Dear Ladies and Gentlemen! Dear Colleagues!

Summer is a time of change in the IOM Vienna Department for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration: Existing projects come to an end or are prepared for extension, and new projects begin.

After a duration of four years, the project “Return and Reintegration Assistance for Voluntary Returnees to Kosovo” (AVRR* Kosovo), which was co-funded by the European Return Fund, the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and the federal provinces of Lower Austria, Carinthia and Tyrol, will come to a close at the end of June 2012. In order to assess the results and success of the project, an external evaluation of the project and a monitoring visit to Kosovo were recently undertaken.

The projects providing Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of returnees to the Russian Federation / the Chechen Republic (AVRR Chechnya) and Nigeria (AVRR Nigeria) were again chosen for funding by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and will be extended for an additional year starting on 01.07.2012. Participants from both projects who voluntarily returned before 30.06.2012 have until the end of the year to complete their reintegration measures. Participants who return after 01.07.2012 can be supported until 30.06.2013 within the new project phases.

The project “Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to Georgia” (AVRR Georgia) has been extended in its current form; voluntary returnees who return to Georgia before October 2012 can register to participate in the project.

Furthermore, the Department is happy to announce two new projects: The AVRR Afghanistan project started on 01.05.2012 and began supporting returnees to Afghanistan with various reintegration measures on 01.06.2012. In addition, the project AVRR CT Moldova, which aims to assist young trafficked and/or vulnerable persons from the Republic of Moldova with rehabilitation and reintegration measures, will begin on 01.07.2012. Beyond directly assisting returnees, the project’s goal is to increase cooperation between Austria and the Republic of Moldova as well as the capacities of Moldovan stakeholders.

We are looking forward to continuing the good cooperation with all of our partners through our current and upcoming projects and would like to take this opportunity to wish our readers a pleasant and relaxing summer!

Best regards,
The IOM Vienna Department for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration

* AVRR: Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
A Successful IOM Project Comes to an End: Return and Reintegration Assistance for Voluntary Returnees to Kosovo (AVRR Kosovo)

On 30 June 2012, the project “Return and Reintegration Assistance for Voluntary Returnees to Kosovo”, which has been implemented by IOM Vienna since 2008 in close cooperation with the IOM offices in Kosovo comes to an end. The project was co-funded by the European Return Fund, the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior (AT MoI) and the Austrian federal provinces of Lower Austria, Carinthia and Tyrol.

The goal of the project was to support voluntary returnees from the Austrian federal provinces of Lower Austria, Carinthia and Tyrol in their return to and socio-economic reintegration in Kosovo. This included support for starting small businesses (e.g. Event management, tailoring, bakery, catering, mechanical services, cab service, pharmacy, grocery shop, etc.) and for purchasing the materials and equipment needed to start the business. Emphasis was also put on training and job placement. Furthermore, additional assistance was available to particularly needy beneficiaries, for example through temporary accommodation or access to medical care.

By the end of June 2012, more than 300 people had participated in the project (128 participated in the first phase, 118 in the second phase, and 57 in the third phase). Most of the project participants opted to set up a business in the agricultural sector, as this constitutes the main source of income in the country. However, a significant number of beneficiaries chose to work in the areas of manual labour or the service sector.

Monitoring Mission to Kosovo:

As one of the steps of finalizing the project, a monitoring mission to Kosovo was carried out at the beginning of June 2012 to discuss and reflect on the provided reintegration assistance with selected beneficiaries.

Representatives from the AT MoI, the provincial government of Carinthia, the return counselling organizations Verein Menschenrechte Österreich and Caritas, and IOM Vienna participated in the mission. The trip began in the capital city Pristina, where the monitoring delegation met, amongst others, representatives from the Austrian Embassy to Kosovo, the Austrian Development Agency and institutions and authorities of the Republic of Kosovo concerned with the process of voluntary return and reintegration in Kosovo. Additionally, a visit to the Migrant Service Centre – an information and advice unit for migrants and returnees in the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of Kosovo – was scheduled.

Various visits to project participants led the monitoring delegation to regions all over Kosovo, including Kline, Peje and Gjakova in the west, Prizren, the second-biggest city, Rahovec and Dragash, the wine-making region of the country, and Kamenice, Gjilan, Viti and Ferizaj in the east of the country.

