

## The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) 2005: a process and impact assessment

Transparency Research, Olga Evans and Laura Powlton (UK Border Agency)

### Aims

The report presents findings of a process and impact assessment of the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme for the 2005 programme year (VARRP 2005), conducted to provide recommendations for programme development and to fulfil European Union funding requirements.

### Context

VARRP 2005 ran from 1 August 2005 to 31 July 2006. VARRP is intended as a cost-effective<sup>1</sup> and dignified alternative to enforced removal/deportation for people whose asylum applications have failed. Assistance available under VARRP includes facilitation of travel to the home country and optional reintegration assistance. VARRP is delivered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). A key change between the VARRP 2004 and VARRP 2005 programmes was the increase on 1 January 2006 (five months into the VARRP 2005 programme year) of the value of the reintegration assistance offered from £1,000 to £3,000.

<sup>1</sup> National Audit Office (2005) Removing failed asylum applicants. National Audit Office: London. [http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0506/returning\\_failed\\_asylum\\_applic.aspx](http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0506/returning_failed_asylum_applic.aspx)

### Method

A qualitative assessment of the VARRP 2005 programme, comprising 105 semi-structured interviews with diverse VARRP stakeholder groups, was conducted between May and September 2007. The groups included 48 VARRP and 19 non-VARRP returnees to Pakistan and Zimbabwe; all were interviewed in the return country. Findings from quantitative analysis of IOM management information are included to provide context.

### Findings

#### Effectiveness of VARRP outreach, information and advice

- The IOM marketing team increased its activities during the programme year. These included: holding 656 outreach meetings; production and distribution to ethnic community, and other organisations and VARRP applicants of various printed media in a variety of languages, including booklets telling 'Stories of Return'; and communications through ethnic community media. Tailoring of communication strategies to different community needs was advocated.
- Principal sources of initial information about VARRP were 'word-of-mouth', ethnic community media, and the UK Border Agency. Use of ethnic community

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### Keywords

Assisted voluntary return  
Asylum  
Asylum seekers  
Immigration  
Return  
Voluntary return  
Reintegration

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media to optimise communication was supported by people eligible for VARRP. A few would have liked more information than was given.

- IOM advisers were positively regarded. Pakistani returnees particularly emphasised the respectful approach and use of their mother tongue by the advisers. Zimbabwean returnees were impressed by the honesty of advisers and the level of information they provided.

### **Decision to return**

- More than half of those eligible for VARRP reported that return was negatively viewed by their community, and comments suggested that this was possibly linked to the shame of having failed to make a success of their time away or to a desire to conceal that the individual had applied for asylum.
- While many VARRP returnees commented on their dire prospects and limited options in the UK, the IOM emphasis on ensuring that VARRP uptake is voluntary appeared to be fairly effective. More than half of the VARRP returnees considered that they had had a choice when deciding to return under VARRP.
- One-third of VARRP returnees (16 people) expected to have left the UK voluntarily anyway, and one-seventh (seven people) to have been deported,<sup>2</sup> if they had not returned when they did.
- For around half of the VARRP returnees, positive marketing and communication encouraged a decision to return (the remainder were unaffected by the information received).
- The enhanced reintegration package itself was not so high in value that it eclipsed consideration of other 'push' or 'pull' factors.

### **Uptake of VARRP**

- During VARRP 2005, 8,742 individuals applied and 5,002 people returned to their country of origin. These were increases of 101 per cent and 92 per cent respectively on the VARRP 2004 figures of 4,348 applicants and 2,599 returnees.
- Many VARRP providers considered the introduction of a much higher level of reintegration assistance (£3,000) than had previously been available (£1,000)

<sup>2</sup> The term 'deported' was used by interviewees but may be a generic colloquialism for various categories of enforced removal.

to have been important in generating the increase in VARRP uptake. Increased marketing efforts, making explicit the assistance value, were also thought to have played a part.

- However, it should be noted that 60 per cent of the increase in VARRP returns between VARRP 2004 and VARRP 2005 could be accounted for by the increase in the number of Iraqi returnees. This in turn was associated with clearance of a backlog of would-be Iraqi VARRP returnees as charter flights to northern Iraq became possible. A special concession to this group, allowing them to defer return for up to six months from VARRP application, may also have encouraged uptake.
- A causal link cannot be proven but the attractiveness of the enhanced reintegration package was supported by the dramatic increase, after its introduction, in the proportion of VARRP applicants who also applied for reintegration assistance.

### **Withdrawing from VARRP**

- Around one-third of VARRP 2005 applicants (2,312 out of 7,608 people) withdrew from<sup>3</sup> the programme.
- People eligible for VARRP and the IOM partner agencies perceived fears about security and other conditions in the return country, an insufficient level of reintegration assistance on offer and suspicion of the authorities in the UK and about VARRP as key factors in withdrawal.
- Abuse of the process (to buy time in the UK or access state support) was also suggested to be a factor by some VARRP providers.
- Hope of obtaining legal status in the UK was also suggested to be a factor.
- Strategies to combat withdrawal most frequently suggested by VARRP providers were: increasing support to VARRP clients and ensuring they wished to return; tightening up controls around access to state support; providing better information on return countries; providing more financial assistance; and sending a stronger message about enforced return as the alternative to VARRP.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'withdrawal' as used here refers to those applicants who cancelled their application, lost contact with IOM, or were known to have travelled independently.

### **Uptake of reintegration assistance**

- Applications for reintegration assistance increased from 44 per cent of all VARRP applicants during VARRP 2004 to 91 per cent of all VARRP applicants during VARRP 2005; and the increase coincided with the introduction of the higher value reintegration package and marketing making explicit the package value.

### **Experience of return**

- Most VARRP returnees identified some positive consequences of the return home; around half mentioned family reunion. Others mentioned relief from the hardships of the UK, better quality of life, and cultural sensitivity.
- All VARRP returnees interviewed had received reintegration assistance; and for one-third the VARRP advice and assistance had a bigger impact on getting established on their return home than any other factor.
- Of those VARRP returnees interviewed, 43 had found a paid occupation since returning and 20 of these were set up in business within three months of return. Thirty-eight VARRP interviewees reported having permanent accommodation.
- The majority of VARRP returnees thought that the reintegration assistance they received provided them with a good start but not an adequate basis for long-term reintegration. Most did not see their income as sustainable.
- The situation was most difficult for returnees to Zimbabwe because of the particular economic circumstances there.
- The majority had not experienced harassment or violence since return; however, such difficulties were more prevalent among VARRP returnees to Pakistan, especially women.
- Only one-third of VARRP returnees expected to still be in the return country in five years' time; however the realism of this expectation could not be tested.

