RETURN FROM THE NETHERLANDS AND REINTEGRATION OF (REJECTED) ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM THE SOUTHERN CAUCASIAN STATES, BELARUS, THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND UKRAINE

RESEARCH REPORT

August 2003

PAULUSKERK

IOM Internationale Organisatie voor Migratie

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental body, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

The project as coordinated and implemented by IOM and the Pauluskerk in the Netherlands was financed by the European Refugee Fund of the European Commission and the Netherlands Ministry of Justice.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

IOM The Hague wishes to acknowledge the very constructive partnership with the “Pauluskerk” in Rotterdam in devising and implementing this research project.

IOM The Hague also extends its gratitude to the Assisted Voluntary Return Service Area and the Research and Publication Unit of IOM Geneva for their very helpful assistance. Jana Barthel of IOM Berlin performed the data entry and analysis of the study and Marc Hulst of IOM Tbilisi wrote the research report.

For the generous financial assistance IOM wishes to thank the European Refugee Fund of the European Commission and the Ministry of Justice of the Netherlands.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Union (EU) is currently moving towards a common asylum policy for all member states, acknowledging that abuse of asylum procedures is on the rise. The EU has outlined three major priorities for this common asylum policy, of which the most relevant for this study is to safeguard the credibility of the asylum system by returning people who no longer need international protection and have no other grounds for residing legally. Relatively little research has been published on European states' experiences in managing the return of rejected asylum seekers, despite the importance of an effective return policy for migration management.

Nonetheless, it is evident that most EU Governments, including the Netherlands, are struggling with the issue of how to facilitate the return of unsuccessful asylum seekers. In response to these challenges, a number of European states have in recent years demonstrated a willingness to adopt more innovative approaches to return. These measures include greater use of assisted voluntary return (AVR) options and in some cases the provision of limited reintegration and/or pre-departure assistance as an incentive to return. The Government of the Netherlands operates the voluntary return programme called "Return and Emigration of Aliens from the Netherlands (REAN)". IOM is involved as partner of the government to make arrangements for the voluntary return travel and the initial period after resettlement in the country of origin.

The mission of IOM in the Netherlands implemented the project of the return and reintegration of rejected asylum seekers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine in close cooperation with the "Pauluskerk". This is a non-governmental organization in Rotterdam that provides humanitarian assistance to people in need, including asylum seekers and irregular migrants. The aims of the project were to facilitate an increased number of sustainable returns of rejected asylum seekers and focus on particular needs of migrants who suffer from drug addiction and/or psycho-social problems. The purpose of the project was to offer increased assistance aimed at the facilitation of return of the target group and conduct research to get a better understanding of the migration behaviour of the target group and the possible ways available to enhance the sustainability of voluntary return to their countries of origin.

The number of asylum claims by citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine in the Netherlands is sharply on the decline, which reflects the general trend of decreasing asylum applications in the Netherlands in particular and in Europe overall. Citizens of the six source countries have recently been applying for asylum in Europe in smaller numbers, but in the Netherlands this decline started one or two years earlier than on average elsewhere in Europe. In contrast to decreasing asylum claims, the general trend of return from the Netherlands to the six source countries is still on the increase, both in terms of assisted voluntary return under the REAN programme and forced returns.

The prime research instrument consisted of an in-depth interview conducted with 173 migrants that were eligible for receiving assistance under the scope of the project. Among them were 149 asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers as well as 24 irregular migrants. The majority of the

sample consisted of men under the age of 40, predominantly from Ukraine, Georgia and Russia. During the project implementation period 43 (rejected) asylum seekers and 108 irregular migrants returned to their countries of origin with the assistance of IOM-"Pauluskerk". Though successful in addressing a number of important issues, the research encountered a relatively low number of (unsuccessful) asylum seekers that addressed the project office in Rotterdam for assistance provided under the project and participation in the research.

The pre-migration situation of the respondents in terms of socio-economic position, housing and health was on average not particularly negative, underlining the fact that economic reasons were only secondary factors in the decision-making process of the respondents to migrate abroad. The prime reason to go abroad was related to persecution in the home country. Many respondents had entered the Netherlands without official travel documents and had been smuggled across one or more borders on their way into the Schengen area. For many respondents the decision to travel to the Netherlands was not based on a determined choice. The influence of the advice and decisions made by visa brokers, smugglers and family members abroad was quite significant.

During their stay in the Netherlands the hopes of many respondents of building their lives in the Netherlands were dashed by the usually negative reaction of the Dutch immigration authorities to their asylum claims. Many respondents were uncertain about their future and some were affected by psychological problems, such as stress and spells of bad nerves. Only a few respondents reported having problems with drug addiction.

The sample was divided over how they viewed their future. Some were sure that their only option left was to return to their countries of origin, either because they did not want to extend their stay in the Netherlands on an illegal basis or had a strong desire to return without any further conditions. The return was for many however not a simple option: many noted that upon coming home they were expecting problems of financial and economic nature as well as problems related to the persecution they had suffered before. For that reason many respondents indicated that they would appreciate assistance in accomplishing their return, mostly in the form of financing their way back, but a number also mentioned concrete help that would facilitate their reintegration and sustain their return. Other respondents declined to consider the option of return and depicted their future either in terms of prolonged stay in the Netherlands or a move to a third country.

The research has delivered useful insights into the differences between asylum seekers and irregular migrants as regards their migration behaviour in general and their plans concerning return and reintegration assistance in particular. The study suggests that the will to return among irregular migrants is greater than among (rejected) asylum seekers, who foresee in general more problems upon return and are for that reason reluctant to consider the option of going back home. Asylum seekers indicated in general a greater need of various types of reintegration assistance, such as job counselling, health assistance, psychological aid and help in finding adequate housing. Irregular migrants expressed a particular interest in economic reintegration assistance and were much less interested in other types of assistance.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background and aims of the study

The European Union (EU) is currently moving towards a common asylum policy for all member states, acknowledging that abuse of asylum procedures is on the rise. Migration flows of asylum seekers are often maintained by smuggling practices involving both people with a legitimate need for international protection and migrants using asylum procedures to gain access to destination countries to improve their economic position. The number of negative decisions after examination of needs for international protection remains significant and the pressure on immigration authorities in dealing with the large number of claims is considerable. The EU has outlined three major priorities of the common asylum policy, of which the most relevant for this study is to safeguard the credibility of the asylum system by returning people who no longer need international protection and have no other grounds for residing legally. The EU gives priority to voluntary returns and has indicated the will to establish a policy of 'integrated returns' with particular attention to the sustainability of these returns (Commission of the European Communities, 2002; 2003).

Relatively little research has been published on European states' experiences in managing the return of rejected asylum seekers, despite the importance of an effective return policy for migration management. Recently IOM has taken the lead in publishing a number of studies that focused both on countries of destination and countries of origin of asylum seekers (for example IOM 2002b; IOM 2003a; Koser, 2001). IOM continues to assist States to find ways to improve the sustainability of voluntary returns of unsuccessful asylum seekers and irregular migrants[1], making sure that they can return to their countries of origin in a dignified and orderly manner.

Nonetheless, it is evident that most EU Governments, including the Netherlands, are struggling with the issue of how to facilitate the return of unsuccessful asylum seekers. Many of the obstacles to return are well known (see for example Ghosh, 2000). Migrants may disappear before they can be returned or they may have no documents making it difficult for the authorities to identify them, and to know which country they should be returned to. Countries of origin may for economic or other reasons not wish to cooperate in the return of their own citizens. Although return is often seen simply as a matter of removing the migrant concerned from a given territory, other problems may arise if the return is not sustainable. Many returnees, especially those subject to removal, simply re-migrate back to the country from which they were returned or to any third country for that matter.

In response to these challenges, a number of European states have in recent years demonstrated a willingness to adopt more innovative approaches to return. These measures include greater use of assisted voluntary return (AVR) options and in some cases the provision of limited reintegration and/or pre-departure assistance as an incentive to return. Governments recognize that AVR can

[1] IOM applies the term 'irregular migrants' as referring to migrants who enter and reside in foreign countries without documents validating their stay and/or professional occupation.

be a more humane and cost-effective alternative to deportation and a means of strengthening the integrity of regular asylum and immigration programmes. It can also support co-operative efforts among countries of origin, transit and destination in managing migration jointly (IOM, 2003a).

