



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Den Internationale Migrationsorganisation (IOM)

Mr. Thomas vom Braucke
Finance and Accommodation Division
Danish Immigration Service
Ryesgade 53
2100 Copenhagen

Copenhagen, 31 March 2017

Re: Final report to the Danish Immigration Service on the project "Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark II (AVRR-DKII) – 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2016.

Dear Mr. vom Braucke,

I am pleased to submit to you on behalf of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) the final narrative and financial report for the project "*Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark II (AVRR-DKII)*." The report covers the full implementation period from 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2016.

As specified in the enclosures, IOM registered assistance to 299 persons, who returned voluntarily from Denmark to their country of origin during the project, which implemented activities by IOM under the Support Programme II (*Støtteordningen II*).

While the 299 persons are less than the initial estimate of maximum 750 persons benefiting from the project, it is highly probable that any number of the 299 persons might not have returned voluntarily, had they not been able to receive reintegration support under the project. As such, the project responded to clear needs amongst the target group in Denmark. Concurrently, it facilitated the work of the Danish authorities by offering a well-defined and voluntary alternative to government facilitated returns, hence clarifying who were cooperating on the return and who not.

It can be noted that IOM's figures on persons assisted under the Support Programme might differ slightly from the figures of the Danish authorities as some persons returned without the assistance of IOM.

In the project, IOM registered a project expenditure of total USD 1,871,856 out of a received contribution of USD 2,251,295. Due to the lower than expected project expenditure, IOM did not in relation to the interim reporting submit a payment request for the second instalment of the full project funding of USD 4,502,589.

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The project balance by 31 December 2016 was therefore **USD 379,439** in the Danish Immigration Service's favour. As per the Project Agreement, unused funds will be returned to the donor unless otherwise agreed between the parties.

IOM would like to propose that the remaining funds could be channelled towards project activities in support of Assisted Voluntary Return from Denmark. This would fall within the objective of the project and in extension of the overall aim of the Support Programme to facilitate cooperation on return. As IOM has expressed to Danish authorities on separate occasions, including to the Danish Immigration Service, the Danish Police, the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, IOM sees a clear need for continued Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration assistance to asylum seekers in Denmark. Including but not limited to pre-departure counselling, voluntary return travel arrangements from Denmark and reintegration assistance in countries of origin.

We would like to thank the Danish Immigration Service for the cooperation on the Support Programme. IOM stands ready to discuss the above proposal with you, as well as any other issues pertaining to the enclosed reports, the project or IOM's work in general.

Yours sincerely,



Simo Kohonen,
Sub-Regional Coordinator

Enclosures:

- Narrative final report on the project "Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark II (AVRR-DKII) – 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2016.
- Financial final report on the project "Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark II (AVRR-DKII) – 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2016.



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM)
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)

Final narrative report to the Danish Immigration Service **Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Project II (AVRR-DKII)**

Executing Organization:	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Project Management Site and Relevant Regional Office	- IOM Country Office in Denmark - IOM Regional Office for the European Economic Area (EEA), the EU and NATO (RO Brussels)
Project Period and Overall Duration:	1 April 2015 to 31 December 2016 (extension: 30 September 2016 – 31 December 2016)
Geographical Coverage:	Denmark and voluntary returnees' countries of origin worldwide
Project Beneficiaries:	Asylum seekers in Denmark who want to return voluntarily
Project Partner(s):	The Danish Immigration Service (DIS), the police National Operational Aliens Centre (UCN), the Counselling Service for Asylum Seekers in Denmark (Danish Refugee Council, the Danish Red Cross)
Project Identification and Contract Numbers:	IOM Project Code: RT.1110 IOM Legal department Approval/Checklist Code: DNK/FDNK/LA0124/2015, DNK/FDNK/LA0205/2016 (Amendment)
Reporting Period:	Final narrative report: 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2016 Financial report: 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2016
Date of Submission:	7 April 2017
Total Confirmed Funding:	USD 4,502,589
Total Funds Received to Date:	USD 2,251,295
Total Expenditures:	1 April 2015 to 31 December 2016: USD 1,871,856

1. SUMMARY OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

The project *Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Project II (AVRR-DKII)* intended to contribute to the further development and consolidation of general Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) services for asylum seekers in Denmark. The project would facilitate the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) of up to 750 migrants, who arrived to Denmark before 19 March 2015 and who applied for AVRR before 1 April 2016. The conditions and eligibility criteria of the support programme were set down in a Bill accepted by the Danish Parliament Financial Committee on 19 March 2015 and kept confidential until the date of its acceptance. IOM therefore did not know of the establishment of the support programme until requested by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) on 20 March 2015 to launch the programme as soon as possible.

The programme largely built on the procedures and cooperation networks established under the previous *Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Pilot Project*. Operational from the beginning of 2013, the pilot programme for the first time offered voluntary return and reintegration support to broader groups of asylum seekers in Denmark, although only to those who applied for asylum in Denmark before 18 December 2012. The deadline for applying for support under the pilot programme was 1 July 2013.

When IOM on 20 March 2015 was informed of the establishment of a new support programme similar to the pilot programme, it was possible to build on previous experience and initiate operations on relatively short notice once a project agreement had been signed. IOM could therefore arrange the returns of the first persons eligible for support already in April 2015.

In the project period, Denmark similarly to other European countries experienced an increased influx of asylum seekers towards and in the second half of 2015. Although only persons who arrived in Denmark prior to 19 March 2015 remained eligible for the support, and the newly arrived were not eligible for AVRR under the programme, the overall pressure on the asylum system had consequences for this project also (specified further below in section three). The reception system amongst others expanded heavily, leading to the establishment of asylum centres across the country with many new staff.

IOM supported the achievement of the project objective and outcomes throughout the project period by consistently implementing, sharing information on and presenting the benefits of AVRR towards eligible migrants, operational partners and the donor. In view of both project implementation and long-term consolidation, IOM brought to the donor's attention any operational issues that were deemed to require donor consideration and approval before arrangements could proceed. Specifically:

- IOM arranged the return of 260 persons with support in the project. This includes 258 persons under the project plus two additional persons assisted to return under other project structures but eligible to receive support. According to IOM's information, 39 eligible persons returned voluntarily to their countries of origin with the assistance of other partners. A total of **299 eligible persons** therefore returned to their Countries of Origin during the project. IOM paid reintegration support to the majority of these persons.
- IOM Copenhagen coordinated the payment of reintegration cash grants corresponding to an estimated value of USD 918,404 in support of a reestablishment and sustainable reintegration in the country of origin.

