

Setting up System of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration in Armenia

Needs and Gaps Assessment Report

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Publisher: International Organization for Migration
14 Petros Adamyan Street, 1st floor • UN House • Yerevan 0010 • Armenia
Tel: (+374 10) 58 56 92
Fax: (+374 10) 54 33 65
<http://www.iom.int>

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Setting up System of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration in Armenia

EMERGE

— Migrants Rights are Human Rights —

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Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

The Needs Assessment and Report prepared by international consultant Geraldine D'Hoop.

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List of abbreviations

AMIF:	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AVRR:	assisted voluntary return and reintegration
BAMF:	Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtling (German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees)
BMA:	Bureau of Migration and Asylum (Republic of Moldova)
CEPA:	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CRRF:	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
EMN:	European Migration Network
ENI:	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP:	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI:	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
EPTATF:	Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Trust Fund
ERRIN:	European Return and Reintegration Network
EU:	European Union
GAF:	Global Assistance Fund
GAP:	Gender Action Plan
GIZ:	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German development agency)
ICMPD:	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IOM:	International Organization for Migration
LGBTQI:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
MFA:	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIA:	Ministry of Internal Affairs (Georgia)
MIBMA:	Support to Migration and Border Management in Armenia
MiGOF:	Migration Governance Framework
MoEWOE:	Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment (Bangladesh)
MoFA:	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bangladesh)
MoHA:	Ministry of Home Affairs (Bangladesh)

MS:	Migration Service (as referred to “State Migration Service of the Republic of Armenia”)
NGOs:	non-governmental organizations
NK:	Nagorno Karabakh
NSS:	National Security Service
NSSRA:	National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia
OSCE:	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
REAG:	Reintegration and Emigration Program for Asylum-Seekers in Germany
GARP:	Government Assisted Repatriation Programme
REAB:	Return and Emigration of Asylum-seekers ex-Belgium
SCRM:	Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
SMSRA:	State Migration Service of the Republic of Armenia
SOPs:	Standard Operating Procedures
SoW:	Scope of Work
UDI:	Norwegian Directorate for Immigration
UMC:	Unaccompanied Minor Children
UN:	United Nations
UNESCAP:	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VARP:	Voluntary Assisted Return Programme (Norway)
VoT:	victims of trafficking

Introduction

The present report forms part of the EMERGE project “*Enhancing Migrants’ Rights and Good Governance in Armenia and Georgia*”, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This initiative aims to strengthen national capacities in the fields of migrants’ rights and migration governance in Armenia and Georgia and strengthen cross-border dialogue and cooperation in the area. Among the different activities foreseen in the project is the assessment and development of an assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) system in Armenia both as a receiving and sending country.

Building upon the long-lasting experience of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for 41 years in the field of AVRR, the AVRR needs assessment aims at providing an overview of existing practices, roles, and responsibilities of national stakeholders in returning third country migrants, capacity needs, as well as producing a set of recommendations for setting-up an AVRR system in Armenia.

This assessment falls under the objective of strengthening national capacities to enhance rule of law and maintain migrants’ rights in Armenia and Georgia. As these two countries have different migration governance system and the Armenian Government has no structural AVRR system in place to date, such needs assessment aims at identifying the best and most effective model that could be further introduced and applied by the Government.

Based on key data available from the Migration Service of the Republic of Armenia and from the National Security Service, along with IOM Armenia’s past experience with some ad hoc AVRR cases from Armenia, four target countries of origin have been selected for the purpose of this research, namely: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This list will be revised over time, taking into account the evolving migration realities in Armenia.

All four countries have been consulted and have shared their respective recommendations on reintegration assistance provision. All statements in the report that are of their concern have been endorsed by them accordingly.

This assessment was conducted through the means of (1) an in-depth desk research of available literature, data and resources including national legislation and legal acts, national policies and strategies regulating the rights of third-country migrants in Armenia and implementation practices; (2) interviews with main national stakeholders and detailed questionnaires to identify the different stakeholders with whom IOM and the Government of Armenia could collaborate in implementing assisted voluntary return activities from Armenia, their mandates, individual roles and existing implementation practices, in order to identify main gaps, capacity needs, and possible legislative adjustments; (3) collection of information on AVRR programmes implemented by other countries (Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, and Serbia) to analyse their main challenges and good practices; (4) collection of information (through a specific detailed questionnaire for IOM missions in the four selected countries of origin) on the reintegration assistance provision, analysing the missions' needs, priorities and potential barriers missions have already identified or are expecting to encounter when assisting migrants returning home and rebuilding their lives. Based on the analysis of all the above-mentioned elements, a set of concrete, actionable and gender-sensitive recommendations is being proposed at the end of the report to the attention of Government agencies in order to set up a new comprehensive AVRR system from Armenia.

Before focusing on the AVRR component, the report starts with an overall situational analysis (chapter 1) on the migration international, regional and national contexts. This first part also includes an overview of the migration-related legal framework and key data. It is followed by a second chapter on AVRR, including a comparative analysis of AVRR schemes in seven different countries. The third chapter details the actual AVRR needs and gaps assessment, including key findings and actionable recommendations, followed by lessons learned (chapter 4) and conclusions.

1. Situational analysis – Setting the scene

1.1 International context – The Global Compact for Migration

On 19 September 2016, the Heads of State and Government from the 193 UN Member States came together at the UN General Assembly to discuss topics related to migration and refugees at the global level. The adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants recognized the need for a comprehensive approach to migration. As a result, UN Member States agreed to cooperate in the elaboration of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted at an intergovernmental conference on international migration on 10 and 11 December 2018 in Morocco. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants also set in motion a separate negotiation process for the Global Compact on Refugees.

The Republic of Armenia was among the 152 Member States to vote in favour of the Global Compact for Migration.

At the conference held on 10 and 11 December 2018, Armen Ghazaryan, Head of the Migration Service of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (from now on referred to as the “Migration Service”) of the Republic of Armenia, welcomed that both Global Compacts, on migration and refugees, reflect a holistic approach with action-oriented commitments.

The Republic of Armenia welcomed the Global Compact for Migration’s comprehensive approach to the governance of migration and accordingly participated, between 27 July and 25 August 2020, in the first voluntary review¹ of Global Compact for Migration implementation since its endorsement. The Migration Service, as the primary body responsible for migration policy development, was responsible for the development of the National Voluntary Review. The Migration Service was in turn supported by the IOM Mission in Armenia. Such review was prepared for the United Nations Economic Commissioner for Asia and the Pacific

¹ www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Armenia_Voluntary%20GCM%20Survey%20Report.pdf.

(UNESCAP) ahead of the “Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration” on 18 and 20 November 2020.

The Global Compact and Voluntary Return²

Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) is an indispensable part of a comprehensive approach to migration management aiming at orderly and humane return and reintegration of migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in host or transit countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

As a core activity of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), AVRR activities provide vital assistance to thousands of migrants every year. Building on its long-standing experience on AVRR since 1979 and a world-wide network of offices and partners, IOM’s AVRR programmes strive to ensure that migrants in need are assisted to return voluntarily, safely and in dignity, and are supported in achieving sustainable reintegration, in full respect for human rights, regardless of their status.

The return and reintegration of migrants unwilling or unable to remain in host or transit countries have gained renewed political importance on the agenda of national and international policymakers around the world. This is reflected in the Global Compact, and in particular its Objective 21, which calls on governments to cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return (...), as well as sustainable reintegration.

Based on its expertise in the field of return, IOM has designed a Framework for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration to guide policymakers and AVRR practitioners. This Framework outlines a vision for dignified voluntary returns and sustainable reintegration seven principles and six concrete objectives applied throughout the voluntary return and reintegration process. These principles and objectives underpin IOM’s commitment to facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and to contribute to migrants’ socioeconomic well-being, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Global Compact for Migration.

The principles and objectives outlined in IOM’s Framework for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration³ contributes to achieving Objective 21 of the Global Compact,⁴ and in particular actions 21.b, 21.f, 21.h, 21.i and 21.g, which focus, among others, on voluntary programmes, migrant children, evidence-based programming, monitoring and sustainable reintegration. They also contribute to objectives 1, 3, 4, 7, 12, 13, which focus on providing accurate and timely information, availability of information, address and reduce vulnerabilities, access to documentation and provide alternatives to detention.

The Framework is further detailed in Chapter 2.1.

² www.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration.

³ www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/a_framework_for_avrr_online_pdf_optimized_20181112.pdf.

⁴ www.bit.ly/3tikANV.

1.2 Regional context – The European Neighbourhood Policy–Eastern European countries

The EU cooperates with Armenia in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and its eastern regional dimension, the Eastern Partnership.

The ENP was established in 2004. It reflects the European Union's (EU) wish to build on common interests with partner countries and commitment to work jointly in key priority areas, including in the promotion of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, and social cohesion.

There is a new focus on stepping up work with EU partners on security sector reform, conflict prevention, counter-terrorism and anti-radicalization policies, in full compliance with international human rights law. Safe and legal mobility and tackling irregular migration, human trafficking and smuggling are also priorities. The new ENP will seek to deploy the available instruments and resources in a more coherent and flexible manner. Additionally, it will be important to seek a deeper involvement of EU Member States in re-energizing work with its neighbours. Equally, the aim will be a deeper engagement with civil society and social partners.

The adoption by the UN General Assembly of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the EU's strong support for its implementation have provided a new transformative political framework in which to engage with partners. Furthermore, this review is being closely coordinated as part of the broader work on the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy.

Ensuring the rule of law and independent and effective justice systems will remain priorities for the EU. They are crucial to social and economic stability, to create trust in state institutions and to provide legal certainty. An independent, transparent and impartial judicial system free from political influence which guarantees equal access to justice, protection of 6 human rights, gender equality and non-discrimination, and full application of the law will continue to be a goal of the EU with all its partners.

Accountable public administration at central and local government level is key to democratic governance and economic development. Therefore, public administration reform is essential. This includes strengthening democratic and independent institutions; developing local and regional authorities; depoliticizing the civil service, developing eGovernment and increasing institutional transparency and accountability. The EU will also support work to improve partner's capacity in policy development, service delivery and management of public finances, and support the work of national parliaments.

Effective anti-corruption measures, mostly on the preventive side, should be implemented in relation to large-scale public procurement, (re)privatizations, reform of state-owned/controlled companies or similar areas where vulnerabilities to corruption are high, including by supporting the key role of civil society.

The EU will continue to work with partner governments, civil society and citizens on human rights and democracy related issues, including electoral processes, as laid down in the Treaty on European Union and the recently adopted EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024. Building on the previous action plans, this new Action Plan, approved on 19 November 2020⁵, sets out the EU’s level of ambition and priorities in this field in its relations with all third countries. With this Action Plan, the Council reaffirms the EU’s strong commitment to further advancing universal values for all. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences have had an increasingly negative impact on all human rights, democracy and rule of law, deepening pre-existing inequalities and increasing pressure on persons in vulnerable situations. No one should be left behind, no human right ignored. To this end the EU and its member states will use the full range of their instruments, in all areas of external action, to focus on and further strengthen EU’s global leadership in the field of human rights and democracy and in the implementation of the EU Action Plan.

The EU will promote and defend the universality and indivisibility of all human rights both at home and in partnerships with countries from all regions. The EU will engage with all partners in an inclusive dialogue on human rights and democracy issues, including on areas where experiences may differ. Human rights and democracy will continue to be an agenda item in our political dialogue with all partners in mutually agreed formats. Support will be provided to civil society fora.

Particular attention will be paid to implementing the EU’s new Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III), adopted on 25 November 2020. It is the Union’s framework for promoting gender equality and women and girls’ empowerment in external relations in third and partner countries, as well as in international fora and agendas. It aims to accelerate progress on empowering women and girls, and safeguard gains made on gender equality during the 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action.

GAP III reaffirms gender equality/women’s rights as a key strand of EU foreign policy, building on the Commission’s 2 previous gender action plans and tackling new challenges and opportunities, while ensuring internal-external policy coherence.

⁵ www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/19/council-approves-conclusions-on-the-eu-action-plan-on-human-rights-and-democracy-2020-2024/?utm_source=dsm-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Council+approves+conclusions+on+the+EU+Action+Plan+on+Human+Rights+and+Democracy+2020-2024#.

It also aligns EU action with international commitments, especially under the:

- ▶ 2030 UN Agenda for sustainable development;
- ▶ UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
- ▶ UN Beijing Declaration and platform for action for advancing women's rights;
- ▶ UN women, peace and security agenda.

Drawing from the EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025, which calls for a gender-equal Europe, GAP III calls for a gender-equal world and is complementary to the LGBTIQ equality strategy for 2020–2025⁶ (adopted by the European Commission on 11 November 2020). It will scale up the EU contribution to reach SDG 5⁷ in all EU internal and external policy areas and across the 2030 Agenda.

The aim of GAP III is to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, by setting objectives and action in six key thematic policy areas. It builds on the previous GAPs and tackles new challenges and opportunities, while ensuring internal external policy coherence.

It should further inform the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) programming, and supporting ENP partners in delivering on their commitments to gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment, in line also with the universal 2030 Agenda.

European Union and Armenia

The relations between the European Union and Armenia are based on the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and Armenia (CEPA),⁸ which was signed in the margins of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in November 2017. The CEPA verification process has already ended and it will enter into force on 1 March 2021. The new agreement provides a framework for the European Union and Armenia to continue working together for the benefit of Armenian citizens. The CEPA is modern, comprehensive and ambitious. It takes into account the new global, political and economic interests shared by both sides. The agreement will enable stronger cooperation in sectors such as human mobility, energy, transport, environment and trade.

At the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels 2017, EU leaders pledged to start a visa liberalization dialogue (VLD) with Armenia, but an official announcement of a VLD is still to come. Visa liberalization with the EU is a priority for Armenia, as stated in the 2019

⁶ www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0698&from=EN.

⁷ www.bit.ly/3vFvVZL.

⁸ www.eeas.europa.eu/cepa-agreement-en.

Programme of the Government of the Republic of Armenia.⁹ Visa liberalization would go a long way to promoting the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration since, “the best way to tackle irregular migration is by providing legal pathways for safe, regular and orderly migration.”

Visa liberalization with the EU is envisaged in the CEPA. Article 15 states: “*The Parties shall continue to promote the mobility of citizens through the Visa-facilitation Agreement and consider in due course the opening of a visa-liberalization dialogue provided that conditions for well-managed and secure mobility are in place. They shall cooperate in fighting irregular migration, including through the implementation of the Readmission Agreement, as well as promoting border-management policy as well as legal and operational frameworks.*”¹⁰

The Council of the European Union presented its Conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 on 11 May 2020.¹¹ Among others, it expressed its willingness to begin negotiations with the Eastern Partnership countries which do not yet have a visa liberalization agreement, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus.

CEPA also includes a democracy and human rights component while security features as political priority.¹² The new agreement provides for increased cooperation between the EU and Armenia in preventing and fighting criminal activities, including organized crime and terrorism.

The EU is a key reform partner in Armenia. Following the Armenian “Velvet revolution” in 2018, the EU stepped up its support and increased its annual allocation in grants to €65 million in 2019. Its current substantial portfolio focuses on supporting the reform agenda of the new government, private sector development, education, and development of focal regions. In addition, since 2014 more than €1 billion in the form of blended loans and grants has been invested in the energy, agriculture and transport sectors.¹³

EU assistance to Armenia supports these policy objectives and is funded through the ENI for the period 2014–2020. It recently included emergency aid for civilians affected by the hostilities provided by EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) in the context of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Other funding sources are the thematic programmes, focused on human rights and civil society.

The European Union’s framework for cooperation with Armenia is the multiannual programming document for the period 2017–2020 (Single Support Framework). It is based

⁹ “The implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement is considered a significant factor promoting the agenda of reforms of the Government for the development of Armenia. The Government will continue to take steps for ensuring the EU visa liberalization for the citizens of the Republic of Armenia” (p.18).

¹⁰ www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017JC0037.

¹¹ www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43905/st07510-re01-en20.pdf.

¹² www.eeas.europa.eu/cepa-agreement-en.

¹³ www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44397/685-annex-5-a-armenia-factsheet.pdf.

on the Eastern Partnership priorities to achieve a: (1) stronger economy, (2) stronger governance, (3) stronger connectivity and (4) stronger society. In addition, it includes horizontal support to civil society, strategic communication, and capacity development/institution building. Currently a multiyear EU-Republic of Armenia indicative programme for 2021–2027 is being developed, which will mostly focus on Republic of Armenia needs and priorities stated in the joint communique on the Eastern Partnership agenda for 2020 presented by the European Commission and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in March 2020.

For more information and latest updates on the EU relations with Armenia, click www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/armenia_en.

1.3 National context – Armenia

The Republic of Armenia has a long migration history. Several waves of migration, including after the genocide in the early 20th century, and after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s has created a highly diverse diaspora whose population far exceeds the current population residing in the Republic of Armenia today. Estimates of migration flows from Armenia based on nationally representative survey data collected in 2013 and 2015 show an average departure rate of 30,000 per year between 2007 and 2012, and 35,000 per year between 2013 and 2015.

As highlighted in the 2021–2031 Strategy, the management of mass migration flows has continually been one of the important directions of public governance of the Republic of Armenia. During the very first years following the proclamation of independence Armenia came up against the issue of managing the mass influx of refugees, founding the tradition of the newly established Republic's migration policy around the protection of refugees.

Later on, Armenia's migration flows were supplemented by mass emigration and labour migration, returning citizens of the Republic of Armenia, new influx of refugees, as well as by immigration of foreign nationals. Over the years every one of these developments contributed to changes in migration policies: the elaboration of four concept papers and strategies on state regulation of migration flows, the development of 2 plans of actions, as well as the conclusion of a number of intergovernmental and international agreements and treaties. The integration policy was consolidated for the first time in a single document, initiated in 2016. As a result, the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved "The conceptual framework for the integration policy of individuals recognized as refugees and granted asylum in the Republic of Armenia, as well as of long-term migrants," and the plan of actions for the implementation thereof. Certain limitations of these documents

notwithstanding, they set the foundations for the emergence of a tradition of integrated policy on the management of integration and reintegration issues in Armenia.

Poverty, high levels of unemployment and a lack of social inclusion are key drivers of outward migration from the Republic of Armenia.¹⁴ An assessment of the Armenian labour market predicted the need for the creation of 27,300 jobs per year¹⁵ (Campbell et al., 2018). Specific challenges include a high number of young people (aged 15–29) who are not in employment, education or training (NEET); and low uptake of state employment services.¹⁶ However, unemployment data may overestimate to the scale of unemployment since data includes seasonal workers who may have temporarily returned to the country. However, the number of individuals registered as being unemployed underestimate the scale of unemployment.¹⁷ A secondary factor driving migration from the Republic of Armenia is the health-care system. The prohibitive cost health care is both a reason to migrate and an inhibitor of reintegration upon return. In 2016, Armenian patients financed an average of 81 per cent of health-care costs as out-of-pocket spending.¹⁸ The weighted results of the Integrated Living Conditions Survey (ILCS) in 2017 estimated that only 2.6 per cent of those born in the Republic of Armenia have access to state subsidized health care, which means that at least one member of the household has the right to use the Basic Benefit Package (BBP) or have health insurance. For the foreign-born population, the number is slightly smaller, at 2.4 per cent. The Ministry of Health has taken steps to address these challenges by extending access to state support to all under 18 and broadening the scope of who qualifies as a vulnerable group, however, health-care access remains a challenge. While the poverty rate remains high, an economic upturn has resulted in a drop in the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty from 29.8 per cent in 2015 to 23.5 per cent in 2018.¹⁹

It should be noted that in Armenia the organization of integration and reintegration of immigrants, returnees and internally displaced persons encounters socioeconomic challenges that the country faces, which create fundamental problems not only for the target groups of this Strategy, but also for the local population. In particular, a need arises to respond to employment and social support measures that constitute primary integration and reintegration needs in conditions of 25,7% of poverty and 17.7% of unemployment.²⁰

¹⁴ SDG Implementation Voluntary National Review (VNR) Armenia 2018: Report for the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; SDG Implementation Voluntary National Review (VNR) Armenia 2020; Armenia-United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2016–2020, Yerevan 31 Jul 2015.

¹⁵ Campbell et al., 2018.

¹⁶ The 2016 Labour Force Survey found that only 6.3 per cent of economically inactive persons had registered with the State Employment Agency.

¹⁷ Campbell et al (2018).

¹⁸ Financing Global Health Database 2018, www.healthdata.org/armenia.

¹⁹ Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, Poverty Level by years, marzes and indicators, www.armstatbank.am.

²⁰ Source: Statistics Committee of the Republic of Armenia.

In this respect it is important to emphasize that issues of integration and reintegration policy defined by this Strategy are called upon, rather than establishing favourable conditions for residence and employment of immigrants, returnees and internally displaced persons, to extend them support in overcoming the challenges determined by the migration and return experience.

The foundations of the current migration policy of the Republic of Armenia were laid in early 1990s, when Armenia began receiving large flows of refugees. From the 2000s to these days Armenia continued to receive new inflows of refugees and persons in the refugee like situation (Syrian Armenians). Within the last decade there is also a noticeable trend of increase in the returning citizens of the Republic of Armenia and the immigration of foreign nationals in the immigration structure of Armenia.

Immigration into Armenia may be generally described through the following flows:²¹

- 1) about 360,000 ethnic Armenian refugees forcibly displaced from Azerbaijan and about 60,000 more who moved in from other territories of the USSR during the first war in 1988–1992 in Nagorno Karabakh (NK);
- 2) about 1,000 people who moved to Armenia in 2003 because of war hostilities in the republic of Iraq, and received the status of refugees, mostly of Armenian origin;
- 3) about 25,000 forced migrants, of Armenian origin, who moved to Armenia in 2012 because of the armed clashes that broke out in the Syrian Arab Republic;
- 4) about 200 persons who applied for asylum in Armenia in 2014 because of armed clashes in the South of Ukraine, mostly of Armenian origin;
- 5) since the 2010s the number of asylum seekers (of non-Armenian origin) in Armenia has also been on the rise;
- 6) since 2010 there has been a significant increase in the immigration of foreign nationals. Between 2018–2019 the number of foreign nationals who have acquired any one of the residence statuses in Armenia amounted to 16,316, compared to the 11,991 between the preceding years of 2016–2017;
- 7) since 2000 there is also a noticeable trend year over years of increase in the immigration flows of return of citizens of the Republic of Armenia who had left Armenia in the past.²² Between 2012–2019 there were 3,380 readmission requests received from the EU countries and the Russian Federation with respect to 6,581 persons, of which the citizenship status of

²¹ All data describing the flows were provided by the Migration Service of the MTGI of the Republic of Armenia.

²² Although Armenia does not maintain accounting for returnees, nevertheless, there is tangential information (continual increase in the number of those who return under readmission agreements, continual increase in the number of beneficiaries of reintegration support programs, etc.) that indicates a growth in the number of returnees.

5,361 persons has been affirmed. Lately, since 12 August 2020, more than 2,000 Lebanese Armenians came from Lebanon after an explosion in Beirut;

- 8) 27 September 2020, heavy fighting broke out in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result of a large-scale military offensive, according to official data, over 90,000 people were displaced from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict area, with many finding refuge in Armenia, thus further exacerbating the national socioeconomic situation in the country caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.²³

Although the Government of the Republic of Armenia has been encountering the issues of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants and of other groups for about 30 years, nevertheless it does not have a comprehensive integration policy strategy. Until 2016 Armenia did not have a conceptual framework on integration of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants and of other groups. Regulation of the sector was predominantly based on a number of international instruments (the 28 July 1951 Geneva “Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees” and its Protocol of 4 October 1967, the Declaration adopted in 1994 in Budapest at the Summit of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the documents adopted at the fifteenth OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, etc.), other laws and stand-alone resolutions (the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Refugees and Asylum,” the Resolution of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia # N9-A of January 14, 2013 “On establishing an interagency commission to coordinate the issues of Syrian Armenians,” etc.).

In 2016 the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved the “Conceptual framework for the integration in the Republic of Armenia of persons recognized as refugees and granted asylum, as well of long-term migrants,” which became the first ever document outlining state policy with respect to the integration of immigrants. Although the 2016 Government-approved conceptual framework was important as the first regulatory document in the sector, it nevertheless had essential shortcomings. In particular the scope of the conceptual framework failed to address the group of persons in the situation of forced displacement who had moved to Armenia from the Syrian Arab Republic and other groups. A partial solution to this gap was proposed by the former Ministry of the Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia to the Government in the “2018–2022 strategy for the integration of persons forcibly displaced as a result of the Syrian conflict and seeking protection in Armenia,” though it did not receive the Government’s approval.

Since the 2000s the trend of returning citizens to Armenia was also quite substantial, the existing integration policy did not address the issues of their reintegration. Steps aiming at reintegration needs of returnees were mostly implemented through the efforts of international and non-governmental organizations on a programmatic, rather than a policy level.

²³ United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Armenia 2021-2025.

Taking notice of these gaps, in 2019 the Migration Service of the Republic of Armenia initiated the drafting of this Strategy to chart the main approaches and interventions of a comprehensive public policy in the area of integration and reintegration of immigrants and returnees.

The Migration Service is the main Government body in charge of migration-related policy in the Republic of Armenia, currently operating within the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures. The mandate of the Migration Service has expanded over time, and, under planned government reforms, will become part of the new Ministry of Interior in 2021. The Ministry of Diaspora was replaced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs in 2019. Many other agencies are also involved in migration-related issues such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its Consular Department; The Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, particularly the State Employment Agency; National Security Service (NSS), particularly the Border Guard troops; the Police; Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Health, and others. Coordination between these various agencies continues to be a challenge in policy development and implementation.

In recent years, the further development of migration policy in the Republic of Armenia has been highly prioritized by the Government as reflected in the 2020–2050 Armenia Transformation Strategy; the National Security Strategy of Armenia; the 2019 Programme of the Government;²⁴ the current draft of a new National Concept for State Regulation of Migration (see on page 35); and the elaboration of several new strategies of relevance to the development of migration policy such as the Draft Integration/ Reintegration Strategy for 2021–2031. For the first time, the Government of the Republic of Armenia’s Programme 2019 contains a dedicated chapter on migration (Chapter 6.7). Like the previous Government Programme 2017–2021²⁵ (Chapter 2.2), the 2019 Programme also contained a chapter on relations with the Armenian diaspora (Chapter 2.4) and contains several references to migration throughout the programme. The main objective of migration policy, according to the 2019 programme is “to ensure the free and safe movement of people by bringing it into balance with the national security of the country”.

²⁴ Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 65-A of 8 February 2019 on the “Programme of the Government of the Republic of Armenia”.

²⁵ Programme of the Government of the Republic of Armenia 2017-2022, Annex to Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 646-A of 19 June 2017.

1.4 Armenia: Migration profile and governance

1.4. National policies and legal framework

This section summarizes the national policies and legislation pertaining to granting asylum, entering, staying and exiting the Republic of Armenia. It also tackles the issues of illegal border crossing and the detention of foreigners, and latest developments in tackling irregular migration.

Granting Asylum

The Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Refugees and asylum”²⁶

This Law regulates in the Republic of Armenia the relations pertaining to recognition of a refugee and grant of asylum, as well as ensures the application of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as “the Convention”) and its 1967 Protocol, and recognizes the right of all aliens and stateless persons to seek asylum in the territory of the Republic of Armenia and at the state border crossing points of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the right to be granted asylum, if they fulfil the necessary requirements – prescribed by this Law – for granting asylum.

This Law, in compliance with the principles and norms of international law, ensures also the protection of all aliens and stateless persons against expulsion to their country of nationality or former habitual residence, or any other country where they are in danger of being subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment.