The Government of the Netherlands operate the programme "**Return and Emigration of Aliens from the Netherlands (REAN**)". IOM is involved as partner of the government to make arrangements for the voluntary return travel and the initial period after resettlement in the country of origin. The eligibility criteria of the REAN programme are applied as follows:

- The applicant is not a national of a European Union member state;
- The applicant intended to take up residence in the Netherlands;
- The applicant is not (yet) or no longer a holder of a residence permit;
- The applicant is not able to pay for the travel costs him/herself;
- The Aliens Office has not yet arranged deportation;
- The applicant has a valid travel document (passport or laissez-passer).

Following from the above, the REAN programme targets both asylum seekers and irregular migrants, that is people who reside in the Netherlands on an irregular basis and have not applied for asylum.

The mission of IOM in the Netherlands[2] implemented the project of the return and reintegration of rejected asylum seekers from the South Caucasus[3], Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in close cooperation with the "Pauluskerk", a non-governmental organization in Rotterdam that provides humanitarian assistance to people in need. This church initially provided help to local drug addicts, but later expanded its services also to drug addicts from other countries and homeless aliens, among which are many asylum seekers and irregular migrants. Over the years the "Pauluskerk" has built up an extremely useful experience in providing services to asylum seekers and irregular migrants, in particular to those coming from former Soviet Union countries.[4]

The aims and objectives of the project were formulated as follows:

a) to facilitate sustainable returns of rejected asylum seekers through profiling, improved counselling, targeted information gathering and actual return assistance;
b) to facilitate increased numbers of returns through improved counselling and targeted return and reintegration assistance;
c) to focus on particular needs of migrants who suffer from drug addiction and/or psycho-social problems.

The project was a combination of offering increased assistance aimed at the facilitation of return of the target group and research to get a better understanding of the migration behaviour of the target group and the possible ways available to enhance the sustainability of voluntary return to their countries of origin. This report focuses primarily on the results of research as implemented in the Netherlands among nationals of six countries of origin of asylum seekers, that is Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine (hereinafter referred to as the 'six source countries').

[2] More information on IOM's operations in the Netherlands is available on http://www.iom-nederland.nl
[3] The South Caucasus countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.
[4] The website of the "Pauluskerk" ('St. Paul's Church') is accessible through http://www.xs4all.nl/~ksa

The target group of the research consisted of asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers from the six source countries present in the greater Rotterdam region (known as "Rijnmond") and who applied for assistance from either IOM or the "Pauluskerk". The scope of the project did not include irregular migrants, although these are also eligible for assistance from IOM through the REAN programme and are regular beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance from the "Pauluskerk".

The project originally set the following targets for the various activities to be implemented:

- Number of interviews: 300. This target number was decreased during the course of the project to 175 interviews;
- Counselling: 200 sessions;
- Assistance in actual return: up to 150 (unsuccessful) asylum seekers were expected to return, but this target was later decreased to 40 returns. As a matter of fact, 43 asylum seekers did return to their countries of origin during the project implementation;
- Facilitate contact with country of origin: initially targeted for 50 beneficiaries, but later increased to 120 beneficiaries due to the large interest in this service;
- Temporary shelter: originally scheduled for 50 beneficiaries during the project implementation period, but later decreased to 15 persons because the need for temporary shelter was not as large as originally previewed.

2.2 General trends of migration from the target countries to the Netherlands

Ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the opening up of the borders of its 15 constituent republics, the Netherlands has been an important destination country for migrants from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine. This report will primarily focus on migration by asylum seekers and irregular migration and not so much on regular migration types, such as official marriages and family reunification.

Trends in migration by asylum seekers to the Netherlands

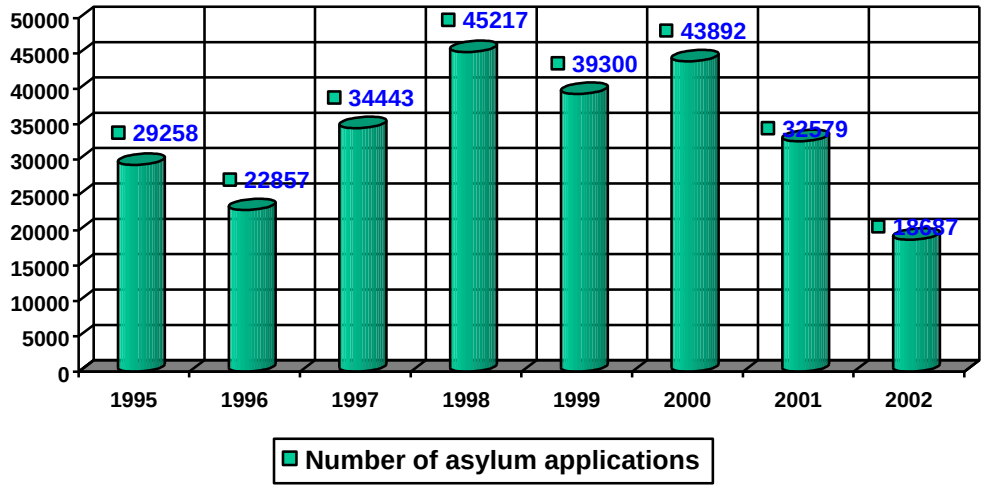
Table 1 shows the trends of asylum requests from 1998 until March 2003. It is striking that over the last five-and-a-half years Azerbaijan is the major source country of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. This is mainly due to a sudden large influx in 1999 that did however not sustain for a long time after. Other important source countries are Russia, which is quite logical due to its sheer size, Armenia, which is known for a structural trend of emigration movements, and Georgia, which compares to Armenia though to a lesser extent. Ukraine and Belarus have not been significant countries of origin, especially when comparing the number of asylum seekers to the size of the population of these countries. Ukraine is however an important source country of irregular migrants in the Netherlands, as is demonstrated in section 2.3.

Table 1 – Number of asylum applications in the Netherlands by citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, 1998 – March 2003 (Ministry of Justice, 2003b)

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Russia	Ukraine	Total/year
1998	711	1,268	25	290	518	227	3,039
1999	1,249	2,449	40	321	960	306	5,325
2000	812	1,163	113	291	1,016	218	3,613
2001	529	634	115	298	911	191	2,678
2002	427	335	131	219	420	156	1,688
2003	57	49	14	30	68	20	238
Total	3,785	5,898	438	1,449	3,893	1,118	16,581

These figures coincide to a large extent with the general trend of decreasing asylum requests lodged by all citizens from non-EU member states in the Netherlands, as demonstrated in Chart 1.

Chart 1 – Total number of asylum applications lodged in the Netherlands by citizens of non-EU member states, 1995 – March 2003 (UNHCR, 2000/2001/2002/2003)



It is generally assumed that the declining number of asylum applications in the Netherlands is related to the new immigration law adopted just before the turn of the century, applying stricter criteria to judge asylum claims and in general limiting the opportunities for legal stay of aliens.

Another interesting development is that the decrease of asylum applications in the period 1999-2002 by citizens of the six source countries in the Netherlands is higher than the average decrease of all asylum applications as illustrated in Chart 1. The 2002 number for the six source countries makes up only 31.6 per cent of the 1999 total, whereas the same ratio stands at 47.5 per cent for the overall population of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. It is well known that asylum seekers usually target countries that they perceive as having lenient immigration laws and for that reason migration flows of asylum claimants are often characterized by sudden changes in destinations. The Netherlands have obviously lost a great deal of its status of attractive country for migrants to lodge an asylum claim, in particular, it appears, for those from the six countries of origin.

Table 2 presents the total number of asylum applications lodged by citizens from the six source countries in Europe, which gives an indication of the general flow of asylum seekers from the six countries concerned.

Table 2 – Number of asylum claims by citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine lodged in Europe, 1998 – March 2003 (UNHCR, 2000/2001/2002/2003 & IGC, 2003)

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Russia	Ukraine	Total/year
1998	5,278	3,138	704	4,083	5,752	2,104	21,059
1999	8,645	6,036	1,876	3,422	11,495	3,662	35,136
2000	8,587	4,542	2,721	3,904	18,930	6,217	44,901
2001	8,610	3,312	2,327	6,267	18,263	10,558	49,337
2002	8,144	3,968	3,081	8,254	19,960	7,291	50,698
2003	755	749	754	1,270	4,106	1,091	8,725
Total	40,019	21,745	11,463	27,200	78,506	30,923	209,856

These figures show a general trend of increasing applications until 2001 and for some countries (Georgia and Russia) even into 2002, but recently the number of applications appears to be on the decline. This is valid in particular for Armenia, and to a lesser extent Georgia and Ukraine as well. Asylum applications, however, tend to be susceptible to seasonal changes, with flows increasing in the spring and summer, and therefore no sound prognosis can be made for the year 2003 on the basis of the decreased number of requests during the first quarter.

