



**Asylum application
rejected – return**

Results and challenges 2008–2015

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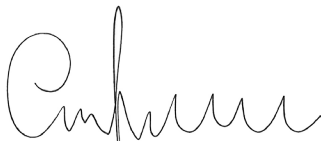
1. Foreword

The Swedish Red Cross meets many people who have applied for asylum in Sweden. In our activities, we are given a unique opportunity to listen to their stories and to understand their needs and what we can do to contribute to improved conditions for asylum seekers in our country.

Some of them are staying in Sweden for an extended period of time while waiting for a decision on their application. Some are granted a residence permit, others are refused asylum, which means that they are obliged to return to their home country.

We have drawn attention to the vulnerability that is often a consequence of a negative decision. Our support to those who have been refused asylum and who have accepted to return home has since 2008 been provided through several projects.

With this report and its recommendation, the Swedish Red Cross aims to describe how we have worked to assist rejected asylum seekers, but also to propose how procedures and activities related to return can be further developed.



Ewa Jonsson
Projektledare
Svenska Röda Korset

2. Summary

Since 2008, the Swedish Red Cross has run projects aimed at offering counselling and assistance to rejected asylum seekers. This report is part of the project Red Cross Network on Return II, which is coordinated by the National Department of the Swedish Red Cross and cofinanced by the European Return Fund (1 January 2013 to 30 June 2015).

In our work to support rejected asylum seekers and other migrants who are obliged to return, the Swedish Red Cross cooperates with sister National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as with the Swedish authorities and other organisations.

Our starting point is the humanitarian needs and interests of the individual. The Swedish Red Cross provides counselling and assistance to people who have had their asylum applica-

tions refused, based on the individual's own request. We offer legal advice, information about the asylum process and the process of return and reintegration, psychosocial support and assistance in contacting relevant authorities. Through the project, needs-based support has also been provided after return by sister National Societies and the IFRC in Serbia, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), the Russian Federation and Iraq (partner countries).

We know from regular follow-up assessments of people who have returned that our support makes a difference and increases the chances of successful reintegration.

The recommendations of the Swedish Red Cross underline, inter alia, the importance of taking individual needs into account when planning and implementing return, and of improving and increasing cooperation between different actors in the return process.

3. Introduction

The Swedish Red Cross has since 2008 run projects aimed at offering counselling and assistance to rejected asylum seekers. The current project – Red Cross Network on Return II – started in January 2013 and ended 30 June 2015.

The overall purpose of the project has been to ensure that rejected asylum seekers have the opportunity to return in safe and dignified conditions and with full respect for their human rights, and that they are given the means to live in dignity in their home countries. Support has been provided based on the individual's own request.

The objectives of the project can be summarised as follows:

- To provide return counselling in Sweden and in partner countries;
- To provide reintegration assistance after return (during the project);
- To ensure ownership and integration of return-related activities in the regular activities of the Swedish Red Cross after the end of the project;
- To establish and maintain networks with sister National Societies and other organisations.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other relevant organisations have been contacted when a need of assistance after return has been identified. The project has in particular cooperated with the Danish Red Cross, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, the Red Cross of Kosovo, the Macedonian Red Cross, the Russian Red Cross Society, the Red Cross of Serbia, the Czech Red Cross, and the IFRC in Iraq, Kosovo and the Russian Federation.

We have based our work on a number of guiding documents developed within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.¹

In 2010, the Swedish Red Cross published the report *Information Network for Return to Northern Iraq, Serbia and Kosovo: Results and experiences from a two-year project*, which explained the background of our work to support rejected asylum seekers who are obliged to return. We described working methods and results, and presented examples of cases involving families who had returned from Sweden to Iraq, Kosovo and Serbia.²

Now we wish to share our results and experiences to further increase knowledge of the return and reintegration process, and to contribute to improvements for migrants who are obliged to return to their country of origin.

1 The IFRC Policy on Migration (2009) and its supplementary advisory note on Action to assist migrants in return (2010); the PERCO guide *Return: Policy and Practice* (2008); the ICRC Position regarding participation by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the expulsion of migrants by the public authorities (2009).

2 Swedish Red Cross, *Information Network for Return to Northern Iraq, Serbia and Kosovo: Results and experiences from a two-year project*, 2010

3.1 Conclusions from previous projects

Based on our experiences from 2008 to 2010, we made the following conclusions:

- Clarity of roles in the return and reintegration process is vital – it must be clear that any support provided by the Swedish Red Cross is solely based on individual needs and on the individual’s own request;
- The Swedish Red Cross may cooperate with the relevant authorities, primarily the Swedish Migration Agency and the police, if requested to do so by the individual concerned;
- There must be a holistic approach to the return and reintegration process, linking the different stages of the process and including a reintegration strategy in the country of origin, in order to ensure dignified and sustainable return;
- Monitoring and follow-up after return is of utmost importance, both to assess the quality and fairness of the Swedish asylum process and to measure the effectiveness of the support provided, but also to show that someone cares about what happens to those who have returned;
- It is essential that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement follow a common approach when addressing needs and vulnerabilities related to return, in accordance with the IFRC *Policy on Migration*.

4. Red Cross Network on Return II

4.1 Background

The reasons why people flee are manifold: Armed conflicts, persecution and oppression, poverty, lack prospects for the future (in particular for children). Regardless of the reason behind an individual's flight, it is often associated with risks and high costs, the sale or abandonment of property and belongings. A lack of legal migration opportunities compel people to seek the help of smugglers to cross borders irregularly. Some of them manage to reach Sweden and apply for asylum.

Only a small fraction of all people who flee from their country of origin reach and are granted permission to stay in Sweden or in another EU country. In 2014, 38 European countries received 264.000 asylum applications. In the EU, most applications were received by Germany, Sweden, Italy, France and Hungary. The Russian Federation registered 168.000 refugees from the conflict in Ukraine. Turkey has received more than half a million asylum seekers and refugees from countries like Syria and Iraq.³

Of those applying for asylum in Sweden in 2014, 36% came from Syria. In total, 58% of all asylum applications in Sweden were granted at first instance (2013: 34%; 2012: 30%). The Swedish Migration Agency accepted 16.386 Syrians, 5.256 Eritreans, 4.324 stateless persons, 1.498 Afghans and 1.161 Somalis.⁴

4.2 The legal framework

When we use the term “return” in relation to rejected asylum seekers, it refers to the obligation of a third-country national who has been issued a refusal-of-entry or expulsion order to leave Sweden. The relevant substantial and

procedural rules are contained in the Swedish Aliens Act and the EU Return Directive⁵.

A person who has been issued a refusal-of-entry or expulsion order is expected to leave the country voluntarily within four weeks (voluntary departure), which means, inter alia, that she/he is responsible for obtaining the necessary travel or identity documents. This is, however, often done with the assistance of the Swedish Migration Agency. The Agency may extend the period of voluntary departure if the return concerns children attending school or a person with strong social ties to Sweden (a provision that is applied restrictively).

