OUT-reach: Information about assisted voluntary return to irregular migrants living outside reception centres

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SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Abbreviations

ARRSO /ARSO – Assisted Return and Reintegration to Somaliland
ARE – Assisted Voluntary Return to Ethiopia
AVR – Assisted Voluntary Return
Caritas – Caritas Norway is the development and relief organization of the Catholic Church
FSR – Financial Support to Return
INLO – National organization for migrants
IOM – International Organization for Migration
IRRANA- Information, Return and Reintegration of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan
IRRINI – Information, Return and Reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq
JD – (Norwegian) Ministry of Justice and Police
Nav – Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration
NOAS – Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers
Pro Sentret – Pro Centre was set up in 1983 as the City of Oslo's service for women and men who sell sex, or who have sold sex in the past.
Prop. – Stortingsproposisjon (Parliament proposition)
PU – (Norwegian) Police International
UDI – Norwegian Directorate of Immigration
Utekontakten – This is a public city council unit (Bergen) with the mission to prevent the development of problems and contribute to improved life situation of adolescents, young adults in high-risk environments, and of people who are potential victims of trafficking.
UNE – Immigration Appeals Board
VARP – Voluntary Assisted Return Programme

1. Executive summary

1.1 Background

Norwegian authorities consider it a prerequisite for a functioning asylum policy that a person who has been an asylum seeker returns to her or his home country after being rejected. The last years, the Norwegian government has increasingly focused on return of irregular migrants, and they have developed various return programmes to assist former asylum seekers who had their asylum application rejected to return. This report was commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) as part of the Norwegian authorities' efforts to identify good channels and means to reach irregular migrants living outside reception centres with information on assisted voluntary return.[1] The study will contribute to:

1. Improve the knowledge base on the current information work on assisted voluntary return outside reception centres;
2. Illuminate the current challenges of such information work;
3. Evaluate existing opportunities to provide such information;
4. Lay the foundation for future efforts to provide information on assisted voluntary return for irregular migrants living outside reception centres;
5. Shed light on the situation of irregular migrants in Norway that live outside reception centres.

We have used a social anthropological and media scientific approach where we have conducted interviews, pursued document analysis and fieldwork. The interviews and fieldwork have provided us with an insight into how information system concerning assisted voluntary return works and how it can be improved.

A recent report has estimated that there are around 18 100 and 56 000 irregular migrants in Norway (Mohn et al. 2014), stating that around 18 100 is the most plausible number. All the irregular migrants we interviewed for this study were rejected asylum seekers who had stayed at asylum reception centres for a period of time, and we see this as reflecting the categories or country backgrounds we were asked to investigate (Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Ethiopia/Eritrea). These are categories where we know that many seek asylum when they arrive in Norway. These are also categories that have been in focus for the Norwegian government's work on establishing return agreements.

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[1] In Norway, irregular migrants are allowed to stay at the asylum reception centers and are provided with a minimum of subsistence money allowance also after their asylum application has been rejected. There are several programmes that work on providing information on assisted voluntary return ongoing in the reception centers. In this report the focus is on how information workers reach those irregular migrants currently not living in the reception centres.

The term «assisted voluntary return» (AVR) in this report refers to a specific type of return migration: namely assisted voluntary return as organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on behalf of the Norwegian authorities. In Norway, IOM has since 2002 been responsible for the implementation of the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme (VARP), including country-specific return programs, program for particular categories, and the Financial Support to Return (FSR). IOM is responsible for assisting people who wish to return to their country of origin or to a third country where the person has either a residence permit or citizenship. Rejected asylum seekers, asylum seekers awaiting application, and people who do not have legal residence in Norway can apply for returning with the Voluntary Assisted Return Programmes.[2]

