

Factors affecting participation in assisted voluntary return programmes and successful reintegration: a review of the evidence

Darren Thiel and Kirsty Gillan

- A migrant's decision whether or not to undertake an assisted voluntary return (AVR) is affected by a number of interacting factors relating to the socio-demographic characteristics of the potential returnee, and the conditions in the country of origin and the host country. Understanding and managing these factors is complex and difficult to address through AVR policy alone but key actions that can be taken include:
 - developing asylum seekers' trust in AVR programmes, for example by engaging with community groups and demonstrating the programmes' effectiveness;
 - increasing the efficiency of the asylum and appeal process so that the period in the host country prior to the final decision is kept to a minimum; and
 - developing tailored reintegration assistance to provide effective solutions to returnees' particular barriers to return (see below for more on this point).
- The evidence indicates that increasing the monetary value of reintegration assistance does not on its own necessarily lead to an increase in the numbers taking up AVR or reintegration assistance. Other actions, particularly focusing on programme marketing, play an important role in the process of encouraging AVR take-up, and could be further pursued. However, it should be noted that extraneous factors, particularly the situation in the country of origin, may have more impact on the return decision.
- The evidence suggests that reintegration assistance can be more effective if tailored and targeted to overcome returnees' particular barriers to return. Barriers vary widely and can include uncertainty about accommodation or employment on return, general economic uncertainty, lack of opportunity for education and the personal shame of having to return home. These same factors can also be barriers to successful reintegration; hence effective improvements in this area should benefit returnees (by enhancing the sustainability of return) and host countries (by making AVR more appealing).
- Beyond the bounds of AVR policy, host countries can encourage AVR take-up by continuing to develop effective enforcement systems for immigration removals and by supporting political and economic security in countries of origin.

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Keywords

Assisted voluntary return
 Repatriation
 Return migration
 Reintegration
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 Failed asylum seekers
 Irregular migrants
 Refugees

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Introduction

Aims

The review aimed to map the existing knowledge of Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) in order to answer the following questions.

1. What factors encourage or discourage AVR participation?
2. What are the key factors for the successful reintegration of AVR participants?¹
3. What are the most effective policy and operational prescriptions for successful AVR programmes?²
4. What aspects of AVR require additional research evidence to support their design or application?

Context

The Immigration and Nationality Directorate³ Review, published in July 2006, set ambitious targets to increase removals of persons with unfounded asylum claims in the UK, and AVR programmes are an important element of this strategy. AVR programmes aim to assist asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers, those granted temporary protection,⁴ and irregular migrants to return to their countries of origin⁵ in a cost-effective,⁶ dignified, humane and sustainable manner.

- 1 'Successful reintegration' was taken to refer to that which was sustainable. This could be indicated by: returnees' subjective testimony; returnees remaining, or expressing a desire to remain, in their country of origin; and measures of returnees securing income and housing.
- 2 Successful AVR programmes are viewed in this report as programmes that return large proportions of potential participants in a humane, equitable, sustainable and cost-effective manner.
- 3 In April 2007 the Immigration and Nationality Directorate within the Home Office became the Border and Immigration Agency. In April 2008 the Border and Immigration Agency became the UK Border Agency (UKBA).
- 4 Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR), Humanitarian Protection (HP) or Discretionary Leave to remain (DL).
- 5 In this report 'country of origin' is understood to refer to the country to which an AVR participant would return. This would normally, though not necessarily, be their country of nationality and the country in which they resided before coming to the host country.
- 6 Consideration of cost-effectiveness of AVR has been provided by the National Audit Office (2005).

The UK Border Agency (UKBA) funds three AVR programmes: the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP), Assisted Voluntary Return of Irregular Migrants (AVRIM) and Return to Afghanistan Programme (RAP)⁷. These are all operated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The UK's AVR programmes provide information and assistance with travel documentation and costs, and some provide reintegration assistance.

Method

This report is based on a literature review, collated between June and December 2006, and an analysis of quantitative data. Most of the literature and statistics relate to UK AVR programmes but, where possible, international literature and statistics were included. Only 21 research papers were found relating to AVR specifically, of which nine were based on primary research studies and only four had appropriate sample designs. No research was uncovered relating to the AVR of irregular migrants. This evidence was supplemented using literature about the general return of economic migrants and refugees.

Findings

Factors encouraging and discouraging return

The quantitative analysis shows that UK AVR programmes have been returning increasing numbers of people, both asylum seekers and irregular migrants, and that at least in the case of asylum AVR, this is despite an overall reduction in the number of people eligible for the programme.

The review found that the key factors encouraging or discouraging AVR participants to return are broadly similar to those affecting the general return of refugees

- 7 The Return to Afghanistan Programme (RAP) ended on the 1 April 2008.

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and economic migrants. The AVR-specific literature, which was supported by the general literature, indicated the key factors that encourage AVR participants to return are:

- improved political, economic and social conditions in the country of origin;
- family (desire to reunite with or head families in the country of origin);
- a desire to reclaim property in the country of origin;
- poor conditions and/or limited options in the host country (e.g. prevention of employment);
- effective enforcement systems in the host country;
- political commitment or a desire to help rebuild the country of origin;
- tailored AVR programmes (e.g. specific to the country of origin and/or individual);
- the involvement of community groups to provide country of origin information and/or organise AVR programmes; and
- provision of appropriate reintegration assistance incentives communicated through targeted marketing campaigns.

In contrast, the key factors found to act against return are:

- a lack of political and/or economic security in the country of origin;
- poor social conditions in the country of origin;
- having children in the host country and/or no family in the country of origin;
- a distrust of AVR programmes and/or formal country of origin information;
- a long period of stay in the host country;
- the shame of return; and
- being unable to return to the home area or reclaim property.

The wider literature about refugees and economic migrants additionally suggests that the decision on when and why to return is strongly related to the original reason for migration, and that gender equality issues in countries of origin can act against return.

One of the most important overarching barriers to return identified by the literature review is that those eligible for AVR programmes often do not wish to return to their countries of origin. The literature suggests that some migrants express a desire to return to their countries of origin when they have been granted permanent status to reside in host countries, and many will experience nostalgia for 'home'; however, this is often only temporary and does not necessarily lead to actual departure.

Conditions for successful reintegration

The quantitative analysis, relating to reintegration assistance (available through the UK AVR programme for asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers to facilitate sustainable return), indicates that the take-up of assistance is increasing. Factors which may affect take-up include the value of assistance; programme marketing and information; and circumstances in the countries of origin.

The review highlighted that successful reintegration in countries with poor political, economic and social infrastructures is a problematic process. Consequently, much of the literature focuses on the barriers to, rather than conditions for, successful reintegration. The key factors found to hinder the successful reintegration of AVR participants, as well as refugees and economic migrants, are:

- economic instability and unemployment;
- the loss of social networks;
- a destabilisation of the local area due to the large-scale return of unskilled young men;
- exclusion by members of the community who had not migrated and returned;
- poor housing and/or the inability to reclaim property; and
- security problems and discrimination, including having no safe area to return to.

Additionally, the literature relating to the return of refugees and economic migrants highlighted the following factors which are also likely to be relevant to some AVR returnees:

- long duration of stay away from the country of origin leading to changes in the returnee and/or the home area;
- poor infrastructure in the country of origin, including health care and/or the education system;
- feelings of guilt associated with having survived or escaped the difficulties in the country of origin; and
- specific issues for women, such as experiencing greater gender equality in the host country.

Factors found to promote successful reintegration are essentially converse to some of the factors outlined above. That is, to increase the likelihood of successful reintegration returnees should return to politically secure areas where they can obtain secure employment, reclaim property and be accepted by the non-migrant local community.

Conclusions

- The evidence revealed that decisions to return under AVR are influenced by a range of factors, particularly those relating to personal circumstances, and to the situations in the host and return country.
- Reintegration assistance was found to potentially motivate return but is more significant as a facilitator for sustainable return.
- Evidence concerning the long-term sustainability of return under AVR was limited but several key inhibitory factors to sustainable return were identified, including the socio-economic characteristics and availability of support to returnees in the country of origin. The evidence did, however, suggest that tailored reintegration assistance, appropriate to individual needs and local conditions, may increase the likelihood of successful return.
- Rises in the value of the reintegration package alone may not lead to an increase in uptake of AVR or reintegration assistance.

