Global Conference on Cities&Migration, Mechelen, Belgium

In 2016, an estimated 54.5 per cent of the world’s population lived in urban settlements. By 2030, urban areas are projected to house 60 per cent of people globally and one in every three people will live in cities with at least half a million inhabitants, turning much of the world into a global city (Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)).

150 representatives from Local Authorities and Associations and Networks of Local Authorities, UN agencies, foundations and the private sector have gathered on the 16th and 17th of November in Mechelen, Belgium, to let their voices be heard in order to promote a more positive narrative on migration in view of the Global Compact For Migration.

The discussions resulted in the Mechelen Declaration on Cities and Migration.

The conference was hosted by Diplomatie.Belgium and Stad Mechelen and co-organized by UN-HABITAT, IOM - UN Migration Agency and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

More information

ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) August 2017 – January 2018

From Belgium

From August to December 2017, IOM facilitated 1383 returns to 72 different countries, a small decrease compared to the same reference period in 2016. Out of these departures, 373 cases received reintegration support from IOM with Iraq, Georgia and Albania as top destination countries.

In 2017, IOM facilitated 3.670 returns to 92 different countries with Ukraine, Romania and Iraq as top destination countries. Out of these departures, 988 persons received reintegration support from IOM with Iraq, Albania, Georgia, Ukraine and Afghanistan as the main destination countries.

In January 2018, 201 persons returned to their countries of origin. The main destinations were: Ukraine, Georgia and Iraq.

While the general number of AVRR is lower than in previous years, IOM noticed an increase of requests for vulnerable cases to benefit from the AVRR programme, i.e. more requests from migrants with health concerns, Unaccompanied Migrant Children (UMC) and Victims of Trafficking (VoT). In order to respond to counseling needs, IOM increased its external counseling capacities and presence in the field.
From Luxembourg

IOM facilitated 33 returns between August and December 2017. Beneficiaries during that period were mainly from Kosovo, Iraq and Morocco. Furthermore, 15 of the returnees were eligible to reintegration assistance and one returnee benefitted from social escort assistance from the airport of departure to family handover point. In total, 4 returnees were identified as vulnerable during that period.

In January 2018, 9 persons returned to their countries of origin. The main destinations were: Kosovo (7), Georgia (1) and Philippines (1).

Job placement: group sessions and individual support with training and employment

Under the Job Placement activity, IOM missions in Armenia, Georgia and the Russian Federation provide additional job counselling to returnees and help them to look for long-term reintegration opportunities in their country of origin. In 2017, 58 persons were assisted and received detailed information on training opportunities, skills development, CV drafting, job interview skills, start self-employment scheme, etc.

In October, IOM Georgia and IOM Armenia organized a group session for returnees from Belgium. In Georgia the training was supported by a career development specialist from the state employment agency, while in Armenia the IOM Micro-Enterprise Development specialist provided training on employment and self-employment opportunities. In the Russian Federation, additional micro-business development trainings with a business consultant are planned for the beginning of 2018 in Grozny and Nazra.

More information on Job Placement

Administrative Assistance in the Balkans

IOM, in partnership with Fedasil and Caritas, implements an activity dedicated to migrant candidates from the Balkan countries. The main objective of the Administrative Assistance is to further support returnees in the various steps of the registration. The administrative assistance has been particularly relevant for vulnerable cases or families away from their country for a long time. In 2017 IOM has assisted 30 cases in Kosovo (UNSC-1244), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia (FYROM) and Serbia. In order to evaluate the assistance and to better understand the reality, IOM Brussels and Fedasil also organized a monitoring mission to Kosovo (UNSC-1244) in September 2017.

More information on Administrative Assistance

Assistance to Victims of Trafficking (VoT)

In 2017, IOM Belgium was involved in the support to VoTs, in particular within the AVRR programme. 11 people decided to return to their countries of origin with IOM support. 10 of them were entitled to reintegration support in their country of return; Iraq, Nigeria, Hungary and Indonesia. All these beneficiaries could benefit from the assistance from an escort, received arrival assistance and onward transportation from IOM (when requested), and were later referred to local NGOs and/or social welfare. IOM also supported the return of 7 UMC VoTs. Their countries of destination are Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Serbia.