We make use of the notion Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) throughout the report, even if the government in the final phase of this project implemented a new return terminology and accompanying changes in the Immigration Act, approved in Council (June 2014). The term «voluntary» was thus excluded from «assisted voluntary return», which is now referred to as «assisted return». This came out of a longer discussion, in which several researchers have argued that it is problematic to call a program «voluntary» when it is not experienced as such by the majority of its participants (see i.e. Brekke 2010; Strand et al. 2011; Øien and Bendixsen 2012; Weiss 2013). The Ministry of Justice proposed the amendments in the return-terminology in the Immigration Act and highlighted that a new conceptual framework will clearer «reveal the individual's responsibility to comply with the negative [asylum] decision which entails an obligation to leave the country» (Prop. 110 L (2013-2014):1). It is emphasized that this is a conceptual change and not a change of practice. During our fieldwork we and our interviewees referred to the concept «assisted voluntary return» and it is this concept that we applied in the report.[3]

1.2 Focus and analytical framework

In the work to increase the number of irregular migrants that returns with Assisted Voluntary Return programmes (AVR), it is considered as vital that UDI improves the programmes' implementation so as to increase the effect in each part of the process. The government has fronted the need to improve the collaboration between UDI, UNE (the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board), the police and International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM provides potential applicants with information about the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme (VARP). Additionally is government funded IOM Outreach

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[2] IOM can also assist people who have a residence permit in Norway (repatriation) and persons who have not yet received a reply to his or her asylum application.

[3] Notably, this new terminology does not imply a name-change of the IOM programme «Voluntary Assisted Return Program». According to IOM, this is because the word «voluntary» is not referencing whether or not it is voluntary to leave Norway after a final asylum rejection, but that it is voluntary to participate in IOM's return program.

projects that work to provide information on AVR in different ways and to various actors, particularly directly to irregular migrants that live outside asylum reception centres and organizations that work with or come into contact with irregular migrants (secondary group). Information work on AVR to irregular migrants that live outside the reception centres are, however, very complex.

In order to evaluate which channels and tools that can reach irregular migrants living outside the reception centres, we have studied the experiences of several actors who come in contact with irregular migrants, with particular focus on their various dilemmas and opportunities. The actors that provide information about assisted voluntary return that we have studied include:

- The immigration administration;
- Other public actors who in varying degrees pursue information work directed towards irregular migrants living outside the reception centres, such as Nav (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration), «Utekontakten», and the «Pro Sentret» (Pro Centre);
- Non-public actors managing publicly funded information projects that aim to reach irregular migrants living outside asylum reception centres with information on assisted voluntary return (IOM Outreach, Outreach projects, NOAS, Caritas);
- Non-governmental actors and volunteers without explicit assignment or project-related information work, but who come regularly in contact with irregular migrants, and who inform about AVR in various degrees.

The analytical framework of the report is based on the questions what information is provided by whom and in what ways? During our fieldwork and data collection we were concerned with whether, different actors should relate to AVR information in different and clearly defined ways, and if so how. Who is best capable and positioned to do what kind of information work? The question of how much motivation, pressure and force the individual actors should attach to information is here relevant. Based on Valenta et al. (2010), we have identified three different ways in which actors can provide information on assisted voluntary return:

- **Information is given by focusing on the migrant's overall situation**. Information is provided with the idea that the migrant can take a standpoint towards the information and can assess the relevance of different information. Return is one out of several relevant topics.
- **Information focuses on motivating to return**. Information is given with clear attempts to make the migrant choose the option sought from the information provider.
- **Information is given together with pressure and threats**. Information is provided with negative consequences if one does not return or threats.

We have reflected upon whether how AVR information is given will have implications for the migrant's reception of that information. Will, for example, information provided by threats be seen as credible, and the actors that provide this information in such a way be

met with trust? We have also reflected upon whether a more holistic way to provide information has other consequences.

1.3 Selected review findings

Part 1: Challenges and possibilities to give information about assisted voluntary return

Part one of the report examines the various actors involved in providing information on AVR, and explores simultaneously the possible future involvement of other actors in this work. We found that the information work of *the immigration administration* is characterized by few public relations; ambiguities in the message as seen from the migrants' point of view; the message is linked to pressure and force; and the information does not take into account migrants' overall life situation. We found that several *governmental agencies* and their employees did not consider it their task to provide AVR information, while others thought such work was difficult or lacked sufficient knowledge to pursue such information work. In some agencies, such as Nav, there was a lack of knowledge about AVR, and many were uncertain about whether their mandate included providing such information.