Factors affecting participation in assisted voluntary return programmes and successful reintegration: a review of the evidence

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1. Introduction

Context

Aims of the project

Assisted voluntary return (AVR) programmes are operated by many European Union (EU) Member States and a small number of other developed nations. In the UK, AVR programmes assist the return of asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers, those provided with temporary protection, and irregular migrants to their countries of origin⁸ in a dignified, humane and sustainable manner.

Despite AVR having been practised in its earliest form in Germany from 1979 and, in a number of other European nations since 1999, there are very few syntheses of AVR research findings.

This report presents findings from a literature review completed during 2006, addressing the following questions.

1. What factors encourage or discourage AVR participation?
2. What are the key factors for the successful reintegration of AVR participants?⁹
3. What are the most effective policy and operational prescriptions for successful AVR programmes?¹⁰
4. What aspects of AVR require additional research evidence to support their design or application?

⁸ In this report 'country of origin' is understood to refer to the country to which an AVR participant would return. This would normally, though not necessarily, be their country of nationality and the country in which they resided before coming to the host country.

⁹ 'Successful reintegration' was taken to refer to that which was sustainable. This could be indicated by: returnees' subjective testimony; returnees remaining, or expressing a desire to remain, in their country of origin; and measures of returnees securing income and housing.

¹⁰ Successful AVR programmes are viewed in this report as programmes that return large proportions of potential participants in a humane, equitable, sustainable and cost-effective manner.

What is assisted voluntary return?

The UK AVR programmes offer migrants:

- assistance with travel arrangements, documentation and costs;
- information on the political, economic and social conditions in their country of origin;
- temporary housing; and/or
- reintegration support – which might include cash payments, vocational training, building materials, medical assistance, and business start-up grants.

UK AVR programmes are funded¹¹ by the UK Border Agency (UKBA)¹² and administered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM also implements AVR programmes for a number of other host countries.

The UK's three AVR programmes are as follows.

1. Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) for those applying for asylum, failed asylum seekers, and for those granted temporary protection (Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR), Humanitarian Protection (HP)¹³ or Discretionary Leave (DL)).
2. Assisted Voluntary Return for Irregular Migrants (AVRIM) for migrants with irregular status in the UK.
3. Return to Afghanistan Programme (RAP)¹⁴ for Afghan nationals resident in the UK.

Some host countries' AVR programmes also return:

- ¹¹ VARRP is co-funded by the European Refugee Fund.
- ¹² Prior to 1 April 2008, the UKBA was the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA), and prior to April 2007 it was the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND).
- ¹³ People granted Humanitarian Protection are no longer eligible for VARRP, although they were until the 2006 programme.
- ¹⁴ Restricted to Afghan nationals who, as of August 2002, were awaiting a decision on an asylum claim, appealing a refusal (including appealing against an extension of Exceptional Leave to Remain/Enter or appealing on human rights grounds), or were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain/Enter. This programme ended in April 2008.

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- asylum seekers who have been granted temporary leave to remain (TLR) until conflict in their country of origin has ceased (e.g. Germany's Government Assisted Repatriation Programme); and
- refugees who desire to return to their countries of origin (e.g. Austria's AVR programme).

Rationale for AVR

AVR policy was developed within the context of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) declaration that the 1990s would be "the decade of repatriation" in which voluntary return was to become one of three "durable solutions" to the growing number of refugees. The fundamental principle of voluntary return was to return people who chose to go in "safety and dignity".

For most AVR participants, including irregular migrants, the programmes provide a more dignified, humane and sustainable method of return than forced removal. Furthermore, the costs of AVR are significantly less than those of forced removal (National Audit Office, 2005). Thus, there are evident benefits for both returnees and host countries.

Report structure

Chapter 2 gives a summary of the research method. The research questions are addressed in Chapter 3, which discusses AVR participants' motivations to return, and Chapter 4, which discusses the key factors involved in successful reintegration. Chapters 3 and 4 comprise descriptions of quantitative data on AVR, followed by reviews of the relevant literature. This includes general literature about the repatriation of refugees and economic migrants to add to the relatively small amount of AVR-specific literature. Chapter 5 outlines the conclusions drawn. Chapter 6 identifies the main gaps in the knowledge base and suggests how these could be addressed to provide fuller answers to the questions above. Appendix A provides full details of the methodology used for the study.

2. Method

This report is based on a literature review collated between June and December 2006, and analysis of statistical data. Most of the data relate to UK AVR programmes but, where possible, international data have been used for comparison.

Appendix A contains a full methodology.

Situations vary amongst different types of migrant groups and the literature reviewed for this report deals with a plethora of different groups of people, as defined by age, sex, education level, nationality, and country and area of return.

Review methodology

A rapid evidence assessment methodology was chosen for this project, involving a systematic search of the literature on AVR. The search uncovered 1,276 titles and abstracts, but a sift of the literature revealed only 21 research papers specifically related to AVR. All but one of these were qualitative reports; nine were based on primary research but, of these, only four investigated AVR participants specifically. The remaining five primary research studies used interviews, focus groups and/or written questionnaires with 'community groups' which included a wider range of migrants than just asylum seekers or failed asylum seekers. No research studies about the voluntary return of irregular migrants were uncovered. This restricted the scope of the analysis undertaken.

As so few directly relevant studies were uncovered, the review looked at more general literature about the return migration of refugees and economic migrants, in order to reveal further factors related to AVR and to clarify and check the assumptions in the AVR-specific literature.

Although asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers and illegal migrants are likely to have different motivations to return, the literature rarely differentiates between these groups. Consequently, the analysis in this report also combined the groups unless otherwise stated.

Quantitative methodology

Quantitative data were analysed to add context to the information drawn from the review. Some data, especially international data, were limited, providing only basic information. International data were often not comparable because of varying methods of data collection, definition and analysis and because returning countries contained very different pools of potential returnees. Therefore, most of the data used in the report are from the UK, and were taken predominantly from IOM London or from UKBA.

3. Factors affecting participation in AVR

This chapter first describes the quantitative data on AVR uptake. It then outlines the main factors identified in the research literature to encourage or discourage the uptake of AVR by asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers.

AVR statistical data

Numbers and characteristics of UK AVR participants

The focus of most host countries' AVR programmes, including the UK's, has been the return of asylum seekers

and failed asylum seekers. In the UK, AVRs have made up an increasing percentage of removals of failed asylum seekers (Table 1).¹⁵ However, AVRs have formed only a small, albeit growing, percentage of the total number of removals from the UK (including both asylum and non-asylum cases) (Table 2).

The number of AVRs from the UK, and a number of other EU Member States, steadily increased in the period 2001 to 2005 (Figure 1). In contrast, AVRs from Germany declined in the same period due to a drop in the numbers returning to Serbia and Montenegro following the cessation of conflict (see Ritzka, 2006).

Table 1 Principal asylum applicants removed or departing voluntarily from the UK, 2003–2006^a

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total principal asylum applicants removed ^b	13,005	12,595	13,730	16,330
Total principal asylum applicants leaving under AVR ^c	1,755	2,300	2,905	4,630
Asylum applicants' AVR as percentage of total asylum applicants removed	13	18	21	28

Source: adapted from Home Office (2007).

a Excludes dependants of asylum seekers.

b Includes cases dealt with at juxtaposed controls. Includes enforced removals, persons departing voluntarily after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under AVR programmes run by IOM. Figures since January 2005 include those who it is established have left the UK without informing the immigration authorities. Since January 2004, figures include management information on the number of deportations.

c Persons leaving under AVR programmes administered by IOM. May include some cases where enforcement action has been initiated.

Table 2 Total persons removed or departing voluntarily from the UK, 2004–2006

	2004	2005	2006
Total persons removed ^a	61,160	58,215	63,865
Leaving under AVR programmes (including AVRIM) ^b	2,715	3,655	6,200
AVR percentage of total removals	4	6	10

Source: adapted from Home Office (2007). Figures include management information on the number of deportations*.

Data for 2003 are not comparable as the number of persons recorded as leaving under AVR programmes does not include dependants of asylum seekers.

a Includes enforced removals, persons departing voluntarily after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under AVR programmes run by IOM. Figures since January 2005 include those who it is established have left the UK without informing the immigration authorities.

b Persons leaving under AVR programmes run by IOM. May include some cases where enforcement action has been initiated.