These statistics underline that the decline in asylum claims in the Netherlands from the six source countries started one or two years earlier (basically in 2000) than in other countries in Europe. This is most probably a reflection of a general trend in the Netherlands of stricter and more consistent rules for judging asylum claims as well as quicker handling of the cases, which for obvious reasons discourage potential asylum seekers to lodge a claim in the Netherlands.

Comparing these Europe-wide statistics (Table 2) to the number of asylum applications lodged by citizens of the six source countries in the Netherlands (Table 1) the following picture emerges:

Table 3 – Share of the number of asylum applications lodged in the Netherlands as part of the total number of asylum applications in Europe filed by citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, 1998 – March 2003

Armenia	9.46 %
Azerbaijan	27.12 %
Belarus	3.82 %
Georgia	5.33 %
Russia	4.96 %
Ukraine	3.62 %
AVERAGE	7.9 %

These shares speak for the relatively small importance of the Netherlands as destination country of asylum seekers from the six source countries, except in the case of Azerbaijan and to a much

lesser extent Armenia. The major destination country, although with certain fluctuations over the years, has always been Germany, whereas a number of other destinations have recently been on the increase, such as Scandinavian countries, Central European countries, in particular the Czech Republic and Austria, as well as North America.

Trends of irregular migration

Figures measuring other trends of migration to the Netherlands, including migrants travelling there to overstay their visas and work on an illegal basis, are inevitably harder to come by due to the illicit nature of their entry and stay. The Netherlands authorities do not collect official statistics or estimations of the number of illegal aliens present at the territory of the Netherlands. For that reason this report can not present a comparison between the numbers of asylum seekers and irregular migrants from the source countries present in the Netherlands. The only indicative statistics available to measure the flow of irregular migrants are the numbers of return by this category of migrants as arranged by IOM. The following section presents these return trends in further detail.

2.3 General trends of return of the target group from the Netherlands

This section deals with two kinds of returns from the Netherlands to the countries of origin, namely Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR), as arranged by IOM through the REAN programme, and forced returns. No data are available on spontaneous returns, referring to migrants returning or leaving the territory of the Netherlands on their own initiative and volition without asking for assistance from IOM or under pressure from an order by immigration authorities to leave the country.

Table 4 – Total number of persons returned with AVR/REAN assistance from the Netherlands to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, 1999 – June 2003 (IOM, 2003b)

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Russia	Ukraine	Total/year
1999	15	1	4	5	22	8	55
2000	54	9	-	20	36	11	130
2001	30	5	9	15	70	28	157
2002	56	21	16	24	66	86	269
2003	38	10	6	6	52	75	187
Total	193	46	35	70	246	208	798

These figures clearly demonstrate an upward trend in assisted voluntary returns from the Netherlands back to the six countries of origin. This number has been on the rise since 1999 and it looks like the figures for 2003 will surpass the numbers of the previous years. A possible explanation for this ongoing increase in returns is the backlog of processing asylum claims, implying that the current returnees are people who applied for asylum a number of years ago.

For a proper understanding of these figures it has to be remarked that they comprise both (unsuccessful) asylum seekers and irregular migrants, as IOM's AVR programme provides assistance to both categories of migrants. AVR statistics are divided per category of migrant and

facilitate therefore a comparison between these two groups. The return trends of asylum seekers, whose claims are still being considered, and rejected asylum seekers are illustrated in the following table.

Table 5 – Total number of asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers returned with AVR/REAN assistance from the Netherlands to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, 1999 – May 2003 (IOM, 2003b)

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Russia	Ukraine	Total/year
1999	15	1	4	4	20	6	50
2000	51	9	-	9	25	6	100
2001	29	4	5	14	48	14	114
2002	51	18	6	16	43	19	153
2003	35	9	4	2	42	25	117
Total	181	41	19	45	178	70	534

These AVR trends do interestingly enough not coincide with the trends of asylum claims. The major source country of asylum seekers over the last five years, Azerbaijan, is an insignificant destination of AVRs from the Netherlands, which is truly remarkable. It is beyond the scope of this report to determine the reasons for that discrepancy, but it points to the probability that Azerbaijani migrants either stay on in the Netherlands, or move to a third country or return home without applying for AVR assistance. This assumption is supported to a certain extent by IOM research conducted in 2002 among returnees in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which concluded that the Azerbaijani sample contained disproportionately many so-called independent returnees as compared to the samples in Armenia and Georgia (IOM, 2002b). It needs to be remarked that this research was not representative of the overall population of returnees to the three countries concerned, but it is interesting that the outcomes of that research appear to be supported by these AVR statistics from the Netherlands.

In contrast to Azerbaijan, AVR movements to Ukraine are relatively big in numbers, despite the fact that Ukraine is not a significant source country of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. It is clear from the distinction between Tables 4 and 5 that most AVR movements from the Netherlands back to Ukraine consist of irregular migrants, that is persons who never applied for asylum. This trend is in sharp contrast to Armenia and Azerbaijan, to which almost only (unsuccessful) asylum seekers return and hardly any irregular migrant.

The Netherlands immigration authorities keep statistics on forced returns (also known as deportations or expulsions). Statistics of deportation are often problematic to use for research purposes as the definition of the term ‘deportation’ may differ across destination countries of asylum seekers and irregular migrants. The figures in Table 6 comprise two types of forced return:

1) The number of aliens that are requested to leave the territory of the Netherlands and were subsequently not located at their addresses during a routine check by the Dutch Aliens Police;
2) Actual deportations executed under active surveillance by the Aliens Police.

For that administrative reason the deportation statistics are not an accurate reflection of actual return trends, because they capture also migrants who decide to disappear in illegality or leave the territory of the Netherlands to a third country before the Aliens Police can actually enforce the expulsion order.

Table 6 – Number of deportations from the Netherlands of citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, 1999 – 2002 (Ministry of Justice, 2003b)

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Russia	Ukraine	Total/year
1999	134	58	67	90	459	483	1,291
2000	135	61	50	91	331	355	1,023
2001	109	35	57	70	300	338	909
2002	102	87	90	83	413	533	1,308
Total	480	241	264	334	1,503	1,709	4,531

Despite the limitations of these statistics the deportation figures are interesting to compare with the number of asylum applications. It is striking that among the six source countries citizens of Ukraine were deported most, despite the fact that the number of asylum claims by Ukrainians over the years was rather limited. There are many factors playing a role in determining this difference, such as the recognition rate of the asylum claims that has a direct influence on the number of unsuccessful asylum seekers liable to deportation. However, the differences between the numbers of deportations and asylum claims could very well point to differences in migration behaviour, in the sense that for example Ukrainians prefer to migrate to the Netherlands without asking for asylum in contrast to for example migrants from Azerbaijan. Again, this relationship is hard to substantiate due to a general lack of reliable statistics on irregular migration.

2.4 Concluding observations on major migration trends

It is clear from the above that the number of asylum claims by citizens of the six source countries in the Netherlands is sharply on the decline, which reflects the general trend of decreasing asylum applications in the Netherlands in particular and in Europe as a whole. Azerbaijan has been the major source country of asylum seekers in the Netherlands during the last five years, while Russia and Armenia are also significant countries of origin. Overall, citizens of the six source countries have recently been applying for asylum in Europe in smaller numbers, but in the Netherlands this decline started one or two years earlier than on average elsewhere in Europe.

In contrast to decreasing asylum claims, the general trend of return from the Netherlands to the six source countries is still on the increase, both in terms of assisted voluntary returns under the REAN programme and forced returns.