For *IOM Outreach, NOAS, Caritas, and other Outreach projects*, we found that information work was characterized by an effort to create relationships with different secondary groups (immigrant organizations, NGOs and ethnic networks). The study highlights that for some actors, such as IOM Outreach and Outreach projects, it was challenging to get in touch with irregular migrants or to obtain the necessary access to the secondary groups (voluntary and migrant organization that have contact with irregular migrants) to provide AVR information. Other actors, such as NOAS, however had already access to the target group, but were without the capacity, time and resources to prioritize this category of migrants. Pro Sentret also had experiences with providing information that can be drawn upon in other contexts. Pro Sentret specified that when they provide AVR information, they focus on *the migrant's overall situation*. Irregular migrants apparently continued trust in the Pro Sentret shows that it is possible to inform about AVR and simultaneously maintain trust. This may be a consequence of the Pro Sentret's significant work for migrants in other areas, but may also be related to other factors: the way they provide information and at what time it is given.

We found that the facts that it is not visible whether a migrant is irregular and that many do not want to be recognized as irregular migrants have implications for the work to provide AVR information. This issue has also consequences for how to evaluate Outreach projects, such as providing assessment to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration of how many irregular migrants the Outreach projects has reached. Many irregular migrants are hesitant to fill out a form, such as the evaluation of Outreach project's form. This means that information work is an arena that is difficult to measure.

Design of information that is *trustworthy* is essential in this information work. In addition, it is important that the work to provide AVR information focuses on the whole individual, the larger contexts and facilitates follow-up meetings. Finally, it is important to provide objective and thorough information without always forming the conversation to be about *motivating* to return. It is further essential that the irregular migrant is provided with an exhaustive understanding and *individualized insight* into the reasons for why his or her asylum application was rejected. Large information sessions for irregular migrants, extensive advertising campaigns, and the use of large leaflets as efforts to reach this category are in such respects unsuitable.

Among the *non-governmental agencies* we identified several that provide AVR information even if they do not have this as an objective within their organization. This included organizations like the Red Cross, the Church City Mission, various immigrant organizations, religious organizations and different types of networks and individuals. While immigrant and religious organizations and NGOs generally enjoy trust from irregular migrants living outside reception centres and thus have greater access to them, their trust-position may change if return information is largely channelled through them. These social and religious networks risk being considered as pursuing the work of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration and cause irregular migrants avoiding them and seeking to other social arenas. Some actors at these social and religious arenas were also sceptical to provide information about AVR because they view it as stigmatizing for their organization or they believe that other aspects of irregular migrant lives and living conditions are more significant to deal with. Similarly, many organizations do not want staff from IOM Outreach and Outreach projects to provide AVR information to their members because: they believe that it is not relevant to their members; consider AVR information as a sensitive topic; or feel that their participants are already well-informed.

Immigrant organizations have some advantages in providing AVR information as they often have a good ethnic network and are linguistically closer to relevant migrants. Language competence and close contact is important to be able to reach irregular migrants, many of who have no education or little Norwegian language skills. Although assisted voluntary return has become more accepted as a solution for some in general, there are still people in various support networks that are sceptical to pursue work associated with assisted voluntary return since they believe it is politically problematic and that such work can break down migrants' confidence in them. Others highlighted that such information is important to offer because they believe that the AVR programme can be useful for some irregular migrants living in difficult situations.

Part 2: Irregular migrants' experiences and perspectives

Part two of the report deals with the complexity of irregular migrants' experiences as related to issues of assisted voluntary return. In this section, particular emphasis is placed on the *issue of trust* among irregular migrants. We saw that irregular migrants' experiences before arrival in Norway, together with the difficulties in asylum seeking process create

challenges for building trust-relationships. We also found that an uncertain future and fear of deportation generated a situation where it was a challenge to create a basic level of trust. In general, we perceived that the irregular migrants had relatively *low institutional trust*, but some also exhibited a *lack of trust in others* (social trust).