- IOM paid special attention to **vulnerable returnees** needing special assistance during or after travel. This included *inter alia* attention to any medical issues that could affect travel, referral to specialized medical services in the country of origin when available, as well as the arrangement of medical or social escorts in total five times for returnees to Iraq (2), Lebanon (1), the Somaliland region of Somalia (1) and Afghanistan (1);
- IOM collected a growing contact base amongst existing and new contacts in the asylum system and at the Danish police. This database consisting of almost **150 individuals and shared e-mail addresses** facilitated sharing of project and contact information, materials and statistical updates to a broad group of stakeholders;
- IOM fortified existing cooperation or made new contacts with staff of approximately **30 embassies** in view of travel document issuance and information sharing on the project;

Further details related to referrals, applicant profiles and returns are provided here below. It should be noted that IOM in most cases only has detailed information on those persons, who returned with IOM, wherefore the statistics in some places refer to the return of all eligible persons (299),¹ in other places only to those who returned with IOM under and received support (260) or under the project itself (258) .

AVRR statistics

Return countries and travel documentation:

¹ Insofar as IOM has accurate information on returns implemented by other partners.

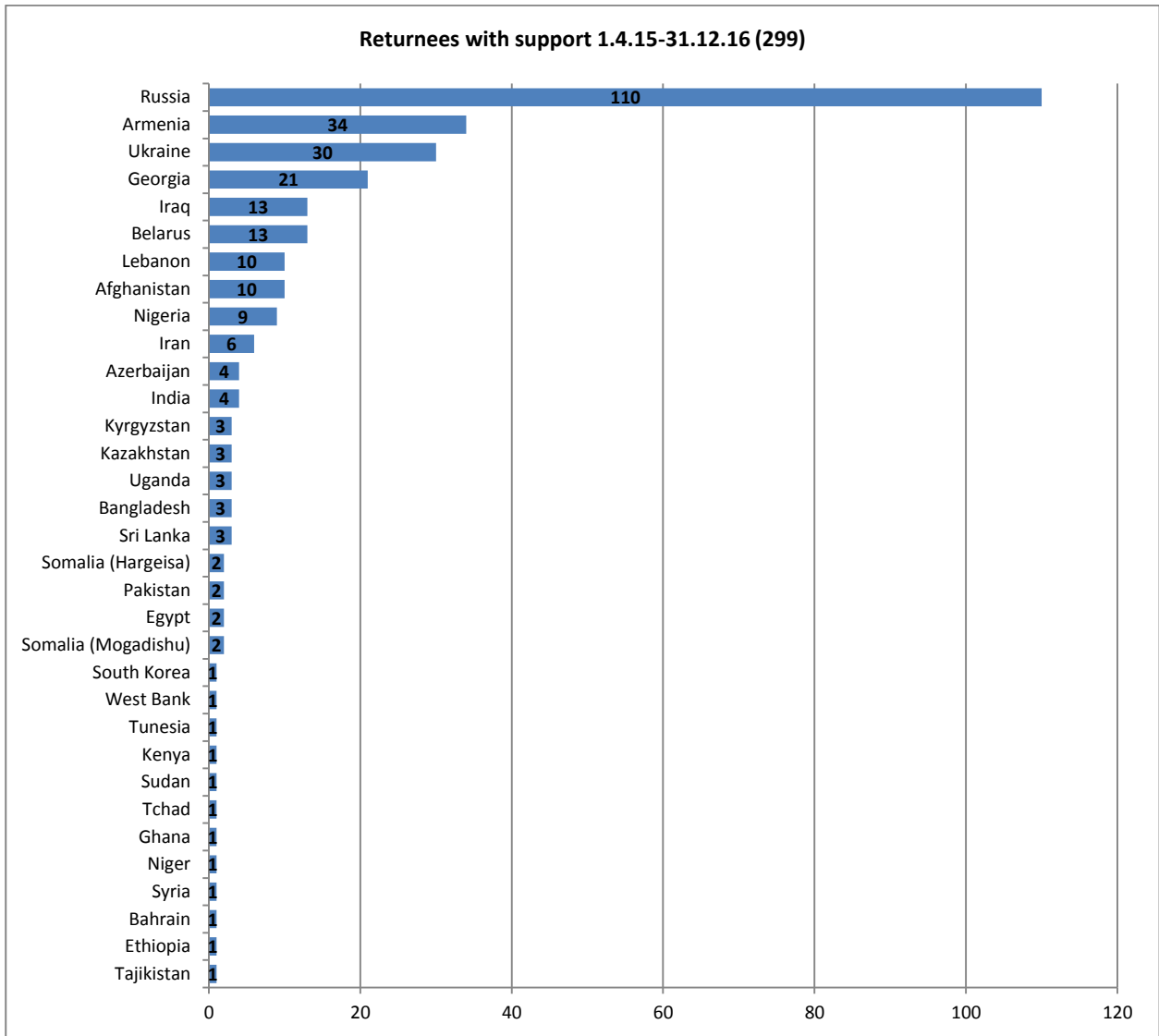


Figure 1

IOM registered the return of total 299 persons under the programme. The majority of these returns took place to the Russian Federation with 92 persons or 37 per cent of all returns. The following large return destinations were Armenia with 34 persons (11 per cent), Ukraine with 27 persons each (10 per cent) and Georgia with 21 persons (seven per cent). Returns took place to 33 countries or regions with Eastern Europe constituting the largest region of return.

Of 260 persons, whose travel was arranged by IOM, 76 persons (29 per cent) are registered as having used a passport as travel documentation, whereas 184 persons (71 per cent) travelled on documents issued by the return country's embassy or the Danish authorities. Seeing that IOM as a rule does not apply for passports but emergency travel certificates, persons travelling on passports therefore either had an existing passport in their asylum file or presented a previously unregistered passport to IOM or a partner in relation to the application for AVRR. Although IOM during the AVRR process witnessed that a number of persons revealed existing national documents and/or another identity/nationality than the one under which they had applied for asylum in Denmark, which greatly facilitated the return process, almost three out of four applicants had to be assisted with the time consuming process of applying for

travel documents from the responsible national authorities. This contributed to extended processing times (see below).

Asylum status:

In the project, IOM registered a total of 453 individuals approved for AVRR support by the DIS according to the eligibility of the support programme, whereas an estimated 600 persons expressed an interest in the programme (without necessarily being eligible).² The most precise IOM figures are available for persons who were approved for support and also returned with IOM (260).

According to IOM information, 186 of the 260 returnees were rejected asylum seekers (72 per cent), whereas 74 persons (28 per cent) had decided to withdraw their asylum application. The persons withdrawing however also include persons, who had been rejected in earlier stages of the asylum process and decided to withdraw only in relation to an application for AVRR. Persons with a final withdrawal after one or more rejections in the asylum system are here registered as having withdrawn the asylum application, wherefore the percentage of rejected asylum seekers is probably somewhat higher than 72 per cent.