The visits to project beneficiaries and their businesses constituted the highlights of the mission. The vast spectrum of small businesses that had been set up or had expanded with the support of the AVRR project and now contribute substantially to the livelihoods of the returnees and their families offered everyone profound insight into the results of the project.

One of the project participants who the Austrian monitoring delegation met was Mr. H. He now lives in a remote village called Hodonoc in the region of Kamenice, where he returned to from Lower Austria one year ago. Mr. H. and his family have long-standing experience in cattle breeding and trading. They formerly owned 27 cows, which sustained their daily income. However, during the war, Mr. H. lost all his cattle and the family’s houses were burned down. In the search for possibilities to support his family and make up for the losses experienced during the war and the bad economic years thereafter, he decided to leave Kosovo. He then spent 6.5 years outside of Kosovo under very difficult conditions and without a work permit. For (Continuation on the next page)
this reason, Mr. H decided to voluntarily return to Kosovo in April 2011 and applied for participation in the AVRR Kosovo project. With the support from the project, he bought two pregnant cows, a lorry for the transport of the cattle and a multi-functional agricultural machine for the production of fodder. In the course of the past year, he and his brother and father managed to increase their stock from two to 24 cows. Now he plans to further expand his business with the purchase of 25 additional calves. Today, through the trading of the animals and the sale of cheese, the family obtains enough to cover their living expenses.

**External Evaluation:**

At the beginning of May 2012, IOM commissioned an external evaluation of the AVRR Kosovo project with the Kosovar research institution Riinvest. The overall goal of the evaluation was to assess IOM’s project implementation strategy. Under the consideration of economic, social and political indicators, the evaluating agency carried out interviews and focus group discussions with 30 project participants as well as Kosovar institutions and government representatives, a return counselling agency in Austria and IOM staff in both countries.

The main result of the evaluation showed that the project implementation strategy selected by IOM fits the national conditions, notwithstanding difficult external circumstances and an overall unfavourable economic environment in Kosovo (an unemployment rate of around 40% and a rapid inflationary trend). Furthermore, the cooperation between IOM and all relevant organizations was assessed to be satisfactory. The ‘case-management’ approach was found to be particularly beneficial, as it enables a decision for the most appropriate reintegration measure according to the actual needs of the individual returnee on a case by case basis.

More than 80% of the interviewed project beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with the reintegration assistance measures offered. The success of the project is furthermore underpinned by the fact that 93% of the interviewed project beneficiaries’ small businesses are still functional. It can thus be concluded that the support for business set-up initiatives is often the best way to address the needs of the voluntary returnees in Kosovo. The evaluation team suggested that measures of this kind should thus be encouraged in the future. Another important indicator for the impact, the success and the sustainability of the project is that 30% of the interviewed project beneficiaries were able to employ additional personnel. It is assumed that the employment of personnel and cooperation with pre-existing businesses can increase the chances of sustainable success of the selected business activity.

In conclusion, a very successful project that benefited a large number of voluntary returnees from Austria, their families as well as their wider social surroundings is coming to an end. The lessons learned within the framework of the project will provide a substantial contribution to the development and implementation of future projects in the area of voluntary return and reintegration.

IOM Vienna would like to take this opportunity to thank all involved stakeholders, the AT MoI, the Austrian federal provinces of Lower Austria, Carinthia and Tyrol, the return counselling organizations and all other supporters of the project!
“You are welcome to Nigeria”
Impressions from IOM Vienna’s monitoring visit to Nigeria

“You are welcome to Nigeria” – these words pervaded the hustle and bustle on the overcrowded streets of the megacity Lagos, and expressed the friendliness with which the monitoring delegation of the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior (AT MoI) and IOM Vienna was welcomed throughout its journey in Nigeria in May 2012.

The monitoring trip to Nigeria took place within the framework of the project “Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration for Nigerian Nationals in Austria” which is co-financed by the European Return Fund and the AT MoI. The aim was to
• observe the progress of the implementation of reintegration assistance in Nigeria,
• gather information on the socioeconomic situation regarding the reintegration of the project participants, and
• document experiences and best practices for current and future initiatives.

Apart from discussion rounds with selected project participants at the IOM Lagos office and visits to different businesses of selected project participants in Lagos and Benin City, the delegation met with representatives of the National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP), and visited the business training which was arranged for interested project participants by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN).