1. Asylum is a protection granted in the Republic of Armenia to a foreign national or stateless person, which guarantees the application with respect to him/her of the principle defined in Article 9 of this Law, as well as all the rights granted under the Convention, this Law, and other legal acts of the Republic of Armenia to persons recognized as refugees in the Republic of Armenia. In order to protect the most fundamental human rights of any migrant or refugee, the Republic of Armenia has applied the principle of non-refoulement. This principle, reflected in different bodies of international law, protects any person from being transferred (returned, expelled, extradited whatever term is used) from one authority to another when there are substantial grounds for believing that the person would be in danger of being subjected to violations of certain fundamental rights.

²⁶ Law of the Republic of Armenia on Refugees & Asylum, 27. November 2008: www.refworld.org/docid/4f1986412.html.

2. Asylum, as defined in part 1 of this Article, extends also to a foreign national or stateless person recognized as a refugee by another State, if he/she has entered the territory of the Republic of Armenia in the prescribed manner and holds a residence status – granting the right of residence – prescribed by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia.
3. The granting of asylum shall be considered a peaceful and humanitarian act in the Republic of Armenia, and it [the granting of asylum] must not grow into an unfriendly attitude, as it does not imply any criticism of the country of nationality or former habitual residence of a refugee, or of any other country.

Entering the Republic of Armenia

The Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Foreigners" (Article 6) stipulates:

1. Foreigners shall enter the Republic of Armenia through state border crossing points, on the basis of availability of a valid passport, on the basis of an entry visa or a document attesting the residence status and in case of authorization by the public administration body authorized by the Government of the Republic of Armenia carrying out border control, unless another procedure is provided for by this Law or the international treaties of the Republic of Armenia.
2. Foreigners under the age of 18 may enter the Republic of Armenia with their parents, one of the parents, another legal representative or an attendant, or alone, if they come to the Republic of Armenia to visit their parents, one of the parents, another legal representative, or a host organization.
3. Entry into the territory of the Republic of Armenia of foreigners who have arrived at a crossing point of the state border of the Republic of Armenia without a passport, a document substituting it or with an invalid passport, or who have been refused an entry visa at a crossing point of the state border of the Republic of Armenia, or who have not obtained an entry authorization from the body carrying out border control, shall not be allowed, and, as soon as possible, they shall be returned to their State of origin or to the State, from where they have arrived, by the means of transport of the same carrier, except for cases when they have arrived in Armenia for the purpose of seeking refugee status or a right to political asylum.

Stay and residence in the Republic of Armenia

The Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Foreigners" stipulates:

- Article 7. Those States' citizens for whom a regime for arriving in the Republic of Armenia without an entry visa is established, may stay in the territory of the Republic of Armenia for a maximum term of 90 days in a year, unless another term is prescribed by the international treaties of the Republic of Armenia.
- Article 9. Entry visa of the Republic of Armenia: Entry visas of the Republic of Armenia shall be issued for a term of up to 120-day stay in the Republic of Armenia, with the possibility of extension for a maximum term of up to 60 days, unless otherwise provided for by this Law or the international treaties of the Republic of Armenia.
- Article 14. Residence statuses of foreigners. In the Republic of Armenia, the following residence statuses are established for foreigners: (a) temporary; (b) permanent; (c) special.

Exit from the Republic of Armenia

The Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Foreigners" (Article 12) stipulates:

1. Foreigners may exit from the Republic of Armenia in case of availability of a valid passport and a valid document attesting lawful stay or residence in the territory of the Republic of Armenia till the moment of the exit, unless another procedure is provided for by law or international treaties.
2. The exit of a foreigner from the Republic of Armenia shall be prohibited where as prescribed by law: (a) a decision has been entered against him or her on involving as an accused, until the closure of the case proceedings or termination of the criminal prosecution against that person; (b) a punishment has been imposed on him or her, the serving of which is possible only in the Republic of Armenia, until the end of the term of serving the punishment or release from serving the punishment as prescribed by law.

Illegal crossing of the state border and illegal migration

The Criminal Code of Armenia stipulates:

Article 329: Illegal crossing of the state border

1. Crossing the guarded state border of the Republic of Armenia without defined documents or proper permission: is punished with a fine of two hundred-fold

of the minimum salary (AMD 1,000 ≈ USD 2), or imprisonment for the maximum term of up to three years.

2. The same action that has been conducted by a group of persons on preliminary agreement or by organized group or through use of violence or a threat to use violence: is punished with imprisonment from three to seven years term.
3. This article doesn't apply to cases, when a foreign citizen or person without citizenship enters the Republic of Armenia without defined documents or proper permission for the purpose to exercise the right of asylum defined by the Constitution and legislation of the Republic of Armenia.

Article 329.1: Organization of illegal migration

1. Entrance to the Republic of Armenia of a foreign citizen or person without citizenship, his/her residence in the Republic of Armenia or transit (transportation) through the territory of the Republic of Armenia for lucrative purpose, which has been done through violation of regulations on entrance, residence or transit defined by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia, or through submission of false documents or false information for the purpose of receiving proper permission for entrance, residence or transit: is punished with a fine from one hundred-fold to two hundred-fold of the minimum salary or with imprisonment for the maximum term of up to three years.
2. Exit from the Republic of Armenia, entrance to foreign countries or residence in foreign country for a lucrative purpose by a citizen of the Republic of Armenia, foreign citizen permanently residing in the Republic of Armenia or person without citizenship, which has been done through violation of regulations on exit, entrance and residency defined by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia, or through submission of false documents and false information for the purpose of receiving proper permission for exit, entrance or residence: is punished with a fine from one hundred-fold to two hundred-fold of the minimum salary, or with imprisonment for the maximum term of up to three years.

Developments in 2019

Considering the importance and topical nature of regulating migration issues, including the organization of an effective fight against irregular migration, the authorities of the Republic of Armenia and its designated agencies undertook specific measures over the year 2019.

In the course of 2019, 1,293,689 foreign citizens have entered the Republic of Armenia, of which 657,582 are citizens of CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization).²⁷

In the same period 1,283,238 foreign citizens have left the Republic of Armenia, of which 649,656 are citizens of CSTO.

4,467 foreign citizens have been identified as having committed an administrative offence: violating the migration legislation of the Republic of Armenia (overstaying the term of sojourn), of which 3,012 were third country citizens (with respect to the CSTO). The same data for 2018 is: 3,666, of which 2,269 were third country citizens (with respect to the CSTO).

Through 2019 the number of visas issued for entry into the Republic of Armenia has increased and amounted to 106,082, whereas in the same period of 2018 the number of entry visa issued was 91,275.

There were 9,574 residence permits issued, the number of those registered (with population registry) was 6,925, including 4,562 from the CSTO member countries. The same data for 2018 is: 8,653 residence permits, 4,358 registered with population registry, including 2,329 from the CSTO member countries.

It is believed that the trend of increase of these general indicators through the period covered is determined by the conclusion of international agreements on issuing visas at the border of the Republic of Armenia, or the establishment of visa-free regime with a number of countries.

Through 2019 there were 68 criminal cases instigated over facts of illicit crossing of the state border of the Republic of Armenia and, for organizing irregular migration, 10 more cases under Article 329.1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia.

Through 2019 the number of people who have submitted requests for granting asylum was 248 foreign citizens. Of which 116 were recognized as refugees and have received asylum. Among those who received a refugee status 45 were Iranians, 31 Syrians, 17 Iraqis.

A bill, a draft Law of the Republic of Armenia “On foreigners and stateless persons” has been developed, in order to ensure conformity with international standards, with the purpose of effectively countering irregular migration, as well as to properly implement the international commitments adopted by the country.

Protocols on the implementation of Readmission Agreements were signed on 10 September, 2019, with the Federal Republic of Germany, on 21 October with the Czech Republic, and on October 28 with the Republic of Bulgaria.

²⁷ Current CSTO members are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan.

Efforts are underway to sign bilateral Protocols with the EU member states on the implementation of Agreement on Readmission with the European Union of 19 April 2013. From among these the drafts of the Protocols with Latvia and Poland are ready to be signed. Draft Agreements on Readmission with Ukraine, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova are ready to be signed.

The reports on the results of the operational-preventive measures (OPM) held in the Republic of Armenia to counter irregular migration by citizens of third countries "Illegals – 2019", and carried out by the law enforcement bodies of the Republic of Armenia, indicates that international criminal groups continue their attempts to use the territory of the Republic of Armenia for transit of the citizens of third countries. To conduct such operation, a command centre has been established, headed by the first deputy chief of staff of the Police of the Republic of Armenia, comprising commanders of the structural units of the Police, the National Security Service, the border protection agency.

The national command centre has analysed the results of the operation and has undertaken measures to thereafter exclude the identified shortcomings, raise the effectiveness of interoperability of the country's competent bodies and organize relevant interventions to fight irregular migration.

Negotiations are underway on concluding bilateral Agreements on Readmission with the EAEU countries, in particular with Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan.

Apart from that, Draft Agreements on Readmission were developed with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of India, the Republic of Uzbekistan and Republic of the Philippines, these were communicated through diplomatic channels with a view of obtaining agreement.

On 31 August 2017, a Protocol Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved the 2017–2021 Plan of Action on the effective implementation of the migration policy of the Republic of Armenia for 2017–2021. The Plan of Actions also included a section "Fight against irregular migration," which covers issues pertaining both to the fight against irregular migration originating in Armenia, and incoming migration flows to Armenia.

The Plan of Actions envisages specific steps aiming at the implementation of the following measures set by the Strategy of Migration Policy:

- ▶ Holding negotiations on signing agreements on readmission with the countries of origin of irregular migration to Armenia;
- ▶ Improving cooperation between public agencies dealing with the detection of irregular migrants, whether crossing the border of or already in the territory of the Republic of Armenia. Implementing measures aiming at development of procedures for joint action and information exchange;

- ▶ Organizing consultations with stakeholder agencies on the rationale of acquiring fingerprints of irregular migrants in the territory of the Republic of Armenia. Developing and submitting respective recommendations;
- ▶ Carrying out, with the assistance of international organizations, trainings to upskill the employees of the law enforcement agencies and the border guards, introducing the best international experience and the latest methods of identifying forged documents.

On 21 July 2016, the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved the “Conceptual Framework for the Integration of Refugees and Long-sojourn Migrants in the Territory of the Republic of Armenia,” (Resolution of the Government #28). On 23 February 2017, the Program of Actions on the implementation of the above Conceptual Framework was approved (Resolution of the Government #8). These documents provide for a range of measures aiming at the integration of persons mentioned above. Organizing education on civic orientation aiming at sociocultural adaptation is one such measure.

Detention of foreigners without an entry authorization – at the crossing points of the state border of the Republic of Armenia

The Article 37 of the Law of Foreigners stipulates:

1. Where, as provided for in Article 6(3) of this Law, it is impossible to return a foreigner to the State of origin or to the State where he or she came from, foreigners who have arrived at a crossing point of the state border of the Republic of Armenia without a passport, with an invalid passport, or who have been refused an entry visa at a crossing point of the state border of the Republic Armenia, or who have not obtained an entry authorization from the body carrying out border control, may be detained in a transit area or in another place – in a special facility provided for that purpose.
2. If the foreigners referred to in part 1 of this Article are family members, they shall be detained together.
3. If the person referred to in part 1 of this Article is a person under 18 travelling without being accompanied by a parent or by a legal representative, he or she may not be detained in a special facility and must be immediately taken to a parent (parents) or a legal representative.
4. The authorized body carrying out border control shall, within 24 hours after placing a foreigner in the special facility, apply to court for obtaining a decision on the permission to detain the foreigner for up to 90 days. For rendering a decision by the court, a foreigner shall be transferred to the court, escorted by a representative of the authorized body carrying out border control.

5. If the return of a foreigner to the State of origin is impossible within 90 days, the public administration body authorized in the field of police of the Republic of Armenia shall issue a temporary permit to the foreigner until the departure of the foreigner from the Republic of Armenia, but for a term not exceeding one year.
6. The procedure for the operation of special facilities at border crossing points and transit areas and for detention of foreigners shall be established by the Government of the Republic of Armenia

Article 38: Arrest of foreigners for the purpose of expulsion.

1. A foreigner may be arrested and detained in special facilities as prescribed by Law, if there are sufficient grounds to suspect that he or she will abscond till the case on expulsion is examined in the court or till the execution of the decision on expulsion which has taken legal effect. Within 48 hours after arresting and placing a foreigner in a special facility, the public administration body authorized in the field of police of the Republic of Armenia shall apply to court for obtaining a decision on the permission to detain the foreigner for up to 90 days.
2. The public administration body authorized in the field of police of the Republic of Armenia shall, no later than within 24 hours, inform of the arrest to the diplomatic representation or consular office of the State of origin of the arrested foreigner or to the diplomatic representation of another State representing the interests of the State concerned, and/or to the foreigner's close relatives in the Republic of Armenia.
3. An arrested foreigner may be detained in a special facility till the decision of the court rendered as a result of the examination of the case on expulsion takes legal effect, but for no longer than 90 days. The provisions of Article 36 of this Law shall apply to a foreigner after the court decision takes legal effect.
4. The procedure for the operation of special facilities and for the detention of arrested foreigners in the territory of the Republic of Armenia shall be established by the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

Protection of the state borders

The Law of the Republic of Armenia on Border Guard Troops stipulates

Article 1: The border guard troops shall be called for protecting the state border of the Republic of Armenia, ensuring the security and independence of the country, on the state border, implementing border control, state border regime and boundary regime at state border check points.

Article 3: The activities of border guard troops shall be carried out under the principle of legitimacy, humanism, protection of citizen's rights and freedoms, single-handed management, cooperation with single national security system, state bodies as well as legal and natural persons.

The central management body of border guard troops is the General Department for State Border Protection.

Article 14: Training of border guard troops refers to the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Education.

Administrative arrests

The Code of the Republic of Armenia on Administrative Offenses stipulates:

Article 261: Bodies (officials) authorized to make an administrative arrest.

Administrative arrest of a person who committed administrative offense can be made only by authorized bodies (officials) defined by the legislation of the Soviet Union and the Republic of Armenia, in particular: border troops in case of violation of the border regime or the regime of crossing border points of the state border of the Soviet Union.

Article 262: Terms of administrative arrest.

Administrative arrest of a person who committed administrative offense can last not more than three hours; in exceptional cases and for special needs other terms of administrative arrest can be defined by legislative acts of the Soviet Union and Republic of Armenia.

Persons who violated the border regime or the regime of crossing border points of the state border of the Soviet Union can be arrested for up to three hours for the purpose to draw up a protocol, or, if necessary, for up to three days to identify the person and investigate circumstances of the violation through informing prosecutor in writing within twenty four hours after the moment of the arrest, or for up to ten days, based on sanction of prosecutor, if violators don't have identification documents.

The term of administrative arrest is counted from the moment of delivery of violator to draw up a protocol, and from the moment of sobering in case of drunken person.

Target groups

In considering Armenia a country of immigration as well as of destination, the following groups are singled out: foreign nationals, asylum seekers and refugees. For the purpose of

the present report and in direct relevance with the objectives of the assessment, we will focus on the first three groups.

Foreign nationals

According to *the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Foreigners"*, foreign nationals are persons are not considered citizens of the Republic of Armenia, are citizens of foreign countries or are stateless persons, and have moved to Armenia with the purpose of establishing residence, of work, education or other purposes.

They hold the citizenship of another State (foreign citizens) or do not hold the citizenship of any State (stateless persons).

Article 5. Principles of the legal status of foreigners in the Republic of Armenia 1. In the Republic of Armenia, foreigners shall have the rights, freedoms, and responsibilities equal to the citizens of the Republic of Armenia, unless otherwise provided for by the Constitution, laws, and the international treaties of the Republic of Armenia.

Year over year there is a stable increase in the number of foreign nationals moving to Armenia with the purpose of establishing residence, of work, education or another purpose. In order to reside in Armenia lawfully, they apply to receive one of the following three residence statuses: temporary, permanent or a special status.

In the course of 2019, there were 7,986 foreign nationals who were granted the right to either of the residence statuses in Armenia (there were 8,330 in 2018, 6,042 in 2017, 5,949 in 2016, and 5,722 in 2015). In the total of foreign nationals receiving either of the residence statuses in Armenia the citizens of the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Iran prevail, followed by ethnic Armenians who are citizens of the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic.²⁸

There has been a substantial shift through the recent years in the nature of migration flows in Armenia, which brought about new needs for the integration of foreign nationals.

In the past foreign nationals in Armenia were the citizens of relatively affluent countries, they were mostly of ethnic Armenian origin and/or were highly qualified workers, whereas in the recent years the situation has been substantially and rapidly changing. Today a larger number of foreign nationals reside in Armenia, who are citizens of countries with a relatively low standard of living, and they enter the Armenian labour market with a supply of lower qualification workforce. This situation not only affects the integration needs of foreign nationals in Armenia, but also the challenges that the migration policy faces.

No comprehensive assessment of integration needs of foreign nationals or relevant policy

²⁸ Source: Police of the Republic of Armenia.

gaps has ever been performed in Armenia. Nevertheless, based on expert evaluation, one may outline and estimate certain needs and gaps:²⁹

- ▶ regulation of employment in Armenia, protection of labour and other rights;
- ▶ reduction of social insecurity risk;
- ▶ reduction of the risk of intolerance and public tension towards foreigners;
- ▶ information and orientation about Armenia and the country's public life, development of language skills;
- ▶ ensuring equivalence of documents and transferability of pension benefits;
- ▶ assessment of the employment, residence and integration needs in Armenia of foreign nationals and of policy gaps.

Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are persons who seek protection in Armenia from persecution or grave danger in their home countries and are awaiting a decision on their claim to receive refugee status, submitted in accordance with the respective international and domestic instruments.³⁰

Between 2015–2019 the number of asylum seekers in Armenia was 1,043, which was 7 per cent less compared to the 1,266 within the previous five-year period between 2010–2014 but is more than the flows before the surge caused by the Syrian and Ukrainian crises. In the recent years the main countries of citizenship for asylum seekers are the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ukraine, Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. In 2019 there were also 30 citizens of Cuba among asylum seekers.³¹

The following are the principal needs of asylum seekers in Armenia:

- ▶ provision of information and orientation;
- ▶ shelter;
- ▶ livelihood support;
- ▶ stable access to translation/interpretation services and legal counsel;
- ▶ safeguarding from the risk of deprivation of liberty and protection of other rights;
- ▶ material/social assistance;
- ▶ ensuring employment;

²⁹ Draft 2021–2031 integration and reintegration strategy of Armenia.

³⁰ Definition is based on the IOM "Glossary on Migration", (2019). The legal definition of asylum seekers is provided by the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Refugees and Asylum".

³¹ Source: Migration Service of the MTGI of the Republic of Armenia.

- ▶ accessibility of health services;
- ▶ accessibility of education;
- ▶ development of language proficiency;
- ▶ psychological support;
- ▶ resolution of issues emerging around family reunion;
- ▶ civic and cultural orientation.

Asylum seekers and refugees with specific needs

Particular attention shall be paid to asylum seekers and refugees with specific needs. Within the meaning of the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Refugees and asylum”, this particular group comprises “children, persons with disabilities, elderly, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, survivors of trafficking, people suffering from grave diseases, persons with mental disorder and persons who have survived torture, rape or other kinds of violence (hereinafter referred to as “vulnerable persons”)”.

Refugees

A refugee is considered to be the foreign national or the stateless person, who has been officially recognized as a refugee by Armenia on the basis of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or has been afforded protection from generalized violence, external aggression, internal conflicts, mass violations of human rights or other grave events violating public order in his/her country of citizenship (and, in case of a stateless person, the country of his/her former residence).³²

The number of persons who were granted refugee status in Armenia between 2015–2019 was 526, which is about 35 per cent less than the number (835) of those who received the status within the preceding five-year period between 2010–2014, but is more than the flows before the surge caused by the Syrian and Ukrainian crises.³³ In the recent years the main countries of citizenship of those who received refugee status are the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ukraine, Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq.

The first flows of refugees into the Republic of Armenia were about 360 thousand Armenians as a consequence of the 1988–1992 Karabakh war and the compatriots who arrived from various regions of the USSR. Later, in 2003, Armenia began to receive more than 1,000

³² The definition is based on the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Refugees and Asylum” and the IOM “Glossary on Migration”, (2019).

³³ The source for this and other statistics describing refugee flows is the Migration Service of the MTGI of the Republic of Armenia.

persons (the predominant majority being of Armenian ethnic origin) arriving in Armenia because of warfare underway in the Iraq, who were subsequently recognized in Armenia as refugees. Currently an insignificant number of asylum claims continue to be submitted by citizens of the Iraq. If most of the claims by the citizens of the Republic of Iraq in 2003 and several years that immediately followed it were submitted by citizens of Armenian ethnic origin, in the more recent years a growth is registered in the claims submitted by non-ethnically Armenians.

In forced migration flows toward Armenia, beginning with 2012, there has been a prevalence of persons forcibly leaving the Syrian Arab Republic (predominantly of Armenian ethnic origin). About a thousand of them have been recognized in Armenia as refugees (the rest have acquired Armenian citizenship or received various residence statuses). In recent years, as is the case with Iraq, so with the Syrian Arab Republic, the number of applicants of non-Armenian origin has grown. Among these there is a prevalence of persons who had previously studied in Armenia and who have a certain command of spoken Armenian or Russian languages.

Since 2014, as a result of escalation of the situation in the Southern part of Ukraine, more than 200 Ukrainian citizens have submitted asylum claims in Armenia (mostly of Armenian ethnic origin). As a result of the war in Yemen in 2017–2018, a notable number of asylum claims have been submitted, and recognized as refugees in Armenia, by Yemeni citizens.

Within the recent years the flows seeking protection in Armenia are not limited only to the forcibly displaced as result of warfare situations. A significantly large number of asylum claims is submitted on the grounds of persecution for reasons of political opinion, membership of a particular social group, conversion to another faith or other attributes (the grounds stipulated by the 1951 Geneva convention). There has been a particular increase in the number of claims submitted from the Islamic Republic of Iran on the grounds of conversion to another faith.

It is worth mentioning that refugees, asylum seekers and members of their families are included in the list of “socially insecure and separate (special) groups of the population” of the Annex 1 of the Republic of Armenia Government decision N 318-N as of 04.03.2004 and have benefits for medical support and services, as well as undergoing special and hard-to-access examinations. Despite the availability of above-mentioned regulation, health-care services, however, continue to remain inaccessible conditioned with the low level of awareness, availability of information and other factors.

Strategic goals of Integration and Reintegration

- 1) Systemic reforms in the organization of integration and reintegration;
- 2) Accessibility of shelter and favourable living conditions;

- 3) Protection of rights and social assistance;
- 4) Ensuring accessibility of education and health services;
- 5) Support to employment and social inclusion;
- 6) Cultural integration and reintegration (including command of the language and daily practices);
- 7) Creation of an accepting environment in the society;
- 8) Capacity-building of structures and staff involved in facilitating integration and reintegration.

Each of the strategic goals has its respective group of directions, according to the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Refugees and asylum”:

ACCOMODATION

Article 14:

1. Asylum seekers in need of housing shall be accommodated in the temporary accommodation centre for asylum seekers (hereafter referred to as “the Temporary Accommodation Centre”) which is a special establishment created for that purpose, until a final decision on their asylum claim is adopted. Asylum seekers placed in the Temporary Accommodation Centre shall be provided with basic means of subsistence pursuant to Article 24 of this Law.
2. Asylum seekers not placed in the Temporary Accommodation Centre, who are not able to cover their basic subsistence needs, shall be provided with financial assistance pursuant to the procedure prescribed by the Government. 9 3. While stipulating the financial assistance to be provided to asylum seekers for covering their basic subsistence needs, the basic needs of vulnerable persons, shall be considered.

Article 24: further details the tight to housing:

1. The Authorized Body shall place asylum seekers, who have applied to the Authorized Body pursuant to Article 47(1) of this Law, and their family members as specified in Article 7(1) and (3) of this Law (hereafter referred to as “family members of the asylum seeker”) in the Temporary Reception Centre, as specified in Article 14 of this Law, where they shall be provided with food (three times per day), linen, personal hygiene accessories, as well as clothes and shoes where necessary (hereafter referred to as “subsistence conditions”). Procedure for placing in the Temporary Reception Centre and for provision of subsistence conditions shall be established by the Government. Following the registration of the asylum application pursuant to Article 48 of

this Law, asylum seekers may either remain in the Temporary Reception Centre or reside at another place on their own means. Minor asylum seekers, unaccompanied or separated from their family, shall be placed in the Temporary Accommodation Centre on a priority basis – taking into account their best interests and in consultation with their representative.

2. The Authorized Body shall place asylum seekers, who have applied to the Authorized Body pursuant to Article 47(2) of this Law, and family members of the asylum seeker in the Temporary Reception Centre, as specified in Article 14 of this Law, where they shall be provided with subsistence conditions according to part 1 of this Article until a final decision on their application is adopted.
3. Refugees who have been refused asylum may be permitted by the Authorized Body to continue to reside in the Temporary Reception Centre until they leave the Republic of Armenia or are granted asylum under Article 58(2) of this Law.

Article 46:

In case the asylum seeker and his or her accompanying family members specified in parts 1-3 of Article 7 of this Law do not hold a valid travel document or a valid entry permit, Border Guard Troops may take a reasoned written decision to detain them for up to 72 hours in the special shelter provided for in part 1 of Article 37 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On foreigners” after which they shall be moved to Temporary Accommodation Centre prescribed by Article 14 of this Law. Grounds for taking a reasoned written decision shall be prescribed by the Government. The reasoned written decision shall be provided to the asylum seeker in a language understandable to him or her. The decision must also contain the appeal procedures. Conditions for detaining in the special shelter must comply with the established international standards.

Article 50:

The Authorized body for labour and social issues shall – jointly with the Family, Women and Children Rights Protection Units – initiate the process of placement of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in consultation with their representative, in case it is not appropriate to place them in the Temporary Accommodation Centre in accordance with Article 24 of this Law. 30 6. When placing a child, the authorized body shall – in consultation with his/her representative – ensure the joint residence of the asylum-seeking child who are members of one family, proceeding from the protection of interests of the child.

EMPLOYMENT

Article 21: Right to wage-earning employment: Asylum seekers and refugees who have been granted asylum in the Republic of Armenia shall have the right to seek employment and work in the territory of the Republic of Armenia under the same conditions as nationals of the Republic of Armenia, unless otherwise provided for by law.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICAL CARE

Article 23: Right to social security and medical care 1. Refugees who have been granted asylum in the Republic of Armenia shall have the right to benefit from social services stipulated by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia for nationals of the Republic of Armenia, to receive state benefits and other financial assistance, benefits granted for cases of temporary inability to work, employment injury in production, accidents and occupational diseases, to receive free medical care and services guaranteed by the State, as well as shall have the right to pension security and to social protection in case of unemployment as prescribed by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia, if they fulfil the requirements prescribed by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia governing the relevant field. 2. Asylum seekers and refugees who have not been granted asylum in the Republic of Armenia shall have the right – equal to that of nationals of the Republic of Armenia – to receive free 11 medical care and services guaranteed by the State, if they fulfil the requirements of the legislation of the Republic of Armenia governing that field.

The Migration Concept

Since 2000, the Republic of Armenia, migration policy and practice has been guided by a National Concept for State Regulation of Migration. The migration concept was revised in 2004 and again in 2010.³⁴ One of the key changes in the 2010 migration concept compared to the 2000/2004 concepts was the inclusion of return and readmission. Where the earlier Concept had focused on emigration, owing to high levels of emigration from the Republic of Armenia in the post-Soviet period in the 1990s, by 2010, the focus had shifted to repatriation.

