European Commission

European Migration Network

Synthesis Report for the EMN Focussed Study 2015

Dissemination of Information on Voluntary Return: how to reach irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities

Final Version

This Final Draft is based on the National Contributions from the following Member States: *Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and Norway*

Migration & Home Affairs

The European Migration Network (EMN) is co-ordinated by the European Commission with National Contact Points (EMN NCPs) established in each EU Member State plus Norway.

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Contents

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The Focussed Study was part of the 2015 Work Programme for the EMN.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This Synthesis Report was prepared on the basis of National Contributions from 25 EMN NCPs (**Austria**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**[1], **Cyprus**, **Czech Republic, Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta, Netherlands**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Slovak Republic**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom** and **Norway**) according to a Common Template developed by the EMN and followed by EMN NCPs to ensure, to the extent possible, comparability.

National contributions were largely based on desk analysis of existing legislation and policy documents, reports, academic literature, internet resources and reports and information from national authorities. Statistics were sourced from Eurostat, national authorities and other (national) databases. The listing of Member States in the Synthesis Report results from the availability of information provided by the EMN NCPs in the National Contributions.

It is important to note that the information contained in this Report refers to the situation in the above-mentioned (Member) States up to and including 2014 and specifically the contributions from their EMN National Contact Points. More detailed information on the topics addressed here may be found in the available National Contributions and it is strongly recommended that these are consulted as well.

EMN NCPs from other Member States could not, for various reasons, participate on this occasion in this Study, but have done so for other EMN activities and reports.

[1] Croatia does not have an assisted voluntary return programme in place yet, therefore it only contributed to the quantitative data for statistical analysis.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY POINTS TO NOTE

- Whilst there is **limited information to estimate the exact scale of irregular migration** in the EU, due to the largely clandestine nature of the phenomenon, (proxy) indicators suggest that **irregular migration is increasing** in many Member States.

- In view of this, the EU and its Member States are keen to develop policies and practices that can increase returns of not having a legal right to stay in the EU. The Return Directive makes clear that **voluntary return is preferred** at EU level over forced return, if it does not undermine the purpose of the return procedure. It is therefore positive that various Member States have recently legislated (or plan to legislate) for more effective promotion of voluntary return and that almost all (Member) States have in place rules for the provision of information on voluntary return.

- Several **challenges in disseminating information on voluntary return** to irregular migrants are common to most Member States, such as: how and where to target irregular migrants when they are not in contact with disseminating actors; language barriers; engaging irregular migrants with those providing information even when the former is unwilling to return and/or is mistrustful of authorities and other actors (both of which prevent migrants from engaging with those providing information); and ensuring that migrants have access to *accurate* information even where they are more likely to rely primarily on informal sources of information from within their community.

- In half of all (Member) States, **state actors maintain a limited role** in the dissemination of information, as this task is mainly outsourced to intergovernmental organisations or civil society organisations. This is largely because (Member States report) civil society organisations are more likely to be trusted by migrants than State authorities and they may have better links to diaspora communities, ethnic minorities than State authorities which help them to engage with irregular migrants. This study has also found that non-State providers of information (i.e. those outsourced to implement AVRR programmes) are more likely to provide tailored information on return than State Actors.

- A wide **combination of tools** (posters, websites, outreach) **to disseminate information** are used by (Member) States; the tools differ in the extent to which they increase accessibility and the understanding of the message disseminated suggesting that **employing a range of tools for information dissemination is advantageous**.

- One of the main ways that migrants learn about voluntary return is through speaking with their peers: whilst perhaps well-trusted by the migrant, such information can be inaccurate or biased.

- Around **one third of all (Member) States have targeted information campaigns specifically at irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities**. They have done this by publicising the return message in mainstream and targeted (e.g. community-specific) media, disseminating information in places frequented by migrants, and building relations with diaspora communities. Several Member States also underline the importance of informing migrants about return before they become irregular migrants / fall out of contact with the authorities.

- In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that some (Member) States have evaluated the promotion of AVRR, there is **little robust evidence of the effectiveness** of different measures in reaching out to irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities. However, (Member) States have **developed some lessons and potential good practices in disseminating information.**

MAIN FINDINGS

What is the estimated scale of irregular migrant populations in the Member States?

Some indication of the scale of irregular migration can be obtained through Eurostat statistics on migrants apprehended while entering the country (illegal border

crossings) and migrants apprehended while illegally staying in the country (see Table A.1a in Annex 2). It is, however, not possible to produce exact estimate of irregular migrants in the EU, due to the clandestine nature of the phenomenon.

According to Eurostat, over the period 2010-2014:

- **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Spain**, **Sweden** and the **United Kingdom** are the top Member States for the total number of migrants found to be illegally present;
- **Austria**, **Germany**, **Sweden** and **Poland** reported the highest annual increase in the number of irregular migrants apprehended (respectively a 117%, 155%, 165% and 201%; rise);
- A significantly lower number of irregular staying migrants is found in Member States which constitute 'transit countries' (e.g. **Estonia**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Slovak Republic**), i.e. countries where irregular migrants temporarily stop during their travel towards western and other northern European countries.

A few (Member) States (BE, DE, FI, IE, NL, PL, SE and NO) have developed national estimates of the scale of irregular migration. Numbers range from a minimum of 1,000 in **Finland**, to 25,000 in **Poland**, up to 520,000 in **Germany**.

What is the scale and nature of irregular migrants who are not in contact with the authorities?

Irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities find it possible to live in the EU both because they live within and depend upon informal economies, e.g. working in the underground / shadow economy, and/or because they live within diaspora or other communities which support them and their needs.

Very few Member States (only AT, LT, LV, MT, SE, SK) provided estimates of the scale of either clandestine entrants or irregular migrants who 'abscond' from the system. For example, the number of absconders in 2014 ranged from 900 units in **Malta**, 4,557 in **Austria** and 8,159 in **Sweden**. Other Member States unable to provide statistics for clandestine entries, reported that clandestine entries are a major issue in their countries (EL, FR). By contrast, Malta reports that the scale of such entries is not significant, since arrivals by sea to the country do not generally go undetected.

What are the main problems faced in disseminating information to those who are not in contact with the authorities?

The most common challenges reported for the actors in disseminating information on voluntary return are:

- The difficulty in knowing **how and where to target irregular migrants when they are not in contact with the authorities** and/or not in contact with the actors disseminating the information.
- **Language barriers** that make it challenging to communicate messages about voluntary return effectively to some irregular migrants.
- Certain irregular migrants are **unwilling to leave** Europe and may thus not be receptive to information about voluntary return. Fear that return will be viewed as 'failure' can be a factor in this.
- **Mistrust** towards both authorities and other actors and institutions promoting voluntary return also creates barriers to the effective communication of information for Member States.
- The mistrust towards actors formally mandated to disseminate information can lead migrants to **rely on informal and possibly inaccurate sources of information**, such as friends, peers and families.
- Engaging with entities who could help with raising awareness on return, such as consular representations, diaspora organisations / communities, NGOs, religious leaders, community leaders) can be difficult.
- **Lack of strategies, policies and methodologies** to effectively engage irregular migrants.

Is the provision of information on voluntary return regulated in (Member) States?

All Member States regulate how information on voluntary return should be disseminated to irregular migrants, either through **legislation, soft law** or **practitioner guidelines**. The Return Directive has had an influence in establishing or guiding these rules in some Member States (LU, SI, SE).

Policy or legislation on the dissemination of information has been recently amended or is about to

be amended in nine (Member) States (AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, HU, PL, UK, NO), suggesting an **increasing interest in strengthening rules and practice to promote voluntary return**.
National provisions indicate the **content of the information** to be provided to the TCN, the **timing** of the information provision, the **language** in and **channel** through which it should be provided and rules around **confidentiality**. With regard to the content of the information to be disseminated, this includes: the possibility of returning voluntarily; the conditions of eligibility to Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) or Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes; information on the assistance and benefits provided under AVR(R) programmes; and contacts for the responsible actors implementing AVRs. A few Member States also have specific rules/guidance in place for **vulnerable irregular migrants**.

Article 7 of the Return Directive obliges (Member) States implementing it to inform the returnee of the period provided to them for voluntary departure. In addition to this, most (Member) States, when issuing the return decision, provide **information on assisted voluntary return**, although the amount of information they provide and the extent to which they do so in a user-friendly / accessible format differs between (Member) States.

Which role different disseminating actors play in informing irregular migrants about voluntary return?

In half of all (Member) States (AT, CY, EE, ES, FI, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, SI, SK), **state actors maintain a limited role** in the dissemination of information on voluntary return to irregular migrants, as this task is **mainly outsourced to intergovernmental organisations or civil society organisations** - mainly the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) and, in some cases, national NGOs.

In other (Member) States (BE, CZ, DE, EL, FR, MT, UK and NO) state authorities play a more active role in the direct dissemination of information on voluntary return by: **training** staff and partners about how to provide information on voluntary return, **producing communications**, providing **return counselling** and establishing **information hubs** for interested migrants to visit. In a few of these (Member) States, state representatives also engage in **outreach work**.

State authorities involved in the dissemination of information on voluntary return and the type of information they provide vary depending on the stage in the asylum / migration cycle and the context:

- **Asylum / migration authorities** and **staff at reception facilities** inform applicants for international protection during asylum procedures;
- **Asylum authority / migration authority** or the **police / law enforcement authorities** explain the possibilities for return, including voluntary return when a return decision is issued;
- **Staff of reception centres, accommodation facilities and detention/immigration reporting centres** provide information during the period of voluntary departure/pending removal;
- Some Member States also engage **their diplomatic representation** as well as **embassies** of particular third countries in the dissemination of information.

A **broad range of non-state actors** play a role in the dissemination of information on voluntary return, either because they are **contracted/funded by the government**, **engaged on an informal basis** by the State or **mandated independently** of the State. The most common actors are: the **IOM,** operating and promoting AVR(R) programmes in most (Member) States; national **NGOs** (e.g. Caritas, Refugee Action, Jesuit Refugee Service, national refugee councils); **diaspora groups**; **community groups**, e.g. faith-based groups / migrant-led groups. **Social, health, and education services** and **legal advisors** are involved in disseminating information on voluntary return to a lesser extent in some Member States.

What are the tools, approaches and campaigns employed specifically to reach out to irregular migrants who are not in contact with the authorities?

The dissemination tools most commonly used by the Member States are **leaflets/brochures** handed over or distributed to migrants in the context of campaigns, **posters** with short texts and explicative pictures, and **websites** with audio-visual information which offer anonymity and easy access to users. Many Member States also provide **helplines** (free of costs in most countries) and **drop-in clinics**.

Other tools used to a lesser extent are dedicated **social media pages** and **online discussion forums** which allow for the exchange of information and discussion among peers, **media campaigns** and **outreach community visits** to migrant communities. Given that studies have shown that many returnees learn about voluntary return through fellow members

of their diaspora and other communities, outreach work amongst these communities is likely to be an important tool. However, the combination of a range of channels for information dissemination and the promotion of voluntary return is most likely to help (Member) States **reach irregular migrants at different times and conditions**, corresponding to their different information needs.

Member States differ in the amount of information they provide to potential returnees and the actors involved in disseminating information. Overall, **non-State actors** (i.e. those NGOs and international organisations contracted to provide AVR(R) and return counselling) are **more likely to provide tailored information**, although in some (Member) States (BE, DE, FR, HU, NO) state actors also provide this information.

To increase the chance that migrants will understand the return message and be willing to engage with those providing voluntary return, **it is important that information is accessible**: provided at a time and place when migrants can access it, is free of charge, in a language they understand and is provided in a manner that does not deter them. Member States normally find that language does not prevent the initial message about return from being disseminated but it can affect nuanced messages. Most (Member) States have developed AVR(R) promotional materials in five or more languages and offer their dissemination tools in several common languages. Member States differ in the way they present the return message, but research in a few Member States has suggested that by overly-promoting or 'beautifying' the return message, third-country nationals might be less likely to trust the information.

During the period 2010-2014, most Member States implemented **information campaigns** aimed at better disseminating information on voluntary return to irregular migrants and employing a variety of tools. Around one third of these specifically targeted irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities and the remainder used methods and approaches which meant that they could target this group as part of a wider target group of third-country nationals. The majority of campaigns focused on promoting AVR(R) programmes, although in a few cases they focus more generally on encouraging (assisted) voluntary returns. The campaigns employed different strategies to **increase the chance of reaching the target groups,** mainly by increasing the ubiquity of information available in key places frequented by migrants, strengthening relations with diaspora communities, using targeted channels of dissemination and social media, highlighting benefits of return (and reintegration), and using cultural mediators.

Is there evidence of effectiveness of different tools and techniques of dissemination?

Some (Member) States have collected evidence of the effectiveness of different approaches used to disseminate information on voluntary return mainly through surveys to assess the AVR process and outcomes and other information received by participants in AVR(R) programmes. This source is used to evaluate the programmes overall, but it covers a small range of assisted returnees and remains limited in telling about the effectiveness of dissemination. It follows from this that there is **little robust evidence of the effectiveness** of different measures in reaching out to irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities and providing them with a clear and comprehensive message. Nonetheless, (Member) States, have **highlighted some lessons and potential good practices in disseminating information**, specifically to reach out to irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities. These comprise:

- Providing information as early as possible to potential beneficiaries of AVR(R);
- Involving NGOs, IOs and civil society organisations in information dissemination, due to their mediating role between state authorities and migrants;
- Involving diaspora groups and other migrant representatives to build trusted channels;
- Providing time to the migrant to reflect on the decision about return;
- Making use of online media;
- Involving different actors in information dissemination with adequate coordination;
- Providing information in a language the migrant understands, to increase its accessibility;
- Ensuring that the individual is aware of the risks of not returning voluntarily as well as the benefits of voluntary return;
- Tailoring information and communication to the specific needs and situation of the migrant;
- Providing information in a factual manner, avoiding confusing and 'emotive' communication.

1 Introduction

This Synthesis Report presents the main findings of the 2015 EMN Focussed Study on "Dissemination of information on voluntary return: How to reach irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities".[2] The overall aim of this study is to inform Member States and the Commission about the different approaches employed in the EU Member States and Norway to ensure that irregular migrants are informed of options for return, with particular reference to **voluntary and assisted voluntary return**.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

One of EU's migration policy objectives is to **prevent, control and fight irregular migration through an effective return policy**, whilst fully respecting fundamental rights and human dignity[3]. The credibility of EU's return policy depends on the effective implementation of the **Return Directive**[4] which requires that those who do not, or who no longer, fulfil the conditions for entry, stay or residence in a Member State have to be effectively returned[5]. Member States are therefore obliged to encourage and enforce the return of irregular staying third-country nationals.

The permanence of irregular migrants in the EU poses challenges: first to the migrants themselves, as they live in a vulnerable situation subject to the limitations this can place on their access to basic rights and services;[6] and secondly, to the responsible authorities and the host society of the Member State, because of the risk of social exclusion, illegal employment and exposure to crimes, such as trafficking, smuggling and exploitation of human beings.

According to EU return policy, **voluntary return should be preferred over forced return** (as long as it does not undermine the return procedure).[7] According to the Council of Europe, voluntary return is commonly considered a more dignified return procedure and is likely to present fewer risks with respect to the fundamental rights of the returnee.[8]

Promoting and supporting voluntary return is therefore in line with EU's return policy and recommended both by the EU and other international bodies, such as the Council of Europe.[9] The dissemination of information regarding voluntary return and Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programmes is also an essential part of (Member) States' policies to encourage and promote the return of irregular migrants. However, the dissemination of information on voluntary return can be particularly challenging when the irregular migrant is not residing in organised facilities or the migrant's address is not known and therefore the authorities are less well-placed to communicate with them directly. Dissemination can also be challenging for other multiple reasons including structural, resource specific and cultural barriers, language barriers as well as the unwillingness of the migrant to return and therefore also the unwillingness to learn about return (see section 2.3).

Tos the extent possible, this study tries to draw attention to the ways through which (Member) States reach **irregular migrants unknown to authorities**, or otherwise **not in contact** with them. However, since few Member States target information dissemination exclusively at this group, the Report rather provides a more general overview of information dissemination, focussing where possible, and particularly in section 6, on the methods and approaches which may be more suitable for reaching out to those not known to the authorities.

1.2 AIMS AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The main aim of this study was to **identify approaches that have either targeted and/or have proven effective in reaching out to those irregular migrants who are not in contact with the authorities**. In order to provide a wider context, the study also gathered information on Member States' policies and practices with regard to the dissemination of information on voluntary return more generally.

