
**Return and Reintegration Assistance
External Evaluation**

Country Study Georgia

Final Report

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Contracting Authority

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Abbreviations

AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
CHF	Swiss Francs
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
FOM	Federal Office for Migration
GEL	Georgian Lari
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
RAS	Reintegration Assistance Switzerland
RIF	Reintegration Information Fund
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SIM	swissREPAT – IOM Movement
TIG	Targeted Initiative Georgia
ZEMIS	Zentrales Migrationsinformationssystem

*Average exchange rate December 2012: Georgian Lari (GEL) – Swiss Francs (CHF): 0.55528
(www.oanda.com)*

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The views expressed by the evaluators do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Federal Office for Migration or the International Office for Migration. The conclusions, recommendations and remaining errors are ours.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The present report is part of the evaluation of the Swiss Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) mandated by the Federal Office for Migration (FOM) in 2012. The report aims at contributing to reaching the evaluation objectives and providing answers to the three principal questions by presenting data and experiences from Georgia. At the same time, this report is a document in its own right, designed to be understood by readers without the necessity to consult additional documents, including the six other country studies (Guinea, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Turkey) and the overall evaluation report.

Evaluation Objectives

- Determine the range and extent of outcomes of selected instruments of the Swiss return assistance for different target groups and countries of origin.
- Make an overall independent assessment of the outcomes achieved against the objectives envisaged.
- Identify key lessons and propose practical recommendations for the optimisation and further development of return assistance, especially with regard to different target groups and different native countries.

Principal Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent and how do country specific return assistance programmes and individual return assistance to Georgians promote voluntary return to Georgia?
2. To what extent and how do country specific return assistance programmes and individual return assistance contribute to the process of social and professional reintegration of returnees and thus sustainable reintegration in Georgia?
3. To what extent and how do country specific return assistance programmes and individual return assistance contribute to an improved cooperation of Swiss authorities and authorities of the country of origin?

1.2 Evaluation Methods

For this report methods of qualitative research were mainly applied, including a comprehensive review of documents (reports, data sheets) made available by the FOM and the International Office for Migration (IOM) on the Swiss Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes since 2005 as well as other relevant reports that feature Georgia specifically. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews (personal and telephone) were carried out with different stakeholders in Switzerland and Georgia, in order to triangulate the responses and increase the validity of our report. The interviewees were from the FOM, IOM and senior public officials in Georgia as well as representatives of non-governmental organisations, who are involved in the realisation of AVRR.

Most importantly, however, we interviewed returnees who received AVRR programme support in the period 2005 – 2011. For this purpose a mission was fielded to Georgia between 9 and 13 December 2012; it was carried out by Michael Morlok and Harald Meier in collaboration with the local consultant Maka Machkhaneli.

The selection of the interviewed persons was made randomly among those who returned through the country programme between 2008 and 2011. IOM Tbilisi contacted the returnees and asked for their consent to participate in the interviews.

Out of a list of 90 returnees IOM randomly contacted address by address until 20 persons, who agreed to take part in the interviews, were identified. Taken altogether IOM contacted 48 persons; 28 persons were thus not reachable (mainly returnees from 2008-2009). While some of them might only have moved or changed phone numbers, some might have re-migrated again.

Given that some returnees did not show up at the scheduled time and as a result interviews had to be rescheduled for others we were able, eventually, to carry out 13 interviews.¹ All interviewed persons were briefed about the purpose of the evaluation, the use of their information and were asked to sign an interview consent form.

Contact with persons who have not migrated – an additional element of the evaluation – was established by the evaluators during the field visit, without prior planning. The evaluators used different opportunities to talk to (mainly) male Georgians in their late twenties and early thirties, seeking their views and opinions on their situation in Georgia and on their plans to migrate to Europe.

Further interviews were conducted with a representative of the Swiss Embassy, as well as local organisations involved in AVRR such as the EC-sponsored Targeted Initiative Georgia (TIG) and Caritas Georgia. In Switzerland we interviewed senior personnel at the FOM, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and in the Cantons.

Where not otherwise mentioned the report does not differentiate between assistance provided through the country programme and the individual return assistance scheme.

2 Programme Presentation

2.1 Structure, duration, context and logic of the programme

The AVRR country programme for Georgia commenced in January 2006 and has since then been extended repeatedly. The programme was concluded along with a bilateral readmission agreement (*Rückübernahmeabkommen*) that entered into force in September 2005.² The readmission agreement aims at contributing to a more effective management of irregular migration and at enhancing bilateral relations with Georgia in this regard. Georgian nationals, who reside in Switzerland without authorisation, shall be guaranteed a quick and safe return to Georgia.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is mandated by the FOM to implement the programme; the country office in Tbilisi provides counselling services to the returnees, administers the payments and provides monitoring data to FOM.

The following table shows the number of country programme participants as well as beneficiaries of individual return assistance in the period of 2006-2011.

Table 1: Return statistics 2006-2011

Programme / Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
All return assistance	97	56	91	116	123	87	570
Country programme	28	38	54	59	33	25	237
% Country programme	29%	68%	59%	51%	27%	29%	42%

Source: FOM, Country programmes statistics (*Statistik nach Nationen 2004-2012*, January 2013; *Ausreisen Länderprogramme 2001-2012*, January 2013).

¹ An additional interview was scheduled with a person who returned to Poti where, for reasons of efficiency, we decided not to travel to.

² *Abkommen zwischen dem Schweizerischen Bundesrat und der Regierung von Georgien über die Rückübernahme von Personen mit unbefugtem Aufenthalt* of 8 April 2005 (entry into force 1 September 2005, SR 0.142.113.609).

The programme is open for Georgian nationals who reside in Switzerland under the Swiss Asylum law. Data of FOM show that between 2006 and 2011 a total of 237 persons benefited from return and reintegration support under the country programme, and a further 333 benefited from individual assistance (1,000 CHF departure assistance paid out at the airport in Switzerland). Altogether, there were 570 AVRR returns.

The programme offers a set of measures and services, including return counselling services (starting in the reception centres), organisation of and payment for return journey, cash assistance in the amount of 500 CHF (minors) and 1,000 CHF (adults),³ in kind assistance up to a maximum of 4,000 CHF for a professional or social reintegration project,⁴ other reintegration support as well as medical assistance. Furthermore, structural aid was provided to Georgia, most notably with regard to the medical component of the programme that focused on issues such as prevention of drug abuse, social work for drug addicts, methadone substitution programmes and rehabilitation.

Note: Since March 2013 the FOM has applied a 48-hour procedure for asylum seekers from Georgia,⁵ which is carried out in reception and procedure centres. Following an initial interview and issuance of a negative asylum decision, rapid repatriation is carried out with a return assistance of 100 CHF. Georgians who entered Switzerland before the end of March 2013 are still eligible to apply for return and reintegration support, but they must return until 30 June 2013.

The decision for the accelerated procedure comes as a response to the significant numbers of asylum applications that Georgians filed over the past years which resulted in negative decisions. In 2012, for instance, the acceptance rate was 0.3 % for Georgian citizens. In order to better understand this figure: the number of all asylum applications in 2012 (worldwide) amounted to approximately 28,000 and the total approval rate to about 12%. Against this background⁶ the FOM also decided to end the country programme for Georgia as of May 2013.

The new provisions also have ramifications for the individual return assistance: theoretically, Georgians who remain in Switzerland for more than 3 months should still be eligible to apply but in practice only few will likely have access to individual return assistance since many will fall short of the three month stay in Switzerland. Exceptions apply, however, for “vulnerable” persons. Changes are also being discussed as regards structural aid to Georgia (under the readmission agreement) and the medical component.

2.2 Country relations and frame conditions

Bilateral relations between Georgia and Switzerland have been particularly strong since March 2009 when Switzerland was requested by both Georgia and Russia to represent the respective interests on behalf of both states.

³ In case of a stay in Switzerland shorter than three months the cash allowances amounts to 500 and 250 CHF respectively.

⁴ The amount of the project assistance changed over time. Whereas it stood at 5.000 CHF at the beginning, it was reduced to 3,000 CHF and increased again to 4.000 CHF starting 2010. Also the cash payments were reduced to 50% in comparison with the start of the AVRR programme.