According to the Swedish Migration Agency's case management manual, *Handbok för migrationsärenden*, return is to be implemented “in a dignified manner” – the return process “should be characterized by a holistic approach and be an integrated part of the asylum process [and] should be focused on individually tailored activities and as far as possible implemented in cooperation with the alien concerned”.⁶

It is the responsibility of the Swedish Migration Agency to facilitate voluntary departure. In some cases, the Agency offers reestablishment support in the form of an allowance that is paid after return. If a person does not comply with the obligation to leave the country, the return case is handed over to the police for enforcement (forced removal). When a rejected asylum seeker has left the country, the Swedish authorities are no longer responsible for her/his wellbeing.

An asylum seeker who has been issued a refusal-of-entry or expulsion order that has become final and non-appealable may submit an application to the Swedish Migration Agency invoking new circumstances that constitute an impediment to return.

3 According to information from the UNHCR

4 According to information from the Swedish Migration Agency

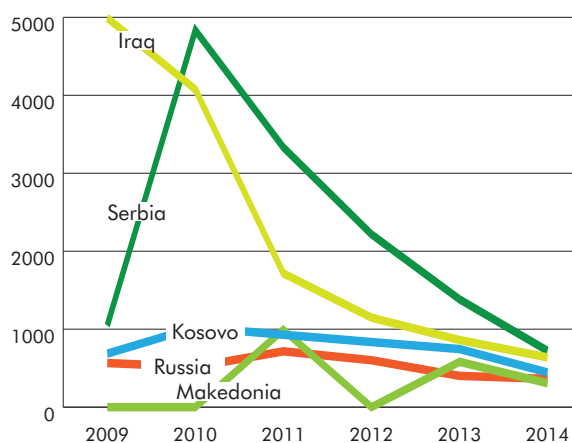
5 Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals

6 Migrationsverket, *Handbok i migrationsärenden, Handläggning av återvändandeärenden*, 2012

4.3 Return

In 2014, a total of 7.599 persons returned through voluntary departure (2013: 10.038) and 3.762 through forced removal (2013: 4.851). During the same period, 7.350 persons who had been issued a refusal-of-entry or expulsion order were registered as having absconded.

The figure below shows when and how many who have returned to the Swedish Red Cross partner countries.



The figure below shows the number of return cases handled by the Swedish Red Cross during the period 1 September 2008 to 31 December 2014.

The number of Iraqi return cases was at its highest from 2009 to 2011 (in total 160 cases). During 2014, 52% of all asylum seekers from Iraq were granted protection at first instance.

In the same year, the recognition rate at first instance for asylum seekers from Kosovo was 11% (74 persons), the Russian Federation 40% (26 persons) and Serbia 3% (27 persons).

The highest annual number of return cases concerning FYROM was registered in 2012. During the whole period, the number of cases involving return to the Russian Federation amounted to 18.

The countries of origin with the lowest recognition rates at first instance in 2014 were Albania (2%), Serbia (3%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (5%), Georgia (5%) and Kosovo (11%).⁷

4.4 Statistics

The Swedish Red Cross has since 2008 registered and handled 998 return cases concerning persons of 37 different nationalities. Most cases have involved return to Serbia and Kosovo, but the numbers have decreased during the past year.

⁷ Recognition rates according to information from the Swedish Migration Agency

Number of return cases handled by the Swedish Red Cross during the period 1 September 2008 to 31 December 2014

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Iraq	19	58	55	47	5	5	2	0	191
Kosovo	24	60	56	44	52	37	14	4	291
Makedonia		0	0	5	14	9	6	1	35
Russia		0	0	1	3	6	8	0	18
Serbia	8	34	20	76	83	74	17	7	319
Other	10	25	16	25	35	13	13	7	144
Total	61	177	147	198	192	144	60	19	998

4.5 Questions examined in the report

When writing this report as part of the project Red Cross Network on Return II, we have used the following questions as our starting point:

- Are there shortcomings in the return process? What can be done to reduce the vulnerability of people with special needs? How can the Swedish authorities improve procedures to facilitate return?
- How can the Swedish Red Cross increase awareness of and strengthen its return-related activities?
- How can cooperation between different actors be strengthened?

4.6 Method

The report is based on the Swedish Red Cross' experiences from our daily work to support rejected asylum seekers in Sweden, but also on lessons learned through our international network and from colleagues in countries of origin who provide counselling and advice after return. In addition, we have used the results of follow-up assessments made by interviewing a large number of families and individuals who have returned. This has deepened our knowledge and understanding of their situation, the circumstances in which they live and their experiences of the return and reintegration process.

A number of studies have been made and the project has recently published a report about the gender perspective in asylum and return cases⁸, primarily based on interviews with nearly 30 women who have returned to Kosovo.

8 Swedish Red Cross, Gender perspective in asylum and return cases, 2015

5. Our work to support migrants who are obliged to return

Our activities must be based on a clear and well defined humanitarian need, in line with the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement⁹.

This means that the Swedish Red Cross makes an independent decision whether to provide return-related support as part of its humanitarian work. In this regard, the interest of public authorities to promote and encourage return is not a valid consideration.

The Swedish Red Cross views the international network of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as a prerequisite for a holistic approach, where the different components of the Movement are involved based on competence and capacity.

Our starting point is the humanitarian needs and interests of the individual. Counselling and assistance is provided based on the individual's own request. The support we offer aims to ensure that the individual's rights are respected, both in the asylum process in Sweden and after return in the country of origin. As with all support provided by the Swedish Red Cross, it is based on trust and confidence. We offer humanitarian support, but it is always the individual concerned who decides whether to accept our offer. The Swedish Red Cross also works to ensure that those receiving our support are actively involved based on their own ability and capacity.

5.1 Cooperation

In order to provide the best possible support to migrants who are obliged to return to their country of origin, cooperation is necessary, internally as well as externally. This became clear already when we started our work in 2008 and cooperation was mentioned as an important factor in the report Information Network for Return to Northern Iraq, Serbia

and Kosovo: Results and experiences from a two-year project. Since then, the importance of cooperation has been confirmed on many occasions during project implementation.

5.1.1 Local branches of the Swedish Red Cross

The local branches are the basis of the Swedish Red Cross and ensure that the organisation's humanitarian work is carried on throughout the country. They organise volunteer groups that handle individual migration cases. Since 2009, we have provided targeted training and developed counselling methods for supporting rejected asylum seekers.

There are also other local activities involving migrants and during the project it has become clear that an increasing number are asylum seekers, many of whom have had their asylum applications refused. In order to improve the preparedness of the local branches to support them, we established a working group comprising representative of five branches with experience of working with migrants.

The working group developed a toolkit that provides advice and guidance¹⁰. A training course on how to respond to and support people in vulnerable situations, focusing on migrants in general and those obliged to return in particular, was also developed and tested with good results in several local branches.

5.1.2 The International Department of the Swedish Red Cross

The International Department is responsible for partnerships with and support to a number of sister National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, including in countries of origin of many rejected asylum seekers.

We have since 2008 worked with the aim of creating consensus within the Swedish Red Cross on how to work with migrants

⁹ See <http://www.ifrc.org/who-we-are/vision-and-mission/the-seven-fundamental-principles>

¹⁰ Swedish Red Cross, Mötet mellan migranten och Röda Korset under asyl- och återvändandeprocessen, 2014

who are obliged to return, in order to strengthen and further develop interdepartmental cooperation.

5.1.3 Other National Red Cross Societies in Europe

In many European countries, primarily in the EU but also elsewhere, we can observe a similar situation as in Sweden. Many asylum seekers and other migrants do not fulfil the conditions to be granted a residence permit and are therefore obliged to leave the country.