In exploring the different tools, content and format of information provision, the study provides an assessment of the extent to which these factors

[2] Concerning the topic of return, see also the 2014 EMN Study on "Good practices in the return and reintegration of irregular migrants" which provides a perspective of (Member) States' use of entry bans and readmission agreements: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/emn_study_reentry_bans_and_readmission_agreements_final_december_2014.pdf; as well as the EMN Study on "The use of detention and alternatives to detention in the context of immigration policies": http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/emn_study_detention_alternatives_to_detention_synthesis_report_en.pdf.

[3] See Recital 2 and article 1 of the Return Directive.

[4] Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals

[5] Denmark, Ireland and United Kingdom do not take part in the Directive and are not bound by its rules.

[6] See, e.g., EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) " Fundamental rights of migrants in an irregular situation in the European Union", November 2011

[7] See Recital 10 of the Return Directive.

[8] Council of Europe "Twenty Guidelines on Forced Return" (2005), available at: http://www.unhcr.org/4d948a7d9.pdf

[9] Council of Europe (2005), *ibid*.

influence the effectiveness of uptake of voluntary return. To the extent possible, it seeks to identify practices that have proven particularly effective and the factors which made them effective.

The specific Study's main aims are to:

- Provide available **information on the estimated scale of irregular migrant** populations in the Member States and an overview of the **main problems** faced in disseminating information to those who are not in contact with the authorities;
- Describe **national approaches** to disseminating information on voluntary return to irregular migrants in general and to those not in contact with authorities, including the content of information provided;
- Describe the **role that different actors in contact with an irregular migrant play** in informing them about the possibilities for voluntary return;
- Provide details on **tools, approaches** and **campaigns** employed specifically to reach out to irregular migrants who are not in contact with the authorities;
- Assess general **dissemination practices to inform irregular migrants** about voluntary return in order to draw out **good practices in disseminating information** to those who are not in contact or are unknown to authorities; and
- Present evaluative findings on the **effectiveness of different tools and techniques** of disseminating information on voluntary return to migrants not in contact with the authorities specifically.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF EU LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

The EU has been developing a comprehensive approach to migration and asylum since 1999. Ensuring the safe and effective return of irregular migrants is an essential component of this approach, complementary to EU policies in the field of international protection and legal migration, as well as national policies. Every year, **between 400,000 and 500,000 irregularly staying third-country nationals** are ordered to leave the EU. However, only around 40% of this number is returned in each calendar year either to a country of origin or to the country from which the migrant travelled to the EU as shown in the following figures[10].

[10] See also DG Home page at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/irregular-migration-return-policy/return-readmission/index_en.htm

Table 1.1 Number of TCNs found to be illegally present, ordered to leave and returned, EU28

Year	TCNs found to be illegally present	TCNs ordered to leave	TCNs returned to a third country
2010	505,130	540,080	198,910
2011	468,850	491,310	167,150
2012	433,325	483,650	178,500
2013	429,060	430,450	184,765
2014	620,170	470,080	168,925

Source: Eurostat. Data extracted on 20th July 2015

The **Hague Programme**[11] called for the development of a coherent return policy and the **Stockholm Programme**[12] reaffirmed this need by calling on the EU and its Member States to intensify the efforts to return illegally residing third-country nationals by implementing an effective and sustainable return policy. As expressed in the recently adopted EU Agenda on Migration[13], a well-managed framework on return could reduce pull factors of irregular stay and entry by making sure that those TCNs who have no right to stay in the Member States are effectively returned, thus contributing to enhancing the security of European borders as well as the safety of migratory flows[14].

Voluntary return and the provision of assistance to returnees - through the implementation of Assisted Voluntary Return programmes (AVRs) and Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes (AVRRs) – are key tools for the EU in implementing its return policy, since it is understood that AVR(R) in particular can help consolidate the position of returnees in their countries of origin and may thus deter new irregular migration, contributing to a sustainable EU return policy[15] as set out in the 2015 **EU Action plan on return**[16].The Council of Europe also recommended that States **promote voluntary return** by *inter alia* "providing complete information to the returnee, in a language he/she can understand,

[11] COM(2005) 184 final.
[12] The Stockholm Programme — an open and secure Europe serving and protecting citizens, Official Journal 2010/C 115/01.
[13] COM(2015)240 final.
[14] Migrants who cross borders illegally often have recourse to criminal networks of smugglers who expose them to life-threatening risks and violence.
[15] However, to date, evaluative evidence of the effectiveness of AVR(R) in encouraging sustainable return is minimal – see the 'REG Guidelines for the monitoring and evaluation of AVRR programmes' for more details.
[16] COM(2015) 453 final.

about the existing programmes of voluntary return..."[17]

The EU adopted rules on return in 2008 with the **Return Directive**[18] which laid down common EU standards and procedures on voluntary and forced return of illegally staying third-country nationals. Although not bound by these provisions, **Ireland** and the **United Kingdom** provide in their policy for the possibility of voluntarily returning irregular migrants. Iceland, Liechtenstein, **Norway** and Switzerland while not members of the EU, implement the Return Directive as part of the Schengen *acquis*.

The Return Directive stipulates that there is a distinction between **voluntary** and **forced return**, emphasising that **voluntary return is preferred**, where "there are no reasons to believe that this would undermine the purpose of a return procedure".[19] Recital 10 to the Directive also states that, "**in order to promote voluntary return**, **Member States should provide for enhanced return assistance and counselling** and make best use of the relevant funding possibilities offered under the European Return Fund". The Return Directive encourages voluntary return by providing that a period for voluntary departure is granted to persons ordered to leave.

Indeed, from 2008 until 2013, the **EU Return Fund** offered grants to organisations and authorities in Member States implementing Assisted Voluntary Return programmes and other projects to support the voluntary return of migrants as well as policies to support forced return. Since 2014, the EU has been continuing to do this through the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)**[20] which has the aim of "enhancing fair and effective return strategies with emphasis on sustainability of return and effective readmission in the countries origin and transit". The Fund will also make available funding to Member States to fund voluntary return schemes, amongst other return-related activities.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Following this introduction (Section 1) the Study is divided into 6 further Sections (2-7) structured as follows:

Section 2: (Overview of the national situation)	Provides an overview of the scale of irregular migrants residing in the Member States and of the challenges in in informing them about voluntary return.
Section 3: (National legislations and policies)	Provides an overview of the legal and policy framework on the dissemination of information about return options in the Member States.
Section 4: (National approach to disseminating information)	Examines the role of actors involved in the dissemination of information on voluntary return and the rationale of their involvement, the tools used and specific campaigns/strategies.
Section 5: (Specific strategies to target irregular migrants)	Presents strategies and campaigns to disseminate information on voluntary return undertaken in the last six years in Member States.
Section 6: (Effectiveness of different approaches)	Highlights good practices and examples of approaches that have proved effective
Section 7: (Conclusions)	Presents the conclusions of this Study.

2 The scale and nature of the problem

Throughout the EU irregular migration remains a challenge that can be addressed, in part, through a credible return policy. This section provides some insights into the scale of irregular migration in EU Member States and then discusses the scale and nature of irregular migrants unknown to or not in contact with the authorities. The section ends by outlining the reasons why it is particularly challenging to disseminate information to this group.

2.1 THE SCALE AND NATURE OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN EU MEMBER STATES

An irregular migrant, in the EU context, is a third-country national (TCN) present on the territory of a Schengen State who does not fulfil, or no longer fulfils, the conditions of entry as set out in the Schengen Borders Code, or other conditions for entry, stay or residence in that Member State.[21] It comprises, amongst others, clandestine entrants, visa/ residence permit over-stayers, those in breach of the conditions of their residence permit/ visa, failed asylum seekers or Dublin transferees staying in the country, i.e. absconders, and migrants who move irregularly between (Member) States (e.g. irregularly staying circular migrants).

[17] *Ibid,* Council of Europe (2005).
[18] Directive 2008/115/EC, available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32008L0115.
[19] See recital 10.
[20] http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/asylum-migration-integration-fund/index_en.htm
[21] EMN Glossary version 3.0.

Due to its clandestine nature, it is not possible to produce reliable statistics on the scale of irregular migration. However, actors in a few (Member) States (BE, DE, FI, IE, PL, SE and NO) have developed national estimates[22] and – for others – some indication of the scale of irregular migration can be obtained through Eurostat statistics on migrants apprehended while entering the country (illegal border crossings) and migrants apprehended while illegally staying in the country. Information on both of these is provided in Annex 2.

Member States use different methods to estimate the scale of irregular migration, hence estimates are not comparable. However, the contrast in the perceived scales in different countries, is notable with **Finland** having the lowest estimate at **1,000** and **Germany** the highest at to up to **520,000**.[23]

Box 2.1 - Estimates of irregular migrants in EU MS and Norway

- **Finland**: The National Bureau of Investigation estimated that the number of irregularly staying TCNs in 2014 was 3,000 – 4,000, whereas the Ministry of Interior estimated figures to be between 1,000 and 2,000.
- **Germany:** Vogel (2015) estimates the number of irregular migrants in DE to have risen from 136,000-337,000 in 2010 to 180,000-520,000 in 2014.
- **Ireland:** In 2014 the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) estimated that between 20,541 and 25,506 undocumented migrant adults were living in Ireland.
- **Netherlands**: In the Netherlands the Ministry of Security and Justice estimated the irregular migrant population 01 July 2012 to 30 June 2013 to be 35,530 (on the basis of police and Royal Netherlands Marechaussee data). In 2009 the Ministry had estimated the number to be higher at 41,835.
- **Poland**: In 2011 the Ministry of the Interior estimated that the number of irregularly staying TCNs in PL was between 25,000 and 50,000.
- **Sweden**: Different Swedish government official reports have estimated the irregular migrant population at between 10,000 and 50,000 during the years 2010-2011[24].
- **Norway**: the National Statistic Centre developed an algorithm for estimates, according to which the number of irregular migrants in the country by 2014 was 18,100.

Whilst all Member States host some irregular migrants, some have been affected by the phenomenon of irregular migration more than others in recent years. **Greece**, in particular, has faced a major increase of migrants on its borders, many of whom either enter irregularly or become irregular on arrival.[25] From 2010 to 2014 there has been a slight fluctuation on the top-level Member States for numbers of migrants found to be illegally present, as shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Top 3 Member States per number of Third-country nationals found to be illegally present, 2010-2014

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1st	**Greece** (115,630)	**Greece** (88,840)	**Greece** (72,420)	**Germany** (86,305)	**Germany** (128,290)
2nd	**Spain** (70,315)	**Spain** (68,825)	**Germany** (64,815)	**United Kingdom** (57,415)	**France** (96,375)
3rd	**France** (56,220)	**France** (57,975)	**France** (49,760)	**France** (48,965)	**Greece** (73,670)

Source: Eurostat, Data extracted on 20th July 2015

Eurostat statistics on third-country nationals (TCNs) illegally present over the 2010 to 2014 period also indicate that **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Spain**, **Sweden** and the **United Kingdom** are the top Member States for the total number of migrants found to be illegally present (see Annex 2). A few Member States have experienced an annual increase in the number of irregular migrants apprehended in recent years: the highest increase concerned **Austria, Germany**, **Sweden** and **Poland** which report respectively a 117%, 155%, 165% and 201% rise in the number of irregular migrants apprehended over the 2010-2014 period (see Table A.1a in Annex 2). Other Member States which have apprehended an *increasing* number of irregular migrants (on an annual basis) in recent years include **Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Hungary** and **Poland**. A caveat should be added here, however, that comparatively higher numbers of apprehensions in one Member State may not necessarily represent comparatively higher numbers of irregular migrants but may instead point to better policing systems or stricter enforcement of immigration rules in Member States.

Member States considered 'transit countries' (e.g. **Estonia**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania, Slovak Republic**) – i.e. countries where TCNs stop only temporarily during their travel towards other (typically western and northern) European countries – report a significantly lower number of irregularly present migrants identified on their territory.

Similarly, **Finland** reports low numbers of irregular migrants; there the share of irregular migrants is estimated to be relatively low at around 1-2% of the

[22] Austria, Germany and the Netherlands repeated or updated estimates from the Clandestino report.

[23] Information on the methods used to arrive at these estimates is available in National Reports.

[24] While these estimates date from 2010 and 2011, subsequently published sources mention this range too, so they appear to be still valid as there are not more recent estimates available.

[25] See data for TCNs Refused entry at borders in table A.1a Annex.

foreign population). In **Germany**, which is estimated to have a comparatively high total number of irregularly staying migrants, the share of estimated irregular foreign population goes from 2% (based on the minimum estimate of 180,000 irregular migrants per 8.4 million in the Member State for 2014) to 6% (based on the maximum estimate of 520,000 irregular migrants).

2.2 THE SCALE AND NATURE OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS WHO ARE NOT IN CONTACT WITH THE AUTHORITIES

For the purpose of the study, irregular migrants can be identified in three categories vis-à-vis their relationship with the authorities:

- **Irregular migrants whose status and place of residence is known to the authorities** and who are therefore in contact with the authorities (i.e. through correspondence or because the irregular migrant is staying in organised facilities). This group includes for instance failed applicants for international protection staying in reception facilities, irregular migrants in open and closed return facilities and irregular migrants who are subject to alternatives to detention, as well as irregular migrants who have been issued a return decision, but who are appealing the decision and/or who are still within the time period allowed for voluntary departure.
- **Irregular migrants who were previously known to the authorities, but whose place of residence is no longer known to the authorities.** This group includes for instance failed applicants for international protection who have absconded following a negative decision on their application, visa over-stayers whose address is not known to the authorities, and other irregular migrants including those subject to alternatives to detention who have absconded from the process.
- **Irregular migrants whose residence on the territory has never been known to the authorities.** This group comprises for instance those migrants who have been smuggled or trafficked into the territory and who have not registered for a residence and/or work permit, as well as those using false or forged information to enter/ stay on the territory. The exact scale of this group is unknown to Member State authorities, although estimates of the numbers may exist based on estimates from those found to be entering / staying irregularly for example.

Migrants find it possible to live in the EU without contact with the authorities both because they live within and depend upon informal economies, e.g. working illegally, and/or living amongst diaspora or other within communities which support them and their needs. **France** and **Norway** report situations where irregular migrants may spend many years absconding from authorities but at the same time, building an informal network of connections and social links through which they can feel 'integrated'[26]. **Greece** reports that, according to the OECD, 24% of Greece's GDP is formed by the underground / shadow economy; it recognises that this factor "provides a cushion" for irregular migrants to stay in the country (unbeknown to the authorities). Irregular migrants in highly vulnerable situations, e.g. victims of trafficking in human beings and other exploited persons, may also live in the EU without daily contact or registration with the authorities.

As shown in Annex 2, very few Member States (only AT, LT, LV, MT, SE) estimate the scale of either clandestine entrants or those irregular migrants who 'abscond' from the system[27] and the available figures range greatly. For example, the number of absconders in 2014 ranges from 900 in Malta, through 4,557 in Austria to 8,159 in Sweden.[28] While they were unable to provide statistics for clandestine entries, **France** and **Greece** report that clandestine entries are a major issue in their countries. By contrast, **Malta** reports that the scale of such entries is not significant, since arrivals by sea to the country do not generally go undetected (likely because the country is small and the borders therefore easily monitored, by contrast to Greece, for example). **Latvia** estimates that the number of clandestine entrants between 2010 and 2014 was around 100 persons in total[29].

2.3 CHALLENGES IN REACHING OUT TO IRREGULAR MIGRANTS NOT IN CONTACT WITH THE AUTHORITIES

(Member) States identify several challenges faced by actors in disseminating information on voluntary return to irregular migrants who are not in contact with the authorities. Some of these are challenges common to disseminating information to any irregular migrant, and some are more specific to targeting this particular group. There is a challenge in knowing **how and**

[26] See also Øien, C. and S. Sønsterudbråten 'No way in, no way out? - A study of living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway'.

[27] **Germany** describes two different data sets which are each indicative of sub-groups of absconders: those listed in the Central Register of Foreigners under 'address unknown', and the "travellers' atrophy statistics" (*Reiseschwund-Statistik*) in the context of the initial distribution of asylum-seekers among reception centres (EASY). It is not possible to aggregate these as a total number of absconders however, so they are not included in Annex 2.

[28] Some Member States included estimates for specific groups of absconders (e.g. those absconding from the asylum procedure) in their National Reports.

[29] This number is a provisional estimation provided by an expert from a non-governmental institution.

where to target individuals when they are not and/or not in contact with those disseminating the information. **Greece** and the **United Kingdom**, suggest that they would benefit from more data collection on the profiles of irregular migrants in the country so as to better target and tailor information provision to make it more responsive to the circumstances of different migrant groups and so more effective activity.