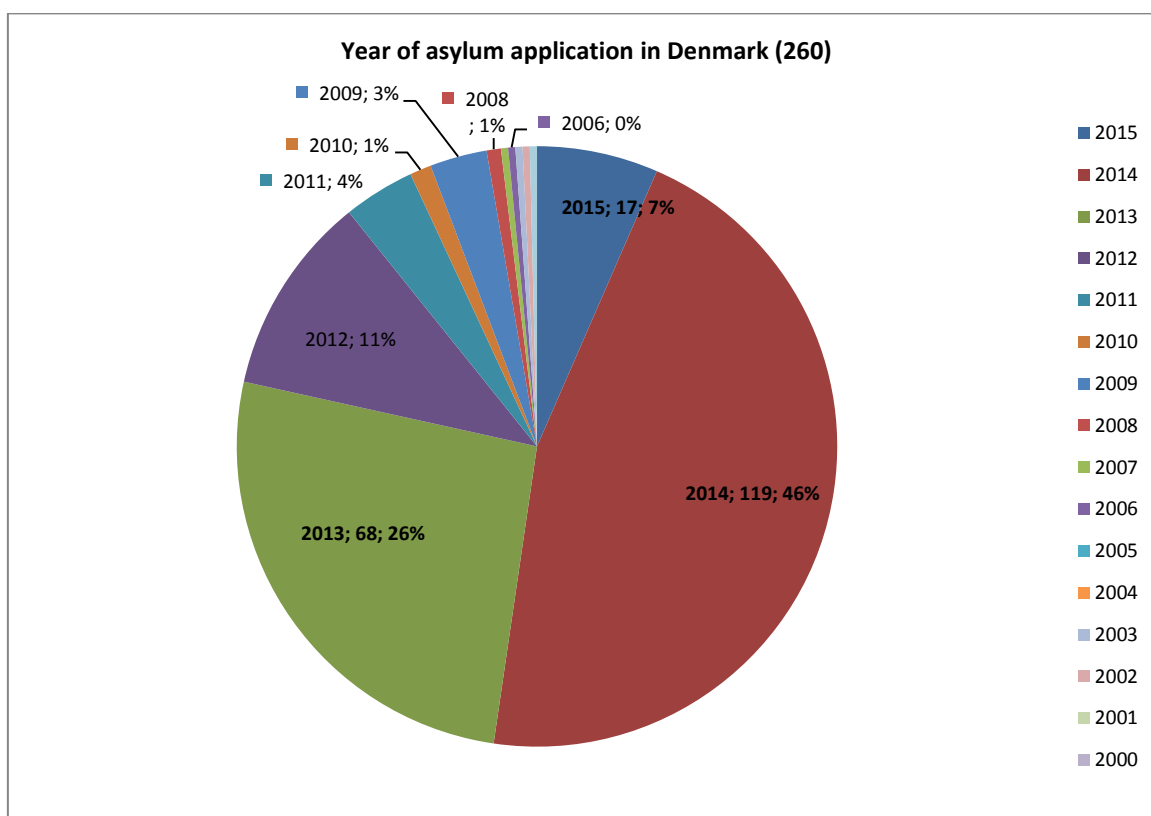


Figure 2

² IOM figures may differ from those of the authorities depending on whether a person who applied from IOM was ultimately approved for support or if IOM was informed of a rejection for support or not. In the project, IOM was for legal reasons only informed by the donor of approved persons, not of persons who were rejected for support.

Of the 260 returnees with IOM, most persons had applied for asylum in Denmark in either 2014 (119 persons) or 2013 (68 persons.) In total 204 persons or 78 per cent of the 260 returnees had applied for asylum in Denmark between 2013 and March 2015 when the programme was launched. The majority of the 260 persons who returned with IOM hence had not been eligible under the pilot support programme from 2012 and had been in Denmark for two years or less. This indicates that applicants were more likely to accept an offer of AVRR if they had spent a short time in Denmark and their asylum case was relatively new.³ Even if the programme was primarily used by rejected asylum seekers, the figures show that it was a challenging task to make rejected asylum seekers take up AVRR offered only a long time after the final rejection. Of the 186 returnees registered as rejected asylum seekers by IOM, only six had received a final rejection in 2012 or earlier (three per cent).

Returnee profiles

Across all IOM returns (260 persons), 93 persons or 36 per cent travelled as singles, whereas 167 persons travelled as part of a family unit (64 per cent). Approximately 43 per cent were female while 57 per cent were male.

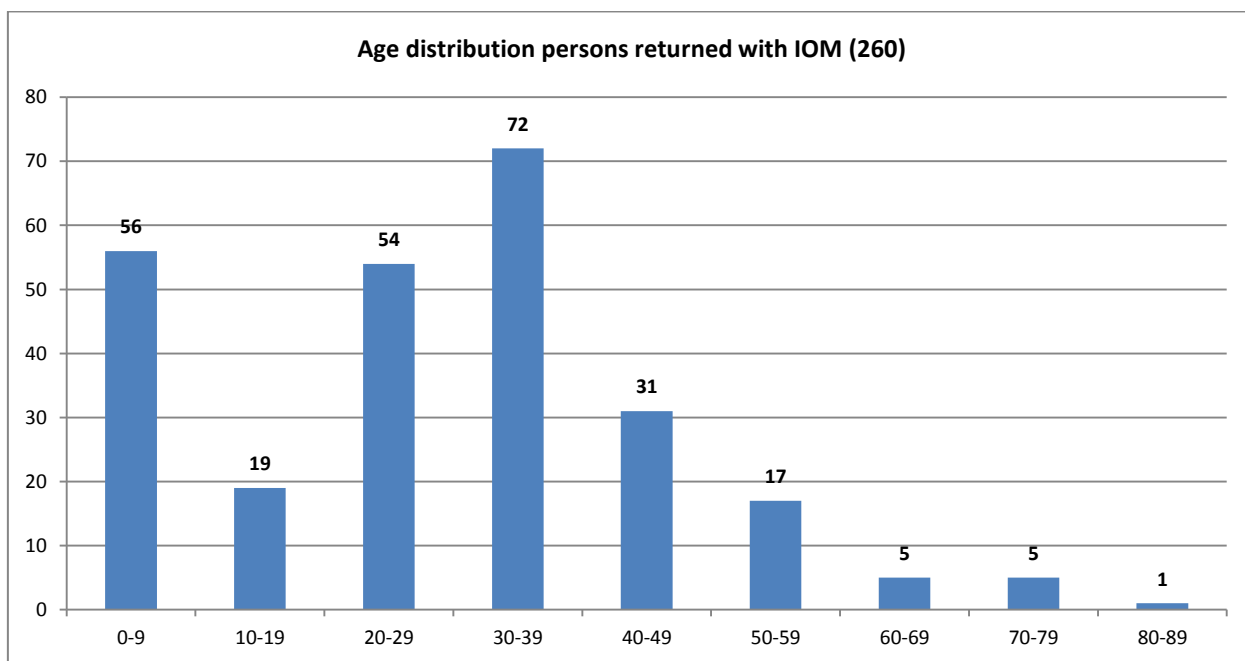


Figure 3

Of the 260 persons whose travels were arranged by IOM, a total of 73 persons were under the age of 18 at the time of return (28 per cent). These 73 minors were all accompanied by their guardians, except for one minor male who was accompanied by his adult sister to Armenia.