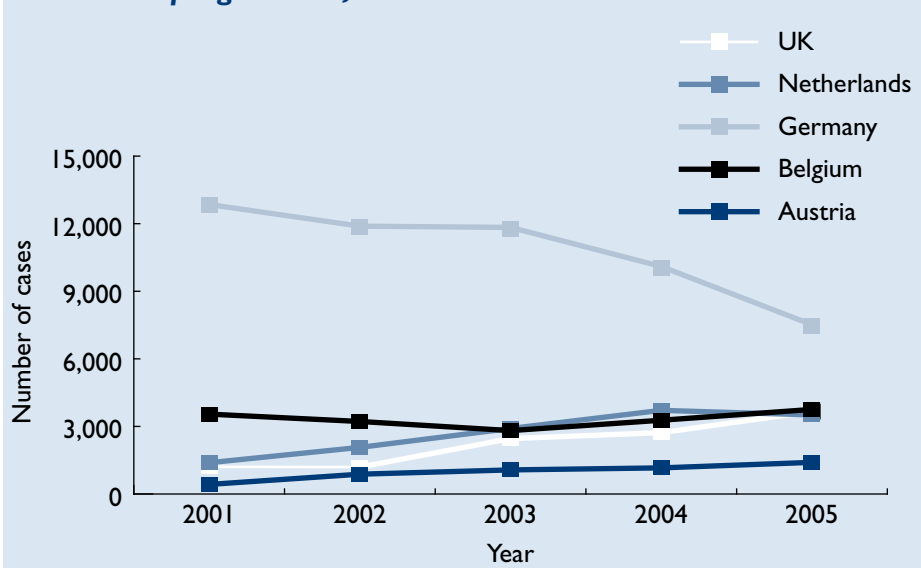
* Deportations are carried out under section 3(5) or 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1971 (as amended by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999) if:

- the Secretary of State deems the person's deportation to be conducive to the public good (section 3(5)(a)); or
- the person is the spouse, civil partner or child under 18 of a person ordered to be deported (section 3(5)(b)); or
- the person after reaching the age of 17, is convicted of an offence which is punishable with imprisonment and on his conviction is recommended for deportation by the court (section 3(6)).

Since section 10 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 came into force, less serious cases requiring removal need not be deported, but may be liable to an administrative removal.

¹⁵ Data contained in this and all subsequent tables and figures have been rounded to the nearest five.

Figure 1 Top five countries returning individuals under AVR programmes, 2001–2005



Source: based on data supplied by IOM Geneva.

In the case of the UK, asylum AVRs have increased despite an overall drop in the number of people eligible for the programme. The fall in the number eligible is due to a combination of a fall in the number of asylum applicants (Home Office, 2007), relatively small changes in the asylum and temporary protection grant rate, and a slight overall increase in the number of asylum applicants removed or subject to enforcement action (Home Office, 2007).

Montenegro¹⁶ constituted the UK AVR destination countries that received the highest number of returnees in 2004 and 2005. All of these countries, except Albania, saw an increase in AVR numbers from 2004 to 2005, with Iraq and Afghanistan showing substantial increases (Figure 2).

Age of asylum AVR returnees

Between January 2005 and December 2006, the majority (78%) of UK principal AVR returnees (excluding AVRIM), were aged between 21 and 39, with only 15 per cent aged 40 and over. However, when the age profile of principal AVR returnees is compared to that of principal asylum applicants,

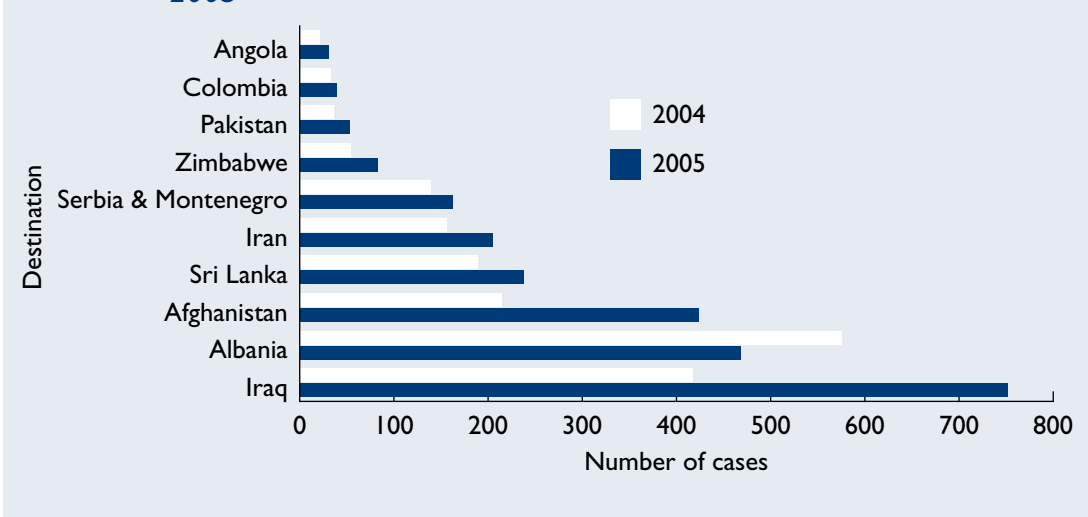
using the asylum applicant data to approximate the pool of those eligible for AVR, the data suggest that the 30–39 age group had the highest relative AVR take-up, followed by the 40–49 age group (see Figure 3). The data also suggest that those aged under 21 are least likely to take up AVR.

Asylum status of AVR returnees

There is differential uptake of AVR at different stages of the asylum process, as shown in Table 3. Asylum seekers in the

UK can apply for VARRP at any stage during their asylum claim, but a large majority of returnees do so when their asylum claim appeal rights have been exhausted and they have no chance of being given the right to remain in the UK legally. In 2006, only ten per cent of asylum seekers applied to return under VARRP during the asylum decision or appeal pending stages (see also Clery et al., 2005).

Figure 2 Number of principal asylum applicants returning under UK AVR programmes 2004 and 2005, showing the top ten destinations in 2005



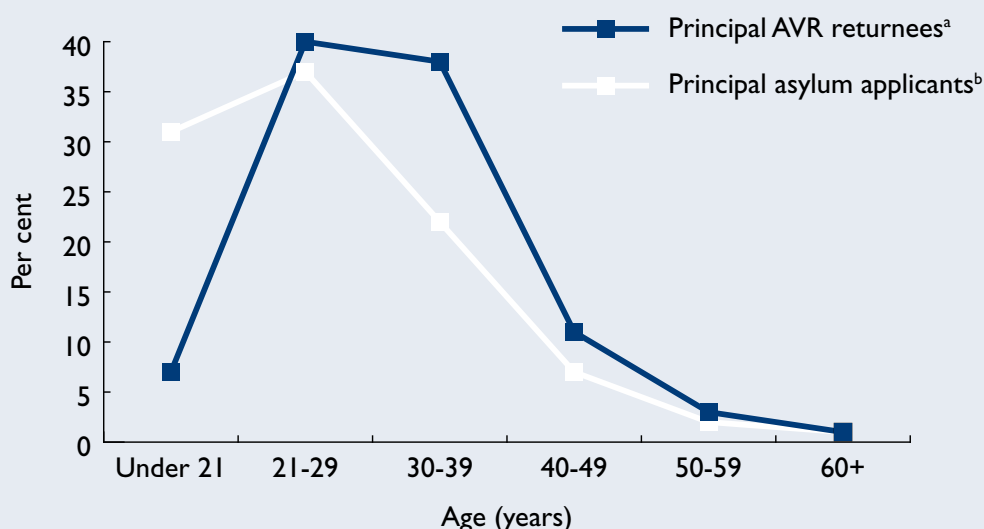
Source: Migration Statistics, UKBA. Excludes dependants.

Destination countries of asylum AVR returnees

A small number of destination countries have received a large proportion of all AVR returnees from the UK. Iraq, Albania, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Iran, and Serbia and

¹⁶ Official UK Home Office statistics grouped Serbia and Montenegro (SAM) as a single return destination because SAM replaced the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 5 February 2003. SAM comprised the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Montenegro, and the Province of Kosovo (administered by the UN on an interim basis from 1999). In 2006, Montenegro voted for independence from Serbia.

Figure 3 Age profiles of principal asylum applicants and principal AVR returnees, January 2005–December 2006



Source: Migration Statistics, UKBA. AVR figures may not sum to the totals shown because of rounding.