Language barriers can make it challenging to communicate messages about voluntary return effectively to some irregular migrants, particularly when organisations rely on printed materials (e.g. leaflets or posters) for the dissemination of information (this was reported as a challenge by **Austria**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta, Portugal** and **Norway**). On the other hand, providing interpretation for face-to-face communication can be resource challenging (**Norway**). **Ireland** reports on the difficulty in communicating with vulnerable migrants suffering from mental or physical health problems (such as addictions).

Third, it can be highly challenging for state authorities and other actors to **engage with irregular migrants**. Nine (Member) States (AT, DE, EE, FI, FR, LU, PL, SE, UK, NO) noted that some irregular migrants are **unwilling to leave** the Member State and Europe and therefore may not be receptive to information about voluntary return; fear that return will be viewed as 'failure' can be a factor in this. **Mistrust** towards both authorities and other actors and institutions promoting voluntary return also creates barriers to the effective communication of information for Member States (as reported by **Austria**, **Cyprus**, **Czech Republic**, **Germany**, **Ireland**, **Malta**, **Netherlands**, **Poland** and **Norway**). **Austria** reports that irregular migrants might be put off from finding out more about AVR(R) programmes from service providers due to a concern that their anonymity will be threatened.

Fourth, when migrants mistrust actors formally disseminating information, they are more likely to rely on ***informal* sources of information**, e.g. friends and families. The **Czech Republic**, **Malta**, **Poland, United Kingdom** and **Norway** suggest that some actors in TCNs' networks might – whether inadvertently or not – disseminate inaccurate / outdated information on voluntary return. This becomes a problem when TCNs rely only on these actors for information. As **Poland** points out, this is an issue which more often affects groups of migrants who stick to their own diaspora groups and are not integrated into wider society. Finally, **Luxembourg** highlighted that asylum seekers who received a negative decision prior to 2009 and have remained on the territory might not have been informed of the actual voluntary return possibility since the Luxembourgish Directorate of Immigration has only been systematically informing rejected applicants of international protection about the possibility of a voluntary return since 2009.

Further challenges faced by Member States in providing information on voluntary return are linked to:

- Difficulty in engaging entities and individuals (e.g. consular representations, diaspora organisations, NGOs,[30] religious leaders, community leaders) who could help with raising awareness on return (BE, DE, LU, PL, SI, NO[31]);
- Lack of funding for small organisations to invest in reaching out to irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities (DE, EL, LV);
- Lack of effective strategies, policies and methodologies for engaging irregular migrants (BE, DE, LU, FI, PL);
- Challenge of making irregular migrants understand the reasons for the rejection of an application (e.g., asylum, residence permit) in order to start reflecting on future options (NO). In **Germany** it can be challenging to keep all relevant actors updated about all current AVR(R) programmes.

3 National legislation and policy on the dissemination of information on voluntary return

This section describes national rules on the dissemination of information on voluntary return, where these exist in (Member) States, providing an overview of information provided with the return decision and highlighting recent or planned changes to policy on information dissemination in (Member) States.

3.1 NATIONAL RULES ON THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ON VOLUNTARY RETURN

All Member States have some rules to regulate or guidance to influence *how* information on voluntary return should be disseminated to irregular migrants, although in some Member States (see table 3.1 below) these are only outlined in the internal guidelines of non-

30 **Germany** notes that some NGOs who would be appropriate partners in promoting voluntary return have until recent years refused to participate in implementing voluntary return programmes, viewing AVR programmes as conceptually problematic (they consider that return can only be 'voluntary' if the option to stay is also available and that the sending of children born in the EU to the country of their parents cannot be truly considered 'return' when not to the country of birth).

31 In Norway, the difficulties derive from the organisations concern that they will lose the migrants trust. Particularly, organisations that have a mandate to provide assistance to migrants (such as legal assistance, or other types of guidance in the Norwegian society).

state practitioners. In the majority of (Member) States, such rules are laid down in soft/law or practice.

Table 3.1: Type of national rules on information dissemination on voluntary return

Source of rules	(Member) States	#
Both legislation & soft law/ practice	AT, BE, FR, PT, SI, SK	6
Soft law/ practice Guidance	CY, CZ, EE, FI, HU, IE, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, UK, NO	15
Internal guidelines of practitioners	CZ, DE, EL, ES, SK	5

In six Member States (AT, BE, FR, PT, SI, SK) where **the obligation to provide information on voluntary return is enshrined in national legislation**, this then constitutes the basis for implementing acts in the form of practitioner guidelines (**Austria**), internal guidelines/regulations of the State (**Belgium, Slovak Republic**), action plans (**France**), implementing protocols (**Portugal**) or memoranda of understanding (**Slovenia**). For instance, in **France** legislation that explicitly provides for the promotion of voluntary return was adopted for the first time on 1st May 2015. To implement the law, an action plan was approved which specifies the approach and the content of the information to be disseminated by relevant actors.

In Member States where rules are outlined in soft law rules and/or guidance for practice, these may distinguish between:

- **Cooperation agreements** / **memoranda** of **understanding** between national authorities and the service provider of AVR programmes, regulating the promotion of such programmes and the provision of information to potential returnees (CY, CZ, EE, ES, HU, IE, LV, LT, LU, PL, SI);
- **State-developed operational guidelines**, **handbooks** and **circulars** distributed to specific actors disseminating of information on voluntary return to irregular migrants (FI, LU, SE, UK, NO);
- **Administrative practice** of the national authorities responsible of migration and asylum policy which inform the potential returnees even if not explicitly mandated by law (CY, CZ, EE, MT, NL, PL).

While in **Germany** there are currently no standardised nation-wide guidelines or directives on information dissemination, the newly-appointed **Coordination Agency for 'Integrated Return Management'** of the Federal Government and the Federal States is currently working on a return counselling guideline, which will outline the information to be disseminated and what channels of communication can be used to this end. In **Estonia**, it has not to date been considered necessary to introduce provisions on the dissemination of information on voluntary return given the comparatively low number of returnees in the country.

Three Member States report that their **rules on the dissemination of information on voluntary return have changed as a result of the adoption of the Return Directive** (LU, SI, SE). **Luxembourg** and **Slovenia** introduced several legislative amendments concerning the promotion of voluntary return when implementing the Return Directive, i.e., made explicit the provision of information on the possibility of voluntary departure and on the return assistance. In **Sweden** the implementation of the Directive resulted in more focused efforts to inform applicants at an early stage of the process and the revision of the informative material distributed. In **Belgium**, the main rules did not change but a website with information on voluntary return was introduced that published downloadable brochures in 20 languages.

Provisions on the dissemination of information on (voluntary) return

National rules or guidance on the dissemination of voluntary return may define *inter alia* the nature of the information to be provided to the TCN, the timing of the information provision, the language in and channel through which it should be provided and language and confidentiality provisions. The extent to which each Member State provides for these aspects in law or guidance for practice is described in the table below.

Table 3.2 Nature of provisions on the dissemination of information on voluntary return in national rules or guidance for practice

Provision	(Member) States	#
Content of info	BE, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, LT, LU, LV, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, UK, NO	17
Timing	BE, CZ, FI, FR, PL, SE, SI, NO, SK, UK	10
Dissemination to vulnerable people	SI, SE, UK, NO	4
Channels of dissemination	CZ, FI, FR, LU, PL, SE, UK, NO	8
Language	BE, CZ, EE, FI, FR, LV, PL, SE, SI, SK, NO	11
Confidentiality conditions	BE, SI, NO	3

In those Member States where the content of the information to be provided is indicated in national rules or operational guidance, the information to be included usually falls into one of the following categories:

- The **possibility of returning voluntarily** (BE, EE, ES FI, CZ, FR, HU, LT, LU, LV, PL, PT, SE, SK, UK, NO);
- The **conditions of eligibility** for Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programme or Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme (BE, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, LT, LV, PT, SE, SI, UK, NO);
- Information on the **assistance and benefits provided under AVR(R) programmes** (the "AVR package") (BE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, LT, LU, LV, SE, SI, UK, NO).
- **Contacts of the responsible actors** implementing AVRs (BE, EE, ES, HU, CZ, UK)

Box 3.1 – Provisions on vulnerable persons

Six (Member) States (ES, IE, SI, SE, UK, NO) have specific rules or guidance in place regarding the **provision of information to vulnerable groups** of irregular migrants, such as victims of trafficking, elderly people and minors. For instance, in **Sweden** there are special rules on how information has to be provided to unaccompanied minors. In the **United Kingdom**, case workers must provide as soon as possible such information in cases of vulnerable persons (families and potential victims of trafficking). In **Ireland**, suspected victims of trafficking are provided with information on accessing AVRR as one of a range of options available to them under the 'National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking' Furthermore, **Norway** offers specialised counselling on return options to vulnerable third-country nationals (TCNs) in reception centres[32].

Rules on confidentiality are explicitly provided in four (Member) States (BE, CY, ES, SI). According to these rules, anonymity in relation to consultations is ensured, and thus the identity of the TCN remains confidential until s/he applies for voluntary return or otherwise agrees to disclose identity to the authorities.

3.2 INFORMATION PROVIDED WITH THE RETURN DECISION

The type of information provided with a return decision and explained during the so-called "removal interview"[33] focuses very much on the legal obligation to return for which the returnee is in principle personally responsible. However, in line with Article 7 of the Return Directive, the TCN is also informed that s/he is provided a period for voluntary departure. Member States may also provide in their legislation that such a period shall be granted only following an application by the third-country national concerned; in this case, the TCN shall be informed of the possibility of submitting such an application with the return decision. All (Member) States bound by the Directive implement its provision. Most (AT, BE, CZ, DE[34], ES, FI, FR, HU, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, NO) also **provide with the return decision further information regarding (assisted) voluntary return** (see Table B.1 in Annex 2). Each inform the third-country national ordered to leave of the **availability of the assisted voluntary return (AVR) option;** eight Member States (AT, BE, FI, FR, HU, LU, SE, SK) and **Norway** provide more detailed information on the **AVR packages**; and nine Member States (AT, BE, CZ, DE, FI, FR, LU, PL, SK) give the contact details of actors responsible for AVR programmes. **Austria, Czech Republic** and **Germany** in addition, supply contacts for NGOs providing counselling and assistance. In **Germany**, **Hungary**, **Luxembourg and Slovak Republic** the TCN ordered to leave is also notified of the conditions and requirements for participation in AVR programmes. In the **United Kingdom**, letters communicating the return decision are likely to include information about both voluntary departure and AVR including contact details for the actors providing support.

Slight differences exist among Member States with regard to the language in which the **information is provided together with a return decision**. The two main situations below were reported:

- Seventeen Member States **translate the document(s) into several most common languages** of third-country nationals (AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LV, LT, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK).
- **Cyprus, Hungary,** the **United Kingdom** and **Norway** use **their respective official languages** in writing but when the decision is presented to the TCN face-to-face[35], interpreters will translate into a language which the migrant understands.

[32] A study about the work with return counselling to families with children can be accessed at http://www.udi.no/globalassets/global/forskning-fou_i/retur/for-barnas-skyld.pdf (only in Norwegian).

[33] I.e. the interview which some Member States hold with returnees following the issuance of a return decision.

[34] In **Germany**, providing a return decision is the responsibility of each municipal migration authority and no general information exists on whether the authorities provide information on AVR(R) programmes when providing a return decision. Nevertheless, there is one relevant exception which concerns the decision on a rejected application for international protection. In this case the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees provides a leaflet with relevant information on different AVR(R) programmes to all rejected applicants.

[35] In the UK this situation might arise when an irregularly staying migrant who does not speak English is detained.

The way information is presented with the return decision will play a role in ensuring that **the beneficiary understands it and is familiar with its content**. Specific measures to this purpose are in place in six (Member) States (BE, ES, FI, LV, SI, SK): **Belgium** notifies the return decision together with a reference to a **website with FAQs and videos** explaining the consequence of the return decision and the assistance provided within AVR programmes and **Latvia**, **Slovenia, Spain and Slovak Republic** aim to structure the information in a **user-friendly way**, **using short statements**, **simple to read and understand**. In **Finland**, the particular situation of the third-country national (e.g. level of education), is taken into account and attempts are made to tailor the information to their situation. Finland also try to ensure that the person to be removed from the country has understood the content of the information through a personal interview. To this end, police officers are trained on how to conduct the interview and which information to provide on voluntary return giving the IOM brochure.

3.3 RECENT OR PLANNED DEVELOPMENTS

Recent or planned legislative and policy developments having an impact on the dissemination of information were reported in nine (Member) States (AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, HU, PL, UK, NO). These developments may suggest that in some Member States there is an **increasing concern for the necessity to enhance national legislation or practice on the dissemination of information**. Some of the main developments are described in the following text boxes.

Box 3.2 New legal bases for return counselling and promotion of voluntary return in Austria, France and Germany

In **Austria**, the new article 52a of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum Procedures Act provides **a legal basis for return counselling and return assistance**. It also **extends the scope of these services beyond asylum-seekers** to other third-country nationals and at every stage of procedures. The new provision establishes **a compulsory return counselling session in certain cases for third-country nationals who have been issued a return decision**. The explanatory notes of the provision emphasise once again that "voluntary departure should in any event be given priority over forced removal" and correspondingly that asylum seekers and other TCNs **are to be provided with return counselling at every stage of the procedures**.

In **France** a new law entered into force on 1st May 2015 which, for the first time, explicitly mentions the importance of **communication with regards to the offer of assisted voluntary return** and reintegration assistance. The implementing Action Plan calls for the local governments authorities (*'préfets'*) to **ensure the dissemination of information at different stages of immigration procedures** and set a permanent provision of information at the premises of the government offices in towns.

In **Germany**, the *Act to Improve the Rights of Persons Entitled to International Protection and Foreign Workers* took effect on 6 September 2013. Amongst other changes it set out new provisions specifying the main state actor responsible for "projects to promote voluntary returns, and paying out funds approved under those schemes". Accordingly, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees will, among other actors, take part in projects to promote voluntary return.

Box 3.3: A wider strategy to encourage return: United Kingdom

Since February 2015, the Home Office Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) team has implemented the **Voluntary Departure Strategy** co-ordinating relevant activities across Immigration Enforcement and systematically piloting new approaches to the dissemination of information on voluntary return. The aim of the Strategy is to efficiently increase voluntary departures and compliance with return decisions. It is being delivered in the context of changes to legislation in the United Kingdom making it more difficult to live there irregularly - and so potentially increasing willingness to return voluntarily whilst at the same time ensuring that information on voluntary return is made available through multiple sources and various actors.

Box 3.4: Reaching out to irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities and encouraging voluntary return: Norway

Irregular migrants unknown to the authorities are among the **main target group of Norway's return policy for 2015**. The Directorate for Immigration (UDI) is aiming at developing a strategy to reach out to this group. To improve communications with potential voluntary returnees and to reflect in a coherent manner the understanding of the return policy among practitioners and policymakers in 2014, UDI **updated return-related terminology** in Norwegian legislation on the basis of feedback from research and evaluations, replacing the term 'voluntary return' with 'assisted return'. This is based on the reasoning that it could be problematic, with regard to the communication to the target group, to call a return program «voluntary» when in reality it is based on an *obligation* to leave.

4 Overall national approaches to disseminating information on (voluntary) return

Various studies[36] have suggested that certain aspects of how messages are delivered can help to influence whether a TCN will be open to learning about options for voluntary return and – possibly - whether they will ultimately return or not. These aspects include:

- The actors involved in providing the information;
- The tools used in the Member States for disseminating information;
- The content, level of detail and relevance of the information provided;
- The timing of the delivery of the information;
- The accessibility of the information, including whether the TCN understands it.

The nature of each of these aspects is explored in more depth in this section.

4.1 ACTORS INVOLVED IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION ON RETURN

Information on voluntary return is provided by a broad range of different actors, both **state and non-state (civil society/international organisations)**. The overall responsibility for return policy is carried out by the concerned Ministries of Interior/Security and Justice/Foreign Affairs. As such, when state authorities (e.g. asylum/migration and/or law enforcement authorities) come into contact with potential returnees, they usually provide information on return possibilities in general, including voluntary return. Since most Member States outsource the implementation of voluntary return programmes to international organisations/NGOs, these also play an important role in the provision of information on voluntary return. In most Member States these include the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) and sometimes national NGOs[37]. Moreover, some state actors and/or the implementing authority of AVRR programmes involve other actors such as public service providers (e.g. health workers) and community organisations (diaspora, religious, migrant-led groups etc.) to provide information on AVRR.

The main actors involved in the dissemination of information on voluntary return are described in more detail below.