These specific returns are organized in close cooperation with IOM partners from the AVRR network (Payoke, Pag-Asa, Surya, Esperanto, and others) and the IOM mission in the country of return. This cooperation and close coordination is crucial in order to ensure the protection and safety of the beneficiaries. The individualized approach and the respect of confidentiality are also key.

In some countries of return, beneficiaries can benefit from specific reintegration projects for VoTs—on top of the Belgian AVRR support. These projects are coordinated by IOM, in cooperation with local NGO and State partners.
Return of Unaccompanied Minor Children (UMC)

In 2017, IOM Belgium assisted 38 UMCs, UMCs Victim of Trafficking and ex-UMCs to return voluntarily to their home country. Out of the 38 children and youngsters that returned, 25 were boys and 13 were girls. 7 beneficiaries were aged-out minors. More than one third of them returned to Albania (14) and 33 were assisted through IOM reintegration support after return. An increase in the number of returns of UMC (and VoT) and ex-UMC can clearly be seen since 2016 (34 returns, while 19 returns in 2014 and 21 in 2015), with Albania being in the top 3 of countries of return since 2015. Therefore, a monitoring mission took place together with Fedasil in Albania from 6 to 10 November, with a special focus on UMCs. More information on the mission.

Return of migrants with heavy medical needs

In 2017, IOM Belgium has assisted 38 migrants with heavy medical needs with return to their home country. From these cases, 12 were assisted with medical escort, 17 with a social escort and 4 with both medical and social escorts. When organizing such returns, IOM makes sure the assistance is in line with international standards to assure the well-being of migrants before their departure, during the travel and to foresee adequate support after arrival. From the departed persons, 11 persons benefitted from a top-up medical reintegration assistance (Adapted Medical Assistance After Return – AMAAR) to ensure the coverage of medical needs for the first months while safeguarding the reintegration budget for socio-economic reintegration.

AVRR partner meeting

The AVRR partner meeting, that took place on 8 December, gave IOM and its voluntary return partners the opportunity to discuss the AVRR trends and developments, to exchange ideas, thoughts and questions.

The morning started with IOM, Caritas and Fedasil presenting the developments within the AVRR programme followed by an introduction to the ‘Conex’-project by Fedasil. Thematic sessions were then organized in three working groups. The first group focused on “AVRR and guidance of people with medical needs”. A second group discussed “Sustainable return with a community approach”. The third group informed on “AVRR of families with children”.

Have a look at the pictures

Info sessions on Voluntary Return

In the last months of 2017, IOM participated in various info sessions on voluntary return organized by Fedasil in Antwerp, Charleroi and Liège, targeting multiple participants from the social network and public authorities in the regions. The aim of these meetings was to give general information on the AVRR programme, and to focus through workshop sessions on the specific approaches for vulnerable groups (families with children and migrants with a significant medical condition) and on other specific subjects such as return in a post-conflict environment (Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia). Each meeting included fruitful exchanges with the attendees.

IOM and Fedasil also organized various information sessions for the Fedasil staff in the Return Desks. The objective of these sessions was mainly to inform about the projects Adapted Medical Assistance After Return (AMAAR), Job Placement, Administrative Assistance, Reintegration Morocco (REMA) and the Barka foundation. In another session, IOM explained on the operational and counseling challenges during assistance of AVRR cases by presenting role plays to the participants. These exchanges on recognizable situations allowed participants to share experiences and best practices in an informal way.
ASSISTED MOVEMENT OPERATIONS

Relocation assistance

The EU relocation scheme is an expression of internal EU solidarity, through which people in need of international protection are transferred from Greece and Italy to another member state of relocation.

