

## Summary

### Rejected and departed from the Netherlands?

#### A study into the backgrounds of the variation in assisted voluntary return among rejected asylum seekers

#### Introduction

Between 2008 and March 2010, the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) for the first time studied explanations for the observation that some rejected asylum seekers decide to return voluntarily to their home country, facilitated by the Dutch government, while others prefer to stay in the Netherlands illegally, or possibly prefer to migrate to another country.<sup>63</sup> The Immigration Policy Department (DMB) of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice invited the WODC to conduct a follow-up study on voluntary return migration. In the current report this follow-up study is reported.

This study builds on the prior research on return migration in the following ways. First, actual return migration behaviour (registered return migration facilitated by the International Organization for Migration, hereafter IOM) is studied rather than intentions and attitudes towards return migration, which were central issues in the previous study. Second, return migration is related to independent quantitative data on social conditions in the countries of origin. Third, the possible influence of return programs on voluntary return is examined in more detail. And last, the current research focuses on the question whether the odds of returning depend on demographic characteristics of rejected asylum seekers (such as sex, age, family composition) and the time required by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) to assess the asylum application.

Whenever the report refers to 'voluntary return' without explicitly qualifying it as *unregistered* voluntary return, *IOM-facilitated* voluntary return is meant. Migrants returning with the assistance of other organizations than IOM, such as 'Maatwerk bij Terugkeer', are nonetheless included in the study because they generally make use of regular return support (and are accordingly registered by IOM as return migrant). However, migrants are also able to leave without the mediation efforts of any organization. No numbers are available regarding this type of departure, although there are indications that only a limited number of rejected asylum seekers can afford to return to the country of origin without any organizational support.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Leerkes, A., Galloway, G., & Kromhout, M. (2010) *Kiezen tussen twee kwaden: Determinanten van terugkeerintenties onder (bijna) uitgeprocedeerde asielmigranten*. [The lesser of two evils: factors determining the intentions to stay or to repatriate among asylum migrants who have or will soon have exhausted all legal remedies]. Den Haag: WODC. Cahier 2010-5. Leerkes, A., Galloway, M., & Kromhout, M. (2011). *Terug of niet? Determinanten van terugkeerintenties en -attitudes onder (bijna) uitgeprocedeerde asielmigranten*. [Going back, or not? Determinants of return intentions and return attitudes among asylum migrants who have exhausted all legal remedies]. *Mens & Maatschappij*, 86(2), 122-156. .

<sup>64</sup> Especially for asylum seekers from outside Europe, getting to the Netherlands can be quite expensive. It is not uncommon for asylum seekers, to finance the trip, to use up large parts of their savings, sell their houses, and/or take out loans (cf. Van Liempt, 2007). Once in the Netherlands, asylum seekers struggle to build up capital since access to the labor market is limited. In a previous study by the WODC,

## Research questions

The central question of the research is formulated as follows:

*To what extent do policy instruments stimulate IOM-assisted voluntary return when controlling for relevant individual characteristics and socio-economic and political circumstances in the country of origin?*

Some examples of policy instruments regarding return migration are additional financial support and the deployment of so-called 'native counsellors'. Native counsellors are persons who come from the most important countries of origin, who speak native languages of these countries, and who are asked to talk to (asylum) migrants originating from similar countries.

The main question is answered by means of the following sub-questions:

- 1 *How does IOM-assisted voluntary return among rejected asylum seekers in the Netherlands vary between countries of origin and in time?*
- 2 *To what extent does the variation in IOM-assisted voluntary return depend (a) on aspects of Dutch return and asylum policies (particularly in the form of return programs by IOM); (b) on conditions in the countries of origin; and (c) on individual characteristics of rejected asylum seekers?*

Although the study is primarily of a quantitative nature, the findings were elaborated in a more qualitative case study in which a typical case (Iraq) was the focus. Accordingly, the third and last sub-question is:

- 3 *How can patterns of IOM-assisted voluntary return be understood while taking into account the (developments in) Iraqi political and economic conditions and the Dutch return policy, particularly in the form of return programs by IOM?*

## Theoretical framework and hypotheses

This research discusses the main theories, determinants and, as far as known, underlying mechanisms of voluntary return migration. The determinants can be classified in terms of aspects relating to political and economic conditions in the countries of origin, social factors in the form of ties with country of origin and country of destination, and several aspects of Dutch asylum policy.