In conversations and interviews with 14 project participants, it became apparent that most of them had managed to gain ground in Nigeria with support of the reintegration assistance delivered. Nonetheless, the project participants face many challenges to setting up a successful and sustainable business such as high rents and extreme price fluctuations, which make it difficult to plan on mid- or long-term basis. Hence, prices that were specified in business plans may be outdated within a short period of time. In addition, long transportation routes and unreliable power supply can hinder success. Mr. I., who returned to Nigeria voluntarily in August 2011 and now runs a minimarket in Benin City, explained that many of his customers pass by his shop after work on their way home at dawn or night. If there is a power blackout, his shop remains in the dark and customers do not drop by. In order to prevent losses in profit, Mr. I. is now saving money to buy a generator to ensure power supply at all times.

Other challenges that project participants face include insufficient living conditions (many participants live at their friends’ or families’ residence) and expectations of family members, neighbours and friends that voluntary returnees come back from Europe as a “made man” or “made woman”.

Nevertheless, most of the returnees are glad to have found an alternative to their difficult situation in Austria. “There is no place like home”, as Mr. N. who had returned to Nigeria in October 2011 stated.

In Benin City the monitoring team met Mr. U. who had lived in Austria for seven and a half years and voluntarily returned to Nigeria in January 2012. Mr. U. decided to launch a transport business, and therefore acquired a minibus. After having serviced and registered the bus, Mr. U. started to deliver goods, as he had not yet received the seats for the bus in order to be able to transport persons. Mr. U. expected the seats to be delivered the day after the monitoring team’s visit. He had already registered at a bus stand where he will pick up his passengers.

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Mr. M. who returned voluntarily from Austria in February 2012 invited the monitoring delegation to visit his business. He has rented a small shop in a market hall where he sells electrical goods such as multi-use plugs, lamps and other items. Mr. M. originally comes from the federal state Kano in the north of Nigeria. However, due to the unstable security situation in Kano, he decided to stay in Lagos upon his arrival from Austria. He explained that it was difficult for him to become re-acquainted to life in Nigeria at the beginning. He has settled in now, but his financial situation is still unstable. “In Nigeria”, he tells his visitors, “I have a rest of mind, but not necessarily of money”. In his opinion, he would not have had a future in Austria. Before Mr. M. left Nigeria, he already had experience as a salesman but did not own a shop. With the project assistance he was able to rent a shop, where he and his employee sell goods to customers, who mostly stop by during weekdays.

IOM Lagos’ assistance to project participants is indispensable for the successful implementation of reintegration measures. The IOM Lagos team not only renders practical assistance (for example, in renting business premises, acquiring goods and so on), but also offers moral support to the project participants in order to facilitate their reintegration in Nigeria.

The monitoring team returned to Austria with a multitude of impressions that will be incorporated in the follow-up project, which will be implemented from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013. While the challenges for the returnees to socially and economically reintegrate in Nigeria are manifold, it became apparent that the project can make a valuable contribution to a successful new start in Nigeria.
Since May 2012, the IOM Vienna has been implementing a new project to support the return and reintegration of voluntary returnees, which is financed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior. In addition to existing projects in Georgia, Nigeria and the Russian Federation/Chechen Republic, IOM now also provides assistance to empower those who voluntarily return to Afghanistan by equipping them with a tailored set of socio-economic measures to facilitate their sustainable reintegration.

The project runs from 1 May 2012 until 30 June 2013 and foresees the participation of 25 voluntary returnees and their family members. During the 14 month implementation period, measures to support the returnees’ efforts to reintegrate into their home society will be provided in a participatory and consultative manner, taking into account the individual needs and skills of the participants.

Given IOM’s extensive field presence in Afghanistan, with offices in Kabul, Badakshan, Gardez, Herat, Kandahar, Kunduz, Mazar-I-Sharif, Bamyan and Jalalabad, the Organization is in a unique position to provide individualized reintegration assistance throughout the country.

Upon arrival in Kabul, each project participant receives a cash grant of EUR 500 for addressing immediate needs after the return to Afghanistan. Furthermore, each adult family member returning with the project participant receives an additional EUR 500 and each minor family member returning with the project participant receives EUR 250.

The reintegration assistance packages of up to EUR 3,500 in-kind per beneficiary can be used to open a small business, complete training or education and/or receive job placement assistance, etc, depending on the beneficiary’s educational and professional background and overall life situation, as well as the local situation. The reintegration grant will not be paid to the beneficiaries in cash, but will be paid directly to the selected suppliers, service providers or institutions. Special support for vulnerable cases can be provided e.g. through the reimbursement of medical expenditure against receipt.