Our findings suggest that there are several reasons for distrust among refugees and asylum seekers. We identified four dimensions that we believe shape migrants trust-relationship: 1) Migrants' earlier experiences (war, migration history, difficult experiences) with characteristics that creates mistrust; 2) Experiences from their current precarious living condition where they often feel being let down, rejected or even tricked; 3) The feeling of being mistrusted by others as irregular migrants is translated into them starting to mistrusting others ; 4) Habitualization of mistrust, where mistrusting others becomes a normal situation. This can be shaped both by earlier socialization as well as their current living condition. In sum, migrants' own perspectives on trust and distrust must be taken seriously if one is to restore confidence. This also creates particular challenges when assessing who can or should provide information on what, and in which contexts. Knowledge of what creates mistrust is particularly important. Both trust and mistrust are complex units that are shaped by several factors, also on the personal level. Frequently, trust relationship is about feeling a kind of value- or political kinship with institutions or humans. It is thus not a question of either or, but degrees of trust and distrust. Information actors must therefore be considered trustworthy and give migrants verifiable confirmations that he or she can be trusted.

The study found that migrants' *understanding of their rejected asylum application and their interest in information on assisted voluntary return* must be seen as interrelated. Information on AVR is ultimately also about the asylum process: Migrants experience that every opportunity to get their asylum rejection changed must be explored before they can think about returning. The fact that migrants understand on what grounds their asylum application was rejected before the migrant experience information on return as relevant or even trustworthy is a consistent finding in the report. This is confirmed by previous research. Information is not perceived as relevant if the rejection of their asylum application is not understood. Many irregular migrants will otherwise not give up hope that they will be able to stay in Norway.

Information on AVR that seems questionable, because of the content or layout, contributes to that other (possibly conflicting) sources of information or *rumours* will prevail. We found that information on assisted voluntary return is often perceived as *ambiguous*. We see this partly as a result of the migrant receiving information from various sources, e.g. from reception centres where they have lived before, activists, family, friends, IOM or NOAS. If one or more of these sources do not have updated AVR information, migrants can obtain conflicting information. There have been major changes over the past two years in how the reception centres informs on assisted voluntary return, existing knowledge can thus be outdated. This may contribute to create undesirable situations where information may appear contradictory, and updated information competes with outdated information.

The study also highlighted that ambiguity is a result of that information spreads through *word of mouth and rumours*. For example, we were able to record stories about migrants that have not received the financial or institutional backing they were entitled to when returning with AVR. Such rumours often appear as more credible than information provided directly from the government because the trust-relationship with the government is broken down. Low institutional trust towards UDI must be seen in light of a lack of confidence that the asylum application decision is fairly and accurately implemented. The combination of low institutional integration and that the official information is perceived as ambiguous paves the way for rumours to be given a larger place in migrants' everyday life and decision making. Rumours are becoming increasingly credible when the migrants experience that information is ambiguous or they do not trust its senders.

Low social integration not only provides a feeling of powerlessness as the migrants have a poor understanding of the processes that controls their lives, but also produces alternative information channels. We thus also examined *various forms of integration* in order to understand what role the background and living conditions of the irregular migrants play for their access to and reception of information on assisted voluntary return. In some circumstances the migrant is left with several different pieces of information, some of which are contradictory. Information ambiguity will also affect the migrant's ability to make an informed decision about his or her situation and may ultimately result in a deadlock where the migrant is unable to make a decision. The message that return is «voluntary» can for example be seen as such an ambiguity - not only because AVR is continually fronted as an «option» to forced return, but also because the migrant in the next moment will hear that return is «mandatory».

The fact that the term «voluntary» used to be included in «assisted voluntary return» was also used as an argument against returning – in the sense: «I'm not returning» because it is «*voluntary* to go home». This *conceptual representation* is not the only reason why migrants remain in Norway. Previous research shows that the reasons why migrants do not return are complex, and in some cases include violence and economic conditions in the return country. In other cases, there are cultural or social reasons why migrants do not return. Further, the terms used in information work outside the reception centres have an impact on which actors are willing to provide AVR information. To be able to reach out with information on assisted voluntary return one must dependent on a number of NGOs and various networks. However, if what is now called assisted return continues to be promoted as deeply tied to forced return in public discourses, some organizations may opt-out of such information work. Organizations have often used long time and energy to build up trust among migrants that many fear losing. As the representative of one immigrant organization put it – there may be a danger that they «sell out this trust» if they become highly active in providing information on AVR.