Based on relevant scientific literature, several verifiable hypotheses were formulated.

## Research method

The current research seeks to explain the variance in *IOM-facilitated return migration*. It therefore focuses on *registered* voluntary return: persons departing without

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108 rejected asylum seekers were asked the following item: 'If I wanted to return (within twelve months), I would have enough money to finance the trip and personal sustenance for the first period.' Eighty-three respondents (75%) disagreed with the statement. It should be noted that the perceived financial opportunities for returning may be even more limited. That is, some of those who agreed with the statement perhaps did so because they were informed about the possibilities of return support by IOM. After all, it is not explicitly asked whether one would be able to finance the trip and personal sustenance *without return support*.

the support of organizations are not included in the research because the departure is not registered. Among other issues, the variation in voluntary return between so-called 'country-years' (such as Angola in 2003 or Zimbabwe in 2009) is studied. Variation in return migration between country-years means that the rate of return to country  $x$  in year  $t$  differs from the return rate in other country-years. The differences in absolute numbers of returnees are not mentioned explicitly here; instead the differences in relative return migration are reported. This means that the differences in the number of return migrants are studied as a proportion of the total number of rejected asylum seekers who are supposed to return, according to the Dutch government. In addition to the variation in return migration at the aggregated level (between country-years), individual differences in the likelihood of return migration are examined. For example, it is studied whether men show a higher likelihood of returning than women. Both analyses are limited to 73 countries of origin showing relatively high numbers of asylum seekers.

### **Variance in relative return migration between countries and years (2001-2011)**

To answer the research question and to determine relative return rates for country-years, IOM-data regarding numbers of rejected asylum seekers who voluntarily return to their home countries are examined. These data are compared to IND data with respect to numbers of rejected asylum requests, categorized by year and nationality. With the obtained data, the variation in relative return migration between country-years can be described and analysed for the period 2001-2011. Log-linear hierarchical regression (random intercept models), where country-years were nested in countries, was used to analyse the data for the period 2001-2011.<sup>65</sup>

### **Individual variance in return migration (2005-2011)**

Regarding asylum seekers who applied for asylum since January 1 2005, we were able to examine for each migrant whether he or she returned with the support of IOM or not (before January 1 2012). For prior years it was not possible to couple information about asylum procedures to data concerning return migration at the individual level. Therefore, two additional issues that could be examined for the period 2005-2011 could not be included in the analysis for the period 2001-2011. First, for the period 2005-2011 it was possible to differentiate cohorts of rejected asylum seekers (a cohort meaning a 'class' of asylum seekers that was rejected in a specific year) and to determine what proportion of each cohort returned through IOM in the subsequent years or was deported. Second, it was possible to examine the effect of determinants that vary on the individual level, in addition to factors that vary at the country and/or year level (for instance, the level of GDP in a country of origin). Hierarchical logistic regression analysis was used to study the likelihood of IOM-facilitated return migration within two years after rejection of the first asylum request.

### **Qualitative methods: Iraq**

In a qualitative case study on (asylum seekers from) Iraq, the results of the quantitative analyses were elaborated further. On the one hand, there has been an increase in IOM-assisted voluntary return to this country in recent years, but on the other hand there are indications that most of the rejected Iraqi asylum seekers do

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<sup>65</sup> The dependent variable measuring the relative voluntary return in a country-year is computed as follows: the total number of voluntarily returned rejected asylum seekers with nationality  $X$  in year  $T$  (the 'numerator') is divided by the total number of rejected asylum seekers with nationality  $x$  in year  $t$  and in the four preceding years (the 'denominator').

not intend to return to Iraq. For the benefit of the analysis of this case, a variety of information about (the backgrounds of) return patterns to Iraq were taken into consideration.

## Main results

The results of the analyses show that a minority of the rejected asylum seekers returns to their home countries with the assistance of IOM. Nevertheless, this kind of return migration has become somewhat more common. Among asylum seekers who were rejected for the first time in 2005 and thereafter again failed to obtain an asylum permit, 5.5% returned within three years through IOM, and by December 31 2011 7% of the cohort had left through IOM. Among asylum seekers whose application was first rejected in 2009 and who did not obtain a permit later on either, 18% had already returned through IOM by December 31 2009. The analyses on the aggregate level for the period 2001-2011 suggest that the level of IOM-facilitated return migration was even lower at certain points in time before the cohort of 2005.