**To Belgium**

The EU relocation scheme has been extended until March 2018. Belgium relocated 908 asylum seekers in 2017 of which 523 came from Greece and 385 from Italy. IOM Brussels provides arrival assistance to all the beneficiaries arriving in Belgium; we welcome them at the airport, provide them a lunch package and arrange their local transportation within Belgium.

In January 2018, Belgium relocated 51 asylum seekers from Italy.

**To Luxembourg**

Between August and December 2017, IOM facilitated the relocation of 222 asylum seekers to Luxembourg; 84 of whom departed from Greece and 138 from Italy. For each individual case, IOM Luxembourg was present at the Findel Airport of Luxembourg to provide assistance to relocated migrants upon arrival.

Resettlement Assistance

**To Belgium**

In 2017, Belgium welcomed 1309 refugees in the frame of the resettlement project, the highest number since the start of the project in 2013. The majority concerned are Syrian refugees; 721 from Turkey, 299 from Lebanon, 156 from Jordan and 15 from Iraq. Belgium also welcomed 118 Congolese refugees from Uganda. IOM facilitates the selection and pre-departure orientation missions for the Belgian government and carries out pre-departure health assessments and possible referrals or stabilization treatments. IOM further organizes the domestic and international travel and provides assistance at the airports upon departure, transit and arrival.

In January 2018, Belgium welcomed 34 Congolese refugees from Uganda.

**To Luxembourg**

IOM also facilitated the movement of 110 refugees resettled from Turkey to Luxembourg. IOM’s assistance was mainly operational and logistical. IOM organized the resettlement selection missions and assisted in flight bookings, provided airport assistance and conducted fit-to-travel checks pre-departure.

More information on Resettlement to [Belgium/Luxembourg](#)

Skills Assessment Pilot

IOM Luxembourg is implementing a Skills Assessment pilot project. The project, which seeks to encourage labor market integration, comprises two principal strands: the production of an informational video as communication material as well as the organization of orientation sessions, both addressed to asylum seekers.

The didactic video is a 90 seconds long animation in which asylum-seekers are informed on the general aspects of the Luxembourgish procedure with regards to labor market access, and aims to simultaneously encourage its audience to start learning one of the three official languages in Luxembourg right from the start, before being granted refugee status. The orientation sessions sought to inform asylum seekers on the labour-market integration procedure, while also underlining the importance of acquiring an official language in their host country, as soon as possible. These sessions also provided a free space for target beneficiaries to communicate their most pressing needs as far as labor integration is concerned.

From September to December 2017, 45 relocated asylum seekers from Italy and Greece (mainly from Syria, Iraq and Eritrea) benefitted from the project.

Have a look at the didactic videos [Arabic/Tingrina](#)
Family Assessment of Unaccompanied Migrant Children (UMC)

Since 1 October 2017, IOM Luxembourg started implementing a Family Assessment pilot project at the request of the Ministry of Foreign and European affairs in Luxembourg. The project seeks to conduct family tracing and family assessments of UMCs’ respective family members in UMCs’ country of origin/former place of residence. These assessments seek to examine UMC’s context of origin including conditions of living, infrastructure, reasons for leaving as well as family ties. The assessments simultaneously serves in determining the most durable solution for UMCs and in the best interest of the child, including but not limited to Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR). The project is highly dependent on thorough collaborations with IOM colleagues working in UMCs’ countries of Origin. Top country of origin of concerned UMCs in Luxembourg are: Albania, Guinea and the Maghrebin countries. The foreseen end-date of this pilot project is 30th of September 2018 and it is funded by Luxembourg’s Ministry of Foreign and European affairs.

Family Reunification to Belgium

In 2017, IOM Belgium assisted 225 persons in organizing their travel in the frame of family reunification. A high increase in the number of cases handled compared to last year (+85%) should be noticed. The main countries of origin were Afghanistan (171 persons), Uganda (15 persons) and Kenya (9 persons).