The transnational project European Red Cross Return Initiative (ERCRI), which was coordinated by the Swedish Red Cross in cooperation with five sister National Societies and the Red Cross/EU Office, undertook a mapping of needs and already existing return-related activities. It recommended continued and strengthened cooperation, including through joint operational pilot projects, and proposed a “best practice model” for work to support migrants who are obliged to return.¹¹

Currently, cooperation between European Red Cross Societies includes mutual support in individual return cases, information-sharing, common trainings and support when starting new return-related activities. This has been facilitated by the project Red Cross Network on Return II through its focus on strengthening and further developing cooperation within and beyond the International Red Cross and Crescent Movement.

5.1.4 Other actors and organisations

In our work with individual return cases in Sweden, cooperation with other actors is common, especially as regards particularly vulnerable people, such as women who have been victims of violence, children and elderly people. This cooperation is based on the specific needs of the individual, e.g. concerning health care, education and elderly care.

11 The European Red Cross Return Initiative was a joint project of the British Red Cross, the Bulgarian Red Cross, the Danish Red Cross, the German Red Cross, the Swedish Red Cross, the Swiss Red Cross and the Red Cross/EU Office, cofinanced by the European Community under the RETURN – Preparatory Actions for 2006; final report available here: <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/migration/perco/perco-ercrri-en.pdf>

We also cooperate with non-governmental organisations in countries of origin based on the individual’s needs after return. Our sister National Societies can identify organisations providing the necessary services.

Other humanitarian actors in Europe offering support before and after return include Caritas in Austria and Belgium, Maatwerk bij Terugkeer in the Netherlands and Refugee Action in the UK. The Swedish Red Cross cooperates with these organisations within the network European Reintegration Support Organization (ERSO)¹², which facilitates access to return-relevant country of origin information. Moreover, migrants returning to countries where the Red Cross and Red Crescent cannot provide support have been referred to organisations within the ERSO network.

5.1.5 The Swedish authorities

In Sweden, the project has primarily cooperated with the Swedish Migration Agency and the police. Initially, i.e. during the first project from 2008 to 2010, much time was dedicated to establishing contacts with the Swedish authorities. The project staff has visited many of the Migration Agency’s reception units and detention centres as well the border police in several police districts. We have also provided written information and participated in conferences organised by the authorities in order to raise awareness about the role and activities of the Swedish Red Cross.

We have also had contact and met with experts of the Swedish Migration Agency and the police to share information and experiences. In our daily work, we are often contacted by case officers of the Migration Agency, who ask for information about what kind of return-related support the Swedish Red Cross can provide. We are similarly contacted by the police in individual cases.

12 ERSO is a network of several European Reintegration Support Organisations working closely together in the field of migration and development. The ERSO network’s objective is to exchange and collect expertise, best practice and information concerning voluntary return and reintegration

5.2 Partners in countries of origin

An important part of developing our work to support migrants who are obliged to return has been to develop operational cooperation with sister National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and/or the IFRC in a number of countries of origin: Serbia, Kosovo, FYROM, the Russian Federation and Iraq. During the first project from 2008 to 2010, it quickly became apparent that our support would become more efficient and sustainable if we could strengthen cooperation between National Societies in host countries and countries of origin.

The operational cooperation between National Societies has improved during the past years through the development of common guidelines and strategies on how to work with migrants and address their needs and vulnerability. Likewise, our joint policy and advocacy work in Europe has made great strides. We have found common avenues to further strengthen

our humanitarian voice, which is undoubtedly necessary when so many people are forced to flee from their country of origin to find safety and better prospects elsewhere.

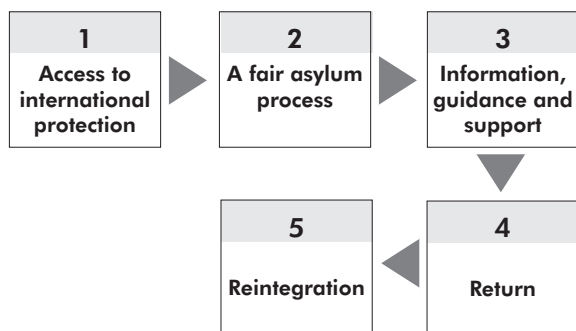
When the Swedish Red Cross started the first project in 2008, the operational cooperation described above was still in its early stages of development. We had to work by trial and error but results exceeded expectations. For more about operational cooperation, see section 6.

5.3 Working methods

The starting point of the Swedish Red Cross' work is the individual's right to/need of:

Our work to provide counselling and support to people who have been refused asylum and are obliged to return to their country of origin is based on these five steps. The present and previous projects have involved defining and developing support relevant to steps 3 to 5.

Step	Definition	Method
Access to international protection	Access to protection is ensured	Analysis of national and international law, advocacy work
A fair asylum process	Asylum applications are examined in accordance with national and international law	Referral mechanism to ensure access to legal advice
Information, guidance and support	Asylum seekers receive accurate and objective information and understand how the asylum process and return process work	Information and guidance about the asylum process and the return process Support in contacting the authorities and other actors Psychosocial support
Return	Rejected asylum seekers have the opportunity to return in safe and dignified conditions and with full respect for their human rights	Assessment of individual needs before and after return Information about conditions in country of origin Practical preparations Material assistance
Reintegration	People who have returned are given the means to achieve sustainable reintegration, from a humanitarian and social perspective	Guidance and support in contacting the authorities and other actors Material assistance Support for self-reliance



The table on the previous page outlines the methods used by the Swedish Red Cross to address needs in the different steps, each of which is important for achieving the objective of a safe, humane and dignified return. A more detailed description follows in sections 5.3.1 to 5.3.5.

5.3.1 A fair asylum process

In order to contribute to a fair asylum process, the Swedish Red Cross provides comprehensive information about the asylum process and offers counselling to rejected asylum seekers. We can provide legal assistance and advice if there are new circumstances in an asylum case that constitute an impediment to return.

5.3.2 Information, guidance and support

Providing information, guidance and support is to a large extent about answering individual questions that come up during the return process. What does it entail in practise? How does it work and what happens during the return process? Many questions concern consequences of not complying with the obligation to leave the country: What are the conditions of detention? What happens if a return case is handed over to the police? What does it involve to remain in Sweden as an irregular migrant; what are the rights of people without a legal status? We also receive questions about the Dublin Regulation and how it works.

Many rejected asylum seekers ask for psycho-social support and assistance in contacting other actors and organisations, including the Swedish Migration Agency, the police, health care services and their children's school. Many who return do not feel well and need someone to talk to and share their thoughts with.

5.3.3 Return

When a rejected asylum seeker has accepted to return to her/his country of origin and requested our support in the return process, we make an assessment of needs that may arise before departure and immediately after return.

Upon request and when possible, the Swedish Red Cross also provides information about conditions in the home country. For this purpose, we have created a database containing return-related country of origin information. In addition, we may search for information through our sister National Societies and other organisations.

The Swedish Red Cross assesses the special needs of particularly vulnerable people, including people with disabilities and women who are victims of violence.

If needed, we also provide material assistance before return, such as clothing and suitcases (this is often done through our local branches).

