Starting over again is never easy. Many migrants who choose to return home have very few financial resources and are often faced with high expectations of family and friends who assume that they have earned a significant amount of money while they were abroad. These personal financial and social challenges are frequently coupled with an overall difficult economic situation in the country of return. Altogether, these factors combine to hinder returnees’ abilities to re-establish their lives.

However, experience gained from IOM’s reintegration projects in various countries shows that it is indeed possible for returnees to successfully re-establish themselves following their voluntary return. IOM’s reintegration projects concentrate on creating a sustainable source of income for returnees, which increases their chances of success. As job vacancies are often few and far between, the assistance often takes the form of small business start-ups. Different individuals and countries have different situations and challenges to face; there is consequently no “one size fits all” solution. Nevertheless, certain business ideas and patterns of behaviour can be identified that contribute to the likelihood that returnees will realize their goals.

Above all, returnees who participate in IOM’s reintegration projects need to have realistic expectations for their businesses and be willing to put in a lot of hard work. Understanding the overall market situation and the possibilities available through the reintegration grant enables returnees to make the right decision on what kind of business to establish. It is important that returnees and their families understand that success does not happen by itself: it needs the right starting point and sufficient motivation.

This newsletter issue provides the individual stories of a number of people who have participated in IOM Vienna’s reintegration projects in order to illuminate the personal hurdles and challenges that they successfully faced after returning home. As these narratives show, returning home is a financial, social, and often psychological challenge. However, with a bit of start-up assistance and a great deal of drive and will-power, it is possible to overcome these difficulties and establish a means of existence at home.
ORS Service GmbH has been an important stakeholder in the area of AVRR in Austria since 2012. IOM Vienna had the opportunity to interview ORS about their work in June 2013.

IOM: When was ORS Service GmbH founded, in which provinces is it active and what are some of its core activities?

ORS: ORS has been active in Austria since 2012 and assists asylum seekers in the federal reception centres funded by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (MoI) (in Lower Austria: Initial Reception Centre East in Traiskirchen, Reception Centre South in Reichenau; in Upper Austria: Reception Centre North in Bad Kreuzen, Reception Centre West in St. Georgen im Attergau; Reception Centre Mitte in Vienna).

Within this function, ORS provides counselling and support (psychological, accommodation placement, subsistence costs, extracurricular activities, etc.) as well as primary medical care and pedagogical activities (workshops, German courses). Another support measure is return counselling, which is available to residents in all five federal reception centres who wish to return home; information is available under the return counselling hotline: 0800 20 30 40.

IOM: How do clients find out about return counselling and what is the procedure?

ORS: Asylum seekers learn about the option of voluntary return either from advertising posters and brochures or within country-specific meetings in the reception centres and from their respective return counsellors, if they express their wish to voluntarily return.

If a client living in a reception center wishes to return voluntarily and fills out an application that is subsequently approved by the MoI, he or she is transferred to the reception center in Traiskirchen. This facilitates the necessary administrative procedures (appointments with the embassy, trip to the airport, etc.), as these tasks can be more easily carried out from Traiskirchen. As soon as all the necessary documents are available (e.g. travel documents), a flight is booked through IOM. On the day of the return, our clients are brought to the airport in Vienna, where they are met by IOM colleagues and accompanied to the gate.

IOM: How many clients do you receive weekly and what are the main countries of origin?

ORS: The weekly rate of clients interested in voluntary return varies depending on a number of factors, including the country of origin of the asylum seekers. The most relevant countries of origin at the moment are Kosovo and the Russian Federation, but an increasing number of Iraqis and North Africans are choosing the option of voluntary return.

IOM: How do your clients react to IOM’s projects on voluntary return and reintegration?

ORS: The IOM projects are very much welcomed by our (Continued on the next page.)
clients. From the very beginning, we provide them with adequate information. If desired, we can also organize an appointment between the beneficiary and the IOM project coordinator (together with an interpreter) either at the reception centre or at the IOM office. This has been implemented for beneficiaries from Pakistan, Georgia and Moldova.

