



# AVRR Newsletter

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration from Austria

Winter 2012/13 Issue 6

## International Workshop for Return Counsellors

For the third consecutive year, the “*International Workshop for Return Counsellors*” took place in the Grand Auditorium of the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior in Vienna from 22 to 23 November 2012. The workshop was jointly organized by the IOM Country Office Vienna and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior. Besides IOM colleagues from Switzerland, Afghanistan, Georgia, Nigeria, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation as well as representatives of NGO Vesta, the organizers were happy about the active participation of return counsellors from Caritas, ORS Service GmbH, Verein Menschenrechte Österreich and Verein Menschen.Leben, as well as of representatives of the Swiss Federal Office of Migration, the Austrian Federal Asylum Office, the Nigerian Embassy in Vienna, the National Association of Nigerian Community Austria and from other institutions.

The event aimed to enhance the direct information exchange between return counsellors and IOM colleagues who assist clients in the framework of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration projects coordinated by IOM Vienna. During the two days, attendees had the opportunity to discuss specific questions about the projects directly with IOM staff and gather information on the socio-economic conditions in the respective countries of return.

As in previous years, the respective project coordinators from IOM Vienna and their colleagues from the countries of return presented the projects co-financed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and the European Return Fund by way of informative presentations, whereby special attention was given to the successes and challenges related to the implementation of the reintegration measures. In addition, the activities and preliminary results of two other AVRR projects implemented by IOM – VREN, which aims at the creation of a European Return Network, and MAGNET, which assists voluntary returnees from Austria, Belgium, France and the Netherlands with job placements in Iraq/the Kurdistan Region – were presented.

This year’s workshop added the innovative element of country-specific working groups, which lent the workshop a more interactive. The working groups focused on the various steps of the reintegration process and challenges to reintegration in the respective country-specific context based on concrete case studies. Furthermore, the format of the small working groups offered an opportunity to further enhance the flow of information between return counsellors and IOM colleagues and to ask questions concerning the living conditions in Afghanistan, Georgia, Nigeria, the Republic of Moldova and the Chechen Republic.

The organizers were very satisfied with the progress and the results of the workshop. “*The International Workshop for Return Counsellors has established itself as an important forum for transnational exchange concerning Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration, and the interest of Austrian stakeholders in meeting reintegration counsellors from the countries of origin is high*”, the Head of the Department for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration at IOM Vienna, Ms. Andrea Götzelmann, said.

Altogether, the workshop was a great success, as the positive feedback that participants provided proved.

## In this issue:

International Workshop for Return Counsellors

New Project: AVRR Pakistan

AVRR Nigeria: Interview with IOM Nigeria

AVRR Afghanistan: Interview with VMÖ

AVRR Georgia: Monitoring Trip

AVRR CT Moldova: Project Trip

AVRR Chechnya: Monitoring



© IOM 2012



© IOM 2012

**Department for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration**

IOM Country Office Vienna

Nibelungengasse 13/4

1010 Vienna

+43 (0) 1 585 3322 24

[avrr.vienna@iom.int](mailto:avrr.vienna@iom.int)

**BM.I**  REPUBLIK ÖSTERREICH  
BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR INNERES



# New Project: Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to Pakistan



Since 1 December 2012, IOM Vienna has been implementing a new project which is financed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, and now supports returnees to Pakistan with various reintegration measures in Pakistan. The project will run for a period of 12 months until 30 November 2013 and foresees the participation of up to 30 people who will be assisted with in-kind reintegration measures worth up to € 3000. In addition to this in-kind assistance, € 300 per returning family member will be provided in cash to cover the initial costs of living. Moreover, persons with immediate needs can make use of special assistance measures such as medical assistance or temporary housing.

**Target group:** Within the project, persons who are (i) asylum seekers, (ii) rejected asylum seekers, (iii) recognized refugees, (iv) persons under subsidiary protection or (v) persons who do not or no longer fulfill the conditions for stay in Austria and who wish to voluntarily return to Pakistan will be assisted in their voluntary return as well as their sustainable reintegration in Pakistan.