5.3.4 Reintegration

For many who return, receiving support in the reintegration process is decisive. It enables them to recreate a life of stability and security.

The support provided after return by the Swedish Red Cross in cooperation with our partners can be divided into three categories:

Short-term support:

- Reception upon arrival and onward transportation to their home town, if needed;
- Food and hygiene parcels;
- Information and guidance;
- Information and support related to registration and renewal of identity documents;
- Support in contacting relevant local authorities concerning temporary accommodation, health care services and education;
- Support in contacting other organisations, for instance to obtain legal advice and assistance.

Long-term support:

- Psychosocial support and home visits;
- Support for self-reliance, such as training courses to improve employability and assistance in setting up small businesses.

Follow-up assessments:

Regular follow-up assessments have been made by interviewing families and individuals who have returned, covering the following issues: personal security, livelihood, housing, education, health care, social welfare and support received from the Red Cross and Red Crescent, as well as any other issue that the persons concerned wished to bring to our attention.

5.3.5 Particularly vulnerable groups

Needs and capacities vary between different individuals. It has become clear, however, that most people who return are in need of some kind of support, which can range from advice on a specific issue to more comprehensive assistance.

There are particularly vulnerable groups and individuals who generally need special assistance to ensure that they are able to return in as dignified conditions as possible. These groups include: people with disabilities, children and women who are victims of violence.

5.3.5.1 People with disabilities

In section 6, we present examples of people with disabilities who have returned to their country of origin. During the present project, it has become clear that people in this group often need longer time to prepare their return and more assistance with practical issues. There is a greater need for a planned reception upon arrival, especially if the individual concerned lacks a social network.

5.3.5.2 Children

Families with children are common among those approaching the Swedish Red Cross for support after having been refused asylum. In our follow-up assessments, we have noted that children who have not been aware of the family's situation and therefore unable to prepare themselves for the return to the country of origin, generally appear to be at increased risk of social exclusion and psychological problems. While not excluding that also other factors may have affected their situation, this finding suggests that there is a need to develop the work with children in the return process to ensure their active involvement.

In the preparation for return, two aspects are of great importance for achieving quick and successful reintegration: the child's mental preparedness and practical arrangements, such as obtaining the necessary documentation (e.g. school certificates) in Sweden.

As part of the present project, we have developed a special checklist for the return of children in families, which contains tips and advice on how case officers, parents and teachers can support them.

The return of unaccompanied children is not discussed in this report. Unaccompanied children and their legal guardians rarely contact the Swedish Red Cross for return-related support.

5.3.5.3 Women who are victims of violence

In about 70 return cases, we have identified women who have been victims of violence. The perpetrator is often a family member: the woman's husband, father or brother. These women have been unable to find protection in their country of origin, neither from other family members and relatives, nor from the local authorities.

There is a great need for counselling among this group. While the women have been refused asylum, the fact remains that they are victims of violence and have a fear of returning.

Several of the women were placed in a treatment centre during the asylum process. Almost all received some form of psychological treatment. It is vital that their return is planned in consultation with the medical staff responsible for their treatment. If there is a possibility of continued treatment in the country of origin, it is important that they bring with them the necessary medical certificates and records from Sweden.

It is important for these women to be informed about the date of their return, so that they can prepare themselves mentally. In our follow-up assessments, we have seen that lack of information has negatively affected women's mental health. It is also important to ensure that they do not arrive home during the night, as this may cause unnecessary anxiety as well as practical problems.

In our view, reliable information about support services in the country of origin must be available in these cases, including about local support groups and women's networks. If there is a safe house, it should be contacted to ensure protection if needed. It is also important to note that, even if support and protection is available, it may not be immediately accessible.



Photo: Suzana Pounovska/Macedonia Red Cross

6. Our support – results and challenges

In this section, we would like to present the people who this report is about – those who have returned to their country of origin. The different case descriptions should be seen as examples representing a large number of similar cases. The names are fictitious.

People who return are often confronted by the same situation as when they left. Sometimes they find themselves in an even worse situation, as a result of having escaped and applied for asylum elsewhere. A difficult humanitarian situation, a sense of powerlessness, failure and helplessness, and a lack of support by the local authorities are recurring concerns among those we have met when making follow-up assessments after return.

Since 2008, we have interviewed 639 persons. This has given us a unique insight into what happens after arrival to the country of origin. Thanks to these follow-up interviews and individual needs assessments, the Swedish Red Cross has received confirmation that the

support we provide makes a difference for the individual concerned. This in turn increases the chances of successful reintegration. We have also learned about what methods work best and what new services are needed.

6.1 To doubt that one's asylum application has been properly examined

A family with an autistic child and its grandmother will be returned to Armenia. The child's mother is five months pregnant. The family claims to come from Syria and belong to a minority group, but the Swedish Migration Agency doubts this and orders a language analysis. The analysis indicates that the family originates from Armenia. The family maintains that they have never lived in Armenia and that they have no connection to the country.

The family turns to the Swedish Red Cross for support and advice. They have been informed

by the Swedish Migration Agency about the return process and say that they are aware of the consequences of not cooperating with the Agency. However, there are several parts of the rejection decision that they do not understand and they complain that it is not clear from the decision that their reasons for asylum have been properly examined.

As the family is in need of legal advice, the case is referred to our migration lawyers.

It is common that asylum seekers approach the Swedish Red Cross for legal advice when their asylum application has been refused. They often have questions about the rejection decision and its reasoning. In this regard, we note that they often have not been able to understand the information provided by the Swedish Migration Agency and by their public counsel. They need time to contemplate the decision and to subsequently be given the opportunity to ask questions.

This is how we have worked

In this case, we provided counselling for the family, in addition to legal advice. The information they received from the Swedish Migration Agency resulted in new questions about what would happen to them. We offered the family continued contact and guidance, both return-related and about circumstances that could constitute an impediment to return.

Comments

People who have been refused asylum need time to talk about the rejection decision. The reasons for refusal may need to be explained several times to ensure that the decision is understood. Any unclear issues must be clarified. This is essential for the individual concerned to accept that her/his asylum application has been properly examined.

In many cases, a rejected asylum seeker has invested everything, financially and emotionally, in creating a new life in the host country.

Many strongly fear returning based on their experiences from the country of origin. Irrespective of its well-foundedness, this fear can be very real and affect the individual's wellbeing.

6.2 To reach a decision whether to return or not

Nada comes from Montenegro and has one child. After one year in Sweden, her asylum application is rejected. The rejection decision becomes final and there are no new circumstances that constitute an impediment to return.

Nada is divorced and used to live in a small village in a rural area. She stayed together with her parents and was financially dependent on them.

Her flight was caused by a feeling of social exclusion due to being divorced and an inability to pay for the care and treatment of her son, who suffered from kidney problems.

When contacting the Swedish Red Cross, Nada says that: "I don't trust what the Swedish Migration Agency tells me since they don't want to understand my situation. They only want to send me home and don't care about anything else".

Nada is anxious and does not know what to do. She needs time and above all answers to her questions about other options than return. What will happen now? Can she remain in Sweden as an irregular migrant? Who can support her and her son? Can the Red Cross provide accommodation and food? Is it possible to apply for asylum in another country?

It is common that rejected asylum seekers turn to the Swedish Red Cross for support to remain in the country without a legal status or to apply for asylum elsewhere. They also ask for housing, food and medicines. These are services that we do not normally provide.