- a Persons leaving under AVR programmes run by IOM. May include some cases where enforcement action has been initiated.
- b AVR departures do not necessarily relate to asylum applications made in the same period, hence the calculated proportion should be treated as indicative only.

Table 3 Asylum status of total AVR returnees, including dependants, January–December 2006^a

Asylum status at application for VARRP	Number of VARRP applicants ^a	Percentage of total VARRP applicants
Asylum decision pending	140	3
Initial asylum claim refused	615	12
Appeal pending	390	7
Appeal rights exhausted	3,860	72
Other ^b	325	6
Total	5,330	100

Source: Adapted from UK AVR Operations, UK Border Agency.

- a Figures are based on management information and have not been quality assured under National Statistics protocols. This information may differ from Home Office published statistics.
- b Those granted ELR, HP or DL.

Evidence from the literature review

The literature review identified many factors which encourage or discourage AVR uptake, but also indicated that, in general, asylum seekers do not wish to return to their country of origin and will usually delay doing so for as long as possible (cf Blitz et al., 2005; Foblets and Vanbeselaere, 2005).

The factors identified as discouraging return under AVR programmes are:

- a lack of political and/or economic security in the country of origin;
- poor social conditions in the country of origin;
- families (children in the host country and/or no family in the country of origin);

- a distrust of governmental AVR programmes and/or formal country of origin information;
- a long period of stay in the host country;
- the shame of return;
- being unable to return to the home area; and
- being unable to reclaim property.

Conversely, the factors identified in the literature as encouraging return under AVR programmes are:

- family (desire to reunite with or head families in the country of origin);
- improved political, economic and social conditions in the country of origin;
- effective enforcement systems in the host country;
- tailored programmes (e.g. specific to the country of origin and/or individual);

- the involvement of community groups to provide country of origin information and/or organise AVR programmes;
- a desire to reclaim property in the country of origin;
- poor conditions and/or limited options in the host country (e.g. prevention of employment);
- a political commitment or a desire to help rebuild the country of origin; and
- the provision of reintegration assistance.

The key factors found to encourage and discourage unassisted return of refugees and economic migrants were broadly similar to those affecting AVR uptake. Additional factors described in the general return literature were the 'push factor' of nostalgic longing for 'home' and the influence of the original reason for migration (for example, political reasons for leaving compared with primarily economic reasons). These factors are described in greater detail below.

Political, social and/or economic security in the country of origin

The literature review suggested that asylum seekers' unwillingness to return is predominantly tied to the poor political and/or economic security in their countries of origin, which may have initially inspired their emigration (Bertrand, 2000; Black et al., 2004; ECRE, 2005; Hailbronner and Gehrke, 2005; Refugee Council, 2004; Sales et al., 2003). Poor social conditions including poor education and health care in their home country also discourage asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers from repatriating. This highlights the importance that children have in their parents' migration plans, i.e. failed asylum seekers do not wish to return to their countries of origin because they do not want their children to be removed from formal education in the West and/or because education systems in countries of origin are insubstantial or ethnically discriminatory (D'Onofrio, 2004).

Poor economic, political and social conditions in countries of origin not only inhibit return to those countries, but if migrants do return, these factors may also inhibit their successful reintegration (as discussed in Chapter 4).

Poor conditions in the host country

The general literature on refugees and economic migrants argues that poor living conditions and limited options in their host country can also affect the likelihood of their return, acting as a push factor (see, in particular, Kibreab, 2003). While three AVR-specific studies noted this (ECRE, 2005; Foblets and Vanbeselaere, 2005; Koser, 2001), two studies (Black et al., 2004; ICMPD, 2003) argued that conditions in host countries played only a minor role with respect to motivating the return of asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers. The evidence suggests that the

strength of this push factor may be affected by the AVR participant's perceptions of the relative conditions in the host country compared with those in the country of origin.

Families

The literature suggests that family concerns are fundamental factors informing migrants' decision making, and that family concerns may override all other factors in their decision to repatriate (see, for example, Foblets and Vanbeselaere, 2005). A person's family situation can both encourage and discourage return, and the desire to be with and protect one's family is a factor mentioned frequently in both AVR-specific studies and studies of return migration more generally. The immediate family, particularly children, comprise very strong push and pull factors.

Those with families in the host country are unlikely to want to return, but those separated from families in their country of origin are likely to want to be reunited with them. A family split between the host country and the country of origin complicates the situation but the literature implies that AVR is most likely to appeal to those who have left their immediate families behind in their countries of origin (Foblets and Vanbeselaere, 2005). Under the UK's VARRP scheme, the return of families has been incentivised by making additional reintegration assistance available to each family member.

Long period of stay in the host country

The evidence shows that the longer asylum seekers remain in the host country, the more they become integrated into the host society, and the less likely they are to desire return (Foblets and Vanbeselaere, 2005; ECRE, 2005). This is particularly so for women who might become accustomed to the higher levels of equality commonly found in Western nations, which they may be unwilling to relinquish (ECRE, 2005; Graham and Khosravi, 1997). This is also the case for those whose children spend the formative parts of their lives growing up in Western countries and who become accustomed to the educational institutions and lifestyle of the West (Sales et al., 2003).

Shame of return

The literature shows that return is highly stigmatised amongst many groups of asylum seekers (Foblets and Vanbeselaere, 2005; IOM London, personal communication). This shame may relate to economic considerations, for example, where relatives or friends in the country of origin contributed to the costs of the original migration or where there is an expectation of the returnee arriving with demonstrable wealth accrued in the affluent West. Return without visible signs of a successful migration can be perceived as a failure (King, 2000; Wyman, 1993). Reintegration assistance can play a role in overcoming this barrier to return (ECRE, 2005) and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Desire to reclaim property

The literature suggests that asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers and refugees were all more likely to desire to return to their countries of origin if they could reclaim property lost through conflict and/or population movements. Evidence from studies of returning refugees illustrates that reclaiming property following conflict is, however, a very problematic process (see D'Onofrio, 2004; OSCE, 2005; UNIAMK, 2006).

Nostalgic longing for 'home'

The general literature on refugees and economic migrants suggests that it is common for migrants with secure leave to remain in a host country to express a desire to return, but often only temporarily (Sales et al., 2003). Yet these desires are usually not followed by actual return. Durations of absence can morph migrants' memories of their 'home' countries into clichéd and idealistic forms, commonly sustained through exaggerated consumption of cultural objects (Anwar, 1979; Graham and Khosravi, 1997) and exiled cultural shift (cf Bhachu, 1985). Actual return is blocked by the migrants', and/or their children's, integration into the host country, and by the recognition that their nostalgia is unreal.

Improved economic conditions and rebuilding the country of origin

The general literature on return also highlights how individuals can have different motivations for returning, often relating to the original reasons for their migration. For example, politically motivated migrants or refugees may feel shame at having left their country and its people's political struggles, and, consequently, are more likely to express a desire to return to help the future of their country (Amore, 2005; Graham and Khosravi, 1997). Alternatively, those migrating for primarily economic reasons may want to return when the economic and social infrastructure of their country of origin has improved, or when they are able to return with visible signs of the success of their migration (King, 2000; Wyman, 1993).¹⁷ Asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers can possess a combination of the attitudes of economic migrants and political migrants which therefore may affect their attitude to return (Bernard, 1976; Stewart, 2003).

Distrust of AVR programmes and/or country of origin information

The literature revealed that asylum seekers tend to distrust the host country's political operations and policy. They variously: doubt the validity of the asylum claims

process; distrust official country of origin information; are frightened of clandestine deportations; and, consequently, are suspicious of the content of government-funded AVR programmes (Blitz et al., 2005; ECRE, 2005; Foblets and Vanbeselaere, 2005; ICMPD, 2003). It is argued that suspicion may be compounded by migrants' lack of reliable information about the UK asylum system both prior to and during their asylum applications (see Gilbert and Koser, 2004; 2006; Robinson and Segrott, 2002), although UKBA has made efforts to improve the accessibility of information over the past few years.¹⁸

The review also highlighted that people interpret news through their pre-existing cultural frames of reference (Shibutani, 1966). If, then, asylum seekers have been subject to dishonesty and mistreatment by official systems in the past, they could well distrust news they receive through official channels or news that reflects positively upon officialdom in the country they have arrived in (cf. Foblets and Vanbeselaere, 2005). Any pre-existing distrust of officialdom would be likely to be compounded by being refused asylum, and would contribute to their suspicion of AVR programmes (Thomas, 2005; 2006; ICMPD, 2003).

