

Seventeen Return Stories



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All migrants featured in this booklet have given their consent for the publication. Fictitious names have been used to protect their privacy.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, 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.

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Carnegielaan 12
2517 KH The Hague
The Netherlands
Tel: +31.70.31 81 500
E-mail: iomthehague@iom.int
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People have always crossed borders in search of a better life. Aspirations and dreams, however, do not always come true. For some migrants, returning home is a logical, viable and desirable option. Of the many migrants with whom IOM the Netherlands is in contact every year, a few thousand sign up for IOM support before returning home voluntarily. While the needs of returning migrants vary greatly, most are in need of some sort of assistance in the return and reintegration process. This is why IOM continuously works on making its support for returnees as flexible as possible.

This booklet presents a small collection of stories selected out of the many return cases that IOM has assisted in recent years. Men and women and their children; young and not so young; from Africa, South America, Asia, the Caucasus or Eastern Europe; people with different skills and life plans. Each individual featured here has a story to tell: about achievements, but also about personal disappointments and concerns; about reuniting with family and friends; about adjusting and starting life anew. Yet all these stories have something in common: they are as much about the present as they are about the envisaged future.

Going back is not as easy or simple as it may seem. Often it means starting all over again. The stories show the different ways in which these people have used IOM's support to re-build their lives, securing an income by setting up a business or finding an employer, providing for the education of their young and taking care of their health. IOM would like to thank them all for sharing their personal story and wishes them the very best for their future!



Martin Wyss
Chief of Mission
IOM the Netherlands

My name is Namir.
I live in **Afghanistan.**

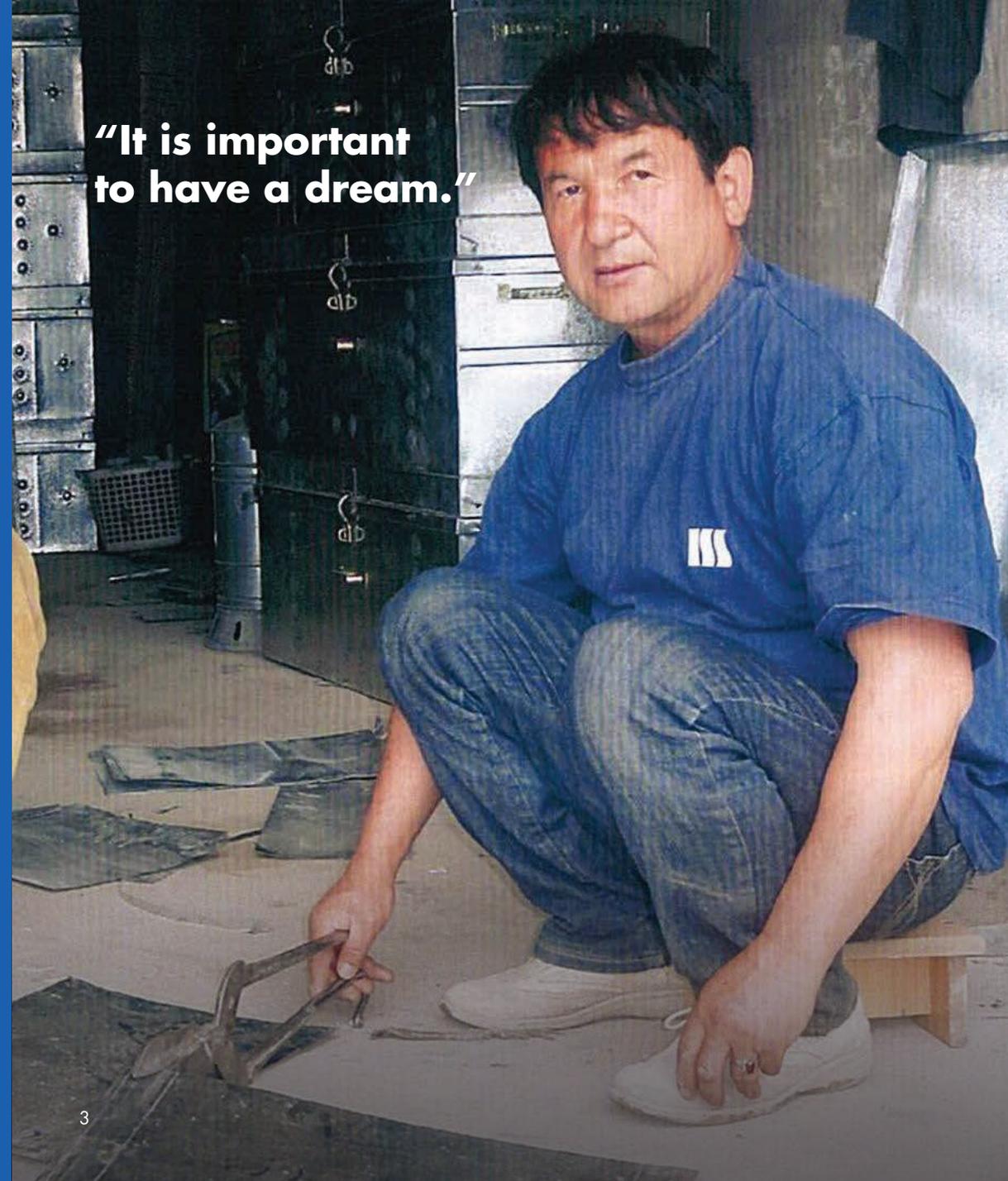
The Netherlands is so different from my country. I did not have the right papers there and that made me nervous. I also missed my family. One day I had enough. I felt too insecure about my future, and I wanted to go home.