We frequently get questions about alternative options to return. In the case above, the individual could not decide whether to return to her country of origin or not.



Photo: Faton Shlehu/IFRC/Kosovo

This is how we have worked

Nada received information and guidance about different options and their consequences. She had difficulties in finding any solution to her situation and decided, aware of the consequences, to try to remain in Sweden as an irregular migrant. Nada had hopes that another organisation, which had supported her during the asylum process, would offer housing. A few months later, she contacted the Swedish Red Cross again, this time to discuss return.

Comments

More time for counselling is needed to, as far as possible, answer the many questions often asked by rejected asylum seekers. The individual needs time to accept the situation and to get out of a sense of desperation and move on. This in turn can help the individual to reach a decision about what to do and to regain a sense of dignity. In most cases, the decision is to return, even if it sometimes requires additional time. It is important to take advantage of this

opportunity while in Sweden, in order for the individual to be assured that all other options have been explored before returning to the country of origin.

6.3 To feel secure when deciding to return

After two years of waiting, Amir, his wife and their two children are refused asylum and obliged to return to Iraq. The family escaped to Sweden and applied for asylum due to the security situation in Iraq but also because one of the children suffered from a heart disease and was in need of specialist treatment. In Sweden, the child has been committed to hospital on several occasions. His doctor writes a medical certificate. But the child's condition and need of treatment is not considered sufficient to constitute an impediment to return.

The family is informed by the Swedish Migration Agency that they are entitled to apply for reestablishment support, on condition that they cooperate with the Agency and accept to return through voluntary departure.

Amir contacts the Swedish Red Cross to discuss his family's situation. He wants to know whether the Red Cross can help them in their asylum case. Can the Red Cross assist in submitting an application to the Migration Agency invoking new circumstances that constitute an impediment to return? He also wants to know what happens if they apply for reestablishment support. Does that mean that they can no longer claim new circumstances that could constitute an impediment to return?

Many rejected asylum seekers who are entitled to apply for reestablishment support contact the Swedish Red Cross to inquire about the consequences of making such an application. While the possibility of receiving reestablishment support is appreciated, there is often uncertainty about the consequences. Does it mean that the individual gives up her/his right to invoke new circumstances that could constitute an impediment to return? This is one of the most common questions we are asked.

Many who return tell us that it is very important to clarify the consequences of making an application for reestablishment support.

This is how we have worked

Amir did not understand the information he had received from the Swedish Migration Agency about return through voluntary departure. Nor did he understand the consequences of not accepting to return to Iraq.

He had partly understood the information about reestablishment support and considered it positive that he and his family would be paid an allowance after return.

Amir wished to cooperate with the Migration Agency and return through voluntary departure. But he needed to discuss it further. He wanted to be sure that he and his family would not risk relinquishing their right to invoke possible new circumstances that could constitute an impediment to return.

We had several counselling sessions with Amir and his family. We talked about how to submit an application to invoke new circumstances and what conditions would constitute an impediment to return. We also offered to refer them to our migration lawyers for legal advice.

We informed them that the entitlement to apply for reestablishment support is lost if they do not cooperate with the Migration Agency and their return case is handed over to the police for enforcement. We also explained that, even if the family applies for reestablishment support, they retain the right to submit an application to invoke new circumstances, for instance if the security situation in their country of origin deteriorates.

In several cases, rejected asylum seekers entitled to apply for reestablishment support have questioned the motive behind the Migration Agency's offer. Also Amir thought about this: – I think that the Swedish Migration Agency wants me to apply for reestablishment support simply to make me accept the rejection decision and return home. I dare not take that risk, even though I need the money. However, after our counselling sessions, Amir and his family decided to return to Iraq.

Comments

In order to avoid that the information given to rejected asylum seekers is perceived as unreliable or misleading, they need clear and comprehensive information about their rights and obligations.

It is also important that they receive information at an early stage in the return process and are given time and opportunity to ask questions. Timely and clear answers make it easier for the individual to decide on the options available. The individual's confidence in the Swedish Migration Agency increases if she/he is satisfied that no relevant information is withheld.

6.4 Preparation for return

Maria is a single parent with a son who suffers from reduced mental and physical ability. She is refused asylum in Sweden and obliged to return to Kosovo. Her son is 30 years old, uses a wheelchair and is totally dependent on help from others. They used to live together with Maria's parents. She has never worked outside the home since her son needs constant care. He is also overweight, which makes it difficult for Maria to handle him. In the country of origin, she did not receive any assistance or compensation for the care she provided. Maria decides to return, but is concerned about a lack of medicines and disability aids. She also needs clothing and suitcases.

When the individual has had time to consider all options and their consequences, she/he is ready to start planning for the future. Practical return-related assistance includes several different needs-based activities, aiming at supporting the individual during the return process in Sweden. According to several people who have returned, a well-planned and orderly departure that takes into account the individual's needs, contributes to a decreased fear of return and a more dignified arrival in the country of origin.

It is quite common that people in need of regular medication need to bring extra medicines when they return. The case officers at the Swedish Migration Agency usually encourage them to contact their doctor for extra medicines. However, all are not aware that they can receive extra medicines or fail to ask their doctor for a prescription. More information and support in contacting health care services is therefore needed.



Photo: Tatiana Klenitskaya/Russia Red Cross

In addition, there is also a need of clothing and suitcases, in particular as regards families with small children.

This is how we have worked

Maria contacted the Swedish Red Cross through our migration advisory service and asked for a personal meeting. However, since she had been placed in a remote asylum centre with poor bus services and could not leave her son for the

travel time required, she was unable to go to a local Red Cross office. Instead, Maria received a visit from a Red Cross volunteer. It was important for her that she got someone to talk to about her situation.

Based on a needs assessment, we offered Maria practical assistance. She was informed about every step of the process and a plan was drawn up on how to prepare her return.

Through contacting the nearest technical aid centre for people with disabilities, the local Red Cross branch provided a wheelchair for Maria's son that they could bring to Kosovo. Maria was also assisted in contacting the local health care centre to receive a prescription for extra medicines. Clothing and suitcases were bought from a Red Cross second-hand shop.

Comments

Practical assistance during the return process is of great importance for people who are obliged to return. The process of preparing for return is often characterised by anxiety and stress, which increases the need for both practical and psychosocial support.

There are many rejected asylum seekers staying in remote locations who do not have the economic means to travel in order to contact organisations for return-related support. This is a major problem for those who are in need of assistance.



Photo: Darko Momirov/Makedona Red Cross

6.5 Individually tailored practical assistance

Sofia is 54 years old and has an intellectual disability. After two years in Sweden, she is obliged to return to Serbia. Sofia has no close relatives who can take care of her in the country of origin. In Sweden, she has a sister with whom she wishes to reunite after their mother died. During most of the asylum process, she has stayed at a care home. Her sister visits her regularly and is constantly in contact with her.

When Sofia is refused asylum and receives the rejection decision, her sister is advised by the Swedish Migration Agency to contact the Swedish Red Cross. Sofia's sister is very worried about what will happen after return. Who will take care of Sofia in Serbia? Where will Sofia find housing? What about food? She often calls the Red Cross and needs someone to talk to.