In order to respond to developments that are taking place both in Armenia and outside of its borders the Migration Service embarked on the development of new State Migration Management Concept³⁵ in February 2020, in collaboration with IOM Yerevan.

³⁴ Concept Paper on the Policy for the State Regulation of Migration in the Republic of Armenia adopted by the Republic of Armenia Government Protocol Decision N51 on 30 December 2010.

³⁵ Concept of the State Migration Management, Draft 12 February 2020.

With the changing migration dynamics in the country, the forthcoming Concept – under development at the time of writing – sets comprehensive and balanced vision for migration governance in Armenia and is primarily focused on enhancing linkages between migration management and improvement of the demographic situation, fighting irregular migration, enhancing migration management and admission, better protection of the rights of migrant workers and protection of asylum seekers and refugees, improved integration and enhancing development potential of migration, improving preparedness in case of migration crises, strengthening cooperation on migration and enhancing institutional capacity in migration management.

Evidence-based, whole-of-government approach and strong partnerships are three fundamental *principles* for the migration management and related policy formulation in Armenia.

The underlying *priorities* for the policy of state migration management are: (1) national security, (2) social cohesion, (3) human rights and dignity of all groups of migrants, (4) cultural diversity, (5) at the same time with promotion of Armenian culture, as well as (6) mobility and migrant engagement for development. These priorities remain in line with the migration goals set forth in 2019–2023 Government Programme.

The new concept of state migration management in Armenia is designed to support the achievement of the *2030 Sustainable Development Agenda* as well as accelerate the implementation of the commitments under the *Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, *Global Compact on Refugees*, *1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol*.

It also aims to implement important reforms in the migration management field, related to border management, document security, return and reintegration, fights against trafficking and organized crime which support strengthening the links with the European Union and pave the way to the launch of the visa liberalization negotiations. Planned reforms will also allow for strengthening cooperation within the frames of the Eurasian Economic Union facilitating labour mobility and stronger economic development.

The concept targets the following groups: (1) immigrants, (2) returnees (Armenian citizens), (3) asylum seekers, (4) refugees, (5) forced migrants/displaced persons who do not fall under the refugee definition (such as ethnic Armenians displaced from the Syrian Arab Republic), (6) emigrants (Armenian citizens in foreign countries, including seasonal labour migrants)³⁶ and (7) internally displaced persons.

This Concept includes nine goals, which are formulated based on the analysis of the existing migration policies, trends, related problems and possible development scenarios:

³⁶ Representatives of Armenian diaspora depending on their migration status could be in any of the target groups, however in order to promote their return and integration in Armenia it would be feasible to develop a specific policy.

1. Enhancing Linkages between Migration Management Policymaking and Improvement of Demographic Situation in Armenia;
2. Increasing Effectiveness of Fight against Irregular and Illegal Migration
3. Increasing Effectiveness of Management of Borders, Entry, Exit and Residence of Foreigners;
4. Improving Protection of the Rights and Interests of Various Groups of Migrants, Improving the System of International Protection;
5. Reforms in Organizing Integration of Foreigners in Armenia and Reintegration of Returnees, as well as Improvement of Admission Environment of Foreigners;
6. Increasing Impact of Migration on Armenia’s Sustainable Development.
7. Improving Preparedness in Migration Crises Situations;
8. Strengthening of International and Domestic Cooperation in Migration Management;
9. Improving Coordination, Integrity and Effectiveness of Migration Management.

1.4.2 Voluntary return in the national legislation

Two existing legal texts make specific references to the voluntary return of foreigners from the Armenian territory, namely the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Refugees and asylum” and the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Foreigners”.

According to the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Refugees and asylum”, voluntary return (article 4) is defined as “the return of an asylum seeker or a refugee to the country of his/her nationality or former habitual residence, which is carried out with the assistance of the Migration Service (hereafter referred to as “the Authorized Body”), pursuant to the procedure established in Article 60 of this Law”.

The principle of voluntariness must be respected by all competent bodies dealing with asylum and refugee issues, and this means that an asylum seeker or refugee: (1) is informed of the situation of the country of his/her nationality or former habitual residence and is able to make a conscious decision on his/her return; (2) has made a free choice to return to the country of his/her nationality or former habitual residence or to stay in the territory of the Republic of Armenia, before a final decision on his/her asylum claim is made or before cessation of recognition of a refugee.

All competent bodies of the Republic of Armenia dealing with asylum and refugee issues must, within the scope of their competence, facilitate the voluntary return of a refugee or asylum seeker, upon the request submitted by the asylum seeker, refugee, or the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereafter referred to as “UNHCR”).

Article 60. Voluntary return procedure

1. Asylum seekers and refugees may apply to the Authorized Body for assisting and supporting their voluntary return as defined in Article 4 of this Law. In that case asylum seekers shall submit a request on suspending the asylum procedure, and persons recognized as refugees – a request on ceasing the recognition of a refugee.
2. In order to assist the voluntary return, the Authorized Body shall provide all applicants for voluntary return with information on the situation in their countries of nationality or former habitual residence as well as shall co-operate with UNHCR and International Organization for Migration (hereafter referred to as “IOM”).
3. The Authorized Body shall, in co-operation with the Authorised Body for Foreign Affairs Issues and pursuant to the procedure established by the Government, assist persons who submit an application for voluntary return in obtaining necessary travel documents and visa for entering their country of origin or main residence or possible third transit countries.
4. An applicant for voluntary return shall have the right to withdraw his/her application any time in the course of the return procedure. Before departure from the Republic of Armenia, an applicant for voluntary return shall continue to enjoy the rights arising out of the status of an asylum seeker or refugee, without any restrictions.
5. After an applicant for voluntary return has left the Republic of Armenia, the Authorized Body shall record the fact of voluntary return in his/her individual file, including the decisions on termination by the asylum seeker of the asylum procedure as prescribed in Article 55(3) of this Law, or cessation of the recognition of a refugee as prescribed in Article 10(1) of this Law.
6. If an asylum seeker or refugee has, as prescribed in this Article, voluntarily returned to the country of his/her nationality or former habitual residence and has later again arrived in the Republic of Armenia and claims asylum, his/her claim shall be examined as prescribed in Article 59 of this Law.

In the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Foreigners”, the following articles refer to the possibility of voluntary return of foreigners from the Republic of Armenia:

- Article 30: Voluntary leaving of foreigners from the Republic of Armenia. A foreigner shall be obliged to voluntarily leave the territory of the Republic of Armenia, if:
- (a) the validity period of his or her entry visa or of residence status has expired;
 - (b) the entry visa has been revoked on the grounds referred to in Article 8(1), (2), and (3) of this Law;
 - (c) his or her application for obtaining a residence status or extending the term has been refused;
 - (d) he or she has been deprived of residence status on the grounds referred to in Article 21 of this Law.
- Article 31: Instituting an action on expulsion of a foreigner If a foreigner has failed to voluntarily leave the territory of the Republic of Armenia in cases provided for in Article 30 of this Law, the public administration body authorized in the field of police of the Republic of Armenia shall institute and file with a court an action on expulsion.
- Article 32: Circumstances banning expulsion of foreign citizens 1. It shall be prohibited to expel foreigners to a State where human rights are being violated, particularly, if he or she is threatened with persecution on the grounds of racial, religious affiliation, social origin, citizenship, or political convictions, or if the foreigners concerned might be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or to death penalty. Evidence on the threat of persecution or on the real danger of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or of death penalty shall be furnished to the court by the foreigner concerned.

1.4.3 Key migration and demographic data

The administrative information source for migration in Armenia is the State Population Register of the Republic of Armenia, which does not fully reflect the data on population movements, given the fact that people are mostly not informing about their movements to the Passport and Visa Department of the Police of the Republic of Armenia and hence are left out of the sight on migration statistics.

The statistics below focus on the 4 selected countries of origin, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This selection is based on IOM Armenia's past experience with some ad hoc AVRR cases from Armenia (mainly from Afghanistan) and also data gathered previously on these countries.

It should be noted that even without migration, the Republic of Armenia faces a population decline owing to a fertility rate of 1.62. Between 2000 and 2016, the population of the

1. Situational analysis – Setting the scene

Republic of Armenia decreased by 228,300 to 2,998,300 persons (stock). In recent years, however, more people have been arriving than departing. Arrivals include Armenians returning to the country, including those holding dual citizenship in countries in conflict, namely the Syrian Arab Republic, but also labour immigrants from countries such as India.

The migration statistics shows higher inflow of Indians and Iranians, and in some cases citizens of Bangladesh (from Police statistics). The major point is that statistics of the Migration Service (MS) and the National Security Service (NSS) Border Troops are not well coordinated and synchronized and sometimes such cases (from Afghanistan etc.) were not included in MS statistics. They appear in NSS border crossing numbers and in such cases they are directly referred to IOM office (if migrants were detained or their detention has come to an end). From the previous IOM experience, cases of Afghanistan were the most problematic, as migrants were the most vulnerable and had problems with documentation.

Overview of Asylum Seekers from the 4 target countries, disaggregated by sex (M/F), age group and country of Citizenship

In 2019, a grand total of 248 asylum seekers registered their asylum application in Armenia. Among these, 107 originated from the Islamic Republic of Iran, 4 from India, 3 from Afghanistan and 2 from Bangladesh. The table below details their repartition by age group, per country of citizenship.

2019		0-13		14-17		18-34		35-64		65+	
Country	TOTAL AS	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Afghanistan	3	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Bangladesh	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
India	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	107	11	6	3	0	31	12	25	17	0	2

In terms of refugee status recognition, we can add that 45 asylum seekers from the Islamic Republic of Iran have been recognized as refugees and 4 from Afghanistan.

Source: Statistical Report, Migration Service.³⁷

In 2018, a total of 218 asylum seekers registered their asylum application in Armenia. Among these, 57 originated from the Islamic Republic of Iran, 12 from Afghanistan and 11 from Bangladesh. No asylum request from Indian citizens has been recorded in 2018. The table below details the repartition of asylum seekers by age group, per country of citizenship.

³⁷ www.migration.am/statistics.

2018		0–17		18–34		35–64	
Country	TOTAL AS	M	F	M	F	M	F
Afghanistan	12	2	0	9	1	0	0
Bangladesh	11	0	0	7	0	4	0
India	N/A						
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	57	10	4	15	4	16	8

Note: In terms of refugee status recognition, 2 asylum seekers from the Islamic Republic of Iran have been recognized as refugees (1 female 0–13 years and 1 male between 18 en dash 34).

Source: Demographic Handbook of Armenia.³⁸

The tables below detail the distribution of foreigners with permanent, temporary and special residence status according to countries of citizenship and including grounds for granting status. It shows that India entails the biggest group of foreigners (1,835 foreigners in 2019 and 2,005 in 2018). Most of them were granted a temporary residence status (1,820 in 2019 and 1,979 in 2018). Indian citizens form about 1/4 of the total grand caseload. They are followed by Iranian citizens (1,254 foreigners in 2019 and 1,310 in 2018). Most of them were granted a temporary residence status (1,004 in 2019 and 1,060 in 2018). It should be highlighted that the Armenian nationality is the ground that is the most common for granting a residence status to Iranian citizens, and to a minor extent, to Indian citizens.

Distribution of foreigners with permanent residence status according to countries of citizenship and grounds for granting status³⁹

As highlighted in the tables below (year 2019 and 2018), Iranian citizens are the biggest group that was granted a permanent residence status (177 in 2019 and 163 in 2018), followed by Indian citizens (15 in 2019 and 26 in 2018). Main grounds for granting Iranian citizens such status were the 3 years of residence (79 in 2019 and 90 in 2018), followed by a business activity (41 in 2019 and 0 in 2018) and the Armenian nationality (57 in 2019 and 73 in 2018). Main grounds for Indian citizens were the 3 years of residence (11 in 2019 and 22 in 2018), followed by a business activity (2 in 2019 and 0 in 2018) and the Armenian nationality (2 in 2019 and 4 in 2018).

³⁸ www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2225.

³⁹ *Source*; Police Passport and Visa Department, Armenia.

1. Situational analysis – Setting the scene

2019				
Country of citizenship	TOTAL	Including, the grounds for granting status		
		At least 3 years of residence	Business activity	Armenian nationality
Afghanistan	N/A			
Bangladesh	N/A			
India	15	11	2	2
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	177	79	41	57

2018				
Country of citizenship	TOTAL	Including, the grounds for granting status		
		At least 3 years of residence	Business activity	Armenian nationality
Afghanistan	N/A			
Bangladesh	N/A			
India	26	22	0	4
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	163	90	0	73

Distribution of foreigners with *temporary* residence status according to countries of citizenship and grounds for granting status⁴⁰

As highlighted in the tables below (year 2019 and 2018), Indian citizens are the biggest group that was granted a temporary residence status (1,820 in 2019 and 1,979 in 2018), followed by Iranian citizens (1,004 in 2019 and 1,060 in 2018). Main grounds for granting Indian citizens such status were education (1,591 in 2019 and 1,126 in 2018), followed by employment (139 in 2019 and 798 in 2018), reuniting with the family (47 in 2019 and 53 in 2018), and business activity (43 in 2019 and 2 in 2018). Main grounds for Iranian citizens were education (562 in 2019 and 466 in 2018), reuniting with family (229 in 2019 and 220 in 2018), business activity (64 in 2019 and 5 in 2018), and the Armenian nationality (8 in 2019 and 9 in 2018). Other groups that benefited from the temporary residence status were Bangladeshi citizens (5 in 2019 and 1 in 2018).

⁴⁰ Source; Police Passport and Visa Department, Armenia.

2019						
Country of citizenship	TOTAL	Including the grounds for granting status				
		Reuniting with family*	Education	Employment**	Business activity	Armenian nationality
Afghanistan	N/A					
Bangladesh	5	0	5	0	0	0
India	1,820	47	1,591	139	43	0
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	1,004	229	562	141	64	8

2018						
Country of citizenship	TOTAL	Including the grounds for granting status				
		Reuniting with family*	Education	Employment**	Business activity	Armenian nationality
Afghanistan	N/A					
Bangladesh	1	0	1	0	0	0
India	1,979	53	1,126	798	2	0
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	1,060	220	466	360	5	9

* spouse, parent or child of a foreigner with the status of temporary residence in the Republic of Armenia, or spouse or close relative (parent, child, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather, grandchild) of a Republic of Armenia citizen or foreigner with the status of permanent or special residence in Armenia.

** Availability of permission of state authorized body of the Republic of Armenia Government granting employment permission in the Republic of Armenia or signed labour agreement.

Distribution of foreigners with *special* residence status according to countries of citizenship and grounds for granting status⁴¹

As highlighted in the tables below (year 2019 and 2018), Iranian citizens are the only ones, among the 4 target groups of the present report, to have benefited from a special residence status in 2018 and 2019. The only ground for granting such status was the Armenian nationality (73 in 2019 and 87 in 2018).

⁴¹ Source; Police Passport and Visa Department, Armenia.

1. Situational analysis – Setting the scene

2019			
Country of citizenship	TOTAL	Including the grounds for granting status	
		Economic or cultural	Armenian nationality
Afghanistan	N/A		
Bangladesh	N/A		
India	N/A		
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	73		73

2018			
Country of citizenship	TOTAL	Including the grounds for granting status	
		Economic or cultural	Armenian nationality
Afghanistan	N/A		
Bangladesh	N/A		
India	N/A		
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	87		87

Overview of border crossings

2020 (January – June 2020)		
COUNTRY	Arrivals	Departures
Afghanistan	1	2
Bangladesh	9	10
India	2,613	4,777
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	13,747	17,000
2019		
COUNTRY	Arrivals	Departures
Afghanistan	50	60
Bangladesh	67	310
India	36,951	34,060
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	141,596	134,896
2018		
COUNTRY	Arrivals	Departures
Afghanistan	22	23
Bangladesh	35	38
India	30,368	26,720
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	138,922	138,174

2. The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Framework

2.1 IOM's AVRR global framework

The return and reintegration of migrants⁴² unwilling or unable to remain in host or transit countries have gained renewed political importance in the agenda of national and international policymakers around the world. Increasingly mixed and complex movements of a growing number of migrants are taking place,⁴³ with many of them remaining stranded or finding themselves in irregular situations for prolonged periods of time.

As a Related Organization to the United Nations system, IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with government, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. With 173 Member States, a further 9 States holding observer status and offices in over 100 countries, IOM is dedicated to providing services and advice to governments and migrants. IOM is mandated by its Constitution to ensure orderly migration, inter alia, through voluntary return and reintegration assistance. In particular, IOM emphasizes that voluntariness remains a precondition for all its AVRR activities.

Since 1979, IOM has been implementing AVRR programmes worldwide as a humane and dignified approach to return and reintegration.

AVRR is a key strategy in ensuring humane and orderly movement of migrants. It is an indispensable component of a migration management approach mutually beneficial to migrants, governments and other relevant stakeholders affected by migration.

⁴² The term "migrant" refers to "any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is" (International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Key migration terms", available from www.iom.int/key-migration-terms).

⁴³ Mixed movements are defined as movements "in which a number of people are travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have varying needs and profiles and may include asylum seekers, refugees, trafficked persons, unaccompanied/separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 10-Point Action Plan on Mixed Migration, 2012, p. 291).

2. The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Framework

In line with its mandate, IOM's key policy considerations when developing and implementing AVRR projects encompass:⁴⁴

- ▶ safeguarding dignity and rights of migrants in operating returns, while seeking adherence to applicable international principles and standards;
- ▶ preserving the integrity of regular migration structures and asylum procedures;
- ▶ enhancing dialogue and cooperation between origin, transit and host countries involved in the return process and reinforcing the responsibility of countries of origin towards their returning nationals;
- ▶ addressing, to the extent possible, the drivers of irregular migration;
- ▶ advocating for the adoption of an integrated approach to return, including post-return reintegration assistance, and;
- ▶ working with national and international partners in both host country and country of origin, to promote international dialogue and implement capacity-building for AVRR initiatives.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration⁴⁵ also recognizes the need for facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration (Objective 21).

AVRR programmes contribute to the achievement of the targets set in the Global Compact for Migration which calls upon states to provide migrants with opportunities for safe and dignified return and sustainable reintegration. Specifically, it calls upon states to promote the implementation of child- and gender sensitive return and reintegration programmes (Global Compact for Migration, objective 21 (b)). It works towards contributing to Target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through facilitating voluntary returns, thereby underlining the relevance of AVRR as an essential pillar of migration management systems and as a preferred option for migrants to return in a humane and dignified manner.

In addition, AVRR contributes to Target 10.2, which is to empower/promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status – by supporting returnees in their economic, social and psychosocial reintegration processes in their countries and communities of origin. Through local partnerships and cooperation in the implementation of and referrals for reintegration support, AVRR is also relevant to achieving Target 17.17, which is to encourage and promote effective public, public–private and civil society partnership.

⁴⁴ www.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration.

⁴⁵ Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (A/RES/73/195) 2018, available from www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195.

Furthermore, by engaging and building the capacity of all relevant stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels, AVRR programmes foster a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the importance of well-managed return policies, thereby relating to Target 17.9, which is to enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North – South, South – South and triangular cooperation. Such an approach is particularly relevant to countries facing challenges and/or limited capacity in reintegrating returning migrants.

The Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF)⁴⁶ provides a comprehensive overview of the essential elements for planned and well-managed migration. It underlines principles and objectives that are also embedded in IOM's approach to voluntary return assistance and reintegration. By offering migrants the possibility to return in a safe and dignified manner, AVRR contributes to achieving MiGOF Objective 3, which stipulates that "Migration should take place in a safe, orderly and dignified manner". By providing assistance to reintegration, AVRR supports the achievement of MiGOF Objective 1, which states that "Good migration governance and related policy should seek to advance the socioeconomic well-being of migrants and society". It derives from this approach that voluntary return and reintegration should not be considered in isolation from other components of migration management.

IOM's Framework for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration

The framework for assisted voluntary return and reintegration (hereinafter referred to as the Framework)⁴⁹ builds on IOM's long-standing contribution in this area and marks an important milestone in the Organization's engagement in AVRR. Designed to guide both policymakers and AVRR practitioners, the scope of the Framework goes beyond IOM's own engagement. Considering the diversity of AVRR projects' eligibility criteria, available resources, national policies, implementation partners and operational contexts, the Framework proposes a road map to address voluntary return and reintegration in a holistic way – one that responds to the needs of the individual returnees, the needs of the communities to which they return and the priorities of concerned governments, calling for the adoption of coordinated measures, policies, and practices between stakeholders responsible for migration management and development at the international, national and local levels.

The Framework lays out the key principles that in IOM's view need to be adhered to in order to support dignified voluntary returns and sustainable reintegration. Building on 40 years of practice, the document also proposes six concrete objectives which are applied throughout the voluntary return and reintegration process. These principles and objectives underpin

⁴⁶ For more information on the IOM Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF), see: www.iom.int/sites/default/files/about-iom/migof_brochure_a4_en.pdf.

⁴⁷ www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/a_framework_for_avrr_online_pdf_optimized_20181112.pdf.

2. The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Framework

IOM's commitment to facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and to contribute to migrants' socioeconomic well-being, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Compact for Migration and the MiGOF.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION



These principles and objectives underpin IOM's commitment to facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and to contribute to migrants' socioeconomic well-being, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Compact for Migration, and the MiGOF.

The principles and objectives outlined in the IOM's AVRR Framework contributes to achieving Objective 21 of the Global Compact, and in particular actions 21.b, 21.f, 21.h, 21.i and 21.g, which focus, among other things, on voluntary programmes, migrant children, evidence-based programming, monitoring and sustainable reintegration. They also contribute to objectives 1, 3, 4, 7, 12, 13, which focus on providing accurate and timely information, availability of information, address and reduce vulnerabilities, access to documentation and provide alternatives to detention.

The strategic objectives of AVRR framework the following:

Objective 1: Migrants can make an informed decision and take ownership of the voluntary return process

Access to timely, unbiased and reliable information is essential. It allows migrants to make an informed decision and fosters preparedness for return and ownership of the return process, thereby enhancing prospects for sustainable reintegration.

Related activities

Conducting outreach and awareness-raising activities

Outreach activities help to ensure that migrants who may be in need of return and reintegration assistance, as well as other information multipliers such as communities, diaspora, consular representations and other relevant stakeholders, are aware of AVRR. Information provided to migrants should be objective and based on up-to-date facts. Whenever possible, mapping and engaging with migrant communities and relevant diplomatic representations in the design and implementation of awareness-raising activities can foster broader outreach and assure that messages are adequately shaped to address identified information needs and are well understood by the target group.

Counselling migrants on return and reintegration assistance

Individualized counselling enables potential returnees to consider all their available rights and options in the host or transit country and in the country of origin, be informed on the assistance that they would receive and on the conditions of the voluntary return and reintegration assistance process, and consequently decide whether return is the best alternative for them.

Counselling should be provided in a language that can be understood by the migrant. It should take place in conditions that allow migrants to ask questions and express their views freely, including their concerns. It may, but does not have to, result in one's decision to return voluntarily, and migrants can change their mind at any stage prior to departure.

Migrants may also need support to contact their communities and families, whose members can play an important role in migrants' decision-making. In some cases, it may be necessary to undertake specific assessments of the migrant's ability to make a competent decision on the return and to express his/her willingness to return.

A number of different actors may have a role in the counselling process. Close collaboration and partnerships between all stakeholders involved contribute to avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring that migrants are provided with accurate information in a reliable,

coherent and transparent manner. Alternatively, migrants who wish to pursue legal options to remain in the host country should be referred to available and relevant legal assistance. As part of this process, and in accordance with international law, migrants should be informed of the possibility to receive assistance and support by various actors, including government asylum authorities, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners, child protection authorities, authorities in charge of the protection of VoTs and others as required.

Objective 2: Migrants reach their countries of origin in a safe and dignified manner

Ensuring migrants reach their countries of origin in a safe and dignified manner implies a number of administrative and logistic arrangements and the provision of movement assistance. Specific processes and safeguards related to migrants in vulnerable situations also apply.

Related activities

Facilitating administrative and logistical arrangements

Travel preparations include a variety of administrative and logistical arrangements, from arranging all necessary documents and booking the tickets to organizing operational assistance needed upon departure, transit, and arrival.

The return journey should be organized in the most suitable and viable ways. As much as possible, returnees should travel on commercial lines like any other passengers, as this represents a cost- and time-effective option that preserves migrant dignity and anonymity.

Providing travel assistance

Migrants may need assistance upon departure and during transit, to go through check-in, passport and security controls.

For instance, accompanying measures or escorts may be relevant to ensure the well-being and security of migrants such as elderly people or unaccompanied migrant children. When health conditions and related needs have been identified at the preparatory stage, arrangements have to be made for a medical escort and medical care all along the travel duration, along with other medical equipment such as stretchers and wheelchairs, as needed. Specific travel measures have to be put in place when facilitating the return of unaccompanied and separated children, elderly migrants and VoTs.

Assisting returnees upon arrival

Whenever requested, immediate assistance upon arrival in the country of origin should be provided to returnees, for instance, in the form of onward transportation to the final

destination and/or in arranging overnight accommodation. Specific arrangements should be in place for migrants in vulnerable situations who may require immediate support upon arrival.

Objective 3: Returnees are able to overcome individual challenges impacting their reintegration

Individual assistance seeks to empower the returnees first and foremost, and create an environment in which they can take ownership of the reintegration process. Accordingly, a flexible approach is required to provide reintegration assistance that is adapted to the returnees' needs, profiles and preferences, as well as to the different return contexts.

Related activities

Collecting information on available reintegration support

Mapping stakeholders providing reintegration-related services to returnees, available opportunities and constraints within the socioeconomic context enables the provision of comprehensive and up-to-date information to returnees during both pre-departure and post-arrival counselling sessions. Importantly, it allows to put in place effective referral mechanisms.

Counselling and referring returnees to reintegration-related services

Individual counselling sessions allow the identification of various economic, social and psychosocial challenges that returnees may face during their reintegration process. Returnees are supported in designing their reintegration plans, which aim to respond to individual needs, address vulnerability factors, and build on skills while taking into account the specific opportunities and constraints in the returnees' communities of return. An effective referral system allows for the identified needs to be matched with services, such as psychosocial support and health care, as well as existing training, education and employment opportunities.

Providing reintegration grants

Reintegration grants can be provided in cash, in kind, or in a combination of both to help returnees meet their most pressing needs and/or support educational or livelihood activities. This may entail support for micro-business set-up, housing, medical assistance, education, vocational training and job placement, among others, depending on individual needs and local opportunities. They should be as flexible as possible to respond to identified needs.

Objective 4: Communities have the capacity to provide an enabling environment for reintegration

The role that communities play in migrant reintegration can be manifold. Communities can provide an environment conducive for reintegration in terms of safety nets, strong social networks, psychosocial support and financial resources. When communities perceive return positively, this allows migrants to return without the risk of being stigmatized, enabling them to re-establish social ties and facilitating reinsertion into society. Similarly, the reintegration process should also benefit (or, at least, not harm) communities through migrants' contributions, skills and experiences. At the same time, receiving communities may not have the capacities, structures or resources to facilitate reintegration. Especially in contexts where the number of returnees is considerable, this may lead to competition over available resources and significantly hamper the returnees' reintegration. A returnee's ability to reintegrate within the community may further be impacted when return is seen as a failure or when the decision to migrate in the first place is seen as abandonment. Return(s) may also result in further economic pressure on migrant communities or families, due, for example, to unrecovered migration-related debts. Therefore, community-based initiatives are critical to strengthen a community's capacity to absorb returnees and mitigate any feelings of resentment or hostility that a returning migrant may face, for instance, for receiving assistance, or, on the contrary, for returning empty-handed.