**IOM:** In your opinion, to what extent do the projects cover the needs of the target group?

**ORS:** The project participants submit an application, which is clarified before they fill it out. The application form allows clients to provide information on what support they will need most in their country of origin and how they intend to use the reintegration grant (vocational trainings, further education, business start-ups, etc.). Experience from previous projects has shown that the returnees’ needs are well met and that the projects run successfully.

**IOM:** Do you maintain contact with your clients after their return?

**ORS:** We keep in contact with some of the returnees through electronic media such as email or Skype.

**IOM:** Do you and your colleagues have any suggestions for the improvement of the return and reintegration projects?

**ORS:** The existing projects are well structured and cover the participants’ needs. Our wish would be for similar projects to be available to voluntary returnees from North African countries.

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**An emotional return to Georgia: Ms. W. tells her story**

Ms. W., 29 years old, returned with her little daughter to Gori in Georgia in March 2013 with the assistance of the project “Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to Georgia”. IOM Vienna asked her in June how she feels now after her return:

**IOM:** How did you experience your arrival in Georgia after deciding to return voluntarily?

**Ms. W.**: It was not easy and it was very emotional to return home.

**IOM:** Looking back, what are your thoughts on your decision to return to Georgia?

**Ms. W.**: As I said, it was not easy, but I am proud of my decision. I am looking forward to the time when my hopes will be met.

**IOM:** So far, what were the most beautiful moments and hardest challenges you faced?

**Ms. W.**: Meeting my family was a beautiful moment. The moment my daughter saw her father, this was a real miracle. The most difficult moment was missing the people who are now far away from me. I miss my daily life in Austria.

**IOM:** How was the first counselling in the IOM office in Tbilisi? What was helpful about it?

**Ms. W.**: In the beginning I felt very confused, but I received a great deal of help from IOM. The first meeting was very successful. The project is really well organized and the IOM staff is professional and friendly.

**IOM:** What did you use the reintegration assistance for and how is it going?

**Ms. W.**: We bought a used car, a Ford Transit, to transport the vegetable and fruit from my in-laws’ farm to the market. We have a lot of tomatoes, apples, strawberries, apricots and grapes. The market is 300 km away and before we had to pay somebody for the transport. Meanwhile, my husband got his driving license and now all of us always drive together in the car. I also help on the farm, because we are only four and there is always something to do. It was great to buy the car with the support of the project, because in the beginning I did not really know what to do.

**IOM:** Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding the project?

**Ms. W.**: The project is very well organized, I couldn’t think of any comments or suggestions.

**IOM:** What would you advise other returnees, who are still in Austria?

**Ms. W.**: I wish other returnees who are still in Austria good luck! I would like all immigrants to return to Georgia. I see a big difference between Georgia and Austria. It is not easy to start a new life, but I am confident that we can achieve it. This is our home after all!
Mr. R. is from a village in the western part of Moldova. The landscape of the region resembles rural Lower Austria: rolling green hills and vineyards as far as the eye can see. Only the occasional horse and carriage and drinking wells with hand-cranks or levers reveal that the scenery is not Austrian, but rather Moldovan.

In spite of the idyllic scenery, the economic situation in the region is dire. Due to the lack of jobs in his village, Mr. R. moved to the capital of Chisinau and began selling Chupa Chups lollipops for a living; however, the income from his sales was only enough to pay for his rent and nothing else. Frustrated with his inability to make ends meet in Moldova, Mr. R. migrated to Moscow, where he hoped to earn enough money to support himself and his family through construction work. After working for three months and only earning a pittance of EUR 190, Mr. R. decided to try his luck in Austria, where he had heard that there were job opportunities. However, upon arrival in Austria he learned that he would be unable to find work without a work permit. Again faced with economic insecurity, Mr. R. decided in January 2013 that his best option would be to return home to Moldova.