³ This is corroborated by the large number of voluntary returns of asylum seekers assisted by IOM in 2016 outside of this support programme (404 persons), of which most were asylum seekers who withdrew their application in order to return. More than 85 per cent of these persons withdrew in the middle of the asylum process and had only been in Denmark for a short time. As such they were not eligible for the support programme.

In two instances, IOM encountered the challenge that infants born in Denmark to eligible parents were not eligible for AVRR support because they had been born after 19 March 2015 and therefore could not be said to have entered the country before the entry into force of the support programme. Formally this meant that the return of the infants could not be arranged with their families. IOM presented the issue to the donor who in the end, after IOM confirmed that the price of infant flight tickets was minimal, agreed that IOM could arrange the return of the minors with the families under the project. However, so as not to confuse the number of returns and eligible persons, these minor cases are not included in IOM statistics on the programme.

Although the majority of returnees with IOM in the reporting period were 39 years of age or younger, also elderly persons returned, some escorted by family members (social escorts), whose travel was also arranged by IOM. Use of escort was discussed and agreed with the donor in each individual case. If the returnee was accompanied by a family member, who paid for his/her own ticket, IOM coordinated the travel with the family member to allow him/her to buy a ticket for the same flights as the returnee. The oldest returnee in the reporting period was 82 years at the time of the return.

Return processing times:

While there is no simple way to describe the time spent from the submission of an application to the actual return under the programme, and hence a number of caveats, indications are provided by IOM data. For the majority of returnees, IOM first received a support decision from the DIS, after which IOM followed up with the returnee and Danish partners in order to create contact to the returnee, receive AVR form and collect information on personal documents in the possession of Danish authorities or the returnee. In other cases returnees applied directly from IOM, where after IOM coordinated application for support to the DIS but had to wait for the eligibility decision from DIS to possibly proceed. There were therefore different ways into the project that cannot easily be reconciled. Additionally, the speed of the processing depended on the time needed by DIS to determine support eligibility, the level of activity of the applicant, availability of counsellors to speak to him/her, presence of national documents, embassy procedures, disappearances and other influencing factors varying from individual to individual.

To sum up, when looking at the processing time from the date of receipt of the AVR form, that provided IOM with essential information on the applicant, until the date of return, there were large variations between returnees depending on the context. IOM has therefore below chosen to consider the **median processing time** instead of the average, as the former is less affected by very small and very large data within the same data set.

Of the 258 persons returned with IOM directly under the support programme from 2015 to 2016,⁴ 145 persons returned in 2015. The median processing time from receipt of AVR form till day of travel was 68 days for these 145 persons. The largest nationality group in 2015 were Russians (41 persons) with a median return processing time of 76 days.

In 2016, 113 persons returned under the programme. The median processing time in 2016 was 126 days, which is 58 days longer than in 2015. Russian nationals also constituted the largest group in 2016 (51 persons), but with a median processing time of 269 days, thus more than three times higher for the same nationality than in 2015.⁵

If regarding the 2015-2016 support programme return processing time from the perspective of travel documents, the median processing time from the receipt of AVR application until the travel was 43 days for persons, who travelled on a national passport, but 85 days for persons, who travelled on an emergency travel certificate. Persons who already had or presented a passport during the return process were therefore generally able to travel double as fast as persons who needed assistance in getting travel documents. The difference and long processing time largely disappear when looking at the time from receipt of travel document until the date of the travel. The median processing time from the day IOM received the travel document until travel date was 14 days for returnees on which IOM has registered the travel document acquisition date (251). IOM in other words arranged the voluntary return in a couple of weeks after receiving the travel document, with very little difference between persons travelling on emergency travel certificates and passports.

With the aforementioned caveats in mind, the processing time figures indicate that the most complex and time-consuming cases tended to remain towards the end of the programme, especially since very few new cases were received after 31 March 2016. At the time of writing (March 2017), there are still complex and open cases who have not yet returned. While there were multiple factors influencing the processing time, including but not limited to the cooperation of the applicant, embassy procedures and the presence of national documents or not, return was generally swift once the travel document had been issued or received. In a programme design such as this, where there is not a constant input of new cases, the programme will automatically be front-loaded with the fastest returns, whereas more complex cases demanding a long processing time weigh towards the end. Return programmes will always contain a certain share of time-consuming cases regardless of the programme design, but if there are no new incoming cases, only the complex cases will remain in the end. Favourable conditions for arranging the return within a

⁴ Not including the two returnees who returned under other project structures but received support also under the support programme. These have been excluded from the calculations because they as particularly vulnerable (trafficked) had different conditions of stay and return than less vulnerable asylum seekers..

⁵ Especially the 2016 returns can be compared to the 404 voluntary returns of asylum seekers implemented by IOM outside the support programme in the same year. The median processing time of these 404 returns was 26 days, which is almost five times less than for the support programme returns. A contributing factor to this is likely to be their fairly recent arrival in Denmark (after the establishment of the support programme) and therefore strong and active cooperation on the return.

relatively short timeframe would therefore first and foremost appear to be 1) the presence of valid travel documents and/or national documents; 2), the active cooperation of the returnee; 3) a short time spent in Denmark.

Payment processing times:

Prior to returns arranged by IOM under the programme, IOM Copenhagen forwarded information on the grant eligibility to the IOM mission in the country of origin. Payment modalities and speed in the receiving country were subject to banking and security considerations in the local context as well as the initiative of the returnees. Returnees were however generally active in receiving their support once they had travelled.

Across the 260 returns arranged and with support paid by IOM, the median time from the travel until the date of payment was 8 days. Returnees therefore generally received their support in little more than a week following the return. This holds true for most of the large returnee groups (median days in brackets): Russian Federation (eight), Armenia (seven) and Georgia (five). Ukraine had a median of only one day, due to the fact that a number of returnees were paid by IOM in transit at Kiev Airport before they continued their travel to remote destinations in Ukraine. These persons would have had difficulties returning to Kiev later in order to receive payment, wherefore IOM for several Ukrainians arranged payment on the day of travel upon transit in Kiev. Iraq stands out with a median payment time of 16 days, twice as long as the general figure. This can be attributed to lack of personal bank accounts in Iraq as well as security considerations for cash payments, regardless whether returns took place to North, Central or South Iraq. In all payments implemented by IOM, the security of beneficiaries and IOM staff is a paramount consideration.

2. PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS REALIZING OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

The project realized the project outcomes and outputs as detailed below:

- **Outcome 1: Eligible asylum seekers are aware to make a decision on AVRR and increasingly cooperate with IOM on their voluntary return from Denmark**

IOM worked to achieve outcome 1 through provision of information on the AVRR programme to counsellors, authorities and beneficiaries approaching IOM. This included information on the practical arrangement of travels as well as travel document procedures, payments of reintegration grants and updates on individual applications. If given the impression that the decision to return voluntarily was yet nor clear or sufficiently informed, IOM referred beneficiaries to further counselling by the counselling service for asylum seekers. Many applicants decided to cooperate fully and reveal their real identity and/or documents once they had been approved for support and received confirmation that providing correct information would not be punishable. As detailed elsewhere in this report, the presentation of national travel and/or other documents helped to shorten the processing time.

- **Output 1.1: AVRR assistance has been offered and explained in a consistent manner to returnees for the duration of the project**

In the reporting period, IOM received AVRR applications from different stakeholders and at various stages in the application process, including beneficiaries themselves and their contact persons, asylum centres, the counselling service, the DIS, and the police. This ranged from receiving confirmation of eligibility but no AVR form, receiving AVR form but no information on eligibility, or just information that a specific person was interested in returning but needed further guidance. In support of consistency but also flexibility and effectiveness, IOM as soon as possible followed up on each application with relevant partners to receive appropriate information, documents, and to ensure eligibility under the project. After the application deadline on 31 March 2016, after which asylum seekers could no longer apply for the AVRR support under the programme, IOM mostly provided information to existing cases and those for whom the DIS made a support decision after 31 March. The last support decisions were received from the DIS in June 2016.

Throughout the project, IOM offered counselling and instructions to project partners, primarily asylum centres but also the counselling service for asylum seekers and the police, on application and procedures, including procedures for acquiring travel documentation.

IOM AVR forms in English, Danish, Arabic Russian and Dari were made available for download on the project page www.iom.fi/avrdenmark from where also DIS information materials and application forms were linked. The project page address was included in IOM staff e-mail signatures, e-mail updates to project partners, and various electronic materials shared with partners.

- **Output 1.2: AVRR pre-departure, travel and post-arrival assistance has been provided consistently to eligible returnees in accordance with project criteria**

IOM provided AVRR assistance to voluntary returnees in accordance with the organization's mandate and internal guidelines, as well as in line with the agreed division of labour with other AVRR stakeholders in Denmark. This included:

- IOM provided **pre-departure** counselling particularly as regards travel and document application procedures and other practical arrangements. IOM also referred potential applicants to further counselling by the counselling service for asylum seekers and advised on support application procedures and criteria. IOM further assisted returnees in acquiring needed travel documentation, including requesting existing personal documents from the Danish authorities and coordinated sending of copies or originals of documents from the country of origin, when such were available and needed for identity confirmation in view of travel document issuance.
- IOM organized **travel arrangements**, including domestic transportation to Copenhagen Airport, international travel, departure assistance, transit and reception assistance at airports. All returnees

were met by IOM's Airport Assistant at Copenhagen Airport and received any personal documents requested from the Danish asylum file in advance, assisted with check-in and security procedures and accompanied all the way to the departure gate. IOM organized the payment of excess luggage fees in accordance with project criteria and coordinated with the donor in case the excess luggage payment in advance was considered excessive. This in a number of instances led to IOM coordinating shipment of personal belongings separately as this was a cheaper option than excess luggage fees on board flights. In five instances, IOM organized the travel of escorts travelling with vulnerable returnees, mostly for age or medical reasons.

- In countries of origin, IOM assisted returnees were in most cases met by local IOM staff, who informed them of **post-arrival** cash grant procedures and organized onward transportation to the final destination when this was needed. Many applicants expressed the importance of being received by IOM staff, who were expected to facilitate their safe entry into the country of origin after several years abroad. Once return was confirmed, IOM Copenhagen informed the DIS and other Danish partners of the implemented return in view of relevant updates to the Danish registration system.

- **Outcome 2: Return stakeholders in Denmark consider that they have received sufficient information and guidance on voluntary return and reintegration procedures and have hence been able to refer persons to IOM for voluntary return assistance**

As described in the interim report, IOM designed an electronic mid-way questionnaire that was distributed to more than hundred return stakeholders on 30 September 2015. The questionnaire was on purpose kept simple and contained nine questions evolving around the respondents' self-perceived level of knowledge on the support programme, but also the importance of the AVRR offer's effect on respondents' work, the beneficiaries and suggestions for improvement.

For the mid-way questionnaire, IOM received 26 answers to the questionnaire distributed to more than 100 potentials respondents.

With the reservation that answers might not have been representative due to the limited number of respondents, 25 out of 26 answered that they did know of the programme from before. Most had heard of the programme from colleagues (27 per cent), the second largest group from the DIS (23 per cent). Out of 26 respondents, 18 informed that they did not need further information on the support programme (69 per cent), whereas six persons (23 per cent) requested more information. Two respondents did not answer the question.

IOM sent out the exit questionnaire to Danish partners on 29 December 2016. The questionnaire was sent to 145 e-mail addresses on the IOM contact list, including both personal e-mail addresses and shared mailboxes. IOM received 22 answers to the questionnaire. Answers were received from asylum centres (16), the police (four) or NGOs (two). The number of respondents was less than for the mid-way questionnaire. One reason for the lower number of respondents could be the decreased activity and overall attention on the programme following

the application deadline on 31 March 2016. Because the exit questionnaire was distributed towards the end of the project approximately nine months after the application deadline, issues relating to the support programme might have appeared less relevant to potential respondents than at the time of the mid-way questionnaire.

As for the exit questionnaire, the information level on the support programme amongst the respondents continued to be good. Of 22 respondents, 20 (90 per cent) knew of the support programme already. Most had heard of the programme from colleagues (nine), from the DIS (five) or from the police. Thirteen out of 22 found that they did not need further information on the support programme (59 per cent).

In the comments to the questionnaire, respondents generally expressed that the offer of voluntary return and reintegration support was important to many asylum seekers. It made it easier to discuss voluntary return with rejected asylum seekers, and eased the work of the police. It was however also expressed that the support was not important for all persons, in particular not for those who were afraid of their future in the home country.

In conclusion, the overall level of knowledge on the support programme amongst respondents appeared to be good, both during the programme and even nine months after the application deadline. Due to the low number of respondents it is difficult to consider the answers representative for all stakeholders, although answers to both questionnaires show a general appreciation of the effects of the support programme on the return related work of practitioners.

