency for Care and Support Services, which hosted the Transnational Exchange V group.

## HISTORY

For 20 years, until 2020, return and reintegration counselling was offered by two main actors in Austria: Caritas Austria and the Human Rights Association Austria. The focus laid on a low-threshold access for migrants interested in voluntary return offered by NGOs. Due to political and strategic changes, the decision was made by the government to create a new, centralized agency solely in charge of return – the Federal Agency for Care and Support Services (BBU).

Michael Hajek, the business unit manager of return counselling and services at the BBU was our main host. Therefore, the 2-day visit started with an exchange and information session with him. He gave an overview of the BBU structure and legal establishment.

## LEGAL ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BBU

The legal framework of the BBU was laid in the BBU Establishment Act in 2019. The agency is a company with limited liability owned by the Federal Ministry of the Interior. The BBU Establishment Act also determines the specific tasks to be carried out by the agency. The BBU started offering its services officially on the 01st of January, 2020. The transfer period of the return counseling from the NGOs to the state ended on 01st of January, 2021. The BBU hired many return and reintegration counselors from Caritas Austria and the Human Rights Association Austria (VMÖ) with the main purpose to keep the counselling expertise and a smooth continuation of return counseling processes for the clients.

## FIVE SERVICES OFFERED BY THE BBU

As part of the trip, the visiting Transnational Exchange V group got an introduction to all the different BBU services and also visited the main reception center for asylum seekers in Traiskirchen which falls under the responsibility of the “Basic Care” service.

### 1. BASIC CARE:

The basic care includes providing accommodation and food, social, medical and psychological support, necessities for the daily use (hygiene articles, clothing) and the required information for migrants who came to Austria with the purpose of seeking asylum.

### 2. LEGAL ADVICE AND LEGAL REPRESENTATION:

The Austrian government decided that legal advice and legal representation at the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA) and at the Federal Administrative Court (BVG) shall be provided for free to every asylum seeker. This service is offered entirely by the BBU legal team. Julia Satovich, a legal counsellor, gave a detailed overview of the Austrian asylum procedure. The question whether a state agency could provide independent counselling was discussed in this context.

### 3. AVRR COUNSELLING:

A highlight of the visit was the exchange session with AVRR counsellors from the BBU and the European participating AVRR counsellors. In the beginning of the exchange meeting, the counsellors shared the following information with the group:

Since 01st of January, 2021, the BBU has been offering return and reintegration counselling for foreigners who are interested in leaving the country and/or are obliged to do so. Asylum seekers in proceedings under the Dublin-III-Regulation can receive information about the option of a voluntary transfer to the responsible EU Member State. The clients receive information about the return and reintegration programs. Once the clients have decided to return voluntarily, the BBU counsellors also organize the return journey (e.g. applying for a plane ticket, assistance with the application for new travel documents), help before departure (e.g.

transfer to and assistance at the airport) and sign up clients for reintegration programs in the country of origin. The counsellors also stay in touch with the clients after return. A special feature of the BBU counsellors is that most of the return counsellors themselves have a migration background and use this commonality as a means to build trust quickly. Most of the counselling sessions are offered in the mother tongue of the clients.

### ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND RE-INTEGRATION

The client needs to lack sufficient monetary resources to pay for the return. The assistance for voluntary return can only be received once in a lifetime and only one person of the nuclear family (children above 18 years old should apply separately for return and reintegration assistance). The client also needs to show during the counselling that it is his/her intention to return long-term and that a certain sustainability of the return is given. Reintegration assistance is only available to (rejected) asylum seekers who have stayed longer than 3 months in Austria except for citizens of the Russian Federation. In their case, the clients must have stayed longer than 12 months in Austria to be eligible for reintegration assistance.

### RETURN AND REINTEGRATION BUDGET

The return assistance for immediate needs after arrival in the country of origin consists of a cash amount ranging from 250€ to 900€ per person depending on the status of the asylum application. The Austrian government decided to work with a digressive model to incentivize an early departure from Austria. However, in the past several exceptions have been made by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum upon an official request by return counsellors. In vulnerable cases, temporary special assistance can go up to 1500€ per person. Citizens from Western Balkan countries, with a visa-free entry status in Austria (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova) and from EEA-MS and EU-MS are not eligible for return assistance.