These migration trends and patterns are an important reference for the research implemented by IOM-"Pauluskerk" in the Netherlands, as they have had a direct impact on the way the survey could be implemented and respondents from the target group identified.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Research methodology

The research team of IOM and the "Pauluskerk" opened a separate office for the research project at a central location in Rotterdam, a major city in the west of the Netherlands where traditionally many immigrants reside. The office was designed to receive asylum seekers from the six source countries in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, offering them a place where they could meet their compatriots and migrants from the other source countries, be interviewed with due respect for their privacy and receive assistance of their preference. The interviews were conducted by a native speaker of Russian, usually enabling a fluent communication with all respondents. Native speakers of other languages of the countries of origin of the respondents were readily available to assist the research team in case of communication problems.

The prime research instrument consisted of an in-depth interview conducted with migrants that were eligible for receiving assistance under the scope of the project. The questionnaire of the interview (attached to the report as Annex 2) was drawn up on the basis of a questionnaire developed for previous research efforts of IOM, such as the exploratory study of return and reintegration of migrants to the South Caucasus (IOM, 2002b) and a similar study implemented by IOM in Albania, Romania and Russia (IOM, 2003a). IOM The Hague adapted the questionnaire for the specific objectives of this research and tested it during a pilot phase that lasted until the end of July 2002 and included 44 respondents (35 asylum seekers and 9 irregular migrants). After this testing phase a small number of questions were re-formulated for inclusion into the final questionnaire that was applied for the main part of the study. These changes were primarily editorial in nature and so minor that the research team decided to include all respondents of the pilot phase into the overall sample.

The IOM-"Pauluskerk" research team implemented the following activities to inform the target group about the various types of assistance available under the project and attract potential respondents to participate in the research:

- The research team distributed an information letter in Russian among all relevant partners of the "Pauluskerk" in the Rijnmond region, including refugee organizations and local charities, and the four district offices of IOM in the Netherlands. All asylum seekers from the six source countries that visited the project office in Rotterdam and the premises of the counterparts of IOM-"Pauluskerk" received this letter.
- The research team kept close relationships with the "Pauluskerk" that offers services at another location in Rotterdam for people from the six source countries that have particular problems, such as drug addiction and socio-medical problems.
- This letter was also disseminated among unsuccessful asylum seekers from the six source countries detained in alien detention centres in Rotterdam and Tilburg.
- A similar call-up for cooperation of migrants was submitted to the attention of the consular officers of all six source countries represented in the Netherlands.

- The research team requested the cooperation of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands (COA) to provide anonymous information about the places of residence of the target group in the Rijnmond area. This enabled the research team to contact these migrants on a personal basis and request their cooperation in the study.
- On a number of occasions the IOM-"Pauluskerk" project team disseminated information about the project through local and national mass media.

As indicated before, the scope of the project specifically excluded irregular migrants from the target group of the research.[5] For that reason the research team did not focus on this category of migrants, despite the fact that irregular migrants visited the project office in larger numbers than (unsuccessful) asylum seekers. During the course of the project the number of respondents recruited from the population of asylum seekers was less than previously envisaged and the decision was taken to target also irregular migrants as potential respondents. The main argument was that the research could identify if there are any significant differences between the profiles of migrants travelling to the Netherlands to apply for asylum and those who do not lodge an asylum appeal. The general assumption of the IOM-"Pauluskerk" team based on its experience in dealing with migrants from the six source countries was that there should be no basic difference between the two groups. Irregular migrants that did participate in the research were assembled in a control sample for the purpose of drawing comparisons with the actual research sample. Section 4.6 presents the results of this comparison.

The main hurdle the research team encountered was the relatively low number of (unsuccessful) asylum seekers that addressed the project office in Rotterdam for assistance provided under the project and participation in the research. One explanation for this is that in 2002 the number of asylum claims in the Netherlands by citizens of the six source countries decreased sharply. Another reason for the lower numbers of respondents was the fact that a number of migrants were primarily interested in the services of the IOM-"Pauluskerk" project office and much less in participating in the research, despite the compensation of 15 Euro offered to each respondent.

This report is based on the outcomes of the interviews and the information the respondents passed on to the research team of IOM-"Pauluskerk".

3.2 Profile and characteristics of the sample

The research team interviewed in total 173 respondents, among which were 149 asylum seekers or rejected asylum seekers (86.1 per cent of the total sample) and 24 irregular migrants (13.9 per cent). The profile of the respondents is summarised in the table on the next page:

[5] This was an explicit requirement from one of the donors, the European Refugee Fund of the European Commission.

Table 7 – Personal profile of the respondents (in percentages of the total sample) (n=173)

	Item	Percentage
1	**Gender**	
	Female	22.5
	Male	77.5
2	**Age**	
	Under 20	8.1
	20-29	35.8
	30-39	32.4
	40-49	16.8
	Older than 50	6.9
3	**Citizenship**	
	Armenia	8.7
	Azerbaijan	12.1
	Belarus	4.6
	Georgia	23.1
	Russia	20.8
	Ukraine	25.4
	Other/stateless	5.3
4	**Marital Status**	
	Single	41.6
	Married	46.2
	Divorced/separated	9.3
	Widow(er)	2.9
5	**Years of Education**	
	No education	1.2
	8 years or less	8.2
	9-12 years	50.9
	13-16	31.0
	More than 16 years	8.8

These data underline that the majority of the sample consisted of young men under the age of 40, primarily originating from Ukraine, Georgia and Russia. Despite high asylum claims from Azerbaijani and Armenian migrants these nationalities did not figure prominently in the sample. The average education level of the respondents is not extremely high, given the fact that almost 60 per cent of the sample did not follow more than 12 years of education, which compared to Dutch reality basically means primary and secondary school plus perhaps a short vocational education afterwards.

Comparing to the number of asylum seekers and their countries of origin reflected in the previous section, this sample is obviously not fully representative for the population of asylum seekers from the six source countries in the Netherlands, mainly because migrants from Armenia and Azerbaijan are somewhat underrepresented.

A comparison with previous research conducted in 1999 by the Netherlands Ministry of Justice (published in January 2000) among 208 asylum seekers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and

Russia delivers the following picture:

- The sample of this research consisted for 77.5 per cent of males, while the total population of asylum seekers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia in the Netherlands in 1998 and 1999 consisted for 54.7 per cent of males. This difference needs though to be interpreted carefully, because the total population of asylum seekers included also young children and spouses, who for obvious reasons would not all be interviewed for this research.
- The share of minors (people under the age of 18) in this sample was 4.7 per cent, which corresponds to the share of unaccompanied asylum seekers in the Netherlands in 1998 and 1999 (4 per cent).
- In slight contrast to the sample of this research, the majority of the 1999 sample of 208 respondents consisted of married persons (59.8 per cent) and the share of single persons was only 24.3 per cent. The percentage of single persons in this research sample was 41.6.
- The educational level of the 1999 sample of 208 respondents was somewhat lower than the sample of this research, as illustrated by the fact that 62.5 per cent in 1999 had not followed education after secondary school.

This comparison is not completely valid and only indicative, because Ukraine and Belarus were not included in the Ministry of Justice research conducted in 1999.

Despite the relatively large size of the sample (173 persons) the results of this research can not provide grounds from which to draw valid conclusions for the whole population of asylum seekers from the six source countries in the Netherlands. The research has however provided very useful insights into the migration behaviour of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, the way they perceive their future in terms of prolonged (irregular) stay or return to their home country, and the ways available to enhance more sustainable returns.

4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

4.1 Pre-migration period

The questionnaire of the in-depth interviews focused in detail on the perception of the respondents of their situation in their countries of origin before they migrated to the Netherlands. Interestingly enough many respondents (30.7 per cent) qualified their socio-economic status before migration as either good or very good. An additional 34.7 per cent marked it as reasonable while a similar share of the sample was not satisfied. Most respondents did not think that their socio-economic position was any worse than that of other people in their communities. Actually, 21.4 per cent thought they were better off, while 51.4 per cent did not see any difference between themselves and people in their direct surroundings.

"My income was not enough to have a normal living, buy food and send my child to school" (32-year-old man from Ukraine)

"My monthly income was enough to buy food and pay the bills" (38-year-old man from Ukraine)

The pre-migration employment situation of the respondents does however not fully explain such positive answers on their socio-economic position. Over one-third of the sample (34.1 per cent) was unemployed, 16.8 per cent had on-and-off jobs whereas 48.5 per cent of the respondents were either self-employed or working full-time or part-time. When asked about their job satisfaction, almost 60 per cent stated that they were satisfied and the remaining 40 per cent were either not satisfied at all (17.5 per cent) or were not completely happy with the job they had before they migrated (22.8 per cent).