As discussed below, there are possible approaches to mitigating distrust, but if failed asylum seekers genuinely believe their countries of origin are unsafe to return to, the asylum system may inevitably appear unjust and arbitrary.

Community involvement to mitigate distrust

A number of studies suggested that involving minority ethnic communities living in host countries in AVR programmes' administration and provision of country information improves the level of trust in AVR programmes (Black et al., 2004; Clery et al., 2005; Koser, 2001). This could prove unworkable if the communities deem their countries unsuitable to return to because they would be unlikely to promote return to these areas.

Communities already play a role in sharing information about the asylum process, on which many asylum seekers rely (Foblets and Vanbeselaere, 2005; Gilbert and Koser, 2004). However, Foblets and Vanbeselaere (2005) report that the information provided through this route can be distorted, which they attribute to both the opacity of the processes and their poor communication to asylum seekers. If, however, community groups were to become more involved in the operation of AVR, news about it may not become so

¹⁷ The distinction made here between economic and political migrants is meant as an analytical device, and not as an actual reflection of 'types' of migrants. Political and economic factors are likely to be combined and interrelated in motivating migration for most migrants (see Bernard, 1976; Stewart, 2003).

¹⁸ For example, in the New Asylum Model process, introduced in 2007, applicants are provided with information about the system at their First Reporting Event and, throughout the claim, the case owner acts as a central point of contact to answer queries.

distorted and these trusted sources of information may help to encourage applications (cf Dumper, 2004; ECRE, 2005).¹⁹

Effective enforced return procedures

AVR is most effective when accompanied by an effective enforcement system, i.e. failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants will be more likely to opt for AVR if the only alternative is forced return. However, the evidence suggested that in previous years, before the recent focus on enforcement measures, only between 20 and 30 per cent of removal orders in the EU were followed by actual expulsion (ICMPD, 2002).²⁰ Hence, the increase in removals of asylum seekers may partly explain the increasing uptake of AVR (Home Office, 2007).

Evasion of removal is perhaps part of the reason why failed asylum seekers with substantial diaspora networks present in the UK have historically shown low rates of AVR uptake (for example, those from India, Pakistan, China and, to a lesser degree, Sri Lanka). There is some evidence to suggest these groups have in the past been able to move into the informal economy, aided by their social network communities (cf Morawska, 2001; Portes, 1995; Thiel, 2005).

Cooperation from country of origin

The data on the number of removals and AVRs to various countries of origin, with and without UK bilateral agreements, suggest that these agreements are vital for successful enforced removals and AVRs to take place. In addition, by opening up the possibility of an enforced removal, these bilateral agreements may increase the likelihood of an individual opting for AVR.

The evidence suggests that, in order to be most effective, the bilateral agreements must be transparent and publicly available, ensuring that community groups are able to know the contents of the agreements, and hence be more likely to trust their provisions and to encourage their members to return under AVR (ECRE, 2005). In addition to these formal agreements, arrangements at community level within the country of origin, when communicated appropriately to community groups in the UK, may also help to increase AVR effectiveness (Koser, 2001).

19 UK AVR policy and operations had, at the time of writing, held consultation meetings with Afghan and Iraqi community groups, and were piloting the use of a 'referral fee' awarded to community groups for referring successful AVR departures.

20 It is acknowledged that this evidence is dated, and that the recent focus on enforcement measures, for example the development of biometric passports, Application Registration Cards and the Eurodac fingerprinting system, would increase the effectiveness of enforcement systems.

Provision of reintegration assistance

The provision of reintegration assistance was shown to be a contributing factor to promoting the return of asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers, and refugees. It is mentioned by two studies as forming a push factor to return (Koser, 1997; Turton and Marsden, 2002), but it appears that its allure is largely flattened by the more important factors including family concerns, and political, economic, and social conditions in countries of origin. The quantitative and qualitative evidence available does not unequivocally indicate that the monetary value of reintegration assistance is a central factor motivating return. However, the tailoring of the assistance might increase its importance as a motivating factor. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Tailored programmes

The literature review showed that AVR may become a more attractive option for participants if AVR programmes are specifically tailored to particular individuals and for particular areas within countries. Tailored programmes would not only increase the appeal of AVR but should assist sustainable reintegration. AVR programmes should be flexible to provide assistance tailored to the needs of people of different genders, levels of skills and education, ethnic differences, and to the conditions of specific areas of countries (CEC, 2002; ECRE, 2005; Hailbronner and Gehrke, 2005; ICMPD, 2003; Koser, 2001). The importance of tailoring programmes to the needs of returnees is recognised by IOM and work to improve this aspect of the service is ongoing (personal communication, IOM).

4. Conditions for successful reintegration

This chapter begins with quantitative data on uptake of reintegration assistance by participants in the UK VARRP scheme. It then discusses factors suggested, by analysis of the quantitative data, to influence the uptake of reintegration assistance, and the impact of this assistance on AVR uptake. This is followed by a review of what the AVR-specific literature²¹ and the general literature on return migration indicated to be the most important factors involved in successful reintegration.

21 Here, AVR participants exclude irregular migrants as no evidence was found concerning this group.

Table 4 UK VARRP returns and grants of reintegration assistance 2002–2006^a

Year	Total number of VARRP returnees ^b	Total number of VARRP returnees granted reintegration assistance	Percentage of VARRP returnees granted reintegration assistance
2002	1,175	38	3
2003	2,392	332	14
2004	2,654	727	27
2005	3,188	859	27
2006	5,327	3,027	57

Source: adapted from IOM London. Figures are based on management information and have not been quality assured under National Statistics protocols.

- a The total proportion of those granted reintegration assistance in 2006 may be slightly higher than the 57 per cent shown in the table because a number of those returning in 2006 may not have claimed assistance in their country of origin at the time of writing. IOM London (personal communication) was estimating that the proportion of those granted assistance in 2006 would be higher than 57 per cent.
- b This information may differ from Home Office published figures.

Reintegration assistance uptake statistics

Rates of uptake under the UK VARRP scheme

Reintegration assistance is administered by IOM in countries of origin following the return of VARRP participants. The vast majority of those who opt for reintegration assistance choose financial assistance for business start-ups (89% in VARRP 2005), but other forms of assistance include: provision of temporary housing for up to three months after return; short-term medical assistance; scholarships for children, education and vocational training; building materials and cash payments.

Table 4 shows that the percentage of UK VARRP returnees receiving reintegration assistance increased substantially from 2002 to 2004 and between 2005 to 2006.

The reasons for the increase in the take-up of VARRP reintegration assistance in the period 2002 - 2006 are likely to include:

- the introduction and increases in the value of reintegration assistance;
- developments in outreach work and marketing of AVR and reintegration assistance; and
- changes in the most common countries of origin for VARRP returnees and varying attitudes to reintegration assistance by returnees to these countries.

The limited evidence available, however, means that it is not possible to assess the relative importance of these factors. These issues are discussed further below.

Country of origin impact on reintegration assistance uptake

Quantitative evidence suggests that returnees in some countries of origin are more likely to take up reintegration assistance than others. Hence, changes in the numbers

returning to these countries affect the overall take-up of reintegration assistance. According to IOM London, during VARRP 2005, returnees to Iraq represented the largest number of cases receiving reintegration assistance (434), followed by Afghanistan (324), Iran (202), Sri Lanka (187) and Pakistan (144).²² These were all among the top ten countries of return under VARRP 2005, but returnees to other countries in the top ten, including Albania, Kosovo, Zimbabwe and Columbia, had much lower rates of reintegration assistance take-up.

Value of reintegration assistance and assistance take-up

The relationship between the value of reintegration assistance and the level of take-up is difficult to establish, partly because changes in the value of assistance have often been accompanied by increased marketing. For example, the introduction of £500 worth of assistance in 2002 under VARRP, is likely to have had a role in the increasing take-up of reintegration assistance between 2002 and 2004. It was, however, also accompanied by an intensification of marketing and outreach work. Raising the value of assistance to £1,000 in March 2005 did not appear to lead to an increase in the percentage of returnees taking up reintegration assistance. In contrast, when reintegration assistance was increased substantially under the 'enhanced package'²³ in January 2006, the percentage of returnees receiving assistance increased, as did the total number of departures.