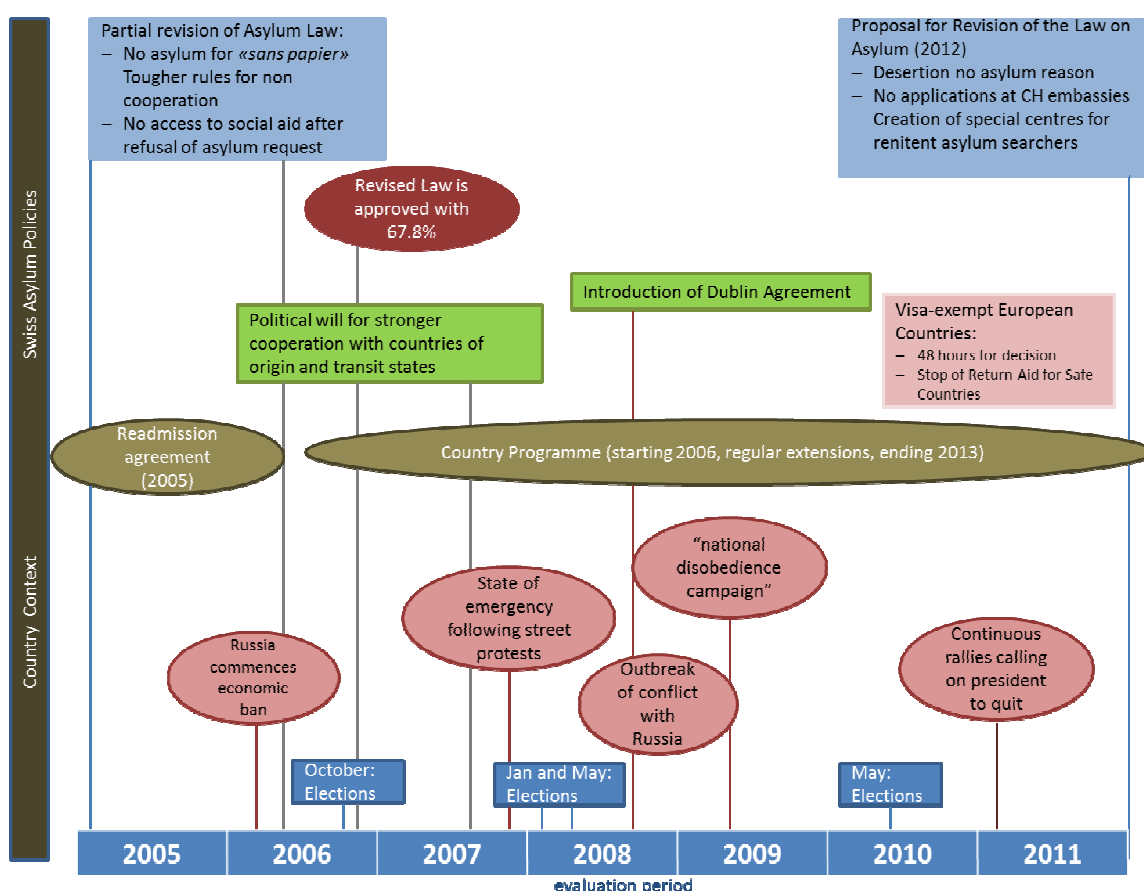
⁵ The accelerated procedure was applied already since August 2012 for three visa-exempt countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia) and since March 2013 also for Kosovars.

⁶ A reason not mentioned above is that the collaboration between the Swiss and the Georgian authorities is unfolding without problems; the country programme is not deemed to be a significant contributing factor for the good collaboration.

A readmission agreement is a technical instrument that sets out obligations and procedures for the involved authorities as to when and how to take back persons who are irregularly residing in the territory of the respective parties. The bilateral readmission agreement between Georgia and Switzerland entered into force in 2005. The agreement paved the way for the implementation of a country programme under which i) Georgian nationals have access to return and reintegration assistance and ii) Switzerland endeavours within the limits of its capacities and resources to provide Georgia structural aid in migration relevant areas.

The following graph shows the most important context development regarding the migration pattern between Switzerland and Georgia in the period of 2005-2011:

Figure 1: Swiss and Georgian context development



2.3 Selected return and reintegration programmes in Georgia

Apart from Switzerland other countries as well as organisations attend to the issue of voluntary return and reintegration. Whilst the programmes differ in volume and scope, they generally offer services similar to the Swiss AVRR programme – not least because of the fact that most countries collaborate with IOM for the roll-out of the programmes in Georgia. The following paragraphs provide for a brief description of selected current interventions⁷:

⁷ There are several other smaller scale projects of bi- and multilateral donor organisations; summarising them is a task beyond the remit of this study. A case in point, however, is the *Consolidating Reintegration Activities in Georgia* project, a two-year EC funded project (2011-2013) that aimed at supporting the

International Organisation for Migration: IOM started to implement voluntary return programmes in Georgia in 2003 and it currently operates such programmes for 15 European countries on a project basis (some of which are shown in Table 2).

In comparison with other programmes, the Swiss one is more generous, particularly in regards to medical assistance. Austria, for instance, applies a maximum of 2,500 EUR for the medical assistance component whereas other countries only cover first aid, tests and drugs up to a limit of a few hundred Euros. Differences also apply regarding the payment modalities; the UK and the Netherlands pay a retainer sum after six months, for example.

Until the end of 2011 IOM supported some 1,700 persons in returning to Georgia.

Table 2 provides an overview of the annual returnee data for a selected group of countries since 2005.

Table 2: Persons supported by IOM under a given AVRR programme

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Switzerland	0	37	46	56	68	45	33	285
Austria	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10
Belgium	0	0	4	4	19	30	24	81
Czech Republic	56	18	4	2	1	0	0	81
Ireland	0	3	13	10	35	38	32	131
Poland	0	1	0	0	186	227	86	500
Slovakia	0	0	0	0	4	18	4	26
UK	24	41	31	23	26	25	13	183
Other	0	0	1	3	40	131	109	451
Total	80	100	99	98	379	514	311	1748

Note: The data for Switzerland include both voluntary returnees under the AVRR programme and other voluntary return assistance.

Source: IOM Georgia

Targeted Initiative Georgia (TIG): The TIG is a reintegration and return programme of the EU Member States Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Sweden, with the Czech Republic bearing overall responsibility. It is financed by the European Commission and designed for an implementation period of three years. The TIG provides a variety of return and reintegration services including job placement, accommodation support, project funding in the amount of up to 2,000 EUR as well as medical support. On a policy level TIG supports Georgia in developing a strategy and associated action plan for migration management. In a so-called *Mobility Centre* in Tbilisi a team of social workers and psychologists is available to deal with returnees' problems whereas two *Job Counselling and Placement Centres* focus on professional reintegration of returnees.⁸

Contrary to the Swiss AVRR programme (and IOM programmes in general) not only "voluntary returnees" (i.e. non-deported returnees) are eligible for support but also deported persons, including persons who returned from a non-EU country. Another specificity of TIG is that the support is available retroactively, namely within 18 months of

development of a policy on reintegration and increasing opportunities for economic reintegration for returning migrants.

⁸ IOM also refers returnees to TIG Mobile Centers, namely returnees who are not eligible to participate in return and reintegration projects implemented by IOM or returnees who need job search assistance.

return to Georgia.⁹ In the first two years of existence the project has been offering support to some 600 returnees (the total of registered returnees in the TIG database is above 1,000) of which 44 were given non-refundable grants for start-up businesses (data as per November 2012). The grant is issued by a selection committee that brings together different representatives, including businesspersons, who review the business plans that are submitted for their viability.

As of December 2012 the TIG provided job counselling to 240 returnees of which 34 could be successfully referred. Further 64 returnees benefited from vocational trainings of which a third (21) found a job. According to the programme manager it is still too early for an assessment of the quality and stability of TIG and to draw “lessons learned” for such kind of professional reintegration.

Caritas Georgia: Caritas Georgia is mandated by the Belgian Federal Agency for Asylum and the EU (until 2010 also by the Netherlands) to provide return and reintegration assistance to voluntary returnees, including persons whose asylum application was refused. In 2011 Caritas managed 19 cases with a set of services, including cash payments (750 EUR), project assistance (1,750 EUR) and medical assistance (maximum 500 EUR). A job placement scheme had to be ceased as it did not live up to expectations. It is particularly noteworthy that Caritas offers to returnees to develop their business ideas (already while returnees are still in Belgium) and business plans with support of SMEDA, a Georgian business consultancy. The service is voluntary but payable (250 EUR) and yet: 50% of the returnees take up the offer.

⁹ This also explains that as of December 2012 there were 12 Georgian nationals registered in the TIG client database who returned from Switzerland between 2010 and 2012, including 2 forced returnees. These 12 returnees were not referred by IOM.

3 Dynamic of returns

In this section we take a look at selected data of the in- and outflow of persons from Georgia from the officially published data. Generally speaking, Georgia has regularly ranked among the top ten countries of origin in terms of the number of asylum requests in Switzerland during the period of observations and only in the recent past has this changed.