Furthermore, we examined *the information process* and the circumstances around migrants' reception of AVR information. In order to identify good models to reach irregular

migrants with AVR information, our study provides: An insight into the information and media channels migrants are using and how they respond to the information conveyed by various governmental and non-governmental agencies, informal information channels and mass media. We particularly focused on how the living condition of this category affects their interpretation and management of information and how it affects different trust-relationships.

In this study, we found that most of the irregular migrants who had been informed of assisted voluntary return understood the basic of the return programs. Some were very well informed about UDI, and knew «Landinfo» (the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre), IOM and decision-making procedures, as well as the program on accompanied return with the police, while other migrants were less interested in formal processes. An important finding was that several migrants did not clearly understand the distinction between assisted voluntary return with IOM, accompanied return with the police and forced return. Whether someone can apply for AVR or accompanied return is regional specific for certain nationalities, such as Palestinians and Somalis. Migrants from these groups found information confusing, unclear or found it peculiar that someone could travel with IOM (assisted voluntary return), while others had to go to the police (accompanied return). In addition, some co-ethnic members considered the fact that one had to return with the police (accompanied return) to some areas as confirming that it was actually not safe to return.

An important finding in this study was that the internet makes it possible for irregular migrants to maintain contact and exchange information with friends regardless of their current geographical or social position. In a situation that might otherwise be characterized by isolation, connection through Internet can be seen as a medium where irregular migrants can «connect» to the world. Irregular migrants access important information through internet, but it also links them to meaningful social spaces where, to some extent, they can put aside problems that they have in «the real world». Global touch with friends and family often takes place via the Internet and mobile phones. Social media makes it increasingly possible to form social networks and get to know friends of friends in a situation where they are frequently on the move and were living circumstances put restrictions on socializing. We also found that those who lack or only have limited access to media technology (e.g. did not own their own PC or smartphone) have increased experience of being outsiders and it limited their social relationships.

This insight provided us with another important finding, namely that migrants used the media and obtained information on the basis of who and what channels in which they already had confidence. As active media users they disregarded information that they perceived as little trustworthy or irrelevant. This indicates the difficulties involved in conveying different information that may be perceived as contradicting those of the migrants' already established practices, expectations, or interpretation frames of the migrants.

Another point that emerged was that migrants largely felt that those who gave AVR information failed to understand their particular situation and individual challenges. Language barrier could lead to miscommunication and interpretation problems. Language skills are important for the migrant to obtain information and social relationships in the Norwegian society in general. Norwegian language skills are not necessarily a reflection of the number of years in Norway. We found that other factors, such as a migrant's social relations to the Norwegian society or to their ethnic network, and the person's earlier education was at least as important.

1.4 Conclusions

Eight main findings emerged from this study:

1) **The target group is uninterested**. IOM Outreach and Outreach projects have a challenge in their work that is not necessarily related to the idea that irregular migrants «live underground», but that the irregular migrants are not concerned about this type of information. In information work there are two main challenges:

    i) How to reach irregular migrants who live outside reception centres with information on assisted voluntary return when these are relatively uninterested in such information?

    ii) How to better the access to information or the actual information situation when irregular migrants outside reception do seek such information?

2) **There is little difference in knowledge and access to information on AVR between the irregular migrants we meet living outside the reception centres and those who live in reception centres.** This may be a consequence of the study's focus on informant categories that covers mainly people who generally apply for asylum when they arrive in Norway and thus have been through the asylum and reception system where information on AVR is to a high extent provided. There were nevertheless *differences in how well an understanding* the various migrants had on the information that was given, differences in *how they interpreted* this information and *how they viewed it*. Social network, whether one is working, how they live, age and education are more important than a person's ethnic or national background in forming their access to information and comprehension of the provided information.