Amongst these persons assisted was the wife and 8 children of Mr Afzali (picture). Mr Afzali arrived in Belgium in July 2015. After receiving a refugee status his family could introduce the request for family reunification. The family went to Islamabad in Pakistan to introduce the request at the Belgian embassy and had to undergo DNA tests. Worried for his wife and children to make the journey on their own – while not being used to travel and only speaking Dari – a social assistant advised Mr Afzali to contact IOM

A colleague of IOM Kabul met with Mr Afzali’s family to check if they were travel ready and to discuss the formalities. The family was assisted through check in and immigration, during transit and at Brussels airport, an IOM staff member awaited the family at the gate and assisted.

IOM in Brussels went to visit the family a few months after their arrival to see how they were doing. The family is dealing with the difficulties to adapt themselves to their new life, new culture and new norms and values. Belgium is now the country of their children. After 2 years of waiting, ongoing stress, living in different reception facilities and being separated; they are all reunited under the same roof.

More information

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Improving Mental Health in Burundi

With the support of the Belgian Development Cooperation, IOM Burundi, IOM Belgium and Burundi’s National Institute of Public Health (INSP) are implementing since Mid-August 2017 a small-scale project that aims to improve access to mental health services in Burundi by strengthening the capacities of the INSP and pursuing the training of psychiatric nurses registered in the 2nd and 3rd years of INSP’s program of mental health and psychiatry. Since the expertise is currently not available in Burundi, the trainings are carried out by medical experts of the Burundian diaspora. Other activities of the project include identification of practical residencies for psychiatric nurses in hospitals and health centers, the organization of a study trip to Senegal (to identify good practices in the mental health structure) and the realization of a short documentary on the state of mental health care in the country.
Promoting engagement of Guinean diaspora

With the support of the Belgian Development Cooperation, IOM in Belgium and Guinea, in partnership with the Guinean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Guineans Abroad (MAEGE) and the Agency for the Promotion of Private Investments (APIP). A pilot project, to support the link between Guinean diaspora in Belgium and their country of origin, is implemented. In October, IOM Guinea organized a four-day capacity-building training for representatives of the DGE, the MAEGE and other ministries. The training on migration and development and diaspora involvement was delivered to the current Director-General of the Directorate for Senegalese Abroad.

A mission of IOM Guinea, MAEGE and APIP came to Belgium in November to meet representatives of the Guinean community and diaspora. Two meetings were held, both attended by the Guinean Embassy in Brussels and the Deputy Director of Guineans Abroad. IOM Guinea presented the project’s main activities and the two partners (DGE & APIP) presented their structures and the services they are providing to the diaspora to support their involvement for Guinea.

Supporting sustainable land management and improving livelihood in Burkina Faso

The Center-East region of Burkina Faso is touched by a high rate of emigration due to poor living conditions. In order to address this high rate and improve the living conditions, IOM Burkina Faso has been implementing a project addressing land degradation and better access to water, thanks to the Belgian Development Cooperation. A number of selected farmers, in coordination with local partners, are working on a 30 hectares field to recover the degraded land. The farmers were trained on various techniques such as the creation of stone barriers, permeable dams, manure pits and compost.

Furthermore in partnership with a local Italian NGO, another 6 hectares field has been identified that will serve as a multifunctional perimeter for the diversification of agriculture and organic farming. A third ongoing activity is the support to a women’s group by training them on the transformation of leaves and seeds of the «neemier». A tree, originating from Asia, that has antibacterial and antiviral properties and its leaves and seeds can be transformed into oil, soap and natural pesticide.

Improving social protection rights of Cameroonian workers

In the framework of ‘Strengthening the Capacities of Local Institutions in Cameroon to Expand the Social Security to include Cameroonian Migrant Workers Living in Belgium’, IOM Cameroon organized a mission to Brussels at the end of November 2017. The mission aimed at presenting the outcomes of the report on social security rights of Cameroonian workers in Belgium.