Related activities

Identifying and addressing the needs and existing opportunities within the community

A socioeconomic assessment undertaken in communities with a high number of returns and/or strong outward migratory pressure helps identify the impact of return migration on the community as a whole. It is important to include communities themselves to the extent possible in the process of such assessments to align reintegration activities with their needs and priorities and ensure that they are not negatively affected or discriminated against by the actions taken. Engaging communities inclusively in reintegration interventions from the outset also fosters local ownership of initiatives and therefore enhances sustainability after the assistance has ended.

Promoting reintegration activities linking returnees and communities

Joint initiatives that encourage the inclusive participation of returnees and non-migrant populations alike, while addressing the targeted communities' needs, can foster social cohesion between returnees and their communities. Activities can range from the set-up of training programmes and job creation initiatives in partnership with the private sector to the

implementation of small-scale infrastructure projects such as water irrigation and road construction, to name a few. Such interventions do not only reinforce a community's capacity to absorb their returning members but may also contribute to strengthening the links between return migration and local development. They allow the community to harness the skills of returnees while also addressing issues that impact the larger community.

Objective 5: Adequate policies and public services are in place to address the specific needs of returnees and communities alike

A returnee's ability to successfully reintegrate is influenced by the political, institutional, environmental, economic and social conditions in his/her country of origin. The existence or absence of return and reintegration-related policies and legal instruments, cooperation between various government departments at the local and national levels, and the degree of engagement of the private sector, diaspora, and civil society impact on returnees' access to employment and basic services, such as housing, education, health and psychosocial assistance.

In some countries of origin, capacities and infrastructure are not adequate to provide returnees and local population alike with an appropriate level of services, protection and assistance. Policy and technical and material support to public institutions, the private sector, and civil society may be necessary to address these gaps. Furthermore, countries with significant returns may also require support to develop adequate policies and structures to address the needs of returning nationals.

Interventions reinforcing the provision of essential services and fulfilment of rights in key areas, such as education, health, psychosocial assistance, access to natural resources, employment and housing for returnees and non-migrant populations alike, are required to address these necessities at the structural level.

Related activities

Involving governments in the design of reintegration-related programmes

Reintegration-related activities must be shaped in line with the needs and priorities identified by governments and civil societies in countries of origin. The effectiveness and ownership of processes and activities can be fostered by engaging local and national authorities and stakeholders in the design of reintegration-related programmes.

Strengthening national and local capacities to provide reintegration services to returning migrants

Structural interventions may be directed at strengthening national capacities to provide reintegration services to returning migrants. This may include providing technical support

and tools, facilitating cross-sectoral coordination, establishing national networks and referral mechanisms, and providing training and conferences to exchange good practices and discuss lessons learned.

Setting up coordination mechanisms to foster complementarity and coherence across reintegration-related activities

Return and reintegration policies are more effective when linked with the protection of migrant rights and with development opportunities in the country of origin, particularly those that address the root causes of migration. Effective coordination is required to build on synergies between development and reintegration efforts while ensuring that specific needs of returnees and communities alike are targeted in all efforts. All stakeholders involved – government and non-governmental, public and private, local and international – must be engaged in fostering coordination, complementarity and coherence across reintegration-related activities. To this aim, complementarities between different funding instruments need to be identified, namely, those used to address return management and those supporting community stabilization and cooperation for development. Development plans and any migration strategies at the national and local levels should equally be taken into consideration during the programme design and synergies should be explored wherever possible.

Strengthening policy frameworks to promote well-managed migration

Activities at the structural level may include analysis, design, and implementation of migration-related awareness-raising campaigns, revision or upgrade of policy frameworks at the national level, or support to national and local authorities in the development of return and reintegration-friendly policies, as well as of standard operating procedures and protocols. Efforts at the regional and global levels should promote the adoption of international and regional policies and the formulation of minimum standards, principles, and approaches for dignified return and sustainable reintegration, for example, by strengthening regional policy dialogues, such as the Regional Conference on Migration (also known as the Puebla Process) and the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA).

Objective 6: Migrant vulnerabilities are addressed throughout the voluntary return and reintegration process

Migrants in vulnerable situations require tailored protection and assistance that directly responds to their immediate needs and addresses the risk factors that contribute to their vulnerability.

Related activities

Identifying migrants in vulnerable situations

Vulnerability assessments form part of the individual counselling. These assessments should not focus solely on specific categories of migrants. Instead, they should be based on a complete understanding of the factors that contributed to the individual migrant's or group of migrants' vulnerabilities, and the resources and capacities they themselves can mobilize to resist or recover from their vulnerabilities.⁴⁸

Vulnerability assessments allow determining whether the return is a viable solution or not for the migrant. If the vulnerability does not bar the return, the assessment should aim to identify potential assistance needs, ensuring that the availability of specific services in the country of origin is being taken under consideration and that the assistance is tailored to individual needs, before and during the return as well as throughout the reintegration process.

Additional safeguards apply for assisting migrants with specific needs, such as the following procedure.

Assisting migrants with health-related needs

For migrants with health-related needs, return may be associated with increased risks due to long journeys, stressful situations or difficult travel conditions. Specific and individualized assistance to migrants with health-related needs is critical, not only to ensure access to health services and tailored assistance during their travel but also to guarantee the uninterrupted continuation of treatment in their countries of origin. Steps to be taken when providing voluntary return and reintegration assistance to migrants with health needs include the following:

- ▶ Gathering information on the availability and accessibility of health services in countries of origin prior to departure;
- ▶ Arranging adequate pre-departure and travel assistance according to the nature of pre-existing health conditions, the need to ensure continuity of treatment and requirements for specific arrangements during the return journey;
- ▶ Assisting returnees in accessing existing health and social support during reintegration, including through referrals to public services and non-governmental organizations.

⁴⁸ IOM Global Compact thematic paper: "Protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants and the specific needs of migrants in vulnerable situations", available from www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Protection-of-Human-Rights-and-Vulnerable-Migrants.pdf.

Protecting victims of trafficking

The well-being and protection of VoTs are the main concern during the whole AVRR process. Depending on the specific situation of each individual, VoTs may face ongoing security concerns in the host country or be at heightened risk in their countries of origin. Accordingly, individual risk and needs assessments are required to adequately determine whether the VoT is in imminent danger in the host country and/or if return to the home community could present a potential risk of being re-trafficked, could lead to any reprisals against the returned VoTs, or give rise to any other negative consequences upon return.

Reuniting unaccompanied and separated children with their families

When assisting the voluntary return and reintegration of unaccompanied and separated children, all actions have to be guided by the protection of the rights of the child, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).⁴⁹

2.2 IOM's Integrated Approach to Reintegration

Reintegration is generally understood as a multidimensional process enabling individuals to re-establish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity and achieve inclusion in civic life.⁵⁰

The notions of return and reintegration are intimately interlinked with that of sustainability. While there is no universally agreed definition of sustainable reintegration, as part of its integrated approach to reintegration, IOM defines sustainable reintegration as follows: *'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. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity'*.⁵¹

This definition is based on trends identified in existing literature, on IOM's practice, and on a review of complementary approaches outside the traditional scope of AVRR. It recognizes that returnees need to participate fully in the economic and social life of their return communities, and that developing a sense of psychosocial well-being after return is crucial

⁴⁹ The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an international treaty which is binding on 196 States Parties. The CRC is a comprehensive instrument that sets out the rights of all children. Its core principles include the principle of non-discrimination, the right to participation, the right to life, survival and development of the child, as well as the principle of the best interests of the child.

⁵⁰ IOM, 2019a, Glossary on Migration.

⁵¹ IOM's paper "Towards an Integrated Approach to Reintegration in the Context of Return" (2017).

to their sustainable reintegration. Consequently, sustainability of reintegration is not only dependent on the returning individual, but also on the local community and the structural situation the environment of return. Economically self-sufficient returnees are able to provide for themselves and their families, and develop a capacity to participate in and benefit from local economic activities in a dignified manner.

It is equally crucial that the returnee feels a sense of belonging: that they enjoy strong social relationships and engaged in the immediate community of return. The migrant's return should have a positive influence on – or at least not worsen – conditions in the community of return (families and other actors). A migrant's psychosocial well-being rests on a minimum sense of safety and security and on availability of basic services (education, housing, water and sanitation, health care). The returnee's positive attitude towards recreating a sustainable lifestyle in the place of return also forms a crucial cornerstone to all other reintegration efforts.

IOM asserts that reintegration support can only be successful if there is a level of re-inclusion across all economic, social and psychosocial dimensions. This can require different levels of interventions. At the individual level, the specific needs of beneficiaries (and when relevant, family members or households) should be covered and support for these provided upon return. At the community level, concerns of families and the non-migrant population in the community of return should be addressed by strengthening social links and increasing the absorption capacity of communities in regions with high levels of return. At the structural level, ensuring access to adequate local public services fosters an environment for re-establishing a dignified existence.

This definition also implies the absence of a direct correlation between successful reintegration and further migration after return. Further migration can still be a choice regardless of whether reintegration is successful, partially successful or unsuccessful. On the other hand, returnees are unlikely to reintegrate if they find themselves, for example, in situations where moving again or relying on a family member abroad is considered necessary for their physical or socioeconomic survival and well-being.⁵²

The IOM definition reflects the broader understanding of the reintegration process and the need for various levels of intervention. IOM recognizes the misconception of directly comparing a returnee to members of the local population: if the community of origin cannot sustain stable livelihoods and already defies migratory pressures, it is much more unlikely

⁵² While the reintegration elements of the integrated approach are part of the development strategies in countries of origin, development aid should not aim to limit further migration. It is widely acknowledged that improvement in development indicators generally leads to increased mobility in the short term, as a result of broadening opportunities and the opening of regular migration channels. In the context of return, however, a positive change in structural factors affecting reintegration allows individual returnees to make a genuinely free choice, rather than opting for (largely irregular) re-migration out of necessity.

that a returnee to this environment will be reintegrated in a way that is sustainable. Attaining sustainable livelihood levels comparable to the local community will not be possible if push factors remain strong, or if returnees' aspirations are not fulfilled. Especially in more unstable or underdeveloped environments, access to basic services and safety might be limited for all, providing little opportunities for sustainable reintegration. If such structural factors are not addressed, they will continue to result in migration as a coping mechanism for actual or perceived inadequate standards of living, insecurity and lack of opportunities.

With the aim of achieving sustainable reintegration as it is defined above, and based on its years of experience, IOM conceptualized its integrated approach to reintegration⁵³ in 2017. The basic premise of this approach is that the complex, multidimensional process of reintegration requires a holistic and needs-based approach. Such an approach takes into consideration the various factors that can affect reintegration, including economic, social and psychosocial dimensions. It responds to the needs of individual returnees and the communities to which they return in a mutually beneficial way, while also addressing the structural factors at play.

To meet these objectives, IOM's integrated approach deploys three levels of support:

- ▶ The individual level has initiatives to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of returnees and returning family members;
- ▶ The community level encompasses initiatives that respond to the needs, vulnerabilities and concerns of communities to which migrants return, including returnee families and the non-migrant population;
- ▶ Structural level initiatives promote good governance of migration through engagement with local and national authorities and stakeholders and supports continuity of assistance through adequate local public services.

Within each of these levels, IOM's integrated approach addresses three dimensions of reintegration:

- ▶ The Economic dimension covers aspects of reintegration that contributes to re-entering the economic life and sustained livelihoods;
- ▶ The Social dimension addresses returning migrants' access to public services and infrastructure in their countries of origin, including access to health, education, housing, justice and social protection schemes;
- ▶ The Psychosocial dimension encompasses the reinsertion of returning migrants into personal support networks (friends, relatives, neighbours) and

⁵³ IOM's Reintegration Handbook:
https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iom_reintegration_handbook.pdf.

civil society structures (associations, self-help groups, other organizations and civic life generally). This also includes the re-engagement with the values, ways of living, language, moral principles and traditions of the country of origin's society.

According to IOM's 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. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity.⁵⁴ IOM has been at the centre of designing and delivering reintegration assistance since the inception of AVRR and thanks to its global presence and worldwide expertise, IOM is in an undoubtedly privileged position to share expertise gained over many years of conceptualization and implementation.

Note that these levels and dimensions are not clear-cut, nor are they mutually exclusive. They overlap and are interconnected by their nature. The economic, social and psychosocial dimensions can influence one another, sometimes on different levels. For example, a community's attitude towards returnees can affect a returnee's physical and mental health which in turn can affect their livelihood and economic opportunities. Ensuring that a reintegration programme addresses the full range of factors that affects reintegration is more important than classifying specific activities for these categories.

⁵⁴ IOM, Towards an Integrated Approach to Reintegration in the Context of Return (IOM, Geneva, 2017): www.bit.ly/3ePPI1X.

2. The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Framework

The diagram below provides a visual summary of the integrated approach to reintegration.



An integrated approach to reintegration should also address cross-cutting issues such as promoting migrant rights, gender equality, partnerships and cooperation as well as improve data collection and monitoring and evaluation of reintegration. Such an approach typically falls under the responsibility of a variety of different stakeholders, whether national and local governments in host countries and countries of origin, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) that have various roles in the reintegration interventions.

The different levels of the IOM integrated approach to reintegration will be carefully taken into account, and in parallel with the IOM's Framework, while developing further the key recommendations of this needs and gaps assessment in Chapter 4.

2.3 Analysis of AVRR programmes: Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia

Before analysing the AVRR framework in Armenia, the present section explores and studies key AVRR programmes from which good practices, gaps and challenges can be elaborated in order to come up with some key recommendations for adaptation to the Armenian context.

The 7 countries have been selected based on their historical AVRR experiences (Belgium and Germany), their innovative approaches (Greece), their similarities with the Armenian migration and return context (Finland, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova) and their regional scope (Serbia) as well as preference by the Migration Service of the Republic of Armenia.

The summary of each project and relevant examples can be found in Annex V. You will find below the overview of the good practices, gaps and challenges identified based on each country's AVRR experience.

COUNTRY	GOOD PRACTICES	GAPS AND CHALLENGES
Belgium	<p>The programme includes a comprehensive referral mechanism thanks to the various partners (98) located all over the territory and that can respond in a tailored manner to the individual needs of migrants.</p> <p>IOM ensures individual return counselling thanks to its thematic and geographical return and reintegration counsellors who are also mobile to meet the migrants in their residence places.</p> <p>Particular attention is paid to vulnerable migrants such as medical cases, unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking among others.</p> <p>Monitoring missions in countries of origin allow to evaluate the programme and adapt it to the realities of the countries and actual needs of beneficiaries.</p>	<p>The additional reintegration assistance is provided through the AMIF funding, which is limited in terms of the level of grants and also eligibility criteria.</p> <p>Reintegration assistance is provided by IOM and Caritas, which can create some confusion in the eye of the beneficiaries.</p>

2. The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Framework

Finland	<p>Flexibility in Government funding.</p> <p>Existing helpline for beneficiaries (only the candidates who have already been referred to IOM).</p> <p>Not to limit/restrict the number of eligible countries.</p> <p>The programme should be needs-based rather than country-based.</p>	<p>The Government is fully in charge, IOM is only assisting with the logistical and movement support and return arrangements. IOM is considered as a “booking agency”.</p> <p>Quite a big number of ERRIN cases from Finland: this provokes some confusion in the eyes of the beneficiaries (different actors involved).</p> <p>IOM does not do the reintegration counselling, which is supposed to be handled in the reception centres (which, however, naturally often lack concrete experience with reintegration as well as in-depth knowledge of the situation in countries of origin). The training of the centres is handled by the Finish Immigration Service (Migri), although IOM is occasionally involved in training events.</p> <p>Communication is fully handled by the Government and is not always fully aligned with IOM messaging on AVRR (e.g. in terms of IOM stressing AVRR as a “humane and dignified” lacks a humane and visionary approach).</p> <p>Target group only limited to asylum seekers (rejected, or who cancel their asylum application in order to return) and victims of trafficking (very few requests). Labour migrants, families, undocumented migrants, etc, are excluded from the eligible beneficiaries.</p> <p>Beneficiary monitoring (e.g. Reintegration Sustainability) not built into the programme by default so far. Monitoring in 2019 and 2020 of a sample of beneficiaries, primarily in Iraq, has been implemented by IOM, though, with funding from Migri (in 2019, through an AMIF-funded project implemented by Migri).</p>
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<p>Georgia</p>	<p>A Memorandum of Mutual Cooperation between IOM and the Ministry of Internal Affairs stipulates the key principles and directions of the engagement of both parties in the sphere of AVRR from Georgia.</p> <p>The most effective channel of spreading information turned out to be word-of-mouth dissemination among the closely-knit migrant communities in Tbilisi, Batumi and elsewhere in Georgia.</p> <p>When migrants had own resources to purchase air tickets but failed to gain access to consular assistance for producing emergency travel documents and replace lost or expired passports, IOM offered mediation on behalf of the migrant towards his/her embassy and requested the issuance of the travel document.</p> <p>IOM's AVRR programme has become even more relevant in securing humane and dignified ways to leave Georgia and return home.</p>	<p>As concerns cooperation with the authorities, good progress has been made by the MIA in organizing return management.</p> <p>There are certain challenges in the institutional framework of Georgia's return management, for example illustrated by insufficient coordination between the country's penitentiary system and agencies responsible for return management.</p> <p>The Georgian authorities are dependent on IOM to organize and finance voluntary return, which is partly explained by IOM's operational contacts with embassies and flexibility in providing assistance to irregular migrants who are not accommodated in the migrant detention centre.</p>
<p>Germany</p>	<p>Use of country fact sheets and individual queries.</p> <p>Digitalization of the Reintegration and Emigration Program for Asylum seekers in Germany / Government Assisted Repatriation Program (REAG/GARP) application process (under development).</p> <p>Take all vulnerabilities and specific individual needs of the migrants into account.</p> <p>Good referral mechanism in place.</p>	<p>Large number of project donors (16 individual Federal States and the federal government).</p> <p>Over the last couple of years, more stakeholders have been involved in AVR: 800 to 1,000 stakeholders are on the ground.</p> <p>The overall AVRR setting in Germany is complicated for some migrants who have a lot of information to proceed with. This provokes some misunderstanding and limitations in counselling.</p>

2. The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Framework

	<p>NGO's are important actors in the AVR process, in particular in the field of counselling of specific groups such as Victims of Trafficking (VoTs), Unaccompanied Minor Children (UMC), or LGBTQI. IOM cannot do this alone.</p> <p>Considering the complex coordination structures within REAG/GARP, high-quality data management is of great importance to ensure ongoing monitoring of programme implementation as well as information sharing with all stakeholders.</p>	<p>Vulnerability issues such as mental health issues, other health issues, migrants belonging to a certain ethnic group, etc, are not reported to IOM by the referring agency.</p>
<p>Greece</p>	<p>The programme entails a very comprehensive and complete set of services (info campaign and awareness-raising, information provision and reception, identification, registration, issuance of travel documents and flight tickets, reintegration assistance, and effective measures for the return sustainability.</p> <p>Acquiring information through the AVRR mobile unit proved to be significant as many of these third-country nationals approached at a later stage the AVRR regional staff as well as IOM Athens premises in Alimos to register for the project.</p> <p>Assistance provided to migrants in situation of vulnerability requires a holistic approach. Special mention should be given to developing further initiatives towards this direction so that each migrant in situation of vulnerability is provided with tailored protection and</p>	<p>Difficulty in finding translation services in the case of dialects and / or languages spoken by a limited number of beneficiaries.</p> <p>Taking into consideration the current situation and significant restrictions imposed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, IOM will incorporate in the project a health component in order to minimize the risk of infection transmission among the AVRR beneficiaries and in parallel ensure the feasibility of assisted voluntary return in accordance with the requirements taken by migrants' countries of origin.</p>

assistance that directly responds to his or her immediate needs.

Extensive reintegration counselling is conducted for migrants in situation of vulnerability and through cooperation with IOM offices in the country of origin.

The IOM regional staff operations in the islands of Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos as well as to the islands of Crete and Rhodes have been an important component to support the orderly and humane migration management.

The reintegration unit of IOM Greece, with the support of cultural mediators, conducted individual counselling sessions with the returnees to provide them with information regarding the implementation of reintegration plans in their country of origin so as to facilitate successful long-term reintegration. During the three years of implementation of the project, it was noticed that there was a need to establish even more new contact channels with beneficiaries' country of origin and therefore, IOM Greece's reintegration unit eventually cooperated with 34 different countries.

Special monitoring and evaluation tools have been created in order to measure the effectiveness of the reintegration assistance and satisfaction of the beneficiary and provide qualitative and quantitative data.

2. The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Framework

<p>Republic of Moldova</p>	<p>Cooperation with other IOM offices (in particular the IOM Mission in Ukraine) has proven to be the most effective means to address the issue of obtaining travel documents for countries without a diplomatic representation in Republic of Moldova.</p> <p>Coordination with government authorities to ensure the smooth departure of migrants was further enhanced through working meetings on specific cases.</p> <p>Development of AVR brochures in English, Romanian, Russian, French and Arabic.</p>	<p>The absence of diplomatic representations of many countries of origin remains an important challenge, sometimes causing considerable delays in obtaining travel documents.</p>
<p>Serbia</p>	<p>Joint regional AVRR programme implementation with 6 countries in the Western Balkans.</p> <p>The AVRR programme comprises a strong information campaign component, including a web application 'Support for Migrants' which provides advices on all the nearest services and support for migrants and refugees in the Western Balkans.</p> <p>The programme focuses on an improved coordination and cooperation with other service providers e.g. police, health institutions, social services providers.</p> <p>Development of a Western Balkans AVRR Curriculum.</p> <p>IOM Serbia has already developed an AVRR needs and gaps assessment which supported the establishment and consolidation of national AVRR frameworks in the Western Balkans countries.</p>	<p>More operational and specific coordination procedures are needed to guide the work between law enforcement and reception/protection authorities for the identification and referral of migrants interested in AVRR; similarly, such detailed guidance is beneficial for the full facilitation of access of migrants to AVRR from the asylum procedure and other migration processes.</p>

3. AVRR from Armenia: Needs Assessment and Gaps Analysis

3.1 Background and Methodology

The EMERGE (Enhancing Migrants' Rights and Good Governance in Armenia and Georgia) project aims to strengthen national capacities in the fields of migrants' rights and migration governance in Armenia and Georgia and strengthen cross-border dialogue and cooperation in the area.

Among the different activities foreseen in the project is the assessment and development of an Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) system in Armenia both as a receiving and sending country. The AVRR needs assessment aims at providing an overview of existing practices, roles, and responsibilities of national stakeholders in returning third-country migrants, capacity needs, as well as producing a set of recommendations for setting-up an AVRR system in Armenia.

This assessment is being conducted through the means of (1) an in-depth desk research of available literature, data and resources including national legislation and legal acts, national policies and strategies regulating the rights of third-country migrants in Armenia and implementation practices; (2) interviews with main national stakeholders and detailed questionnaires to identify the different stakeholders with whom IOM and the Government of Armenia could collaborate in implementing assisted voluntary return activities from Armenia, their mandates, individual roles and existing implementation practices, in order to identify main gaps, capacity needs, and possible legislative adjustments; (3) collection of information on AVRR programmes implemented by other countries (Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Norway and Sweden) to analyse their main challenges and good practices; (4) collection of information (through a specific detailed questionnaire for IOM missions in the four selected countries of origin) on the reintegration assistance provision, analysing the missions' needs, priorities and potential barriers missions

have already identified or are expecting to encounter when assisting migrants returning home and rebuilding their lives.

The AVRR needs and gaps assessment falls under the objective of strengthening national capacities to enhance rule of law and maintain migrants' rights in Armenia and Georgia. As these two countries have different migration governance system and Armenian Government has no AVRR system in place, the needs assessment aims at identifying the best and most effective model that could be further introduced and applied by the Government.

On 10 July 2020, the IOM Mission in Armenia – in cooperation with and co-chairmanship by the Migration Service of Armenia – organized the 1st meeting of the Steering Committee under the EMERGE 3-year regional project.

The major objective the Steering Committee was to inform all relevant stakeholders on the project progress, as well as discuss further opportunities and approaches that could improve the efficiency and increase impact of the project. In addition to the Migration Service of Armenia, the Steering Committee engaged the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs and Police Passport and Visa Department.

In her opening speech, Ms. Ilona Ter-Minasyan, Head of the IOM Office in Armenia, mentioned that the key of the project are migrants residing in Armenia, while, as a rule, the main focus was on Armenian emigrants. "We are currently trying to fill in this gap. In this context, lack of information on migrants living in Armenia is an issue of concern", noted Ms. Ter-Minasyan adding that the pandemic has changed migration flows.

Armen Ghazaryan, Head of the Migration Service emphasized the importance of introduction of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) system in Armenia which is being developed from scratch. "I hope this will become one of our main working instruments and will ease the burden of deportation by the Police Passport and Visa Department", mentioned Mr. Ghazaryan adding that this practice, however, was rarely applied by Armenia.

The detailed methodology can be found in Annex II.

3.2 Needs Assessment

3.2.1 Needs criteria

Based on the completed desk-research and interviews with the main national stakeholders, the following needs criteria can be listed:

Overall situation in Armenia

- A comprehensive and balanced vision for migration governance in Armenia;
- Fighting irregular migration and organized crime;
- Enhance migration management and admission;
- Better protection of the rights of migrant workers (regulation of employment);
- Protection of asylum seekers and refugees;
- Improved integration of foreign nationals and enhancing development potential of migration;
- Strengthening cooperation on migration;
- Enhancing institutional capacity in migration management;
- Structured and well-established accommodation system for asylum seekers (cfr. *Paper on the design of an accommodation centre for asylum seekers in Armenia*);
- Evidence-based, whole-of-government approach and strong partnerships;
- Local NGOs in Armenia need more resources and capacity-building on migration issues.

Assisted voluntary return and reintegration general

- An institutional AVRR scheme from Armenia, presented as a humanitarian approach in respect of basic human rights' protection, should be established with clear guidelines and repartition of roles/functions among the different actors involved;
- There is a need for the international community's involvement in order to provide complementary funding to the overall scheme;
- There is a need for country of origin related information, in the form of country fact sheets in the relevant local languages of the target countries;
- There should be a clear a distribution/definition of functions among the active stakeholders;

- Some legislation amendments would be needed to institutionalize AVR;
- There is an acute need for specific trainings on AVRR-related matters, in particular on the following topics: Communication and visibility on return migration; Data collection, processing and analysis; Development of Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines; Enhancing cooperation and policy coherence on return migration; Exchange tools, techniques and methods; Identification of AVRR candidates; Key return migration trends; Post-arrival and reintegration assistance; Pre-departure counselling techniques; Return of people with special needs (victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors, medical cases, etc.);
- The unity of the family should be preserved (in particular in detention centres) in order to organize dignified returns from Armenia.

3.3 Gaps Analysis

3.3.1 Gaps criteria

Based on the completed desk-research and interviews with the main national stakeholders, the following gaps criteria can be listed:

Overall situation in Armenia

- Demographic situation;
- Lack of information on migrants living in Armenia;
- Lack of access to information, employment, health care, social and other services;
- Irregular migration and border crossings;
- Border management;
- Document security;
- Lack of an appropriate accommodation system for asylum seekers;
- Socioeconomic challenges (poverty and unemployment);
- Failure to integrate and reintegrate foreign nationals;
- Absence of diplomatic representations, and corresponding State collaboration, in Armenia for Bangladesh. Concerned ministry, particularly Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall find out a way forward for liaising with other close by Bangladeshi Embassy/High Commission/Consulate office for better

coordination aiming to having consular access to identify the Bangladeshi returnees, particularly for issuing Travel Documents for those without any such documents or if the tenure of the documents is expired;

- Policymaking gap: currently, the Migration Service is making policy, however, this should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior. There is a special law on structures of the Government and that law says that the ministry is making the policy and for each Ministry, that law specifically describes the areas of policy that each should make.