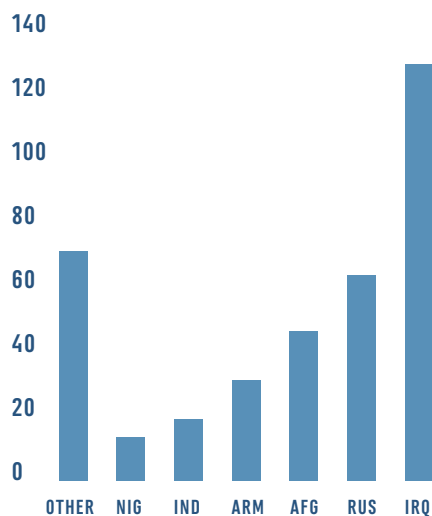
The reintegration assistance of 3000€ to 3300€ varies slightly depending on the country of return and the provider of the reintegration program. The amount can either be fully disbursed in-kind or in a combination of in-kind assistance and cash assistance which ranges between 200€ to 500€. The Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior provides reintegration assistance in cooperation with local service providers in most countries through the ERRIN pro-

gram and the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII). IOM Austria and Caritas Austria are the other two providers of reintegration assistance. Most contracts with reintegration services providers run until the end of 2022. Since the ERRIN project ended in March 2022 and Frontex with the Joint Reintegration Services took over in April 2022, the BFA is expecting major changes in 2023 about the reintegration providers in Austria.

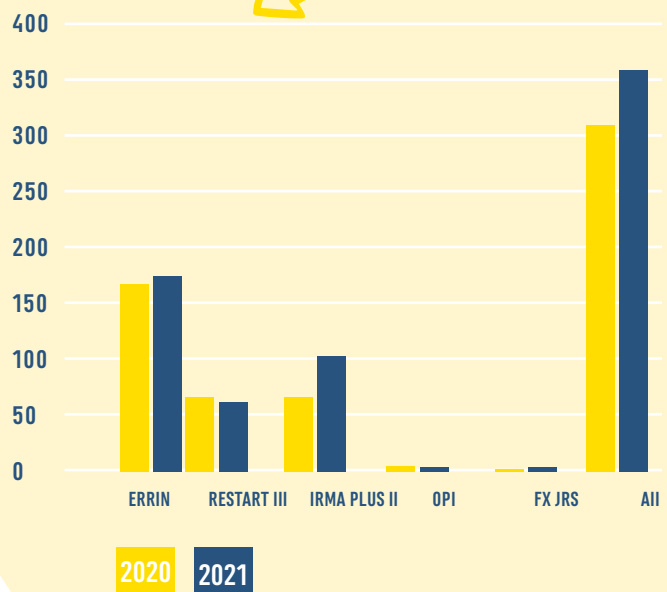
## DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTARY RETURN

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
VOLUNTARY RETURN	5.917	5.198	5.846	5.728	4.551	4.805
ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN	4.434	3.229	3.320	2.782	1.751	2.558

## TOP COUNTRIES REINTEGRATION 2021



## PARTICIPANTS REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMES 2020 and 2021





#### TRAINING FOR COUNSELLORS

As part of the introduction of the BBU services, the visitors also listened to a presentation from Rebecca Alice Dörtl, a former actress and speaking coach. This presentation was the most surprising input of the trip and the meeting lasted much longer than planned because so many curious questions were asked. The leadership of the return counseling department is currently focusing on developing measures to ensure a standardized high quality counselling. For this purpose, a special training department "BBU Bildungscampus" was founded. It is still in its initial stage. The training includes intercultural awareness, role-plays about counselling situations and much more. The language skills, which counsellors offer, will be tested in official language exams. Only if the counsellors can prove a certain level of language command, they can continue to offer the counselling sessions in the tested languages. Otherwise, an interpreter is to be requested by the counsellors. A mandatory, annual training for return counsellors is planned as well.