4.1.1 STATE ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Overall, in terms of organisational approach in the Member States and Norway, a distinction can be made between:

- (Member) States in which **state authorities** play an **active role** in the dissemination of information on voluntary return **in addition to** the involvement of **civil society/international organisations** (BE, CZ, DE, EL, FR, MT, SE, UK, NO); and
- Member States in which **state authorities** play a **limited role** in the dissemination of information as this task is mainly outsourced to **civil society/international organisations** (AT, CY, EE, ES, FI, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, SI, SK).

Box 4.1: Examples of state measures to actively promote return

In **Belgium**, the government operates an "individualised return path": from the moment a third-country national lodges an asylum application, return counselling is offered to asylum seekers in all reception facilities. To this end, Fedasil provides a training programme to social workers in reception facilities, and also operates four "return desks" for the dissemination of information on voluntary return to irregular migrants staying outside the reception system (see section 5.2).

In **France**, the regional directorate responsible for return in Paris (within the French Office for Immigration and Integration) regularly organises interview sessions by nationality, using an on-site interpreter, in order to provide potential returnees with all the information necessary and to answer any questions. One morning a week is devoted to Chinese nationals, due to the significant presence of this community in the capital.

In **Greece**, the Alien Directorate of the Hellenic Police have installed an 'information kiosk' outside

[36] Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies (2014) OUT-reach: Information about assisted voluntary return to irregular migrants living outside reception centers; IOM Greece (2014) Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration for Third Country Nationals; IOM (2010) Practical guide AVR Information provision; IOM Slovakia (2008) Development of a Comprehensive System of Information Dissemination on Programme of Assisted Voluntary Returns and Its Implementation with a Focus on Needs of Migrants; ECRE (2005)Increasing Refugee Participation in the Field of Voluntary Return.

[37] For example, the *Verein Menschenrechte Österreich, Caritas*, and *Verein Menschen.Leben* (**Austria**); Caritas International (**Belgium**); Oxfam Italy and Xenagos Foundation (**Italy**); Refugee Action (**United Kingdom**); ACCEM (Spain)

their offices, operating on workdays 8am to 2pm to provide information and discuss with migrants the AVRR programme and its benefits. It is ran by the police supported by interpreters

In the **United Kingdom**, immigration enforcement teams engage in community outreach (see section 5.2). In 2014, the government established the Central Voluntary Departure Service a service delivered by private contractors to act as a central point of contact for irregular migrants interested in voluntary departure but requiring little or no assistance (see section 4.3). The Service also includes a helpline.

In **Norway,** the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) runs its own helpline and a service desk to disseminate information on voluntary return. Moreover, at local level, social workers who are on street patrol disseminate information on a non-systematic basis. The latter concerns a municipality-based social service following which members of the target group are contacted and information is disseminated.

State authorities in **Belgium**, **Czech Republic**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Malta**, the **United Kingdom** and **Norway** play an **active role** in the direct dissemination of information on voluntary return. Activities undertaken to promote voluntary return include for example: the training of staff on how to make information on voluntary return available to the target groups (BE, EL, FR, UK, NO); the production of informative material (DE, EL, FR, MT, UK, NO); provision of return counselling to irregular migrants (BE, CZ, DE, EL, FR, MT, UK, NO); establishing information hubs for interested migrants to visit (BE, EL, NO).

Even in those Member States (AT, CY, EE, ES, FI, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, SI) where state authorities play a more limited role, state authorities (migration officers, police, asylum officers, etc.) coming into direct contact with potential returnees (e.g. in the asylum procedure), often still provide basic information on voluntary return (e.g. the existence of an AVR(R) programme and a referral to organisation providing further information).

The following sections explain in more detail which state authorities are involved when and what type of information is provided.

State actors involved in the dissemination of information to applicants for international protection during the asylum procedure

During the **asylum procedure**, some (Member) State authorities (AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, FR, HU, LU, MT, PL, SE, SK, UK, NO) already provide information on voluntary return to **applicants for international protection**. This can be done by different authorities at different intervals during the procedure. For example, **asylum / migration authorities** can provide information on voluntary return to applicants when[38]:

- applying for asylum (AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, MT, SE, UK, NO);
- examining an asylum application (BE, EE, FI, FR, LU, SE, UK, NO);
- the asylum application has been rejected (AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, LV, NL, PL, SE, UK, NO)

In addition, during the asylum procedure, when applicants reside at reception centres, **staff at reception facilities** can also provide information on voluntary return[39]. Depending on who runs the reception facilities, this is either done by state actors and/or NGOs, as well as third parties contracted to provide reception to applicants for international protection[40]. In many Member States, NGOs and AVRR providers also visit reception facilities to provide information on voluntary return (see section 4.1.2 for details).

During the asylum procedure, the provision of information primarily focuses on the rights and obligations of applicants during the asylum procedure, the consequences of a failed claim and the options of return including voluntary return.

State actors involved in the dissemination of information on voluntary return when imposing a return decision

In most Member States, the return decision is issued by either the asylum authority or the migration authority (AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, FR, HU, IE, LT, LV, NL, SE and NO) or the police/law enforcement authorities (CZ, HU, EE, EL, FI, PL, SI, SK). When a return decision is imposed, or sometimes also prior or following the imposition of the decision, the concerned authorities in most Member States usually also explain the possibilities for return, including voluntary return (see section 3.2). Whereas this is mostly done at national level by asylum/migration authorities and/or the police, in **Belgium** and **France**, it is also implemented at local level as the obligation to explain the options of return, including voluntary return, is also carried by staff of municipalities (BE) or prefectures (FR).

[38] The information is complemented with information gathered from the EMN Ad Hoc Query on Voluntary Return Counselling as requested by Belgium on 30th April 2014.

[39] In Norway a so called 'return adviser' provides information and counselling on return all reception centres.

[40] See also the 2013 EMN Study on the Organisation of Reception Facilities for Asylum Seekers in different Member States.

The obligation to return, including information on voluntary return is in some Member States (e.g. **Belgium**, **Finland, Luxembourg, Poland, Sweden**) not only presented in writing (i.e. the return decision), but also orally in a removal interview. For example, in **Finland** the Finnish Immigration Service imposes a return decision after which the **police** are responsible for the implementation of the decision, and will explain the return options (including voluntary return) during a face-to-face removal interview with the concerned third-country national. Starting from 2014, in **Luxembourg** irregular migrants ordered to leave automatically receive an appointment for a **return interview**, during which they will also be informed about the possibility of a voluntary return.

(State) actors involved in the dissemination of information on voluntary return during the period of voluntary departure/pending removal

Once a return decision has been imposed and the return possibilities have been explained, the concerned third-country national will normally be granted a period of voluntary departure between 7-30 days, as laid down by the Return Directive or as per national legislation (IE, UK).

Depending on where the concerned third-country national is housed during this period (if housed at all by the state), information on voluntary return can be provided by different state actors:

- Staff at reception centres - where failed applicants remain in reception centres; (AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, NL, PL, SE, NO[41])
- Staff at open return facilities (BE, DE[42])
- Staff at alternative accommodation centres to detention (e.g. those housing families)
- Staff at detention centres (CY, CZ, ES, HU, LV, LT, LU, NL, SI, SK, UK)

Other state actors involved in the dissemination of information at different stages of the procedure

Various Member States (e.g. AT, CY, CZ, BE, EE, EL, ES, IE, LV, NL, SK, UK) engage **embassies** of particular third countries in the dissemination of information on voluntary return, usually by displaying leaflets/brochures/posters at their premises. In **Estonia**, the Police and Border Guard Board (PBGB), in cooperation with IOM, gives training to diplomats working in Estonian embassies to raise awareness about voluntary return possibilities and to encourage them to disseminate information material. In **Greece** the Ombudsman can also provide information on voluntary return.

4.1.2 NON-STATE ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

In addition to the information provided by state actors on voluntary return, a broad **range of other actors** play a role in the dissemination of information on voluntary return. These organisations may be contracted by the State to undertake this work, or are mandated independently to do so.

The following main actors are involved:

- International Organisation for Migration (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, LU, MA, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK, NO)[43]
- NGOs (AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, UK, NO)
- Diaspora groups (AT, CZ, DE, FR, HU, IE, LU, NL, UK, NO)
- Community groups, e.g. faith-based groups / migrant-led groups (AT, CZ, DE, ES, FR, IE, LU, MT, NL, PL, SI, UK, NO)
- Other:

  - Social, health, and education services (AT, DE, EL, ES, FR, IE, LU, LV, SI, UK)

  - Legal advisors (DE, EE, FI, HU, IE, LV, PL, NO)

These organisations are involved because they are **contracted/funded by the government** (AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, HU, IE, LU, NL, PL, SI, SK, UK) **engaged on an informal basis** by the State (CZ, PL, UK) or **mandated independently of the State** (BE, DE, EL, FR, LT, NO). [44]

Dissemination of information by organisations contracted by the State

In most (Member) States (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK and NO) **the government contracts either IOM or NGOs to implement AVR(R) programmes**. An important element of such programmes is the provision of information on voluntary return. The aim, according to IOM, is to provide clear, thorough and objective information based on facts, with a view to

[41] In **Norway** the reception centres are operated either by municipality, or by private entrepreneurs or by NGOs, not by State actors.

[42] In **Germany**, open return facilities (*Ausreiseeinrichtungen*) exist in the Federal States of Bavaria, Lower Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saxony-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein.

[43] This information is based upon data gathered through the REG.

[44] Please refer to the National Reports for the details of the NGOs.

adequately preparing potential returnees for return and to enable them to make an informed decision[45].

Dissemination of information by diaspora and community groups

Diaspora groups have been involved in disseminating information on return, by passing on / making available brochures and other information distributed to them by NGOs official contracted to disseminate information and/or by state authorities. In some (Member) States (DE, MT, NL, UK, NO) they take a more active role in raising awareness about AVR(R) programmes and in **Norway** they even offer return counselling. **Poland** also succeeded in involving community group leaders in the process of information dissemination and counselling.

Dissemination of information by other actors

In the **United Kingdom**, staff of the Home Office liaise with and train National Health Service staff about voluntary departure options and provide leaflets to be shared with irregular migrants. A similar, more localised, collaboration takes place in **Austria** whereby the *Krankenhaus der Barmherzigen Brüder* hospital in Vienna has committed to refer any patients demonstrating and interest in return to Caritas, which offers return counselling. In **Germany**, social, health and education services in the district of Saxony-Anhalt operate as return counselling centres in the district. They provide general information on AVR(R) programmes and help with filing applications for support measures. Further, information on return counselling centres is displayed or handed out for example by social workers in homeless shelters, prisons and women's shelters, or by street workers and meeting points for irregular migrants (e. g. cafés).

Box 4.2: The Counselling Office of the Protestant Church districts of Trier and Simmern-Trarbach in Rhineland-Palatinate

In **Germany**, the Counselling Offices of Trier and Simmern-Trarbach deaconries supports the authorities in dealing with return counselling in 36 municipalities of the Federal State, providing information and advice on questions regarding return to irregular migrants, without providing return counselling itself. Employees of the counselling centres can also participate in visits to countries of origin, receive intercultural competence training and participate in conferences. The Counselling Office informs the municipal counselling centres and foreigners authorities of events and news, using a newsletter, among other means.

4.1.3 COORDINATION BETWEEN ACTORS

Where multiple actors are involved it is also of importance that their **contributions are coordinated**.

In most (Member) States (AT, BE, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SI, SK, UK, NO) the **dissemination tools are funded by the responsible national authority** using also **EU co-funding** (except Norway). While other actor(s) are responsible for the production and delivery of information (especially in the case of AVR(R)). In some Member States (BE, CZ, ES, NL, SI, UK) specific tools are also produced and disseminated directly by the relevant national authorities.

Some good examples of **coordination** between different actors for the dissemination of information in Belgium, Germany and Ireland are described below:

Box 4.3: A centralised approach to voluntary return and the dissemination of information on AVRR in Belgium

In **Belgium**, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) is responsible for the organisation and implementation of voluntary return. The management of voluntary return programmes is completely centralised within this agency. As such, Fedasil carries responsibility for the coordination of different activities and different actors involved in voluntary return. For example, it manages the budget, involvement of different actors, development of a national strategy, communication on AVR (including to those who are not in contact with authorities), return of specific target groups (e.g. UAMs), and follows-up on the agreements with IOM and Caritas International Belgium etc.

Box 4.4: Capacity-building amongst actors in Ireland

In **Ireland**, in 2015, IOM Ireland launched a series of NGO information events across Ireland, with the aim to build capacity for the distribution of information on voluntary return and to develop an informal partnership approach. The strategy aims to embed assisted return as a service within NGOs, so that staff members are aware of basic concepts of return.

Box 4.5: Establishment of a Coordination Agency in Germany

To enforce a new strategic return policy, the Federal Government in **Germany** has set up an "Integrated Return Management" Coordination Agency. Established in 2014, the Coordination Agency is tasked with developing means of to promoting, enforcing and linking (assisted) voluntary returns and forced returns, especially of irregularly staying third-country nationals.

45 http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/avrr_in_the_eu.pdf

4.2 TOOLS USED IN THE MEMBER STATE FOR DISSEMINATING INFORMATION ON (VOLUNTARY) RETURN

Member States employ a range of tools to disseminate information on voluntary return usually combining several methods to tell different messages or levels of detail or to target different audiences.

Table 4.1. Tools used in the Member States and Norway for disseminating information on (voluntary) return

Tools	(Member) State	TOT MS
Leaflets/ brochures	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI, SE, SK, UK and NO	24
Posters	AT, BE, DE, CY, CZ, EE,EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI, SK, UK and NO	23
Websites	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, EL, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SK, UK, NO	21
Drop-in clinic (face-to-face)	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SK, UK, NO	20
Helplines/ info lines	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, MT, NL, PL, SK, UK, NO	19
Dedicated social media pages (e.g. Facebook)	CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR[46], HU[47], IE, LU, NL, SE, SK, UK, NO	15
Media campaigns	BE, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, HU, IE, LU, NL, PL, SK[48], UK, NO	15
Community visits	AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, NL, PL, SK, UK, NO	14
Online discussion forums	CY, DE, ES, FR[49]	4

The most common tools of dissemination are printed materials, mainly information **leaflets** and **brochures**. These were **disseminated by all (Member) States** contributing to this study. They are distributed to a wider public in the context of campaigns to promote AVR/AVRR programmes (e.g. BE, CZ, PL, SI, SK); or also handed over to third-country nationals in reception/detention facilities (DE, FI, FR, NL, PL, NO, SK).

Posters were also used by most Member States to disseminate information on return. Posters may be effective in **passing a message to irregular migrants not in contact with authorities**, especially when the text is short and accompanied with an explicative picture conveying the message easily, as highlighted in the National Report of **Belgium, Poland and Slovak Republic**.

Box 4.6: Use of posters in Belgium, Poland, Slovakia and Norway

Posters have been used to specifically target irregular migrants unknown to the authorities in the context of the *Thinking of Home* dissemination campaign in **Belgium**. Posters were placed in public places frequented by irregular migrants (main train stations, immigration office, municipalities). **Poland** also launched a poster campaign in public transport hubs called "*I want to return home*". The outdoor information campaign in **Slovak Republic** used billboards and different poster forms (city lamp posts, continentals, bench stickers, entrance door stickers, and public transport stops stickers) (see Box 5.1.).

In **Norway**, several IOM campaigns screened information on **digital boards** in shopping centres in seven major cities. Information on return was also showed via **advertising space on taxis**.

Most (Member) States provide information through **websites**. Because they offer anonymity and are easily accessible (providing the migrant has access to a computer and the Internet), they are important tools in contexts where the target group would be otherwise very difficult to reach. In the **Netherlands**, IOM has developed and makes use of a website: "buildyourreturn.nl" to help potential returnees tailor the information they gather on return. The website had 4,200 visitors in 2014 (note that 33,735 migrants were ordered to leave in 2014, so it is perhaps not a large number of users). As reported in the Dutch National Report for this Study, IOM underlines the need for a website as a tool for disseminating information but argues that websites are not the most effective way of reaching out to irregular migrants.

Dedicated **social media** pages and **online discussion forums** provide a space for migrants to exchange information, seek advice and discuss their return options with peers (e.g. (former) migrants who have already returned). For (Member) States with high numbers of irregular stayers e.g. **France**[50] and the

[46] Only for some projects.
[47] This channel is planned for the future, it has not been implemented so far.
[48] The only compact information campaign was conducted in several phases in 2009 – 2011.
[49] Only for some projects.

[50] In France, dedicated social media pages and online discussion forums are only used in the framework of some specific projects, such as MAGNET II which is managed by IOM.

