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

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● 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.