### **Satisfaction with reintegration assistance**

- The majority of VARRP returnees (37 out of 48) rated the reintegration assistance they received as at least acceptable.
- The £500 cash relocation allowance (paid on departure) and the 'in-kind' assistance delivered on return were regarded as the best elements of reintegration assistance by half of the VARRP returnees.
- Other aspects which were valued were the indirect benefits, such as opportunity for a new start and family reunion, and these could be emphasised in marketing.
- A range of suggestions for improving reintegration assistance uptake (within current funding levels) were provided by both VARRP returnees and VARRP providers. Many of these concerned the following: more flexibility and tailoring of assistance; more marketing and awareness raising emphasising the 'positives' of VARRP; or extending training opportunities (including prior to departure).

### **Strengths of VARRP and suggestions for improvements**

- Reintegration assistance, return with dignity, and quick decisions and processing were most frequently cited as the best elements of the VARRP process by VARRP providers.
- Increasing the information provided to applicants was the most frequent suggestion for improving VARRP. Others included: better targeting; more positive advertising; improving internal communication between partners; and increasing the cash element of assistance.

### **Differences between VARRP and non-VARRP returnees**

- Compared with VARRP returnees, the people who made their own arrangements to return appeared to be less pressured into returning by circumstances in the UK, and more settled and less dependent on state or NGO support upon return.

## The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) 2005: a process and impact assessment

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### I Introduction

#### Aims

This report presents findings of a process and impact assessment of the UK Border Agency Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) for the 2005 programme year (1 August 2005 to 31 July 2006). It looked specifically at: VARRP outreach and information activities; withdrawal rates; uptake of reintegration assistance; and experiences of returnees to Pakistan and Zimbabwe. It sought to provide recommendations for programme development and contributes to fulfilling European Union (EU) funding requirements. These research findings were shared with UK Border Agency staff as they became available.

#### Context

The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) has been jointly funded by the UK Border Agency and European Refugee Fund (ERF) since 2000. VARRP exists to provide asylum seekers in the UK with the means to return permanently to their country of origin (or habitual residence) in a dignified and sustainable<sup>4</sup> manner. (Eligibility criteria for VARRP are set out in Appendix I.)

Support available under VARRP includes travel costs, arranging travel, help with documentation (passports or other travel documents), and support at departure and arrival. Since 2002 the package has also included optional reintegration assistance<sup>5</sup> in the form of financial support

towards vocational training, job placements, or small business start-up for adults and education for children. The nature of this support can vary depending on the needs of the applicant and the specific situation and opportunities in the country of return.

The value of reintegration assistance available during the VARRP 2005 programme year increased after the first five months. Between 1 August 2005 and 31 December 2005 reintegration assistance to the value of £1,000 was available; this was also the maximum available during the VARRP 2004 programme. From 1 January 2006 to 31 October 2006, an enhanced package of reintegration support was piloted.<sup>6</sup> For the duration of the pilot period, the value of the 'in-kind'<sup>7</sup> reintegration assistance available increased to £3,000, including a £500 cash relocation grant on departure.

In 2005, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) implemented VARRP with five partner agencies: Refugee Action; North of England Refugee Service (NERS); Safehaven Yorkshire (SHY); Wolverhampton Asylum and Refugee Service (WARS); YMCA Glasgow; and over 30 UK non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

All VARRP applications are directed to IOM and eligibility is assessed by the UK Border Agency. The partner agencies ensure access to VARRP, provide impartial, confidential advice and support for asylum seekers and are involved with raising awareness of VARRP through outreach activities. Reintegration support is delivered by IOM's overseas missions, which monitor returnees' progress and liaise with IOM London.

4 The UK Border Agency takes absence of re-migration to the UK as its key measure of the sustainability of return.

5 The UK has operated an assisted voluntary return scheme for asylum applicants since 1999. Prior to the addition of optional reintegration assistance, the package was known as the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme (VARP).

6 The pilot was initially intended to run between 1 January 2006 and 30 June 2006 but was extended.

7 VARRP reintegration assistance is normally given 'in kind', i.e. payment is made by IOM to suppliers of approved goods and services (e.g. for business set-up) to VARRP returnees. Exceptionally reintegration assistance is given as staged cash payments.

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VARRP 2005 directly contributed to the UK Government's 2005 five-year strategy: 'Controlling Our Borders: Making Migration Work for Britain - Five-Year Strategy for Asylum and Immigration', and Home Office Public Service Agreement target 5 (PSA5) for 2004 and 2005. PSA5 specifically aimed to: "reduce unfounded asylum claims as part of a wider strategy to tackle abuse of the immigration laws and promote controlled legal migration".<sup>8</sup> The 2005 five-year strategy included a commitment to enforce immigration laws more effectively by removing greater proportions of failed asylum seekers in comparison to the number of unfounded applications. VARRP is regarded as a positive and cost-effective alternative to enforced removals (Home Office, 2002 and 2005; National Audit Office, 2005).

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## 2 Method

A qualitative assessment of the VARRP 2005 programme was carried out between May and September 2007. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with people involved in delivering VARRP (i.e. IOM officers, staff in IOM partner NGOs, UK Border Agency representatives) and with actual and potential VARRP users (i.e. people who had returned under VARRP 2005, people who had applied to VARRP but then withdrawn, and people eligible for but not taking up VARRP). Details of the target and achieved interviews are given in Table A1.

A total of 105 interviews were conducted:

- 26 with individuals involved in delivery of VARRP;
- 28 with VARRP returnees to Pakistan (six women and 22 men) and 20 with VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe (ten women and ten men);
- 26 with people eligible for but not using VARRP (including nine people (one woman and eight men) who had returned to Pakistan and ten people (three women and seven men) who had returned to Zimbabwe without VARRP assistance); and five with people who had applied for but then withdrawn from VARRP (see Table A2).

At least two-thirds of the VARRP returnees and almost all of the non-VARRP returnees had returned to their country as lone individuals (not with any family) (see Table A3).

Those involved in delivering VARRP were interviewed in the UK, Pakistan and Zimbabwe. VARRP returnees were interviewed in Pakistan and Zimbabwe. Those eligible for but not using VARRP were interviewed in the UK, Pakistan and Zimbabwe. Those interviewed in Pakistan and Zimbabwe had returned of their own initiative and were designated 'non-VARRP' returnees for the purposes of this report. People who had withdrawn from VARRP were interviewed in the UK.

The aim had been to also interview VARRP returnees who had not taken up reintegration assistance; but neither the one identified in Pakistan nor any of the 15 in Zimbabwe could be contacted.

To capture different perspectives on key issues (such as the VARRP processes and the impact of reintegration assistance) the same broad topics were covered with each group of interviewees, and some questions were asked of all respondents. However, specific questions were also tailored to different respondent groups.

Interviews with VARRP users and potential users were conducted face to face. Those in Pakistan and Zimbabwe were conducted by local researchers in the native languages of the interviewees. People involved in delivering VARRP completed an online survey followed by a telephone interview.

Findings from a quantitative review of IOM management information, undertaken by researchers at the UK Border Agency (Gillan and Larsen, 2006), have also been used to provide contextual information for this report.

A more detailed account of the method is provided in Appendix 2.