#### 4. HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING

The task of the human rights observers of the BBU is to accompany and observe the entire process of forced returns by charter flights or buses from the beginning until the persons to be returned are handed over to the authorities in their home country. In case of violations of human rights, the observers must report to the Austrian authority. The observers already join a talk between the

escort leader and the deportee (in case of a forced return from the detention center) one day prior to the forced return. After every forced return, the observer writes a report on the course of the deportation.

#### 5. INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION SERVICES

In the field of legal counselling as well as return and reintegration counselling, building trust with the clients is vital. The clients need to understand the information given in the counselling sessions and engage in discussions about future prospects in Austria or in the home country. Therefore, the BBU counsellors can always call interpreters from the BBU department of interpretation and translation services. The BBU GmbH interpreters assist the legal counsellors as well as the return and reintegration counsellors in their activities. The interpreter pool consists of eight full-time staff and self-employed interpreters on call.

#### CONCLUSION OF THE FIELD TRIP

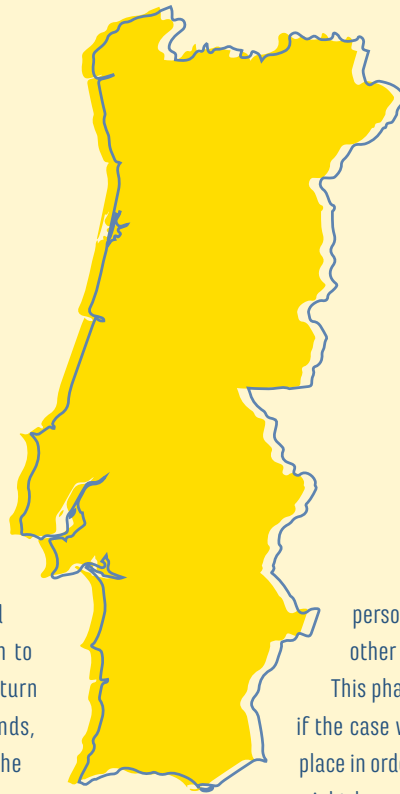
The BBU is still relatively young and will develop its services and structure further within the upcoming years. The motivated leadership team is focused on standardizing the AVRR counselling offers as well as on establishing a high counselling quality. The visiting group of counsellors was very much intrigued with the training aspirations of the BBU for counsellors. A revisit to the BBU in a few years will be helpful to see which ideas about the standardization and the quality control were successfully implemented and which ideas were discarded.





Field trip to

# PORTUGAL



Transnational Exchange V project organized the third field trip to Portugal from the 12th to the 15th of July, 2022, with six European return counsellors from Greece, Sweden, Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and Austria. The aim of the trip was to get a good overview of the Portuguese immigration and AVRR counselling system and to compare it with other European systems. The host for the Transnational Exchange V delegation was IOM Portugal.

The first day started with a visit to the Portuguese Immigration and Borders Service (SEF). Marina Portugal, Head of the Asylum and Refugees Department, gave a presentation about the services and role of the SEF. The Asylum and Refugees Department has 23 staff members and is responsible for checking the asylum applications as well as issuing residence permits and travel documents for refugees. Before 2015, the department received around 30 applications a month. After 2015, the amount of asylum applications grew to around 30 applications per day. The asylum procedure is divided into two phases. In the first phase, the admissibility phase, the SEF checks if the

person comes from a safe third country and for other obvious reasons to reject the asylum claim.

This phase lasts around 30 days. In the second phase, if the case was admitted, an in-depth examination takes place in order to determine if and which protection status might be granted during another six to nine months. In practice, the waiting time for the asylum decision from the SEF might take two years or longer because of the lack of staff. There is a special law (article 88) in Portugal which allows migrants to get a residence permit, even without asylum, if they worked longer than 6 months and paid taxes.

The Portuguese government has been working with a unique approach and a more open legislation to immigration compared to other European countries. Marina Portugal ascribes this to the Portuguese heritage. Portugal has always been “a melting pot” for different cultures and nationalities. And of course the colonial history plays a big role in immigration, as a big majority of immigrants come from Portuguese speaking Brazil. There is also a more practical reason for the politics of openness when it comes to immigration: Portugal is in the need of workforce.