The presented study contributes to a feasibility study related to a bilateral agreement between Belgium and Cameroon on the transferability of social security benefits. The delegation was composed by representatives of IOM Cameroon, of the Ministry of External Relations and of the National Social Security Office. The mission included meetings with representatives of the International Office of the SPF Sécurité Sociale, the Belgian International Cooperation on Social Protection (BELINCOSOC), the National Office for Social Security (ONSS) and IOM Belgium’s Country Office. A final event with diaspora members and associations took place on Saturday December 3rd, where the final report was presented.
INTEGRATION

Celebrating Outputs at the Skills2Work closing Event

On 29 and 30 November, IOM, together with project partners, hosted the Skills2Work Project’s closing event in Brussels. The event was attended by over 70 guests from various organizations based in the nine participating Member States.

Guest shared their good practices, unique perspectives, challenges, and ideas regarding the integration process with the audience through presentations and a ‘market place’ networking event. The event also saw the official launch of the Skills2Work promotional film and the success stories booklet that highlights the perceptions of employers and refugees in European labour markets.

The Skills2Work project was launched in January 2016, and will conclude at the end of February 2018. More information on the project.

VISIBILITY AND EVENTS

International Migrants Day & Global Migration Film Festival

On the occasion of the International Migrants Day, IOM took part on 18 December in a joint movie screening ‘Stranger in Paradise’, with CINE-ONU and the Government of Flanders, as part of the IOM’s Global Migration Film Festival. The screening was held in Cinema ZED, Leuven, and followed by a festive reception. More information on this event.

Consular Day on Return

On 21 and 22 September 2017, IOM Luxembourg participated at the Consular Day organized by Luxembourgish’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs during which IOM presented its AVRR Luxembourg programme to various embassy representatives, the Luxembourgish Red Cross, Frontex representatives and other experts in the return thematic. It was the opportunity for IOM Luxembourg to further strengthen its liaison with various embassies and relevant stakeholders in the field.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Labour migration

With the support of the Belgian Government and in coordination with various Tunisian partners, IOM will start in March the project “Enhancing Tunisian Youth Employability Through Vocational Apprenticeships and Professional Internships in Belgium and Tunisia”. The high rate of unemployment in Tunisia, especially among young graduates, is one of the main challenges to be addressed by the Tunisian government, contributing to internal instability and at the same time acting as a strong driving factor of regular and irregular migration towards Europe. Through this project, IOM aims at strengthening governmental efforts by supporting Tunisian youth’s employability and skills enhancement through the provision of apprenticeships and internships in Belgium and Tunisia to selected beneficiaries, in order to build their skills and consequently increase their chances to find an adequate job or to create their own. The beneficiaries will spend six months in Belgium doing an internship or an apprenticeship to strengthen their skills before heading back to Tunisia. Upon their return they will receive five-month support for the identification of an internship, job placement, or start of their own business. IOM will ensure proper continuity of the project with its expertise in the field and its long-standing presence in both countries.

Contributing to evidence-based migration and diaspora policies in Rwanda

Thanks to the support of the Belgian Development Cooperation, IOM Belgium will soon start a mapping exercise of the Rwandan diaspora in Belgium. As output of the project Migration Profile in Rwanda, the diaspora mapping report will contribute to IOM’s efforts to build the capacity of the Rwandan Government to develop a diaspora engagement strategy for development.
The IOM’s Migrant App (MigApp) was launched on International Migrants Day, 18 December. The MigApp is an application which can be downloaded into any mobile device (via Google play & App Store) and which offers migrants a secure, user-friendly, one-stop-shop platform where they can directly access relevant migration information and services relevant to their specific migration process (travel requirements and regulations, money transfer, health guidelines, etc.). We invite you all to download the MigApp and to send your feedback on the application to IOMBrusselsCOCommunications@iom.int.

More information on the MigApp and watch this video.

Interesting IOM Publications

- World Migration Report 2018
- More than numbers - How migration data can deliver real-life benefits for migrants and governments
- Migration Research Leaders’ Syndicate
- Fatal Journeys Volume 3 (Part 1 / Part 2)
- Migration Initiatives 2018

For more information, contact the IOM Country Office for Belgium and Luxembourg’s Communications team here.

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