In many return cases, there is a need of information about conditions in the country of origin, especially as regards particularly vulnerable people. Providing such information has proven to be a very important part of the support that we can offer in Sweden.

Most requests for information concern availability of adequate health care, specific medicines, safe houses for victims of violence and homes for elderly people. In addition, it is of crucial importance to have information about what will happen if a person with special needs returns without being received by someone upon arrival.

In order to contribute to a humane and dignified return, we also contact the Swedish Migration Agency and the police to discuss practical arrangements in individual cases.

This is how we have worked

As regards Sofia's return, the Swedish Red Cross cooperated both with the Red Cross of Serbia and the Swedish Migration Agency.

Through the network of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that we have created, the Swedish Red Cross has access to a fast and efficient information system. We have been able to build a database containing return-related country

of origin information, covering issues such as security, housing, health care, social benefits, education, minority protection and gender. It also includes information about other actors and organisations that can provide support after return.

According to information from the Red Cross of Serbia, it would be possible for Sofia to be placed in a home for elderly people. But first she had to be registered in her home municipality. After that, she could turn to the municipal social services and apply for placement. Then the social services would undertake a needs assessment. And following a positive decision, she would have to wait for a place to be available at an elderly home. The whole procedure would normally take at least six months and up to one year. Sofia needed help to ensure its successful conclusion.

What would happen meanwhile? She had no other housing and no relatives who could take care of her in Serbia.

When Sofia's sister contacted us, the Swedish Migration Agency had already initiated the return process and was about to make travel arrangements. We had several contacts with the Red Cross of Serbia to discuss Sofia's situation. It was important that her housing situation was solved before return. We agreed with the Red Cross of Serbia that:

- We would contact Sofia's case officer at the Migration Agency to explain the situation and discuss the possibility of postponing her return trip for two or three weeks, in order to have time to find housing.
- The Red Cross of Serbia would, through its contacts on the national and local level, try to arrange a placement in an elderly home.

The Swedish Migration Agency agreed to postpone Sofia's return trip. The Red Cross of Serbia managed to find a place in

a home for elderly and organised reception and transportation upon arrival. This meant a lot both to Sofia and her sister.

Sofia's sister, who had been very worried about what would happen after return, said: – Although I myself am from Serbia, I would never have been able to do all what you have done for Sofia.

Comments

For return to be considered dignified, both as regards preparations in Sweden and after arrival in the country of origin, it is necessary to ensure sufficient time for preparations, access to relevant information and efficient cooperation between all actors involved. This is especially important in cases of particularly vulnerable people. Efficient cooperation requires knowledge of different roles and responsibilities, and well-functioning networks and channels of communication.

6.6 Information, guidance and practical assistance after return

Annika and her 20 years old son Edvard are obliged to return to Kosovo after almost eight years in Sweden. When Edvard contacts the Swedish Red Cross, they are in hiding. He calls to discuss ways of remaining in Sweden. Edvard does not accept to return to their country of origin. He only has terrible memories of his childhood in Kosovo and views it as a foreign country. He likes Sweden and wants to stay here.

After several months without contact with us, Edvard calls from a detention centre. He will be forcibly removed to Kosovo within a couple of days and is very concerned about his return.

Edvard and his mother do not know what will happen after return but hope that they can stay with a relative. They have no valid identity documents. Edvard has no education and lacks work experience. His mother is ill.

There is generally a great need for support in the form of information and guidance in the country of origin, especially if the individuals concerned have been away from the country for a long time.

Some people who are obliged to return only need information about how to register in their home municipality, others need more comprehensive guidance and assistance in contacting relevant local authorities. Without such support, the reintegration process would be significantly prolonged. By way of example, during the period of 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2014, we made follow-up assessments of 44 families (145 persons) in Kosovo of which 29 families (86 persons) were in need of assistance in contacting local authorities.

We have observed that there is a general view in countries of origin that people returning have failed and come back for help. This further complicates the situation after return.

The Government of Kosovo has developed a National Strategy for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo¹³. Based on this strategy, reintegration support provided by the local authorities includes, inter alia:

- Housing and renovation/reconstruction of existing house;
- Food and hygiene parcels and medicines;
- Professional training and language training for children;

However, only people who left Kosovo before 28 July 2010 and apply within twelve months after return are entitled to benefit from reintegration support. Others may be eligible for regular services and social assistance provided by the municipalities.

Our follow-up assessments show that many people who have returned did not receive reintegration support, some of them despite fulfilling the relevant criteria. Among the 44 families followed-up in Kosovo in 2013 and 2014, only eight families met the criteria for benefiting from reintegration support. Of those, two did not receive any support.



Photo: Najwa Qaisy/IFRC/Iraq

This is how we have worked

Before return, we made an *assessment* in order to identify what support Annika and her son Edvard would need in their country of origin. The assessment was then sent to the Red Cross of Kosovo.

The family received the name and telephone number of a contact person at the Red Cross whom they were welcome to call upon arrival. Now it was up to them to take the next step. They decided to turn to the Red Cross of Kosovo.

Within a week, Annika and Edvard were visited by two representatives of the IFRC and the Red Cross of Kosovo. They discussed the needs assessment made by the Swedish Red Cross and concluded that Annika's need of health care had to be prioritised.

The Red Cross of Kosovo considered that Annika and her son met the criteria for benefiting from reintegration support provided by the local authorities. While they already had housing, the family was in need of medicines and food parcels. Annika and Edvard were informed about their rights and referred to the Municipal Office for Communities and Returns.

13 http://www.mpb-ks.org/repository/docs/National_Strategy_for_Reintegration_of_Repatriated_Persons.pdf

Despite these efforts, they were refused support as they could not prove that they had left Kosovo before 28 July 2010.

The Red Cross of Kosovo therefore had to help the family to try to speed up the civil registration process, in order for Annika to be eligible for regular health care services and social assistance. This turned out to be a complicated undertaking. Both Annika and Edvard had to obtain several different certificates to be able to register in their home municipality. They had no expired documents that could be renewed. Because of their long absence from Kosovo, they lacked knowledge of how the process works. By assisting in contacting the relevant authorities, the Red Cross facilitated the family's registration. Annika was then able to access health care. She also applied for social assistance, but was refused on the ground that Edvard was of working age and therefore should be able to provide for their livelihood.

It is common that people who have returned are denied social assistance even when they are in clear need of it. This not only applies to Kosovo but also to other countries of origin. However, this problem affects the whole population, not only people who have returned, as the demand for assistance exceeds available resources.

Out of the 44 families followed up in Kosovo in 2013 and 2014, only eight families were granted social assistance.

Comments

Most people who have returned are in need of guidance, especially those who have been away from their country of origin for a long time. There is a great need for information about the civil registration process and, in many cases, for support in contacting the local authorities. The majority of those who have returned are also in need of social assistance. Immediately upon arrival, many are in need of food and hygiene parcels.

Public reintegration support does not exist or is very limited. Moreover, people who have returned often do not receive such support despite fulfilling the relevant criteria.

6.7 Housing

Stefan, his wife and their two children are obliged to return to FYROM after two years in Sweden. The older child suffers from asthma. The family came to Sweden in the hope of finding health care for him.

When they are refused asylum and receive the rejection decision, they accept to return. What worries Stefan, however, is that he and the family will return to the same situation as when they left their country of origin. He had no steady job and the family lacked their own housing.