"I was satisfied with my job, but could no longer stand the discrimination, the way I was treated and the working conditions"(35-year-old woman from Russia)

"I was happy with my job, but not with the salary"(35-year-old man from Ukraine)

These results indicate that economic factors played a rather insignificant role in the decision-making process of the respondents: 20.2 per cent of the sample stated that the bad economic situation at home contributed to their decision to depart, whereas better economic opportunities as perceived abroad were mentioned by 13.3 per cent of the sample.

As a matter of fact the most important reason for the respondents to go to the Netherlands was related to persecution at home (applicable to 57.2 per cent), followed by economic considerations (33.5 per cent), to join family or friends (4 per cent) and study (2.3 per cent). This is logical given the fact that most respondents applied for asylum in the Netherlands, though it has to be noted that interviewing asylum seekers while they are still in the destination country comes with certain obstacles. It can be expected that these respondents maintain the same story to the IOM interviewers as they conveyed to the immigration authorities so as not to jeopardize the possible

success of their asylum claim. This assumption is to a certain extent supported by the outcomes of this survey. For rejected asylum seekers the issue of persecution in their countries of origin was not so important as it obviously appeared for respondents who were still in the asylum procedure. Just over half of the rejected asylum seekers (55.6 per cent of this group of 99 respondents) saw persecution as the prime motivation to leave, whereas almost all respondents still in the asylum procedure (86 per cent of a group of 50 persons) cited that as the primordial reason to migrate.

"I had been arrested before for my political views and was forced to migrate. Friends helped me to pay off the police and I escaped" (46-year-old man from Azerbaijan)

Other questions that were asked to assess the pre-migration situation of the respondents related to their housing and health. A small majority of the sample (55.5 per cent) was content with their housing situation, while 41.7 per cent were not particularly satisfied with how they lived. The household situation of the respondents was quite varying, in the sense that 37 per cent of the sample lived with their partner and/or families, one-third with their parents, 15 per cent lived alone or with a roommate and 11 per cent lived with their extended family.

"The apartment was noisy, the toilet was outside and the place was really poorly constructed" (51-year-old man from Azerbaijan)

Most respondents (60 per cent) indicated that their health before migration was good or even very good, whereas 8.8 per cent reported regular complaints and 11 per cent stated that they were chronically ill before they went abroad. Health considerations were however hardly ever mentioned by the respondents as an important factor in their decision to migrate.

Overall the pre-migration situation of the respondents in terms of socio-economic position, housing and health was not particularly negative, underlining the fact that economic reasons were only secondary factors in the decision-making process of the respondents to migrate abroad.

4.2 Travel to the Netherlands

Among those respondents who are married or have a structural relationship with a partner (99 persons or 57.2 per cent of the total sample), 46.5 per cent stated that their families had stayed at home and did neither join the migrants at a later stage. A similarly large group, 41.4 per cent of the married respondents, stated that they had travelled to the Netherlands together with their family. A small group of respondents (6.9 per cent) noted that either their families had joined them later or had travelled with only some members of their family.

Just over half of the total sample (51.4 per cent) had intended from the outset to travel to the Netherlands or had vague ideas of 'going somewhere to Europe or the EU' (16.2 per cent). Other respondents however (22.5 per cent) had initially wanted to travel to other destination countries (mentioned were for example Norway, Russia, Germany and Portugal) or were undetermined where they wanted to go (9.8 per cent). This explains the fact why 26.6 per cent did actually not choose The Netherlands as their final destination, but happened to end up there, usually because mediators arranged their journey. The most important criterion for the respondents to travel to the

Netherlands was related to general and unspecified information circulating in the countries of origin and assumptions made about that destination country. Another group of respondents (15 per cent) mentioned that family members or friends played an important role in their decision which country to go to. Finally a number of respondents was offered employment or guessed that they could find a job in the Netherlands (4.6 per cent), whereas 5.2 per cent said that by chance they could get their hands on a Dutch visa without having a preference for any particular country.

"I chose the Netherlands because it is a liberal and progressive country, for example the freedom there to use soft drugs and be married to somebody of the same sex" (29-year-old man from Ukraine)

"I heard that it is a safe country to live in, tolerant behaviour to refugees and no persecution at all" (33-year-old man from Russia)

Many respondents had entered the Netherlands without official travel documents and had been smuggled across one or more borders on the way into the Schengen area. Among all respondents 30.1 per cent stated explicitly that they had entered the Netherlands in an illegal manner, usually by train or bus. A number of respondents (15 per cent) were smuggled into the Netherlands or the wider Schengen area in the back of a truck, which is a well-known smuggling method for people from former Soviet Union countries (see for example IOM 2001; 41). In contrast, 16.8 per cent of the sample had allegedly entered the Netherlands with a tourism visa that allows a stay of maximum three months.

"I travelled illegally, first by truck to Turkey, then by ship to France and minibus to Holland" (21-year-old man from Armenia)

"I crossed the Polish border on foot through the woods and from there was taken by car to the Netherlands" (34-year-old man from Russia)

"I flew to Minsk, from there by a small bus to the Netherlands. I had a passport with me, but no Schengen visa" (24-year-old man from Armenia)

As is usually the case with migrants travelling abroad to ask for asylum or overstay their visas to work, many needed help to obtain a visa or otherwise secure a passage to the Netherlands (applicable to 76.4 per cent of the total sample). This assistance came either from family members or friends, or from firms or unspecified agents (both cases accounted for 38.2 per cent each). For this assistance the respondents paid an average price of US$ 2,212 according to a range specified in Table 8.

Table 8 – Sums of money paid to travel to the Netherlands (in US$) in percentages of the total sample (n = 170)

Less than 500	14.1 %
500 – 999	24.1 %
1000 – 1999	20.0 %
2000 – 4999	17.6 %
5000 or more	14.1 %
Other/don't know	10.0 %

The journey was financed primarily with money that the migrants themselves had saved (55.4 per cent). Other respondents claimed that they had borrowed money from family members or friends (25.5 per cent), while 17.9 per cent of the sample had borrowed money on a commercial basis.

"I sold everything I had to get the money to travel to the Netherlands" (45-year-old man from Georgia)

"A driver from Ukraine took me in his truck to the Netherlands. A friend of mine had paid my journey so I did not know how much it actually cost" (29-year-old man from Armenia)

Many respondents did not have any clear-cut plans about how long they wanted to stay in the Netherlands. A small majority (50.3 per cent) wanted to stay as long as they could manage, if possible forever. One out of four respondents (24.3 per cent) stated that they wanted to stay in the Netherlands for a limited period of time, usually related to the motivation to earn enough money to sustain their relatives back home and eventually return. The remaining respondents (25.4 per cent of the sample) had unspecified plans of the duration of their stay in the Netherlands and did not give any specific explanation to the interviewers. Two migrants stated that they wanted to stay as long as they thought it would not be safe to return to their countries of origin.

The hopes of the migrants concerning their future were mostly pinned on finding a safe and normal life in the Netherlands, without the fear for persecution that they had experienced in their home countries (mentioned by 30 per cent of all respondents). Another important perspective for the future was to find a job in the Netherlands or study there (applicable to 29.5 per cent) and to be able to sustain relatives in the countries of origin through remittances. For 26 per cent of the respondents their immediate hopes focused primarily on getting first an official status and the right to remain in the Netherlands, after which they would then further plan their future. Less important considerations related to return home without any conditions (5.8 per cent), to be reunited with family members (5.2 per cent), and leave the Netherlands for a third country to build up a future there (2.9 per cent).

"I wanted to stay to earn some money for my family at home" (26-year-old man from Ukraine)

"I intended to find work here, earn money and then go back home" (34-year-old man from Ukraine)

"To get a residence permit, find a job and raise my child in a safe country" (32-year-old woman from Georgia)

4.3 Stay in the Netherlands

Upon arrival in the Netherlands 149 respondents applied for asylum (86.1 per cent of the total sample), while the remaining 24 persons preferred to stay in the Netherlands on an irregular basis. The majority of the asylum seekers (71.5 per cent) had applied for asylum after the year 2000. Among those 149 persons, 98 claimants were rejected (65.8 per cent of the group of asylum seekers) and the cases of the remaining 51 respondents were still being considered at the time of the interview. This high rejection rate reflects the generally strict policy of the Netherlands government towards asylum seekers from the six source countries, which only in exceptional cases can have a valid ground to claim asylum (Ministry of Justice, 2000; 57-67).