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<sup>8</sup> Home Office SR 2004 PSA TARGETS, 29 July 2004, 27 July 2005.

### 3 Findings

This chapter provides the results of the analysis of the interviews, online survey and the quantitative report as they related to the main areas of enquiry about VARRP 2005:

- effectiveness of VARRP outreach, information and advice activities;
- uptake of VARRP;
- decision to return;
- Withdrawal from VARRP;
- uptake of reintegration assistance;
- experience of assisted return;
- satisfaction with reintegration assistance;
- strengths of VARRP and suggestions for improvements; and
- differences between VARRP and non-VARRP returnees.

#### Effectiveness of VARRP outreach, information and advice

##### Outreach activities

The IOM VARRP communications team came into existence in 2003. During VARRP 2005, IOM and its partners continued to increase efforts to raise awareness about voluntary return. This included arranging 656 outreach meetings. Through these, IOM met 2,912 different agencies, and a total of 7,406 individuals. Additionally, VARRP was promoted via leaflets in a variety of languages, newsletters and information packs. Two booklets ('Stories of Return' and 'Mini Stories of Return') were distributed to community organisations and potential applicants. Local media, including ethnic community press, radio and television, were also used to raise awareness.

Partner agencies and IOM reflected that different groups of potential returnees had to be approached in different ways. Some communities could be reached via their embassies in the UK; others would not have one or would not approach that body. Other groups could be targeted through the "ethnic media", via refugee community organisations (RCOs) and community leaders, and some through statutory services.

##### Information received about VARRP

VARRP 2005 returnees and potential returnees in the UK (60 people in total) were most likely to have first heard of VARRP through word of mouth (12 people), advertising in community media (12 people), and letters from the UK Border Agency (11 people). Other initial information

sources reported were: the internet, immigration removal centres, solicitors and other advisers. Seventeen people gave no response. The importance of 'word of mouth' may be an indirect indicator of the effectiveness of the VARRP marketing and outreach activities. It suggests a climate of awareness among the VARRP eligible community.

Thirty-eight of the (60) VARRP returnees and potential returnees in the UK had suggestions for communication channels that would optimise the accessibility of information about VARRP and most of these (20) pointed to further use of ethnic-group-specific, and occasionally mainstream, media channels. Other suggestions referred to use of community groups and venues. Conversely, a few recommended leaving the matter in the hands of specialist agencies or official channels.

VARRP returnees to Pakistan and Zimbabwe (48 people in total) were generally satisfied with the information they received about VARRP through advisers and other means (for example, printed materials and internet sites). Most rated the information received about the VARRP programme as 'very good' (25 people) or 'acceptable' (14 people). Among those (seven people) who were dissatisfied, half (four people) gave insufficient information as the reason; the remainder gave no reason or had suspicions about the underlying motives of the VARRP providers.

##### Advice about VARRP from IOM advisers

Most of the 48 VARRP returnees to Pakistan and Zimbabwe had a positive view of the advice they received, with 21 rating it as 'acceptable' and 16 as 'very good'. (Only one returnee stated they were not happy with the advice they received.) The reasons given for this level of satisfaction included: the respectful and friendly approach of the advisers; information in the mother tongue; fulfilment of promises; and the provision of clear and objective information about the process. A returnee to Pakistan said: "*They [IOM] tell all the things straightforward. It means that they do not play with the words and inform all about the positive and negative aspects.*"

There were differences between the Pakistani and Zimbabwean returnees in the elements of advice most valued. The 13 returnees who mentioned the respectful and friendly approach of the IOM adviser, and the five who mentioned advice in the mother tongue, were all Pakistani. The four who mentioned honesty and fulfilment of promises, and the 12 who valued the information they were given, were all Zimbabwean. These findings may reflect cultural differences, or variation between IOM advisers.

### **In conclusion:**

- The impact of IOM's VARRP marketing activities was reflected in the importance of ethnic community media and 'word of mouth' as initial sources of information about VARRP 2005 among people eligible for VARRP.
- The IOM strategy of using ethnic community media channels to raise awareness of VARRP was encouraged by people eligible for VARRP.
- The majority of VARRP returnees were satisfied with the information they had received about VARRP, with dissatisfaction linked to a desire for more information.
- IOM advisers were positively viewed by VARRP returnees. Pakistani returnees particularly valued their respectful and friendly approach, and their ability to communicate in their mother tongue. Zimbabwean returnees emphasised the level of information they were given and the honesty of their IOM advisers. These findings point to the importance of culturally sensitive and specific approaches to communication with potential VARRP returnees.

## **Decision to return**

### **Perceptions of voluntary return**

While the number of VARRP applicants and returnees has been increasing, when interviewees who were eligible for VARRP (79 people in total) were asked how voluntary return was viewed by their community more than half (39 out of the 67 people who responded) reported that it was viewed 'very negatively'. Sixteen respondents reported mixed views about voluntary return in their communities, and 12 people reported that it was viewed 'very positively and encouraged'. All but one of those reporting a positive perception of voluntary return was a VARRP returnee.

Nine out of the ten people who had returned to Zimbabwe without VARRP assistance did not answer the questions directly but reported that they had concealed the real circumstances of their stay in the UK from their community back home. Their comments suggested that in some cases it may be the shame of return after a failed attempt to settle or advance oneself, or the desire to conceal the true circumstances of their stay in the UK that is the problem rather than VARRP itself.

### **Voluntariness of return**

At the time of applying for VARRP, around half of those who returned to Pakistan (12 out of 28 people) and Zimbabwe (nine out of 20 people) said they had had at least one appeal against their asylum decision refused and five of these VARRP returnees (three to Pakistan and two to Zimbabwe) reported having reached the stage of having appeal rights exhausted. Most other VARRP returnees applied when their asylum claim had been refused and they had appealed against the decision. One returnee to each country reported having been granted discretionary leave to remain. The asylum status at the time of return of non-VARRP returnees was not recorded.

IOM is keen to stress the 'voluntariness' of decisions to return home with VARRP. Almost half (23 out of 48) VARRP 2005 returnees interviewed felt they had complete choice about accessing VARRP services and deciding whether to return to their country of origin. A further six felt they had some constraints around deciding to return, but felt that the decision to return was their own.

Nineteen VARRP returnees stated that they had no choice in deciding whether to return. Notably these were 12 out of 20 returnees to Zimbabwe, compared with seven out of 28 to Pakistan. Most of those who reported not having a choice about return gave reasons to do with the fear or threat of enforcement or the authorities (mentioned by 14 people), not having legal status in the UK (mentioned by eight people), and the destitution arising from their status in the UK (mentioned by seven people).

People who made their own arrangements to return, predictably, felt they had more choice when making decisions to return; only two out of 19 felt that they had no choice. One of these two was returning from a sense of family duty and one felt there was no other option.

VARRP returnees (48 in total) were also asked what they thought would have happened to them had they tried to stay in the UK. Answers were diverse but 16 people thought they would have returned to their country of origin anyway; seven thought they would have been deported;<sup>9</sup> and 12 indicated that they would have remained in the UK (presumably illegally).