Assisted voluntary return and reintegration general

- There is no existence of an institutional AVRR scheme from Armenia, besides some ad hoc cases (4 cases to Afghanistan in 2019);
- There is no comprehensive legal framework around AVRR from Armenia;
- There are not a lot of NGOs dealing with migration in Armenia;
- Civil society organizations: this is an important gap in Armenia at the regional level. There are big foundations but smaller grass-root organizations dealing with migration issues almost do not exist. They do not have any migration-focused agenda (due to the Government priorities). They could provide more services to AVRR migrants;
- Limited funding for AVRR projects;
- Issue with travel documents, in particular for the migrants originating from the target countries for which there is no diplomatic representation in Armenia;
- Issue with receiving citizens back (case of the Islamic Republic of Iran): there could be some restrictions upon entry, and based on the administrative status of the migrant;
- Sometimes, return candidates lack financial resources for transportation and food to come to the IOM office to receive any type of support: no technical means to reach the office. We should be accessible for them. We should identify the places where they can be located and where we can reach them proactively.

3.4 Key findings

This section summarizes the key findings of the overall consultancy (desk research and interviews conducted with 11 different national stakeholders), as resulting from the gaps and needs assessment of an AVRR system from Armenia.

3.4.1 The migration policy in Armenia

Finding #1: The migration policy merely focuses on integration and reintegration, as defined in the Migration Strategy, but does not propose any comprehensive setting for assisted voluntary return of foreign nationals from Armenia.

- Migration in Armenia mostly takes the form of emigration, which has left a social, demographic and economic impact.
- Armenia's migration flows are being supplemented by emigration and labour migration, returning citizens of the Republic of Armenia, new influx of refugees, as well as by immigration of foreign nationals. Over the years, these developments contributed to changes in migration policies: the elaboration of four concept papers and strategies on state regulation of migration flows, the development of two plans of actions, as well as the conclusion of a number of intergovernmental and international agreements and treaties.
- The integration policy was consolidated for the first time in a single document, initiated in 2016. As a result, the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved "The conceptual framework for the integration policy of individuals recognized as refugees and granted asylum in the Republic of Armenia, as well as of long-term migrants," and the plan of actions for the implementation thereof. These documents set the foundations for the emergence of a tradition of integrated policy on the management of integration and reintegration issues in Armenia.
- The organization of integration and reintegration of immigrants, returnees and internally displaced persons encounters socioeconomic challenges that the country faces.
- Over the last decade, there is also a noticeable trend of increase in the returning citizens of the Republic of Armenia and the immigration of foreign nationals in the immigration structure of Armenia. The migration policy fails to address this particular group of migrants.
- In 2016 the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved the "Conceptual framework for the integration in the Republic of Armenia of persons recognized as refugees and granted asylum, as well of long-term migrants," which became the first ever document outlining state policy with

respect to the integration of immigrants. Although the 2016 Government-approved conceptual framework was important as the first regulatory document in the sector, it nevertheless had essential shortcomings.

- The scope of the conceptual framework failed to address foreign nationals, the huge group of persons in the situation of forced displacement who had moved to Armenia from the Syrian Arab Republic and other groups.
- In light of the increasing trend of returning citizens to Armenia, the existing integration policy did not address the issues of their reintegration. Steps aiming at reintegration needs of returnees were mostly implemented through the efforts of international and non-governmental organizations on a programmatic, rather than a policy level. The same observation arose regarding the big numbers of internally displaced persons. The integration policy failed to specify any action that would address their issues.
- Taking these gaps into account, the Migration Service of the Republic of Armenia initiated in 2019 the drafting of the new Migration Concept to chart the main approaches and interventions of a comprehensive public policy in the area of integration and reintegration of immigrants and returnees, as well as prioritizes the development of the system of voluntary return from Armenia.

3.4.2 The legal framework for voluntary return

Finding #2: The national legislation on migration is lacking any legal reference to the possibility of voluntary return, either to Armenia or from its territory.

- A bill, a draft Law of the Republic of Armenia “On foreigners and stateless persons” has been developed, in order to ensure conformity with international standards, with the purpose of effectively countering irregular migration, as well as to properly implement the international commitments adopted by the country.
- This Law specifically focuses on the entry, stay, residence and exit from the Republic of Armenia. However, it fails in presenting voluntary return as an option, rather focusing on the obligation for foreigners “*who have arrived at a crossing point of the state border of the Republic of Armenia without a passport, a document substituting it or with an invalid passport, or who have been refused an entry visa at a crossing point of the state border of the Republic of Armenia, or who have not obtained an entry authorization from the body carrying out border control*” of “*returning to their State of origin or to the State from where they have arrived (except for cases who arrived in Armenia for the purpose of seeking refugee status or a right to political asylum)*”.
- The national legislation fails in presenting return as part of regulating migration issues. Rather, the laws and practices encompass measures to fight

against irregular migration and criminal cases of illicit crossing of the state border of the Republic of Armenia (cfr Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia), detailing the relevant fines according to each case. Draft agreements on Readmission were however developed with 2 of the 4 target countries of this research, namely the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India.

- The 2017–2021 Plan of Action on the effective implementation of the migration policy of the Republic of Armenia for 2017–2021 also includes a section ‘Fight against irregular migration,’ which covers issues pertaining both to the fight against irregular migration originating in Armenia, and incoming migration flows to Armenia.
- Considering the importance and topical nature of regulating migration issues, including the organization of an effective fight against irregular migration, the authorities of the Republic of Armenia and its designated agencies undertook specific measures in 2019.
 - An overall increase trend has been noticed in the number of visas issued for entry into the Republic of Armenia and in the number of residence permits issued.
 - This overall trend is being determined by the conclusion of international agreements on issuing visas at the border of the Republic of Armenia, or the establishment of visa-free regime with a number of countries.

3.4.3 Institutional capacity for voluntary return

Finding #3: There is insufficient horizontal coordination and cooperation between relevant national authorities.

The discussions held during the interviews indicate that there is insufficient horizontal coordination between the different national authorities. Most national agencies refer strictly to their respective mandates. The desk research confirms the weakness of cross-sector and inter-agency coordination and of measures to mainstream migration and return across other national strategies. In terms of cooperation with NGO actors, there exists however a quarterly integration and reintegration platform/working group coordinated by the Migration Service and which brings NGO actors around the table.

3.4.4 Cooperation with countries of origin

Finding #4: The cooperation with countries of origin is a major area of concern.

IOM has a fortunately a physical presence and offices in the 4 target countries of the present assessment, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

However, IOM Armenia has so far not organized any voluntary return to these countries, besides some ad hoc cases to Afghanistan. Therefore, there is no actual system in place allowing a smooth collaboration with these different countries, besides counting on the long-standing experience IOM has at the global level on AVRR matters with these countries.

In addition, the absence of diplomatic representations in Armenia such as Afghanistan and Bangladesh should be highlighted. This makes the process for obtaining valid travel documentation much more complex and lengthier. This might also have an impact on the knowledge and acceptance of voluntary return for these countries within their institutional schemes. However, in the context of Bangladeshi migrants, IOM Dhaka has already invested efforts and touched base with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) to avail their required support needed by going through a well-established coordination mechanism.

3.4.5 Accommodation for AVR beneficiaries

Finding #5: There is no adequate accommodation system in place in Armenia that could host return candidates while taking into account their individual needs.

From the desk research, it appears that there is no real accommodation system in place, that could host AVRR candidates who are applying for voluntary return.

The report on Needs Assessment of Special Accommodation Centres for Foreigners in the Republic of Armenia⁵⁵ (2013) conducted by IOM highlights the absence of a central migrant accommodation which as such provides the opportunity to design a purpose built closed centre for irregular migrants that will fully meet international standards in terms of space, services and facilities, combined with a care regime that protects the rights of migrants and acknowledges their status as non-criminal administrative detainees.

The analysis of the national legislation in Chapter 1.4.1 also demonstrated that the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Refugees and asylum” (article 14) purely focuses on asylum seekers in need of housing who shall be accommodated in the temporary accommodation centre for asylum seekers which is a special establishment created for that purpose, until a final decision on their asylum claim is adopted. Asylum seekers placed in the Temporary Accommodation Centre shall be provided with basic means of subsistence. In case the asylum seeker and his or her accompanying family members do not hold a valid travel document or a valid entry permit, Border Guard Troops may take a reasoned written decision to detain

⁵⁵ www.publications.iom.int/books/needs-assessment-special-accommodation-centres-foreigners-republic-armenia (available in English and Armenian).

them for up to 72 hours in the special shelter provided for in part 1 of Article 37 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On foreigners” after which they shall be moved to Temporary Accommodation Centre prescribed by Article 14 of the Law “On Refugees and asylum”.

There is therefore a lot of work to be done before that the current accommodation system in place is able to host return candidate beneficiaries during their voluntary return process, while taking into account their individual needs according to their respective administrative status. As per IOM’s AVRR Framework, beneficiaries of the IOM AVRR programmes may include stranded migrants in host or transit countries, irregular migrants, regular migrants, and asylum seekers who decide not to pursue their claims or who are found not to be in need of international protection. AVRR assistance can also be provided to migrants in vulnerable situations, such as victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children, or migrants with health-related needs.

The current practice and legislation in place do not take all these beneficiaries into account, besides the asylum seekers in need of housing. There are therefore no provisions for the other types of beneficiaries that are highlighted above.

3.4.6 Capacity-building of professionals and AVRR partners

Finding #6: The lack of trained personnel is perceived as a major weakness in view of the future implementation of the new AVRR scheme from Armenia.

During the interviews, the majority of the national respondents has shared its willingness to collaborate with IOM and the Armenian Government in the future AVRR scheme from Armenia. A lot of stakeholders are already well positioned and active within the migration area. They have good networks and can easily mobilize them. However, most of them have pointed out the pressing need to be trained in order to be able to provide decent and adequate services to the returning migrant candidates.

The lack of (trained) personnel is rated by the respondents as one of the main capacity constraints, which they addressed with the request for support to address training issues.

The following priority training areas have been identified by the interviewed stakeholders: AVRR legal framework (especially in light of the upcoming legislative and political reforms in Armenia); exchange tools, techniques and methods; data collection, processing and analysis; identification of AVRR candidates; pre-departure counselling techniques; return of people with special needs (VoTs, UMC, medical cases...); development of Standard Operating Procedures; counter-trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants.

3.4.7 Overall funding of the new AVRR scheme from Armenia

Finding #7: There is an obvious lack of structural funding for the setting-up and proper implementation of a new AVRR scheme from Armenia.

At present, the Government does not have any structural AVRR programmes. Only a few cases have voluntarily returned so far, and without any structural and institutionalized support. Services are provided on an ad hoc basis due to the lack of funding. The process has never been streamlined so far.

The new scheme will not be made possible without any sufficient and decent financial investment, which can be assessed based on the AVRR programmes and projects that IOM has already implemented for 41 years in other countries. Annex V gives a comprehensive overview of IOM initiatives in 7 different countries.

In line with finding #5, there is a lack of funds to further develop the current special accommodation centres in order to host and meet the specific needs of returning asylum seekers. Additionally, without any other funding sources, there will remain a gap in the housing of the other groups of beneficiaries such as migrants in an irregular situation or very vulnerable groups (such as victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors and migrants with health concerns).

3.4.8 Summary of key findings

Finding 1 The migration policy merely focuses on integration and reintegration, as defined in the Migration Concept, but does not propose any comprehensive framework for assisted voluntary return of foreign nationals from Armenia.

Finding 2 The national legislation on migration has weak legal references to the possibility of voluntary return, either to Armenia or from its territory and requires a set-up of more comprehensive voluntary return system.

Finding 3 There is insufficient horizontal coordination and cooperation between relevant national authorities.

Finding 4 The cooperation with countries of origin is a major area of concern.

Finding 5 There is no adequate accommodation system in place in Armenia that could host return candidates while taking into account their individual needs.

Finding 6 The lack of trained personnel is perceived as a major weakness in view of the future implementation of the new AVRR scheme from Armenia.

Finding 7 There is an obvious lack of structural funding for the setting-up and proper implementation of a new AVRR scheme from Armenia.

3.5 Actionable recommendations

A complete set of recommendations can be built upon the key findings of the overall assessment, the desk research, the various interviews with the key stakeholders and the inputs from IOM sending countries and IOM offices in the four target countries of origin. Eleven different agencies⁵⁶ have been duly interviewed between 8 September and 9 October 2020. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not directly interviewed due to time constraints but provided its overall feedback during a phone call. Some other stakeholders could not be reached or preferred to postpone. Due to the conflict situation, a meeting with all involved stakeholders could not take place, therefore these recommendations have not been validated yet at the time of writing.

The recommendations below are structured in three parts, namely: the overall AVRR scheme from Armenia, the pre-departure and return phase, and the post-arrival and reintegration phase.

3.5.1 Recommendations concerning the overall AVRR scheme from Armenia

1. Include a clear section on AVRR from Armenia, in the migration legal acts and relevant policy documents (Law on Foreigners, Law on refugees and asylum, Migration Strategy, etc.). The mandate and coverage of the voluntary return issues, including relevant beneficiaries⁵⁷ and their adequate accommodation during the return application process, by the national legislations, should be made clear. Legal texts should be revised towards a returnee-oriented approach. A new Decree could be developed to clarify the roles of its

⁵⁶ Armenian Caritas Benevolent NGO, Armenian Red Cross Society, Border Guard Troops, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Hans Christian Kofoed Foundation, Migration Service, Mission Armenia NGO, National Security Service, Police, UNHCR, Yezedi Center for Human Rights.

⁵⁷ As per IOM's AVRR Framework, beneficiaries of the IOM AVRR programmes may include stranded migrants in host or transit countries, irregular migrants, regular migrants, and asylum seekers who decide not to pursue their claims or who are found not to be in need of international protection. AVRR assistance can also be provided to migrants in vulnerable situations, such as victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children, or migrants with health-related needs.

subordinate agencies in the AVRR legal framework and process. It can also refer to IOM and its support role in implementing AVRR.

In parallel, the actual accommodation system should be reviewed in order to allow proper housing for the different voluntary return candidates, according to their respective administrative status. It would be recommended to work with coaches within the reception structures who would be trained to provide pre-departure counselling and orientation

This recommendation is derived from the analysis of the national policies and legal framework review, and from the interviews with national stakeholders.

2. Conclude a Memorandum of Mutual Cooperation/Framework Agreement between IOM and the main donor, which stipulates the key principles and directions of the engagement of both parties, as well as possible funding sources in the sphere of AVRR from Armenia. This recommendation is derived from the analysis of AVR programmes implemented in other countries.
3. Invest substantially in international and diplomatic relations with the four target countries of origin in collaboration with the responsible national institutions and the IOM offices in the field.⁵⁸ Some additional attempts are expected to be made by MFA Armenia: new arrangements, new policies with these countries. The security and respect of human rights dimension should be considered.

As regards the four target countries of origin, it should be recalled that only India and the Islamic Republic of Iran do have a diplomatic representation (through their Embassy) in the capital, Yerevan. Afghanistan is represented through its Embassy in Moscow and Bangladesh through the Embassy in Greece.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with the national stakeholders and also from the feedback received from the countries of origin, that are all very much concerned and willing to collaborate on this important issue.

4. Search for alternative sources of funding to national state funding, such as the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Organisation for

⁵⁸ In the context of Bangladeshi migrants, IOM Dhaka has already touched base with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) to avail their required support needed by going through a well-established coordination mechanism.

Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Trust Fund (EPTATF).

A thorough analysis of the required budgets would need to be made, in order to start with a pilot project and a limited caseload of beneficiaries: a decent and realistic budget based on a certain targeted caseload.

In addition, it is highly recommended to invest financially in further developing existing accommodation structures in order to host AVRR candidates during their process and/or create new structures such as return counselling centres with dedicated and trained staff.

This recommendation is derived from the different interviews with stakeholders and IOM Armenia's experience with ad hoc cases, which clearly highlighted a need in a structural funding framework for AVRR ex-Armenia activities.

5. Establish a (quarterly) return inter-agency cooperation platform/forum where all active AVRR stakeholders would exchange information, share their best practices, challenges and some specific cases (also avoiding duplication of cases). This group would establish a roadmap including the activities, the responsible institutions/persons, and timeframes for the implementation of the activities. This platform could be coordinated by the Migration Service and should be legally defined by the law or decree. Ideally, this could be a forum, where all relevant stakeholders would be able to share their experiences in a harmonized way as well as a platform for establishing a better coordination mechanism and for being informed on each actor's specific tasks in the process.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with the national stakeholders who have all shared their general consent on enhancing inter-agency cooperation through more regular exchange of information among them.

6. Develop one SOP document for all AVRR stakeholders, so that they all follow the same rules and speak the same language. This standardized document would outline the key procedures in terms of roles and tasks' allocation, work coordination, leadership, reporting, etc.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with the national stakeholders who have all shared their general willingness to coordinate their actions and be aware of the operational steps in the AVRR process.

7. Invest in thematic AVRR-related trainings. The following needs have been the most identified by the interviewed stakeholders in order to be fully engaged in the new AVRR scheme: Exchange tools, techniques and methods; data collection, processing and analysis; identification of AVRR candidates; pre-departure counselling techniques; return of people with special needs (VoTs, UMC, medical cases); development of Standard Operating Procedures; counter-trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with the national stakeholders.

8. Ensure a reliable data collection system of high-quality and up-to-date data management in view of a proper monitoring of programme implementation as well as information sharing with all stakeholders. This should be put in place through one centralizing body (possibly Migration Service) for all AVRR-related data and trends.

This recommendation is derived from the desk research, the analysis of available data provided by various stakeholders and the interviews with the national stakeholders.

9. Consider carefully gender aspects when designing the new AVRR scheme (situation and protection of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, for instance). Gender-mainstreaming and protection should be at the core of the project. How to address other protection related issues experienced by victims of trafficking (VoT) by giving proper legal and support assistance, safe housing and deal with the issue of stigma within the family or community in the country of origin, while maintaining confidentiality all the way through the process.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with the national stakeholders and also from the feedback received from the countries of origin.

10. Take into account language, religious, ethnic (minorities) and cultural barriers of the migrants in all return phases.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with the national stakeholders and also from the feedback received from the countries of origin.

11. Involve NGOs, civil society organizations and community groups (when applicable) in the AVR process, as they can be in direct contact with the beneficiaries and be considered as connecting points.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with AVRR stakeholders and suggestions made by both IOM sending missions and the four target countries of origin.

12. The first step in that direction would be to map the organizations in countries of origin that are supporting business initiatives or employment issues. In this respect, a well thought out mechanism may be built in the project design to know how best each individual returnee's economic reintegration intervention in the countries of origin are rightly aligned with the local need-based supply chain-system, thus leading to contribute to the economic sphere in the local community to ultimately making his/her economic intervention sustainable.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with AVRR stakeholders and suggestions made by both IOM sending missions and the four target countries of origin.

13. Explore the collaboration with the academia: they can help to provide in-depth understanding on what's happening in the destination countries. This idea will give food for thought as to make any potential adjustments and changes in the project design in the near future.

This recommendation is derived from the suggestions made by some target countries of origin.

14. Further develop the digitalization of the AVR application process. Envisage the use of an app, such as MigApp,⁵⁹ allowing partners and migrants to have easily access to migration-related information and services. Such app would be available in Armenian, English and the main local languages of the four target countries of origin.

This recommendation is derived from the different exchanges with IOM Armenia, and the national stakeholders who had already some knowledge about the AVRR programmes in general.

3.5.2 Recommendations concerning the Pre-departure and Return Phase

1. Establish the information provision and referral of potential candidates through the following channels: through special accommodation and new return counselling centres to be created in key locations where most return

⁵⁹ MigApp is the IOM's global app for migrants designed to help them make informed decisions during their journeys by simplifying access to secure and reliable migration-related information and services. More information; www.iom.int/migapp.

candidates reside in Armenia; through a centralized helpline service; through a centralized website; through the dissemination of generic AVRR leaflets to the potential candidates in key locations; directly through IOM; through partner organizations' channels.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with the national stakeholders.

2. Develop tools to ensure an adequate individual return counselling, such as: handbook on the counselling of vulnerable cases; provision of return-related and country of origin fact sheets on the four target countries; specific trainings on individual return counselling techniques and on how to deal with multi-faced target groups (cultural/religious differences in each of the targeted countries of origin).

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with the national stakeholders and feedback received from the IOM offices in countries of origin.

3. Build a solid needs-based partner network that will be empowered to take into account during the pre-departure counselling phase specific migrant vulnerabilities, such as language barriers, health concerns, human trafficking and protection issues. Envisage the possibility to organize virtual counselling sessions with IOM missions in the countries of origins for some particularly sensitive cases.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with the national stakeholders and feedback received from the IOM offices in countries of origin.

3.5.3 Recommendations concerning the Post-arrival and Reintegration Phase

1. Complement assisted voluntary return with post-arrival and reintegration support whenever possible, in order to ensure the return sustainability, allowing as such an integrated approach that addresses the needs of individual returnees as well as the communities in a mutually beneficial way.

This recommendation is derived from the IOM's AVRR Framework and was also highlighted on different occasions by several national stakeholders and IOM offices in countries of origin.

2. Prepare the reintegration scheme well in the pre-departure phase (including all relevant individual special needs and background of the beneficiary), to avoid any mismatching with the country reality upon return. A strengthened collaboration between all actors involved, from pre-departure to reintegration phases, is highly recommended to reach this goal.

This recommendation is derived from the inputs received by IOM offices in countries of origin.

3. Include the local communities (community-based approach) in the reintegration scheme in order to avoid exclusion, stigmatization and lack of tolerance against the returnees (use of human success stories that have an impact on the local populations). Bear in mind that some of the target countries of origin are naturally less welcoming than others.

- The community sponsorship approach that is used in some of EU countries for the integration of refugees could be adopted and used. However, this might be challenging for some countries that are less “open” such as Afghanistan and India.
- The best mechanism will be to motivate the community to support the migrants, based on the needs of the community “returnees can help you”.
- The community could be composed of coaches and trainers to provide the returnees with new skills for them to be able to work.
- The situation regarding the political, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic aspects should be investigated first.
- When designing the special economic or social support schemes, local vulnerable populations should be considered and the community population where the returnees should be reintegrated should be supportive as they might have similar support needs.

This recommendation is derived from the interviews with some NGOs that are active or have partners in countries of origin and from the inputs received by IOM offices in countries of origin.

4. Put in place a clear monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the reintegration support to understand the key successes and challenges migrants and local communities might face and allow an adequate feedback on the reintegration cases. The use of this feedback should be analysed, as well as how the project will be redesigned according to this feedback. Such mechanism should also allow to evaluate the extent to which the reintegration support programme duly promotes sustainable reintegration.

Furthermore, a due reporting and an analysis of monitoring data and overall progress of the programme implementation should be provided through a final narrative and financial report submitted three months after the end of the project. The Final narrative and financial report shall report on the results of the programme and include an analysis of the activities, trends, challenges and lessons learned.

5. Organize monitoring visits of Armenian government officials to the four target countries of origin and, in turn, exchange visits of countries of origin officials to Armenia, in view of determining the impact of voluntary return programmes on the sustainability of reintegration. This would also allow both ends to have a comprehensive picture of the return and reintegration process and adapt the scheme accordingly.

3.5.4 Summary of actionable recommendations

Recommendations concerning the overall AVRR scheme from Armenia

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Recommendation 1 | Include clear section on AVRR from Armenia in the migration legal acts and relevant policy documents (Law on Foreigners, Law on refugees and asylum, Migration Strategy, etc.), which should become returnee-oriented. The mandate and coverage of the voluntary return issues, including relevant beneficiaries and their adequate accommodation during the return application process, by the national legislations should be made clear. |
| Recommendation 2 | Conclude a Memorandum of Mutual Cooperation/Framework Agreement between IOM and the main donor, which stipulates the key principles and directions of the engagement of both parties in the sphere of AVRR from Armenia. |
| Recommendation 3 | Invest substantially in international and diplomatic relations with the four target countries of origin in collaboration with the responsible national institutions and the IOM offices in the field. |
| Recommendation 4 | Search for alternative sources of funding to national state funding, such as the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Trust Fund (EPTATF). |
| Recommendation 5 | Establish a (quarterly) return inter-agency cooperation platform/forum where all active AVRR stakeholders would |

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exchange information, share their best practices, challenges and some specific cases (also avoiding duplication of cases).

Recommendation 6 Develop one SOP document for all AVRR stakeholders, so that they all follow the same rules and speak the same language. This standardized document would outline the key procedures in terms of roles and tasks' allocation, work coordination, leadership, reporting, etc.

Recommendation 7 Invest in thematic AVRR-related trainings, such as exchange tools, techniques and methods; data collection, processing and analysis; identification of AVRR candidates; pre-departure counselling techniques; return of people with special needs (VoTs, UMC, medical cases...); development of Standard Operating Procedures; counter-trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants.

Recommendation 8 Ensure a reliable collection system of high-quality and up-to-date data management in order to ensure ongoing monitoring of programme implementation as well as information sharing with all stakeholders. This should be put in place through one centralizing body for all AVRR-related data and trends.

Recommendation 9 Consider carefully gender aspects when designing the new AVRR scheme (situation and protection of women, families, victims of trafficking, for instance).

Recommendation 10 Take into account language, religious, ethnic (minorities) and cultural barriers of the migrants in all return phases.

Recommendation 11 Involve NGOs, civil society organizations and community groups (when applicable) in the AVR process, as they can be in direct contact with the beneficiaries (connecting points).

Recommendation 12 Explore the collaboration with the academia: they can help to provide in-depth understanding on what's happening in the destination countries.

Recommendation 13 Further develop the digitalization of the AVR application process. Envisage the use of an app, such as MigApp, allowing partners and migrants to have easily access to migration-related information and services. Such app would be available in Armenian, English and the main local languages of the four target countries of origin.

Recommendations concerning the Pre-departure and Return Phase

Recommendation 1 Establish the information provision and referral of potential candidates through the following channels: through special accommodation and new return counselling centres to be created in key locations where most return candidates reside in Armenia; Through a centralized helpline service; through a centralized website; through the dissemination of generic AVRR leaflets to the potential candidates in key locations; directly through IOM; through partner organizations' channels.

Recommendation 2 Develop tools to ensure an adequate individual return counselling, such as: handbook on the counselling of vulnerable cases; provision of return-related and country of origin fact sheets on the four target countries; specific trainings on individual return counselling techniques and on how to deal with multi-faced target groups (cultural/religious differences in each of the targeted country of origin).

Recommendation 3 Build a solid needs-based partner network that will be empowered to take into account, during the pre-departure counselling phase, specific migrant vulnerabilities, such as language barriers, health concerns, human trafficking and protection issues. Envisage the possibility to organize virtual counselling sessions with IOM missions in the country of origin for some particularly sensitive cases.

Recommendations concerning the Post-arrival and Reintegration Phase

Recommendation 1 Prepare the reintegration scheme well in the pre-departure phase (including all relevant individual special needs and background of the beneficiary), to avoid any mismatching with the country reality upon return. A strengthened collaboration between all actors involved, from pre-departure to reintegration phases, is highly recommended to reach this goal.

Recommendation 2 Complement assisted voluntary return with post-arrival and reintegration support whenever possible, in order to ensure the return sustainability, allowing as such an integrated approach that addresses the needs of individual returnees as well as the communities in a mutually beneficial way.

Recommendation 3 Include the local communities (community-based approach) in the reintegration scheme in order to avoid exclusion, stigmatization and lack of tolerance against the returnees (use of human success stories that have an impact on the local populations). Bear in mind that some of the target countries of origin are naturally less welcoming than others.

Recommendation 4 Put in place a clear monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the reintegration support to understand the key successes and challenges migrants and local communities might face and allow an adequate feedback on the reintegration cases.