But returning without anything would have made me feel ashamed. I only wanted to go back to Afghanistan when I had a clear plan for the future. I was once a shepherd, but also trained and worked as a mechanic. I wanted to use this knowledge to start my own business.

Once I had a workable plan, I felt confident about returning home. I decided to start a small metal workshop in Kabul. My technical expertise was good, but I did not have enough money to start my business. I also had doubts whether I could earn enough money to support my family. I contacted an old friend in my village, and we decided to go into business together.

In our shop we sell iron boxes, heaters, ovens and other metal products. My friend discovered that there is high demand for metal products. I would like to continue the business partnership because it works well, however sometime in the future when I make enough money I plan to start my own business. It is important to have a dream.

**“It is important
to have a dream.”**





“I knew it would be hard to remain in the Netherlands without papers.”

My name is Célia. I live in **Angola**.

I returned to Angola in 2010 with my mother and my niece Felicidade. Making up our minds to return was a difficult decision, especially since my mother was ill and I had my six-year-old niece with me. I might have chosen a different path if I had been in the Netherlands alone, but I had to think about my family. I knew that it would be hard on them to remain there without papers.

We came to the Netherlands in search of medical treatment for my mother and education for my niece. We were very disappointed that we were not allowed to stay. I was especially worried about how this would affect my niece.

At first it was also not easy being back in Angola. Sometimes I still wish we could have stayed in the Netherlands. Luckily, we have some friends in Angola who helped us find a place to rent. The landlord is nice and patient with us when we are late with the rent. My niece is happy at school; however, my mother's health is not improving.

With the support we received, we paid my niece's school fees, we purchased medication for my mother and I set up a small sewing shop. Opening a sewing shop in Angola brought with it many challenges, so I have changed my focus to purchasing second-hand clothing in bulk for resale in the market. I make just enough to support my mother, my niece and myself.

Sometimes I think I would like to go back to the Netherlands, but only with the right papers. It would be good for my mother because medical treatment is much better over there.

My name is Petrus. I live in **Armenia**.

My wife, our two young children and I travelled to the Netherlands on Schengen visas that cost a lot of money. We paid a few thousand euros per person, which adds up. But after one year in the Netherlands, we decided to go back home to Armenia.

We were fortunate to receive generous support to start anew. Initially I was thinking of starting a cow farm. I did a bit of research and decided instead to focus on sheep, as they do much better on our mountainous terrain. My family received a reintegration grant and we had some savings. I invested everything we had in a flock of sheep.

I partnered up with another sheep farmer, and we now share the costs for the paddock, fodder and shepherd. Our little flock is in the lambing phase now, and each ewe has one to three lambs. We will sell the young ones in the surrounding villages. It is not easy. Sustainable animal husbandry requires hard work. Lately we are having trouble keeping a growing population of wolves away from our sheep. Sometimes we are lucky and make some extra earnings as the authorities pay us for each wolf we shoot.