22 These numbers are not mirrored in Table 4.1 because VARRP 2005 ran from August 2005 until July 2006.

23 The 'enhanced package' of reintegration assistance was introduced on 1 January 2006, for people returning under VARRP who had submitted an asylum application prior to that date. In addition to the standard £1,000 worth of reintegration assistance, the package offered a further £1,500 of in-kind reintegration assistance and a £500 cash payment. The assistance was available to applicants and their dependants who applied for VARRP prior to 31 October 2006 and who returned within three months of their application date.

Impact of reintegration assistance on AVR uptake

Similarly, a causal link between increased value of reintegration assistance and AVR uptake cannot be established as the quantitative data suggest that other factors, including programme marketing and country of origin conditions, were also important. For example, departures to Albania continued to fall from a peak in July 2005, despite the introduction of the enhanced package in early 2006. In the same time period, departures to Iraq, which accounted for most of the increase in AVR take-up from 2005 to 2006, cannot be solely credited to the increased reintegration assistance package, as they coincided with political developments in Iraq (i.e. democratic elections) and the recommencement of regular charter flights to Iraq making it possible for large numbers of Iraqi failed asylum seekers to return. Furthermore, departures to a number of other AVR destinations such as Ivory Coast, Macedonia, Syria and Ukraine, remained stable throughout the increased assistance period.

Where departures did increase with a rise in reintegration assistance, this often also coincided with an increase in marketing to those groups. For example, applications from Turkish and Indian nationals increased following the rise in the value of assistance in January 2006, but these populations had been targeted with increased marketing activity during the summer of 2005, which may have contributed to the increased numbers returning. In support of this, marketing of AVRIM, which usually awards no reintegration assistance,²⁴ was also increased over this period and was accompanied by a large increase in departures (albeit from a very small base – see Table 5).

Table 5 Number of cases returned under AVRIM programme, 2004–2006

Year	Number of returns
2004	10
2005	420
2006	860

Source: Home Office (2008). May include some on-entry cases and some cases where enforcement action has been initiated. Removals under this scheme began in December 2004.

The multiplicity of factors involved and the historically low take-up of reintegration assistance support the idea that reintegration assistance has not been one of the most important factors motivating return, although it may be more important for some groups or nationalities

²⁴ AVRIM does not grant reintegration assistance except to returnees who are classed as vulnerable, for example, those who have been trafficked who may receive assistance to the value of £1,000.

than others. Yet it can have an important role to play in facilitating a dignified return with the potential of longer-term sustainability. The analysis in Chapter 3 revealed that returning with little to show for initial migration may be a source of great indignity for return migrants (King, 2000; Wyman, 1993). Consequently, the provision of reintegration assistance may help to alleviate that indignity by providing a visible sign of advancement. Small business start-up assistance provides the most obvious sign of advancement and IOM's data show that it is the most popular form of assistance, with 89 per cent of those taking up assistance under VARRP 2005 opting for it in preference to vocational training or education.

Non take-up of reintegration assistance

Table 4 shows a sizeable proportion of VARRP participants have not taken up reintegration assistance. The review revealed no evidence on why this is, but it is likely that several factors are involved, including distrust of whether applicants will receive the assistance in the country of return, or practical difficulties associated with accessing assistance in countries with poor infrastructure. Another possibility is that returnees did not opt for assistance because they had their own economic resources to draw on. There is insufficient evidence around the socio-economic status of asylum seekers in the UK to support this hypothesis, but it might be assumed that a section of the asylum-seeking population are formally educated and/or cash-rich (see Burnett and Peel, 2001; Carey-Wood et al., 1995).

Evidence from the literature on factors affecting reintegration of AVR participants

Successful reintegration is defined by UKBA as that which is sustainable, i.e. returnees do not re-migrate to the UK. For IOM, successful reintegration, in the context of AVR, is a sustainable situation in which returnees find income-generating activities that help them to become financially independent for at least one year after their return. Successful reintegration can be measured through:

- returnees' subjective testimony;
- returnees remaining or expressing a desire to remain in their country of origin; and
- objective measures of returnees' income and housing.

There is little information on the reintegration of returnees and the majority of studies into AVR identified the need for more research in this area. Apart from the UKBA VARRP evaluations, the main source of published

evidence about reintegration was IOM's (2004) UK VARRP self-evaluation report. However, these reports lack detail, are based on small samples, only refer to UK programmes, and are thus limited in their scope. At present, there is no research evidence comparing outcomes for those returning to their country of origin with reintegration assistance and those without.

The main message from the limited amount of available research is that returnees face a number of barriers to their successful reintegration (see below). However, in terms of subjective personal satisfaction with AVR programmes, IOM (2004) found that 88 per cent of returnees were 'very satisfied' with the programme, and Clery et al., (2005) found that all respondents rated their satisfaction with the UK VARRP 2003 programme as 'excellent' or 'very good'. Other self-reported benefits of AVR were, as mentioned above, that reintegration assistance 'saved face' enabling a dignified return (ECRE, 2005), and IOM (2004) reported that 42 per cent of business start-ups had benefited the local community (although the report did not explain how).

The literature also shows that some AVRs were not entirely successful, even with reintegration assistance. Three studies reported that sizeable percentages of returnees were unemployed and/or considering re-migrating. IOM (2004) reported that 44 per cent of the AVR returnees they interviewed across seven countries, would consider re-migrating; Black et al. (2004) indicated the majority of young male returnees to Bosnia and Kosovo wanted to re-migrate; and Clery et al. (2005) showed that 50 per cent of VARRP 2003 returnees were unemployed. However, IOM London (personal communication) argue that self-sufficiency and business success for those returning with assistance has been greatly increased since VARRP 2003 and 2004 (although no published evidence is available yet to support this hypothesis). Even so, as little is known about those who return without reintegration assistance, it is not possible to measure the contribution of reintegration assistance to actual reintegration.

The major factors identified by the literature as acting against the successful reintegration of AVR participants are:

- economic instability and unemployment;
- loss of social networks;
- exclusion by members of the community who had not migrated and returned;
- destabilisation of local area due to large-scale return;
- poor housing and/or inability to reclaim property; and

- security problems and discrimination, including having no safe area to return to.

Other factors included: returnees' pessimistic attitudes towards the future; that reintegration funds were too small; and that returnees faced problems dealing with the authorities in countries of origin.

Successful reintegration in countries with poor political, economic and social infrastructures was shown to be a problematic process. Consequently, much of the literature focuses upon problems of, rather than conditions for, successful reintegration. However, the factors outlined above can be seen as almost mirror images of factors that promote successful reintegration, and they will be discussed accordingly.

Economic instability and unemployment

Unemployment and poor economic infrastructure in countries of origin are problematic issues to address through national AVR programmes. However, IOM, and its AVR programme funders, have taken steps by providing small-business start-up grants, business advice and vocational training for returnees.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that in some cases reintegration assistance would be more effective if accompanied by broader social and economic development in countries and communities of origin. For example, in the case of VARRP returnees to Albania, the lack of electrical infrastructure meant that they required the full enhanced package of £3,000 in order to buy electricity generators to start their small business (IOM London correspondence; see also OSCE, 2005). Hence, the evidence suggests that the value or form of assistance required to be most effective will vary according to the economic and service infrastructure in the country of origin.

Loss of social networks, exclusion by the non-migrant community and destabilisation

Although the evidence is mixed, large-scale return migration can potentially destabilise local economies. As Bascom (2005) illustrates in his case study of returns to Eritrea, the large-scale return of unskilled men can force wages down and rents up, which can be to the detriment of local communities, although cheaper labour and higher rents can be of benefit to the local economy. However, this destabilisation may be mitigated by reintegration assistance to enable economic self-sufficiency, accompanied by broader assistance to develop the social, economic and political infrastructure (ECRE, 2005; Sales and Blitz, 2003). King (2000) found that returning to start a small business is

relatively common amongst return migrants in general and small businesses tend to have only negligible effects on local economies. Business start-up support is the most frequently taken assistance type, and is a good way of helping returnees to support themselves in the absence of state social security.

AVR participants returning to impoverished and war-damaged areas with substantial amounts of reintegration assistance have been shown, in some cases, to provoke disaffection within local communities and encourage ill feeling towards returnees (Blitz et al., 2005; ECRE, 2005). This may be compounded by the loss or erosion of social networks resulting from periods abroad. Such negative reception by those who remained in the country of origin is significant because, in developing nations with weak and impoverished state systems, local communities are frequently the primary source of social security (Piperino, 2004), for example, housing, health and food. Similarly, these social networks are vital for developing the relationships necessary for entrepreneurial success in relatively unregulated developing economies (Granovetter, 1990).