Based on his young age and vulnerable economic situation, which exposed him to the risk of trafficking for labour exploitation, Mr. R. was eligible to receive reintegration assistance from IOM through the AVRR CT Moldova* project. The project aims to socially and economically empower minors and young adults who voluntarily return to Moldova from Austria in order to lower their probability of being (re-)trafficked.

When two IOM Vienna colleagues visited Mr. R. in June 2013, they met a strong, young entrepreneur with a plan for his future. Through the assistance of the project, Mr. R. had purchased 50 sheep as well as building materials for a barn and agricultural equipment for gathering fodder. Mr. R. also received a business training in order to learn the basics of sales, marketing, accounting, and other necessary skills for running a business.

Mr. R. said that his sheep had almost immediately provided him with an income. Through the sale of meat, sheep’s cheese and lambs, Mr. R. now earns EUR 600 a month, which is enough to cover his costs of living and contribute to his family’s income. Mr. R.’s long-term goal is to increase his flock to 500 sheep, a feat that he estimates will take him four to five years. He also mentioned the possibility of buying a special Dutch breed of sheep that is said to produce four times more milk than his sheep, which would further boost his profits.

His most immediate plans, however, do not involve his business: Mr. R. intends to marry his girlfriend and start a family of his own. Although the wedding is not yet official, Mr. R. was very keen to invite the IOM Vienna colleagues to attend the festivities.

Mr. R. stated that he is very glad to be back in Moldova and that his mother is overjoyed that he no longer has to leave the country to find work. According to Mr. R., “If I hadn’t received the assistance to purchase the sheep, I would have had to return to Moscow to search for work.”

*Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Minors and Young Adults from Moldova with emphasis on the Prevention of (Re-)Trafficking
Mr. A. and Mr. K. came to Austria in summer 2012 in search for a more secure and stable life. In Austria, however, they quickly realized that their hopes and dreams connected with a better life abroad might not come true in the near future. The assistance of IOM’s AVRR Afghanistán* project gave them new hope and motivated them to restart their lives in Afghanistan. Mr. A. and Mr. K. voluntarily returned to Afghanistan on 13 November 2012.

It was during this journey that they got to know each other. They talked about the plans they had for the IOM project and realized that they were both experienced in the construction sector and had both thought about restarting their work in this field.

Mr. K. had amassed years of experience in the construction sector and Mr. A. is a plumber with knowledge and experience in shuttering buildings and construction services. During their discussions, they saw that they would perfectly complement each other in a business partnership. Thinking economically, they calculated that a partnership would enable them to set up a larger and more sustainable business.

A couple of weeks after arrival in Afghanistan, they consulted IOM in Kabul and presented their idea. The IOM colleagues in Kabul briefed them about the documents required to set up their business and about the detailed assistance process. With all information at hand, Mr. A. and Mr. K. consulted with their families about their decision and agreed on the details of their partnership. They decided to establish a business offering shuttering building services for construction work. Their services focus on building shuttering for the construction of new buildings and the renovation of old buildings. According to their information, there is a growing demand for these services, as the construction and reconstruction sector is growing in Kabul.

Since Mr. A. and Mr. K. both brought in essential skills and the same amount of money to the business through the IOM assistance, they agreed on an equal share in profits and expenses. When the final decision about the partnership was made, Mr. K. rented a shop, obtained a business license and they both worked out a detailed business plan and provided all required documents to IOM in Kabul. After they had made the necessary preparations, IOM assisted them in purchasing the jacks for building the shuttering.

The plans of the two returnees turned out to be realistic and after three months of implementing their business, Mr. A. explained "...now we have a good combination in the business. If we have plumbing works, I do it and when I am free I work with Mr. K. in shuttering." The business is profitable and brings both business partners enough income to sustain themselves and their families. Mr. K explained "I am busy in the construction sector and earn sufficient income for my family, while in Austria I didn’t have work permit and had an unproductive life."

*Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to Afghanistan

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