Whoever does not return voluntarily risks deportation. The analysed data show similar levels of both deportation and IOM-facilitated voluntary return among rejected asylum seekers. For each of the cohorts (2005-2011), the total amount of registered departure consists of less than 40% as of December 31 2011. Although information on their current residence is lacking for the majority of rejected asylum seekers, this proportion has declined in recent years due to the increase in IOM-facilitated voluntary return.

In the analyses, factors that can possibly explain the increase in IOM-facilitated voluntary return migration are examined. The increase appears to be due in part to the introduction of additional return programs. Particularly the increased availability of additional financial support and the introduction of native counsellors seem to have had a significant effect. For rejected asylum seekers that had access to a native counsellor, the likelihood of returning through IOM (strictly speaking this concerns the *odds* of returning) within two years after the rejection of the first asylum request was 1.89 times higher than for cases that had no access to a native counsellor. Quantifying the effect of additional financial support was difficult, as these effects could only be examined based on the aggregated data for the period 2001-2011, since nearly all asylum seekers were entitled to additional financial support in the period 2005-2011. The analysis of aggregated data shows that the likelihood of IOM-facilitated return increases by a factor of 1.5 if the returnee is entitled to receive additional financial support.

Although voluntary return migration appears to have become more common due to financial support, the impact of this support seems limited when unintended effects are excluded. That is, financial support for return migration appears to encourage 'return support migration', with migrants from relatively nearby countries applying for asylum in the Netherlands solely with the intention of returning with financial support. At least, in the period 2001-2011 we find that asylum seekers from certain European countries, such as Macedonia and Belarus, more often return via IOM than we expected, considering the political and economic conditions in these countries and the migrants' demographic characteristics. In 2010 the Dutch government introduced measures to discourage such types of unintended usage.

Subsequently, we examined whether certain policy measures can explain the increase in IOM-facilitated return. The analyses showed that from the 2008 cohort onwards, there was an increased rate of return migration that other examined factors fail to explain. The effect possibly relates to the launch of the Repatriation

and Departure Service (DT&V) in 2007, as rejected asylum seekers were counselled and encouraged to return more intensively since then. This assumption could not be confirmed with certainty, however. Another policy factor that likely contributed to the increase in return rates was the modification to the asylum procedure. At least, the analysis shows that the likelihood of IOM-facilitated return is relatively low if a request is rejected either relatively quickly, or if the rejection is announced after a long period.

Since the introduction of the new asylum procedure as per January 1 2010, extremely long procedures taking longer than nine months occur less frequently. The extent to which asylum seekers return to their home countries with the assistance of IOM is also affected by the political and economic conditions in these countries. Voluntary return is less common towards countries with low levels of freedom and/or safety and/or GDP. Apparently, political conditions in countries of origin not only affect Dutch admission policies but also the return behaviour of individual migrants who do not receive protection. The relationship between return migration and conditions in the country of origin is clearly illustrated by the case study of Iraq. It shows that protection may end (that is, the ending of categorical protection) although the political situation at home has not improved much; therefore, the return rates are lower than expected after the protection ends. Furthermore, there appear to be significant regional differences in political and economic conditions, so that return migration to flourishing Northern Iraq proceeds more readily than to Central Iraq.

Finally, findings explaining individual variance (between asylum seekers) in return migration are reported. There are indications that the probability of voluntary return decreases in proportion to greater 'settlement migration'. That is, it is found that female rejected asylum seekers less often return with the assistance of IOM than male rejected asylum seekers. Returning is also less likely if asylum seekers have children in the Netherlands, particularly if these children attend school. In the current study it was not examined whether the probability of return migration increases or decreases when asylum seekers are employed (either paid or unpaid) in the Netherlands. Asylum seekers who have migrated at a relatively old age appear more likely to return to their countries of origin than asylum seekers who migrated at younger ages. A possible explanation is that older migrants have more ties with the country of origin and are therefore more strongly oriented to return.