Recommendation 5 Organize monitoring visits of Armenian government officials to the four target country of origin and, in turn, exchange visits of country of origin officials to Armenia, in view of determining the impact of voluntary return programmes on the sustainability of reintegration. This would also allow both ends to have a comprehensive picture of the return and reintegration process and adapt the scheme accordingly.

3.6 Roles of national stakeholders and their relevance to Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)

One of the main objectives of the present assessment was to understand the main stakeholders in the AVRR process in Armenia and their individual roles. The needs and gaps analysis allowed to identify a clear need for understanding the mutual responsibilities of each actor in the process, and for an enhanced inter-agency coordination in view of a smooth implementation of the new scheme.

Derived from the above recommendations, the table below gives an overview of the roles of the main stakeholders who have been interviewed. It also includes their relevance to AVRR and potential new roles they could play within the new AVRR scheme. This overview is not exhaustive as other organizations might be interesting to add to this list, which will be completed over time.

AGENCY	MAIN ROLES	RELEVANCE TO AVRR	POTENTIAL NEW AVRR-RELATED ROLES
<p>Migration Service/MS (Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure)</p> <p>Interviews on 08.09.20 with Ms. Haykanush Chobanyan, Head of the Return and Reintegration Department and on 23.09.20 with Mr. A. Ghazaryan, Head of the Migration Service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The State Migration Service of Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development of the Republic of Armenia is a state agency of the executive department of the Republic of Armenia acting as part of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development of the Republic of Armenia, which renders services in the field of migration acting on behalf of the Republic of Armenia in cases prescribed by the law or, in certain circumstances, by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia. Overall migration management. The MS works with asylum seekers, grants refugee status and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Migration Service is in touch daily with IOM Armenia and has already collaborated to organize ad hoc AVRR cases from Armenia. The Service is fully willing to engage in the new AVRR scheme as the main coordinator, expecting IOM to support with the institutional management of AVRR. The Migration Service can establish the legislation and guidelines of the new scheme. As a State Organization, the MS can be involved in the negotiations with the country of origin, through diplomatic channels (readmission agreements already developed with India and the Islamic Republic of Iran). 	<p>MS would be the main agency managing and coordinating the voluntary return policy and programme from Armenia, in collaboration with IOM. It could also potentially channel some funds for the implementation of the programme.</p> <p>MS could also be the centralizing body for AVRR-related data collected by IOM and relevant partners.</p> <p>MS could also participate with IOM in joint monitoring missions in country of origin to assess the impact of the reintegration assistance on the individuals and the community.</p> <p>It would also facilitate the diplomatic relations with some targeted countries of origin, together with MFA and IOM.</p> <p>Reforms targeting combination of functions of</p>

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	<p>provides integration support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ After the ongoing reforms, the future Migration Service will be in the framework of the new Ministry of Interior, and called 'Migration and Citizenship Service'). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The issue of return for recognized refugees might come at some point, due to change of environment, such as improvement of political, economic, social, etc, situation in the country of origin, willingness of refugees to return, etc. 	<p>MS and Police Visa and Passport Department will result in establishment of a joint Service that will have all encompassing approaches to migration and deals with all kinds of migration-related issues, except policymaking and integration.</p>
<p>Police</p> <p>Interview on 28.09.20 with Ms. Irina Mkrtchyan, Passport and Visa Department, and Ms. Nonna Manukyan, Passport and Visa Department</p>	<p>The Police of the Republic of Armenia carries out cooperation with international organizations and ministries of Internal Affairs of foreign countries at both bilateral and multilateral levels.</p> <p>In the field of migration, the police issues conventional travel documents to people who were granted with refugee and asylum seeker status based on the decision of the Migration Service.</p> <p>Illegal migration - Discovering illegal migrants residing in Armenia, as well as informing and recommending the latter to legalize his/her status in Armenia. In case of lack of justifications/grounds defined by the law the migrant is recommended to voluntarily leave the territory of Armenia. If the migrant doesn't leave, the Police opens a deportation case and submits it to the court.</p>	<p>Once the person expresses his/her own will to return, the Police is ready to encourage this and facilitate. We should try to penetrate the motivation of the candidates to make sure the person returns voluntarily.</p>	<p>The Police would be one of the national bodies presenting AVR as an option to potential candidates.</p> <p>The Police could be also a direct interlocutor with MS and IOM when identifying potential return candidates residing irregularly on the territory.</p>

<p>National Security Service (NSS)</p> <p>Joint interview with Border Guard Troops on 30.09.20 with Mr. Vahagn Balyan, Investigative Department</p> <p>Vaghinak Badeyan, Counter-Intelligence Service</p> <p>Manvel Mayilyan, Border Guard Troops</p> <p>Alina Kochinyan, Border Guard Troops.</p>	<p>Activities of NSS bodies are implemented in following directions:</p> <p>(1) intelligence activities;</p> <p>(2) counter-intelligence activities;</p> <p>(3) military counter-intelligence activities;</p> <p>(4) protection of state border;</p> <p>(5) fight against crime.</p>	<p>No direct role at the moment in AVR but can contribute to information provision towards potential return candidates.</p>	<p>NSS would be one of the national bodies presenting AVR as an option to potential candidates.</p>
<p>Border Guard Troops</p> <p>Joint interview with the National Security Service on 30.09.20 with Mr. Vahagn Balyan, Investigative Department (NSS)</p> <p>Vaghinak Badeyan, Counter-Intelligence Service (NSS)</p> <p>Manvel Mayilyan, Border Guard Troops</p> <p>Alina Kochinyan, Border Guard Troops.</p>	<p>The Border Guard Troops of the NSS of the Republic of Armenia are meant to protect security and independence of the Republic of Armenia, border control at border crossing points, to ensure the State border regime and border regime.</p> <p>The Border Guard Troops of the Republic of Armenia were established in February 1992 within the the Republic of Armenia MoD, and in 1993, by the Decree of President of the Republic of Armenia, the MoD Directorate of Border Guard Troops went under the structure of the RA State Directorate of the National Security and later on, it was renamed into Border Guard Troops of the NSS of the Republic of Armenia.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The border control: only issue relevant to AVR is with paper work. They do not impede with the exit of such people across the border. They would only welcome and positively judge the AVR programme. ▪ Border Guard Troops have already presented AVR as an option to cases who arrived at the border ▪ They can be part of the information sharing on AVR options. 	<p>Border Guard Troops would be one of the national bodies presenting AVR as an option to potential cases at the border.</p>

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<p>Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS)</p> <p>Interview on 24.09.20 with H. Khachatryan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Armenian Red Cross Society, through the Population Movement direction, provides the asylum seekers and refugees in the Republic of Armenia with basic legal counselling, psychosocial assistance and advocacy, regular border monitoring, and is involved in activities aimed at integration of refugees, as well as prevention and fighting against Sex and Gender based violence in the Republic of Armenia. ▪ For 'general migrants', ARCS provides the following services: info provision, counselling, financial assistance, food, clothes, any type of humanitarian assistance, info on their COo situation, psychological services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Up to now, ARCS did not work with any AVR project. However, they referred some cases (voluntary and deported) from RCS and provided them with comprehensive information. ▪ Only involved so far in the process of UNHCR refugees for resettlement or voluntary return to their countries (they were asylum seekers or refugees in Armenia) - only a few cases. 	<p>ARCS would be one of NGOs presenting AVR as an option to potential candidates and referring them to IOM.</p> <p>ARCS could also become an IOM return partner and, after due training, be able to provide relevant pre-departure counselling, psychosocial/legal support and register return files.</p> <p>ARCS could also be a referral partner for particularly vulnerable cases.</p>
<p>Armenian Caritas</p> <p>Interview on 18.09.20 with Lusine Stepanyan, Responsible for the Migration and Integration Strategic Direction</p>	<p>Armenian Caritas, which has Benevolent NGO status', focuses its domestic efforts on social protection and care, community-based development programmes to improve the living and educational conditions, to improve public health to the most vulnerable social groups, migration and integration to implement sustainable reintegration measures for returnees and humanitarian and development activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Armenian Caritas is involved in AVRR with different countries. Starts from the support at the airport (case worker). If no need at the airport, the support starts at the office (tailor-made reintegration): counselling, business set-up, referral to the state bodies, coaching for reintegration, field and monitoring visits. ▪ Caritas had two types of programmes on return and reintegration: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) programmes within AVRR system; b) Migration and 	<p>Caritas would be one of NGOs presenting AVR as an option to potential candidates.</p> <p>Thanks to its long experience in AVRR, Caritas could also become an IOM return partner and be able to provide relevant pre-departure counselling, psychosocial/legal support and register return files. This would also include the preparation with the reintegration project.</p> <p>Caritas could also participate in joint monitoring visits in the field together with IOM and relevant national institutions.</p>

		Development project that supported both deported people and those who returned to Armenia voluntary but out of the AVRR system.	
<p>UNHCR</p> <p>Interview on 25.09.20 with Ms. Naira Marutyan, Protection Associate, and Ms. Susanna Grigoryan, Assistant Protection Officer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR's role in Armenia focuses on supporting the Government to ensure quality asylum procedures and helping the country to carry out its responsibilities vis-à-vis refugees and asylum seekers in conformity with international law and standards. UNHCR assists asylum-seekers by making available through its partners social and legal counselling and representation. UNHCR's mandate is limited to refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR and IOM have encountered the issue of people who accidentally appeared in Armenia, such as victims of smuggling/trafficking going to work in Turkey; They wished to return and were brought to the attention of IOM. UNHCR arranged a roundtable discussion in autumn 2019 with other governmental stakeholders to discuss the needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR would be one international organization which would present AVR as an option to potential candidates. UNHCR could also be a referral partner for particularly vulnerable cases. UNHCR could also participate in some key AVRR-related researches.
<p>Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF)</p> <p>Interview on 10.09.20 with Ms. Isabella Sarsgyan, Programme Manager</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Eurasia Partnership Foundation's (EPF) guiding vision is a South Caucasus that is peaceful, conflict-free and cooperative with civically engaged citizens, socially responsible businesses, and sustainable, accountable and effective third sector organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No engagement yet on AVRR matters Potentially EPF could do the following: Research and analysis, training, awareness-campaigns. Also: follow-up, engage in integration training/anti-discrimination. 	<p>EPF could present AVR as an option to potential candidates.</p> <p>EPF could collaborate with IOM in some information and awareness-raising campaign around migration and AVRR-related issues.</p> <p>EPF could also participate in some key AVRR-related researches.</p>
<p>Hans Christian Kofoed Foundation</p> <p>Interview on 28.09.20 with Mr. Varuzhan Vardanyan, lawyer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hans Christian Kofoed Beneficent Foundation is a non-profit organization that pursues social, beneficial, educational and other public benefit goals. From 1 January 2014 "Hans Christian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Foundation has experience in dealing with migrants, they are ready to help them with their return or their citizenship. They also have doctors, psychologists, lawyers, etc. 	<p>The Hans Christian Kofoed Foundation could present AVR as an option to potential candidates and provide them with some initial pre-departure and psycho-social counselling after due training.</p>

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	<p>Kofoed" Beneficent Foundation has been the only organization in Armenia dealing with homeless issues. Foundation continues to strive to expand its programs and offerings to the beneficiaries.</p>		
<p>Yezedi Center for Human Rights Interview on 16.09.20 with Ms. Shashik Sultanyan, Chairperson</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The main office is in Yerevan but they do have local offices in other regions in Armenia. ▪ The centre aims at protecting the rights of national minorities and of marginalized groups, including refugees from North Iraq in Armenia. ▪ The centre works with the Government in the field of the right to education and school education in particular. ▪ It makes recommendations to the Government concerning the identity and culture of minorities: national minorities should be included in all fields, including socioeconomic life. ▪ It strives to bring the issue to international organizations (for instance, the Council of Europe): protection of rights globally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The centre has not had any involvement in AVRR matters but stands ready to collaborate with IOM and the Government in disseminating information to target groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yezedi Center for Human Rights could present AVR as an option to potential candidates and be a good referral for some minorities or marginalized groups willing to return but lacking the psychosocial support to do so.
<p>Mission Armenia NGO Interview on 09.10.20 with Alla Harutyunyan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mission Armenia provides a wide range of community-based social and health-care services to more than 8,000 beneficiaries through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mission Armenia has not directly worked with IOM but has experience with returnees to Armenia. They were involved in the working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mission Armenia NGO could present AVR as an option to potential candidates and be a good referral to IOM.

	<p>about 50 infrastructures founded in 22 cities of eight marzes of Armenia.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mission Armenia has a small and a bigger social house designed for elderly people and people with disabilities. Sometimes they accommodate foreigners and the youth, and provide feeding and clothes. ▪ They also provide legal consultancy. 	<p>group on the Integration and Reintegration strategy. The spectrum of activities of Mission Armenia is very broad but mostly on the migration and refugees topic, they are working with UNHCR.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They work with asylum seekers and refugees and some of them have expressed their willingness to return home. Some of them originate from the target countries of this research. ▪ 5-6 years ago, the Mission worked with Caritas Belgium in the field of return and reintegration of Armenian returnees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ After due training, Mission Armenia could provide initial pre-departure and psychosocial counselling to return candidates.
<p>Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (MFA)</p> <p>Interview replaced by 2 phone calls on 22.09 and 29.09 with Hasmik Sahakyan, Counsellor, MFA Consular Department</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia is the authorized body of the state governance system that elaborates and implements the foreign policy of the Government of the Republic of Armenia. ▪ The Ministry is established, reorganized and its activities shall be terminated by law. ▪ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia operates based on Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On the Structure and Functioning of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MFA positions itself as a supporting structure in organization of voluntary return and considers the Migration Service as a leading agency in coordination/management of AVRR process. ▪ In terms of engagement in the assisted voluntary return process, MFA can issue certificates (replaces documents in case they are absent) for migrants leaving the country, as well as ensure communication with representations of foreign embassies accredited in Armenia (including both with and without embassies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MFA would be the essential official body that would help IOM and MS to open-up and facilitate diplomatic relations with some of the target countries. ▪ MFA could also be a good partner when liaising with diplomatic representations in order to help particular cases in obtaining their travel documents. ▪ MFA could also participate in roundtables and steering committees with the other national bodies exchanging on some particular AVRR cases.

Government”, the Law “On Diplomatic Service” and other legal texts.

- According to the Law of the Republic of Armenia on the Structure and Functioning of the Government adopted on 23 March, 2018 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the following areas of activity:
 - Realization of the rights and interests of the Republic of Armenia in international relations;
 - Protection of the rights and legitimate interests of citizens and legal entities of the Republic of Armenia in foreign countries;
 - Realisation of the International treaty relations of the Republic of Armenia, as well as diplomatic or consular relations with foreign countries and international organizations;
 - Presentation of relevant recommendations on the basis of an analysis of the world political and economic situation, foreign and domestic policies of foreign countries, activities of international organizations;
 - raising the role of the Republic of Armenia in solving global and regional problems;

located in Yerevan).

In terms of countries, that Armenia has no diplomatic relations with, MFA can support in using existing diplomatic channels (representations of other countries, international organizations, etc.) to get information on migrants. They stated that IOM can and is contacting foreign embassies, however they agree that MFA engagement in this process would be very important.

- MFA doesn’t see need for its direct engagement in pre-departure, departure and post-arrival/integration processes as considers the Migration Service as a key structure responsible for that and MFA can support with ensuring proper communication with foreign representations (consular and diplomatic).
- Once the system is introduced MFA would be happy to participate in discussions around practical mechanisms for application of AVRR system.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ ensuring the State Protocol of the Republic of Armenia;▪ providing the state agencies with the foreign policy related information necessary for realization of their functions.▪ The activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are aimed at strengthening the external security of the Republic of Armenia, ensuring favourable external conditions for development, deepening the engagement in international organizations and international processes, and further strengthening of cooperation with friendly and partner countries.▪ Establishing stability, cooperation, security and peace in the region is one of the key issues of foreign policy. Armenia brings its contribution to the establishment of a stable and secure South Caucasus.		
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4. Lessons learned

4.1 Migration-related data to and from Armenia

Migration-related data to/from Armenia is not available in a coherent manner and not always up-to-date. As highlighted in chapter 1.4.2, the main administrative information source for migration in Armenia is the State Population Register of the Republic of Armenia, which does not fully reflect the data on population movements, given the fact that people are mostly not informing about their movements to the Passport and Visa Department of the Police of the Republic of Armenia and hence are left out of the sight on migration statistics. This issue has been noticed when conducting the desk research.

In theory, and as per the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Statistics, the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSS Republic of Armenia), known today as the “Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia”, has a clear mandate for collecting data, including obtaining data from administrative sources.

In practice, the following State institutions maintain administrative registers or information on migration issues, namely:

- The Migration Service of the Republic of Armenia (MS Republic of Armenia) – in charge of the administrative register of persons seeking international protection and readmission (produces and disseminates statistics).
- The Police of the Republic of Armenia – is authorized by the Government to maintain the Central Register of the State Population Register and coordinate the work of local registers, and to collect information on residence permits' procedures and permits issued.

- The National Security Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSS Republic of Armenia) – in charge of operation and maintenance of the Electronic Border Management Information System, which registers information on entry (exit) to (from) the Republic of Armenia of people and vehicles.⁶⁰
- The State Employment Agency – in charge of issuing work permits, collecting information on returning migrants to the Republic of Armenia seeking support to be integrated into the Armenian society, assisting unemployed Armenians (including the ones who would be willing to work abroad), and promoting Armenia to foreign work seekers.
- The Police of the Republic of Armenia, the Prosecutor’s General Office, and the National Security Service are the competent authorities working on various aspects of irregular migration. They hold information on prevention of illegal entry and stay in the country, on persons who have been refused to enter the Republic of Armenia, who have been found to be illegally present in the country, and on the repatriation of persons found illegally present on the territory of the Republic of Armenia.
- The NSS of the Republic of Armenia has established a close cooperation with the above-mentioned bodies in order to effectively use their administrative data sources to produce official migration statistics and to methodologically support the development of administrative registers.

However, the availability and collection of data is not centralized in practice and it remains difficult to extract coherent and up-to-date migration-related data. One of the reasons, as explained in the *Report on Sector Review on Migration Statistics in the Republic of Armenia*, is that financial and human resources of the for producing migration statistics are not considered fully adequate in terms of quantity and qualification.⁶¹

For the direct purpose of the present AVRR needs and gaps assessment, migration-related data to/from Armenia has been collected on the following topics:

- Border crossings 2018, 2019, 2020 (from the National Security Service)
- Asylum applications and asylum seekers in 2019 (from the Migration Service)

⁶⁰ The Republic of Armenia Government decision N 884-N as of 22 June 2006 “On Development of Electronic Border Management Information System of the Republic of Armenia, defining regulations for its maintenance and the list of users of the system”.

⁶² Report on Sector Review on Migration Statistics in the Republic of Armenia, 2015: www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/52535/10844196/SR+Migration+Armenia+2015.

- Number of Foreigners granted Residency Status in the Republic of Armenia in 2018 and 2019 (from the Migration Service)
- Distribution of foreigners with permanent, temporary and special residence status according to countries of citizenship and grounds for granting status in 2018 and 2019 (from the Police Passport and Visa Department)
- Demographic Handbook of Armenia 2019 (from the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia)

On the return dimension, statistics are not collected on a systematic basis at the national level, besides by IOM. As highlighted in the recommendations, it would be advisable to settle an official Statistics Unit coordinated by the Migration Service which will be under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior with the upcoming set of reforms.

4.2 Contextual factors

In the current pandemic context linked to COVID-19 and several limitations have hampered the conduction of the present needs and gaps assessment.

Firstly, due to travel constraints linked to COVID-19, it has not been possible for the international consultant to travel to Armenia. This has had a direct impact on the interviews, which were all organized online instead of face to face meetings. This resulted in some minor technical connection and/or interpretation issues. All in all, all planned interviews have occurred and were highly welcomed by the participants. Fruitful and open exchanges took place in an informal manner, allowing the participants to share freely their responses to questions while the consultant filled-in simultaneously the online questionnaires. All responses have been submitted to each participant who revised and endorsed accordingly.

Some participants did not speak English, therefore, interpretation has been foreseen in some cases. This resulted in longer interviews, which was well planned in order to avoid false expectations about the duration of interviews.

Secondly, it was initially foreseen to organize focus groups in order to present and discuss the main recommendations in order to better adapt them to the reality. These groups could not take place unfortunately.

It has not been possible to meet with certain important representatives, such as the Police Department on Combating Illegal Migration, the Ministry of Health Care, the Ministry of Justice and the Penitentiary Service, etc. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shared

its general feedback over the phone, no online meeting could be organized, and the online questionnaire could not be filled-in either.

In consequence, some aspects in the general recommendations might not be as exhaustive as they could have been. However, this has a minor impact given the fact that most of the main stakeholders could be met and have shared their in-depth feedback.

It is therefore highly recommended to organize a separate meeting to discuss these particular issues with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with IOM and the Migration Service before the launch of the new AVRR scheme and also regularly during the project implementation (in the form of a working group to discuss particular cases, for instance).

An official presentation on the key findings and recommendations of the assessment was planned where all actors involved would be invited to share their final inputs and validate the recommendations. Unfortunately, this could not take place due to the heavy workload of most of them. This presentation will be postponed to a later stage to be determined in due time.

4.3 Exchanges with national stakeholders and IOM offices

4.3.1 National stakeholders

Before the round of online meetings with the different stakeholders, the full questionnaire together with relevant explanations were given to all participants who were given time to reflect on the different questions. A preliminary meeting with the Head of the Migration Service was organized in order to test the questionnaire and adapt some questions accordingly.

In addition to the desk research, the direct information and feedback received by the stakeholders during the meetings allowed to develop a clearer picture on their actual roles and future roles they could play in the future AVRR scheme (as highlighted in the table above). It showed a common consensus on better coordination and cooperation among all actors willing to engage in the process, based on their respective mandates and limits as well. It surely highlighted the fact that there is no coordination platform at the moment on migration and voluntary return, which has been proposed by several actors and highly welcomed by the majority of them.

4.3.2 IOM offices in the region and Europe (Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia)

An important activity of the assignment was to analyse the AVRR schemes implemented in other countries that already have the expertise in order to study their good practices and challenges and adapt them to the Armenian context.

The exchanges of information took place through the means of video calls and email correspondence with the different project and reintegration focal points in the seven countries. These countries have been chosen upon the suggestion of IOM Armenia, the Migration Service, the Regional office Vienna and the international consultant based on the expertise of these countries, their similarities or differences with the Armenian migration and return context.

These have been truly useful in drafting the key recommendations in view of setting-up the “ideal” AVRR scheme from Armenia.

4.3.3 IOM offices in the four countries of origin

The IOM offices in the four selected countries of origin have been contacted, through the means of a predefined questionnaire (annex V), in order to collect information on the reintegration assistance provision beyond the return assistance, analysing the missions’ needs, priorities and potential barriers missions have already identified or are expecting to encounter when assisting migrants returning home and rebuilding their lives.

The information collected has been summarized in order to come up with the most common features, good practices, gaps and challenges of these four missions in providing reintegration assistance.

This information from the four “receiving missions” complemented perfectly the different elements highlighted by the eight offices (considered as “sending missions”) and allowed to provide a comprehensive set of recommendations on return and reintegration as a whole.

Conclusion

The present AVRR needs and gaps assessment report, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and as part of the EMERGE project "*Enhancing Migrants' Rights and Good Governance in Armenia and Georgia*", provided an overview of existing national policies, legislation and practices, along with a clarification on the roles, and responsibilities that national stakeholders could potentially own in the implementation of a new AVRR scheme from Armenia.

The in-depth desk research of available literature, data and resources, the interviews with main national stakeholders, the analysis of AVRR programmes implemented by other countries (Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, and Serbia) and the inputs received from IOM missions in the four selected countries of origin on the reintegration assistance provision have allowed to identify the relevant gaps in various areas and the corresponding capacity, policy and legislative needs.

A set of 7 key findings and 13 concrete, actionable and gender-sensitive recommendations has been developed to the attention of Government agencies in order to set up a new comprehensive AVRR system from Armenia. These recommendations on the general scheme are complemented by 8 specific ones on the AVRR process from Armenia.

It should be highlighted that the world pandemic situation linked to COVID-19 and has hindered some expected results of the assessment. Meetings with stakeholders have been replaced by online interviews and an official presentation and discussion with the participants has not taken place at the time of writing. Therefore, the set of recommendations has not been fully validated yet.

Finally, this assessment paves the path for some additional analyses, such as the actual needs of the migrant beneficiaries, which were not directly analyzed in the report, given the limited scope of the present research. Hearing the voices of these migrants from the four target

countries of origin will allow designing a more realistic AVRR scheme from Armenia, which will be tailor-made to individual needs and realities in the countries of origin.

As the United Nations leading agency in the field of migration, IOM enjoys a long-lasting experience for 41 years in the field of AVRR and stands ready to support the Armenian Government in further designing and implementing the new AVRR scheme from Armenia, building upon the key findings and recommendations of this research.

We thank all stakeholders and IOM colleagues who have greatly contributed to the realization of this assessment report.

In line with the Global Compact for Migration's comprehensive approach to the governance of migration and also in view of the upcoming political and legislative reforms in Armenia, we trust this research will contribute to strengthen the national capacities of the Republic of Armenia in the fields of migrants' rights and migration governance in Armenia, while enhancing cooperation and coordination in the AVRR area.

Annexes

Annex I – Bibliography

Annex II – Methodology

Annex III – List of AVRR Stakeholders

Annex IV – AVRR Stakeholders' Questionnaires

Annex V – Overview of IOM AVRR projects:
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Annex VI – IOM country of origin Missions'
Questionnaires

Annex VII – Summary of inputs shared
by IOM country of origin Missions

ANNEX I

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ANNEX II

METHODOLOGY

1. SCOPE OF THE ASSESSMENT
2. DETERMINE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA NEEDS AND GAPS
3. PLAN FOR DATA COLLECTION
4. COLLECT, ANALYSE AND PRESENT DATA
5. APPLY THE CRITERIA AND PRIORITIZE NEEDS
6. IDENTIFY NEXT STEPS AND REPORT BACK

1. SCOPE OF THE ASSESSMENT

What is the purpose? <i>Understand the context</i>	It aims at identifying the best and most effective AVRR model that could be further introduced and applied by the Armenian Government.
Who will use the results?	IOM, the Government of the Republic of Armenia (Migration Service of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures).
What are the resources?	Data Migration Statistics, Migration Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2021, Migration Concept, National Legislation (Law on Refugees, Law on Foreigners), Emerge Factsheet, etc.
How will the community be involved?	Individual (online) interviews through questionnaires and focus groups by type of actors (Government/ NGO and civil society/ Diaspora from the four target countries of origin/ EU/ etc.).
Who will be the decision makers?	IOM, the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

2. DETERMINE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA NEEDS AND GAPS

NEEDS

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration	People-centred, international cooperation, national sovereignty, rule of law, sustainable development, human rights, gender-responsive, child-sensitive, whole-of-government approach, whole-of-society approach.
Guiding Principles	
3 fundamental principles of migration management in Armenia and policy formulation	Evidence-based, whole-of-government approach, strong partnerships.

GAPS

GAPS	Socioeconomic assessment; main actors/stakeholders involved.
Mapping the 4 targeted migrant populations	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran.
Mapping the available services for migrants	Integration, accommodation, special care for vulnerable migrants, mobility, etc.
Mapping the most salient issues at stake	National security, detention, health, reception, accommodation, protection, human rights and dignity of all migrants.