## IOM in Pakistan:

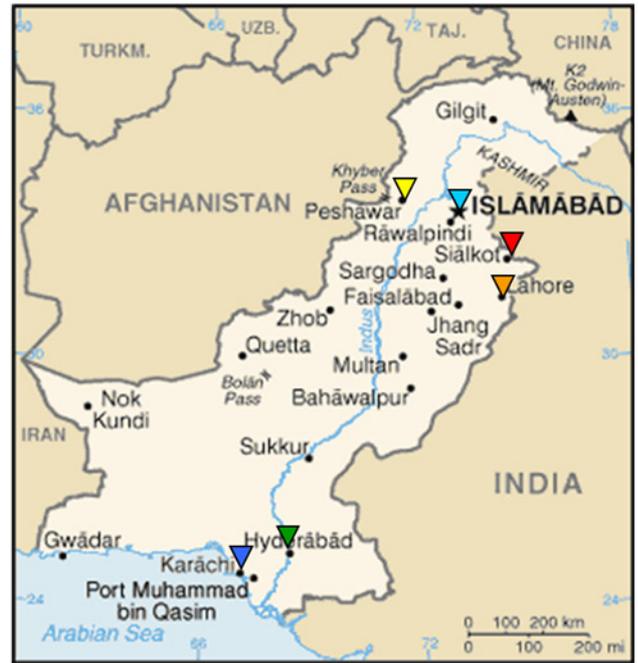
With its main office in Islamabad as well as five sub-offices (Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, Mirpur and Hyderabad), IOM in Pakistan has a wide presence in the country, which contributes substantially to providing the project participants with the best possible individual support.

IOM coordinates all activities with the return counsellors and is available for any questions regarding the project. An International Workshop for Return Counsellors is expected to be organized in autumn 2013. In addition to the regular monitoring in Pakistan that is conducted by IOM in Pakistan, a monitoring trip will take place in order to collect information on the provided reintegration assistance.

*In addition to Afghanistan, Georgia, Moldova, Nigeria and the Russian Federation/Chechen Republic, IOM now also supports the reintegration of voluntary returnees to Pakistan through various socio-economic measures.*

## For further information please contact:

Ms. Daniela Blecha, Project Coordinator AVRR Pakistan  
International Organization for Migration  
Nibelungengasse 13/4  
1010 Vienna  
E-mail: [avrr.vienna@iom.int](mailto:avrr.vienna@iom.int)  
Tel: 01 / 585 33 22 14



IOM offices in Pakistan. © CIA World Factbook

*This project is financed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior.*

## AVRR Nigeria: Monitoring project implementation

*During the recently held "International Workshop for Return Counsellors", which was jointly organized by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and the IOM Country Office Vienna in November 2012, the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Team of IOM Vienna was delighted to welcome their colleague Winnie at this event. Barbara Albrecht, coordinator of the project "Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Nigerian Nationals in Austria" (AVRR Nigeria) took the opportunity to conduct an interview with Winnie on the margins of the workshop.*

**Barbara:** Welcome to Vienna, Winnie! Please briefly introduce yourself and IOM in Nigeria.

**Winnie:** My name is Winnie and I head the IOM sub-office in Lagos. IOM has two offices in Nigeria. The main office is located in the capital Abuja and has 24 staff in total. In Lagos we have nine staff working on different voluntary return and reintegration projects.

**Barbara:** Could you give an introduction of how IOM Lagos carries out monitoring in the framework of the AVRR Nigeria project?

**Winnie:** Monitoring is an important aspect in the framework of the projects we run. We usually maintain continuous contact with the AVRR Nigeria project participants when we assist them in implementing their reintegration assistance. At the same time, it is very important to collect information in a standardized and comparable way. To this end, we use two monitoring forms. One is filled out shortly after the voluntary return and the other a couple of months later after the

implementation of the reintegration assistance has taken place. For IOM Lagos it is essential that we visit the businesses as this is how we can best assess the business. If we monitor by phone, we cannot properly assess and report on the socio-economic situation of the person.

**Barbara:** How does IOM Lagos staff get in touch with project participants?

**Winnie:** Normally we call participants in advance to inform them that we will visit them sometime soon. We usually don't exactly specify the date or time. Often we already know the location of the businesses and stop by at any given time. If we cannot find the location, we ask the participants to wait at a landmark that everybody knows.