3.1 Data overview

Table 3: Data on Georgian asylum seekers, 2005-2011

Georgia	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Persons in the asylum process								
Total number of new asylum seekers	441	319	221	481	638	642	371	3113
Total number of Georgians in the asylum process in Switzerland	423	345	240	344	327	205	169	n/a
Number of persons with approved asylum / annum	0	1	0	0	0	3	3	7
Departures								
Supervised, independent exits in % of persons in the asylum process ¹⁾	65	57	36	110	113	88	63	532
Forced Return	33	31	47	89	163	94	58	515
Dublin returns	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Third country returns	3	0	2	2	2	4	5	18
Uncontrolled departure	47	35	32	63	109	86	88	460
Entries into asylum process	0	2	4	10	13	6	10	45
Other exits ²⁾	0	0	0	2	24	132	117	275
AVRR participants								
Participants	-	28	38	54	59	33	25	237
In % of departures	-	22%	31%	20%	14%	8%	7%	13%

¹⁾ Kontrollierte, selbständige Ausreisen; ²⁾ Until 2011 incl. so-called Dublin cases

Source: FOM Annual statistics; Country programme statistics

3.2 Discussion of data

In the seven year period that is subject of this review more than 3,000 new asylum requests have been processed. The data show similar patterns between the two periods 2005-2007 and 2009-2010, namely the gradual decrease of the total number of persons in the asylum process which, at least for the first period, was also associated with a decline of the number of new asylum requests per year.

As a result of Georgia's short war with Russia in August 2008, asylum requests peaked in 2008 and 2009 (between the two years there was a sharp 30% increase) and only returned to pre-war levels in 2011. The high number of new asylum requests in 2010 has arguably to do with a change of travel visa practice in Poland as regards Georgian citizens.

The number of persons in the asylum system gradually decreased from 344 in 2008 to 169 three years later. Latest data for 2012 (not in the table) shows that there has been a renewed increase to 277. The total stock of persons who are granted provisional admittance levels at around 70 per annum.

Participation in the country programme (starting 2006) has increased step by step in the first four years of its operations. This increase mirrors the normal evolution of a programme that develops and grows over time – with improved processes and more experience in implementing the programme on-site.

It is noteworthy that the proportion of voluntary returns to forced returns is small – despite the existence of a readmission agreement and reportedly good working relations between the Swiss and the Georgian authorities e.g. as far as document provision is concerned. These elements should lead to higher participation, since the risk of being repatriated is also higher. A similar observation can be made by comparing the number of supervised, independent exists (2005-2011: 532) and the number of uncontrolled departures (2005-2011: 460) over the period of observation. This might suggest that the package of return and reintegration assistance is not attractive enough to outweigh the actual and potential benefits of staying in Switzerland. Another reason that could explain the proportion is that the FOM also excluded returnees from applying to the country programme due to delinquency in Switzerland.

3.3 Migration and return motives

Migration to Switzerland is almost exclusively undertaken by Georgian men; predominantly men below 30 years of age. The interviews in Georgia show that the motives for migration are very heterogeneous – ranging from health problems (hepatitis, drug addiction) and family problems to adventure or even “fun” – and yet, most often returnees explain that the dire prospects of Georgia's labour market sparked their decision to find employment abroad. In practice, however, only a fraction of the migrants is able to find any job in Switzerland and those few jobs are in the informal, low skill and low wage sectors.¹⁰

As far as the reasons for return are concerned the following should be noted: all but one person had already received a negative decision before they sought AVRR support; but

¹⁰ For more information: External Evaluation AVRR Programme: Data Analysis, B,S,S. Economic Consultants, 2013.

8 out of 13 stated at the same time that the AVRR support was important – at that point – to consider returning as opposed to seeking alternative remedies (illegal stay, seeking asylum in another, neighbouring country of Switzerland, challenge the decision etc.). This is particularly the case for those returnees, who also benefitted from medical assistance (5 out of 7 reported that AVRR support was decisive).

4 Individual Returnees

This chapter presents ten cases of returnees and their story of migration, return and reintegration. They were selected out of the overall sample of 13 persons and shall illustrate the range of experiences had. In order to secure anonymity, the names have been dropped.

A.A.	
Gender	Male
Education / previous experience	Secondary school degree
Civil status	Single, no kids
Return to Georgia	Returned in 2009
Migration Trajectories In the course of 2008 A.A. left due to “<i>personal reasons and problems</i>”, which he wished not to explain in more detail (but which he later in the interview described more concretely as substance abuse). Having travelled via Ukraine, Hungary, Slovenia and Italy – partially crossing the green border by foot – he arrived in Chiasso in late summer 2008, where he immediately reported to the police. After one week, he recalls, he was transferred to Martigny (and a village in the vicinity) where he stayed for more than one year. During this stay his health situation deteriorated and he was eventually hospitalised (diagnosis: Hepatitis C/D) and received medical treatment for several months. He returned to Georgia in late 2009 with a flight via Vienna, where he met briefly with a person from IOM. Arrival assistance, offered by IOM in Georgia, was not required. Motivation for assisted return Plans to return to Georgia were never on his mind as long as there was some hope left that his asylum application in Switzerland could be successful. Once the opportunity of a legal stay was foregone, he approached the asylum centre for information on return assistance. The idea to open up a vulcanisation shop grew in discussions with other Georgians in the asylum centre as well as friends and family, with who he remained in contact throughout his stay in Switzerland. The concrete business plan was drawn up with support from an asylum officer at the asylum centre. He received 4,000 CHF to purchase the necessary equipment and to rent a workshop in Tbilisi. In addition, he received a 1,000 CHF cash payment at departure at Zurich airport. Apart from the negative decision, the offer of medical support in Georgia has been decisive for him to return to Georgia.	

Reintegration

Upon return to Georgia he was supported by IOM. First and foremost he continued to receive medical assistance that included regular blood and organ tests as well as medication at the “HEPA medical centre”. In 2011 he had the last medical examination following which medical support ended. Social integration has never been an issue; friends and family members helped him gain a footing in Georgia again. The vulcanisation business was established within three months but it failed after a short period of time, mainly because of his health situation and the high rent for the workshop that he was unable to pay. Also, the revenues fell short of expectations (bad location and facilities, few clients). He eventually sold some of the used goods and used the proceeds for other purposes. He now shares a flat with friends and has occasional jobs. He gives good feedback to staff of IOM Georgia, who have been in contact with him a few times, have been supportive and “human”.

Plans

A.A. is genuinely thankful for the support he received, particularly the medical support without which he likely would no longer live. Plans to leave Georgia are “*always in the air*” but have not materialised as of yet. The key problem is the need for medical assistance, which he is only marginally able to finance himself (costs for medical checks range from 100-300 GEL).

B.B.

Gender	Male
Education / previous experience	University degree in economics Supplier / asphalt company
Civil status	Married, one daughter
Return to Georgia	2010

Migration Trajectories

The person migrated from Georgia to Italy with a valid tourist Schengen visa in January / February 2009. The reason for his migration was his Hepatitis B/C/D infection for which no affordable treatment was available to him in Georgia. Efforts to obtain an asylum status in Italy failed and he thus decided to test the water in Switzerland, where he arrived via train in Chiasso in the course of 2009. He stayed primarily in an asylum facility in Chur and received medical support (interferon injections, blood tests) for several (18?) months (unable to provide more concrete information).

Motivation for assisted return

The person states that coming to Switzerland was only a means to obtain medical treatment and that he always wished to return to Tbilisi, not least to be together again with his wife and daughter. The negative decision he received did speed up the process of preparing for return. Information about the AVRR programme has been available in the asylum facility and was also given by the social worker. She advised about the opportunity of medical support in Georgia, which was the decisive factor to leave voluntarily. In addition, she worked out a business plan with him, namely the opening of an internet café. Family members in Georgia supported the idea, which provided for

additional motivation to start the project. He returned in 2010.

Reintegration

Even though the person still believes that the business idea was good, the actual location of the business did not work out. He ran the internet café for 2-3 months, then closed it and sold the equipment. He invested the money into an existing flooring business of a friend and he is currently still working at this shop. IOM supported his reintegration process by offering “business training”. He qualifies IOM staff as “good and attentive”. According to the interviewee the medical support that he received in Georgia was instrumental in the reintegration process – not least in view of the high medical cost (CHF 600 for an interferon injection). Even though he was sceptical when he accepted the return and reintegration support in Chur, he is surprised how easily everything unfolded. Social integration occurred without problem; he was welcomed and supported by his family, who were happy about the opportunity to open up a business.

Plans

His plans are closely associated with the business, which is supposed to grow (e.g. by becoming a representative office for a Swiss supplier of wooden floors). Given that he is able to sustain his family and that his health situation is “*under control*” he has no emigration plans. The feeling of “*being a nobody*” in Switzerland, even though he acknowledges to have received substantial support, also seems to have been a daunting experience.

C.C.