IOM London addresses these issues through its business start-up assistance for returnees in parts of Africa, South America and Sri Lanka, by encouraging business partnerships between the returnee and the non-migrant community. Research shows that in the West, in general, migrant groups exhibit higher levels of entrepreneurial activity than indigenous populations (cf Kempton, 2002; Kirk, 2004; Light, 1972). Their success is partly due to their embeddedness in tight-knit social networks and because of their links to transnational contacts within their diaspora networks (Portes, 1995; 1996). This suggests that business partnerships could be an effective means of rebuilding eroded social networks for returning migrants by establishing strong, mutually beneficial links with members of the non-migrant community.

Poor housing and/or inability to reclaim property

The literature revealed that another of the barriers to successful reintegration was that returnees had problems accessing housing, or that they could not reclaim their own property following conflict, either because it had been destroyed by war, or their property and local area had become inhabited by other ethnic groups. IOM currently offers building materials to some groups as part of their reintegration assistance. However, small-scale reintegration assistance can do little to offset the effects of population movement, which highlights that attention needs to be paid to this issue at a broader strategic and international development level.²⁵

²⁵ The Department for International Development (DFID) is working to strategically address these issues through the Millennium Development Goals and other work to lift people permanently out of poverty.

Discrimination in country of origin

Another factor, identified by the review, is that returnees often face problems dealing with government authorities in their countries of origin. These may particularly affect minority ethnic returnees (see D'Onofrio, 2004; Heimerl, 2005), and are likely to restrict successful reintegration.

General literature evidence on the reintegration of returnees

The general literature shows that despite the different circumstances involved in the reintegration of refugees, economic migrants, asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers, the main factors facilitating or preventing successful reintegration are similar. Additional factors identified in the general literature on return migration, not covered in the AVR-specific research, were the impact of spending a long period of time away from the country of origin, and the act of return as a positive choice by the migrant.

Long period away from the country of origin

The general migrant literature highlighted that a long period spent outside the country of origin makes successful reintegration more difficult, owing to changes in the country of origin and the returnee. Although AVR participants do not generally live abroad for as long as economic migrants or refugees, they may still be affected by feelings of alienation and difficulty associating with the non-migrant population on their return.

Long periods abroad can affect more than the subjective and associational aspects of return. Bascom (2005), for example, illustrates that although returnees to Eritrea were mostly welcomed by the non-migrant population, they had lost the basic agro-pastoral cultural knowledge necessary for living in the area. Similarly, Ghanem (2003) shows that for women who had become accustomed to certain gender equality rights, there were considerable barriers to their reintegration in a country of origin where these rights were not respected. Therefore, the evidence suggests that reintegration post-AVR should be a smoother process for those who have spent a shorter time away, highlighting the importance of an efficient asylum process.

Making return as a positive choice

Another salient factor illustrated by the literature review of migrants in general, and applicable to AVR returnees, is that returns which are undertaken as a positive choice are more likely to lead to a successful reintegration outcome. The implication of this is that the less constrained the returnee feels the choice of AVR to be, the greater the

likelihood of successful and sustainable reintegration (cf Black and Gent, 2005). Thus, policy actions that enhance the return option and increase its appeal, for example by improving the clarity and transparency of the asylum process or improving the reintegration package, should also improve the likelihood of successful reintegration.

5. Conclusions

This report set out to provide a comprehensive synthesis of AVR research evidence. It presents findings from a literature review and collation of statistical data, identifying factors affecting the take-up and success of AVR programmes, and identifies gaps in the knowledge base.

The evidence revealed that decisions to return under AVR were influenced by a range of factors relating to personal and migration circumstances. On the individual level these included the individual's family situations in both the host country and country of origin, their socio-demographic characteristics, length of stay in the host country and the stage of their asylum claim.

Factors related to the host country were also important, for example the strength of enforcement systems and the level of trust in the AVR scheme. The evidence on the impact of social and economic conditions in the host country was more mixed and suggested that the impact is determined by the migrant's perception of the difference in conditions between the host country and country of origin.

The factors related to the country of origin which affect the likelihood of return were predominately related to the political, social and economic security and stability in that country, including education and health services. Additional considerations for those considering returning were identified as the stigma attached to returning without having been successful, the potential to reclaim property and the desire to help rebuild their country of origin.

Reintegration assistance was found, in some cases, to encourage return, but its prime significance was as a mechanism for facilitating the sustainability of return.

The evidence on the long-term success of AVR at ensuring a sustainable return was limited by the lack of empirical studies,

but some key inhibitory factors were identified. These included economic uncertainty, unemployment, poor housing, the loss of social networks and problems with security or discrimination. Many of the factors are complex and difficult to address through AVR policies alone and can only be resolved through attention to supporting political stability and the development of economic and social infrastructure in countries of origin.

One area in which AVR policy can potentially impact on the likelihood of a successful return is the development of reintegration assistance. The evidence shows that small-business start-up assistance was particularly popular as it could mitigate the 'shame of return' and was appropriate to the income-generating needs of many returnees. Yet, raising the value of assistance alone may not directly lead to an increase in take-up of reintegration assistance or AVR. The evidence shows that to facilitate take-up of AVR and the sustainability of return, both the value of reintegration assistance, and the form it takes, must be appropriate to the returnees' particular needs and the local conditions.

Much of the evidence uncovered by the review was relevant to the UK context as most of it was of UK origin. This was an advantage for interpreting the evidence from the UK perspective but it meant that there was little substantial comparative evidence.

Given the advantages that AVR offers over other removal mechanisms, both for the host country and the returnee, it is likely that these programmes will be operated and developed for the foreseeable future. The ideas and themes identified in this report provide a framework for AVR policy and operational leaders to consider, investigate and discuss when developing and refining AVR programmes to meet future challenges.

6. Knowledge gaps

The review revealed a dearth of evidence, particularly outside the UK's programmes, relating to AVR. Efforts in the UK and the rest of the EU could profitably focus on addressing the knowledge gaps discussed below in order to aid policy and operational leaders with refining AVR provision and to maximise the effectiveness of programme delivery. In particular, there is much potential for further individual and collaborative efforts by researchers across the EU, to evaluate and research AVR.

- Very little is known about the return experiences of non-assisted returnees or AVR returnees who do not opt for, or who are not entitled to, reintegration assistance. This lack of comparative evidence makes it difficult to judge the effectiveness of reintegration assistance, or to assess what other forms of support might be appropriate. It also makes it difficult to judge how effectively AVR programmes deliver a sustainable return, and which policy interventions would be most likely to enhance sustainability. One approach to fill this gap would be to conduct detailed monitoring of a sample of returnees in their countries of origin, including those receiving assistance, and those returning independently. However, this type of research is challenging to conduct in the field of AVR, given that it relies on the voluntary cooperation of returnees.
- Distinguishing between asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers in this research would highlight where differences exist between the groups. This distinction has largely been ignored by existing studies. These knowledge gaps may be addressed by engaging with a sample of UKBA asylum case owners in order to gather their knowledge about AVR promotion in the asylum process and reasons why people choose, or do not choose, to return with AVR programmes.
- Little is known about the characteristics of irregular migrants in the UK (partial exceptions are Anderson, 1998; Black et al., 2005; Jordan and Duvell, 2003), and there is an almost complete gap in the evidence about irregular migrants' attitudes and propensity to return. Gathering evidence to fill this gap would enable UKBA and IOM to ensure that their promotional efforts and the delivery of AVRIM are operating effectively. These groups tend, by definition, to lie outside of empirical research, but it is recommended that research is undertaken to build knowledge about irregular migrants and, in particular, about their attitudes towards, and knowledge of, return options.
- There is little evidence about the socio-economic status, skills or educational backgrounds of asylum applicants in the UK. Research in this area would enable UKBA and IOM to design AVR programmes with greater precision, particularly reintegration assistance, to meet the needs of participants. However, it is noted that there may be difficulties in accessing accurate information.

Appendix: Details of method

The information for this report was gathered using a literature review and the collation of statistical data. Most of the data relate to UK AVR programmes but, where possible and appropriate, international data have been included.

Review methodology

For increased reliability, consistency, and transparency, a systematic review methodology was originally chosen for this project. However, due to resource constraints and because of the nature of the studies being identified, a full systematic review methodology was rejected in favour of a rapid evidence assessment (Davies, 2003).