**Barbara:** Do the project participants look forward to your visits?

**Winnie:** The participants know that they will only get the final installment of the in-kind reintegration grant after the monitoring has taken place. Some are happy for us to come visit while others say: "Don't worry. I'll give you the picture of the business." For such cases, we smile and explain that we still need to see and meet them personally. Once we know that participants would like us to contact them, we certainly do. We often also keep in touch even after project has closed.

**Barbara:** How do participants react to the monitoring forms?

**Winnie:** Sometimes they think they are too long but in general they don't complain. We try to explain to project participants that we need and want to know how they are doing. Also the donors want to know how they were able to settle down after their voluntary return to Nigeria, what challenges or difficulties they faced or whether it was easy to reintegrate. This information is also relevant in terms of identifying recommendations and improvements for future projects and for others who consider coming back to Nigeria. The more information is available on the results of the project, the more the trust in the project is enhanced among all sides.



© IOM 2012

Barbara and Winnie with examples of Nigeria success stories.

**Barbara:** Do you have any suggestions for improvement with regard to the AVRR Nigeria project?

**Winnie:** One of our ideas is to create peer groups of project participants to exchange notes and discuss in a group on how to improve their businesses. Someone who is doing well can advise others – for example on best business practices, how to obtain a business registration or on the process of renting a shop. IOM in Nigeria seeks to engage closer with the Nigerian government. Our Chief of Mission systematically exchanges with the government in Abuja; at the same time it is important that the government gets more involved in the field of voluntary return and reintegration in order to further assist the returnees after they have received support from the countries they have returned from. We hope our efforts in this regard will bear fruit.

**Barbara:** Thank you so much for these valuable insights, Winnie! On a different note, you have just attended the International Workshop for Return Counsellors here in Vienna. What are your impressions?

**Winnie:** The workshop was very interesting and provided a great opportunity to exchange and network! I would like to commend the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and my IOM colleagues on this event. In addition to the interactive working groups that were held this year, one recommendation for future workshops is to actively involve return counsellors even more. It would be interesting to learn about the challenges they face and how they think IOM can assist in overcoming those challenges.

**Barbara:** Thank you so much for your time and your suggestions!

*This project is co-financed by the European Return Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior.*

## AVRR Afghanistan: Interview with the return counselling organization “Verein Menschenrechte Österreich”

In May 2012 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Country Office in Vienna began implementing the project “Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to Afghanistan”, which is financed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior (AT Mol).

The organization “Verein Menschenrechte Österreich (VMÖ)” is one of the main actors in the field of return counselling in Austria. Due to IOM’s close cooperation with VMÖ in the framework of this and other projects, IOM staff members Angelika Scherzer and Andrea Götzelmann conducted an interview with the director of VMÖ, Günter Ecker, and Dilyana Borisova, head of the VMÖ return counselling office. The interview was held on 25 October 2012 at the office of VMÖ in Vienna.



Dilyana Borisova, Head of the VMÖ voluntary return office (front right), with return counsellors from Afghanistan.

**IOM: Since when does Verein Menschenrechte Österreich exist and what are its fields of work?**

Günter Ecker: Verein Menschenrechte Österreich has existed as a registered organization since October 2002. It has been operationally active in the field of support of asylum seekers and migrants since March 2003. The starting point was the support of persons in detention pending deportation in Vienna and Upper Austria, as well as return counselling in the Austrian federal provinces of Burgenland and Lower Austria, which was financed by the European Refugee Fund. Today we employ about 100 staff members and are active in all Austrian federal provinces.

**IOM: How does VMÖ coordinate with other organizations that are active in a similar field of work?**

Günter Ecker: Every now and again, we have individual cases that require coordination with other return counselling organizations, like Caritas. This works relatively easily. However, it’s not usually the case that return counselling organizations seek agreement on how return counseling is carried out.

**IOM: How do your clients usually learn about the return counselling?**

Günter Ecker: Either through their counsellors in detention pending deportation, through counselling in the Dublin procedure or legal counselling, as well as through other NGOs, state authorities or from people in the diaspora who, for example, know someone who has already returned. Our staff or people from the client’s social network are the main source of information.