Gender	Female
Education / previous experience	University degree in natural sciences No job / work experience
Civil status	Married, three children
Return to Georgia	2010

Migration Trajectories

The person – 18 years old and pregnant at the time – left Georgia in September 2005 together with her daughter and her sister. They had obtained a tourist visa and travelled via Prague to Geneva where they applied for asylum. Her husband had already left Georgia, reportedly because of threats he received from a business partner, and applied for asylum in Zurich where he ended up by chance. In October 2005 she gave birth to a son, her second child. The person was offered to stay in a social institution (“*Heim*”) in Geneva as a single parenting mother, though with support of her sister. Due to an administrative issue she was barred from staying together with her husband. Until 2009, when the issue was resolved, he only was able to travel from Zurich to Geneva occasionally. She returned in 2010, having lived close to 5 years in Switzerland.

Motivation for assisted return

In 2009 the person (and her husband) received a negative decision but was given sufficient time to organise her return, not least because of the family situation. She had heard about the AVRR programme before, both from the social worker with who she

was in regular contact and other persons. Given that she had to leave Switzerland anyway she accepted the offer and requested to be given reintegration assistance to co-finance the purchase of an apartment in Tbilisi (any other support, such as opening up a business, appeared to be too risky for her (and practically a non-option because of her three children).

Reintegration

In addition to 700 EUR in cash at the Zurich airport she received 6,000 CHF, which she used to purchase a 60m² apartment (with additional money from her brother in law). Her package also included the financing of several sessions of a psychologist for her two older children, who suffered from a form of “*depression*”. Meanwhile her husband works on her mother’s farm as he could not find another job. She is extremely happy with the assistance – financial and moral alike – that she received.

Plans

The person states not to have any particular plans but to “*try and live a normal life*”. She does not have the wish to leave Georgia, stating that as a foreigner life in Switzerland is hard too (even though she received allowances of some 1.100 CHF per month).

D.D.

Gender	Male
Education / previous experience	University degree in marketing; No job
Civil status	Single, no kids
Return to Georgia	Returned in 2008

Migration Trajectories

In summer 2005 the person left Georgia and came to Germany one year later, where he was caught by police and brought to an asylum centre. Before he had lived in Ukraine, Slovakia, and Austria (where he states he went on hunger strike). After three months he left to France, where he briefly worked for a construction company and then went on to Geneva. By chance he met a few Georgians and applied for asylum in Vallorbe (summer 2007); he was then transferred to a “*Heim*” in Schaffhausen. In the beginning he tried finding a job on the black market but the longer his search was unsuccessful the more he was “*hanging around and being bored*”. Personal problems – substance abuse and a hepatitis infection – made him leave Georgia to search for better living conditions.

Motivation for assisted return

Once he learned that his asylum application was rejected his social worker suggested that he participate in the AVRR programme. Another resident of the asylum centre also encouraged him to take the offer and return, which he did. Within five days not only his project of opening a mushroom business was accepted but he was also granted medical support (injections once per week for six months in a clinic in Tbilisi). In 2008 he departed from Zurich (and received 1,000 CHF at the airport).

Reintegration

Back in Georgia he was in contact with IOM, who purchased the necessary greenhouse equipment and mushroom seeds for him (3,000 CHF) and also contacted him thereafter. However, most likely because of the bad quality of the seeds but also his lack of experience, the seeds only partly sprouted and he only produced a few kilos of mushrooms – which he had a hard time to sell on the local market. After the first season he stopped the project altogether. Whether he was offered business training or not, he cannot remember. He realises that the only ones who benefited “*were the sellers of the equipment and seeds*”. Generally he is of the view that the medical treatment was the most valuable element in the return programme – “*without health life is miserable*”. He says that with his sickness one is stigmatised in Georgia, which makes it virtually impossible to find a decent job. While in Switzerland he was regularly in contact with his family. Integrating again into the community posed no particular challenge since everyone in the village knew that he left and for which reasons.

Plans

He lives at home with his parents and has occasional jobs. He thinks of moving to a town to search for a job there and to start over again.

E.E.

Gender	Female
Education / previous experience	n. a.
Civil status	Divorced, 1 daughter
Return to Georgia	2010

Migration Trajectories

The person left Georgia in May 1998 for personal reasons related to her ethnic background together with her then 20 year old daughter, who is mentally handicapped. Via Moscow she eventually came to Bielefeld, Germany, where she stayed for the following five years as an asylum seeker. She then received a negative decision but managed to stay a few more months in Germany. During this time she got in contact with a Roma who brought her to Switzerland and she applied for asylum in Zurich. Years of proceedings (negative decisions, appeals etc.) followed during which she always stayed in Zurich, where she started to feel integrated. In February 2010 she was arrested in Zurich for two days and allegedly denied medication for her daughter. Even though there was a pending appeal she was deported to Georgia in late February 2010. A few weeks later she was allowed to come back to Zurich again and stayed there during the remainder of the appeal process.

Motivation for assisted return

She had been informed about the possibility for several years and by different social workers but was not at all interested in making use of the programme. The possibilities of staying in Switzerland outweighed by far the financial package of the programme. Once she received another negative decision (around September 2010) she accepted the assistance package (1,500 CHF in cash upon departure, 4,000 CHF for

reintegration purposes). In November 2010 she returned to Tbilisi via Vienna.

Reintegration

The return process was very well organised and handled professionally by IOM in Georgia. She received furniture for her apartment in the amount of 4,000 CHF. Spending the money for a business project seemed a *“complete waste”* to her. Medication for her daughter and herself was provided for a period of three months. The medication her daughter requires costs some 100 CHF per month – much more than the 100 GEL monthly social security benefit she receives. Although she appreciates that she received all support that was offered to her, she is bitter and feels that the negative decision she received by the Swiss authorities was wrongful. Through established contacts the person meanwhile found a relatively well paid job in Tbilisi and is able to finance her family. Still, she no longer feels *“at home”* in Georgia having lived so many years abroad.

Plans

She does not have any particular plans to return to Switzerland but she is very clear that she would seize any viable opportunity to leave the country.

F.F.

Gender	Male
Education / previous experience	Secondary school
Civil status	Currently studying (marketing, 2 nd year)
Return to Georgia	Returned in May 2009; in December 2011 deported to Georgia

Migration Trajectories

F.F. was twice in Switzerland:

1. In early summer 2008 the person came to Switzerland for the first time, namely to find a job and *“because I know that Switzerland is a great country”*. He entered via a route through Ukraine, Austria and Germany but states that he can no longer recall well the course of events. In Switzerland he was assigned to the asylum centre in Altstätten as well as to another one the name of which he can no longer recall.
2. In summer 2011 the person entered Switzerland for the second time. Before coming to the asylum centre in Basel he stayed in the Netherlands and about a month in Germany (at a friend's place). The reason for his migration was mainly *“problems with the local police”* (apparently due to a failed love affair with the daughter of the local police commissioner). Following receipt of a negative response he went to Germany, where he sought contact with an asylum centre. Within a few days he received a return ticket and went back to Georgia.

Motivation for assisted return

1. The return process took longer than planned because apparently his documents were lost by the authorities in Bern; re-doing his case file required time. He became aware of the possibility of assisted return in the asylum centres (posters, brochures)

and in conversations with one of the social workers. Once he learned that he could no longer legally stay he decided to take up the offer and leave voluntarily. The prospect of searching for another country to seek asylum seemed senseless to him at the time, and the offer (1,000 CHF cash payment and project) was tempting. In May 2009 the person returned to Georgia.

2. No assistance from Switzerland.

Reintegration

After the first return, in May 2009, IOM assisted in purchasing a tractor (approx. 3,000 CHF) for the family farm and vineyard. The investment was meant for the entire family and not only for the person. The family was able to expand its farmland but within less than two years the tractor broke; it is now no longer in use. Social reintegration has not been difficult since he could come back to his family and home town, where he soon met regularly again with this friends. IOM was in contact with him twice following the purchase of the tractor.

Plans

The person is now in his second year of studies in marketing at a university in Georgia. He has the ambition to finish a B.A., *“start over again”* and find a job in the tourism industry – or at some point a job in Europe.

G.G.	
Gender	Male
Education / previous experience	Secondary school; previous job as forwarding agent
Civil status	n. a.
Return to Georgia	July 2011
Migration Trajectories In August 2010 the person left Georgia and arrived in Chiasso in February 2011. From there he came to Locarno and later to an asylum institution in Biel. He travelled via Turkey and Greece, where he stayed some 5-6 months. The costs of the illegal transport via Turkey and Greece amounted to approximately 1,300 EUR. Even though he knew that he would never get permission to stay longer term in Switzerland, he was always focused on getting there: in search for job opportunities. For this reason he did not also bother to seek asylum in Greece. The immediate need to leave the country was caused by <i>“problems at work, which brought [him] into real trouble”</i>.	
Motivation for assisted return Following a few weeks of asking around he managed to find some illegal part-time employment in Biel (a few hours per week, for about two weeks and 30 CHF per day). However, he soon realised that the opportunities are meagre and, having received a negative response, decided to take up the offer of paid return that he was informed about by a Red Cross worker in the asylum centre. The choice of participating in the AVRR programme was simple: better take the money than return with nothing else but a bad experience. Within about two weeks his business plan was approved and his	

return organised. The idea to purchase a hearse was developed with his friend who already was in that business. It was planned to improve the business jointly.