When asked if the respondents were considering going to another country to claim asylum there, 70.5 per cent stated 'no', 18.1 per cent were positive they would go try their luck in another country and 11.4 per cent had not yet made up their mind. Many respondents were not very keen to dwell in more detail on their plans and refrained from naming the future destination countries. Only 14 respondents gave more details on their intentions, naming 10 destination countries in Western Europe and North America.

"I don't want to go back to my home country, but to which country I should go now? No idea, I will go somewhere" (29-year-old man from Azerbaijan)

"It does not really matter for me, I'm really tired of it all" (23-year-old man from Georgia)

Just over one-third of the sample (34.4 per cent) had some kind of job in the Netherlands, although most of them (22.7 per cent of the total sample) could only work on an on-and-off basis. The majority (64.7 per cent of those who had a job) worked less than 30 hours per week, which delivered on average a relatively low salary, not exceeding US$ 500 for 86.5 per cent of the employed respondents. When excluding 5 per cent of either extreme of the answers given (meaning leaving out the lowest and highest amounts mentioned to account for unrealistically high amounts mentioned by a few respondents) the average monthly salary arrives at US$ 273. A majority of the total sample, 65.7 per cent, did not work at all during their stay in the Netherlands.

"I had work depending on the season, either somewhere in agriculture or selling newspapers on the street" (45-year-old man from Georgia)

The respondents were divided over the question how they could adapt in the Netherlands: half stated that they did well or even very well, the other half mainly emphasized negative aspects of their stay abroad. One negative aspect was the fact that many were separated from their families and friends and missed them a lot (expressed by 62.8 per cent of the respondents).

"I have no job, am not very familiar with the culture of the country and feel lonely and desperate" (35-year-old woman from Belarus)

"Dutch people are nice and I have a lot of Georgian friends here, so I do quite well" (41-year-old man from Georgia)

"I feel bad about missing my family, have depressions and feel also bad physically" (29-year-old man from Ukraine)

"Although I know the Dutch language a bit, which helps me to make social contacts and make me feel better here, I feel a strong longing for my home country" (21-year-old man from Armenia)

As mentioned before, this research project also had a medical component. The a-priori assumption was that certain respondents would have problems with drug addiction and suffer from psychological disorders. As noted in section 2, the "Pauluskerk" has specific expertise in providing aid to drug addicts among the population of asylum seekers and irregular migrants.

Among the services it offers is the provision of clean needles and syringes with the aim to prevent the spreading of diseases among drug addicts.

The majority of the sample (72.7 per cent) qualified their health ranging from reasonable to very good, 19.2 per cent had regular complaints and 8.1 per cent of the total sample were chronically ill. These problems were related first of all to physical complaints, such as problems with the heart, stomach, liver, kidneys and back ache (as applicable to 25.4 per cent of the total sample). A smaller number of people (8.7 per cent of the overall sample) reported psychological disorders, in particular depressions, as their main problem and an equal number of respondents (8.7 per cent) mentioned overall tiredness, stress and headaches as their prime health complaint. Twenty-eight (28) per cent of the respondents said that they took medication to cure or at least ease their illnesses.

"I have a lot of stress because I am already waiting four years for the answer to my asylum request. I take medications to deal with the stomach problems that I have" (38-year-old man from Azerbaijan)

"I lost weight because of the Hepatitis B that I had and now I take pills to ease my stomach problems. In the past I used to take all sorts of drugs, but I have stopped doing that" (41-year-old man from Georgia)

"I take tranquilizers to better deal with the chronic depression that I have" (43-year-old woman from Armenia)

"I am often nervous and have a lot of stress. I used to take heroine and cocaine, but I stopped seven months ago and am now on Methadone and Oxyzapam (tranquillizers)" (23-year-old man from Georgia)

"I have stress, am frequently nervous and suffer from depression and other psychological problems. I am addicted to marihuana" (30-year-old man from Russia)

"Before I took hard drugs for a period of eight years. I now have problems with my liver and heart and take Sastril to deal with that" (30-year-old man from Azerbaijan)

Comparing with the assessment of their pre-migration health a trend towards a slight deterioration becomes visible: the number of people having regular health problems at the time of the interview increased more than twofold (from 8.8 per cent to 19.2 per cent). Interestingly enough the number of chronically ill persons decreased somewhat. In addition, more persons reported few complaints during their stay in the Netherlands (29.7 per cent) as compared to the pre-migration period (19.8 per cent). These are not significant changes, but it appears that the stress related to the difficulties of getting an official status in the Netherlands contributes to a less positive health situation of the respondents in general.

This research sample contained relatively few drug addicts, as only 6.4 per cent of the respondents (11 persons) reported having problems with drugs, mostly with soft drugs. Six persons had been addicted in the past to hard drugs and some of them were on Methadone during the period when the interview was conducted. Only one person mentioned to the interviewers that he was addicted to hard drugs. The explanation given by the IOM-"Pauluskerk" research team for these relatively low numbers is the fact that many drug addicts did not show up at the research site in Rotterdam and were not interested in participating in the research. Instead they preferred getting clean needles at the church building, which is at a different location in Rotterdam.

As a general conclusion, the hopes of many respondents of building their lives in the Netherlands were dashed by the usually negative reaction of the Dutch immigration authorities to their asylum claims. Many respondents were uncertain about their future and some were affected by psychological problems, such as stress and spells of bad nerves. Only a few respondents reported having problems with drug addiction.

4.4 Impact of migration on the migrant and community in the country of origin

The questionnaire focused in quite some detail on the remittances that the respondents were able to send home and the impact of these remittances and their absence on the community in their country of origin. A large number of respondents (77.8 per cent) did not send any money home from the Netherlands. The remaining respondents claimed that they sent on average US$ 1,304 home per year, which would come down to an average of US$ 109 per month. When excluding five per cent of the answers on both extremes (that is, the lowest and highest amounts mentioned) the average annual remittance was US$ 732, which is US$ 61 on average per month. Comparing to the monthly salaries earned by the respondents it would mean that the remittances constituted 22 per cent of their average salary.

Among the 37 respondents who transferred remittances most estimated that these amounts were either very important or rather important, which is quite logical given the fact that their families in the countries of origin often have to live on very modest salaries. In a few cases the money transfers were the only source of income for the home communities.

Many respondents (36.3 per cent of the total sample) assessed the impact of their absence on their families as negative, while a rather small number of persons (12.5 per cent) saw mainly positive aspects. Another 37.5 per cent of the respondents could not make either a negative or a positive assessment. The negative assessments mainly related to the fact that the family was suffering financially because the prime breadwinner was abroad (mentioned by 30 respondents or 17.3 per cent of the total sample). Another problem experienced by the families of the respondents back home had to do with care for children and elderly, which had become more complicated due to the absence of the migrant (mentioned by 36 respondents or 20.8 per cent of the total sample).

When asked how the respondents assessed their stay in the Netherlands and the impact it had, a majority of the sample (54.3 per cent) assessed it as a failure, among which 26.5 per cent even as an absolute failure. Only 16.5 per cent of the total sample qualified their stay in the Netherlands as a success, whereas 17.6 per cent of the respondents had mixed feelings and could not pick out either positive or negative aspects.

"I did not manage to obtain a residence permit, so my stay here is of course a failure" (26-year-old man from Russia)

"I have no job, no food, no place to stay for the night, no money, it's a total disaster" (36-year-old man from Georgia)

"If I had known in advance about all the troubles that I would have in the Netherlands I would have never left my country" (29-year old man from Ukraine)

"It was successful in part because I could develop my professional skills as a musician, but on the other hand I am not sure about the answer to my asylum claim" (42-year-old woman from Georgia)

"If I had known everything in advance I would have immediately asked for asylum in France and not in the Netherlands" (47-year-old man from Belarus)

4.5 Plans related to return and the future in general

A large part of the sample was adamant in stating that they would never return to their country of origin (48.2 per cent). The other respondents were either thinking a lot about returning home (30.6 per cent) or dedicated thoughts to that option occasionally (21.2 per cent).