3) **The fact that many irregular migrants live outside reception centres has nevertheless implications for how the government should work to give AVR information.** Access to and contact with irregular migrants living outside reception centres is difficult to achieve. Irregular migrants' trust of return information and their reception to information is affected by their living condition outside asylum reception centres. This is characterized by situations where their trust towards the world are continuously tested and often tainted. Further, the relationship between access to information and migrants' level of social integration points to a paradox: While poor integration means that they have lesser access to AVR information, good integration leads to *lower motivation* for applying for AVR.

4) **Trust and distrust are complexly shaped among irregular migrants.** Everyday life as an irregular migrant brings along situations and challenges that disrupt social relations and create uncertainty and unpredictability, contributing to reducing trust and confidence. Furthermore, migrants often do not trust the authorities because their mandate is to achieve that irregular migrants leave Norway. The low confidence in IOM that we found among irregular migrants can be explained by a combination of aspects, including: perception that IOM work for the authorities since they receive financial support from the government; experience that IOM's main focus is money because irregular migrants are offered money to return, and because of a general perception that IOM receive economic benefits for each migrant they return; rumours that migrants who returned with AVR did not obtain their rights; and that IOM cannot give them the information they want, namely how to obtain a residence permit in Norway.

5) **Migrants' access to information is characterized by a fragmentation of sources, including word of mouth**. This makes information in general fragmented and ambiguous. Finding their way between different agencies is not only complex, but irregular migrants also experience getting different answers on this way. In addition, irregular migrants frequently perceive information differently than how the actors providing the information had intended, both because the migrants receive different information from various sources and because they interpret the information within their own framework of interpretation. Their interpretation frame is formed by the migrants' experiences, values and attitudes, impressions of the Norwegian society and hope for the future.

6) **The information design is not accommodated towards its' receiver**. Information about assisted voluntary return is also about migrants' homeland, what they can expect and how they can plan their lives there. Lack of knowledge among information actors about the country of return, may contribute to the migrants' experiencing that his or her situation is not taken seriously, and that the content of AVR is reduced to a commodity with money in focus.

7) **The importance of understanding the asylum rejection**. It is essential for migrants to have a good understanding of why his or her asylum application was rejected, and a realistic assessment of whether change of government's decision is possible, in order to have an interest in AVR information. Understanding their asylum rejection is not merely about what a refusal implies legally speaking, but also an emotional and mental process whereby the migrant must be given the opportunity to respond to broken hopes and reconsider their own situation.

8) **Information for irregular migrants living outside reception centres takes place within a challenging framework that is further complicated by how *force* and *voluntary* is variously combined in the dissemination and presentation of return in different contexts**. There is a potential risk that information on AVR is too strongly linked to forced return and AVR information very early in the asylum process can weaken the applicant´s confidence in the asylum system and thereby the confidence that their application is justly treated. Information about AVR can sometimes be said to undermine its' own purposes.

1.5 Recommendations

Information actors' role and potential

In order to build trust between irregular migrants and actors who give information on AVR, it is important that reputation is not only built through good reports and appealing information. A good reputation is also built through daily practice and everyday situations with irregular migrants and information actors. On a general level, we see that various information actors have different potentialities on how to provide information on AVR to irregular migrants. To have a variation between the actors involved is a big advantage in terms of the various trust-relationships different migrants could conceivably build up. It is difficult to assess which various advantages the specific organizations (religious, ethnic, volunteers, or activist-oriented) have, because this varies considerably over time and is often dependent on the individuals that at any given time are active in the organizations, and their personal or private prerequisites for building relationships with various migrants.

On an institutional level, it may have a negative impact on the trust of irregular migrants if secondary groups receive financial support from the UDI to provide information on AVR. Financial support often brings along scepticism from migrants who perceive an economic relationship between the state and organizations as a confirmation that these organizations work for the Norwegian state or UDI. Consequently, it is not necessarily desirable to give all actors who are in contact with irregular migrants prominent positions in project-based work associated with AVR information. It may seem as if the non-existence of financial support from the government can provide a better basis for establishing trust and confidence in efforts to provide information on AVR to irregular migrants.

