



EVALUATION BRIEF

December 2020

SYNTHESIS EVALUATION: EXTRACTING LEARNING FROM EVALUATIONS OF ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION (AVR(R)/PARA) PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

This evaluation brief presents a summary of key findings, conclusions, and recommendations, as identified by the evaluator for use by key stakeholders, including internally by IOM staff and externally by Member States. More details can be found in the full evaluation report.

Evaluation type: Central - Office of the Inspector General (OIG)

Evaluator: Christian Bugnion

Evaluation period: 2008—2020

Final report date: December 2020

Commissioned by: OIG

Managed by: OIG and AVRR Unit

Evaluation purpose: To examine the evolving knowledge

on and operational base of AVR(R)/PARA interventions with particular attention to the following objectives: (i) To strengthen evidence-based learning in AVR(R)/PARA; (ii) To determine whether the strategic efforts and tools put in place by the AVRR Unit address the most frequent evaluations recommendations; and (iii) To inform AVRR Unit about possible programming adjustments based on common trends, gaps, lessons learned and good practices identified.

Evaluation criteria: Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and cross-cutting issues.

Evaluation methodology: Desk research and key informant interviews (semi-structured).

Synthesis Evaluation Information:

Geographical coverage: Global

Funding: USD 18,600

BACKGROUND & SUMMARY

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) is part of a comprehensive approach to migration management aiming at orderly and humane return and reintegration of migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in host or transit countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

IOM's AVRR programmes strive to ensure that migrants in need are assisted to return voluntarily, safely and in dignity, and are supported in achieving sustainable reintegration, in full respect for human rights, regardless of their status. IOM's AVRR-related activities are guided by the [Framework for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration](#), which outlines seven principles, such as 'voluntariness', 'sustainability of reintegration' or 'evidence-base programming, and six objectives such as 'returnees are able to overcome individual challenges impacting their reintegration' or 'adequate policies and public services are in place to address the specific needs of returnees and communities alike'.

Reintegration assistance is equally relevant for those migrants who are assisted to return voluntarily by actors other than IOM or are forcibly returned by governments and who may find themselves in a vulnerable situation due to extended periods of time spent abroad, a lack of preparedness before return and stigmatization linked to deportation. These migrants, and the communities to which they return, need post-arrival support through comprehensive reintegration assistance. For this reason,

under very specific conditions, in cooperation with governments of both origin and host countries, IOM has also been providing post-arrival reintegration assistance (PARA) to migrants returned by other actors, voluntarily or involuntarily, after they were formally admitted to their countries, that is, after the process of return concluded.

Successful implementation of AVR(R)/PARA programmes requires the cooperation and participation of a broad range of actors, including the migrants, civil society and the governments in both host and transit countries and countries of origin. The partnerships created by IOM and a diverse range of national and international stakeholders are essential to the effective implementation of AVR(R)/PARA – from the return preparation to the reintegration stage. Operational guidelines available to manage reintegration programmes in both AVRR and PARA contexts, include the [Reintegration Handbook](#) that provides practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance, and IOM's [Integrated Approach to Reintegration](#).

In reviewing the evaluation reports, it is important to keep in mind that there is no agreed upon definition of sustainability and that success of AVR(R)/PARA interventions is defined differently by donors. Importantly, since 2016 an important interest from development donors towards AVRR has been observed. This, coupled with the evolution of migratory trends, has led IOM to conceptualise a new model (or Integrated Approach to Reintegration), which may already incorporate some of the findings of the evaluations carried out in the past. In the same vein, IOM has recently improved its M&E framework, including through the identification of standard indicators to measure sustainability.

KEY FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The synthesis has been based on an analysis of 42 reports from 2008 until 2020 selected by the AVRR unit and OIG. The reports show a constant evolution in both the concepts related to AVRR, but also in the operationalization of AVRR. With an increasingly complex international scenario regarding migration, IOM has shown a good level of flexibility and adaptability and has been responding well to the evolving needs of the new complex migration environment. In recent years however, a strong push for the institutional reinforcement of AVRR has led to the publication and roll-out of critical guidance such as the Integrated Approach to Reintegration, the Framework for AVRR and the Reintegration Handbook.

As such, only a few reports were produced after 2017 (six of the 42 or 14 per cent) that can be related to the most recent reflection of IOM engagement in AVRR and in a more integrated approach to reintegration. A wider sample of recent reports would have allowed a better comparison in the application of the recent guidance regarding the integrated approach, a therefore more evidence of results linked to the various aspects which are more thoroughly covered in recent interventions such as the EU-IOM Joint Initiative.

But previous reports have raised and discussed issues such as the “voluntary” character of the return, the “sustainability” of return or of reintegration, the lack of an agreed definition for sustainable reintegration and other conceptual challenges, which have been instrumental in the understanding of the gaps and weaknesses that have been addressed in the recent IOM guidelines and publications. It is also understood that IOM is now working at the policy level to actually frame the IOM AVRR and PARA institutional approaches.

Most of the groundwork towards defining conceptually sustainable reintegration, developing the related policy, providing the tools to actually establish an evidence base of results, and supporting management functions at the M&E level appear to be gradually put in place for AVRR. There is no doubt that IOM is not the organization it was ten years ago, and it has adapted its work in the field of AVRR accordingly as illustrated in this synthesis report. Institutional changes by joining the UN, the approval of the Global Compact for Migration, an evolving and intensifying migration scenario across a wider range of countries, and a more mature reflection on the nature, mandate and objectives of the Organization have allowed IOM to be well positioned to advocate for harmonization of the AVRR procedures

with the international community while at the same time providing operational guidance to further enhance its performance in providing AVRR services.

Certainly, there are a number of challenges, including a difficult balance between the donor-driven supply side approach to AVRR and the migrants’ needs-driven, demand side for sustainable reintegration, which will hopefully become an increasingly accepted model for AVRR. Critical partnerships will need to be established to collectively contribute to the objectives of AVRR for the assistance to migrants across many contexts and countries in the world. IOM has the tools and experience to address the challenge of a new generation of increasingly complex and sophisticated AVRR/PARA interventions and maintain the adequate balance between high-level advocacy and flexible and effective field-based operations.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

A comprehensive policy on return and reintegration that elevates the internal guidance documents to an institutional level deserves to be developed, an effort currently on-going in IOM.

IOM project documents should clearly state the intent of the approach used and the threshold for success. The integrated approach to reintegration identifies the need for the developmental processes to be supported through strong partnerships with national actors, CSOs, micro-credit and private sector, but such an approach does not necessarily apply to each AVRR project.

IOM should continue advocating for flexible donor funding, to give an option to vulnerable migrants (i.e. returned unaccompanied and separated children, victims of trafficking) to appoint family members or social services to benefit from reintegration assistance, when he/she is not able to benefit personally from the type of assistance offered.

Reintegration grants need to be tailored to the context in which returns take place and the amount should not be determined by donors’ requirements but based on an economic assessment.

The systematic inclusion of pre-departure and post-arrival psychosocial counselling addressing anger/stress management, trauma and mental health conditions should be mainstreamed in all AVRR interventions.

Sufficient funding and time should be allocated for post-return monitoring: challenges were identified in the follow-up procedures and access to returnees (e.g. length of monitoring, access/distance issues, logistics means to ensure monitoring in remote locations).