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<sup>9</sup> The term 'deported' was used by interviewees but may be a generic colloquialism for various categories of enforced removal.

### **The attractiveness of VARRP**

Around half (22) of the 48 VARRP 2005 returnees reported that advice and information they received about VARRP had encouraged them to return. The reported influences included learning about the benefits of VARRP, promise of help in starting a new life, feeling motivated by success stories, learning about the option to go home, help in finalising the decision to return and making return a more positive proposition. The remainder of the returnees felt their decision was not influenced by such information.

For a few of the VARRP 2005 returnees interviewed, application for VARRP reflected a positive decision to take advantage of help in fulfilling aspirations (for employment, business, or family reunion) tied with returning to their country.

For most, however, the decision to apply for VARRP appeared to come from a combination of pessimism or desperation about their situation and prospects in the UK with awareness of the possibility of a more positive outcome and dignified departure from the UK that VARRP could offer. Six of the Pakistani, but no Zimbabwean, returnees commented that the VARRP package value was good.

*One woman returnee to Pakistan reported: "My lawyer told me that I should go back. He said that after some time they will stop the financial help that they provide me now. Without the help from the UK government I was not able to survive there i.e. to feed my baby and myself. Another thing he told me that the Home Office will arrest me and deport me. The IOM package became attractive for me in the above mentioned circumstances. So I decided to take the assistance under VARRP."*

*Another returnee to Pakistan, a man, said: "The police had arrested me and I was put in a detention centre. I was not able to do some job there. I felt they would deport me [in] an unrespectful manner. The offer given by the IOM, in the mean time attracted me. Certainly, it was a good chance for me to return home with something in my hand. I plan to start my business here in Pakistan."*

For the five people who applied but withdrew from VARRP the decision to apply appeared linked with the possibility of accessing support when facing destitution.

The evidence suggests that even the enhanced package on its own was not a sufficient incentive for people to return and that their decision was influenced by one or several other 'push' or 'pull' factors.

### **In conclusion:**

- Returning home after a failed attempt to gain asylum in the UK may be perceived as shameful or risky by returnees and their communities. Negative perceptions of return under such circumstances will impact on attitudes to VARRP.
- However, half of the VARRP returnees expected to have left the UK voluntarily anyway or to have been deported, if they had not returned when they did.
- While many VARRP applications are made by people whose prospects in the UK are dire and options limited, the IOM emphasis on ensuring that VARRP uptake is voluntary appeared to be fairly effective. More than half of the VARRP returnees considered they had some volition in returning under VARRP.
- For around half of the VARRP returnees, positive marketing encouraged a decision to return.
- The enhanced reintegration package was not so high in value that it eclipsed consideration of other 'push' or 'pull' factors.
- Marketing should continue to highlight the possibility for VARRP to lead to a more positive return scenario than would otherwise be possible.

### **Uptake of VARRP**

The number of applications had increased steadily year on year between VARRP 2001 and VARRP 2004 and continued to do so during VARRP 2005. During VARRP 2005, there were 7,608 applications, covering 8,742 individuals. This was an increase of 101 per cent on the 4,348 individuals covered by applications during VARRP 2004. VARRP 2005 assisted 5,002 people to return to their countries of origin, an increase of 92 per cent on the 2,599 people who departed under VARRP 2004.

More than half of the VARRP providers interviewed (16 out of 26) thought that the introduction of the 'enhanced VARRP package' on 1 January 2006, with its offer of a much higher level of reintegration assistance than previously available, had an important impact on the increase in the number of VARRP applications. This is supported by the dramatic increase in the percentage of VARRP 2005 applicants also applying for reintegration assistance during the 'enhanced VARRP' period (93% compared with 59% of the 'pre-enhancement' VARRP 2005 applicants and 44% of VARRP 2004 applicants).

However, a causal link between the increased value of the reintegration package and the increase in VARRP applications cannot be proven, and other factors (internal and external to VARRP) may also have had an impact. Most notably, political changes and the introduction of regular charter flights to northern Iraq, made large-scale returns to that country feasible during VARRP 2005. Along with a special concession for Iraqis allowing departure to be deferred for up to six months, this contributed to the clearance of a backlog of Iraqi VARRP cases. Between VARRP 2004 and VARRP 2005, returns to Iraq increased by over 300 per cent (from 397 people to 1,848 people). Effectively, 60 per cent of the increase in total returns between VARRP 2004 and VARRP 2005 could be accounted for by the increased number of Iraqis returning.

The implementation of the enhanced package also coincided with the increased marketing efforts by IOM, VARRP partners and the UK Border Agency AVR team. Six of the VARRP providers interviewed suggested VARRP 2005 advertising campaigns were a key factor in increasing the number of applications and the uptake of reintegration assistance.

### **In conclusion:**

- The introduction, during the VARRP 2005 programme year, of a much higher level of reintegration assistance than had previously been available was considered by many providers to have been important in generating the huge increase in uptake of VARRP. Increased marketing efforts, making explicit the assistance value were also thought to have played a part.
- However, it should be noted that 60 per cent of the increase in VARRP returns between VARRP 2004 and VARRP 2005 could be accounted for by the increase in the number of Iraqi returnees. This in turn was associated with clearance of a backlog of would-be Iraqi VARRP returnees as charter flights to northern Iraq became possible. A special concession to this group, allowing them to defer return for up to six months from VARRP application, may also have encouraged uptake.
- While a causal link cannot be proven, the attractiveness of the enhanced reintegration package was supported by the dramatic increase, after its introduction, in the proportion of VARRP applicants who also applied for reintegration assistance.

## **Withdrawal from VARRP**

IOM data show that under VARRP 2005, as under VARRP 2004, around one-third of applicants (2,312 out of 7,608 people) cancelled their VARRP applications, lost contact with IOM or made their own arrangements to return.<sup>10</sup> It is possible that a number of those who cancelled their application or lost contact with IOM may have chosen to apply again later or make their own arrangements to return.

Only five people who had applied for and then withdrew from VARRP participated in the research, and all were in the UK at the time of interview. Two of these reported that they changed their mind about return after receiving information from relatives or friends in the country of return. All five reported having applied for VARRP when their asylum claim appeal rights had been exhausted.

All interviewees, except those returnees who made their own arrangements to return, were asked why they thought people withdrew from VARRP. Sixty-three out of the 86 people asked provided at least one, and sometimes several, suggestions. Most of the reasons given could be categorised as follows: perceived security risks and other unacceptable conditions in the country of return (mentioned by 27 people); insufficient level of reintegration assistance on offer (12 mentions); suspicion of the authorities in the UK and about VARRP (11 mentions); abuse of the process e.g. to 'buy' time in the UK or access Section 4 support (ten mentions); and hope of obtaining a legal status in the UK (seven mentions) (see Table A4). Other influences included a change in family circumstances in the return country.