Before Stefan and his family came to Sweden, they lived together with his parents in a small house with one room and a kitchen. The house was old and in need of renovation. After return, they would have no other choice than to stay with his parents again. He is concerned that this may aggravate his son's asthma as the house is mold infested.

In general, lack of housing is a common problem among people who are obliged to return. Access to proper housing is also one of the most important requirements for sustainable return and reintegration.

The public authorities in our partner countries do not provide housing for people who return, with the exception of Kosovo where limited support is available. Our follow-up assessments in all countries concerned show that there is a great need for housing support. Out of a total of 83 families (281 persons) followed up in 2013 and 2014, only 20 families had their own housing. Moreover, houses and apartments are often in poor condition and in great need of renovation.

The majority of the families followed up stayed with relatives or friends. This is often a temporary solution that is not sustainable



Photo: Vera Lumi-Shala/IFC/Kosovo

in the longer term. Seven of the families lived in rented apartments, often paid by a relative living abroad. Another seven families received temporary housing support from the authorities, of which six had returned to Kosovo, but none of them had found a long term solution to their housing needs.

In one case, we managed to arrange placement in an elderly home (described above in section 6.5). This is the only case where the support provided by the public authorities can be viewed as a permanent solution.

This is how we have worked

We made an assessment of what support the family would need in their country of origin and sent it to the Macedonian Red Cross. The assessment showed that they were in need of initial assistance and housing support.

Stefan contacted the Macedonian Red Cross a few days after the family's arrival in FYROM. A week later, they were visited by the Red Cross at the house of Stefan's parents. They discussed the needs assessment together and agreed on how to proceed.

The Macedonian Red Cross noted that the needs assessment made by the Swedish Red Cross was consistent with the family's actual situation after return. They also confirmed that the house was in great need of renovation and that this had to be prioritised as it was late October and winter was coming. The Macedonian Red Cross and the UNHCR have a long-standing cooperation in providing house support to particularly vulnerable groups, especially families with children.

The roof was leaking and in urgent need of repair. Doors and windows had to be insulated. The Red Cross hired a carpenter to identify possible solutions. It was concluded that the roof could be mended but that the doors and windows had to be replaced. Stefan went to several stores selling building materials to compare prices and presented cost estimates to the Red Cross. Stefan did the work on the house himself with the help of a neighbour.

The Macedonian Red Cross visited the family several times during the renovation. Stefan expressed his happiness: – I can't describe how happy I am that you helped me with the renovation of the house. I can't believe that at last my children will sleep in a dry room.

Comments

Problems related to housing are a common concern among people who have returned. The majority of those who we have met had no house or apartment of their own to return to. This means that they had to find temporary housing solutions, such as staying with relatives or friends. Having to depend on the goodwill of others creates dependency and insecurity. Moreover, not having a permanent address makes it more difficult to access social assistance and education. These problems undermine reintegration efforts and increase the likelihood of people once again leaving their country of origin to find better prospects abroad.

Even when housing is available, houses and apartments are generally in poor condition and not inhabitable without renovation. Public housing support for people who return is often non-existent.

6.8 Assistance to support self-reliance

David, his wife Emma and their two daughters are obliged to return to Serbia after two years in Sweden. They belong to a minority group.

Before the family returns, they contact the Swedish Red Cross to discuss their situation. David is very disappointed that they were not allowed to stay in Sweden. He is concerned about his daughters. They have adapted well to life in Sweden and are doing very well at school. David is worried about how they will make it in Serbia. The family has a house but no means of livelihood. David and his wife have no education and have only had temporary jobs.

In general, a lack of livelihood opportunities is one of the most difficult problems for people who return. It is difficult to find work in all of our partner countries, partly because of high unemployment but also due to low or no education among those who return and a lack of work experience and contacts with prospective employers. However, some have practical skills such as painting, carpentry and wood chopping.

In Serbia and Kosovo, it is particularly difficult for Roma to find employment. For most of them, undeclared work is the only way to earn an income. This means that they lack labour law protection, which in turn may further increase their vulnerability.

Our follow-up assessments show that, while 64 out of 81 families followed up in 2013 and 2014 received an income through temporary employment, their economic situation remained precarious. Those with previous experience work in sectors where long-term jobs are scarce and competition is tough. It is particularly difficult for small private businesses to generate

a steady and sufficient income. However, without the self-reliance support provided by the Red Cross, these families would not have earned any income at all.

When we included assistance to support self-reliance in the project, the proportion of families that could earn at least part of their own livelihood increased. From the end of 2012 to June 2015, the proportion increased by 10% in Serbia and 40% in Kosovo.

In 2009, the Government of Serbia adopted a Strategy of Returnees' Reintegration Based on the Readmission Agreement¹⁴, addressing different issues of relevance for achieving

sustainable reintegration. However, it does not foresee any concrete support to facilitate self-reliance of people who return.

The socio-economic situation in Serbia has made it difficult to implement the strategy. The standard of living is low and characterised by high unemployment and poverty.

The *Serbian National Employment Strategy* mentions the need for action to reduce discrimination and increase the employment rate among socially marginalised groups, including Roma. People who return are, however, not identified as a particularly vulnerable group. There are no measures to facilitate their reintegration into the labour market in Serbia.

14 http://www.kirs.gov.rs/docs/Readmission_strategy.pdf



Photo: Vera Lumi-Shalaj/IFC/Kosovo

This is how we have worked

During the meeting with David and Emma, the Red Cross of Serbia discussed the needs assessment made by the Swedish Red Cross. Based on this assessment, the Red Cross initiated assistance to support self-reliance.

Assistance to support self-reliance is provided in accordance with a model developed based on previous positive experiences from ICRC programmes:

- Individual counselling
- Individual action plan
- Vocational training and skills enhancement activities
- Provision of basic equipment

The Red Cross of Serbia is experienced in supporting people in vulnerable situations to earn their own income through employment. Together with the Red Cross, David and Emma agreed on two individual action plans. David wanted help to buy tools and Emma to find a part time job.

David's action plan included a mapping of his previous work experience. He had worked in different sectors, mostly in construction. His father in law was running a small saw mill.

The Red Cross of Serbia approved David's request and suggested that he should find out where tools could be bought and compare prices of different suppliers. Two weeks later, David presented a list of several different alternatives. The following tools were purchased: a power saw, a hack saw, a hand saw, a jig saw and an axe.

Three months after the family's return, David and his father in law received their first new costumers. They were visited twice by the Red Cross during the start-up period.

The Red Cross of Serbia also discussed with Emma about the possibilities for her to find employment. Through its local network, the Red Cross assisted Emma in contacting a family that needed cleaning help. She was hired for six hours of work per week.

Comments

Lack of livelihood opportunities continues to be a major obstacle to sustainable reintegration. The most effective remedies have been assistance in setting up a small business and using local networks to find employment. There is a great need for assistance to support self-reliance in countries of origin. Public self-reliance support is non-existent or very limited, often including only training activities.

As exemplified in the case described above, many people who return have work experience despite lacking formal education. They need guidance, practical support and help to buy the necessary tools and equipment. The local network of the Red Cross has proven to be very useful in this regard.