United Kingdom[51], they can provide a means of disseminating information to a larger population than is possible through other channels.

Outreach visits to specific migrant communities in the Member State are performed by the AVR service provider (for example IOM in the **Netherlands** and **Poland**) or by Home Office immigration enforcement community engagement staff in the **United Kingdom**. Many (Member) States contributing to this study underlined the importance of outreach (see sections 5 and 6), in part because they help to sow accurate information within a community, which can then be passed on through peer-to-peer exchanges as described in Box 4.6.

Box 4.7: The importance of face-to-face exchanges between peers as a channel of information dissemination

According to studies and evaluations conducted in several Member States (AT, BE, DE, FR, HU, LT, NL, UK, NO), one of the main ways that TCNs learn about voluntary return is through 'word of mouth'. For example, in the **Netherlands** a study showed that, in 2013, 57% of all third-country nationals who returned voluntarily learned about the programme through word of mouth or via civil society organisations.

Some Member States (AT, FR, NL, PL) argue that irregular migrants are more likely to rely upon this channel because they trust the person providing the information more than those providing the information through formal channels. Conversely, **Czech Republic, Malta**, **Poland** and **Norway** report that the message may be improperly disseminated and the content misunderstood thus affecting the impact of a strategy. Both of these arguments suggest that outreach activities – through which actors formally involved in information provision engage members of migrant and other communities (i.e. actors more often involved in informal information provision) in disseminating information – may be an effective practice in increasing migrants' trust in the information provided. This may also suggest that **a combination of approaches** (with informal channels raising initial awareness with understanding and knowledge of the options available being substantiated through formal channels) is likely to be an **optimal way of disseminating information**.

[51] In the UK, social media has been used by Refugee Action to deliver its government-funded AVR programme 'Choices' but not directly by the Home Office.

Indeed, **employing a range of tools for information dissemination is advantageous**, since migrants have different information needs at different times and often require time to digest information and refer back for further information. Different tools arguably have different functions, as well as different advantages and disadvantages for disseminating to those not in contact with the authorities. These are summarised in the table below.

Table 4.2. Advantages and disadvantages of different tools of dissemination

Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages
Leaflets / brochures & posters	Can use it anonymously Low production costs Can be placed in multiple locations Can be translated into multiple migrants' languages at a relatively low costs	Provides limited information. Can be considered 'promotional' and therefore may deter migrants. Easy to for migrants to overlook / ignore
Helplines	Anonymity for the migrant user	Can be expensive to run
Word of mouth	Trusted channel Inclusion of illiterate TCNs	Improper dissemination Misunderstandings Circulation of out-dated information
Social media / websites	Quick dissemination Trusted channel Anonymity for user	Improper dissemination Misunderstandings
Drop-in clinic (face-to-face)	Tailored counselling	Can be expensive to run Not easy to access for migrants with reduced mobility

4.3 CONTENT OF THE INFORMATION PROVIDED

Section 3.1 and 4.1 both provided some insight into the *content* of the information provided to irregular migrants. Table 4.3 below provides more detail and outlines the actors responsible for disseminating different aspects of information in the Member States. It illustrates that in most Member States, national authorities provide basic information on the legal obligations of the irregular migrant, their options for voluntary return and some further detail and/or signposting as to where they can go for further information. However, more tailored information on what the irregular migrant can expect at the airport on returning and in the country of return, as well as

individually tailored information,[52] is provided by the actors delivering voluntary return including AVR(R) if at all.

Whilst not covered in the table below, **Belgium** and **Estonia** state that they provide information to the migrant on the risk of being issued an entry ban if they do not return voluntarily. **Poland** informs the migrant that the length of the entry ban to be issued may be shortened if they return voluntarily.

Most Member States focus on providing information on the irregular migrants' obligations to return (as outlined in the return decision amongst other sources of information) or on the details of AVR(R) programmes. The **United Kingdom** is therefore somewhat unique having, in addition to the AVR programme (delivered for the Home Office by NGO project Refugee Action 'Choices'), a service providing information on voluntary return in general. The Central Voluntary Departures Service, launched in March 2014 (ongoing) **provides a dedicated, centralised point of contact for voluntary departures**. It targets third-country national irregularly staying in the United Kingdom but in particular any non-asylum migrants who can return easily and with limited support. Migrants may contact the Service after receiving information in return decision letters, or through exposure to other media (such as leaflets & posters) but may also be referred there by other actors. Its objectives include to "increase compliance with return decisions" and "reduce the number of failed departures".[53]

Lithuania highlights the fact that information provided by different actors should be consistent and non-contradictory. This highlights the need for coordination between actors disseminating information on return, as discussed in section 4.1.3. In addition, a finding reported by **Norway** is that the content of the information delivered on return should touch upon individual issues in which irregular migrants are interested, such as: the security situation in their country of origin as well as the family situation and the consequences for the migrant after the return. This is linked to the fact that the migrants' choice to stay irregularly is based not only on their own wish, but also on circumstances related to those of their family and/or depending people in the country of return.

[52] Note that tailored is most likely to be available through helplines and drop-in clinics, although it may be possible to tailor information to some extent through online services.

[53] For further information about the UK's Central Voluntary Departure Service see the UK National report.

Table 4.3 Content of information disseminated in (Member) States by actor

Content of the information	Actor disseminating the information						
	National authorities responsible for return	Actors implementing and /or promoting AVR(R) programmes	Migrant community groups	Case workers[54]	Legal advisors	Reception centres staff[55]	Third-country consulate / embassies
The legal obligations of the returnee	AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, UK, NO	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, LU, LV, PL, PT, SE, SK, UK	BE, DE, LU	BE, DE, EE, FI, IE, LU, LV, MT, PL, SE, UK, NO	BE, DE, EE, FI, IE, LU, NO	AT, BE, DE, PL	BE,
Information on AVR(R)s	AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, UK, NO	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, (SE[56]), SI, SK, UK, NO	BE, DE, FR,, IE, LU, PL, UK, NO, SK	BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LU, LV, MT, PL, SE, UK, NO	BE, EE, FI, IE, PL, UK, NO	AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, LV, MT, PL, SK, NO	AT, BE, FR, LU, SK
Eligibility conditions for AVR(R)	BE, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, UK, NO	AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, LV, LT, MT, NL, PL, SI, SK, UK, NO	BE, DE, HU, SI, UK	BE,DE, EE, LV, MT, PL, SE, UK, NO	BE, EE, FI, IE, UK	BE, DE, FI, LV, MT, NO	BE
Where the irregular migrant should go for more information (signposting)	AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, LV, LT, PL, SI, SK, UK, NO	BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, LV, MT, NL, PL, SI, SK, UK	AT, BE, DE, FR, IE, LU, PL, UK, NO	BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LU, LV, MT, PL, UK, NO	BE, DE, EE, FI, HU. IE, PL	AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, LV, MT, PL, NO	BE, EE,
Other voluntary return options	BE, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, LV, LT, PL, SE, SI, UK, NO	BE, CZ, DE, IE, LU, MT, UK	BE, DE, IE, LU, UK	BE, EE, FI, IE, LU, LV, PL, SE, UK	BE, DE, EE, FI, IE, PL, NO	BE, DE, EE, FI, LV, MT, PL, NO	BE
What the irregular migrant can expect at the airport on returning	BE, DE, EE, FR, IE, SI, NO	BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, HU, IE, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI, SK, UK, NO	BE, DE	BE, EE, PL, UK, NO	BE	BE, FI, LV, MT, PL, NO	BE
What the irregular migrant can expect in the country of return	BE, DE, FR, NO	AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, HU, IE, LU, LV, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, (SE[57]), SK, UK, NO	BE, DE, LU	BE, LU, PL, UK	BE	BE, PL[58]	BE

[54] In Sweden case workers at the Migration Agency are the agents who disseminate information on voluntary return.
[55] In **Germany,** the provision of information by social workers in reception centres depends on the rules of single Federal States.
[56] IOM office in Kabul runs a free of charge helpline, but there is no info/helpline itself in SE.
[57] Only done by the IOM office in Kabul so not generally provided info on in SE.
[58] Only done within the assisted voluntary return programme organised by the Head of the Office for Foreigners in Poland.

Content of the information	Actor disseminating the information						
	National authorities responsible for return	Actors implementing and /or promoting AVR(R) programmes	Migrant community groups	Case workers[54]	Legal advisors	Reception centres staff[55]	Third-country consulate / embassies
Individually tailored information[59]	BE, DE, FR, HU, NO	AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, ES FI, IE, LV, MT, NL, PL, SK, UK, NO	BE, DE, PL	BE, UK	BE, EE, PL	BE	

[59] Note that tailored is most likely to be available through helplines and drop-in clinics, although it may be possible to tailor information to some extent through online services.

4.4 TIMING OF INFORMATION PROVISION

Providing information on voluntary return and relevant contact details at an early stage in the migration / asylum process can be advantageous (this is of course not possible when the migrant is an irregular entrant who has never had contact with the authorities). Providing information at an early stage allows the authorities to reach TCNs who may become irregular stayers *before* they fall out of contact with the authorities and becomes more difficult to reach (this finding was reported by **Austria**, **Belgium, France, Germany** and **Norway**). Actors working in the field in **Austria**, for example, reported[60] that asylum seekers and residents in immigration detention centres who were given business cards of return counsellors still had these cards even after being moved to other quarters. This finding might suggest that irregular migrants would retain these contacts information at a later stage.

Nine (Member) States (BE, CZ, FI, FR, PL, SE, SI, SK, NO) stipulate in legislation / soft law or guidance some specific points in time or stages of the asylum / migration cycle at which a TCN should be informed about voluntary return (see Table 3.2). Eight Member States stipulate in national rules that information on voluntary return should be provided at the same time as issuing the return decision (AT[61], BE, FR, HU, LU, PL, SE, SK) (see also section 3.2 above). A further nine provide that information on voluntary return should be provided alongside a negative decision on international protection (BE, DE[62], FI, FR, PL, SE, SI, UK, NO). Some (Member) States provide that such information should be given already when a TCN is seeking international protection (BE, CZ, FI, FR, NL, SE, SK, UK, NO).

While not necessarily stipulated in legislation / soft law, in several (Member) States consultations and information meetings/events on voluntary return take place **systematically during stay in organised facilities** such as reception centres (AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, NL, PL, SE, NO), detention centres (CY, CZ, ES, HU, LV, LT, LU, NL, SI, SK, UK) and at immigration reporting centres (UK). More information on the timing of information provision is provided in section 4.1.1.

4.5 ACCESSIBILITY OF THE INFORMATION PROVIDED

For a migrant to gain an understanding of his / her options for return, including voluntary return, information must be accessible. Accessibility, in this sense, means having information located in places visited by migrants, but also providing the information in a language and format that the migrant will understand and/or will be willing to engage with. It also means reducing obstacles which might deter a migrant from accessing information, e.g. having to pay to use a helpline or access a service, or not being able to identify information easily through the Internet. This section provides an overview of these aspects of accessibility in the Member States.

The languages in which information is provided

Language was highlighted as a challenge to information dissemination by a number of Member States (see section 2.3). All Member States have developed AVR promotional materials in five or more languages in addition to the Member State language. In **Portugal** the information material is available only in Portuguese and Russian. Many (Member) States (e.g. AT, CY, DE, FR, EE, HU, IE, LT, PL, SE, SK, UK, NO) also provide information on voluntary return through websites available in languages other than the Member States' national language(s). For instance, the AVR website in **Sweden** contains information and visual presentations on voluntary return available in a number of different languages in addition to English. The choice and number of languages into which information is translated is dependent on the ubiquity of the language amongst migrant groups.

In practice, language may not act as a barrier to understanding *basic* information. Practitioners consulted for the **Austrian** report state that **migrants often speak more than one language** and return counsellors usually offer services in more than one language. However, **nuances in the details of voluntary return may be lost due to a language barrier**. This might be overcome through interpretation. However, a number of national reports (AT, CZ, PL), as well as a recent Norwegian study on information provision on return,[63] highlighted the importance of return information being given *directly* in a language understood by the migrant rather than through an interpreter. This is because **interpreters without a background in return policy may not be able to translate key concepts and information correctly**, confusing the migrant. They also may lack objectivity, which might skew interpretation. Having a third party there to interpret also risks the migrant's anonymity and confidentiality.

[60] Interview with the NGO Verein Menschenrechte Österreich.

[61] In Austria this is not a legal requirement but is implemented in the administrative practice.

[62] Although it is not stipulated in national rules, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Germany together with IOM has been providing information on AVR(R) programmes alongside a negative decision on international protection for many years.

[63] Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies (2014)

Written materials (i.e. leaflets, brochures, posters) are unsurprisingly made available in more languages than available through helplines, drop-in clinics etc. This is because it is less expensive to translate leaflets than it is to employ multilingual speakers to man helplines. It is also because, while migrants might have sufficient competency in a language to communicate and understand it, a leaflet written in their own first language might be more likely to draw their attention in than one written in a second language.

Presentation of the information

The way that information is presented can play a key role in whether the information is trusted by the migrant. The Norwegian study on information on return[64] found that use of "strong visual and linguistic presentations" or "beautification of the Information" was counterproductive, as attempts to deter or persuade could "increase the distrust that migrants already have towards the authorities". This links to a finding of the **Austrian** report that 'over-promotion' of voluntary return and AVR programmes can deter migrants, as it conveys the message that voluntary return is not really voluntary.[65] **Poland** indicated that short and too general slogans may lead to misunderstandings of the message amongst the targeted group.

In the **United Kingdom** the approach to information presentation is variable: information on assisted voluntary return (particularly material created by the NGO delivery partner) is presented in a non-threatening manner, taking a user-centric perspective (e.g. the sub-title of the government AVR page is "Information to help you return to your country voluntarily"), whereas Home Office information on (general/ unassisted) voluntary departure is presented with a focus on the illegality of staying without permission (e.g. the sub-title of the voluntary departure page is "You must return to your home country if you're in the UK unlawfully or your leave to remain has expired)". However, research undertaken in Norway[66] has suggested that disseminating positive and negative messages to migrants at the same time can be confusing for them and thus counterproductive for information dissemination.

In **Ireland**, IOM found that use of large public banners to advertise an IOM 'presence' and available programmes are counterproductive when trying to promote voluntary return. The high visibility of the banners deterred migrants from approaching the IOM staff near the banner, for fear that it breached confidentiality by revealing their intentions to onlookers. IOM in Ireland ran focus groups in 2012 to pilot different graphics and designs and on this basis revised its promotional material.

The amount of time provided for the migrant to decide on return

The **Austrian** and **French** National Reports for this Study highlight that migrants often need time to reflect on whether they want to return voluntarily or not. It also highlights that return may often be a last resort, with the decision only being taken when no other options remain (for more on this see section 6.2).

Accessibility of online information

In the Internet age, migrants are highly likely to research information on voluntary return online, particularly when they want to remain anonymous and – possibly – to avoid contact with the authorities. As stated in section 4.2, almost all Member States make available information through websites. For this study, EMN NCPs were asked to test the extent to which information was easily searchable using key words such as 'voluntary return'. All Member States who searched this information found that the key words led to the websites of AVR providers. However, **Germany** notes that it is problematic that, while searches for information using the German language returned highly relevant and useful URL suggestions, an English-language query produced "sub-optimal (search) results", especially among the non-governmental actors. The National Report therefore concludes that non-German-speaking prospective counselling clients who conduct an Internet query might not receive an accurate picture of all available AVR(R) programmes.

Costs of accessing services, availability of services and confidentiality considerations

In most of the (Member) States that have a dedicated telephone service for information on (assisted) voluntary return (AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, MT, NL, UK, NO) **phone-calls to the service are free**. Only in **Czech Republic**, **Finland, Poland**, **the Netherlands**, **Slovak Republic**[67] and **Spain** are

[64] Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies (2014)

[65] The **German** report also describes a "spectrum of positions" available in the literature on whether voluntary return can truly be considered as such. This ranges from the opinion that a return can only be voluntary if there is still an option to stay, through the position that a foreigner can return voluntarily and even with assistance given that the alternative is forced return, to the notion that voluntary merely implies the absence of physical force in the context of a return.

[66] Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies (2014)

[67] The helpline is however low-cost.

calls to helplines charged. In **Norway** and the **United Kingdom**, phone-calls to the State-ran helpline are charged, while phone-calls to the helpline ran by the AVRR service provider are free. In no Member State are face-to-face information services (i.e. drop-in clinics) chargeable.

Drop-in clinics operate in many (Member) States (see section 4.2), but their opening times and days are often limited to a few hours on workdays only. For irregular migrants who work (albeit irregularly) such services might be less easy to access.