Reintegration

Within two weeks of his return via Vienna IOM had finalised all necessary work to purchase the hearse. In the meantime the person also participated in IOM's business training, though he was not interested in the subject (he thought he had to be there). He did not make use of the offer to receive medical assistance. A few months after the investment it became clear that the business did not develop as he thought it would and he thus sold the hearse, replacing it with a delivery van. Since then he runs a distribution / delivery service that is more or less working out financially.

Plans

Altogether the decision to leave Georgia did not pay out: he now earns less than before. However, the plan is to continue the distribution business and *"live a normal life"*. This is possible as long as his previous employer (the one he left the country for) does not know he is back in Tbilisi. Though the person is mindful of the support he received, he argues that 6,000 CHF (5,000 for the car and 1,000 in cash) is far too little for many people *"to do some serious project or business"*. [Note: The interviewee repeatedly stated to have received 6,000 CHF. Yet, the maximum support under the Georgia country programme amounts to 5,000 CHF.]

H.H.	
Gender	Male
Education / previous experience	n./a.
Civil status	Married, two daughters
Return to Georgia	Returned in February 2009; in July 2012 deported to Georgia
Migration Trajectories H.H. went twice to Switzerland: 1. Already in 2002 he and his brother were brought to Ukraine where they stayed with family friends. He does not want to disclose more than that he had <i>"serious problems"</i> with his father at the time. Since 2004 both brothers were in different countries applying for asylum. In 2004, for instance, he left to Germany and his brother to Austria; three years later they met again in France. In France he was for the first time put into jail. In 2007 he came to Switzerland where upon arrival, police brought him to the asylum centre. Later that year he was transferred to Lugano. 2. In March 2012 the person made a second attempt to migrate from Georgia and travelled to Sweden and later to Belgium, where he also submitted an asylum application. In summer 2012 he finally came to Switzerland again where he was arrested shortly after the crossing of the border and put into a detention centre. The person states he was advised that he was in detention because of breaching the AVRR programme commitment but later police allegedly also filed charges against him for theft in more than 90 cases.	

Motivation for assisted return

1. He was soon “*sick of the situation*” in the asylum centre, namely because there were too many people with different cultural backgrounds. There he was persuaded by a group of fellow Georgians to use heroin again, though he was clean when he came to Chiasso. He was advised by a social worker to participate in the AVRR programme under which he could also get medical support to treat his drug addiction. With no prospect of staying in Switzerland and the prospect of some financial support (1,000 CHF cash payment and project) he accepted the offer. His project was to purchase two cows and two calves for the farm of his family. Participation in the methadone programme in Georgia was granted for a period of three months. Within four months of the first discussions with the social worker about participating in the AVRR programme he returned to Georgia.
2. No longer eligible to participate in the AVRR programme.

Reintegration

The person lives with his extended family in a small town where he helps at the farm, together with his wife and his twin daughters. Apart from a few occasional jobs he is not working, also because he travels every day to Tbilisi for the methadone substitution (the travel to/from Tbilisi takes about 1.5 hours every day). The support from IOM was professional and he has met the IOM team several times upon his return in February 2009.

Plans

The person wants to leave Georgia again as soon as possible (in direction of Switzerland, Strasbourg or Milan) (“*nothing can stop me doing so*”). He is bitter about the treatment in Switzerland and wants to be rehabilitated – as a matter of pride and principle. He also states that his case of ill-treatment should be heard at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

I.I.	
Gender, Age	Male
Education / previous experience	University degree, now cameraman
Civil status	Married, no kids
Return to Georgia	Returned in September 2010
Migration Trajectories	
He left Georgia in 2008, the day before the war between Georgia and Russia started. His reasons for emigrating were “<i>private</i>” and the fact that he was unemployed at the time. He arrived in Chiasso about two months after leaving Georgia (stops on his way were: Turkey, Serbia, Hungary, Austria and Italy). He was arrested by the Swiss police and sent back to Italy. As he tried to enter Switzerland a second time, the police arrested him again. He says he was treated badly (his clothes were taken away; he was beaten and laughed at). He was then brought to a refugee centre and interviewed. For six months he waited for an answer, and one day the police came and took him back to Italy. With a permit to stay in Italy for five days, he travelled to Geneva and was brought	

to Vallorbe, then back to Geneva. Here they treated him much better, and he told them his true story. While in Switzerland, he spent a week in prison (for having repeatedly used public transport without buying a ticket) and two months at a drug rehabilitation centre. When he received a negative response to his refugee application, he decided to go; he was tired. A translator told him about the programme (but he had already heard of it before). In September 2010 he travelled back to Georgia.

Motivation for assisted return

He received 1,000 CHF in cash and was promised 4,000 CHF as reintegration assistance upon submitting a business plan. He says that the assistance played an important role in his decision to return; but then, he also did not have a job in Switzerland, his family needed him back in Georgia, and he felt tired.

Reintegration

The business idea came from him. Friends of friends opened up a shop in a village near Tbilisi, and through the programme, he became a partner in their business. IOM bought products for the shop (sugar, salt etc.). He worked as an employee (shop assistant) for about two years (with a salary of 350 CHF). As his wife got pregnant, the commuting was too much, so he took his money out of the shop, and invested it into a different shop. He moved back to his hometown later and was again able to retrieve his money from the business. He now works as a cameraman. He got the job through an internship that his wife organised for him.

He was told about the business training but he did not participate. He was not interested in learning how to do business, he knew he wanted to move on (his passion was with cameras). He also got medical assistance which helped him a lot because his health was in a bad shape (no further details given). Generally he thinks that the programme made a big difference; *"if you have no money and no health you have all kinds of problems"*. From the start IOM helped him out; in his view, they were very professional. Socially, he had no need to reintegrate: he kept in touch with his family during the time he was away.

Plans

He is very happy with his job. He might travel abroad as a tourist, but he does not want to emigrate again. He's not in touch with other returnees; even in Switzerland he did not know any other Georgians.

J.J.	
Gender, Age	Male, 27 years
Education / previous experience	Divorced, no kids
Civil status	University degree (telecommunications)
Return to Georgia	April 2010
Migration Trajectories In autumn 2009, he left Georgia for personal reasons (while he did not further specify his reasons he did say that they were neither political nor related to the Georgia-Russia war). He managed to obtain a tourist visa for Italy and travelled there by plane. After a short while in Italy, where he stayed with a friend, he travelled on and arrived in Switzerland in early 2010 (why he chose Switzerland, he could not recall). He was stopped by the police upon entering Switzerland, and brought to a reception centre. He returned to Georgia a few months later, in April 2010. During his time in Switzerland, he did not work (but would have liked to). Motivation for assisted return He thought about returning before hearing of the programme and says he would have returned anyway: He feels much better in Georgia. The programme helped him make up his mind however. A Red Cross worker, who counselled him "<i>in a good way</i>", told him about the programme. He also heard about it through other Georgians. But as no one had experience with the programme, they were all sceptical about it and did not trust it. In the end, he would have come back anyway, so he decided to take up the offer. Reintegration He had the idea to buy a minivan, with the intention of transporting things back and forth to a small workshop. IOM bought the minivan, worth around 3,000 CHF, for him. He had no background in transportation; he studied telecommunications at the university. In this field he saw no perspective however, and the salaries are very low. The minivan broke down after 2 or 3 months, and he had to sell the van for a low price (ca. 1,000 CHF). But his business idea did not work out anyhow. He now works at a gambling centre as a bet maker, a job he's very happy with. Did the assistance help him? He says at least it helped him make up his mind about returning in the first place. However, 3,000 CHF is not much help for reintegration: While some people really appreciate this, the value seems not that high to him. Socially, he was well integrated and did not need any help in this regard. He kept in touch with family and friends while away. He was told about the possibility of medical support as well as the business training, but did not take up the training offer. He was not interested in the training and says that just having a certificate does not help with finding a job. Plans He says that he's ok off now and that he does not want to leave again (except as a tourist). He's very happy with his job. His friends still mostly want to try their luck. But he tells them not to go: The 3,000 CHF is not worth the hardship. As an asylum seeker, he argues, you are a no-body, you get treated differently. It's a degrading feeling.	

5 Reintegration

5.1 Frame Conditions for Reintegration¹¹

Georgia's 2008 war with Russia is the single most important event in the recent past and it continues to greatly influence the frame conditions for reintegration in Georgia. The period under review of this evaluation was also marked by a growing criticism of the government's legitimacy, which resulted not only in a much polarised political situation but also in violent street protests. Again in the run-up to the most recent parliamentary elections, there were tensions and occasional instances of violence and reports of detentions and arrests of party activists. At least one of the interviewees explained that he was contemplating leaving again, because of the deteriorating security situation in the village where he lives.