6.9 Assistance in contacting other actors that can provide adequate support

Peter, Olga and their two daughters are obliged to return to the Republic of Dagestan in the Russian Federation after more than four years in Sweden. Peter has a physical disability and their youngest daughter is autistic. They have no jobs and the family lacks housing in their country of origin.

While in Sweden, they receive support from the municipality's children care services. It in turn contacts the local Red Cross branch for assistance after return, including housing, health care and livelihood support. However, before they are scheduled to meet with the Red Cross, the family is unexpectedly forcibly removed to the Russian Federation.

People with disabilities should be considered as a particularly vulnerable group. They risk ending up in a very difficult situation in the country of origin after return. In the absence of public support, there is a great need for assistance, often requiring the involvement of several different actors.

As opposed to Kosovo and Serbia, the Russian Federation has no reintegration strategy. While there is a so called “programme of return of compatriots from abroad”, it does not cover people who have left the Russian Federation to apply for asylum elsewhere. This programme provides for support related to travel arrangements for return, citizenship and registration, employment, temporary housing and cash support (approximately 3.000 USD per family member).

As part of the present project, the Russian Red Cross has initiated advocacy work to include rejected asylum seekers who return in the programme.

This is how we have worked

In this case, we contacted the Russian Red Cross Headquarters in Moscow and described the situation. They in turn contacted the local Red Cross in Makhachkala in Dagestan. The Red Cross located the family and initiated a needs assessment. It was concluded that the family was in a very difficult situation. They stayed with relatives in a mountainous area outside their home town and winter was coming. Their housing consisted of a shed without a proper roof and heating. The family lacked food, health care and medicines.

A “visiting nurse” of the local Red Cross assisted the family and helped them in contacting the relevant authorities. After a few months, they could move back to their previous housing, a wagon parked on a main street that they shared with another family. The Red Cross facilitated this by supplying kitchen utensils, beds, mattresses, blankets, etc. The family was also assisted in contacting a school for children with special needs.

In addition, they needed to have their disabilities certified to receive the correct help and financial support from authorities. This required registration with a medical doctor, which proved to be a problem as the family did not have a permanent address. However, through its local network, the Red Cross managed to help them to register. The family was further assisted in contacting other local organisations, including an organisation offering free legal advice to vulnerable people. They were also in great need of psychosocial support and the Red Cross therefore visited the family regularly.

Comments

While cooperation between different actors is important, it is often lacking. There is a high risk of severe vulnerability if people with special needs are returned without proper reception upon arrival. Even when support is available, access often depends on knowledge and local networks.

7. Recommendations

Recommendations to the public authorities:

- Develop the dialogue and increase the number of planning meetings with rejected asylum seekers before return to ensure that they fully understand the rejection decision they have received, are aware of their rights and are sufficiently prepared for return.
- Ensure that the needs of the individual is at the center of the planning for return, taking into account particular vulnerabilities and availability of livelihood opportunities, housing and support in the country of origin.
- Improve the procedures for making travel arrangements. This is especially important for particularly vulnerable persons to ensure that they do not arrive home during the night without onward transportation from the airport.
- Increase the possibilities of extending the period of voluntary departure and clarify the grounds for extension.
- Extend the reestablishment support to more countries of origin, in particular where livelihood opportunities are scarce.
- Initiate regular consultations with the Swedish Red Cross and other relevant actors to exchange information and experiences.
- Ensure that rejected asylum seekers have timely access to information about support provided by the Swedish Red Cross and other actors.

Recommendations to the Red Cross and Red Crescent:

- Strengthen cooperation with relevant public authorities while ensuring that any support provided is based on the individual's own request.
- Increase the capacity to receive requests for information and support from rejected asylum seekers. All staff and volunteers should be informed about available services and able to make referrals.

- Increase the opportunities for personal meetings with rejected asylum seekers.
- Strengthen the capacity of local branches to handle requests for support from rejected asylum seekers, including by disseminating the toolkit developed by the project.
- Ensure that the training in psychosocial support developed by the project is available to staff and volunteers working with asylum seekers.
- Strengthen and develop regular contacts between National Societies in host countries and countries of origin.
- Disseminate results and experiences of working with rejected asylum seekers, nationally and internationally.
- Promote joint trainings on return-related support among National Societies.
- Increase cooperation between National Societies that provide support to rejected asylum seekers.

We would also like to share the recommendations developed as part of the present project and included in the report Gender perspective in asylum and return cases¹⁵:

- Strengthen the capacity of the migration authorities to make gender-aware analyses of asylum seekers' protection needs. Include a gender perspective in the investigation and assessment of applicants' need for international protection.
- Strengthen the capacity of the Swedish Migration Agency to determine the availability of effective national protection from a gender perspective. Develop procedures that promote greater responsiveness to women who have been victims of violence. For instance, the asylum assessment must take into account whether a criminal complaint could lead to a risk of increased violence or social stigmatisation.
- Increase the gender competence of the migration authorities regarding political opinion as a ground of persecution. This is

15 Swedish Red Cross, Gender perspective in asylum and return cases, 2015

of particular importance as women's political involvement may look different than that of men and women can be at higher risk just because of being women.

- The Swedish Migration Agency must provide clear information during the asylum process that domestic violence is a criminal offense in Sweden and that the incidence of such violence may be significant in the asylum assessment.
- Develop relevant gender-related country of origin information in the Swedish Migration Agency's database for legal and country of origin information (Lifos). Improve country of origin information regarding women's situation, their rights and access to effective and durable protection. This is important both for the asylum assessment and the return process.
- Ensure that asylum decisions and judgments include an objective account of relevant country of origin information – not only facts that may justify a refusal. It should also be clear how country of origin information provided by applicants has been assessed.
- Ensure that the Swedish Migration Agency better explains decisions and judgments involving an obligation to return, so that applicants fully understand why they have been refused asylum. It is extremely important that applicants feel that decisions and judgments are legally sound and that all of their claims have been properly examined.
- Strengthen the capacity of the Swedish Migration Agency to support applicants in the return process. A feeling of having had one's application unjustly assessed and being unfairly treated by the Swedish authorities, is likely to increase women's vulnerability in the country of origin by reinforcing mistrust towards public authorities.
- Ensure that the authorities responsible for enforcing return decisions employ a gender perspective. The way return is undertaken must be adapted to the individual, including taking into account gender. A dignified return is in everyone's interest and increases the chances of successful re-integration in the country of origin.

8. Concluding remarks

A journey comes to an end – its final destination is reached. Seven years of projects in different constellations are over. Now we bring our experiences and results from this period into our continued work with rejected asylum seekers and cooperation with other actors.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm thank you to all the people we have met along the way; to you who have been refused asylum and turned to us for support; to our deeply committed Red Cross volunteers across Sweden; to our fantastic colleagues in Sweden and around the world; and to all of you who have cooperated with us.

You have all contributed in various ways to the implementation of the project and to its results, which we hope will improve the conditions for those who are obliged to return to their country of origin.

THANK YOU!

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the world's largest humanitarian network. The Movement is neutral and impartial, and provides protection and assistance to people affected by disasters and conflicts. It endeavours to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. The Movement is made up of nearly 100 million members, volunteers and supporters in 189 National Societies

The world around us is in constant change. Human vulnerability and commitment, as well as the challenges in our society are changing. The Red Cross addresses change in the world around us by constantly developing activities and working methods, just as we have always done.