IOM guidance on information provision to migrants underlines **the importance of confidentiality**.[68] It states that before passing personal data on to third parties, prior written consent is to be obtained from the person concerned. Where information services are provided by IOM or by other organisations responsible for delivering AVR programmes, anonymity is granted to the service user until / unless s/he lodges an application for voluntary return.

5 Specific information campaigns

Information campaigns are **strategic projects aimed at disseminating a specific message** (in this case information on voluntary return) **to a specific target group**. A campaign will usually employ **multiple tools** and channels of communication, sometimes involve **various actors**, and be implemented within a **fixed time period**. This section describes how (Member) States have made use of campaigns to reach out to different groups of migrants, including those not in contact with the authorities and to promote voluntary return. The section provides first an overview of these campaigns in (Member) States and then provide more detail on the specific *strategies* used within these campaigns to target those irregular migrants out of contact with the authorities.

5.1 OVERVIEW OF MEMBER STATE CAMPAIGNS

During the period 2010-2014, most Member States implemented **campaigns to better disseminate information** on voluntary return among irregular migrants. Some of these campaigns also targeted specifically those **irregular migrants who are not in contact with the authorities**, contributing to raise awareness of the return procedures available in the Member State. Table 5.1 provides an overview.

Table 5.1 Member State who implemented a specific strategy or campaign

Strategy/campaign	(Member) States	# MS
General campaigns	BE, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, MT, NL, PL, SK, UK, NO	17
Targeting migrants unknown to the authorities	BE, CZ, FR, HU, MT, NL, UK, NO	8
No campaigns implemented	AT, EE, LV, LT, SI, SE	6

In most Member States (CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, HU, IE, LU, MT, NL, PL, SK, UK, NO) at least some campaigns have had the purpose of promoting AVR(R) programmes and have therefore been **implemented by the main organisation delivering the AVR(R) programme** (see Box 5.1).

Box 5.1: Examples of campaigns promoting AVR(R) programmes: Hungary, United Kingdom, Norway, Slovak Republic

1. The **Hungarian Project for Migrants on AVR** made use of various tools, among which: brochures and posters explaining requirements and benefits of the assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes; a dedicated toll-free helpline in 7 languages; a multilingual website in 8 languages; out-reach community visits.

2. In the framework of the '*Choices*' project, the **United Kingdom** communication strategy entails the use of **leaflets**, **poster campaign**, regular **advertisements** placed in **nationality specific newspapers**, **helpline**, **website**, **drop-in clinics** in office, **outreach visits to community** settings where irregular migrants can be found, and a DVD on 'stories of return'. This latter one plays in the waiting room of most Reporting Centres on a cycle of various languages with subtitles.

3. In **Norway**, several IOM campaigns screened information on **digital boards** in shopping centres in seven major cities. Information on return was also showed via **advertising space on taxis** and browsed in several languages in various **media targeting migrant communities**, such as the Radio Latin America. An **information clip** about IOM and the AVR aid scheme is **aired on TV** on public holidays (Christmas, Easter etc...).

4. Between 2009 and 2011, IOM launched in **Slovak Republic** an information campaign on AVRR explaining how to return safely and legally. The campaign focused primarily on unregistered or undetected TCNs living in the Slovak territory anonymously.

Since 2006 IOM in the **Netherlands** has had in place an overall strategy to **increase return amongst irregular migrants**. The strategy is multi-faceted and involves many different actors. Details are provided in the Box below.

Box 5.2: IOM Netherlands' strategy: "Outreach to

[68] IOM (2012) The Practical Guide on Information Provision on Return and Reintegration in Countries of Origin

irregular migrants"

Through this strategy IOM try to reach **rejected asylum seekers** and **irregular migrants who are difficult to contact** via the common channels of information. **Vulnerable groups** of migrants have particularly been targeted e.g. persons with health issues, victims of THB, victims of sexual exploitation, minors, as well as **TCNs of certain nationalities**. The strategy has involved the distribution of leaflets, a website, a helpline, outreach visits to places frequented by irregular migrants and engagement with formal and informal networks of migrants. It has entailed collaboration between social workers, migrant organisations, churches and mosques, small migrant businesses, doctors, lawyers, and the Aliens Police and Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V).

In eleven (Member) States (BE, CZ, DE, FI, FR, EL, HU, IE, MT, UK, NO), State authorities have designed and implemented campaigns. The campaigns have either focussed on increasing awareness of voluntary return amongst a **general population**, amongst a **particular diaspora community** (linked to nationalities estimated to be prevalent in the irregular migrant population), or among a particular **sub-group of irregular migrants**:

- The following diaspora communities have been engaged:
  - **Afghanistan** (NO);
  - **Albania** (BE);
  - **Brazil** (IE);
  - **Cape Verde** (LU);
  - **Chinese community** (HU, IE);
  - **Democratic republic of Congo** (BE);
  - **Ethiopia** and **Somalia** (NO);
  - **Georgia, Ghana** and **Kenya** (DE);
  - **Kosovo** (DE);
  - **Latin American** countries (NO);
  - **Russians and Ukrainians** (CZ);
  - **Sikh / Punjabi communities** (UK);
  - **Vietnamese** and **Mongolian** (CZ, DE);
  - **Western Balkans** (BE, DE).[69]
- In **France** several field projects have been established in recent years to disseminate information on voluntary return in Calais to groups of migrants, whose majority is transiting through France to get to the United Kingdom. Similarly, **Malta**, in cooperation with the IOM, has been targeting those arriving irregularly by boat through poster campaigns. **Finland** and **Luxembourg** have been targeting information on AVR(R) mainly at (rejected) applicants for international protection.

In **Norway** the authorities' focus on dissemination of information on voluntary return has increased in recent years. While in 2007 the UDI commissioned only two limited information projects to external organisations, in 2014, nine out-reach information projects were funded. The UDI report that as a result of the projects, an increasing number of migrants have received information on return.

5.2 METHODS EMPLOYED TO REACH TARGET GROUPS

Campaigns have made use of different strategies to increase the likelihood that the voluntary return message will be heard and – possibly – taken up by irregular migrants. These strategies are discussed below. While not always specifically targeting irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities, each strategy is applicable to this latter group and is presented as a possible practice that could be applied to communicating with them.

Increasing the ubiquity of information and the return message

Two strategies have been employed to increase the coverage of information campaigns:

- At least eleven (Member) States (BE, CZ, DE, EL, ES FI, MT, PL, SK, UK, NO) have implemented information campaigns in which information on return (usually posters) are set up in transport hubs and other public areas.
- At least eight (Member) States (CY, DE, EL, ES, FI, HU, PL, UK, NO) also made use of mainstream media (e.g. public radio, newspapers, television and internet) to try to reach a wider number of irregular migrants. In some cases (e.g. DE, EL, FI, HU, IE, UK), these media campaigns have been developed in the language of the target group and advertised in the media of diaspora communities.

Disseminating information in places frequented by migrants

In the last six years, nine (Member) States (BE, DE, EL, FR, HU, MT, SK, UK, NO) have tried to reach groups not residing in organised facilities or meeting with migration authorities by disseminating information in places likely to be visited by migrants. IOM in **Norway** attended several international and multi-cultural festivals where diaspora groups, migrant organisations

[69] The EMN Informs on 'Challenges and good practices in the return and reintegration of irregular migrants to Western Africa' and 'Practical approaches and good practices in return and reintegration to Afghanistan and Pakistan' outline Member State practices to disseminate information on voluntary return to these two groups.

and umbrella organisations were present, conducted mapping studies of specific diaspora groups of particular concern (i.e. Iraqis, Afghans and Somali) with the aim of helping immigration authorities adjusting approaches to reach this groups. In **Poland**, national authorities, IOM and several NGOs held meetings with diaspora groups in religious and cultural centres, festivals and restaurants from mid-2011 till mid-2012.

Building relations with diaspora communities

Since 2013, the United Kingdom, the Home Office Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) **Community Engagement team** has been working with Sikh and Punjabi communities to increase awareness and uptake of voluntary return among irregular migrants. The project focuses on **relationship and trust building** with community groups, dissemination of information about the **benefits of voluntary departure** and provision of a **free helpline** active seven days a week. In **Germany**, several actors implemented AVR(R) programmes for specific communities such as Armenians (RECEA), Vietnamese in Berlin (IOM) or Ghanaians in Hamburg (Hamburg-Ghana-Bridge).

Disseminating information via targeted (community-specific) media

As part of the Community Engagement project described above, the **United Kingdom** also launched nation-wide media campaign through Asian, Sikh and Punjabi TV channels, radio and newspapers. A further six (Member) States (BE, CZ, DE, HU, IE, NO) have targeted specific communities of migrants through local media (newspapers, radio). The purpose of the campaigns is (a) to reach out to the communities; (b) to overcome any **language barriers** blocking migrants in these communities from accessing information on return; and (c) tailor the VR message. In **Hungary** a campaign targeting the Chinese community took place in 2009 and lasted four months; a "marked" increase in the number of Chinese national accessing the AVRR service was noted. However, there is no evidence that the campaign was successful in reaching migrants not in contact with the authorities (since migrant status was not recorded) nor is there evidence that it increased the number of Chinese nationals using the AVRR service.

Highlighting the benefits of return

Some Member States (**Belgium**, **France**, **Luxembourg**, **Poland**) have focussed on positive messages and images when trying to provide information on return. **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Slovak Republic**, **United Kingdom** and **Norway** have published 'stories of return' from migrants who have successfully (and happily) returned on their websites/leaflets to promote the benefits of (assisted) voluntary return. However, see section 4.5 for further discussion on this approach.

Using social media

Finland has not specifically set out to target irregular migrants nor those not in contact with the authorities, with its information campaigns on AVR(R), but given the fact that it has focussed on disseminating information via the Internet and social media, it is likely that its message will have also reached this group. Its campaign, "*Stories of Retur*n", managed by IOM in 2015, aimed to spread information on AVRR through a dedicated multilingual website with stories of return accompanied by a pre-launch and post-launch social media campaign (including daily posts on Twitter and Facebook). This media campaign reached thousands of users (1,429 unique users and 53,369 views) with a total of 8,466 visits to the website and social media.

Communication via 'cultural mediators'

In several Member States (CZ, DE, EE, EL, FR, HU, IE, NL, SK, UK and NO), state authorities and/or the IOM have collaborated with representatives of diaspora communities acting as 'gatekeepers' to these communities. For example:

- In **Greece** by IOM officers visited targeted areas with a high density of migrants, informing them about voluntary return opportunities in their countries of origin. Here, police officers and interpreters provided information and discussed with migrants the AVRR programme and its benefits.

- In 2015, IOM in **Ireland** started a campaign based on the concept that **word of mouth** and **community-based referrals** are the most effective way to disseminate information on voluntary return to potential returnees, current asylum seekers and irregular migrants in Ireland. 'Outreach Consultants' cultivate relationships and partnerships within local communities with community leaders and service providers through regular outreach visits as well as presentations and training on voluntary return in a variety of languages.

- In the **Netherlands** the Repatriation and Departure Service has appointed an internal contact for diaspora organisations to: i) establish and maintain contact with these communities; ii) to provide information about (voluntary) return which can

"travel by mouth" amongst their community members to also reach those third-country nationals not in contact with the authorities.

As noted in section 4.2, cultural mediators in some Member States may provide incomplete, bias or incorrect information to potential returnees which might be damaging to the process of engaging and informing these third-country nationals of the possibilities for return.[70]

Informing migrants before they become irregular migrants / fall out of contact with the authorities

Norway (since 2012) and **Belgium** (since 2012) have focussed on providing information at an early stage in the migration process. In **Belgium**, a campaign, "*Return desk*", established in 2012, offered counselling services to irregular migrants, including those not in contact with the authorities, via information desks located in places frequented by migrants (e.g. building of the Immigration Office and the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons). Information was made available by return counsellors in 15 different languages. These could also be reached on a free telephone number. Because of its success, three more 'return desks' were installed in three major cities (Ghent, Antwerp and Liege) in 2014 and 2015. Belgium also implemented three further campaigns targeting irregular migrants from Albania, the Democratic Republic of Congo and those coming from the Western Balkans.

6 Evidence of effectiveness

One of the objectives of this study is to evaluate findings on the effectiveness of different tools and techniques of disseminating information on voluntary return. In the context of this study, 'effectiveness' refers to effectiveness in:

(a) reaching irregular migrants who are not in contact with the authorities, and

(b) ensuring that irregular migrants have a comprehensive understanding of their options for voluntary return, so as to be able to make a balanced, well-informed decision.

It was not an aim of the study to examine effectiveness in terms of whether the migrant returned or not, since multiple factors may contribute to a decision to return, including the situation in the country of return, the conditions of the return package (where relevant) and ties to the Member State. Nonetheless, for the interested reader, trends per Member State in some aspects of voluntary return (voluntary departure, return through AVR programmes and through AVRR programmes) are provided in Annex 2 to this Study.

This section begins by providing an overview of sources of evaluative evidence of the effectiveness of different approaches in Member States (see section 6.1). It then summarises the available evidence (see sections 6.2 and 6.3). Overall, the study has found that **there is little robust evidence of effectiveness**, not least because of the **methodological challenges** in collecting and analysing such data. However, Member States, drawing on the perspectives of practitioners and other actors involved in disseminating information on voluntary return have been **able to highlight some lessons and potential good practices** (see sections 6.2 and 6.3).

6.1 SOURCES OF EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DISSEMINATION ON VOLUNTARY RETURN

The main source of information on the effectiveness of information on voluntary return are **satisfaction surveys** or information gathered in other ways from participants in voluntary return programmes in most Member States (BE, CY, EE, FR, HU, LU, LT, SE, UK). In **Czech Republic** evaluative information is provided by TCNs participating in voluntary return programmes only on their own initiative. IOM in **Ireland** used to conduct such surveys but does so no longer due to the difficulty in assessing neutral information from a beneficiary during the AVRR process. Since 2015, IOM **Luxembourg** has started to use the survey to systematically ask how the person accessed information on voluntary return. In **Austria,** IOM collects information on the effectiveness of information provided to beneficiaries of the AVRR programme through structured interviews.

In **Belgium**, **France**, **United Kingdom** and **Norway,** information about AVR returnees' satisfaction with information provision has been gathered. This information is gathered and triangulated with other sources (statistics, management information, service provider interviews) to evaluate programmes overall. However, such **evaluations** tend to focus on assessing the effectiveness of processes and practices to support the improvement of the AVR(R) schemes' delivery generally rather than focussing on which aspects of communications strategies are most effective in reaching out to irregular migrants.

The perspectives of migrants gathered through satisfaction surveys of AVR(R) service providers and state authorities are **limited in what they can tell us about the *effectiveness*** of information dissemination. Even where the results of a survey suggest that returnees were happy with the information provided to them, these **only cover a small range of assisted returnees**, they do not cover those returning

70 See in particular the National Report of the Czech Republic for more on this.

voluntarily without assistance, or those who received information but chose to ignore it or not to return. Only in **Austria** and the **United Kingdom** (see below), has data also been collected from non-AVR(R) returnees. Further, migrants responding to surveys in the context of AVR programmes are those who have already returned and who may be unlikely to respond negatively (perhaps for fear their assistance will be revoked). **Lithuania** notes *"since the survey is conducted prior to departure, it is likely that the returnees may feel pressure and provide a more favourable evaluation of the services provided by IOM"*. Beneficiary surveys are, however, **useful for indicating through which channels** migrants are more likely to learn about voluntary return (see sections 6.2 and 6.3).

Box 6.1: Surveys of potential voluntary returnees in the United Kingdom

The Home Office in the **United Kingdom**, under their annual evaluations of their AVR programme[71], have in some years collected data from people still in the UK eligible for AVR but who may or may not have applied, people who have applied for AVR and then dropped out of the scheme, and also with people eligible for but having returned without AVR. However, engaging such 'potential' AVR returnees in research, in a systematic way, is challenging and participant numbers have been small and the nationalities concerned few. While some indicative findings about 'potential' returnees' awareness of and response to information about AVR have been generated, methodological limitations, as well as changes in AVR and the wider migration context, may limit their generalisability. Further, larger-scale research in this area could be of value.

6.2 EFFECTIVENESS IN REACHING OUT TO IRREGULAR MIGRANTS NOT IN CONTACT WITH THE AUTHORITIES

This section outlines some practices which (based on evidence in National Reports) might be considered potentially effective in reaching out to irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities. The evidence is largely 'patchy' covering small samples of migrants and often based on observations of practitioners or anecdotal evidence; however, it aligns with arguments made in other studies, which are also referenced throughout this section.