There are approximately 260,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the conflicts in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions during the 1990s remain in Georgia,¹² who require particular political attention. Resolving the pressing issues of inadequate housing and low employment gained a more prominent place on the government's agenda in the past years.

While Georgia experienced several years of steady economic growth, which only came to a brief halt in 2008 and 2009, and features regularly among the most reformist countries as far as business climate is concerned, a substantial part of Georgia's population continues to live in poverty and the unemployment ratio remains high with close to 15% - though most international organisations and NGOs believe the figure to be significantly higher. Several labour market difficulties persist, including a high youth and urban unemployment rate that increasingly affects the population with higher education. The apparent mismatch in the labour market, exacerbated by a vast informal sector and a dysfunctional job market in which nepotism regularly paves the road to success, and associated unemployment was most often stated to be the main reason that motivates specifically Georgian youth to migrate.

An important element is the social environment within which return and reintegration takes place. Family bonds in Georgia continue to be tight, which is also reflected in the interviews held in Georgia. Yet in a few selected cases this also leads to conflict which in turn can lead to migration (despite being mentioned several times it appears to be a secondary migration reason, however). Nevertheless, the vast majority of the respondents were able to go back to the fold and to reconnect with friends; many of the returnees stayed in contact with their social network during their migration.

In 2009 the European Union and Georgia concluded a Mobility Partnership. Over the past years negotiations were held for visa facilitation and a readmission agreement, which entered into force in March 2011. The ensuing dialogue on visa liberalisation "*with the aim to discuss the conditions for visa-free travel to the EU for Georgian citizens*" has recently been formalised in the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, which was handed to Georgia in February 2013. At the same time Georgia drafted a Migration Strategy 2013-

¹¹ For section 5.1 several resources were consulted: Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2012 – Georgia Country Report, Gütersloh, 2012; Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Georgia, European Commission: Progress in 2012 and recommendations for action, SWD(2013) 90 final, Brussels, 2013; Election Observation Mission: Final Report, OSCE/ODIHR, Warsaw, December 2012.

¹² Source: <http://mra.gov.ge/main/ENG#section/50>; accessed on: 2 April 2013.

2015 that deals with migration and development, legal and combating illegal migration, asylum policy and the return and reintegration of Georgian citizens.

5.2 Assessment of Reintegration

Based on the interviews with returnees, the appreciation of IOM and other actors involved in the implementation of the programme as well as external observers, we make an assessment of the quality of the reintegration.

General: There is a general sense of gratitude amongst the returnees for the return assistance that was offered to them – even more among the ones who received additional medical support than among the others (see also below). Most of the returnees were of the opinion that the AVRR support was helpful in managing the difficult period of transition from Switzerland to Georgia. At the same time, without being prompted, two of the interviewees stated that the financial assistance was too little to set up “something real” (an additional four answered the same when they were specifically asked).

Social integration: Most of the returnees were of the opinion that social integration did not pose any particular problem for them. Family relations are generally very important for Georgians, which also transpired in the interviews, and most of the interviewees maintained contact with their relatives and friends during their migration. At same time family reasons were at least in two cases the main reason for the departure – not counting those cases in which drug addiction led to family tensions. The ease of coming back to the family is closely associated with the relatively young average age of the returnees and the relatively short stay abroad (on average 1.4 years in the interview sample). For those who were abroad for a longer period of time, reintegration can be a challenge, at least initially, when adapted lifestyles, values and attitudes cause alienation from friends, family or generally the majority population.

Assistance: The types of assistance most often used among the interview sample are business projects and medical assistance. The business projects themselves differ in terms of branch and modality and thus reflect the ambition and effort of all parties involved – returnees, counsellors and IOM – to identify projects that suit the needs of the respective returnee.

Table 4: Types of assistance

Types of assistance	Examples	n
Business	shops: wooden floors, vulcanisation, curtains; mushroom farm	8
Accommodation	purchase of furniture; purchase of apartment	2
Other	purchase of tractor	3
Medical	hepatitis treatment, methadone substitution programme	7

Note: Some returnees received supplementary medical assistance; therefore the number of projects displayed is higher than the number of returnees interviewed.

Still, four returnees changed their business given that their initial plan failed and we also observed three returnees who stopped their project altogether, for different reasons. Those who changed their business were able to recuperate some of the invested money and to reinvest it for another purpose (e.g. selling a used hearse to buy a minivan;

selling computer equipment to co-finance another business). To such situations IOM reacted with the required flexibility, which not only the returnees but also other interview partners clearly see as an asset of the Swiss AVRR programme.

However, the fact that changes occur frequently suggests that too many resources are being invested superfluously in developing a business plan whilst the returnee is still in Switzerland. Without having direct insight into local realities or contacts to the social network it appears that business ideas cannot be assessed in sufficient detail.

Self-assessment: With a view to measure the success of the *business projects* the returnees were asked to make a self-assessment according to four indicators that we present in Table 5. Half of the business projects are considered successful, one of them to the extent that the returnee can cover the living costs of his family with the proceeds of the business. The other four returnees were of the opinion that their projects failed; two believe that they are worse off now than before – because the financial support could not cover the full amount of the investment required or because a business risk was taken, which would not have been the case had support not been provided.

Table 5: Self-assessment business projects

Assessment	n
Successful, living costs fully-partly covered with proceeds	1
Partly successful, living costs partly-minimally covered/supplemented with proceeds	3
Partly failed, but had some impact ("personal benefit")	2
Failed, same situation or even worse than before	2

Accommodation support: The accommodation support projects were both qualified as being very “successful” in the sense that they greatly alleviated the burden of return. Having the issue of housing sorted out freed up resources – money and time alike – in order to search for jobs in the first months following the return. It is noteworthy that the accommodation projects were chosen by the two women of the interview sample. Both were of the opinion that investing into a basic human need is by far more sustainable than operating a risky business venture.

Reasons for success and failure: The reasons due to which a business project is successful are primarily tied to the specific case: differences in terms of age, family situation, personal and health situation, prior experience and expertise, the actual location of the business and its access to clients etc. – all these factors and combinations thereof serve as explanations. It is thus not easy to identify common factors for success (or failure). Yet, two conclusions can be drawn:

- *Operating a business is complex and necessitates a certain set of skills:* Those whose project failed gave reason to conclude that they were over-burdened with the project both in terms of the actual work to be done and the administration that goes along with the project. On the contrary, those who were able to build up on relevant professional experience or education were able to develop the project.
- *Business Orientation Training:* The IOM runs complementary and voluntary business training with a view to support returnees in the start-up phase of their business project. The training covers basic entrepreneurial topics such as market research and situation analysis, legal and financial basics and soft skills. However,

participation in the training has been low throughout the period of implementation of the AVRR programme. In the sample for this report, for instance, only *one out of thirteen* took up the training offer. Changes to the training format (interactive, workshop-style, individual sessions) did not bring about the envisioned demand for training as of yet. IOM currently discusses the idea to eventually make the business training a mandatory feature of the reintegration assistance.

Short term stabilisation: Even in those cases in which the business is no longer operational positive side-effects contribute to “stabilising” the returnee during the first few months of the reintegration period. Having a project, an idea and something to do, not returning with empty hands and thus saving face, being able to contribute to family income – all these factors help focusing on return and reintegration rather than regretting having missed the chances abroad. This observation is underpinned by the views of return counsellors in Switzerland who explained that developing a project idea already in Switzerland helps returnees to re-orient and re-focus on their prospective lives in Georgia and to start becoming emotionally ready and prepared for return.

Medical Assistance: Under the AVRR programme Georgians have the opportunity to additionally benefit from medical assistance. IOM Georgia is managing this part of the programme by referring or helping to enrol returnees at the appropriate medical institutions. According to one study, about 20% of all asylum seekers avail themselves of the medical support, which is a significantly higher rate compared with other countries.¹³ According to observations of return counsellors, however, there is a downward trend of this kind of asylum seeker in the recent past.

Given that many Georgian asylum seekers suffer from substance abuse, medical support is typically provided for the treatment of hepatitis, for detoxification and out-patient withdrawal and methadone dispensation as well as for the treatment of psychological problems. A specific feature of the medical assistance is that the maximum amount is not capped; in an *exceptional* case the support reportedly amounted to 16,000 CHF. Furthermore, it is also offered to returnees who are not *per se* eligible for the return and reintegration assistance.