To assess the progress of the reintegration assistance provided through the project, a monitoring visit will be organized by IOM Vienna to better understand the sustainability of reintegration and needs of project participants. Additionally, an IOM colleague from Afghanistan will be invited to Vienna to present their work at the “International Workshop for Return Counsellors” in fall 2012.

For further information about the AVRR Afghanistan project, please refer to the contact person at IOM Vienna Ms. Angelika Scherzer (ascherzer@iom.int, 01-585 33 22 24).
Success Stories from Georgia

Ms. R., 55 years old
Ms. R. had been living as recognized refugee in Vienna for almost ten years before her husband died in spring 2011 in Austria. This triggered Ms. R.’s decision to return voluntarily to Georgia and to go back to her remaining family members in September 2011.

After returning to Georgia, Ms. R. had several counselling sessions with IOM colleagues in Tbilisi to discuss her reintegration plan. Although Ms. R. was originally educated as a lawyer and had worked as a hotel manager, she decided to join the agricultural holding of her son-in-law. She used the reintegration allowance of the project “Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to Georgia”, which is co-financed by the European Return Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, to purchase two calves and three bee colonies, including beehives and bee feeds.

Ms. R., who primarily lived in Tbilisi before coming to Austria, has now settled in Ghogheti, a village in the Kareli District about 100 kilometres northwest of Tbilisi. Living in the countryside has helped her to re-acustom herself to life in Georgia, she says. At the farm, Ms. R. supports the parents of her son-in-law through agricultural activities and is responsible for the production and the sale of milk and honey. After a cold winter that delayed the expected harvest of milk and honey, the project beneficiary was happy about her first proper crop in spring.

During a monitoring visit of the reintegration team of IOM Tbilisi, Ms. R. reported that it was initially difficult to find her way around in Georgia after the long time she had spent abroad. However, Ms. R. also said that she was satisfied with her current living conditions and that she enjoyed being reunited with her family. In particular, her regular visit to her daughter and grandchildren in Tbilisi give her strength to go on with life. She was very thankful for the support that she received in the framework of the project.

Mr. M., 41 years old
Mr. M. had been living for half a year as an asylum seeker in Lower Austria before he returned voluntarily to Georgia with the assistance of IOM in November 2011. He is now living together again with his wife and their children as well as his parents at his former residence in Rustavi, about 30 kilometres southeast of Tbilisi.

The project beneficiary, who studied economics and had worked in the transport business before he left Georgia, decided to enter into a business partnership: A relative who owns three successful bakeries tasked Mr. M with the management of the stores. He used the reintegration assistance provided by IOM in the framework of the project to purchase several tons of flour. The latter is used for producing Greek Lavash, a very popular but rarely available bread in Georgia. Apart from his function as director of the three branches of the bakery, Mr. M. occasionally works as a truck driver in the Caucasus region.

In the course of a monitoring visit in May 2012, the colleagues from IOM Tbilisi were able to assess Mr. M.’s living conditions. Together with his wife, who works as a teacher, he earns enough to provide for the whole family. Mr. M’s found his participation in the project to be very helpful for him and his family.
Additional Assistance for Particularly Vulnerable Returnees to the Chechen Republic

Various forms of assistance are available to returnees who participate in the project “Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to the Russian Federation / the Chechen Republic”, which is co-funded by the European Return Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior. In addition to receiving EUR 500 for covering immediate living costs and a EUR 2000 in-kind reintegration grant, project beneficiaries also have the possibility to apply for special assistance if they are found to be particularly vulnerable, i.e. due to sickness, lack of accommodation, etc.

This additional support assists particularly needy beneficiaries to bridge the gap until they begin earning regular income, which usually takes a number of months following their return, depending on the chosen form of assistance.

This additional assistance is flexible and can be used to meet the specific needs of the individual. Generally, the assistance is usually used to either cover medical costs, i.e. reimbursing costs for medication, paying for medical consultations or hospital stays, etc, or for improving the beneficiaries’ living conditions, i.e. paying the first few months rent or purchasing necessary furnishings, such as a bed, a refrigerator, an oven, an electric heater, or a bathroom with bathtub and sink.