**IOM: Do you have counsellors who speak the native languages of the clients from the various countries of origin?**

Günter Ecker: We definitely cover the most important languages. We recently hired a number of people who speak Afghan languages. It is part of our recruitment policy to specifically look for employees who have a language profile that corresponds with the profile of our clients. We therefore only depend on interpreters in selected languages. We have to adapt to the changes within our cliental structure. It doesn’t make sense, for example, to have a well qualified team of people who speak Serbo-Croatian, and meet clients from Afghanistan or Pakistan.

**IOM: How many clients receive return counselling per week at an average? How many of them are from Afghanistan?**

Günter Ecker: Right now we are in the process of compiling comprehensive statistics on our cliental turnover. In 2011 we had 2,560 new return procedures and in the same year we were able to close 1,855 of these procedures with a voluntary return. This demonstrates a return rate of 79%. With regard to the 2012 statistics the return rate at the end of August was 80%; this means that during the first eight months 1,238 returnees left Austria. The number of returnees to Afghanistan is slightly increasing.

Dilyana Borisova: In the year 2011 VMÖ supported 51 returnees to Afghanistan, mainly men travelling alone. This year we have had 35 people so far. I suppose that this number will increase by the end of the year.

**IOM: How do you explain the increasing number of voluntary returnees to Afghanistan?**

Günter Ecker: Currently we can’t explain it. At the moment we can only state that it is possible to return to some parts of the country. I think we have to regard this in a differentiated way. The place and surroundings in Afghanistan to which a person returns are probably important factors on which returnees base their decisions.

**IOM: How do your clients react to the project “Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to Afghanistan”?**

Dilyana Borisova: The returnees react very positively to the project. Certainly there is also a little skepticism and insecurity as to whether the promised support measures will be definitely received in Afghanistan. As soon as more people have participated in the project, the knowledge and the experiences that the money and the assistance are provided as promised will spread.

(continued on the next page)

**IOM: In how well would you say does the project meet the needs of the target group?**

*Dilyana Borisova:* Generally speaking it is a good project. Currently the immediate needs upon return are very well covered through the payment of the project cash grant. With time it will become more apparent how well the needs of the clients are in fact covered. In one year we will see if there are success stories of returnees and how the project could support the returnees. It is still too early to draw any reliable conclusions.

**IOM: Do you stay in touch with your clients after their return?**

*Dilyana Borisova:* Within one to two weeks after their return we call the clients to ask how they arrived. So far all of them have reported that they were received by IOM and that they obtained the promised cash grant of EUR 500. They told us that afterwards they got in touch with one of the IOM offices and that they further discussed their plans for their future and what kind of business they wanted to start.

*Günter Ecker:* This monitoring is a kind of quality management for us to see if, following their return, anything happened that didn't work out well and should be improved. This doesn't only concern the countries where reintegration projects are implemented; we make contact with every returnee, no matter if he/she returned for example to Colombia, China or Afghanistan.

**IOM: Which suggestions do you and your colleagues have with regard to the improvement of the project?**

*Günter Ecker:* We are very glad when the support promised in Austria is available soon after the return. This seems to be the case in this project. Of course there is a lot that can be done to promote voluntary return and – in the specific case of Afghanistan – to make it safer. In the end, the main moments of decision are separate and don't have anything to do with VMÖ or IOM; such as the overall political situation in Afghanistan, where it is not clear in which direction it will turn.

**IOM: Thank you very much for your feedback and your time!**

*This project is financed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior.*

## Monitoring trip to Georgia

As reported in the last newsletter issue, a monitoring trip to Georgia took place from 22 to 25 October 2012 within the framework of the project "Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to Georgia". The delegation consisted of two staff members of the IOM Country Office Vienna and two representatives of the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior. The aim of the trip was to gain a deeper understanding of the project's progress and the living conditions of project participants after their return in order to identify possible improvements that could be made to the project.



A project participant runs a market stand together with her mother in Rustavi.