Medical support has been a recurrent theme in the field interviews. Seven of the thirteen interviewees received medical assistance and all of them repeatedly stated that this type of support was decisive not only for their decision to return but also an important element during their reintegration process. The interviewees repeatedly qualified medical support as the most important element of their return and reintegration package. This holds true particularly for five returnees who received hepatitis treatment or took part in a substitution therapy. As far as those interviewees with hepatitis are concerned, most of them would have been unable to access a similar treatment, which is costly and not covered by any public health programme or welfare scheme. Those with a drug addiction can resort to a governmentally supported methadone programme that covers the substitute drug, whilst the patient only pays for the work of the medical personnel; the cost of such treatment is approximately 150 GEL or 90 CHF per month.¹⁴ IOM informed returnees about these governmental schemes.

¹³ Drug Use Among Asylum-Seekers from Georgia in Switzerland, IOM Bern, May 2010.

¹⁴ Drug Situation in Georgia 2010, Javakhishvili et. al., GIP-Tbilisi, 2011

Offering medical assistance, diagnosis and treatment for certain diseases in Switzerland, for which medical support in Georgia is not accessible, is very helpful and builds up trust in the quality of the Swiss return and reintegration efforts.

5.3 Effects on and Perception of non-migrant Populations

From the small sample of interviews and the data analysis that was carried for this evaluation it is not possible to assess concretely whether pull effects exist or not. There are a few arguments that speak against the existence of at least a *significant* pull effect. We briefly explain these points in the following:

- The *rate of the acceptance* of return and reintegration assistance under the country programme is very small in comparison with other forms of exiting the Swiss asylum system. For a significant part of persons eligible to benefit from the assistance the option of finding alternative solutions (illegal stay, leaving to another country etc.) appears to outweigh the benefits of the return and reintegration assistance.
- Eight of the thirteen returnees we interviewed entered Switzerland illegally and two report that they needed to pay sums up to 2.500 CHF for the *illegal journey*. In light of these costs – even though they are partially offset by the return assistance – it is difficult to argue in favour of a pull effect.
- The majority of the returnees we interviewed stated to have *learned about the existence* of return and reintegration assistance *in Switzerland*; they denied having come to Switzerland “specifically for purposes of the financial support”.
- From the interviews we cannot discern that a person would have come to Switzerland with a view of receiving medical or other financial assistance upon the person’s return to Georgia. Quite to the contrary: persons who migrate have the primary wish to stay abroad and to seize opportunities to build up a better life.

More than the AVRR programme the presence of family, friends or other networks in Europe provides a certain “pull-effect”; in a similar vein, the possibility of accessing a high quality public health system might be a pull factor (one interviewee stated to have left Georgia specifically to find treatment for his hepatitis infection).

The push factors – including in particular unemployment, low income and an overall difficult socio-economic environment that have been identified as key drivers of the migration of Georgians – appear to be much more important.

These observations do not necessarily coincide with the statements of some of the return counsellors we interviewed in Switzerland. Their experience is that many returnees, including Georgians, often dispose of fairly good knowledge of the options for return support – though it is impossible to establish whether they acquired the knowledge abroad or in Switzerland. There is also a notion that those who enter Switzerland with the support of a facilitator do know about the return assistance – in the event that their asylum applications is refused.

The truth is likely somewhere in between: pull-effects can neither be excluded nor proven with sufficient certainty.

Although not a pull-factor in the strict sense but related: The current practice that persons who stay less than three months in the Swiss asylum system receive substantially lower financial assistance than the ones who stay longer carries the risk of providing false incentives.

Following the introduction of the new 48-hour rapid procedure only very few Georgians are likely able to access return assistance. The new procedure practically puts paid to any attempt to benefit from return assistance.

6 Cooperation

6.1 Background

Bilateral relations between Switzerland and Georgia date back to 1992 and have been good ever since. In March 2009 Switzerland assumed responsibility to facilitate the diplomatic contacts between Georgia and Russia, which led to significant intensification of the bilateral relations. Switzerland also mediated in regards to the customs agreement between both countries in November 2011. Cooperation in the field of education, peacekeeping and security as well as humanitarian aid also intensified in the past years.

Both countries signed a readmission agreement of persons with unauthorised stay in April 2005; it entered into force on 1 September 2005. Based on the provisions of the agreement, namely to foster collaboration as far as the reintegration of persons returning to Georgia is concerned, the Federal Office for Migration developed a country-specific return assistance programme.

The programme, which was initially planned to last until end of 2007 but was since then regularly extended, aims at supporting voluntary and sustainable return and is implemented in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the International Organisation for Migration.¹⁵ Under the programme return and reintegration assistance takes different forms with a view to fit to the needs of the returnees in light of the specific country context.

Against the background of the readmission agreement and the country programme (see also above 2.1 on the background and structure of the AVRR programme) Switzerland and Georgia have commenced negotiations on a visa liberalisation scheme (see also above 5.1 regarding the EU-Georgia visa liberalisation process).

6.2 Assessment by Georgian Authorities

Georgia's primary concern with regard to migration, according to a representative of the Ministry for IDPs, relates to managing the thousands of internally displaced persons, particularly in terms of finding permanent solutions for housing and social and economic integration (a problem that waits to be resolved for almost twenty years). Secondly, in light of the ongoing migration management efforts in the context of the visa liberalisation negotiations with the EU, more importance is given to reduce the number of forced returnees to Georgia. It also emanates from the interviews that the AVRR programme is – compared with other migration relevant issues – too small to be of particular interest.

Against this background the Georgian authorities do not appear to place particular importance to the issue of voluntary returns *per se* – to the extent we were able to establish in this review – but they appreciate that Switzerland supports fellow citizens so

¹⁵ World Vision International has in the past also contributed to the operational implementation.

as to reduce the number of forced returns. Medical support is very much appreciated in governmental, social and medical circles.

The implementation mechanism of the programme – e.g. the amount and intensity of meetings, exchange on issues of relevance – is very low profile.

6.3 Assessment by Swiss Authorities

There is a general notion among the programme stakeholders that Switzerland entertains very good relations with Georgia in the field of migration, which facilitates the implementation of the readmission agreement (documents, for instance, can be obtained very easily and returnees, principally, do not experience problems upon arrival by Georgian border or customs personnel) as well as the country programme.

Whilst there have been intense contacts between the authorities at the time of designing the country programme, this has not been the case in the past few years. Collaboration has been smooth and did not require particular follow up or coordination mechanisms (meetings, reunions etc.). Neither has the country programme been a topic of particular debate on the occasion of bilateral talks. Generally speaking, the Swiss authorities did not promote or advocate the country programme actively.

The country programme will ended in May 2013 and it is expected by the Swiss interview partners that this decision will neither have any ramifications on the current good working relations nor on the ongoing negotiations for visa liberalisation.

7 Conclusions

The following chapter provides a summary of the findings presented in chapter 1 to 6, and the evaluators' conclusion on the Swiss AVRR programme in Georgia. The assessment and conclusions are primarily based on the interviews with returnees, most of which expressed gratitude for the assistance and support they received; such feelings can have an impact on the feedback.

7.1 Return

Voluntary return is not the preferred outcome of the asylum process – but the existence of an assistance package often tips the scales towards return.

The actual return and reintegration payment seems to have only secondary importance on the decision to return (negative decision on the asylum application, family and personal reasons, disillusionment etc. seem to be primary motives for return). The vast majority of returnees in fact waited until an asylum decision is issued before making any steps towards return. Once confronted with the situation of having to leave, the AVRR assistance is, however, an important element in the return process, medical assistance seemingly more than the project assistance. Still, the number of voluntary returns is small compared to forced returns and other forms of leaving the country, despite the existence of a readmission agreement and a country programme.

Information provided by return counsellors and IOM has an effect on the participation rate and increases acceptance of the instrument.

Scepticism and concerns that some returnees had at the beginning of the return process, namely whether the return assistance would eventually be paid on-site, soon dissolved as a result of both comprehensive and detailed counselling in Switzerland as well as professional services by IOM in Georgia. All interviewees confirm that they had received what was promised to them.

7.2 Reintegration

The impact of reintegration assistance is difficult to measure – most certainly it contributes to stabilising the returnees during the first months of the return.

Reintegration assistance helps returnees in the period of transition; it helps stabilising and provides the returnees the opportunity to focus on the present rather than the past and to structure one's life upon return. Reintegration assistance is one of several factors that play a role as to whether return and reintegration are sustainable or not.

Reintegration assistance is a valid means of helping returnees to start again – but the actual form of assistance requires a thorough and frank assessment during the counselling sessions.

The success of a business project appears to hinge on several factors, including the personal skills and experiences of the returnee. For returnees who for whatever reason do not have the right skill set, the use of the assistance to pay e.g. housing seems to be the more practical form of support. Paying the reintegration assistance in the form of a monthly allowance to cover for living costs might also be the better aid in such situations.

Returnees have very good experience with IOM and reiterate their professionalism.