The next place of visit was the Bobadela Reception Center run by the Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR). Three reception centers are available for asylum seekers in the admissibility phase. After asking for asylum at the airport or at any police station, the CPR offers accommodation and its services for one to four months. This is when the asylum seekers are being interviewed by the CPR and briefly by the SEF, but cannot work or go to school. The Bobadela Reception Centre is funded by SEF and can accommodate 60 to 70 asylum seekers, who receive an assistance of 150 € pocket money as well as medical assistance. A tour of the premises showed how well organized and homely the center is. After a short stay at the reception center in Bobadela, the migrants need to move out and receive assistance from the social security system. This phase can be a bottleneck in the immigration process, since the delegation learned that the social security system in Lisbon is on the verge of collapsing and people are being encouraged to move to other parts of Portugal.

The second day of our trip was hosted by IOM Portugal. There is only one IOM office in Portugal, namely in Lisbon, where Luís Carasquinho introduced the Transnational Exchange V visitors to the Portuguese AVRR counselling system. The Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support Project (ARVoRe) officially started in 2001. The currently ongoing project ARVoRe VIII started in 2021 and ends on the 31st of December, 2022. 250 returnees have been assisted within this program so far. 82 % of these cases returned to Brazil. The reasons for their return are mainly a difficult economic situation, unemployment and delays in processes of regularization of stay.

The cooperation between different partners is the key for successful return and reintegration services. There are more than 30 stakeholders in the information and counselling network of IOM Portugal distributed along the Portuguese territory. Orquidea Polónia introduced the services of the National Immigrant Support Center (CNAIM) is a part of the counselling network. CNAIM typically supports immigrants to find a solution after they have received a negative decision after phase two. The immigrants have officially 20 days time to either find a job or return to their country of origin. In the latter case, the registration and application for AVRR counselling from IOM is done together with a CNAIM counsellor. Joana Henriques from Caritas Lisbon also gave a presentation about their services. Similar to CNAIM, Caritas Lisbon can refer interested clients to IOM Portugal.



One of the highlights of the trip was meeting Andreia Dickinson, a psychologist working for the Transcultural Psychology Office in Clinical Ethnopsychology Center. Psychosocial counselling for potential returnees is offered by her complementing the AVRR counselling services by IOM. If clients want psychosocial support, the migrants receive on average eight sessions paid by the ARVoRe VIII project, which empowers them to make well-founded decisions about their future. Especially citizens of Latin American countries show a great openness and desire to receive psychosocial counselling and/or therapy according to Andreia Dickinson.



In order to learn more about the target group of returnees from Portugal, the Transnational Exchange V visitors had a meeting with Casa do Brasil. It is a community project, “a living room” for Brazilians living in Lisbon. Speaking to the Casa do Brasil staff gave a good overview about the practical issues and problems which the immigrants often face. One of the biggest problems are the prolonged processes and waiting times for receiving a residence permit during which the Brazilians cannot travel home. Even though the process of applying is easy, the long waiting times create problems for many Brazilian labor migrants who arrived in Portugal just with a tourist visa of three months. Immigrants often are exploited by employers being asked to work for free when they don’t have a residence permit or Portuguese identification card just to be able to later have proof of employment. Again, if a migrant at Casa do Brasil raises the question of returning to his or her country of origin, employees at the house refer them to IOM.

The trip ended with a presentation about IOM reintegration services. Ana Teresa Fernandes from IOM Portugal introduced the reintegration partner in Brazil providing individual reintegration support mainly for creating small businesses, first needs and psychosocial support. The support grant is up to 2000€ cash, which however is to be spent under the same scrutiny and supervision as with in-kind support. Guilherme Otero from IOM Brazil attended the meeting online and

told about the monitoring of the use of the cash payments and the structures of local networks. IOM Brazil cooperates with seven local NGOs in seven out of 26 states regarding reintegration assistance.

The field trip ended with lessons learned about advantages and disadvantages of a country with easy immigration rules and its effects on voluntary return. The participating European AVRR counsellors also shared a lot of information about their work during the breaks and allotted times in the agenda. In total, the participants called the field trip “inspiring” and “eye-opening”.



# TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGE

2020 – 2022