The delegation travelled from Tbilisi, the country's capital, to Rustavi, a city in southern Georgia near the Armenian and Azerbaijani border which is known for its steel production, as well as to Kareli district, a region strongly characterized by agriculture. Through conversing with the returnees, it became clear that the agricultural sector is especially profitable for the use of the reintegration assistance due to the high demand for milk and meat products as well as for eggs and honey in the country. The visits to selected participants showed that the country's economical situation, which is marked by high unemployment and low purchasing power, constitutes a significant challenge. Some of the persons visited by the delegation had given up the business they had set up in the framework of this project because the income or demand had turned out to be lower than initially expected. Others, however, had been able to expand their business continually and meanwhile earned enough to financially maintain not just themselves, but also their families. The central finding of the monitoring visit is that – in addition to the reintegration assistance – initiative and patience on the part of the returnees is necessary to be successful in the labor market. Business partnerships proved again to be recommendable options when using the reintegration assistance, as they allow building upon existing businesses.

The agenda included not only meetings with project participants but also with relevant stakeholders. Caritas Georgia reported on a similar project aiming to assist voluntary returnees from Belgium; the Mobility Center in Tbilisi which is located at the "Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons" presented its work regarding the support of returnees from different European countries, including Austria; and an employee of the Job Counselling and Placement Centre run by IOM explained how project participants can receive assistance through vocational counselling and job placement. Furthermore, exchange about the implementation of the project and the identification of synergies with relevant Austrian representatives in Georgia took place, for example with the Consul General in Georgia, Ms. E. Berger, the Austrian Police Attaché, Mr. A. Neumüller and the head of the office of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) in Tbilisi, Mr. A. Bohr.

*This project is co-financed by the European Return Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior.*

## Understanding Human Trafficking in Moldova

According to the Moldovan National Bureau of Statistics, the average monthly salary in the country is approximately EUR 200. Even with an academic education, it is difficult to find a job that covers the costs of living. This precarious economic situation motivates many Moldovan citizens to migrate abroad where they can often earn sufficient money to send back to their families. The Moldovan Ministry of Economy states that these remittances reduced absolute poverty in Moldova by 11.9% in 2009.

However, while labour migration can provide a means of economic survival, it also carries risks for both the migrant and their family members left behind. First, mass labour migration implies an increased risk of human trafficking for labour and/or sexual exploitation. Indeed, while trafficking in the past has usually been for the purpose of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation appears to be on the rise for Moldovan citizens.<sup>1</sup> Second, these migration movements often negatively affect Moldovan families left in the country, as children are left with only one parent or in the care of a relative or neighbour. This places many children in a socially weak position, leaving them vulnerable to social exclusion, substance abuse and human trafficking.<sup>2</sup>

In response to the persistent trend of human trafficking of citizens of the Republic of Moldova, IOM Vienna's project *AVRR CT Moldova*\* aims to assist vulnerable individuals and trafficked persons who voluntarily return to the Republic of Moldova and to improve transnational cooperation between Moldova and Austria in the area of counter-trafficking. Through the project, returning victims receive the psychological, medical, legal and social assistance they need and potential victims are socially and economically empowered to prevent future cases of trafficking.



The Austrian delegation with colleagues from the IOM office in Chişinău.

In order to better understand the situation of human trafficking in the Republic of Moldova and to meet relevant stakeholders, an Austrian delegation led by IOM Vienna undertook a Study Visit to the Republic of Moldova in October 2012 within the framework of the AVRR CT Moldova project. The delegation was comprised of representatives of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Criminal Intelligence Service, the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs – which also represented the Task Force Human Trafficking –, the youth welfare centre of the City of Vienna “Drehscheibe” and the NGO LEFÖ-IBF.

The aim of the Study Visit was to meet central Moldovan actors in the area of counter-trafficking and to learn more about Moldovan anti-trafficking mechanisms in order to identify areas where concrete collaboration between the two countries can be strengthened. The delegation visited a number of ministries, public authorities and NGOs that provide care to children and trafficked persons, as well as the local IOM office.

By the end of the trip, the delegation had gained a better understanding of the phenomenon of human trafficking in Moldova and areas where Austrian and Moldova could work together to assist each other to prevent trafficking, assist victims, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

A follow-up study visit of Moldovan stakeholders to Austria took place in December 2012. A second study visit to Moldova is planned for March 2013.