Provide information as early as possible

The **United Kingdom**'s Home Office statistics show that between April 2013 and March 2014, 68% of persons returning through AVR were asylum applicants, while asylum cases represented only 19% of total enforced removals and voluntary departures. The UK Report, speculatively, suggests that a factor in this may be the fact that asylum applicants have more opportunities to learn about AVR, as the schemes are more heavily promoted to them during the asylum process. Further, a 2008 evaluation of a small group of Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) returnees found that almost half of the returnees (13 out of 27 asylum route migrants) said they would have applied for VARRP sooner had they known about the programme. So, ensuring migrants know about AVR as soon as their status becomes irregular might result in earlier AVR departure.

Involve NGOs in information dissemination

A study by IOM **Ireland**[72] argues that NGOs and other **civil society organisations play a hugely important role in mediating between state authorities** ultimately responsible for returning migrants, **and the migrants** themselves. This is reflected in the findings of this study which show that whereas state actors have an active role in information dissemination in some Member States, but only a limited role in others, civil society organisations are key actors in all Member States.

The rationale for the role of civil society organisations is described by the **Netherlands** in their National Report: "*organisations in civil society are considered to be more suited to establishing contact with irregular migrants, especially those who are not in contact with the authorities*". Civil society organisations are **more likely to be trusted by migrants than State authorities** and they may have better access to irregular migrants due to links to diaspora communities, ethnic minorities, plus relevant language skills. On the other hand, \ Norwegian study has pointed out a dilemma of the NGOs when trying to establish/keep trust bonds with migrants: as far as they are perceived by the migrants as too linked with State enforcement authorities, the trust relationship may be jeopardised.

In the **United Kingdom**, Home Office evaluations of its AVR scheme indicate that returnees are positive about NGO delivery of AVR, and trust may be a factor in this. Indeed, VARRP 2008 evaluation interviewees commented on the friendly and respectful way that IOM staff had treated them. Interestingly, IOM in **Hungary** report anecdotally that when conducting outreach activities they perceive those **nationals who**

[71] See United Kingdom National report for links to evaluation reports.

[72] IOM Ireland (2015) Strengthening Information & Outreach for Assisted Voluntary Return In Ireland.

have an existing awareness with and familiarity of IOM from their country of origin are **much quicker to trust the information provided to them than migrants who do not**. For example, IOM Hungary perceives irregular migrants from African and Middle Eastern countries to at first regard voluntary return as 'an impossible' choice whereas Kosovar participants are quick to ask questions and consult staff.

Involve diaspora groups and other migrant representatives

EMN research[73] highlights the positive impacts of the involvement of diaspora and other community organisations in the process of providing return information. It found that through such engagement:

- ***More*** potential returnees **are reached**, including those who live outside of reception facilities and/or stay irregularly on the territory;
- The information is considered ***trust-worthy***; and
- Members of the community/diaspora are ***better informed*** about the programmes.

According to a Norwegian Study[74], and also confirmed by IOM[75] as well as other civil actors[76], the ***trustworthiness*** of information is crucial. If migrants are more likely to trust information provided through their own community, then it is important to involve these members.

Provide time to the migrant to make a decision about return

The National Report for **Austria** draws on information gathered through interviews with practitioners to argue that TCNs considering return **require ample time to thoroughly reflect before deciding whether to return voluntarily**. This aligns with arguments in a recent IOM study[77] and the **German** National Report for this study. Time is required not least as migrants often have to include their families in their country of origin in the decision process. Only once the individuals concerned recognise that voluntary return represents a new opportunity and that there is no more hope of being able to stay in Austria do they get in touch with return assistance, it is observed.

The National Report for **France** also presents information from interviews with different stakeholders who argue that migrants make the decision to opt for voluntary return as the result of a **long psychological process, depending on their individual situation**. Although migrants may be aware of the programme on arrival in France, they need time to reflect on their different options. Often voluntary return is the last resort after having tried all the options to regularise their situation. Deciding to return may also be driven by the fear of being apprehended (due to their irregular situation) or by a desire to escape exploitation if the migrant is in an exploitative situation. Consequently, the various initiatives implemented may not always have immediate effect, but may be effective in the longer term.

Use online media

There are **mixed findings about the relative usefulness of online** and other **media** (websites, social media, TV) as tools for disseminating information to irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities. On the one hand, as argued by **Norway**, access to the Internet is ubiquitous and migrants, are highly likely to make use of the Internet for information and communications. On the other hand, as discussed in section 2.2, irregular migrants who are not in contact with the authorities comprise not only those supported by communities, but also those in highly vulnerable positions. An exploited migrant is likely to be kept away from means of communication for fear of reporting the exploiters; and an irregular migrant on a black market salary is perhaps unlikely to have the time or money to access television, Internet or even newspapers.

6.3 EFFECTIVENESS IN ENSURING THAT IRREGULAR MIGRANTS HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR OPTIONS

Involve different actors in information dissemination

The above-mentioned IOM Ireland study found that, "***the AVRR message is most effectively disseminated when it is supported by a broad coalition of invested organisations and stakeholders***". This is because it increases opportunities for communication, collaboration and verification of information and therefore limits the risk of a generalised and misleading message being communicated. This therefore underlines **the importance of involving different actors**, including community representatives, in information dissemination.

Provide information in a language the migrant understands

[73] EMN REG Inform: "Challenges and good practices in the return and reintegration of irregular migrants to Western Africa", January 2015.
[74] Outreach, information about assisted voluntary return to irregular migrants living outside reception centres
[75] See the Netherlands National Report
[76] See German National Report.
[77] Koser (2015) Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants.

In the **United Kingdom**, returnees on the VARRP programme value access to information in their own language. Among the 45 VARRP returnees to Pakistan interviewed for the VARRP 2008 evaluation, many were reported to have limited English language skills; two respondents experienced difficulties completing an application because no one speaking their language was available to assist. Indeed, as discussed in section 4.5, language is an important way of increasing accessibility of information.

Ensure that the TCN is aware of the risks of not returning voluntarily as well as the benefits of voluntary return

Based on their experience of the national AVR programme, the **Czech Republic** reports that**,** the key factor motivating TCNs to participate in the scheme was "*not the payment of the flight ticket or the reintegration assistance, [but rather] to solve their difficult irregular situation [and] at the same time not lose the option to re-enter the territory*".[78] This supports the argument made in the National Reports of **Belgium, Germany** and the **United Kingdom** that TCNs should be informed of the risks of not returning voluntarily, including the risk of an entry ban.

Tailor information and communication to the needs of the TCN

The experiences of the AVR programme in the **Czech Republic** described above showed that TCNs who had settled in the country and who had social / familial ties there were more likely to be motivated to return voluntary if it could mean avoiding a re-entry ban. This suggests that different TCNs are motivated to learn about voluntary return for different reasons. The **Austrian** report also states that migrants are more or less likely to be open to assisted voluntary return dependent on their situation (e.g. whether they are in transit or settled, apprehended or not). These examples illustrate that the individual tailoring of information can increase effectiveness in increasing understanding of options for return. This is also argued in the National Reports of **Belgium**, **Germany**, the **Netherlands** and **Norway**. Since individual tailoring of information can be more costly than more general information dissemination, this highlights the importance of reaching out to communities which can disperse community-specific messages to a wider audience.

Provide information in a factual manner

Linked to the above, the above-mentioned **Norwegian** study on information dissemination argues that the 'beautification of the message' should be avoided (see also section 4.5). **Belgium** found that by presenting information in an emotive way a negative image can be portrayed to the target audience. While the poster used for the 'thinking of home' campaign contained a simple picture with a short slogan in English which was aimed at being **easily understandable** to the majority of migrants, feedback suggested that the message had been experienced negatively. **Norway** also argues that combining threatening information with promotional information can be confusing to potential returnees.

7 Conclusions

Return policy is essential for a credible legal migration policy (see section 1). Information dissemination is a key element in operating an effective voluntary return policy enabling people to make an informed choice about their future.

Irregular migration is increasing in many (Member) States (see section 2.1) and the numbers of irregular **migrants who are not in contact with the authorities remains a persistent problem**, exposing individuals to risks of exploitation, fear of apprehension and unequal treatment in terms of access to social services, health and other support for which they may be eligible (see section 2.2). The clandestine nature of irregular migrants' status means that there are many **challenges for governments to reach them** with information about voluntary return as a solution to the problems of irregularity (see section 2.3).

All (Member) States have **national rules in place, either in legislation or in soft law or operational guidance, for the provision of information on voluntary return** (see section 3). National rules tend to determine the content, timing, etc. of information provision (see Table 3.2). Such rules **tend to focus on the provision of information to irregular migrants in contact with the authorities** (e.g. at the moment of issuing a return decision or when the TCN presents themselves to the authorities / AVR-provider).

That some (Member) States (AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, HU, UK, NO) have recently strengthened or are about to strengthen policy, legislation or practice on the dissemination of information (see section 3.3) suggests a **growing emphasis on the promotion of voluntary return**. However, the effectiveness of information dissemination is not, ultimately, determined by having protocols set out in national rules, but rather by **ensuring that different aspects of practice** (actors involves, tools used, content provided, etc.) **are conducive to reaching migrants** residing outside of organised facilities and by providing a clear and comprehensive message (see section 6). In most (Member) States, **state authorities play a limited**

[78] Similarly, a study conducted amongst a small group of returnees in **Finland** found that only 33% agreed that the return assistance offered by IOM influenced their decision to return voluntarily.

role in the dissemination of information as this task is **mainly outsourced to intergovernmental organisations or civil society organisations**. Where state authorities are actively involved in dissemination they tend to take less of a visible role, training and raising awareness amongst partners about voluntary return (so that they might pass it onto potential returnees) and producing and maintaining written information (leaflets, websites, etc.), although in a few (Member) States, state representatives also engage in outreach work.

Popular dissemination tools include leaflets, brochures, posters and websites and many Member States also provide helplines and drop-in clinics. By combining a **range of tools for information dissemination**, (Member) States can better ensure that migrants are reached at different times corresponding to their different information needs (i.e. signposting when they first learn about voluntary return and – later – more detailed, tailored information).

During the period 2010-2014, most Member States implemented **campaigns to better disseminate information** on voluntary return among irregular migrants. Around two thirds of these targeted their campaign (in part, at least) at irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities. The majority of campaigns focus on promoting AVR(R) programmes, although in a few cases they focus more generally on encouraging voluntary returns (whether assisted or not). Some Member States (e.g. AT, DE, FR, UK) have also undertaken strategic review of approaches to promotion of (assisted) voluntary return.

(Member) States employ a range of strategies to target irregular migrants, including:

- Increasing the ubiquity of information and the return message;
- Disseminating information in places frequented by migrants;
- Building relations with diaspora communities;
- Disseminating information via targeted (community-specific) media;
- Highlighting the benefits of return;
- Using social media and other online tools;
- Communicating via 'cultural mediators'; and
- Informing migrants before they become irregular migrants / fall out of contact with the authorities.

There is **little robust evidence of the effectiveness** of different measures in reaching out to irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities and providing them with a clear and comprehensive message. However, Member States, drawing on the perspectives of practitioners and other actors involved in disseminating information on voluntary return have been able to **highlight some lessons and potential good practices**. These comprise:

- Providing information as early as possible;
- Involving NGOs in information dissemination;
- Involve diaspora groups and other migrant representatives;
- Providing time to the migrant to make a decision about return;
- Using online media;
- Involving different actors in information dissemination;
- Providing information in a language the migrant understands;
- Ensuring that the TCN is aware of the risks of not returning voluntarily as well as the benefits of voluntary return;
- Tailoring information and communication to the needs of the TCN;
- Providing information in a factual manner.

According to studies and evaluations conducted in several (Member) States (AT, BE, FR, HU, LT, NL, UK NO), one of the main ways that TCNs learn about voluntary return is through 'word of mouth'. (Member) States can help to ensure that information disseminated this way is accurate by reaching out to and engaging with communities.

Annex 1 Glossary

The following key terms are used in the Synthesis Report. The definitions are taken from the EMN Glossary v3.0[79] unless specified otherwise in footnotes.

Assisted voluntary return: Voluntary return or voluntary departure supported by logistical, financial and/or other material assistance.

Clandestine entry: Secret or concealed migration in breach of immigration requirements.[80]

Compulsory return: (referred to simply as 'return' in the Return Directive more commonly known as 'forced return'): The process of going back – whether in voluntary or enforced compliance with an obligation to return – to one's country of origin / a country of transit / another third country, to which the third-country national concerned voluntarily decides to return and in which they will be accepted.

Country of Origin: The country of nationality or, for stateless persons, of former habitual residence.

Country of Return: In the EU context, a third country to which a third-country national returns.

Irregular stay: The presence on the territory of a Member State, of a third-country national who does not fulfil, or no longer fulfils the conditions of entry as set out in Art. 5 of the Schengen Borders Code or other conditions for entry, stay or residence in that Member State.

Irregular migration: Movement of persons to a new place of residence or transit that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries.

Organised facility: Different forms of premises used for the detention of foreigners or the housing of applicants for international protection as described in the EMN Report on "The Organisation of the Reception Facilities for the Asylum Seekers in different Member States".

Removal: means the enforcement of the obligation to return, namely the physical transportation out of the Member State.

Return: The movement of a person going from a host country back to a country of origin, country of nationality or habitual residence, country of transit, or any other third country a returnee agrees to be returned to, usually after spending a significant period of time in the host country whether voluntary or forced, assisted or spontaneous.

Return decision: An administrative or judicial decision or act, stating or declaring the stay of a third-country national to be illegal and imposing or stating an obligation to return.

Returnee: A person going from a host country back to a country of origin, country of nationality or habitual residence usually after spending a significant period of time in the host country whether voluntary or forced, assisted or spontaneous.

Reintegration assistance[81]: The assistance provided by programmes with the aim of making the reintegration process of each individual returnee a success. Assistance can be provided in various forms, such as identifying opportunities for work and education, cash-in-hand handed at the time of arrival but most often takes the form of payment of goods that go towards setting up a project to sustain the livelihood of the returnee on a long term basis.

Third-country national: means any person who is not a citizen of the Union (including stateless persons) within the meaning of Article 17 (1) of the Treaty and who is not a person enjoying the Community right of free movement, as defined in Article 2(5) of the Schengen Borders Code.

Voluntary return: The assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or third country, based on the free will of the returnee.

Voluntary departure: Compliance with the obligation to return within the time-limit fixed for that purpose in the return decision.[82]

[79] Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/emn-glossary-en-version.pdf

[80] IOM Glossary 2nd ed., 2011.

[81] VREN, Final Recommendations, Booklet.

[82] The UK definition of 'voluntary departure' is broader**. For the UK, 'voluntary departure' includes: 'notified voluntary departures', 'assisted voluntary returns', and 'other confirmed voluntary departures'**. A '**notified voluntary departure'** is one where a person, established to have breached UK immigration laws and/or having no valid leave to remain in the UK, for whom removal directions may or may not have been set, has notified the Home Office of their wish to make their own arrangements to leave the UK and provided evidence of this; and the Home Office will have been required to facilitate/monitor the departure as necessary. An '**assisted voluntary return'** is one through a range of programmes available to individuals in the asylum system or who irregular migrants are and who wish to return home permanently. **'Other confirmed voluntary departures'** are those where persons are established to have left (through data matching) or have been identified leaving the UK (through embarkation controls) without formally informing the immigration authorities of their departure.

Annex 2 National statistics on return of third-country nationals

Table A.1a EU statistics on third-country nationals found to be illegally staying, ordered to leave and refused entry at borders by year, 2010-2014.