- **Output 2.1: Return stakeholders in Denmark have received information on the programme and IOM AVRR assistance**

In the project period, IOM participated in four stakeholder coordination meetings arranged by the DIS. Because of a need to focus on the practical arrangement of returns, particularly in the initial period with less staffing at IOM Copenhagen (see section three), IOM arranged only a limited number of meetings with other stakeholders. This was however not a problem for the implementation per se as IOM was able to handle necessary communications by e-mail and phone.

IOM met with the Red Cross return counsellors at a theme day in the Sandholm centre at the beginning of April 2015. The support programme and general AVR cooperation was also discussed in three separate meetings with representatives from the Ministry of Justice in September as well as with the police in October and November 2015. Throughout 2016, IOM at various meetings with the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, Danish police and other partners brought up the benefits and needs of a continued offer of AVRR in Denmark in support of the overall project objective.

IOM met with staff from several embassies, including but not limited to embassies in Copenhagen of Russia, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Iraq, Iran, Ghana, Uganda, Bangladesh and Egypt. When it was not necessary or possible to meet in person in order to issue travel documents, IOM informed embassies of the AVRR programme in relation to written applications for travel documents. During a visit to Norway for a separate

seminar arranged by IOM Oslo in September, IOM met with the Stockholm embassies of Lebanon and Bangladesh⁶ as well as the Embassy of Somalia in Brussels.

In relation to a separately arranged visit by the Stockholm Embassy of Bangladesh to Copenhagen in May 2015, IOM organized that an embassy representative visited the IOM Copenhagen office to interview a number of AVRR applicants. In March 2016, IOM arranged a visit to Copenhagen by the Embassy of Sudan from Oslo in view of applicant interviews and travel document issuance. Also the Consul of the Embassy of Somalia in Brussels visited Copenhagen in August 2016 arranged by IOM. As a direct result of the visit, IOM received a Somali travel document for an applicant, who later returned voluntarily to Somalia (Mogadishu) with support.

IOM found the personal meetings with embassies essential in building trust and cooperation with the embassies, who appreciated the voluntary return assistance provided by IOM to their nationals.

- **Output 2.2: Electronic and printed information materials have been produced and shared with partners on a regular basis**

In the project, IOM worked to deliver the output primarily by regularly sharing electronic newsletters with statistical and other updates to return stakeholders in Denmark, in particular staff at asylum centres, the counselling service for asylum seekers, and various Danish authorities. Also due to the feedback received in the mid-way questionnaire, IOM facilitated potential contacts with IOM by installing and using messaging services reckoned to be in use by applicants such as Skype and Viber.

In January 2016, IOM finalized an AVRR poster primarily providing contact information on IOM for potential applicants. The poster is attached to this report as Annex 1. It had for technical reasons not been possible to finalize the design earlier. Because the poster was finalized relatively close to the application deadline on 31 March 2016, IOM decided not to spend funds on printing and distributing the poster in hard copy, but rather to include an electronic version in the regular updates sent to partners on the mailing list. The poster was forwarded to the mailing list in February 2016 and again in March 2016. IOM later heard from applicants calling IOM that they had seen prints of the poster at their asylum centres. One may therefore surmise that the poster was put to its intended purpose by recipients on IOM's mailing list of partners.

⁶ The responsibilities of travel document issuance later transferred from the Embassy of Bangladesh in Stockholm to the newly opened Embassy of Bangladesh in Copenhagen.

Table 2.1: Progress Achieved Compared to Indicators in the Results Matrix

	Indicators	Baseline	Target	Progress made during reporting period	Cumulative progress
<p>Objective: To contribute to the further development and consolidation of general Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) services for asylum seekers in Denmark</p>	<p>Percentage of the number of eligible migrants who choose to voluntarily return</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>Up to 10 per cent of the total eligible caseload participate in the program in the 18 months of the pilot project</p>		<p>According to the Bill establishing the support programme, 10 per cent of the total eligible caseload corresponded to approximately 1,000 persons. Although IOM during the programme was in contact with estimated 600 persons interested in support, the target of 1,000 persons was not reached. IOM however finds that the visibility and networks of the support programme contributed to the record number of IOM voluntary returns in 2016 outside the programme, and thus indirectly to continued focus on and use of voluntary return from Denmark.</p>
<p>Outcome 1: Eligible asylum seekers are aware to make a decision on AVRR and increasingly cooperate with IOM on their voluntary return from Denmark</p>	<p>Number of migrants living in Denmark under the asylum system who voluntarily return</p>	<p>Approximately 300 persons returned and received support under the pilot support programme</p>	<p>Up to 750 returnees have returned under the project</p>		<p>IOM registered a total number of 299 returns with support under the project. As such the project target of 750 persons was not met.</p>

Output 1.1 AVRR assistance has been offered and explained in a consistent manner to returnees for the duration of the project	Guidance note on application and travel procedures for project partners produced		Yes/No	IOM did not produce a written guidance note in the interim reporting period but focused on providing direct advice on application and travel procedures to project partners through primarily phone and e-mail.	IOM provided written (e-mail) and telephone guidance to partners and counsellors throughout the project.
Activities 1.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Application forms Danish, English, Dari, and Russian, and information materials were made available for download on the project webpage; - IOM received, processed and confirmed eligibility of AVRR applications in coordination with project partners, in particular the DIS - IOM offered telephone and direct counselling to applicants approaching IOM for guidance. - An IOM staff member travelled to North Jutland (Hansthalm, Brovst) in January 2016 to provide direct counselling to a number of complex cases present at the local asylum centres at the time. 				
Output 1.2 AVRR pre-departure, travel and post-arrival assistance has been provided consistently to eligible returnees in accordance with project criteria	Percentage of eligible applicants to the programme that return and receive reintegration assistance	0	80%	With a cancellation rate of approximately 25 per cent and a return rate of approximately 50 per cent of applicants, the return rate had not reached 80 per cent by the time of the interim report.	According to IOM calculations, the return rate of persons approved for support was approximately 66 per cent in the project. While this was an improvement compared to the interim figure, the target of 80 per cent was not met.
Activities 1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IOM arranged the return of 260 persons and supported the reintegration grant payment also to most persons not returned with IOM. However, in a number of cases IOM was unable to carry out payments to persons not returned with IOM, wherefore the donor facilitated such payments. - IOM confirmed travel document requirements for all returnees and facilitated travel document issuance for approximately 71 per cent of all IOM facilitated returns; - IOM provided international as well as domestic transportation to returnees; - IOM assisted returnees with departure at Copenhagen Airport, transit and reception assistance when this was possible and/or requested by the returnees; - IOM paid for excess luggage and Copenhagen Airport in accordance with limits set by the donor and tried to find cheaper solutions when excess luggage on flight was considered overly expensive; - Five returnees returned with escorts in the reporting period, one for medical reasons and the remaining four because of old age (social escorts); 				

