

Newsletter No.2 2023

News from the voluntary return field and migration in Europe

- **Europe:** RIAT will get faster next year! RIAT 2.0 will run on a new server independent from the European Commission starting from the beginning of 2024; watch out for more information from your national authority about possible new log-ins or creating new accounts.
- **Germany:** Heavy deportations of Iraqi citizens without legal permission to stay started in the 2. half of 2023, after a migration cooperation agreement between the German and Iraqi government was signed in spring 2023. Hence, a lot more Iraqis are considering voluntary return and are seeking counselling.
- **Germany:** The AVRR counselling system is decentralized in Germany and carried out by various actors (NGOs, IOM and the government). IOM has had, however, the only mandate in Germany to implement the federal program for the financial and logistical AVRR assistance (hence booking plane tickets and disbursing money) for more than 20 years. From January 2024, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) will take over this mandate; transition problems can be expected which might delay voluntary returns in the first quarter of 2024.
- **Portugal:** The Immigration and Border Services (SEF) closed on 29.10.2023 with the goal to create a separation between the border police and immigration & asylum authority. The newly created Agency for Integration Migration and Asylum (AIMA) is in charge of asylum now.
- **Belgium:** The “reception crisis” is climaxing with currently around 5000 single young male asylum seekers forced to sleep in the streets because the government has run out of accommodation places for asylum seekers.

COLUMN

Reinventing your future

I sometimes feel so inspired by the attitude people have towards life, work and challenges. A Swiss AVRR counsellor, who I met during one of the Transnational Exchange VI activities, started her professional career in the investment field – dealing with huge amounts of money and living in countries like Japan and Singapore.

After some years, she felt the urge to change careers in her early thirties and got a second masters in International cooperation and development. By chance, she took her first job after graduation in 2016 as an AVRR counselor for an NGO. She has loved it ever since.

She observes the changes in Europe in the voluntary return field with great interest and curiosity. More and more governments want to be in charge of AVRR counselling alone which creates sorrows and concerns about the future for many NGO AVRR counsellors. Instead of being downcast and scared about future developments for NGOs, this lady sees opportunities for NGOs to reinvent its work and to scout new fields of services.

This positive excitement towards change and little fear of losing the old and familiar is admirable. It's one thing to talk about welcoming change but it's another thing to actually go through with it with a positive attitude. She talks the talk and walks the walk. That's why I am inspired!

HOWEVER, I don't think it is wise for governments to exclude NGOs from the AVRR counselling field. A complementary coexistence would cater best to the migrants' needs. –Salomé



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AVRR-systems in Europe

Click on each country to find out more information about the **respective return counselling system** including counselling providers, financial assistance, return numbers, etc.

WHAT IS AVRR?

European AVRR-systems in detail

The new website of Transnational Exchange VI offers information in English on return counselling systems in various European countries. You can easily find out which actors are involved in the pre-departure phase or how many people have returned to which countries in recent years. In addition, contact details of return counselling centers in the respective European country are listed to make it easier to establish contact between return counsellors. Curious? Visit the site at: www.transnationalexchange.com

Up-coming Transnational Exchange VI events

Workshop, November 2023

Transnational Exchange VI is organizing a workshop with the title “Mental illness as a challenge in return counselling”. The workshop will take place in Augsburg from 14th to 16th of November 2023 with 35 return counsellors participating from all over Europe. The registration for this event is already closed.

Online conference, March 2024

An online conference with the topic “Mental illness as a challenge in return counselling – part 2” will take place on 21st of March 2024. Due to a huge interest in the mental illness workshop in November 2023, a second event with the same topic is going to be offered online (with new speakers and perspectives) in order to give everyone interested a chance to participate. More detailed information and registration coming in January 2024

Field trip, June 2024

The next field trip will take place in June 2024 and will be heading to Spain. More information coming in March 2024!

Latest events: Fieldtrip in Belgium

The Transnational Exchange VI project organised its second field trip to Belgium from the 26th until the 29th of September 2023 for six European return counsellors from Sweden, Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland and Germany.

The aim of the trip was to get insights into the Belgian asylum and assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) counselling system and to compare it with other European systems. The hosting organization for the Transnational Exchange VI delegation was Caritas International Belgium (CIB). Read the report online:

[DOWNLOAD](#)



Transnational Exchange VI delegation visiting a reception center in Machelen, Belgium



Working groups in progress at the “New tools for AVRR counselling in Europe” workshop in Augsburg

Latest events:

Workshop “New tools for AVRR counselling in Europe” in May 2023

The second workshop of Transnational Exchange VI took place in Augsburg, Germany on the 02. – 04. of May 2023. 34 return counsellors from 9 European countries took part in the workshop with the topic “New tools for AVRR counselling in Europe”. Read the workshop report to learn about systemic counselling approach, motivational interviewing method and IOM’s return counselling toolkit.

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