(Member) States	TCNs Illegally staying					TCNs Ordered to leave					TCNs Refused entry at borders				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
EU 28	505,130	468,850	433,325	429,060	620,170	540,080	491,310	483,650	430,450	470,080	394,800	343,005	317,170	326,320	286,420
Austria	15,220	20,080	23,135	25,960	33,055	11,050	8,520	8,160	10,085	n/i	400	445	245	360	455
Belgium	12,115	13,550	15,085	15,075	15,540	22,865	36,885	50,890	47,465	35,245	1,855	2,730	2,390	1,535	1,535
Bulgaria	1,705	1,355	2,050	5,260	12,870	1,705	1,355	2,050	5,260	12,870	3,070	2,810	3,070	2,550	1,930
Croatia	n/i	n/i	n/i	4,150	2,500	n/i	n/i	n/i	4,355	3,120	n/i	n/i	n/i	10,015	8,645
Cyprus	8,005	8,230	7,840	7,015	4,980	2,845	3,205	3,110	4,130	3,525	685	575	545	430	425
Czech Republic	2,655	3,085	3,315	3,695	4,430	2,915	2,520	2,375	2,405	2,460	330	360	190	310	330
Denmark	665	400	630	395	515	n/i	2,170	3,295	3,110	2,905	80	115	95	140	85
Estonia	860	1,020	905	910	720	110	480	580	600	475	1,665	2,205	1,915	1,400	695
Finland	3,755	3,305	3,620	3,365	n/i	3,835	4,685	4,300	4,330	3,360	1,185	1,420	1,640	1,735	1,590
France	56,220	57,975	49,760	48,965	96,375	76,590	83,440	77,600	84,890	86,955	9,840	11,100	11,310	11,745	11,365
Germany	50,250	56,345	64,815	86,305	128,290	19,190	17,550	20,000	25,380	34,255	3,550	3,365	3,820	3,845	3,605
Greece	115,630	88,840	72,420	42,615	73,670	132,525	88,820	84,705	43,150	73,670	3,805	11,160	9,415	6,995	6,445
Hungary	3,255	3,810	6,420	8,255	12,160	5,515	6,935	7,450	5,940	5,885	10,475	11,790	9,240	11,055	13,325
Ireland	4,325	2,470	2,035	1,465	900	1,495	1,805	2,065	2,145	970	2,790	2,545	2,205	1,935	2,475
Italy	46,955	29,505	29,345	23,945	25,300	46,955	29,505	29,345	23,945	25,300	4,215	8,635	7,350	7,370	7,005
Latvia	195	130	205	175	265	210	1,060	2,070	2,080	1,555	815	1,230	1,820	2,050	2,050
Lithuania	1,345	1,895	2,080	1,910	n/i	1,345	1,765	1,910	1,770	2,245	1,965	2,215	2,215	2,865	3,450
Luxembourg	215	n/i	n/i	260	440	150	n/i	1,945	1,015	775	0	0	5	0	5
Malta	245	1,730	2,255	2,435	990	245	1,730	2,255	2,435	990	130	80	200	300	275
Netherlands	7,580	6,145	n/i	n/i	n/i	29,870	29,500	27,265	32,435	33,735	2,935	3,500	2,515	1,990	2,310
Poland	4,005	6,875	8,140	9,280	12,050	10,700	7,750	7,995	9,215	10,160	23,015	20,225	29,705	40,385	20,125
Portugal	10,085	9,230	9,110	5,155	4,530	9,425	8,570	8,565	5,450	3,845	2,060	1,795	1,240	810	955
Romania	3,525	3,365	2,145	2,400	2,335	3,435	3,095	3,015	2,245	2,030	4,750	3,620	3,340	3,410	4,045

(Member) States	TCNs Illegally staying					TCNs Ordered to leave					TCNs Refused entry at borders				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Slovak Republic	1,440	1,145	1,395	1,025	1,155	870	580	490	545	925	840	595	595	435	455
Slovenia	3,415	4,350	1,555	1,040	1,025	3,415	4,410	2,055	1,040	1,025	7,845	7,970	7,665	4,780	4,410
Spain	70,315	68,825	52,485	46,195	47,885	78,920	73,220	60,880	32,915	42,150	290,045	227,655	199,830	192,775	172,185
Sweden	27,460	20,765	23,205	24,400	72,835[83]	20,205	17,600	19,905	14,695	14,280	90	155	155	185	345
United Kingdom	53,700	54,150	49,365	57,415	65,365	53,700	54,150	49,365	57,415	65,365	16,365	16,150	14,455	14,910	15,905
Norway	n/i	1,925	2,760	3,180	3,720	n/i	15,855	14,680	14,245	15,355	140	150	175	235	250

Explanatory note:

Source: Eurostat

TCNs illegally staying: Eurostat, "Third country nationals found to be illegally present- annual data (rounded)" (migr_eipre). Data extracted on 20th July 2015

TCNs ordered to leave: Eurostat, "Third country nationals ordered to leave- annual data (rounded)" (migr_eiord). Data extracted on 20th July 2015

TCNs refused entry at borders: Eurostat, "Third country nationals refused entry at the external borders - annual data (rounded)" (migr_eirfs). Data extracted on 20th July 2015.

n/i: *information not available*

n/a: *not applicable*

Table A.1b EU statistics on third-country nationals returned to a third country following an order to leave by year, 2010-2014.

(Member) States	Total Returns to a third country				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
EU 28	198,910	167,150	178,500	184,765	168,925
Austria	5,355	3,765	3,395	3,605	n/i
Belgium	4,200	5,675	7,605	6,885	5,250
Bulgaria	210	335	605	1,015	1,090
Croatia	n/i	n/i	n/i	2,530	2,150
Cyprus	4,060	4,605	4,370	3,915	2,985
Czech Republic	920	530	430	320	315

[83] The noticeable increase compared to previous years is also due to a different calculation made by Swedish authorities.

(Member) States	Total Returns to a third country				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Denmark	385	485	1,010	1,605	910
Estonia	40	355	375	415	100
Finland	960	2,490	2,640	2,685	2,855
France	13,235	13,360	15,130	13,270	13,030
Germany	10,875	14,120	12,440	15,585	19,060
Greece	51,785	10,585	16,650	25,465	27,055
Hungary	2,165	4,180	4,675	3,230	3,440
Ireland	805	755	740	585	335
Italy	4,890	6,180	7,365	5,860	5,310
Latvia	190	1,055	2,065	2,070	1,550
Lithuania	1,230	1,645	1,820	1,660	1,925
Luxembourg	70	345	0	605	605
Malta	270	160	570	460	175
Netherlands	9,345	9,240	9,405	7,765	7,655
Poland	6,620	6,920	6,690	8,375	9,000
Portugal	1,150	1,090	0	1,135	760
Romania	3,015	2,875	2,890	2,235	2,085
Slovak Republic	585	435	315	370	655
Slovenia	1,085	1,170	970	640	150
Spain	19,860	20,325	17,520	16,240	14,155
Sweden	10,900	9,845	12,290	9,035	6,230
United Kingdom	44,705	44,630	46,545	47,205	40,095
Norway	2,945	3,785	2,010	3,885	3,855

Explanatory note:

Source: Eurostat, "Third country nationals returned following an order to leave - annual data (rounded) (migr_eirtn). Indicator: Persons returned to a third country. Data extracted on 20th July 2015

n/i: *information not available*

n/a: *not applicable*

Table A.2a National Statistics on the number of third-country nationals returning, by year and by type of migrant

Member) States	a. Forced returns					b. Voluntary departures					c. Assisted voluntary return					d. Returns through AVRR				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Austria	1,197	788	699	618	1,705	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Belgium	3,586	3,708	3,847	4,193	3,519	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	2,428	2,830	3,,774	3,873	2,585	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bulgaria																				
Croatia	1,524	2,296	2,292	1,769	1,408	2078	1,832	1,314	961	769	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cyprus	3,265	3,941	3,529	3,690	2,959	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	16	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Czech Republic	727	326	262	185	175	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	221	207	223	148	169	0	0	9	10	13
Denmark																				
Estonia	66	111	155	268	196	n/i	347	397	396	310	7	8	29	17	23	0	2	15	11	6
Finland	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	233	304	320	342	318	1	82	119	158	111	187	222	201	184	207
France	8,517	6,355	6,260	6,085	7,200	2,035	3,515	4,589	3,897	3,127	4,713	6,839	6,824	5,492	5,423	1,383	376	421	628	708
Germany[84]	15,052	12,185	11,098	13,645	12,844	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	3,445	5,016	3,963	8,019	10,464	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Greece	n/i	8,741	6,798	8,780	12,818	n/i	1,847	4,236	648	162	337	249	966	186	n/i	n/i	511	6,324	9,157	7,357
Hungary	563	738	1,231	599	1,121	n/i	n/i	3	5	8	426	350	415	353	491	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Ireland	343	280	302	209	114	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	85	73	90	86	50	217	237	246	272	135
Italy																				
Latvia	94	54	57	33	103	104	1,004	2,010	2,047	1,459	16	73	89	82	94	9	32	24	21	25
Lithuania	137	125	236	279	362	21	29	1,459	1,472	1,886	55	47	65	43	66	4	6	14	8	21
Luxembourg	37	26	142	84	153	5	13	125	45	23	8	433	1,467	479	305	104	101	97	116	186
Malta	231	128	266	71	98	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	5	2	0	5	6	37	29	39	50	69
Netherlands[85]	1,715	1,375	1,385i	1,140	995	460	330	280	330	375	1,540	1,470	975	645	640	480	910	1,025	1,340	1,160

[84] The data on AVR in Germany only includes voluntary return via the main nationwide REAG/GARP programme. Federal State-specific AVR(R) programmes are not included, though, estimates suggest an additional high four-figure number of assisted voluntary return in recent years via these programmes.

[85] a. The police and KMar are responsible for handing over the irregularly-staying third-country nationals discovered by them to the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V). So here only the numbers of departures are presented of third-country nationals who were handed over by these organisations to the DT&V. Not all irregularly-staying third-country nationals discovered in the Netherlands are handed over to the DT&V. For example, third-country nationals who are refused entry at the border or third-country nationals who, on apprehension, are still in possession of a valid travel document, could immediately be deported by the police or KMar themselves.

b. It is not possible to split the numbers of third country nationals returning voluntarily within the time-limit fixed for that purpose in the return decision. Voluntary return, departure after handover to DT&V by the police or KMar.

c. Please note: If a third-country national is denied entry or a residence permit is not extended, he is notified to leave the country. The immediate return of these migrants is not part of the figures presented here about voluntary return.

Member) States	a. Forced returns					b. Voluntary departures					c. Assisted voluntary return					d. Returns through AVRR				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Poland	3328	625	512	1223	901	n/i	4355	5379	5112	6599	1647	1164	764	1994	1502	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Portugal																				
Romania																				
Slovak Republic	643	234	149	229	275	n/i	155	147	110	361	85	66	23	19	27	42	29	31	31	30
Slovenia	220	153	205	164	162	n/i	n/i	n/i	629	668	19	16	11	20	17	0	5	3	3	6
Spain	n/i	21,231	17,307	14,519	12,289	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	4,389	4,658	2,837	4,242	5,411	99	102	100	159	389
Sweden	2,654	3,127	3,501	4,055	3,580	12,177	10,714	12,988	10,611	8,006	12,177	10,714	12,988	10,611	8006	454	70	0	50	243
United Kingdom[86]	12,649	12,666	11,994	10,066	8,963	26,866	26,209	29,547	31,735	25,815 (p)	4,539	3,119	3,693	4,286	2,403	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Norway	1,543	1,983	1,959	2,547	1,977	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	1,446	1,807	1,742	1,892	1,622	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Explanatory note:

Source: National Reports, which also contain explanatory notes of national data.

a. Forced returns: third-country nationals returning by physical transportation out of the Member State, on the basis of a return decision[87].

b. Voluntary departures: number of third-country nationals returning voluntarily within the time-limit fixed for that purpose in the return decision[88].

c. Assisted voluntary return: number of irregularly-staying third-country nationals returning via AVR packages.

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[86] Enforced removal is where it has been established that a person has breached UK immigration laws and has no valid leave to remain within the United Kingdom. The Home office enforces their departure to ensure they leave the UK. Dublin II individuals removed under Article 4.4 have been excluded from the statistics provided in regard to Article 7.1.b. Multiple notices issued to the same person within a year are not counted. Currently it has not been possible to quality assure this information under National Statistics protocols. Port figures have not been included in the table. Data includes main applicants and dependants, each counted individually. Data differ from published Home Office statistics, primarily due to inclusion of EU nationals returned within the Home Office statistics and the exclusion of these individuals here. The number of EU nationals returned increased year-on-year during this period (from approximately 1,000 in 2010 to approximately 3,000 by 2014).
Voluntary departures include people who left as notified voluntary departures (where a person notifies Home office that they have departed); cases as a result of embarkation controls or by subsequent data matching on Home office systems; and assisted voluntary returns. (Assisted voluntary returns includes data for VARRP, AVRFC and AVRIM. People leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return programmes run by Refugee Action (prior to April 2011, run by the International Organisation for Migration) may include some on-entry cases and some cases where enforcement action had been initiated. Dublin II individuals removed under Article 4.4 have been excluded from the statistics provided in regard to Article 7.1.b. Multiple notices issued to the same person within a year are not counted. Currently it has not been possible to quality assure this information under National Statistics protocols. Port figures have not been included in the table. Data includes main applicants and dependants, each counted individually. (p) 2014 data are provisional; a significant proportion of voluntary departures are identified via data matching on Home Office systems, and are usually subject to upward revision as matching checks are made on travellers after departure. Data will be revised in August 2015.

c. "Assisted voluntary return" includes data for VARRP, AVRFC and AVRIM. People leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return programmes run by Refugee Action (prior to April 2011, run by the International Organisation for Migration) may include some on-entry cases and some cases where enforcement action had been initiated. Dublin II individuals removed under Article 4.4 have been excluded from the statistics provided in regard to Article 7.1.b. Multiple notices issued to the same person within a year are not counted. Currently it has not been possible to quality assure this information under National Statistics protocols. Port figures have not been included in the table. Data includes main applicants and dependants, each counted individually.

[87] I.e. an administrative or judicial decision or act, stating or declaring the stay of a third-country national to be illegal and imposing or stating an obligation to return.

[88] In accordance with the provisions of Directive 2008/52/EC (Return Directive) the time-limit shall be of 30 days. Ireland and United Kingdom do not take part in the Directive, are not bound by its rules and therefore may apply different time limits on voluntary departure.

d. Returns through AVRR: number of irregularly-staying third-country nationals returning via AVRR packages (assisted voluntary return and reintegration) – where different from (c).
n/i: *information not available ;*
n/a: *not applicable*
(p) = *provisional data*

Table A.2.b National Statistics on the number of third-country nationals not in contact with the national authorities, by year and by type of migrant

(Member) States	a. Absconding third-country nationals					b. Clandestine entries				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Austria[89]	2,964	2,367	2,625	3,601	4,557	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Belgium	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Bulgaria										
Croatia	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Cyprus	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Czech Republic	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Denmark										
Estonia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Finland	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
France	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Germany	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Greece	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Hungary	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Ireland	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Italy										
Latvia	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Lithuania	280	255	397	110	152	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Luxembourg	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Malta	n/i	n/i	n/i	700	900	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Netherlands	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Poland	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Portugal										

[89] The numbers only refer to absconding asylum-seekers, and not all third country nationals.

(Member) States	a. Absconding third-country nationals					b. Clandestine entries				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Romania										
Slovak Republic	n/i	251	310	227	236	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Slovenia	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Spain	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Sweden	2,957	2,735	4,903	6,272	8,159	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
United Kingdom[90]	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i
Norway	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i	n/i

Explanatory note:

Source: National Reports.

a. Absconding third-country nationals: Number of irregular migrants who were previously known to the authorities, but whose place of residence is no longer known to the authorities.

b. Clandestine entries: Number of irregular migrants whose residence on the territory has never been known to the authorities.

n/i: *information not available*

n/a: *not applicable*

[90] When a return decision is issued by the UK the precise content will vary depending upon the circumstances in which the decision is issued and at time of writing (June 2015) was evolving with other developments coming out of the Immigration Act 2014. At time of writing the decision letter was likely to information about both voluntary departure and AVR and contact details for the relevant delivery partners.

Table B.1 Overview of the information related to voluntary return provided by the Member States and Norway at the same time of the return decision

(Member) States	Period for voluntary departure	Option of Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR)	Information on AVRs package	Requirements for eligibility to AVRs	Contact details for AVR	Contacts of NGOs
Austria	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Belgium	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Bulgaria						
Croatia						
Cyprus	✓					
Czech Republic	✓	✓			✓	✓
Denmark						
Estonia	✓					
Finland	✓	✓	✓		✓	
France	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Germany[91]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greece	✓					
Hungary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ireland	✓	✓			✓	
Italy						
Latvia	✓	✓				
Lithuania	✓				✓	
Luxembourg	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Malta	✓					
Netherlands	✓	✓			✓	
Poland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Portugal						
Romania						
Slovak Republic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

[91] In **Germany**, providing a return decision is the responsibility of each single migration authority and no generalizable information exists on whether the single authorities provide information on AVR(R) programmes when providing a return decision. Nevertheless, there is one relevant exception, which concerns the decision on a rejected application for international protection. In this case the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees provides a leaflet with relevant information on different AVR(R) programmes to all rejected applicants.

(Member) States	Period for voluntary departure	Option of Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR)	Information on AVRs package	Requirements for eligibility to AVRs	Contact details for AVR	Contacts of NGOs
Slovenia	✓	✓				
Spain	✓					
Sweden	✓	✓	✓			
United Kingdom	✓	✓			✓	✓
Norway	✓				✓	✓