

The Home Office introduced voluntary assisted return programmes in 1999. The programme that facilitates the return of those who have made an asylum application is called VARRP (Voluntary Assisted and Return and Reintegration Programme). VARRP is available to all current and failed asylum seekers of all nationalities. The programme is co-funded by the European Refugee Fund (ERF) and the Home Office, and since it was introduced in 1999 it has been operated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on behalf of the Home Office.

All of those who leave the UK under VARRP receive a package of help and assistance which includes advice and information for the returnee whilst they are still in the UK, help with obtaining travel documentation, an international flight, assistance and reception arrangements at the UK airport of departure and the destination airport and onward domestic transportation to the returnees final destination in the country of return. In addition returnees receive a package of 'in kind' reintegration assistance which helps to support the sustainability of the return. Depending on the facilities available in the country of return, and returnees personal preferences, IOM will provide the returnee with help in starting up a small business (supplies, equipment, payment of rent), vocational training courses, job placements or education.

Reintegration assistance was first introduced in 2002 when it was valued at £500; in 2005 it was increased to £1000. It is available to all returnees; in the case of a family it is available to each family member including children. Currently, the level of the reintegration assistance has been enhanced for all those who applied for asylum before 1st January 2006 and leave the UK under VARRP between 1st January and 31st December 2006. The enhancement has raised the £1000 of 'in' kind assistance to a package of £3000. This consists of an initial £500 cash grant which is either paid at the airport on departure or upon arrival in the country of return, £1000 of 'in kind' reintegration assistance and a further £1500 which the returnee can choose to take as either a series of phased cash payments or they can opt for additional in kind reintegration assistance.

In each of the calendar years from 1999 to 2005 the numbers of voluntary returns under the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) were as follows.

	VARRP
1999	48
2000	548
2001	1207
2002	1175
2003	2392
2004	2654
2005	3188

The numbers of returnees who have left under VARRP and who have also benefited from reintegration assistance by calendar year is as follows.

2002	38
2003	332
2004	727
2005	864

The cost of the VARRP programmes by programme year is as follows:

1999	£116,829.90
2000	£549,863.78
2001	£1,324,402
2002	£956,049.44
2003	£3,000,549.16
2004	£6,645,055
2005	£9,450,020 (budgeted costs, actual expenditure to be announced shortly)
TOTAL ESTIMATED COST TO 31/07/06	£22,042,767.28

In 2005 there were returns to over a hundred countries. There is a list of these countries available but I have only provided the top 10 nationalities, but should you require the full list please let me know and I will arrange for a hard copy to be sent. The numbers returned by nationality are as follows:

Iraq	768
Albania	509
Afghanistan	376
Sri Lanka	252
Iran	224
Kosova	168
Zimbabwe	103
Pakistan	82
Colombia	52
Angola	41

IND only centrally record information on those that have attempted to return to the UK since March 2003 and this is detailed below. Information concerning those that have attempted to return to the UK before March 2003 is not held in the format you have requested. To provide you with this information we would need to run a report detailing all individuals that have left the UK under VARRP in this time period and then look at each case individually to determine whether there is any evidence of their return or attempted return to the UK. Under the FOIA we are not required to do this to respond to a request.

2003	118	5%
2004	104	4%
2005	83	3%
2006 (January – August)	16	½%

Of those who have returned or attempted to return since March 2003, 42% were spouses of settled persons and were granted leave to remain or indefinite leave to remain, 13% were granted EEA residence cards as dependants of EU nationals, 10% had EEA Registration Certificates, 9% were illegal entrants or overstayers, 8% were refused leave to enter as visitors and 7% claimed asylum.

Reintegration assistance under VARRP can only be accessed by returnees on return to their country of origin. Under the enhanced scheme returnees also receive a £500 resettlement grant which is usually payable at the airport.

The number of people who have voluntarily returned to their country of origin under the programme and who have subsequently returned to the UK and again applied for voluntary return totals 10. The nationalities of the 10 are from Albania (4) Kosovo (3), Poland (1) and Nigeria (2). Out of the 10 there was only one case where the applicant returned under VARRP on both occasions and benefited from reintegration assistance worth £797 for a business set up when he first returned under VARRP. At no point has anyone received reintegration assistance on more than one occasion.

Since 1st August 2005, the eligibility criteria for VARRP exclude any applicant who has previously returned under VARRP and then reapplied for return under the programme on their return to the UK.