3. PLAN FOR DATA COLLECTION

Which methods?	Combination of qualitative (in-depth desk-research, online interviews and questionnaires, focus groups) and quantitative methods (review of available data).
PEST analysis	Political, economic, social, technological factors.
SWOT analysis	Strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
Existing source of data	Migration statistics 2019, gender statistics, socioeconomic situation of the Republic of Armenia 2019 – 2020 (only in Armenian/Russian), Statistics on border crossing of the Border Guard Troops of the National Security Service.
Develop the plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Desk-research: 22.08.20; 2. Stakeholders consultations: 15.09.20; 3. Summary of key findings/Final draft report: 30.09.20; 4. Final report: 30.10.20.

4. COLLECT, ANALYSE AND PRESENT DATA

Primary data	Migration and demographic statistics 2019 (full list in desk-research).
Secondary data	Data collected through stakeholder consultations and focus groups.

5. APPLY THE CRITERIA AND PRIORITIZE NEEDS

Meeting with the Migration Service in order to present the criteria and prioritize needs together	Date to be determined.
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6. IDENTIFY NEXT STEPS AND REPORT BACK

Presentation of key findings	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Field mission/meetings with key stakeholders;2. PowerPoint Presentation with overview of main findings + 1 pager doc summary.
Report back to stakeholders	Prepare an internal and external version of the final report, which can be shared with the different actors accordingly.

ANNEX III

List of stakeholders for AVRR Needs and Gaps Assessment

Name	Position/Organization
1. Haykanush	Chobanyan Migration Service of the Republic of Armenia
2. Armen Ghazaryan	Migration Service of the Republic of Armenia
3. Irina Mkrtchyan	Passport and Visa Department, the Republic of Armenia Police
4. Nune Manukyan	Passport and Visa Department, the Republic of Armenia Police
5. Manvel Mailyan	Border Guard Troops, National Security Service (NSS) of the Republic of Armenia
6. Alina Kochinyan	NSS
7. Vaghinak Badeyan	NSS
8. Vahagn Balyan	NSS
9. Hasmik Sahakyan	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Republic of Armenia
10. Varuzhan Vardanyan	“Hans Christian Kofoed” foundation
11. Naira Marutyan	UNHCR representation in Armenia
12. Susanna Grigoryan	UNHCR representation in Armenia
13. Hasmik Khachatryan	Armenian Red Cross Society
14. Sashik Sultanyan	Yezidi Centre for Human Rights
15. Isabella Sargsyan	Eurasia Partnership Foundation
16. Lusine Stepanyan	Migration and Integration Programme, Armenian Caritas
17. Alla Harutyunyan	Mission Armenia Charitable NGO

ANNEX IV

AVRR STAKEHOLDER QUESTIONNAIRE TEMPLATE

ABOUT

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been established in 1951. It is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.

With 173 member states, a further 9 states holding observer status and offices in over 100 countries, IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants.

In particular, to support the reinsertion of returning migrants, IOM has been carrying out worldwide Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes since 1979 as a humane and dignified approach to return and reintegration.

Through partnerships with government and non-governmental stakeholders as well as other international organizations, IOM has increased its expertise and reach of AVRR programmes, effectively assisting more than 1.6 million people throughout the years. In 2019, IOM assisted 64,958 migrants to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

The Republic of Armenia joined IOM as a member in 1993. IOM activities in the country are grounded on a number of official documents signed with the Government of Armenia, including the Cooperation Agreement on Privileges and Immunities (1994) and Memorandum of Understanding (2001).

The **IOM office in Yerevan** was opened in 1993. The Organization's objectives in Armenia are: to assist the State of Armenia in achieving border management practices that strike the right balance between control and facilitation and are consistent with best international standards; to reduce and prevent the trafficking and smuggling of persons; to enhance the self-sufficiency and integration of returnees, trafficked victims, refugees, internally displaced and low income persons; to assist the Government in labour migration management; to enhance the capacity of national NGOs to address migration issues; to revitalize and develop rural communities.

Building on IOM's long-standing contribution and 41 years of practice in the area of AVRR, the present questionnaire forms part of an AVRR Needs and Gaps Assessment implemented within the framework of the **EMERGE project** "*Enhance Migrants' rights and Good Governance in Armenia and Georgia*", funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

The objective of this questionnaire is to identify the different stakeholders with whom IOM and the Government of Armenia could collaborate in implementing assisted voluntary return activities from Armenia, their mandates and existing implementation practices, in order to identify main gaps, capacity needs, possible legislative adjustments. • This questionnaire seeks to find out what motivates these actors to engage in such projects, as well as the extent and the way they would like to get involved. • This questionnaire aims at determining the needs, priorities and potential barriers stakeholders have identified or are expecting to encounter when engaging in a new voluntary return scheme. • The results of this questionnaire will facilitate initial multi-stakeholder dialogues, as well as to manage expectations and identify needs from the onset of a potential partnership.

STRUCTURE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is structured in 3 main sections, to reflect on the main phases of the Assisted Voluntary Return process, namely: the pre-departure phase, the actual return phase and the post-arrival and reintegration phase.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any data and information provided in this questionnaire will be treated strictly confidential by IOM and will not be transferred to any third parties. Participants interested in getting more information on IOM ongoing projects in Armenia are encouraged to fill in their contact details at the end of this questionnaire. We will then contact you separately.

QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION: GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following organizations do you work for?

- a. Academia
- b. Delegation of the European Union to Armenia
- c. Diaspora
- d. Diplomatic representation
- e. Human Rights Defender
- f. International Organization
- g. Migration Service
- h. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- i. Ministry of Justice
- j. National Security Service, Border Guard Troops
- k. NGO, Foundation or Civil Society Organization
- l. Penitentiary
- m. Police
- n. UN agency
- o. Other

2. At which level(s) does your organization operate?

- a. Local
- b. National
- c. Regional
- d. International

3. Which migration-related topic(s) are of interest to your organization?

- a. Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
- b. Asylum and Refugees
- c. Border management
- d. Human trafficking and smuggling of persons
- e. Immigration
- f. Integration
- g. Labour Migration
- h. Migration management
- i. Migration Research
- j. Protection of migrants' rights
- k. Readmission
- l. Other:

4. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes according to you?
- Strengths:
 - Weaknesses:
5. In your view, how could local NGOs and community groups be engaged more effectively in the return process?
-
6. Based on your organization's internal structure and mandate, which challenges would you/your organization potentially face should you collaborate with IOM in a new AVRR scheme from Armenia?
-
-
-
7. Considering the existing national legal regulations and practices in place, which aspects work well, and which ones need further improvement and/or revision, in view of setting-up a new AVRR scheme from Armenia?
-
8. In your view, what should be done to improve the cooperation and the coordination between national stakeholders?
-
9. Based on Armenia's national context, which potential barriers in Armenia may hamper the development of such AVRR scheme?
- Difficulty to obtain travel documents
 - Lack of accommodation facilities (shelters, etc.)
 - Lack of available trainings in this field
 - Lack of coordination among actors
 - Lack of policy framework
 - Lack of Protocols
 - Lack of regional policy dialogues
 - Lack of Standard operating procedures
 - National health system
 - National security environment
 - Other:

10. Based on Armenia’s national context, which are the general elements the new AVRR scheme should focus on?

.....
.....
.....

11. Based on the possible countries of origin (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Islamic Republic of Iran), which are the specific elements the new AVRR scheme should focus on?:

.....
.....
.....

12. Which particular training needs would you have, should your organization collaborate in a new AVRR scheme from Armenia?

- a. Communication and visibility on return migration
- b. Counter-trafficking in Persons and Human Smuggling
- c. Data collection, processing and analysis
- d. Development of Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines
- e. Enhancing cooperation and policy coherence on return migration
- f. Exchange tools, techniques and methods
- g. Identification of AVRR candidates
- h. Key return migration trends
- i. Migration and Gender
- j. Migration Health
- k. Post-arrival and reintegration assistance
- l. Pre-departure counselling techniques
- m. Return of people with special needs (victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors, medical cases, etc.)
- n. Treatment of individual return files
- o. Other:

PART 1: PRE- DEPARTURE

INFORMATION PROVISION

13. How should the information provision and referral mechanism of potential return candidates be put in place (multiple options possible)?
- a. Through special accommodation and return counselling centres
 - b. Through a centralized hotline service
 - c. Through a centralized website
 - d. Through the dissemination of generic AVRR leaflets to the potential candidates in key locations
 - e. Directly through IOM
 - f. Other:

OUTREACH AND AWARENESS-RAISING

14. Would you be interested in being involved in outreach and awareness-raising activities on voluntary return towards potential return candidates?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe

COUNSELLING

15. Bearing in mind its mandate, would your organization be interested to provide individual return counselling to the potential candidates?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe
16. Which tools would you need to ensure adequate individual return counselling?
- a. Provision of return-related and country of origin fact sheets
 - b. Specific trainings on individual return counselling techniques
 - c. Handbook on the counselling of vulnerable cases
 - d. Other

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

17. What would you suggest to strengthen the collaboration among the different actors involved in the pre-departure phase?

.....

CHALLENGES

18. Based on the current national context, which potential barriers and challenges may hamper the pre-departure phase?

.....

PART 2: RETURN

19. What are the three current main roles, if any, of your organization in the context of receiving migrants in Armenia and organizing their return?

.....
.....
.....

20. What would you suggest to strengthen the collaboration among the different actors involved in the return phase?

.....

21. Based on the current national context, which potential barriers and challenges may hamper the return phase?

.....

PART 3: POST-ARRIVAL AND REINTEGRATION

22. Based on its mandate, in which post-arrival activity would your organization be willing to collaborate with IOM?

- a. Collect information on available reintegration support
- b. Provide counselling and refer returnees to reintegration-related services
- c. Provide complementary reintegration assistance
- d. Identify and addressing the needs and existing opportunities within the community
- e. Promoting reintegration activities linking returnees and communities
- f. Be involved in the design of reintegration-related programmes
- g. Setting up coordination mechanisms to foster complementarity and coherence across reintegration-related activities
- h. Strengthening policy frameworks to promote well-managed migration

23. What would you suggest to ensure an adequate feedback on reintegration cases?

.....

24. What would you suggest to involve the local community in the reintegration process?

.....

25. What would you suggest to ensure the sustainability of the reintegration support?

.....

26. What would you suggest to strengthen the collaboration among the different actors involved in the post-arrival phase?

.....

27. Which potential barriers and challenges may hamper the post-arrival and reintegration phase?

.....

28. Comments

PERSONAL DETAILS

IOM would be happy to cooperate with you in future projects.

In order for us to reach out to you and to discuss possible cooperation opportunities, please fill in the details below. We will then be in touch with you shortly. Please note that your personal details will be treated strictly confidential.

First name and last name:

Organization:

City and Country:

Email address:

Phone number:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COLLABORATION!

ANNEX V

Overview of IOM AVRR projects

Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Serbia

Belgium

The Assisted Voluntary Return programme (previously known as “REAB programme/Return and Emigration of Asylum-seekers ex-Belgium”) is implemented in Belgium since 1984. Initially funded by the Belgian Ministry for Social Integration, it is now under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior, through the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil).

This AVR programme is conducted in close cooperation with governmental institutions, civil society and migrant communities, constituting an example of multi-level approach to voluntary return and creating a comprehensive migration management system for the benefit of all parties involved.

To perform the necessary voluntary return activities and ensure the possibility of migrants to easily access the programme at each stage of their stay in Belgium, IOM has developed an extensive network of partners covering the whole territory of Belgium. The voluntary return network consists of a combination of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local authorities (some cities and communes), governmental structures for reception of asylum seekers such as Fedasil and the Red Cross reception centres (Flemish Red Cross, French-speaking Red Cross), migrant associations and Immigration Office.

Migrants residing in Local Reception Initiatives can access the voluntary return programme via Fedasil or by referring themselves to a voluntary return partner of their choice. This provides effective services which are tailored to the different needs of the migrants in order to ensure that each potential beneficiary can choose the most suitable way to access the voluntary return programme.

Since 2006, IOM provides structural reintegration assistance to those eligible beneficiaries requesting reintegration assistance after returning to their country of origin. This programme component is jointly implemented with Caritas International; therefore, the reintegration caseload is divided. This assistance includes the following elements:

Pre-departure and post-return counselling and orientation; Travel arrangements, including flight bookings and airport assistance throughout the journey; Referrals to local governmental and non-governmental partners delivering required services to beneficiaries in the country of origin; Delivery of in-kind grant packages to finance and facilitate income-generating activities (i.e. development of beneficiaries' micro-businesses, purchase of stock and merchandise, etc.), to finance administrative, medical and psychosocial support, to invest in personal development and building of skills and capacity by covering the costs for vocational and technical training fees or education fees, by covering basic accommodation needs (i.e. rent, refurbishment, household goods, etc.), and by providing wage subsidies in the context of regular employment or internships.

To ensure that the migrants make an independent and well-informed decision, applicants receive pre-departure return and reintegration counselling from IOM and its return partners. The aim of this counselling is to provide available, accurate, and objective information on the return and reintegration process and to assess the individual needs.

The specific vulnerabilities of each beneficiary are identified through a gender-sensitive needs assessment during the pre-departure counselling and through active liaison with the referring AVRR partners. The programme aims to address the specific needs of women, girls, boys and men, inclusive of those identifying as LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex), and of different ages, so that everyone has equal access to the assistance provided.

IOM Brussels Migrant Protection and Assistance team provides extensive counselling services for vulnerable migrants in need of protection and migrants in need of reintegration support following their voluntary return to their country of origin.

The contractual basis for the programme is the Convention ORG001-2016 between Fedasil and IOM, and the Convention VT-2010-001 - Reintegration Tripartite Agreement between Fedasil, IOM, and Caritas International. The budget is allocated annually and can be updated during the year of implementation with amendments to the Convention which are mutually agreed upon by IOM, Fedasil and Caritas International during quarterly steering committees. To allow for a coherent AVRR management on national level, the programme runs in parallel with the IOM reintegration project financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) - Belgium National Actions, and co-funded by Fedasil. This project provides country specific reintegration assistance and is implemented from 01.01.2020 to 31.12.2021. This project provides complementary reintegration support to nationals of Iraq, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Armenia and the Russian Federation – which are priority countries for Belgium in its return policy – returning under the Belgian AVRR programme and aims to strengthen the capacity of the IOM offices in the field of AVRR in the selected countries of origin. Nationals from other countries can also benefit from complementary reintegration support under the AMIF project.

As part of the monitoring process, the programme includes various monitoring and management missions in countries of origin, organized jointly with Fedasil, in order to analyse the impact of the reintegration assistance on the individuals but also on the local community.

Since 1984 until September 2020 included, IOM has assisted 82,223 migrants to return home voluntarily from Belgium. Among these, 11,761 migrants benefited from reintegration assistance since 2006.

Assisted Voluntary Returns (top 5) and Reintegration from Belgium in 2019, by destination country

Country of Destination	Number of returnees	For which reintegration assistance was released
Brazil	456	21
Romania	320	1
Ukraine	290	11
Iraq	101	77
Georgia	98	24
Total (Top 5)	1,265	134
GRAND TOTAL (all destinations)	2,183	596

Good practices

- The programme includes a comprehensive referral mechanism thanks to the various partners (98) located all over the territory and that can respond in a tailored manner to the individual needs of migrants.
- IOM ensures individual return counselling thanks to its thematic and geographical return and reintegration counsellors who are also mobile to meet the migrants in their residence places.
- Particular attention is paid to vulnerable migrants such as medical cases, unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking among others.
- Monitoring missions in countries of origin allow to evaluate the programme and adapt it to the realities of the countries and actual needs of beneficiaries.

Key challenges and gaps

- The additional reintegration assistance is provided through the AMIF funding, which is limited in terms of the level of grants and also eligibility criteria.

- Reintegration assistance is provided by IOM and Caritas, which can create some confusion in the eye of the beneficiaries.

More information

www.bit.ly/3h0cwyx.

Finland

Apart from various nationality-specific and ad hoc return projects, no general AVRR programme existed in Finland until 2010. Returns were primarily organized by the Police, while IOM also arranged voluntary returns on an ad hoc basis. Following the adoption of the EU Return Directive (2008/115/EC) Finnish authorities officially introduced voluntary return as preferred option over forced return.

The current AVRR Finland project, which started on a structural basis in 2010, is funded today by the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri).

IOM Finland has provided AVRR assistance to beneficiaries on behalf of Migri since July 2015 based on short-term agreements, and – following a public procurement process in early 2016 – was selected as the implementing partner for AVRR for an initial 27-month period until September 2018, followed by a subsequent procurement decision by Migri for another 27-month period from October 2018 to December 2020, thus contributing to the provision of uninterrupted AVRR assistance and continued cooperation based on established procedures.

It covers the following target groups as defined in the national legislation: persons who have received a negative decision on their asylum application, persons who have withdrawn their asylum application, victims of human trafficking who do not have a municipality of residence in Finland, persons who have received temporary protection, persons who have been granted a temporary residence permit because they cannot be removed from the country, but who do not have a municipality of residence in Finland, persons whose international protection status in Finland has been withdrawn or cancelled and a decision has been made to deport them.

The assistance provided at IOM Finland includes pre-departure counselling, assistance with travel document acquisition, help in registering children born in Finland, travel arrangements and expenses from the person's current location to the final destination in the country of return, and possible reintegration assistance such as cash or in-kind assistance.

IOM Finland also provides initial counselling to asylum seekers having received a final negative decision on their asylum application and who are no longer

reception centre clients. As a general rule, such clients are referred by IOM to counsellors in Migri's RETU-project ("Return as an Option" -project, "RETU-Mahdollisuutena vapaaehtoinen paluu") for filling and submitting an AVRR application, eligibility assessment and decision-making.

This AVRR Finland project is framed by a donor agreement signed for 2 years with a one-year budget that can be revised. The Law on Reception (Act) includes some aspects on AVR, such as the counselling done in reception centres.

The provision of departure cash grants and more comprehensive post-arrival reintegration assistance is based on the Reception Act and the Ministry of Interior's decree (in 2018 No. 648/2017 and since 1 January 2019 No. 1278/2018). This decree lists maximum support amounts by country, and furthermore stipulates that less than the maximum, or no financial support at all, can be granted if authorities consider that a returnee is not in need of full support, or if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the support would be misused.

Post-arrival cash grants will generally be paid out by local IOM missions in the country of origin, while in-kind support will be provided primarily through the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN). In countries of origin not covered by ERRIN, the provision of in-kind support will be handled by IOM country of origin missions and coordinated by IOM Finland. In addition to the post-arrival reintegration assistance beneficiaries receive (if applicable), a departure cash grant is disbursed by IOM in connection with departure assistance at the Helsinki-Vantaa airport (usually 200 EUR/adult and 100 EUR/child; meant to cover immediate needs during travel or upon arrival). Post-arrival in-kind grants are handled either by IOM or ERRIN, and beneficiaries are not eligible to receive support from both sources.

From January to December 2020, the estimated caseload is 60 returnees per month, with ca. 50 per cent of returnees to Iraq, while previous years' experiences show that Russian Federation, Georgia, and Islamic Republic of Iran are among the more frequent countries of origin.

Assisted Voluntary Returns (top 5) and Reintegration from Finland in 2019, by destination country

Country of Destination	Number of returnees	For which reintegration assistance was released
Iraq	187	186
Russian Federation	42	42
Georgia	26	25
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	22	21
Ukraine	17	12
Total (Top 5)	294	286
GRAND TOTAL (all destinations)	391	372

Good practices

- Flexibility in Government funding.
- Existing helpline for beneficiaries (only the candidates who have already been referred to IOM).
- Not to limit/restrict the number of eligible countries. The programme should be needs-based rather than country-based.

Key challenges and gaps

- The Government is fully in charge, IOM is only assisting with the logistical and movement support and return arrangements. IOM is considered as a “booking agency”.
- Quite a big number of ERRIN cases from Finland: this provokes some confusion in the eyes of the beneficiaries (different actors involved).
- IOM does not do the reintegration counselling, which is supposed to be handled in the reception centres (which, however, naturally often lack concrete experience with reintegration as well as in-depth knowledge of the situation in countries of origin). The training of the centres is handled by Migri, although IOM is occasionally involved in training events.
- Communication is fully handled by the Government, and is not always fully aligned with IOM messaging on AVRR (e.g. in terms of IOM stressing AVRR as a “humane and dignified” lacks a humane and visionary approach).
- Target group only limited to asylum seekers (rejected, or who cancel their asylum application in order to return) and victims of trafficking (very few requests). Labour migrants, families, undocumented migrants, etc, are excluded from the eligible beneficiaries.

- Beneficiary monitoring (e.g. reintegration sustainability) not built into the programme by default so far. Monitoring in 2019 and 2020 of a sample of beneficiaries, primarily in Iraq, has been implemented by IOM, though, with funding from Migri (in 2019, through an AMIF-funded project implemented by Migri).

More information

www.bit.ly/2RsOiCE,
www.voluntaryreturn.fi/en/voluntary-return.

Georgia

Since 2013, the IOM office in Georgia has been operating a comprehensive AVRR programme for foreigners residing in Georgia who express the wish to return home, but do not have the resources to do so. This programme consists of pre-departure counselling and humanitarian assistance, travel arrangements and subsequent reintegration assistance in their home communities thanks to the involvement of IOM offices in their native countries.

On top of organizing these individual movements, IOM assists the Georgian authorities in developing high standards of return management, including for those migrants who have been accommodated in the migrant detention centre, based on the principle that voluntary return should be prioritized over forced return options.

Over the past eight years, IOM has assisted 642 migrants to return home in dignity.

The programme is funded by the EU as part of a series of comprehensive, border and migration-management projects that IOM Georgia has been running since 2013.

A Memorandum of Mutual Cooperation between IOM and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of Georgia has been signed on 21 January 2015 for a period of 5 years on the Assisted Voluntary Return of Irregular Migrants from Georgia. It stipulates the key principles and directions of the engagement of both parties in the sphere of AVRR from Georgia.

IOM continues cooperating with the MIA Migration Department in offering a humane alternative to forced return and extending post-return reintegration assistance to detained migrants, based on the Cooperation Agreement with the MIA signed in 2015.

Target beneficiaries are vulnerable migrants such as people with health issues and victims of THB, stranded migrants, rejected asylum seekers and other foreigners residing in Georgia who want to return to their countries of origin but who do not have the means to do so.

IOM operates this programme independently from the Georgian Government.

This programme typically includes the following services:

- Registration and determination of immediate and long-term (post-arrival) needs;
- Pre-departure humanitarian assistance in case of destitute migrants. This may include medical assistance for those who need care before travel and temporary accommodation for homeless persons;
- International air travel to final destination, with IOM assistance foreseen upon departure from Tbilisi or Batumi airport, as well as during transit and destination airports;
- Cash assistance to facilitate travel over land to final destination in country of origin;
- Reintegration assistance delivered by IOM office in country of origin of the migrants, provided the latter express interest in this service and contact IOM to move forward with an individual reintegration plan. Reintegration support can take many forms, but the most commonly support provided under the project is assistance in setting up micro-business projects, finding temporary accommodation, enlist in study programmes and procurement of household items to improve the quality of life and well-being of returnees.

Information on the availability of these services is disseminated in the form of printed material through partner organizations (such UNHCR and its partner organization World Vision for asylum seekers, and MIA's Migration Department and MFA's Consular Department addressing irregular migrants). This brochure is available online in four languages (English, French, Russian and Arabic).

The number of requests for IOM return assistance has been systematically high, pointing to the persistent need among foreigners in Georgia who, for various circumstances, got stranded in Georgia and see no other way out than return home.

The number of referrals by the Migration Department of the MIA of migrants requesting return assistance from IOM increased. This was primarily due to the enhanced activity of the newly styled Community Police patrolling the streets on foot and their mandate to check the immigration status of foreigners. The MIA Migration Department coordinates this process from the migration management point of view, inter alia by issuing an increased number of orders to irregular migrants to leave the country. People who do not take that order into account may be put up in administrative detention prior to their departure from the territory of Georgia. This means that IOM's AVRR programme has become even more relevant in securing humane and dignified ways to leave Georgia and return home.

Assisted Voluntary Returns (top 5) and Reintegration from Georgia in 2019, by destination country

Country of Destination	Number of returnees	For which reintegration assistance was released
Nigeria	17	9
Azerbaijan	10	7
Uzbekistan	10	6
Sudan/India	16	3/5
Pakistan/Islamic Republic of Iran	12	4/1
Total (Top 5)	65	35
GRAND TOTAL (all destinations)	118	49

Good practices

- A Memorandum of Mutual Cooperation between IOM and the Ministry of Internal Affairs stipulates the key principles and directions of the engagement of both parties in the sphere of AVRR from Georgia.
- The most effective channel of spreading information turned out to be word-of-mouth dissemination among the closely knit migrant communities in Tbilisi, Batumi and elsewhere in Georgia.
- When migrants had own resources to purchase air tickets but failed to gain access to consular assistance for producing emergency travel documents and replace lost or expired passports, IOM offered mediation on behalf of the migrant towards his/her embassy and requested the issuance of the travel document.
- IOM's AVRR programme has become even more relevant in securing humane and dignified ways to leave Georgia and return home.

Key challenges and gaps

- As concerns cooperation with the authorities, good progress has been made by the MIA in organizing return management. There are certain challenges in the institutional framework of Georgia's return management, for example illustrated by insufficient coordination between the country's penitentiary system and agencies responsible for return management. The Georgian authorities are dependent on IOM to organize and finance voluntary return, which is partly explained by IOM's operational contacts with embassies and flexibility in providing assistance to irregular migrants who are not accommodated in the migrant detention centre.

More information

www.bit.ly/3nKffgU,

www.informedmigration.ge/en/safe-migration/service_point-for-immigrants.

Germany

In 1979, the German Ministry for Family, Youth and Health gave IOM the authority to implement the Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum-Seekers in Germany (REAG), as the first AVR programme in Europe. In 1989, the programme was complemented by the Government Assisted Repatriation Programme (GARP), which was initiated as a supporting measure and financed by the Ministry of the Interior. Effective from 1st January 2000, the Ministry of the Interior took over the entire responsibility for both programmes. The REAG/GARP-Programme is implemented by IOM on behalf of the Ministry of Interior, Building and Community (BMI) and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF/Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtling) under the auspices of the BMI, as well as the 16 respective German Federal States' ministries, which jointly finance the programme. From 1979 until the end of 2019, IOM Germany has assisted more than 720.000 migrants to voluntarily return home or emigrate to a third country.

The migrants eligible to benefit from the program are asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers and recognized refugees as well as war and civil-war refugees, victims of forced prostitution or trafficking and other foreigners (eligible under "1 AsylbLG, the German asylum seekers" benefit Act), as well as migrants who have been granted residence due to humanitarian or political reasons.

The application of financial assistance within the programme REAG/GARP is organized in cooperation with German authorities, welfare organizations, specialized counselling centres, central information centres for voluntary return, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). To obtain REAG/GARP assistance, the appropriate applications can only be submitted through these authorities and organizations. Nationwide IOM works together with 800 – 1000 German authorities.

In order to simplify and harmonize the AVRR support programmes of the German Government, the REAG/GARP programme is implemented in a complementary manner with the other programmes such as the StarthilfePlus programme, the information portal ReturnfromGermany.de, the ZIRF Counselling project (individual queries and country fact sheets available for 26 countries of origin in multiple languages and updated regularly) country and/or Virtual Counselling. Basically, the REAG/GARP programme covers the assistance provided while the migrants are still in Germany such as travel organization and cash payment of financial return support while the StarthilfePlus programme focuses on the activities in the countries of origin (reintegration assistance, payment of further financial reintegration support).

Migrants in situations of vulnerability are supported through the implementation of several measures: among these is the provision of tailored assistance to migrants with identified

health needs and the provision of transit and arrival assistance at the airport in the country of origin through IOM which can take the form of temporary accommodation prior to onwards travel.