\*“Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Minors and Young Adults from Moldova with emphasis on the Prevention of (Re-) Trafficking”. This project is co-financed by the European Return Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior

<sup>1</sup> OSCE (2012). *Report by OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, following her visit to the Republic of Moldova*, 31 October – 3 November 2011 SEC.GAL/147/12

<sup>2</sup> Cheianu-Andrei, Diana, et al (2011). *Specific Needs of Children and Elderly Left Behind as a Consequence of Migration*

*This project is co-financed by the European Return Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior.*

## First Impressions from Long-term Monitoring in the Chechen Republic

Within the IOM project “Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees to the Russian Federation / the Chechen Republic”, three steps of monitoring are carried out to assess the progress of the reintegration of the project participants and their personal situation. The third and final monitoring is carried out with 15 selected participants. The final monitoring aims at analysing the long-term effects and the sustainability of the reintegration assistance provided by IOM. Although final conclusions from the monitoring cannot yet be drawn, this article will provide a few first impressions of participants’ experiences in the reintegration process.

Mr. E. is among the returnees who were recently visited for a third monitoring. Mr. E. came to Austria on his own in April 2011. He claimed asylum, but seven months later he decided not to wait for the outcome of his asylum procedure, and to return to the Chechen Republic voluntarily. The main reason for Mr. E.’s decision was that due to health issues he preferred to be close to his family and in familiar surroundings.

Already prior to his return, Mr. E. thought about how to make the best use of the reintegration measures provided by IOM within the project in order to make a living for himself and his family in the Chechen Republic. Mr. E. is married and has two daughters and three sons, who partly have their own families already. Mr. E., who has a degree from a technical college, initially wanted to become involved in agriculture and cattle breeding, as he owned a piece of land in the Chechen Republic.

After his return in November 2011, Mr. E. developed the idea of opening a wholesale business for mineral water. With the support and counselling of the Chamber of Commerce of the Chechen Republic and IOM Moscow, Mr. E. compiled a business plan reflecting these ideas. After registering as an individual entrepreneur, he signed a contract with a Chechen supplier of mineral water which was located close to the border to neighboring Republic Ingushetia. For the purchase of the mineral water, Mr. E. used the reintegration support provided by IOM as well as his own savings. Mr. E. planned to sell the water in the Russian city of Astrakhan. After some difficulties at the beginning (at first, the sale did not go as well as planned), Mr. E. managed to re-sell the mineral water with a profit.



Mr. E. pointing to his mineral water bottles.

### Monitoring process in the Chechen Republic

Since IOM does not have an office in the Chechen Republic, monitoring visits with project participants are conducted by the interregional organization VESTA, IOM’s implementing partner in the Chechen Republic.

The first two monitoring visits are conducted with all project participants; the first visit is conducted shortly after return; the second visit is conducted about four to six months later. The third monitoring is conducted additionally with 15 selected project participants, shortly before the end of the project phase. (The fourth project phase of the AVRR Chechnya project ran from 01st July 2011 until 31st December 2012.)

Today, a little over one year after his return to the Chechen Republic, Mr. E. reports that thanks to his mineral water business he has managed to create a financial basis for the purchase of further goods. With his income from the sale of the mineral water, he first purchased chicken eggs, which he re-sold for a good price. Later he started other business activities, including trading sheep. Mr. E. wants to keep trading grocery products in the future. Moreover, he currently has a new business project in mind – the purchase and installation of a rubbish processing plant in the region around Grozny. He is currently leading negotiations with a Russian construction company and a bank about possibilities for investment.

Mr. E.’s health issues demanded that some examinations be undertaken at a hospital in the Russian Federation, the costs of which were not covered by his health insurance. He also needed to buy medication, which he could not afford, given his rather low income at that time. IOM therefore granted one-time additional medical support to Mr. E. for covering his medical treatment.

Today Mr. E. says that the reintegration assistance that he received from IOM was an important contribution to the improvement of his living conditions in the Chechen Republic. With the project’s assistance, Mr. E. was able to open his own business and to create an income for himself and his family. With the income from the sale of mineral water and from his other business projects, Mr. E. was able to save a sum of money, which he now wants to re-invest in a larger business project. According to Mr. E., the reintegration project was flexible enough to meet his individual demands. Mr. E. was also able to use some of his profits for doing reconstruction work on his house. Mr. E. says that he feels at home again in the Chechen Republic; he is satisfied with his current income situation, and he is already planning further business activities in the future to come.

*This project is co-financed by the European Return Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior.*