

Newsletter No.2 2024

COLUMN

News from the voluntary return field and migration in Europe

Germany:

- **BAMF's "Focus Weeks" for Voluntary Return:** Due to high volumes of applications and processing delays, the BAMF introduced "focus weeks", dedicating one week per region with intensive efforts to book flights for the waiting returnees. While effective, it posed challenges for counsellors, who had to manage a lot more departures simultaneously than usual.
- **8-Month Gap in Medical Assistance in 2024:** For eight months, vulnerable individuals needing medical support during and after flights were not assisted due to delays in reaching a service agreement between the BAMF and IOM Germany..
- **AMIF Reporting Rule Changes:** Many return counselling services, funded by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), faced challenges when new staff cost reporting rules were introduced in the third quarter of 2024, leaving several centres overwhelmed by the adjustments.
- **Flight Suspensions to the Middle East:** Flights to the Middle East were suspended twice in 2024 (August and October), each for a week. This significantly impacted return counselling efforts, particularly for returnees to Iraq, one of the main return groups from Germany.

Blurred lines between forced and voluntary return regarding counselling: A Finnish field experience

During a recent field trip to Helsinki, participating AVRR counsellors encountered a new and complex situation when meeting with one of the four Finnish AVRR actors. The counsellors visited the Helsinki Police and met with their reintegration counselling team. This team provides detainees with information on financial and organizational assistance available after forced return through the EURP Frontex program. If detainees would like to hear more about the EURP program after a first mandatory information session, multiple counselling sessions may follow with the focus on a sustainable reintegration.

This concept was unfamiliar for the AVRR counsellors, who are accustomed to helping individuals navigate the voluntary return process only. Offering similar reintegration counselling to forced returnees raised several questions. Is it information giving or counselling? Should all EU member states provide this level of support? And, most critically, does this blur the lines between forced and voluntary return? Can sustainability and forced return be named in the same sentence?

As counsellors reflected on the experience, they found themselves in a dilemma: balancing professional standards with the desire to provide individuals facing deportation with as much help as possible. "Forced returnees are a vulnerable group", stated a Finnish police woman. This was in line with the humane approach from other Finnish governmental AVRR actors, with whom our group met. It's clear that the return landscape is ever evolving. How different EU member states will adapt remains to be seen.

Up-coming Transnational Exchange VI events

Workshop, November 2024

Transnational Exchange VI is organizing a workshop “Voluntary return to Russian Federation” in Augsburg from 5th to 7th of November 2024. There are still a couple of places available for the event, so in case you have clients from Russia, please apply on our website:

<https://transnationalexchange.com/news/>

Field trip to the Netherlands

The next field trip of Transnational Exchange VI will be heading to the Netherlands! It will take place on 18th until the 21st of February 2025. We will visit two relevant NGOs working in the field of AVRR: Goedwerk Foundation and Vluchtelingenwerk. Additionally we will meet with IOM Netherlands and DT&V, the Ministry of Justice and Security.

Please see more information and a link for applying on our website:

<https://transnationalexchange.com/news/>

Latest events

Fieldtrip in Finland

The Transnational Exchange VI project organised its fourth field trip to Finland from the 27th until the 30th of August 2024 for six European return counsellors from Spain, Netherlands, Austria, Estonia, Belgium and Germany. The group met with all the relevant AVRR actors in Finland: The Finnish Immigration Service, which is responsible for the AVRR program in Finland, Finnish Police, IOM Finland and a NGO called Finnish Refugee Council. The group also visited the Transit Center of the Helsinki Reception Center. Read the report [here](#).



Transnational Exchange VI delegation visiting the Police in Finland and learning about their role in the Finnish AVRR system. Since 2023 the Police has its own EURP reintegration counselling team focusing on clients in detention centers.



Visiting the Emergency Reception and Referral Centre (CAED) of Carabanchel in Spain.

Field trip in Spain

The third field trip of Transnational Exchange VI took place in Madrid, Spain, from June 18 to 21, 2024. During the visit, six participants engaged with key stakeholders in the voluntary return field, gaining deeper insights into the specific challenges faced by Spain's target groups. In Spain, return counsellors primarily assist "failed" economic migrants, many of whom, lacking prospects, have fallen into destitution — most notably from Latin American countries. Interestingly, only 14% of the IOM-supported returnees in 2023 were rejected asylum seekers, highlighting the unique composition of Spain's returnees. For a closer look at the Spanish counselling system, read the full report [here](#).



Co-funded by
the European Union

Caritasverband für
die Diözese Augsburg e.V.