For the implementation of the REAG/GARP programme, IOM Germany works closely with about 800-1000 entities (governmental and non-governmental) throughout Germany, that are eligible to submit REAG/GARP applications on behalf of the migrants to IOM Germany. These applying entities play a crucial part in the return process. However, the return-counselling landscape in Germany varies very much in terms of stakeholders providing the counselling but also regarding regional distribution and density of counselling centres as well as their respective qualitative specializations.

The REAG/GARP also includes outreach to beneficiaries, monitoring and training. IOM organizes trainings for the staff of applying entities responsible for counselling migrants interested in voluntary return, in order to inform them about the programme and to ensure a coherent approach for the application of the procedure

Over the last couple of years, more stakeholders have been involved in AVR. The Ministry of Development is also more engaged and is involved in supporting counsellors on reintegration opportunities in countries of origin.

GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit/German development agency) has also become an important actor, in trying to further link sustainable return and reintegration with development in the countries of origin.

Assisted Voluntary Returns (top 5) and Reintegration from Belgium in 2019, by destination country

Country of Destination	Number of returnees	For which reintegration assistance was released
Iraq	1,791	1,733
Georgia	1,064	147
North Macedonia	989	101
Russian Federation	956	939
Albania	838	77
Total (Top 5)	5,638	2,997
GRAND TOTAL (all destinations)	13,053	7,139

Good practices

- Use of country fact sheets and individual queries.
- Digitalization of the REAG/GARP application process (under development).
- Take all vulnerabilities and specific individual needs of the migrants into account.
- Good referral mechanism in place.
- NGO's are important actors in the AVR process, in particular in the field of counselling of specific groups such as Victims of Trafficking (VoTs), Unaccompanied Minor Children (UMC), or LGBTQI. IOM cannot do this alone.
- Considering the complex coordination structures within REAG/GARP, high-quality data management is of great importance to ensure ongoing monitoring of programme implementation as well as information sharing with all stakeholders.

Key challenges and gaps

- Large number of project donors (16 individual Federal States and the federal government).
- Over the last couple of years, more stakeholders have been involved in AVR: 800 to 1,000 stakeholders are on the ground.
- The overall AVRR setting in Germany is complicated for some migrants who have a lot of information to proceed with. This provokes some misunderstanding and limitations in counselling.
- Vulnerability issues such as mental health issues, other health issues, migrants belonging to a certain ethnic group, etc, are not reported to IOM by the referring agency.

More information

www.ReturningfromGermany.de,
www.bit.ly/33egsno.

Greece

The implementation of assisted voluntary returns including reintegration measures and operation of Open Centre in the Prefecture of Attica for applicants of voluntary return (AVRR/OCAVRR) started in September 2019 and is funded 75 per cent by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union (AMIF) and 25 per cent by National Funds.

AMIF and the Hellenic Ministry of Citizen Protection have established a Responsible Authority and a Delegated Authority by which the amount of funds of the project is being provided in

instalments (including pre-financing) to IOM Greece which has been awarded the project in order to implement the Action and manage the funds accordingly. Therefore, the National Funds, in general, come from the Greek Budget as a state (in which the funding of AMIF has been deposited), provided to the Hellenic Ministry of Citizen Protection (essentially the Hellenic Police) to co-fund with AMIF the whole migration pillar of AMIF.

Through this Action, IOM will enable 12,800 third-country nationals to travel in a safe, dignified and organized manner from Greece to their final destination in their respective countries of origin, to accommodate 1,920 applicants of assisted voluntary return in the Open Centre for Applicants of Voluntary Return and Reintegration (OCAVRR) and to support 2,000 returnees in their reintegration process.

The Open Centre is established near the centre of Athens, aiming at providing accommodation to vulnerable migrants who are experiencing certain situations of vulnerability or specific needs (migrants with health needs, pregnant women, single-parent families, elderly migrants), registered to IOM's AVRR projects and have no place to stay until their departure. The Open Centre is situated among hospitals, embassies of third countries and very near to the underground and bus stations.

The Open Centre for migrants registered for assisted voluntary return and reintegration (OCAVRR I AND OCAVRR II) was co-funded by the European Union (DG HOME-EMAS) and the Hellenic Republic – Reception and Identification Service from 1.1.2014 and until 31.8.2019. The Open Centre for migrants registered for assisted voluntary return and reintegration (OCAVRR) is the first open centre in Europe and acts as a supplementary action of the AVRR project. This exemplary Open Centre is established near the centre of Athens to provide shelter and services (catering services, 24/7 security services, cleaning services, knives and provision of medical and psychosocial support) to migrants in Greece who have registered with IOM Greece's AVRR programmes and who have no place to stay until their departure.

Due to the fact that the OCAVRR I and OCAVRR II projects exhibited the fact beyond doubt that a Centre is needed for the AVRR beneficiaries in order to be able to reside somewhere in Athens while they prepare their return the OCAVRR project was incorporated in the current AVRR project.

Eligible beneficiaries of the AVRR/OCAVRR project are categorized as follows:

1. Third-country nationals who have not yet received a final negative decision on their application for stay, legal residence and / or international protection as foreseen for them in a member state and who may opt for the voluntary return option;
2. Third-country nationals who have been granted the right of stay, legal residence and / or international protection as defined by the EU Directive 2011/95 or

temporary protection as defined by the EC Directive 2001/55 in a member state and who have chosen to opt for voluntary return;

3. Third-country nationals present in a member state who no longer meet the entry or stay prerequisites in a member state, whose removal has been postponed in accordance with Articles 9 and 14, paragraph 1 of Directive 2008 / 115 / EC.

In addition to the above, and as defined in the Call for Proposals, priority is given to nationals from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Georgia, India, Iraq, Morocco and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Migrants from Albania and North Macedonia cannot participate in the AVRR/OCAVRR project.

The two-year AVRR project is designed to contribute to the comprehensive management of migration in Greece and respond to the imminent needs of migrants through facilitating the safe and dignified return and reintegration of third-country nationals to their countries of origin.

To respond to the imminent need for AVRR information provision, counselling and assistance throughout Greece, IOM has established five satellite offices, and expanded the network of its regional staff and cultural mediators to 30 personnel. IOM staff was present in various locations across Greece to ensure that the information and counselling within the terms of the project is easily accessible to both eligible beneficiaries and local stakeholders regardless of geographic constraints. IOM satellite offices in the field are well established in the areas of high migratory pressure and thus receive large numbers of migrants interested in voluntary return in their premises, while AVRR regional staff in the various locations across Greece witnesses the project's significance and widespread recognition. Through the satellite offices in Crete, Ioannina, Patra, Rhodes and Thessaloniki and the presence in different regions including the islands of the Northern–Eastern Aegean, IOM provides extensive AVRR information, counselling and assistance even in remote areas of Greece.

Main components of the project entailed the following: Information campaign and raising awareness on the AVRR option (targeted material, leaflets, posters, TV info spot, short films, regional information visits); The reception, information provision (through, among others, mobile information units), registration of third-country nationals that express their will to return to their countries of origin; Identification and operation issues related to AVRR; Issuance of travel documents and flight tickets; Reintegration assistance; Effective measures for the sustainability of the return and the reception of third-country nationals in the countries of origin and accommodation in the Open Centre.

IOM implements these actions with its own means. However, in the Open Centre, there is a Director of the Centre and administrative employees that are under the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) of the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum who take care of the administrative aspects of the Centre.

Assisted Voluntary Returns (top 5) from Greece in 2019, by destination country

Country of Destination	Number of returnees
Iraq	1,214
Georgia	763
Pakistan	646
Iran (the Islamic Republic of)	280
Afghanistan	202
Total (Top 5)	3,105
GRAND TOTAL (all destinations)	3,854

Good practices

- The programme entails a very comprehensive and complete set of services (info campaign and awareness-raising, info provision and reception, identification, registration, issuance of travel documents and flight tickets, reintegration assistance, and effective measures for the return sustainability).
- Acquiring information through the AVRR mobile unit proved to be significant as many of these third-country nationals approached at a later stage the AVRR regional staff as well as IOM Athens premises in Alimos to register for the project.
- Assistance provided to migrants in situation of vulnerability requires a holistic approach. Special mention should be given to developing further initiatives towards this direction so that each migrant in situation of vulnerability is provided with tailored protection and assistance that directly responds to his or her immediate needs. Extensive reintegration counselling is conducted for migrants in situation of vulnerability and through cooperation with IOM offices in the country of origin.
- The IOM regional staff operations in the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos as well as to the islands of Crete and Rhodes have been an important component to support the orderly and humane migration management.
- The reintegration unit of IOM Greece, with the support of cultural mediators, conducted individual counselling sessions with the returnees to provide them with information regarding the implementation of reintegration plans in their country of origin so as to facilitate successful long-term reintegration. During the three years of implementation of the project, it was noticed that there was a need to establish even more new contact channels with beneficiaries' country of origin and therefore, IOM Greece's reintegration unit eventually cooperated with 34 different countries.
- Special monitoring and evaluation tools have been created in order to measure the effectiveness of the reintegration assistance and satisfaction of the beneficiary and provide qualitative and quantitative data.

Key challenges and gaps

- Difficulty in finding translation services in the case of dialects and / or languages spoken by a limited number of beneficiaries.
- Taking into consideration the current situation and significant restrictions imposed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, IOM will incorporate in the project a health component in order to minimize the risk of infection transmission among the AVRR beneficiaries and in parallel ensure the feasibility of assisted voluntary return in accordance with the requirements taken by migrants' countries of origin.

More information

www.bit.ly/2PNNU0R.

Republic of Moldova

IOM started the implementation of AVR activities in the Republic of Moldova in 2009, within the framework of the EU-funded GUMIRA project. Coordination with government authorities to ensure the smooth departure of migrants was further enhanced through working meetings on specific cases. To ensure due departures, IOM and the Bureau of Migration and Asylum (BMA) agreed that IOM will refer all AVR applicants to the BMA for clearance and coordination with all relevant authorities. The absence of diplomatic representations of many countries of origin remained an important challenge for the implementation of the AVR programme, sometimes causing considerable delays in obtaining travel documents. Cooperation with other IOM offices (in particular the IOM Mission in Ukraine) has proven to be the most effective means of addressing this issue. The IOM developed AVR brochures in Arabic, English, French, Romanian and Russian.

During the reporting period, 73 individuals were assisted in returning to their countries of origin, including 54 men, 14 women and 5 children. 3 cases required a medical escort.

From November 2011 until January 2012, IOM the Republic of the Republic of Moldova conducted a legislative review of AVRR procedures in the Republic of Moldova aimed at harmonizing Moldovan legislation with European and international standards in the sphere of dignified return and migrants' rights contributing to the development of a government-led AVRR system. Building on the recommendations of the report on *Readmission in Moldova: Legal-Institutional Analysis and Lessons from EU Experience* (completed within the framework of the GUMIRA project in Moldova), two IOM-commissioned experts (international and local) conducted a legislative review and developed a comprehensive action plan for necessary legislative and normative amendments for the establishment of an AVRR system in the Republic of Moldova.

Throughout his assignment, the EU expert paid two working visits to the Republic of Moldova. Both visits involved a number of meetings with stakeholders involved in return and reintegration procedures (BMA, MAC, BGS, NEA, the Department for Consular Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNHCR, the NGO “Institute of Penal Reform”, first instance court judge, the UN Human Rights Advisor, the EU High Level Advisor on Migration to the BMA, the leading national expert in the migration area from the Academy of Science, etc.). The expert also had the possibility to attend the UN Justice, Human Rights and Gender thematic group with an intervention on migrant’s rights and AVRR as well as to visit the Temporary Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers, which is part of the referral system for AVR of third-country nationals.

The EU Acquis and other international standards relating to migration management were used and served as a measurement tool for recommendations developed to amend the Republic of Moldova’s legislation with regard to AVRR. The Review consists of the following sections: detailed legislative assessment; recommendations for the state authorities on the basis of the assessment; suggested training programme on AVRR issues, and draft curricula.

Based on the review, IOM conducted an AVRR training for up to 20 representatives of the Moldovan Government and relevant NGOs. The training was delivered in September 2012 by IOM experts from the Regional Office in Vienna and IOM Kiev.

Results:

The draft Legislative Review of AVRR was completed and has been shared with government counterparts for their comments. IOM, jointly with the partner NGO ‘Institute for Penal Reform’, has promoted the recommendations of the AVR Legislative Review with the governmental partners, especially the BMA for further consolidation of the relevant comments, adjustment of the proposed legislative and normative amendments and their submission to the government for final approval.

The legislative amendments based on the AVRR Legislative Review have been submitted by BMA to the Government for approval. Subject to approval of the respective amendments the BMA will submit in a successive manner the amendments to the Return regulation which have been also proposed by the AVRR Legislative Review.

Assisted Voluntary Returns in 2009, by destination country (top 5)

Country of Destination	Number of returnees
Russian Federation	17
Armenia	12
Ukraine	9
Turkey	6
Georgia	5
Total (Top 5)	49
GRAND TOTAL (all destinations)	73

Good practices

- Cooperation with other IOM offices (in particular the IOM Mission in Ukraine) has proven to be the most effective means to address the issue of obtaining travel documents for countries without a diplomatic representation in the Republic of Moldova.
- Coordination with government authorities to ensure the smooth departure of migrants was further enhanced through working meetings on specific cases.
- Development of AVR brochures in Arabic, English, French, Romanian and Russian.

Gaps and challenges

- The absence of diplomatic representations of many countries of origin remains an important challenge, sometimes causing considerable delays in obtaining travel documents.

More information

www.moldova.iom.int.

- Legislative Review of the AVRR procedures in the Republic of Moldova, IOM, January 2013.

Serbia

From January 2019 until mid-2021, IOM Serbia is implementing a regional AVRR programme in the Western Balkans for returns from the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo⁶²). It is funded by the

⁶² References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

following bilateral donors: the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Federal Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Austria, and the Repatriation and Departure Service of the Dutch Ministry of Justice, as well as the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and EU.

IOM Serbia is working with the following national partners: the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM), the Department for Foreigners of the Border Police Directorate, and the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia.

The overall objective of this joint regional programme is to increase the access and the availability of services to migrants who wish to return to their countries of origin. This goal is being achieved through a wide range of services: increased outreach in all six countries (reception/asylum centres, hotspots/public spaces, border areas, etc.); information dissemination – info campaigns, info sessions, leaflets and brochures; improved coordination and cooperation with other service providers e.g. police, health institutions, social services providers; increased capacities for implementation of the AVRR services in the Western Balkans (e.g. national and regional trainings, development of a Western Balkans AVRR Curriculum); support to the voluntary return and reintegration and promotion of sustainable reintegration (e.g. info campaigns, reintegration counselling on all 90 locations); provision of migrants with information and counselling subsequently upon return to their country of origin; support of Western Balkan governments through effective operationalization of national AVRR frameworks.

As a part of the AVRR programme, an information campaign is implemented, aiming to strengthen the availability of information on the assisted voluntary return and reintegration programme in the Western Balkans territory. The campaign messages are mostly sent through digital communication channels and are directed to migrants present in six Western Balkan beneficiaries. The campaign aims to enable migrants with better access to AVRR programme, as well as provide an overall support and information provision for migrants in need, travelling through or currently residing in the Western Balkans territory.

In parallel with the information campaign on AVRR, an additional campaign is being implemented for provision of useful information, as response to COVID-19, with messages on mobility restrictions, new regulations and requirements in international travel, but also prevention, protection, security measures and psychosocial support. The communication strategy, primarily based on digital campaign, is using multiple web platforms for informing migrants, such as the app Support for Migrants (www.supportformigrants.com) and the AVRR website for the Western Balkans (www.avrr-wb.com) as well as advertising on Facebook, Instagram and Google ads.

In 2016–2017, IOM developed regional Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on AVRR along with a gaps and needs assessment,⁶³ both under an EU funded “Regional Support for

⁶³ Framework for Voluntary Return in the Western Balkans, an IOM assessment, November 2016.

Protection sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans”. Both documents pertain to the Western Balkans situation, with some country specific differences. This project supported the establishment and consolidation of national AVRR frameworks in the WB countries which then developed and finalized their own operational frameworks through different modalities.

Assisted Voluntary Returns (top 5) and Reintegration from Serbia in 2019, by destination country

Country of Destination	Number of returnees	For which reintegration assistance was released
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	103	6
Algeria	23	2
Pakistan	15	5
Iraq	15	2
India	7	4
Total (Top 5)	163	19
GRAND TOTAL (all destinations)	193	29

Good practices

- Joint regional AVRR programme implementation with 6 countries in the WB.
- The AVRR programme comprises a strong information campaign component, including a web application “Support for Migrants” which provides advices on all the nearest services and support for migrants and refugees in the Western Balkans.
- The programme focuses on an improved coordination and cooperation with other service providers e.g. police, health institutions, social services providers.
- Development of a Western Balkans AVRR Curriculum.
- IOM Serbia has already developed an AVRR needs and gaps assessment which supported the establishment and consolidation of national AVRR frameworks in the Western Balkans countries.

Gaps and challenges

- More operational and specific coordination procedures are needed to guide the work between law enforcement and reception/protection authorities for the identification and referral of migrants interested in AVRR; similarly, such detailed guidance is beneficial for the full facilitation of access of migrants to AVRR from the asylum procedure and other migration processes.

More information

www.avrr-wb.com, www.bit.ly/3vDVLae, www.bit.ly/3eU7900.

ANNEX VI

IOM COUNTRY OF ORIGIN MISSIONS' QUESTIONNAIRE TEMPLATE

ABOUT

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been established in 1951. It is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.

With 173 member states, a further nine states holding observer status and offices in over 100 countries, IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants.

In particular, to support the reinsertion of returning migrants, IOM has been carrying out worldwide assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes since 1979 as a humane and dignified approach to return and reintegration.

Through partnerships with government and non-governmental stakeholders as well as other international organizations, IOM has increased its expertise and reach of AVRR programmes, effectively assisting more than 1.6 million people throughout the years. In 2019, IOM assisted 64,958 migrants to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

The Republic of Armenia joined IOM as a member in 1993. IOM activities in the country are grounded on a number of official documents signed with the Government of Armenia, including the Cooperation Agreement on Privileges and Immunities (1994) and Memorandum of Understanding (2001).

The **IOM office in Yerevan** was opened in 1993. The Organization's objectives in Armenia are: to assist the State of Armenia in achieving border management practices that strike the right balance between control and facilitation and are consistent with best international standards; to reduce and prevent the trafficking and smuggling of persons; to enhance the self-sufficiency and integration of returnees, trafficked victims, refugees, internally displaced and low income persons; to assist the Government in labour migration management; to enhance the capacity of national NGOs to address migration issues; to revitalize and develop rural communities.

Building on IOM's long-standing contribution and 41 years of practice in the area of AVRR, the present questionnaire forms part of an AVRR Needs and Gaps Assessment implemented within the framework of the **EMERGE project** "*Enhance Migrants' rights and Good Governance in Armenia and Georgia*", funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The possible target countries of origin of the present assessment are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

The objective of the general questionnaire is to identify the different stakeholders with whom IOM and the Government of Armenia could collaborate in implementing assisted voluntary return activities from Armenia, their mandates and existing implementation practices, in order to identify main gaps, capacity needs, possible legislative adjustments. • This questionnaire seeks to find out what motivates these actors to engage in such projects, as well as the extent and the way they would like to get involved. • This particular questionnaire for IOM missions in countries of origin focuses specifically on the reintegration assistance provision, analysing the missions' needs, priorities and potential barriers missions have already identified or are expecting to encounter when engaging in a new voluntary return and reintegration scheme from Armenia. • The results of this questionnaire will help IOM Armenia in developing a set of actionable recommendations in view of the implementation of a new assisted voluntary return and reintegration scheme from Armenia.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any data and information provided in this questionnaire will be treated strictly confidential by IOM and will not be transferred to any third parties. Participants interested in getting more information on IOM ongoing projects in Armenia are encouraged to fill in their contact details at the end of this questionnaire. We will then contact you separately.

QUESTIONS

1. Title, function, etc.
2. Which IOM mission do you represent?
.....
3. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of AVRR programmes according to you?
 - a. Strengths:
 - b. Weaknesses:
4. Considering the existing IOM's reintegration assistance already in place in your country, which aspects work well, and which ones need further improvement and/or revision?
.....
.....
.....
5. Based on your country socioeconomic dynamics, which challenges does your office face when assisting voluntary returnees with their reintegration?
.....
.....
.....
6. Based on the possible countries of origin (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Islamic Republic of Iran), which are the specific elements the new AVRR scheme should focus on?
.....
.....
.....

7. What kind of reintegration support services do the returnees need the most in your country?

- a. Accommodation
- b. Education
- c. Health assistance
- d. Legal services
- e. Micro-business support
- f. Psychological support
- g. Other

8. Are there any particular services available in your country to assist the reintegration of vulnerable groups? Please detail.

.....

9. What are the main challenges that returnees face when returning to your country?

- a. Economic
- b. Social
- c. Health
- d. Other

10. What would you suggest to ensure an adequate feedback on reintegration cases?

.....

11. In your view, how could local NGOs and community groups be engaged more effectively in the reintegration process?

.....

12. What would you suggest to ensure the sustainability of the reintegration support?

.....

13. Based on your mission's experience in providing reintegration support, which format of reintegration support can be provided?

- a. Cash grant
- b. In-kind support
- c. Combination of both

14. What would you suggest to strengthen the collaboration among the different actors involved in the post-arrival and reintegration phase?

.....

ANNEX VII

Summary of inputs from IOM COUNTRY OF ORIGIN Missions

The IOM missions in the four selected countries of origin (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Islamic Republic of Iran) have been contacted, through the means of a predefined questionnaire (Annex VI), in order to collect information on the reintegration assistance provision beyond the return assistance, analysing the missions' needs, priorities and potential barriers missions have already identified or are expecting to encounter when assisting migrants returning home and rebuilding their lives from Armenia.

A summary of the main findings can be found below.

Main strengths of AVRR programmes

- It allows potential returnees to prepare for return;
- It takes into account the individual needs of the returnee;
- It offers special services to vulnerable returnees;
- The in-kind reintegration assistance is tailored to the needs of returnees;
- It looks at the individual needs of the returnees and the community at structural level;
- It often time leads to sustainable reintegration;
- Cross-border coordination;
- Flexibility in providing assistance in different settings such as COVID-19 pandemic;
- Supporting wide range of beneficiaries including asylum seekers, ex-refugees, stranded migrants, IDPs in different stages of migration cycle with different needs (Islamic Republic of Iran);
- Phone reintegration counselling remains a good option when onsite monitoring is not feasible;
- Well-coordinated approach in place (Bangladesh) with OPs Unit and Migration Health Department (MHD), Migration and Development (M&D) and Migrant Protection and Assistance (MPA) in cross-cutting areas.

Main challenges of AVRR programmes

- Wholistic reintegration including economic, social, and community level is somewhat challenging, due to a number of factors;
- Disproportionate amount and type of assistance by comparison to the realities in the country of origin;
- Sometimes the monitoring follow-up cannot take place for various reasons;
- In some cases, limited reintegration package;
- No harmonized reintegration packages;
- AVRR projects are for a specific period (mostly for one year); therefore, there is no long-term follow up/monitoring in the projects to know the situation of a returnee after the completion of a project;
- There is no additional assistance for returnees to boost their running activities if they face any economic problem during the project or after completing the project;
- Advocacy with the country of origin government to sensitize about the voluntary nature of programme is needed;
- More efforts should be made towards developing activities that focus on benefiting the community as well;
- Online transfer of the reintegration assistance grant: a lot of returnees do not have a bank account;
- Onsite monitoring of the economic reintegration projects is sometimes challenging in some specific contexts (COVID-19, security, conflicts, etc.);
- Severe economic regression, with internal and international political roots, can cause unexpected difficulties which makes the reintegration process very difficult for returnees and degrades sustainability aspects of the return;
- Take into account that many returnees are either illiterate or with elementary education;
- The absence of a social welfare support makes it more challenging to provide additional support;
- Putting different control mechanisms in place to ensure transparency, the process of receiving reintegration assistance has become very complicated and sometimes painful for the returnee.

Specific elements of the new AVRR scheme

- Focus on economic reintegration considering the economic sustainability that COVID has impacted enormously;
- A comprehensive reintegration package that must include both cash and in-kind support;
- Must be flexible and tailored to the needs of returnees;
- Should consist of additional support for housing needs (house rent, house reconstruction/rebuild, and household items) and medical support for returnees with a weak health condition;
- Where possible, include child allowance for returning family to support schooling in the country of origin.

Suggestions to ensure an adequate feedback on reintegration cases

- In addition to the standardized IOM monitoring and evaluation tools, put an appropriate mechanism in place, by making arrangements for a designated free telephone line, so that an skilled attendant/person will receive calls from returnee migrants, who already received reintegration assistance, for responding to their any needs arisen out from time to time. Reciprocally, the designated attendant/person shall also follow-up to know how well the returnee is doing based on his/her advice. Another option could be to set-up an automated phone so that returnees can send voice messages and also a general email address to enable returnees send their requests or any feedback. The voice mail and email would be managed by IOM in order to dispatch easily the information to whoever is concerned;
- Case by case feedback, as usual, unique cases stories could be published on IOM website and social media platforms. When situation comes back to normality, media personalities could be invited to visit the successful reintegration projects/activities aiming to have good media coverage promoting visibility of IOM and Good Practices;
- Institutional Monitoring tool already available on MiMOSA;
- Proper counselling to inform returnees about the reintegration assistance and avoid false expectations;
- Follow up and monitoring based on economic indicators that determine the situation upon arrival and post-arrival assistance.

Suggestions to engage local NGOs and community groups more effectively in the reintegration process

- In addition to the standardized IOM monitoring and evaluation tools, put an appropriate mechanism in place, by making arrangements for a designated free

telephone line, so that an skilled attendant/person will receive calls from returnee migrants, who already received reintegration assistance, for responding to their any needs arisen out from time to time. Reciprocally, the designated attendant/person shall also follow-up to know how well the returnee is doing based on his/her advice. Another option could be to set-up an automated phone so that returnees can send voice messages and also a general email address to enable returnees send their requests or any feedback. The voice mail and email would be managed by IOM in order to dispatch easily the information to whoever is concerned;

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- Institutional Monitoring tool already available on MiMOSA;
- Proper counselling to inform returnees about the reintegration assistance and avoid false expectations;
- Follow up and monitoring based on economic indicators that determine the situation upon arrival and post-arrival assistance.

Suggestions to ensure the sustainability of the reintegration support

- Assisting returnee migrants to plan need based project based on migrants' skill and ability as well as assessing available resources to run the project. Finally, gaining family and community supports are considered to be very important for long term sustainability;
- Focusing on the needs which usually pop up immediately following their return when they are most vulnerable such as housing and basic needs;
- Flexible reintegration support tailored to the needs of returnees;
- Not only taking into consideration the economic self-sufficiency but also social stability and psychological well-being;
- Taking into consideration not only the returnees need but also his family's need;
- A long-term follow-up/monitoring could gauge the impact of reintegration support and provide feedback for future programming;
- The start-up amount of assistance and a comprehensive counselling to best utilize the assistance are crucial in determining and ensuring that a reintegration assistance may be marked as sustainable.

Suggestions to strengthen the collaboration among the different actors involved in the post-arrival and reintegration phase

- A well-coordinated platform could be developed bringing in all actors and stakeholders in that with high level policy support by the relevant ministries and departments;
- Trying to engage them as early as possible in the design and implementation of the reintegration project;
- Establish a proper coordination mechanism;
- Share information;
- Providing capacity-building training.

A close coordination between the sending and receiving missions is essential to ensure that all aspects of reintegration assistance are covered in the true spirit of assisting AVRR beneficiaries.