<p>Outcome 2: Return stakeholders in Denmark consider that they have received sufficient information and guidance on voluntary return and reintegration procedures and have hence been able to refer persons to IOM for voluntary return assistance</p>	<p>Percentage of return stakeholders who express that they have received a satisfactorily level of information and guidance on the programme</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>At least 80 per cent of approached return stakeholders find that they have received sufficient information (exit questionnaire)</p>		<p>According to the exit questionnaire, 90 per cent of respondents found that they had received sufficient information. The target was therefore met, although the low number of respondents raises questions as to the representability of the answers.</p>
<p>Output 2.1 Return stakeholders in Denmark have received information on the programme and IOM AVR assistance</p>	<p>Number of different partners and stakeholders informed of the programme</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>10 meetings with asylum centres and partners, 15 embassies informed</p>	<p>Approximately 20 embassies informed of IOM AVR and programme criteria Five meetings with different partners in the interim reporting period</p>	<p>IOM estimates to have been in contact with at least 30 different embassies throughout the project. IOM discussed project activities in meetings with return stakeholders on at least 10 different occasions. The target was therefore met.</p>
<p>Activities 2.1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IOM participated in four partner coordination meetings arranged by the DIS - IOM provided advice and return updates to applicants, asylum centre staff, the Counselling Service and other return stakeholders mainly through telephone - IOM informed at least 30 different embassies accredited to Denmark of project and IOM AVR services in Denmark, mainly in connection with contacts for travel document acquisition; - IOM produced and distributed mid-way and exit questionnaires on the perceptions and knowledge of the AVR that were distributed to stakeholders in September 2015 and December 2016 respectively. 				
<p>Output 2.2 Electronic and printed information materials have been produced and shared with partners on a regular basis</p>	<p>Availability of 1) electronic and 2) printed materials</p>		<p>Yes/No (webpage, newsletters, social media/messaging services) Yes/No (project posters, business cards)</p>	<p>Project webpage, newsletters, Twitter, Viber and Skype were all used to reach out in the interim reporting period. IOM worked on the design of the project</p>	<p>Continuing what was included in the interim report, IOM used various, particularly electronic, lines of communication and information to ease contact with IOM.</p>

				poster but was for technical reasons not able to finalize it in the reporting period.	IOM finalized the poster in January 2016 and distributed it widely to return stakeholders (by e-mail). The poster contained a QR code pointing to an electronic business card with IOM Copenhagen contact information. The target was met.
Activities 2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A specific project webpage was provided under the address www.iom.fi/avrdenmark, from where application forms and other materials were made available for download; - IOM used the existing IOM Copenhagen Twitter account to broadcast messages on the programme, including statistics. Messaging services reckoned to be used by project target groups, such as Vibe and Skype, were installed on staff computers and mobile phones; - The project contact list created from contacts with the Counselling Service for rejected asylum seekers, centre workers and the police was used to distribute project updates, IOM contact information and questionnaires. 				

3. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND ACTIONS TAKEN

Challenges faced by the project were to some extent intrinsic and related to the requested design and eligibility criteria of the programme, which were decided in Danish parliament and on which IOM did not have any influence. Also some external factors such as the strain on the asylum system had an effect of the programme. The challenges included:

Challenge: As mentioned, IOM was informed of the establishment of the support programme on 20 March 2015, only the day after the programme had been adopted by the Danish Parliament on 19 March 2015. IOM was requested to launch operations as soon as possible according to preset programme criteria. Even if it facilitated a quick launch of the programme that the project document, procedures and networks could be modelled on the pilot programme, IOM Copenhagen had had to downsize the office and hence experienced AVR staff due to the funding gap between the pilot programme and the current one. The initial months of implementation were therefore without full staffing. Because the initial period of the programme with low staffing coincided with the launch of information meetings by the counselling service, IOM was not able to participate in these meetings.

→ **Action taken:** IOM initiated the needed hiring processes as soon as possible after the signature of the agreement. Without full staffing, all available staff time was focused on the processing and arrangement of returns in lieu of other project activities such as meetings and outreach because returns were known to be the donor's top priority.

Challenge: Particularly during the second half of 2015, the Danish asylum system was under heavy pressure due to increased influx of new asylum seekers. Even though the new arrivals were not eligible to receive return assistance and reintegration support under the support programme, it was at times difficult to receive timely responses to enquiries on individual applicants from asylum centres and Danish authorities otherwise occupied with the newcomers. Also, newly hired asylum centre staff were not necessarily knowledgeable about AVRR and the conditions of the programme relevant only to persons who applied for asylum in Denmark only before 19 March 2015.

→ **Action taken:** IOM consistently followed up on pending answers, sending reminders and trying to find other contact persons in urgent cases.

→ **Action taken:** IOM systematically collected contact details of new contacts in the asylum system and added these to an internal contact list used to distribute information on the programme at regular intervals, thereby assuring that also new staff received information on the programme.

Challenge: In some instances, IOM considered it obvious that applicants were not actively cooperating on the return but rather used an application for AVRR as a means to drag out the process, without personally contributing to the return. This led to various requests to postpone the travel, last-minute cancellations or even no shows at the airport, in which case the efforts going into arranging the return were in vain. IOM could however not finally close a case unless also the DIS had had a possibility to hear the applicant. In a hearing, the applicant might claim that s/he was

cooperating, but without explicit proof of non-cooperation the DIS could not reject the support and IOM could not formally close the case.

→ **Action taken:** IOM as widely as possible, within the confinements of the programme and eligibility criteria, took into consideration returnees' personal requests and reasons for postponing or not being able to provide needed documentation. However, if there were indications of unwillingness to return, IOM consequently followed up with beneficiaries, the counselling service and the DIS to ascertain whether the applicant had made an informed decision to return or not. In a number of instances, applicants who on IOM's request had been asked by the DIS to re-confirm their cooperation, and informed that they intended to cooperate, were in the end closed again by IOM due to continued non-cooperation.

Challenge: Because of the formulation in the original Bill that support could primarily be granted for returns to the country of origin, several cases occurred where parents and children of mixed nationalities could only be granted if they returned to their respective nationality countries. This by default would split the families, which IOM according to its policy and regulations will try to avoid, particularly when minor children are involved. In line with the principle of voluntariness, IOM also cannot split families against their will.

→ **Action taken:** While it is recognized that marriages of mixed nationalities, who want to travel to one country together, are a complex issue in any return programme, the decision that support could only be granted upon return to a specific country added extra restrictions to IOM's attempts to find sustainable solutions for families, who wanted to stay together. IOM therefore worked thoroughly with the families in order to find an acceptable solution, including for family members to turn down the offer of reintegration support if they could travel to the spouse's country of origin under other return structures, in accordance with national rules on legal entry and IOM policy on Assisted Voluntary Return.