Information design

Based on the key findings of the survey, we believe overall that the information must be:

• **More comprehensive**. Information about AVR should be conveyed along with other types of information that may be relevant to irregular migrants in Norway.

• **Individually tailored**. The information situation must provide opportunities for migrants to get answers to questions that are specifically relevant to him or her.

• **Confidence based**. Information about AVR should take place within a framework that the migrants feel familiar with, and with an approach focusing on understanding the migrant's situation.

• **More available**. Information should be made more accessible on arenas that migrants themselves are using and experiencing as important.

• **Dimmed**. Use of strong visual and linguistic presentations or beautification of the information in the information processes should be avoided, as this may seem counterproductive. Attempts to deter or persuade may increase the distrust that migrants already have towards the authorities.

1.6 Concrete measures

To achieve an efficient, accurate and diverse information service on AVR to irregular migrants living outside reception centres we recommend the following concrete measures, which are all aimed at disseminating information about return in ways that safeguard the above mentioned information design factors:

1. **Creation of a web portal with comprehensive information for irregular migrants in Norway.** The portal should also function as a forum for improved information flow and cooperation between the various actors who in varying degrees perform information work.

2. **Creation of a well-functioning telephone service for irregular migrants.** One-to-one conversations via phone provides an opportunity to ask specific questions about their personal situation and receive the desired consulting in an informal manner, also anonymously and before the migrant has decided whether or not to seek return.

3. **Consider opportunities for face-to-face communication between irregular migrants and public administration**. One possibility is to strengthen the work already pursued by actors external to the immigration administration, such as the existing conversations done by NOAS or Caritas info centre.

4**. Information on AVR on UDI's website must be made more accessible**. Since the area of return is a governmental priority, we propose the creation of a box in the main menu called 'return and repatriation - Information'. It is important that *information* on return comes before the question of *how to apply* in order to not be intrusive.

5. **Creation of Facebook pages as meeting places for people who have returned and those considering returning**. Country specific Facebook pages where migrants who have returned and migrants who are considering returning can communicate should be established. They can for example be carried out as a collaborative government-funded project between NOAS, IOM and Caritas.

6. **Develop modest designed and portable written information that informs about the web portal and phone**. To inform about the web portal and phone, we recommend designing small leaflets, stickers and «card» that are easy to spread in many different venues where migrants are moving and which are easy to be included in one's pocket.

7. **Clearer division of tasks between actors who provide information to irregular migrants and those providing information to the secondary group**. IOM Outreach and Outreach projects should focus their outreach work on providing information on AVR to secondary groups. When irregular migrants contact them (e.g. visit their offices), information and conversation on AVR can be pursued as today, although with increased competence (see recommendation 8 and 9).

8. **Obtaining expertise on how to present information on AVR**. Information actors should reflect more on how they provide information about assisted voluntary return and in which situation they provide such information. We recommend a holistic approach to migrant's situation, his or her asylum rejection, and what return will mean for this individual. Persons who provide information on return should have an understanding of how certain living

conditions and past events may have psychological effects, and have knowledge about the various factors that affect trust for migrants living outside the reception centres.

9. **Design ethical guidelines and procedures for persons who provide information on AVR**. Today, information on assisted voluntary return is given in different ways. Clear guidelines are necessary to better take into account the migrant's vulnerable situation, the sensitivity about return questions and the existing challenges of communicating information about assisted voluntary return. Giving information in certain contexts can be counterproductive, end up increasing mistrust, and may result in migrants find themselves humiliated.

10. **The name «assisted return» is a better alternative than «assisted voluntary return»**. To call a program for «voluntary», whilst not perceived as a voluntary program for the targeted users contributes to increased resistance to the program. We agree with the changes implemented where the term «voluntary» return is removed from the name. At the same time, any continuous association between assisted return and forced return by political statements in the public may contribute to continued reluctance towards assisted return programs. A future high focus on forced return may counteract the ability to provide good information on assisted return because work on forced return that are linked up to other forms of return weakens trust, credibility, creates resistance, and contribute to irregular migrants losing interest in return information.