Returnees' needs are first identified in Austria by return counselling organizations, which discuss potential returnees' perspectives with them and introduce them to the project. If they are interested in participating in the project, potential beneficiaries fill out the application for project participation, which includes information about their medical needs and expected place of living.

In addition to these counselling sessions, IOM Vienna conducts individual interviews with the majority of project beneficiaries prior to their return in order to clarify the project and identify specific needs of the beneficiaries. After their return, the local partner organization Vesta visits beneficiaries at home and assesses their living conditions and immediate needs. If Vesta finds that the beneficiary is especially in need of support, a request with details of the person’s needs and the level of the requested assistance are submitted to IOM Vienna for approval.

In order to provide the best support possible to project beneficiaries, the type and level of assistance is based on the needs of the individual at hand.

For example, Ms. U. returned to the Chechen Republic with her husband and six children in November 2011. They now live with her aunt in her brother-in-law’s house. The house has no bathroom and Ms. U. had to wash the clothes of her eight family members outside in the yard. With the assistance of IOM, the family was able to install a warm water boiler and a washing machine, which has significantly improved her daily routine.

This is only one case of many vulnerable project beneficiaries who have received assistance to reduce their vulnerability through the project. Between July 2011 and June 2012, 46 of the 111 total project beneficiaries received additional assistance.
Reintegration in the Republic of Moldova is especially difficult for minors and young adults who return home alone. Due to the socio-economic conditions in the country and lack of economic perspectives, this group is particularly susceptible to falling victim to human trafficking, especially if they have interrupted their education or live in a difficult family situation. Above all, people who have already been trafficked are prone to being exploited again.

In order to address this phenomenon, IOM Vienna will be heading a new project starting on 1 July 2012: “Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Minors and Young Adults from Moldova with emphasis on the Prevention of (Re-)Trafficking” (abbreviation: AVRR CT Moldova), which is co-funded by the European Return Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior.

The goal of this project is to assist trafficked persons who return from Austria in their rehabilitation and reintegration in the Republic of Moldova and to prevent the trafficking of young, vulnerable persons. In order to realize this, the project builds on three pillars:

1. Exchange and networking among relevant actors from the Republic of Moldova and Austria;
2. Capacity building of Moldovan service providers who assist children and (potentially) trafficked persons; and
3. Rehabilitation and reintegration of young adults who voluntarily return to the Republic of Moldova and of minors in whose best interest it is to return to the Republic of Moldova.

In order to enable exchange between Austria and the Republic of Moldova, a Steering Committee comprised of Austrian and Moldovan stakeholders will be established. The Steering Committee will serve as a platform for formal exchange and provide input for deepening transnational cooperation to combat human trafficking on the operational level. Also for this purpose, three study visits will take place within the project: two to the Republic of Moldova and one to Austria.

Although the Republic of Moldova already has a comprehensive National Referral Mechanism for referring trafficked persons to competent institutions and service providers, there are still deficiencies in terms of financial capacities of local centres and institutions providing assistance. For example, it is difficult to ensure that specialized staff of these institutions receives additional training. Through the project, up to 100 psychologists and social workers should receive training on providing counselling to abused, neglected and exploited minors.

In addition, the project will provide support for the rehabilitation and reintegration of up to 15 minors and young adults. As minors and adults have different needs, they will receive slightly different assistance measures through the project. Prior to the return of a minor, family tracing can be undertaken, if necessary, by the IOM office in Chisinau. After the return, a crisis intervention will be undertaken in order to meet the child's immediate needs, such as temporary accommodation and/or medical and psychological assistance. Furthermore, a reintegration plan tailored to the needs of the individual will be drafted with the assistance of a counsellor. Emphasis will be placed on education. If possible, it is preferred that minors return to their families in the Republic of Moldova.

Adult beneficiaries will receive assistance for temporary and, if necessary, long-term accommodation as well as medical and/or psychological assistance. They will also prepare a reintegration plan with the assistance of a counsellor. In addition, adults have the possibility to receive business training and in-kind assistance for starting a small business.

All rehabilitation and reintegration measures for both target groups will be implemented within the framework of the National Referral Mechanism.

Through these activities, the project aims not only to help young, vulnerable Moldovan returnees from Austria, but also to strengthen the existing system to combat human trafficking in the Republic of Moldova so that trafficked persons receive the assistance they require and that preventative measures against human trafficking are undertaken.

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