

Newsletter No.1 2024

News from the voluntary return field and migration in Europe

- **Germany:** The BAMF (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) took over the main return program from IOM Germany in January 2024. Due to these changes, the processing time for applications is currently approx. 3 months and returnees have to be very patient after their return decision.
- **Sweden:** A new return center has been opened in Malmö. If the application for asylum is rejected in Sweden, the person will be offered a place at a return center, especially planned to support the return process with booking flights, assisting with travel documents, sharing information on return support and programs.
- **Iceland:** The number of applications for international protection in Iceland has multiplied over the last three years. Total applications peaked in 2022 with 4520 applications, marking a considerable increase from 2021, in which 875 applications were received. 2023 and early 2024 showed a slight decrease in the number of applications. Nevertheless, the high number of asylum seekers has put immense pressure on the asylum system in general and especially on accommodation centers.
The number of returns, both voluntary and forced, has shown noticeable changes in Iceland from 2021 to early 2024. Voluntary returns saw a great increase in 2023, with 552 individuals returning voluntarily compared to 99 in 2022. Until April 2024 Iceland already assisted 227 voluntary returnees. The largest group of returnees in 2023 and 2024 has been Venezuelans.
- **Europe:** The Return and Reintegration Facility (RRF) is developing guidelines and training material on specific situational and/or target group-based return counselling. One of the training material focuses on counselling with persons who suffer from mental health disorders and/or substance abuse for example.

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Transnational Exchange
VI video

What can our project
Transnational Exchange VI do for
you? Watch this short video to
learn all about the project!

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Navigating the complex world of migration: An interview with the AVRR counsellor Audrey Bety

Audrey Bety, an AVRR professional from IOM Belgium, has had a remarkable career journey in the field of migration. Her story highlights the complexities and challenges of working with vulnerable migrants and refugees, offering a unique perspective on the global migration landscape.

Entering the field of AVRR

After completing her Master's degree in International Conflict Analysis and International Relations in 2008, Audrey began her career in IOM as an intern within the Migration Health team. This initial role paved the way for her first professional contract as an AVRR counsellor for vulnerable migrants. Reflecting on this transition, Audrey shares: "It was an eye-opener on the different realities and challenges migrants face on their path to Europe and back home". She emphasizes the importance of understanding each migrant's unique story and the need for tailored support, highlighting the humbling nature of the work with vulnerable migrants and the continuous learning required to meet the diverse needs of beneficiaries.

A new perspective in Guinea

After several years in Brussels, Audrey moved to Guinea, where she joined the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as a Protection Officer and Resettlement Focal Point. This role provided her with a different perspective on migration, focusing on the resettlement of refugees to third countries. "Working for UNHCR in Guinea was a dream come true, as it used to be the biggest operation in the late 90's", Audrey tells referring to the civil war in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast that time. "Three words would resume this period of my life: challenge, despair and gratitude. 'Challenge' as we continuously needed to

manage the refugees' expectations and ensure a fair and transparent process in a difficult context. 'Despair' as the resettlement opportunities were not always aligned with the effective needs in the field. And immense 'gratitude' for having contributed to the improvement of the lives of highly vulnerable people."

Leading in Haiti

In 2015, Audrey returned to IOM, this time in Haiti, where she served as a Protection Project Officer. Only few weeks after having given birth to her second child, she took on the demanding role of Team Leader of the Capacity-building team on a project that aimed at increasing the overall protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) returning to their areas of origins. Her work involved increasing the protection of IDPs and developing training programs to strengthen local protection mechanisms. Audrey's team played a crucial role in the emergency response following Hurricane Matthew, which devastated southern Haiti. Despite the pressures and doubts she faced, Audrey expresses pride in her team's achievements and the impact of their work. "You cannot forget such an experience, and I am grateful I had the opportunity to be part of it", she reflects.

Returning home

For the past three years, Audrey has been back in Europe, working as an AVRR counsellor and a Medical Cases Focal Point in IOM Belgium. The decision to return was influenced by her desire to provide a more stable environment for her young family. While she remains open to future field experiences, Audrey is content to be settled in Europe for now, enjoying the reunion with her family and colleagues at IOM Belgium.

Up-coming Transnational Exchange VI events

Field trip to Spain, June 2024

The next field trip to Madrid, Spain will take place on 18. – 21. June 2024. The aim of the trip is to get to know to the AVRR system and its main actors in Spain. The application period for this event has ended.

Field trip to Finland, August 2024

A field trip to Helsinki, Finland will be organized on 27. – 30. August 2024. The participants (return counsellors) will get to visit the Finnish Immigration Service, Police, a reception center, NGOs and IOM Finland. The application period for this event has ended.

Workshop in Augsburg, November 2024

The next in-person workshop in Augsburg, Germany, will take place on 5.-7. November 2024. The topic of the workshop is Voluntary return to the Russian Federation. More information and the chance to apply for it will follow in July 2024.



Working group on assignment in the workshop "Mental illness as a challenge in return counselling".



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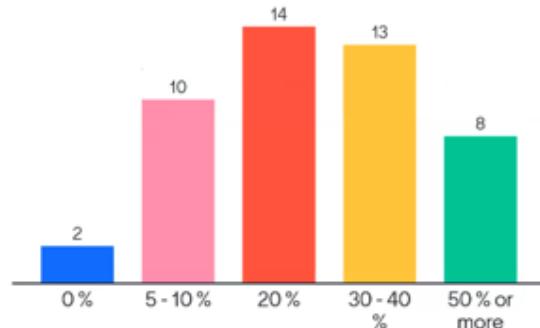
Latest events

Workshop and online conference with the topic: Mental illness as a challenge in return counselling

The Transnational Exchange VI workshop with the topic "Mental illness as a challenge in return counselling" took place on the 14. – 16. November 2023 in Augsburg with 35 European return counsellors from eleven different European countries. Due to the huge interest in the topic, a second event with the same topic was organised online on 21st of March 2024 with 96 participants.

Even though there isn't an easy, straight-forward way to assisting migrants with mental health issues, the counsellors received medical explanations regarding several mental illnesses, then region-specific input (Westafrica, Middle East) and important information for the return day. All of this information is summarized in the two reports. Click here to find the reports: [DOWNLOAD](#)

How many of your clients have mental health problems (approximately)?



A question for the conference participants revealed that a vast majority of counsellors encounters clients with mental health problems regularly (74% of the counsellors stating that 20% or more of their clients have mental health problems). These numbers seem quite representative for most return counsellors in Europe based on more feedback the Transnational Exchange VI team received from different counselling centers. This shows the great need of counsellors to be better equipped for working with this vulnerable group but also that every fifth case takes more organizational and counselling resources than usual, which results in less return numbers but effectively a great workload for counsellors.

Caritasverband für die Diözese Augsburg e.V.