IOM Tbilisi enjoys very good reputation amongst the interviewees, who repeatedly qualified them as professional, flexible, understanding and “human”. IOM has the advantage of operating AVRR programmes on behalf of several European countries, of being closely involved in interventions such as the Targeted Initiative Georgia from where it can draw lessons learned, and of maintaining close contacts with both governmental and non-governmental bodies in the field of migration in Georgia.

7.3 Cooperation

The country programme seems to have little effect on the bilateral relations, which are generally very positive; ending the programme should have no effects at the level of governments.

Bilateral relations between Switzerland and Georgia are good and have intensified during the past years. The positive relations are also mirrored in the smooth implementation of the readmission agreement and the country programme. Both Georgian and Swiss authorities qualify the country programme as a “nice to have” but put more weight on the importance of the readmission agreement.

8 Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed after the field mission to Georgia in mid-December 2012. With the introduction of new procedural provisions for Georgian nationals as of March 2013 and in light of the phasing out of the country programme¹⁶, some of the recommendations may no longer be relevant for FOM's work in Georgia; they might still be of interest for other contexts, e.g. countries where country programmes or migration partnerships continue to be implemented.

8.1 Preconditions

The new proceedings for Georgian asylum seekers necessitate defining the strategy of providing return and reintegration assistance on-site and the approach and specific actions for vulnerable groups.

In light of recent changes to the proceedings for Georgian asylum seekers ("48-hour procedure"), the end of the country programme and the probable decrease of the future caseload as well as the smooth implementation of the readmission agreement it is recommended to:

- Define how to cater for the few future beneficiaries of individual return assistance (e.g. vulnerable persons): the options are, for instance, to continue collaboration with IOM on a smaller-scale or consider collaboration under the TIG project.
- Keep the possibility of providing medical assistance to vulnerable groups and to provide relevant support under the structural aid component of the readmission agreement.

Service quality of counselling services in Switzerland is an element that builds up trust and increases the acceptance of the AVRR instrument.

The returnees speak generally very positively about their experiences with return counsellors in Switzerland and cherish their support. Contacts with return counsellors contribute to help returnees re-focusing and are thus an important element in the entire return processes. And yet, more operational work, such as the development of business plans, is recommended to be provided upon return in Georgia – not least given that many projects are changed once the returnee is back home.

8.2 Incentives for Return

The amount of return and reintegration assistance should be reviewed in order to mitigate the risk of undesirable incentives.

Some interlocutors were of the opinion that the current system of paying higher amounts of return assistance on the cantonal level (as compared to the reception centres) incentivises asylum seekers to prolong their stay in Switzerland in order to access higher AVRR payments.

¹⁶ In future only those who stay more than three months in the Swiss asylum system as well as vulnerable cases will be principally eligible for individual return assistance. The aim of the 48 hours proceedings and ensuing repatriation is precisely to shorten the asylum proceedings and the presence of the asylum seeker in Switzerland significantly, well below the three-month threshold. The practice for vulnerable groups (e.g. drug addicts) remains to be defined.

Medical assistance: provided in Switzerland and in Georgia can play an instrumental role in a person's decision to return and should be continued.

It is recommended that persons who need to return within the 48-hour procedure continue to receive support for medical treatment for a certain period of time upon their return to Georgia. This should be limited to diseases for which medical assistance is not easily accessible (e.g. hepatitis).

8.3 Reintegration Assistance

Business projects: should be granted following a careful assessment of the resources of a returnee and the risk of failure of a project.

It is far-fetched to assume that every person can sustainably operate a business project. Hence, with a view to mitigate the risk of failure of business projects potential beneficiaries must be carefully assessed regarding, for example: Previous work experience in the field; personal or family assets to co-invest or support of the business idea; availability of a qualified or complementary partner to run the business jointly. The risk (and possible profit) of a business also have to be taken into consideration. If a business project is not feasible, other support that is less risk prone should be provided (e.g. housing, vocational training).

The first, preliminary assessment can be carried out in Switzerland, namely in the meetings with the return counsellors. On this occasion the business idea can be developed. The operational design, including the drafting of a business plan, is best done in Georgia by persons with in-depth contextual knowledge. Experience shows that many projects are changed shortly after arrival on-site. Overall, this should also decrease the amount of administrative work and associated cost in Switzerland.

Business training: should become a mandatory element of the reintegration assistance for selected returnees with little or no relevant experience.¹⁷

The operation of a business – albeit small – requires basic skills and knowledge. To the extent that returnees do not possess such expertise, the participation in relevant training can increase the success rate of a business. Depending on the individual background of a returnee and type of project, the release of the payment should be made contingent upon participation in business training.

As far as the design of the business training is concerned, it is recommended that the training concept of IOM (content, approach, training provider) be reviewed along the lines of good practice in Georgia. In this context it is recommended to continue the recent practice of carrying out training in the TIG's Job Placement and Counselling Centres in Tbilisi and Kutaisi.

Payment modalities: consideration should be given to foresee a retainer payment following a six month period.

It has hitherto been the practice that the reintegration assistance is paid in full at the beginning of the project. This bears the obvious risk that there is no more capital at the disposal of the returnee to make up for a failed investment or to make necessary adaptations or repairs. Depending on the project, a retainer payment should also provide

¹⁷ Note: At the time of submitting this final report IOM advised that this measure has been implemented starting 2013.

for an incentive to try harder with the project. The additional administrative effort that is required for the payment of instalments appears to be manageable and could coincide with the last IOM monitoring exercise on site.

Medical assistance: consideration should be given to allow for reintegration assistance to be used for medical purposes only.

The provision of medical assistance has repeatedly been qualified as an important and distinct element of the Swiss AVRR programme. All stakeholders share the opinion that such assistance is in selected cases not only a *conditio sine qua non* but generally an element that significantly influences the sustainability of the return. The current practice is that medical assistance can be used for a period of three to six months. Beyond this period, however, challenges remain for the returnees to access and afford medical services. Against this background it is advisable that the reintegration assistance can be used only to cover medical assistance and for a longer period of time compared to the current practice. To the extent that structural aid continues to be provided to Georgia (under the readmission agreement), investments into medical support and prevention measures should be considered.

8.4 Follow-up of Reintegration

Monitoring should be continued to collect and analyse data and information for sound policy and decision making.

The current practice of six- and twelve month monitoring should be maintained. Monitoring data should be more actively shared among interested stakeholders in Switzerland (FDFA, SDC, Cantons, non-governmental organisations that attend to the issue of return and reintegration).

8.5 Other

Feedback to return counsellors in Switzerland.

During the evaluation we had the pleasure of speaking to qualified and enthusiastic return counsellors and the feedback of the returnees suggests that the service quality of return counsellors in Switzerland is generally high. Amongst the latter we noticed a common wish to learn more about the concrete successes *and* failures of return and reintegration assistance.

Reporting and communication by IOM.

Two interview partners were of the opinion that IOM reporting should paint a more realistic picture and spell out more clearly the challenges and failures that are experienced on-site.¹⁸ This could be done, for instance, with a more systematic yet brief post-18 or 24-month monitoring exercise as part of the annual reporting. At the same time FOM should reasonably communicate to IOM that candid reporting will not influence the eventual extension of a service provision mandate.

¹⁸ Monitoring is carried out by IOM in Georgia. Given that the same persons who granted assistance are the ones responsible for monitoring, it cannot be excluded that responses of returnees have a positive bias – which eventually results in what some interview partners qualify as “*overly positive reporting*”.

Persons interviewed in Switzerland and Georgia

Switzerland

- Eve Amez-Droz, International Office for Migration, Bern
- Simon Blunier, Head of Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region, Federal Office for Migration, Bern
- Odile Rittener, Deputy Head Migration Section, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Bern
- Nikolai Pchelin, Coordinator Return Assistance, Sozialhilfe-Basel Stadt, Basel
- Michael Ammann, Federal Office for Migration Focal Point, Reception Centre, Kreuzlingen
- Nawzad Kareem, Head of Return Section, Durchgangszentrum Rain, Glarus
- Peter Marty, Head of Return Section Cantons OW, SZ, ZG, Caritas Schweiz, Lucerne

Georgia

- Ilyana Derilova, Chief of Mission, IOM Mission to Georgia, Tbilisi
- Rusiko Imnaishvili, AVR Project Coordinator, IOM Mission to Georgia, Tbilisi
- Bela Hejna, Project Director, Targeted Initiative for Georgia, Tbilisi
- Jean-Daniel Andrey, Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia, Tbilisi
- Konstantin Razmadze, Ministry for IDPs from the occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees/Migration Unit, Deputy Head of the Migration Unit, Tbilisi
- Irakli Gamkrelidze, Head of Centre, Centre of Mental Health and Prevention of Addiction, Tbilisi
- Levan Baramidze, Head of Centre, Centre of Mental Health and Prevention of Addiction, Tbilisi
- Liana Mkheidze, Development and Emergency Programme Manager Caritas Georgia, Tbilisi

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