Challenge: The restriction that persons who had entered Denmark after the establishment of the support programme in some instances meant that infants born to eligible parents in Denmark after 19 March 2015 were not eligible and hence could not return with their families under the project.

Action taken: IOM presented the issue of non-eligible infants to the donor, arguing that the costs of arranging the return of an infant without reintegration support would be minimal compared to the costs of children and adults. In the end, the DIS agreed that also such infants could have their return arranged by IOM given the reduced impact on the overall project budget.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The second Danish general AVRR programme was launched on short notice in March 2015, with the first returns taking place the following month. Despite challenges in the first part of the project, IOM was able to register and process applications all through the reporting period thanks to existing operational capacity and know-how. Returns were arranged to a number of different countries and regions during the project, including to countries that are known to be a return priority for Danish authorities. The project also catered for returns of families with children as

well as the requirements of vulnerable returnees in need of escorts or other special attention. While there less total returns than envisaged, the majority of the returnees were rejected asylum seekers.

Reflecting also the input from Danish project partners in the mid-way and exit questionnaires (asylum centres, NGOs, police), IOM finds that the offer of AVRR under the programme was important to many returnees who had accepted the return decision of the Danish authorities and/or made up their mind to return. While the prevalence of families with children amongst returnees presumably also reflected the overall composition of the group of eligible asylum seekers, it might likewise indicate that families considered the conditions for their voluntary return favourable. The combined and generous reintegration support of adults and children meant that especially large families were provided with a good basis to reestablish themselves in the country of origin.

The offer of AVRR further encouraged persons to come forth and reveal their real identity and/or existing documents in relation to submitting an AVRR application or during contacts with IOM. This information might have staid hidden and been a hindrance to the asylum and later return processes had they not decided to cooperate and return voluntarily. As such, IOM considers that an offer of independent return counselling as well as safe and sustainable AVRR filled a gap for asylum seekers in Denmark, who saw contacts with the police and/or the lack of return support a hindrance for their return.

The support provided under the programme in the majority of cases concerned also reception by IOM staff in the country or origin, which made returnees feel safer about the return knowing that there was a contact organization facilitating entry, even if long-term post-arrival follow-up was not possible under the terms of the programme.

Some implementation challenges were encountered in the reporting period, especially as related to the predefined eligibility criteria of the programme, lack of time to prepare the project setup, the situation of families with children born in Denmark, and the fact that only persons with an asylum application predating the launch of the programme remained eligible for support. The requirement that all cancellations should be confirmed by the DIS at times created confusion on whether certain AVRR applications remained active or not. Throughout the project, IOM flexibly worked to identify sustainable solutions and actively brought up issues for discussions with the donor, when this was considered needful.

IOM recognizes Denmark's policy of having AVRR programmes designed and accepted in Parliament, as well as the wish to keep planned programmes confidential until the day of acceptance to avoid pull-effects. Still, such exclusion criteria and design processes may have negative consequences for the overall effectiveness of the programme greater than any pull or other unintended effects. Primarily in the deliberate exclusion of applicant groups who would otherwise have been ready to return before spending several years in the asylum system, but also that programmes do not continue in a consolidated manner but are set up from scratch every time and therefore do not reach full impact until later into the implementation. As was mentioned earlier, IOM arranged a record number of voluntary returns in 2016, many of which were outside of the programme reported here. Even if the majority of the returns in 2016 were done outside of the support programme, they would not have been possible without the cooperation networks and IOM return capacities established under the support programme. In total, IOM arranged 532 voluntary returns from Denmark in 2016, of which 112 under the support programme for rejected asylum seekers. The total could potentially have been considerably higher, had persons arriving after 19 March 2015 not been excluded for the

support. As it were, the total number of returns under the support programme remained lower than originally hoped for.

IOM therefore strongly recommends that future programmes should take into consideration lessons learned from previous programmes and be less restrictive in terms of eligibility criteria, target groups and programme length. Although the number of asylum seekers to Denmark decreased in 2016 compared to the record influx in 2015,⁷ persons who arrived in 2015 or later may in the years to come still require an offer of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration assistance in order to make an informed decision about voluntary return. While there are many factors influencing an individual decision to cooperate and return voluntarily, including an offer of reintegration assistance in the country of origin, also the possibility to cooperate with entities that do not directly represent the Danish authorities are important to many returnees and embassies. Having programmes with a strictly defined eligibility period and target group further holds the risk of excluding of a considerable number of persons who cannot access the programme, although voluntary return might be in the best interest of both the returnees and Danish authorities.

As was seen above, Danish partners and practitioners generally appeared to be well-informed about the programme criteria. Nevertheless, the number of applicants and returns remained lower than envisaged. While the aforementioned exclusion criteria contributed to the low number of returns, IOM recommends that future programmes could consider ways to support the cooperation of potential applicants through enhanced counselling and information provision as well as document facilitation. The latter might include the arrangement of seminars and other information sessions targeting embassy staff as well as extra support provided to returnees who actively facilitate the issuance of travel documents. As seen previously, the lack of travel documents and/or cooperation would appear to be one of the major factors in a prolonged return process.

IOM stands ready to provide input to any future planned Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes from Denmark, based on the organization's long experience with the design and implementation of return activities in Denmark and globally.

5. ANNEXES

Annex 1: AVRR poster

⁷ See the statistics on https://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/E3C50EA0-BD36-4DDD-9C8D-7AAF44DE1F12/0/seneste_tal_udlaendingeomraadet.pdf



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency

**ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION SUPPORT TO ASYLUM
SEEKERS IN DENMARK PROJECT II (AVRR-DKII)**

FINAL FINANCIAL REPORT

for the period from April 2015 to 31 December 2016

USD

CONTRIBUTIONS

Government of Denmark - The Danish Immigration Service (September 2015) 2,251,295

Total resources 2,251,295

EXPENSES

Budget

Staff expenses 619,452 565,943

Office expenses 180,300 86,048

Operational expenses

Output 1

Costs related to travel document acquisition	9,375	5,111
Visit of consular staff to Denmark	10,000	2,737
Domestic travel of returnees to airport in Denmark	29,750	8,112
International transportation, transit and reception assistance	562,500	135,529
Excess luggage	64,500	18,478
Temporary accommodation and refreshments for long transits	4,000	2,641
Escorts	12,500	6,395
Cash reintegration grants	1,788,000	636,109
Cash support for start-up of own business	923,650	282,295

Output 2

Printing, packing and distribution of information materials 1,500 -

Contingency 2,500 -

IOM overhead (7%) 294,562 122,458

Total expenses 4,502,589 1,871,856

Balance of resources at 31 December 2016 USD 379,439

As the responsible project manager, I certify that the financial and narrative reports are correctly stated in accordance with IOM internal rules and procedures.

Simo Kohonen
Sub-Regional Coordinator
29 March 2017