Responses from the IOM partner agencies, VARRP returnees, and potential VARRP returnees tended to focus on fears about conditions in the country of return, the package value, and suspicion of the authorities. For example, an adviser from a partner agency reported: *"Making a decision about voluntary return is never an easy one. So, people may have a change of heart. Sometimes they may feel coerced through destitution to sign for voluntary return. Sometimes there may be change in situation in country of origin. More often people talk to friends and family back home and they do not encourage them to return."* Suspicion was thought to focus on a lack of trust that VARRP returnees would get what they were promised.

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<sup>10</sup> These people are referred to collectively as VARRP 'withdrawals' in this report.

Potential abuse of the process was also suggested in some responses from VARRP providers. One VARRP returnee to Pakistan also suggested: “People apply for the VARRP assistance. In [a] few days they get the documentation saying that they are being registered with IOM. Now if police ask them [for] the papers they show these documents. It means these documents provide legal status in UK to the concerned person at least for six months. They work in these six months to earn little more money so that they could do well at home.”<sup>11</sup>

The interviewees from IOM, the partner agencies and the UK Border Agency (26 people; 22 responding) suggested a range of measures for reducing the withdrawal rates from VARRP. The most frequently suggested were: to provide better support to clients and make sure the client genuinely wants to return (seven mentions); to remove the potential that a VARRP application is used for ‘other purposes’, specifically Section 4 support (five mentions); produce better information on the country of return (four mentions); provide more financial assistance (four mentions); and to send a stronger message about an enforced return as the only other option to VARRP (four mentions) (see Table A5).

### **In conclusion:**

- Comments of the few VARRP ‘withdrawals’ interviewed provided some support for the speculation by some VARRP providers that for this group, access to the limited state benefits (Section 4 support), which VARRP application conferred, may have been a stimulus to application. Tightening of access to support was suggested.
- Fears about security and other conditions in the return country, and suspicion of the authorities in the UK and about VARRP were seen as key factors in withdrawal. Increasing support to VARRP clients and providing better information on return countries might help to counter these. More contact between IOM advisers and applicants, and development of the ‘Stories of Return’ concept might assist.
- VARRP applicants may be influenced by information and advice from diverse networks, including their friends and family in the return country. IOM work on mapping networks for different ethnic communities should be encouraged in order to identify and, where possible, use trusted networks to communicate about VARRP.

<sup>11</sup> This comment reflects the perception of a VARRP user but does not reflect the true situation. Acceptance onto the VARRP programme does not confer legal status or right to work for failed asylum applicants.

- Surprisingly, few VARRP returnees seemed to think that they would have been deported if they had stayed in the UK. If the UK Border Agency were to raise awareness of enforcement among the asylum-seeking community, this could discourage withdrawal.
- While some interviewees suggested that higher value reintegration packages could reduce withdrawal, the enhanced package did not appear to have impacted on withdrawal rates. However, tailoring reintegration assistance deals with the specific issues affecting different countries (e.g. hyperinflation in Zimbabwe) might make VARRP more convincing.

## **Uptake of reintegration assistance**

As noted, applications for reintegration assistance were far higher during VARRP 2005 (91% of all applicants) than under VARRP 2004 (44% of all applicants), and the increase in applications for reintegration assistance coincided with the availability of the higher value, ‘enhanced’ VARRP package. It was also noted earlier that the increases in applications for both VARRP and reintegration assistance, while likely to have been encouraged by the introduction of the higher value, ‘enhanced’, VARRP reintegration package, may also have been due to the increased marketing of VARRP which made explicit the details of the reintegration package on offer.

### **In conclusion:**

- Both the increased value of the enhanced reintegration package and marketing of this enhancement are likely to have increased uptake of reintegration assistance.
- Any further enhancements should be well advertised by IOM.

## **Experience of return**

Most VARRP returnees (39 out of 48 people) and non-VARRP returnees (17 out of 19 people) could identify some positive consequences of having returned home. Three-quarters of both groups mentioned family reunion and commitments; and around one-fifth of each group mentioned business or educational opportunities. A better quality of life and cultural sensitivity were mentioned by a few people in each group. Relief from hardship in the UK was also important for VARRP returnees, but not for non-VARRP returnees (see Table A6).

All VARRP returnees interviewed for the evaluation had received reintegration assistance. In general, the majority of VARRP returnees thought that reintegration assistance provided them with a good start. Around one-third (18 out of 48) of the VARRP returnees interviewed reported that the assistance and advice from VARRP made more difference to getting established when they returned home than family, friends or any other factor (21 returnees did not answer the question).

On return the majority of returnees, but especially the VARRP returnees, had set up their own business (17 VARRP returnees to Pakistan; 19 VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe; three non-VARRP returnees to Pakistan; and four non-VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe) or joined an existing business (six VARRP returnees to Pakistan; two non-VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe). In Pakistan women had invested in businesses run by others (e.g. buying a car to be leased for rental); in Zimbabwe women had set up their own businesses.

The majority of VARRP returnees' businesses had been set up within three months of return (12 out of 17 in Pakistan, and eight out of 19 in Zimbabwe); and most of the remainder within six months of return (three out of 17 in Pakistan and ten out of 19 in Zimbabwe). Time to set-up in the remaining VARRP cases was not known. Three of the businesses in Pakistan had failed but in one case an alternative source of income had been found.

Time to business set-up for non-VARRP returnees to Pakistan was not known; however, it is worth noting that in all six cases where a non-VARRP returnee to Zimbabwe set up or joined a business, the business had already been organised prior to their return.

Those five VARRP returnees to Pakistan who had not set up or invested in business included two mothers who were caring for their children or dependants. One of these noted that her husband had invested her reintegration assistance in a family business; the other indicated no source of income but had returned with family. One VARRP returnee to Pakistan had found a 'high-level' job, and two were still planning what to do.

The six corresponding non-VARRP returnees to Pakistan were employed (two people), job hunting (two people), retired and living with family (one person), or a housewife (one person).

The one VARRP returnee to Zimbabwe who had not set up a business had opted for full-time training. Three of the four corresponding non-VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe were still deciding what to do and circumstances were not known in the case of the fourth person.

Most VARRP returnees (21 out of 28 in Pakistan and 17 out of 20 in Zimbabwe) and non-VARRP returnees (all nine in Pakistan and nine out of ten in Zimbabwe) reported having a permanent<sup>12</sup> place to live. The majority of all returnees (37 out of 48 VARRP returnees and 18 out of 19 non-VARRP returnees) considered their accommodation as at least acceptable as compared with that of other people around them. Non-VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe were especially positive, with seven out of ten people rating their accommodation as very good in comparison with that of their neighbours (as compared with six out of 20 VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe).

There was, however, frustration among VARRP returnees that the assistance provided did not go far enough in providing a basis for long-term reintegration. Over two-thirds of VARRP returnees (35 out of 48 people) stated that their income was not sustainable and that they believed it did not provide a basis for long-term reintegration. In contrast, under half of the non-VARRP returnees (seven out of 19) were of this view.