"I got a negative answer on my asylum request, so I see no perspective in staying in the Netherlands" (20-year-old man from Georgia)

"I only want to go back when it's safe again in my country" (21-year-old man from Armenia)

"I will probably have to return because I have few possibilities to stay here or go to any other country" (23-year-old man from Russia)

The interviewers spent quite some time asking questions what kind of problems, if any, the respondents were expecting to experience upon their return, which could turn into an obstacle for actually implementing their return plans. The biggest problems that the respondents expected could trouble their homecoming were lack of employment (mentioned by 41 per cent of the total sample), followed by expected problems with government officials and persecution as experienced before departure (38.7 per cent), psychological problems in terms of reintegration problems and failure of migration to the Netherlands (30.1 per cent), social problems with for example their communities of origin (29.5 per cent) and finally problems with lack of adequate housing facilities (mentioned by 28.4 per cent of the sample).

"I will not be able to pay back the money that I borrowed to go abroad" (42-year-old man from Ukraine)

"Lack of employment opportunities, problems with registration, no place to stay, social problems in terms of difference between the mentality here and in my home country, and also economic and financial problems" (40-year-old man from Russia)

"I will have problems with the military and will have no home to return to" (31-year-old man from Georgia)

Comparing these expected problems after return with the initial motivations of the respondents to leave their countries of origin, it is interesting to note that the aspect of persecution in the home countries has lost importance (57.2 per cent before departure versus 38.7 per cent of the expected problems). In some contrast, economic considerations have gained certain importance (33.5 per cent versus 41 per cent), but this increase is not by any means a significant change.

Many respondents (76.3 of the total sample) stated that they would need assistance to return home and reintegrate in their home community, whereas only a small group (9.8 per cent) said that they could handle their return without any outside help. A third group of respondents (9.2 per cent) refused to answer this question, reasoning that it was irrelevant for them as they declined to return back home by all means. Not surprisingly, given the answers to the problems that the respondents expected upon returning to their countries of origin, some sort of financial assistance would be appreciated most (applicable to 93 per cent of those who said they would need assistance or 61.3 per cent of the total sample). This concerned in most cases the inability of the respondents to pay the return ticket from their own pockets, instead pinning their hopes on IOM to assist in travelling back. Other types of assistance that the respondents would require are related to improving their social position (mentioned by 23.1 per cent of the total sample), assistance in curing health problems (19.1 per cent of all respondents) and help in overcoming expected problems with adaptation in psychological terms (18.5 per cent).

"It would be a great help to get money to buy a plane ticket to return home" (36-year-old man from Azerbaijan)

"I will need help from international organizations to protect my human rights" (46-year-old man from Azerbaijan)

The last question of the interview dealt with the way the respondents perceived their future and in which country they would be living. A large number of respondents (37.8 per cent) found it hard to answer this question and could not mention anything specific. Almost one-fourth of the sample (24.4 per cent) thought that in the future they would have returned to their country of origin and picked up their old lives, whereas 27.3 per cent of the respondents stated they wanted to remain in the Netherlands and build their lives there. A small group of interviewees (10.5 per cent) was thinking of leaving the Netherlands to go to a third country.

"I will try to get into the French Foreign Legion" (23-year-old man from Russia)

"I want to live in a country where there is no discrimination and where it is safe for my family, especially for my children" (30-year old woman from Russia)

In summary, the sample was divided over how they viewed their future. Some were sure that their only option left was to return to their countries of origin, either because they did not want to extend their stay in the Netherlands on an illegal basis or had a strong desire to return without any further conditions. The return was for many however not a simple option: many noted that upon coming home they were expecting problems of financial and economic nature as well as problems related to the persecution they had suffered before. For that reason many respondents indicated that they would appreciate assistance in accomplishing their return, mostly in the form of financing their way back, but a number also mentioned concrete help that would facilitate their reintegration and sustain their return. Other respondents declined to even consider return as an option and depicted their future either in terms of prolonged stay in the Netherlands or a move to a third country to try their luck there.

4.6 Asylum seekers in comparison to irregular migrants

A comparison between the interviews with asylum seekers and irregular migrants has delivered interesting information, though it has to be noted that such a comparison is not based on firm grounds, because of the low number of irregular migrants represented in the sample (24 persons or 13.9 per cent of the total sample). In addition to the difference between irregular and regular migrants (the latter meaning those who applied for asylum), the research team also distinguished between rejected asylum seekers (99 persons or 57.2 per cent of the total sample) and asylum seekers, referring to those respondents whose claim was still being considered at the time of the interview (50 persons, 28.9 per cent). This section will also touch upon some interesting differences between these two groups.

On many issues, including the personal profile of the migrants, there was basically no difference between the two groups, or only insignificant or ambivalent deviations. However, in a number of instances the group of irregular migrants differed significantly from the asylum seekers, namely as regards:

a) Citizenship

Ukrainians made up 75 per cent of the group of irregular migrants and respondents from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus were not represented at all in this group. This difference coincides to a large extent with the migration behaviour trends discussed in section 2 of this report, in the sense that migrants from Ukraine do rarely apply for asylum in the Netherlands and instead prefer to stay there on an irregular basis.

b) Travel with family to the Netherlands

All irregular migrants left their family behind in their countries of origin, whereas relatively many asylum seekers travelled with their families to the Netherlands. It has to be noted that many respondents did not answer this question and the difference is based on the accounts of 18 irregular migrants and 81 asylum seekers. As a logical consequence of the fact that most had left their families behind many irregular migrants complained that they missed their next of kin a lot, more so than asylum seekers.

c) Motivations to leave the country of origin

As could be reasonably expected, the issue of persecution as a motivation to leave their countries of origin was almost completely irrelevant for irregular migrants, whereas it was the most important reason for asylum seekers. The prime motivation of irregular migrants to migrate was related to improving their economic position, while economic considerations were only secondary for asylum seekers. For rejected asylum seekers the issue of persecution in their countries of origin was not so important as it was for respondents who were still in the asylum procedure. Just over half of the rejected asylum seekers (55.6 per cent among 99 respondents) saw persecution as the prime motivation to leave, whereas almost all respondents still in the asylum procedure (86 per cent of a group of 50 persons) cited that as the primordial reason.

d) Choice of destination country

On average irregular migrants were much more determined than future asylum seekers of their country of destination. Most irregular migrants based their decision on information they had

heard about the Netherlands or on vague assumptions, and were hardly ever led by the decisions of other persons, such as smugglers, visa brokers or family members abroad.

e) Financing of the journey

Because of the fact that irregular migrants relied less on help from outsiders they also invested on average less money (US$ 949 per person) in their departure than asylum seekers (US$ 2,480 on average per person). As noted before, some respondents mentioned unrealistically high amounts of money required to travel to the Netherlands, so this difference, significant as such, needs to be interpreted with a certain reservation. Interestingly enough many irregular migrants borrowed money on a commercial basis to finance their migration, whereas this was an insignificant source of money for asylum seekers.

f) Change in the health situation during the stay in the Netherlands

The health of asylum seekers deteriorated during their stay in the Netherlands, whereas the self-perceived health situation of irregular migrants remained quite stable and satisfactory to most of them. Many asylum seekers (42 per cent of that group) said that they took medication to cure their illnesses. In addition, problems with drug addiction as noted among 11 asylum seekers were entirely absent among the group of irregular migrants.

g) The issue of return to the country of origin and perception of the future

The majority of irregular migrants (two-thirds of that sub-sample) dedicated a lot of thoughts to returning to their countries of origin and only a few among them were categorical in excluding that option. In stark contrast, a lot of asylum seekers refused to even think about return. For obvious reasons this feeling was strongest among the category of asylum seekers who were still hoping for a positive answer to their claim. Rejected asylum seekers were divided about whether return would be an option to them: most refused to think about it (48 persons or 48.5 per cent of this particular group of respondents), but other rejected asylum seekers were less sure and 28 persons (28.3 per cent of that group) saw return as the most viable alternative in the near future.

The greater desire among irregular migrants to return is to a certain extent supported by the number of Assisted Voluntary Returns facilitated by IOM the Hague. During the project implementation period (June 2002 to May 2003) 108 irregular migrants and 43 (rejected) asylum seekers returned to their countries of origin with the assistance of IOM-"Pauluskerk".