11. **Information about return must obtain a clearer expression**. Selection of images and text on the written material should be carefully planned and directed specifically to irregular migrants on the basis of that the situation where AVR is being considered by the migrants is perceived as tough and difficult. Brochures should have information that is recognizable among the target audience, without gimmick, but rather a balanced representation that also discusses certain dilemma that migrants may experience upon return.

12. **Information campaigns in the public sphere are not a particularly suitable information initiative.** Information campaigns in the public sphere were according to our survey little noticed by irregular migrants, and examples from past campaigns were perceived as difficult to understand, of little relevance or at worst intimidating or offensive. If public campaigns continue in the future, the design and objectives should change.

13. **Stakeholders involved in providing information on return should strengthen their knowledge of how media influence migrants' interpretative frameworks, but there is no basis for suggesting specific information measures through the Norwegian media**. Simultaneously, UDI can contribute with providing attention to the challenges around information work, media and migration in general through courses and conferences.

14. **A better understanding of what return means for the individual and situated in relation to the homeland context should be fundamental at any stage of the information campaign**. Better knowledge about which ideas of «returning» that exist in the individual countries of return is useful during dissemination of AVR information. Such knowledge should be developed through future research.

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15. **Information through homeland media should be considered for some countries**. In many cases, homeland media is not suitable as information channels, partly because migrants have low confidence towards these media. But in some cases, information through media in the migrants' homeland should nonetheless be considered. Here we think about whether it is possible to modify the perceptions of assisted voluntary return in home countries by increasing information on the AVR programme, its content, application and aim. UDI must first identify the countries in which such measures would be appropriate.

16. **Broader focus in efforts to disseminate AVR information**. The focus of AVR information is the category «rejected asylum seekers» which can give assisted voluntary return as a whole a negative mark on the expense of other irregular migrants who are not former asylum seekers and who could possibly need this information. One must see return in a broader focus and that it may be relevant for other categories of irregular migrants.

17. **Assistance to understand the rejection letter**. Understanding of what a final rejection means is essential for migrants to form a realistic picture of their own possibilities and often form the basis for starting a decision-making process on AVR. We recommend changing standard formulations in the rejection letter to make the message more understandable, clearer and more precise. In addition, migrants should be provided with specific assistance to understand the rejection letter as it forms a crucial basis for becoming interested in information about AVR. NOAS is already pursuing important work here.

18. **Strengthen health care access for irregular migrants who live outside the reception centres**. For irregular migrants to be able to relate to information on AVR their health condition need to be generally improved. To ensure that basic needs are meet is not tantamount to facilitating that irregular migrants remain in Norway, but is instead enabling them to maintain a minimum of relations with the Norwegian community and can provide vital to make migrant able to take hold of their own future and to consider returning.

19. **Continuous and updated information on AVR must be provided to the secondary groups**. Information via many actors (incl. NGOs) necessarily entails the risk of ambiguity and confusion. Follow-up with updated information to this group is therefore necessary to reduce this problem.

20. **Conscious and consistent choices on how information about AVR is disseminated by the individual actors**. Each unit of information actor (public, private, NGOs, etc.) must take a conscious choice whether to provide information with a focus on migrant's overall situation, information focusing on motivation, with sanctions (e.g. financial penalties if they do not attend information meetings), or information with pressure/persuasion/ threats of forced return. Today, different ways to inform overlap and are used variously and migrants react negatively towards this. The focus on pressure or persuasion by some information actors may shape migrants perception towards these actors in a negative way, and in particular deteriorate the possibilities to building trust.

21. **Develop workshop / interactive drama where irregular migrants may play out possible scenarios that could occur upon return and other possible scenarios that could happen by continuing to live in Norway**. In participatory theatre, focus can be put on the structural framework that exists, and the specific individual situation because the individual irregular

migrant is performing his or herself. In such a partially controlled setting one can play out the many difficult choices. This may initiate some new personal thoughts and ideas, and at least a new reflection about his or her personal life and future. Such measures are best suited to take place within the reception centres, rather than outside.

22. **Information measures must be given time to establish themselves**. The measures undertaken should have comprehensive and long-term strategies, and when evaluated this should be done with a holistic and long-term perspective.

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