Perceptions of the sustainability of incomes also varied between countries of return. Almost all (18 out of 20) VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe, compared with two-thirds (18 out of 28) of the VARRP returnees to Pakistan saw their income as 'not sustainable'. The economic situation of hyperinflation in Zimbabwe could account for this difference. The difference between nationalities was, however, less marked among non-VARRP returnees (three out of nine and four out of ten non-VARRP returnees to Pakistan and Zimbabwe respectively saw their income as not sustainable).

Harassment and violence were not reported to affect the majority of returnees (VARRP and non-VARRP). The quarter of returnees (12 out of 48 VARRP returnees and four out of 19 non-VARRP returnees) who said they had experienced harassment or violence since returning reported incidents such as: questioning by authorities (e.g. immigration and police); verbal threats and questions from political opponents; fear of crime because they were perceived as rich; and, in one instance, sexual harassment.

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12 This was as designated 'permanent' by the interviewee.

More of the returnees to Pakistan than to Zimbabwe reported experiencing such incidents; 13 (comprising ten VARRP and three non-VARRP returnees) out of 38 people compared with three (two VARRP and one non-VARRP returnee) out of 30 people. Women were more likely than men to have experienced problems in Pakistan (four out of seven female returnees compared with nine out of 30 male returnees), and less likely than men to have experienced problems in Zimbabwe (none out of 13 women and three out of 17 men).

Interviewees were also asked about experience of discrimination. The pattern of responses was very similar, with Pakistani returnees being more affected than returnees to Zimbabwe. But it should be noted that the respondents did not appear to make a clear distinction between harassment and discrimination.

Uncertainty about longer-term reintegration in the country of return was confirmed by VARRP returnees' views on where they thought they would be in five years' time. Only one-third (16 out of 48 people) believed that they would stay in the country of return. Almost half (22) thought they would be in another country, and nine of these expected to be in the UK. The remainder did not know where they would be. In contrast, among the non-VARRP returnees most (seven out of ten) Zimbabweans expected to remain in their country. Pakistani non-VARRP returnees were generally unsure of where they would be, but none stated that they would still be in Pakistan. (See Table A7)

### **In conclusion:**

- VARRP returnees were more likely than non-VARRP returnees to have found a paid occupation/source of income soon after return; and returnees in general favoured setting up or investing in businesses.
- The majority of all returnees had found permanent accommodation of a standard they considered acceptable.
- The majority of all returnees had not experienced harassment or violence since return. However, such difficulties were more prevalent among returnees to Pakistan, and particularly among women.
- The majority of VARRP returnees thought that the reintegration assistance they received provided them with a good start but not an adequate basis for long-term reintegration. Although most VARRP returnees had started the reintegration activity

aimed at providing an income (a business or a job) within three months of return, most did not see their income as sustainable.

- The situation was most difficult for VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe, perhaps because of the particular economic circumstances there. Increased flexibility and tailoring of reintegration assistance to individual needs might increase the effectiveness of assistance, even at a set monetary level.

Only one-third of VARRP returnees expected to still be in the return country in five years' time.

### **Satisfaction with reintegration assistance**

Reintegration assistance was generally well received by the VARRP returnees interviewed; three-quarters (37 out of 48 people) thought this had a positive impact and rated it as 'acceptable' (27 people) or 'very good' (ten people); and 11 people rated it as 'poor' or 'not acceptable'.

When asked what had been the best thing about the reintegration assistance they had received, more than half (28) of the VARRP returnees mentioned the cash payment and in-kind support as key benefits. Seven valued the opportunity for a new start, and others commented on family reunion, education, and the efficiency of the process. Three people felt there was no particularly good thing (see Table A8).

Perceptions of little or no benefit were largely associated with the view that financial support was inadequate, sometimes, particularly in Zimbabwe, because of the devaluing effects of inflation. Half of the VARRP returnees interviewed (24 people) thought that there should be more money for reintegration assistance.

When asked how the uptake of reintegration assistance could be improved (within existing funding levels) VARRP returnees gave a variety of suggestions. The most common response was to make changes in the payment methods currently operated by IOM (nine people). The majority of these responses (eight people) were from returnees to Zimbabwe, where hyperinflation was running at between 60 to 100 per cent per week, and quotes for goods were valid for about 24 hours. IOM's procurement procedure could take two weeks to complete and this made purchasing very difficult.

Other suggestions from returnees were: increased business training for returnees; more advertising; focusing on success stories; assistance at the airport in the country of return to deal with corrupt officials; more follow-up on return; and loans to be made available later on in the process for business development.

VARRP providers' suggestions were for more advertising and more awareness raising about the VARRP programme; increased reintegration package flexibility and tailoring to returnees' circumstances; and making additional training opportunities available. Examples were provided from other countries where potential returnees were given skills training prior to return (for example, in welding).

#### **In conclusion:**

- The financial benefits of reintegration assistance were especially valued by VARRP returnees; while these were generally well received, many sought more financial support.
- Other aspects which were valued were the indirect benefits, such as the opportunity for a new start and family reunion, and these could be emphasised in marketing.
- A range of suggestions for improving reintegration assistance were provided by both VARRP returnees and VARRP providers. Many of these were around more flexibility and tailoring of assistance or more, positive, marketing and awareness raising.

### **Strengths of VARRP and suggestions for improvements**

VARRP providers (26 people) were asked to state the best element of the VARRP process for them. Choices included the following: reintegration assistance (mentioned by eight people); return with dignity (six people); quick decisions and processing (five people); individual approach to advice (three people); and the voluntary nature of return (two people).

Suggestions for improvements from VARRP providers were as follows: more information to applicants on various aspects of return (e.g. country of return information) (mentioned by six people); better targeting (two mentions); more positive advertising (two mentions); and better internal communication (two mentions). There was also one mention in each case for the following: increase in the cash element; more advertising; consideration of human rights; better quality of advice; and more success stories.

#### **In conclusion:**

- The strengths of the VARRP process, identified by VARRP providers, and the positive consequences of returning home under VARRP, identified by the VARRP returnees, provided useful ideas for inclusion in the increased and improved communication activities that VARRP providers recommended to improve the VARRP process.

### **Differences between VARRP and non-VARRP returnees**

Although the number of interviewees who made their own arrangements to return (non-VARRP returnees) was small (19), there appeared to be differences between this group of interviewees and those who returned through VARRP.

Family reunion was a pre-eminent perceived benefit of return for both groups. Business opportunities were also relatively important to both groups. However, fewer of those who made their own arrangements to return mentioned relief from hardship in the UK as a main benefit of return (see Table A6).

The impression of being more settled was suggested by thoughts about their future. While almost half of VARRP returnees did not see themselves in their country of return in five years' time, only one-quarter of those who made their own arrangements to return did not anticipate staying in their country (see Table A7).