Search methodology

An initial literature search was undertaken using electronic social science literature databases. The databases searched were: Refugee Studies Centre Library; the British Library Inside; British Library Catalogue; The British Library of Development Studies; Social Science Information Gateway; Cambridge Scientific Abstracts; Ingenta; Swetswise; LexisNexis; Ovid; British Library of Economic and Political Science; Forced Migration Online and Google.

The search terms used were: assisted voluntary return(s); voluntary return(s); assisted return(s); return migration(s); migrant return(s); supported return(s); asylum return(s); refugee return(s); asylum removal(s); migrant removal(s); repatriation (repatriate); reintegration (reintegrate).

Following an initial sift to remove titles that were plainly unrelated to AVR (e.g. return migration of fish or birds, or the reintegration of criminals), the literature search yielded 1,276 titles. A number of these titles were doubles and triples of the same texts, and a larger number were only mildly related to the subject matter and the specific research questions.

Additionally, 18 experts working in the field of AVR were contacted in order to unearth 'grey', (i.e. unpublished) literature. Experts were asked for information about works-in-progress, government research, NGO reports, student dissertations, and any other unpublished literature, or literature that was published in obscure journals or edited volumes.

The experts included academics who were known to have been involved in AVR-related research (Richard Black, University of Sussex; Katia Amore, University of Warwick; Khalid Koser, Brookings Institute; Brad Blitz, Rosemary

Sales and Lisa Marzano, Middlesex University; Jean Pierre Cassarino, European University Institute; Lukas Gehrke, International Centre for Migration Policy Development; and the Refugee Studies Centre Library, Oxford). Other experts contacted were relevant officials working in government departments that operated AVR policies (Hans Van Miert, Netherlands Advisory Committee on Aliens' Affairs; Arno Tanner, Finnish Directorate of Immigration; Bente Scott Amundsen, Norwegian Directorate of Immigration; Neil Mullenger, Australian Immigration Service; Martin Kohler, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Germany). Members of international organisations involved with AVR were also contacted (Ana Fonseca, IOM London; Mariko Tomiyama, IOM Geneva; Tarek Abou Chabake, UNHCR Geneva; Laurent Dalmaso, IGC Geneva). Only two research reports were uncovered during the 'grey' literature search – one from Germany and one from Belgium.

Assessment for inclusion criteria

Decisions as to the relevance of studies were based on the researcher's initial examination of titles and keywords, followed by abstracts, and, where necessary, reading of entire texts.

Inclusion criteria were based on whether the research addressed either or both of two questions.

- Why do AVR participants choose to return?
- What are the conditions for the successful reintegration of AVR participants?

Successful reintegration would be ascertained by three main measures.

- Subjective testimony of AVR participants (positive/negative).
- Objective measure such as participant secured employment and housing (poor, reasonable or good).
- If returnees remained or expressed a desire to remain in their country of origin.

AVR studies uncovered

It was discovered during initial literature searches that only a very small amount of literature existed with regard to AVR. All of this literature was read and its bibliographies interrogated in order to uncover other relevant research. This, however, yielded only very few additional studies.

A total of 21 AVR-related studies that answered the research questions were uncovered. Nine of these studies were based upon primary research but, of these, only four investigated AVR participants specifically. The remaining five

primary research studies were based on interviews, focus groups and/or questionnaires with 'community groups' which included refugees, those granted humanitarian protection, and/or economic migrants rather than asylum seekers or failed asylum seekers specifically. Extrapolations from the 'community group' population may provide misleading information because these types of migrants might have different motivations to repatriate than, for example, failed asylum seekers.

The remaining 12 studies were evaluation or review studies, the proceedings of policy-orientated conferences or theoretical studies.

- Of the total 21 studies, 15 addressed questions related to AVR participants' motivations to return, and 14 addressed questions related to AVR reintegration.
- There were no primary research studies that focused on the return of irregular migrants.

Almost all the reports were qualitative and exploratory. They were thus not methodologically rigorous enough to undertake statistical meta-analysis (i.e. there were no examples of isolation of variables as in experimental studies; no randomised control trials; and no random sampling). The review could, then, only systematically compile and code the literature according to the criteria outlined below.

Broadening inclusion criteria: return of refugees and economic migrants

As so few AVR-specific studies were uncovered, it was decided to assess additional literature that focused on return migration and reintegration of refugees and economic migrants. The additional literature was not searched using a systematic search methodology owing to resource constraints. Rather, the intention was to include a representative sample of literature on return migration (i.e. it included review, evaluation, comparative and primary studies of the repatriation and reintegration of refugees and economic migrants).

This more general literature was reviewed in order to provide additional information about migrants' motivations to return and/or conditions for successful reintegration not uncovered by the limited number of AVR-specific primary research studies. It was also done to cross-check the factors identified by AVR-specific literature, and to reduce the possible bias of generalisation from the small population of AVR-specific studies. However, return migration has been researched relatively little outside legal studies (see King,

2000; Amore, 2005) and, consequently, this aspect of the review ultimately encompassed a substantial proportion of total published literature on return migration.

A total of 23 studies about the return migration of refugees and economic migrants were reviewed. Of these, 13 studies (primary, secondary and evaluation studies) related to motivations to return; seven of these included information about refugees' motivations, and six about general return migration – encompassing economic migrants and refugees.

Sixteen studies contained analysis and/or recommendations about factors that inhibited or promoted successful reintegration of refugees and/or economic migrants. Of these, five were primary research studies. The remainder were evaluation or review studies, comparative analysis, or conference proceedings.

Scoring the literature

Owing to the small quantity of evidence, the literature was scored by only one reviewer. This may have compromised the reliability of the review, since it meant that the scoring of the literature was based upon a single researcher's opinion. The review methodology and the report have, however, been peer reviewed.

Because the review was based almost entirely on qualitative research and very little primary research was available about AVR, the system for coding studies was altered slightly from the original Quality Assessment Tool (QAT) (Spencer et al., 2004) scoring system.

Studies were awarded a score depending on strength of their methodology and analysis, and the overall quality and relevance of the studies. The reviewer compared different types of methodologies (for example, primary research studies with reports summarising seminars about the direction of AVR policy), and awarded additional scores according to the type of methodology employed. It was considered that the original QAT score of one to five did not provide enough range to adequately award primary research studies a high enough value, hence a one to nine scale was used.

QAT scores enabled the reviewer to ascertain degrees of evidence for particular factors found by the literature to promote/restrict uptake of AVR programmes and/or factors found to promote/restrict successful reintegration of AVR participants. This aided decisions on how the final report was structured and narrated, and it also left the final report open for scrutiny by future reviewers.

Problems of generalisation

The reviewed literature dealt with a plethora of groups of people, as defined by age, sex, education level, nationality, and country of return, which made generalisation difficult. All of these factors influence people's motivations to return, their experiences of return, and barriers to reintegration. It is thus important to note that what works in one context may not work in another context.

Quantitative methodology

There were problems obtaining detailed statistical data describing AVR participants' demographic characteristics from both the UK and international sources. UK data were easier to obtain and, in general, much more detailed than most of the international data obtained. It appeared that many countries that administered AVR programmes did not keep data on AVR participants, other than the total numbers of participants that left under the programmes and, sometimes, even this was not available.

It was also found that different countries used varying methods of data collection and different ways of categorising AVR participants. This made accurate comparison of AVR statistics between countries difficult. Additionally, because the operation of AVR is entwined with the numbers of asylum seekers and removals within a particular country, comparison of AVR programme effectiveness between different countries was very problematic. Different countries contained different pools of potential returnees, different nationalities of potential returnees, and different enforcement and administrative systems, all of which made cross-country comparison highly unreliable. As Hailbronner and Gehrke (2005) argue:

For most Member States there are no detailed figures available about the number of foreigners obliged to return after rejection of an asylum claim for subsidiary protection, simply due to the fact that specific data collations do not always exist. This makes statistical analysis of the numerical effectiveness of return policies impossible especially in a comparative context

(2005: XVII).

In the UK, AVR data were gathered from different sources (ARK, UKBA and IOM London) in order to include a broad coverage of information. IOM London kept more detailed information about aspects of reintegration assistance and time scales of return than UK government sources. However, unlike much of the UK government data, IOM data have not been processed through the rigorous National Statistics quality assurances and may differ from Home Office published statistics.

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