Table 9 – Return of irregular migrants and asylum seekers with assistance of IOM-"Pauluskerk", June 2002 – May 2003, in absolute numbers and percentages (IOM The Hague, 2003b)

Country	**Asylum Seekers**	**Irregular Migrants**
Armenia	3 / 6.98 %	1 / 0.92 %
Azerbaijan	5 / 11.63 %	3 / 2.78 %
Belarus	-	3 / 2.78 %
Georgia	10 / 23.25 %	4 / 3.7 %
Russia	12 / 27.9 %	21 / 19.44 %
Ukraine	13 / 30.23 %	76 / 70.37 %
TOTAL	**43**	**108**

The total number of returnees during the period June 2002 to May 2003 who returned from the Netherlands to the six countries of origin, including with the help of IOM-"Pauluskerk", was 399 persons (228 asylum seekers and 171 irregular migrants) (IOM, 2003c).

Though difficult to compare because of the lack of statistics on the total number of irregular migrants present at the territory of the Netherlands, it confirms the strong interest among irregular migrants to go back home.

As a logical consequence of the strong desire among irregular migrants to return, most of them depicted their future in terms of returning to their countries of origin and building their lives there. Asylum seekers were much more divided about how they saw their future: many wanted to stay on in the Netherlands (including 24 rejected asylum seekers or 24.2 per cent of that sub-sample) or were uncertain about what they should undertake. The option of trying to go to a third country was mentioned by 13 rejected asylum seekers and, in slight contrast, only by one irregular migrant.

h) Problems expected after return and assistance required

There is no significant difference between asylum seekers and irregular migrants in terms of the degree to which they expect to be confronted with problems after their return. There are however clear differences in the types of problems they expected most. Irregular migrants referred most of all to the obstacle of finding a job after return, whereas asylum seekers mentioned first and foremost the problems they were expecting with government officials in terms of the persecution they had experienced before. Another important difference between the two groups is that asylum seekers, in particular the rejected ones among them, mentioned a larger number of expected problems, including lack of (adequate) housing and psychological as well as social problems in reintegrating and adapting after return. These issues were less important for irregular migrants, except the issue of housing, which was marked as a concern by about one out of three respondents in each group.

As a logical consequence of the above, asylum seekers indicated that they would appreciate receiving a broad package of reintegration assistance items, such as psychological assistance, help in adapting to the social standards of the country of origin, economic assistance and help in improving their health situation. Irregular migrants mentioned primarily help in economic terms as the most important item of reintegration assistance and were much less interested in a broader aid package. The issue of health assistance was important for those respondents who were still in the asylum procedure and rejected asylum seekers mentioned most frequently the need of psychological assistance after return.

The differences between the two groups point to a deviating migration behaviour of asylum seekers on the one hand and irregular migrants on the other hand, which can be summarized by means of the following tentative profile.

Irregular migrants are persons who are quite determined about their goal and are usually in control of the various stages of the migration process. They are primarily persons who want to improve their economic position by working abroad and for that reason are not interested in applying for asylum. They leave their family members behind, which is an important motivation

for them to limit their stay abroad to the length required to earn enough money to improve the socio-economic position of their families. Return to their countries of origin is for that reason a feasible issue, although they expect that economic obstacles, mainly in terms of lack of employment, could potentially hinder their reintegration process. For that reason they would appreciate post-return assistance most of all in terms of finding employment and are not greatly interested in other forms of reintegration assistance.

In contrast, **asylum seekers** are migrants who have more abstract goals when moving abroad and are less determined in deciding on their final destination. They are influenced quite strongly by the advice and decisions of visa brokers, smugglers or family members abroad. The prime motivation to leave the country of origin, according to their own statements, is related to persecution by government officials. Many asylum seekers have no clear picture of how their residence abroad should develop and usually pin their hopes on a positive outcome of the asylum claim. Return is for many of them not an option, although many asylum seekers are not sure of what else they should do. Due to the negative answer to their asylum request or the uncertainty about the final outcome of their claim many (rejected) asylum seekers report a broad set of problems, including problems with their physical health and psychological disorders. For that reason asylum seekers would appreciate receiving a broad package of reintegration assistance, if they decide to return.

Again, it has to be noted that this analysis has been based on a small and therefore not representative group of irregular migrants, implying that the differences noted between asylum seekers and irregular migrants may not be fully based on reality. This analysis and the study in general have provided however valuable examples of the problems various categories of migrants are facing when confronted with the option of returning to their countries of origin.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 General conclusions of the research

The research team of IOM and the "Pauluskerk" conducted in-depth interviews with 173 migrants that were eligible for receiving assistance under the scope of the project. Among them were 149 asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers as well as 24 irregular migrants. Among those, 43 (rejected) asylum seekers returned to their countries of origin during the project implementation period. The majority of the sample consisted of men under the age of 40, predominantly from Ukraine, Georgia and Russia. The research was successful in addressing a number of important issues concerning the plans migrants in the Netherlands have related to return and the reintegration assistance they would require in their home communities. The number of respondents was less than originally previewed, which was related to the overall decrease in asylum claims in the Netherlands and a lack of interest to participate in the research.

The pre-migration situation of the respondents in terms of socio-economic position, housing and health was on average not particularly negative, underlining the fact that economic reasons were only secondary factors in the decision-making process of the respondents to migrate. The prime reason to go abroad mentioned by the respondents was related to persecution in the home country. Many respondents had entered the Netherlands without official travel documents and had been smuggled across one or more borders on their way into the Schengen area. For many respondents the decision to travel to the Netherlands was not based on a determined choice. The influence of the advice and decisions made by visa brokers, smugglers or family members abroad was quite significant.

During their stay in the Netherlands the hopes of many respondents of building their lives in the Netherlands were dashed by the usually negative reaction of the Dutch immigration authorities to their asylum claims. Many respondents were uncertain about their future and some were affected by physical and psychological problems, such as stress and spells of bad nerves. Only a few respondents reported having problems with drug addiction.

The sample was divided over how they viewed their future. Some were sure that their only option left was to return to their countries of origin, either because they did not want to extend their stay in the Netherlands on an illegal basis or had a strong desire to return without any further conditions. The return was however not a simple option: many noted that upon coming home they were expecting problems of financial and economic nature as well as problems related to the persecution they had suffered before. For that reason many respondents indicated that they would appreciate assistance in accomplishing their return, mostly in the form of financing their way back and concrete aid to facilitate their reintegration and sustain their return. Other respondents refused to even consider return as an option and depicted their future either in terms of prolonged stay in the Netherlands or a move to a third country.

The research has delivered also useful insights in the differences between asylum seekers and irregular migrants as regards their migration behaviour in general and their plans concerning return and reintegration assistance in particular. The study suggests that the will to return among irregular migrants is greater than among (rejected) asylum seekers, who foresee in general more problems upon return and are for that reason reluctant to consider the option of going back home. Asylum seekers indicated in general a greater need of various types of reintegration assistance, such as job counselling, health assistance, psychological aid and help in finding adequate housing. Irregular migrants expressed a particular interest in economic reintegration assistance and were much less interested in other types of help.

5.2 Insights gained and policy implications

This research has delivered insight into the differences between the migration behaviour of irregular migrants and asylum seekers. The sample of this research and in particular the group of irregular migrants was too small to draw valid conclusions. More in-depth **research** would be required to gain a full understanding of the factors influencing the migration behaviour of various groups of migrants and the way in which a dignified, sustainable return to their countries of origin can be promoted.

The research has underlined the importance of having a return assistance package such as the REAN-programme provides. The research also shows that there might be a need of being able to provide **assistance tailored to individual needs**. Tailored assistance would mean that during the pre-return counselling attention is dedicated to specific obstacles mentioned by the migrant, which might hamper his return. This is relevant to promote voluntary return, as the outcomes of the study have demonstrated that the group of rejected asylum seekers is often uncertain of their future and may decide to move to a third country or disappear in illegality. The current REAN-programme does not provide such form of tailored assistance. Equally important, the option of a specific reintegration assistance package would most likely enhance the sustainability of their return.

This study has also demonstrated that the will among **irregular migrants** to return home appears larger than among (rejected) asylum seekers. Whether or not irregular migrants actually return will depend on a number of factors, such as the ability to hang on to a job in the country of destination and the perspectives of finding attractive employment in the country of origin. The study suggests that the voluntary return of irregular migrants would receive a boost if they could become eligible to economic reintegration assistance, for example in the form of post-return vocational training, counselling and job placement.