Non-VARRP returnees also appeared to be more financially independent than those who returned through VARRP. Presumably non-VARRP returnees had self-funded return. Many of the non-VARRP returnees to Zimbabwe had managed to set up or arrange businesses before they left the UK. More non-VARRP than VARRP returnees lived off subsistence farming or were employed, and none of them were financially dependent on their families, the state or any other support. Eight of the VARRP returnees' main source of income was the VARRP reintegration assistance and one person depended upon their family (see Table A9).

When it came to difficulties experienced on return, both VARRP returnees and those who returned on their own reported similar experiences. They all faced the difficulties associated with a lack of law and order, relatively poor facilities, lack of opportunities for employment, corruption, family problems, lack of personal safety, and discrimination against women.

The only demographic details gathered about the two groups of returnees were nationality, sex and whether they returned alone or with family. It may be that the observed differences reflect some self-selection for VARRP as opposed to independent return. Those asylum applicants who are able to plan and fund independent return presumably have access to greater financial or other resources (e.g. higher levels of education or skills, family networks, other social connections) in the home country than VARRP applicants. Pull factors (such as perceived business or employment opportunities in the home country) may be more influential for this group than for many VARRP returnees.

The 'word-of-mouth'/snowballing process of recruitment of the non-VARRP returnees also means that those interviewed may have been an unrepresentative, perhaps more settled, subset of all non-VARRP returnees.

### ***In conclusion:***

- Compared with VARRP returnees, the people who made their own arrangements to return appeared to be less pressured into returning by circumstances in the UK, and more settled and less dependent on state or NGO support upon return.
- Further investigation would be needed to confirm whether this reflected differential opting in to VARRP by subsets of asylum applicants with different resource sets, or simply a sampling artefact.
- More detailed and systematic profiling of the resources of VARRP applicants by IOM could inform tailoring of marketing and of reintegration assistance.

## **Appendix I: VARRP eligibility criteria**

VARRP is open to any asylum seeker who:

- is waiting for a Home Office decision on his/her asylum application; or
- has had his/her asylum application refused by the Home Office; or
- is appealing against a refusal; or
- has exceptional leave to remain; or
- has been granted humanitarian protection.<sup>13</sup>

VARRP is not available to any asylum seeker who:

- has been granted indefinite leave to remain and/or refugee status; or
- is a convicted prisoner subject to a deportation order; or
- is a short-term immigration detainee for whom removal directions have been set; or
- has been convicted of a serious immigration offence; or
- prior to IOM receiving the application, has received one or more custodial sentences in the UK, totalling in excess of 12 months.

## **Appendix 2: Method**

### **Overall research design**

The evaluation of the VARRP 2005 programme was carried out between May and September 2007 in Zimbabwe, Pakistan and the United Kingdom. It was a qualitative study into the process and impact of VARRP 2005 (which ran from 1 August 2005 to 31 July 2006). The study involved interviews and an online survey with asylum seekers, returnees, IOM, implementing partners and the UK Border Agency. Zimbabwe and Pakistan were chosen as case study countries as they were in the top ten countries of return in the VARRP 2005 year. The selection of the study countries was also influenced by practicalities of conducting research such as safety of participants, feasibility of achieving the required sample and the availability of a good network of contacts on the ground.

<sup>13</sup> People granted humanitarian protection are no longer eligible for VARRP, although they were during the 2005 programme.

## Participants

The Home Office provided a draft sampling guide for the qualitative survey work which included the following categories:

- a. VARRP providers
  - Partner agencies
  - IOM officers
  - Partner NGOs
  - Other NGOs
  - UK Border Agency
- b. VARRP returnees
  - With reintegration assistance
  - Without reintegration assistance
- c. Eligible for VARRP but non-users
  - Applied but withdrew
  - Never applied and still in the UK
  - Never applied and returned to home country independently

The sampling framework was discussed with the UK Border Agency and IOM before the evaluation and the initial targets for interviews were revised to be more realistic.

To help with the sampling of VARRP returnees, IOM London provided anonymised lists of VARRP 2005 returnees to Pakistan and Zimbabwe. Returnees taking up reintegration assistance were randomly selected (45 out of 75 people in Pakistan and 60 out of 74 people in Zimbabwe). This was done on the basis that 15 interviewees were required in Pakistan and 20 in Zimbabwe, and the expectation that one in three would be contactable, available, and willing to be interviewed.

As there were few VARRP returnees who did not receive reintegration assistance (one in Zimbabwe and 15 in Pakistan), all of these were included in the potential sample.

People eligible for VARRP but still in the UK were identified through IOM's partner agencies and other contacts in the refugee sector (e.g. refugee community organisations).

The category of returnee expected to be most difficult to reach were people who did not use VARRP services and made their own arrangements to return. These were identified by other interviewees during the fieldwork.

A final sample of 93 interviewees was agreed with the understanding that the team would seek to identify further interviewees during the fieldwork and arrange interviews with them. The revised target and achieved samples are shown in Table A1.

## Response

Overall, the research team carried out 105 interviews. Achieved samples were close in size to or greatly exceeded targets for most categories of respondent. The exception was the sample of VARRP returnees not taking up reintegration assistance; none of the 16 potential participants was contactable during the fieldwork.

The success in contacting returnees to Pakistan and Zimbabwe who had made their own return arrangements was most noteworthy. Nineteen such people were interviewed against a target of ten. Factors which helped in the recruitment of this hard-to-reach group were, first, local researchers in the team spoke local languages and were able to ask sensitively about others who returned. Second, interviewers were referred (hence 'vetted') by a trusted person (family member, friend or a neighbour). Third, the process of approaching and interviewing people offered choice of location, language and time for interviews, paid compensation for their time and gave guarantees of confidentiality.

## Research instruments

Distinct sets of questions were devised for each category of interviewee, but all contained some common questions and common themes. These provided different perspectives on the majority of key issues such as the VARRP process and the impact of the reintegration assistance. The questions are available on request from the UK Border Agency, Analysis, Research and Knowledge Management team.

All the responses from the interviews and online surveys were entered into a database, which was accessible online to authorised parties. Although the fieldwork was conducted across three continents, the online database provided early access to interview records, and allowed the external and UK Border Agency research teams to monitor the quality of interviews and overall progress.

## Piloting of research instruments

Prior to the main fieldwork, six pilot interviews were conducted; one with a member of each VARRP user and potential user subgroup and one with a VARRP provider. Pilot interviews were conducted in the UK, Pakistan and Zimbabwe and were used to test and refine the questionnaires. Minor adjustments were made to some of the questions as a result. The pilot interviews were included in the final analysis. However, following the pilot interviews, a more fundamental change was made to the way interviews with IOM, partner agency and UK Border Agency staff were conducted. Instead of face-to-face interviews, a combination of online questionnaires and follow-up telephone interviews was used as a more effective way of collecting data.

## Data collection

The research team consisted of three core members (senior managers at Transparency Research) and four local researchers (two in each of Pakistan and Zimbabwe). The local researchers were recruited, inducted, briefed and managed by a member of the core research team. The use of local researchers improved the reach to relevant communities and provided a local perspective within the team. The local researchers spoke at least two relevant languages, which eliminated the need for recruiting and managing interpreters and minimised the amount of information 'lost' in translation. All the interviews in the UK were conducted by two members of the core team.

The clients who used reintegration assistance were first approached by IOM to introduce the research and confirm their willingness to be interviewed. A member of the research team then made all other arrangements. IOM and local researchers received an introduction brief on confidentiality, data protection, general discussion topics and other logistical arrangements. All interviews with people eligible for or using VARRP were conducted face-to-face.

The relevant staff within organisations involved in delivering VARRP were identified in consultation with the UK Border Agency, IOM and the partner agencies, and were approached directly by a member of the core team. All staff were also informed by IOM about the evaluation and received an introduction brief similar to that mentioned above. Staff of VARRP provider organisations first completed an online survey. For this they received detailed instructions and their personal log-in details for

a secure access to the relevant questionnaire. After a week they took part in a telephone interview to further explore their responses and fill any gaps in the information provided in the survey.

Those eligible for VARRP but still in the UK were identified and approached through the partner agencies and other contacts in the refugee sector (e.g. refugee community organisations). Prior to the interview, they received the same information as former asylum applicants interviewed in the case study countries.

The hard-to-reach returnees, who did not use VARRP services and made their own arrangements to return, were identified and recruited by snowballing from contacts with other interviewees. These non-VARRP returnees identified themselves as former asylum seekers in the UK. This proved a very successful technique for the reasons described previously. Prior to the interview, these respondents received the same information as VARRP returnees interviewed in the case study countries.

Where possible and where consent was granted, interviews were audio recorded for quality auditing purposes. All interviewees in Zimbabwe and half of returnees in Pakistan declined to be recorded, and a few more interviews were not recorded due to technical failures. Two face-to-face interviews conducted in the UK with UK Border Agency representatives were also not recorded due to lack of facilities.

## Analytical framework

Manipulation of and sampling from the anonymised list of IOM clients was done using a MySQL database and Microsoft Excel. The questionnaire responses were entered into a website-accessible MySQL database for analysis, with custom-built analysis tools using PHP. Data were also downloaded into Excel spreadsheets for further analysis for more specific answers. The website was access protected with two log-ins required to access data for either data entry or analysis. Access was restricted to the external and specific UK Border Agency researchers.

## Appendix 3: Tables

**Table A1 Target (T) and sample achieved (A)**

VARRP stakeholder group	Interview location						Total	
	UK		Pakistan		Zimbabwe			
	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A
<b>VARRP providers</b>								
IOM officers	5	4	3	3	3	3	11	10
IOM partner NGOs	11	11	-	-	1	-	12	11
Other NGOs	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
UK Border Agency	5	5	-	-	-	-	5	5
<b>VARRP returnees</b>								
With reintegration assistance	-	-	15	28	20	20	35	48
Without reintegration assistance	-	-	8	-	1	-	9	-
<b>VARRP- eligible non-users</b>								
Applied but withdrew	5	5	-	-	-	-	5	5
Never applied*	5	7	5	9	5	10	15	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>105</b>

\* These included people who had returned to their country without VARRP assistance (nine to Pakistan and ten to Zimbabwe).

**Table A2 Sex of interviewees using or eligible for VARRP**

VARRP stakeholder group	Male	Female	Not recorded	Total
<b>VARRP returnees</b>				
Pakistan	22	6	-	28
Zimbabwe	10	10	-	20
<b>Returned without VARRP</b>				
Pakistan	8	1	-	9
Zimbabwe	7	3	-	10
<b>VARRP-eligible non-users in the UK</b>				
Applied but withdrew – still in the UK	5	0	-	5
Never applied – still in the UK	4	1	2	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>79</b>

**Table A3 Whether returnees went alone or with family members**

VARRP stakeholder group	Alone	With family	Not known	Total
VARRP returnees				
Pakistan	19	9	0	28
Zimbabwe	15	4	1	20
Returned without VARRP				
Pakistan	8	1	0	9
Zimbabwe	8	0	2	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>67</b>

**Table A4 'What are the reasons for people dropping out of VARRP?'**

Reason	Number of times mentioned by all interviewees except non-VARRP returnees*
Uncertain or unacceptable situation in home country	27
Suspicion of authorities in the UK	11
Level of assistance not enough	12
VARRP used as means for something else (e.g. Section 4)	10
Obtaining status in the UK	2
Rumours of amnesty	5
Other	13
No answer at all	24
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Total number of respondents</b>	<b>86</b>

\* Non-VARRP returnees were the 19 people eligible for but never having applied for VARRP who had returned to Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

**Table A5 'How do you think the number of people dropping out of VARRP can be reduced?'**

Suggestions	Number of times mentioned by VARRP providers
Support clients better	7
Change relationship with Section 4 support	5
Provide more financial assistance	4
Produce better information on country of return	4
Send stronger messages in respect of enforced return as the only other option	4
Guarantee security/conditions for returnees	2
Clearly communicate IOM's independence from HO	1
Carry out more outreach work	1
Focus on benefits in promoting VARRP	1
Improve the marketing of VARRP	1
Improve communication between HO departments	1
Make the initial decision making by Home Office faster	1
No reason to reduce, since VARRP is voluntary programme	1
No answer at all	4
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Total number of respondents</b>	<b>26</b>

**Table A6** *‘What were the positive things about coming back?’*

	Number of times mentioned by VARRP returnees	Number of times mentioned by non-VARRP returnees
Family reunion and commitments	38	14
Business or education opportunity	13	5
Relief from hardship in the UK	9	1
Better quality of life or cultural sensitivity	3	2
Nothing positive	4	2
No answer at all	1	
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Total number of respondents</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>19</b>

**Table A7** *‘Where do you see yourself in five years’ time (e.g. plans to remigrate, move within the country, etc.)?’*

	Number of VARRP returnees			Number of non-VARRP returnees		
	Zimbabwe	Pakistan	Total	Zimbabwe	Pakistan	Total
In country of return	6	10	16	7	0	7
In the UK	1	8	9	2	0	2
In another country	7	6	13	0	3	3
Don’t know/unsure	6	4	10	0	6	6
No answer	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total respondents</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>

**Table A8** *‘What was the best thing about the reintegration assistance you received?’*

Benefit	Number of VARRP returnees
Capital/money/business	28
New start	7
Other	4
Nothing	2
Family reunion	3
Quick/efficient	2
Education	2
<b>Total number of respondents</b>	<b>48</b>

**Table A9** *‘What is the main source of your income?’*

Main source of income	Number of VARRP returnees	Number of non-VARRP returnees
Single employment	13	7
VARRP reintegration assistance	8	0
Other	3	3
Subsistence farming	1	1
Support from family/friends	1	0
No answer	22	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>19</b>

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