I plan to sell my lambs on the Iranian market next year. There is high demand for sheep there, but you need to know a business intermediary, which I have not found yet. We will see what happens.



**“Sustainable
animal husbandry
requires hard work.”**

**“It has not been easy
to adapt to a country I left
more than ten years ago.”**



My name is Alejandra.
I live in **Colombia**.

I was two years old when I left Colombia for Europe. My grandma and I first lived with my uncle in Spain. We moved to Amsterdam when it became clear that he could no longer support us. Living in the Netherlands proved very complicated, primarily because we did not have the right papers. My grandma, for instance, required special medical care because of her age but she had no health insurance over there. I also missed my parents badly. I had not seen them in years.

When I was almost sixteen, my grandma and I decided to return to Bogotá. We first stayed at my dad's place. I was really happy to be reunited with him, but due to his drug problems it did not work out. My mom partied a lot, so we could not stay with her either. Fortunately my grandma found a small but secure apartment, and we moved in. The rent is high but somehow we cope. With the reintegration support my grandma bought some basic furniture for the apartment and even a computer for me. We used the remaining money for my dental treatment and my education.

My grandma finds strength in her faith and gives me moral guidance. I do not know what I would do without her. Sometimes I am stressed and a little bit sad, as it has not been easy to adapt to my new life and to a country I left more than ten years ago. But I am graduating from high school soon, and hopefully I will be able to continue my studies at university.

My name is Kafele. I live in **Egypt**.

Before travelling to the Netherlands I was a housekeeper, also known as a bowab. I lived in the Netherlands for fifteen years, but now I am fifty years old and alone. I decided to return to Egypt to start my life anew.

When I first came back to Egypt, it was confusing and difficult to figure out how to move forward. I was away for quite a long time, so I first had to discover how the country had changed. Eventually I decided to set up a photocopy centre in front of a large university. I used my reintegration grant to buy a photocopy machine and covered the additional costs with my own savings. I had no experience in this field as I went to a technical school in Egypt and used to be a bookkeeper.

I am a hard worker and have good business sense. Due to the location of my shop my customers will be students and staff from the university. My plan is to offer fair and reasonably priced goods and services. I am keen to make a wise investment, and I am very happy with my decision.



**“I am keen to make
a wise investment,
and I am very happy
with my decision.”**



**“I found it hard to believe
that I would actually receive
the promised support.
But I did!”**

My name is Avtandil. I live in **Georgia**.

When I lost my job as a driver at the railway company in Georgia, I decided to travel to Europe. I was young and had nothing to lose. I applied for asylum in Poland and then travelled onward to the Netherlands. The Dutch authorities wanted to send me back to Poland and booked a flight for me, but I preferred to return home with my head held high. It was clear that staying in the Netherlands was not a viable option.

I had no passport, so I received assistance obtaining a travel document and arranging my travel. I was promised support upon arrival in Georgia. I found it hard to believe that I would actually receive the promised assistance, but I did! With the money I received, I purchased materials to renovate my family's greenhouse, and I hired a carpenter to help me with the work.

My younger brother, Tengiz, came back a month after me. Our mother was happy the family was reunited again. We had left separately without telling her about our plans to go to Europe. Like me, Tengiz was nearly deported to Poland but managed to return to Georgia with reintegration assistance. He had considered investing in a motorcycle business with a friend but instead decided to open a bakery at our parents' place. The bakery sells lavash, delicious bread that is very popular here. His business is doing well. Between the bakery and the greenhouse we will be able to earn a steady income to support our family.

My name is Kofi. I live in **Ghana**.

I grew up on a farm in a small village near Accra. I came to Europe in search of stable employment. I struggled without a work permit. I managed to find temporary jobs over the course of many years and sent money back home to my family. Eventually I found myself unemployed and had no means to stay in the Netherlands.

I could not imagine returning home empty-handed after twenty years in Europe, so I was really happy to receive assistance with my return. I used the reintegration grant and some savings to buy dairy cows. It was my own idea since milk is scarce in Ghana. I compete against large multinational companies, but I sell fresh milk, which gives me an advantage. I sell my products to schools and hospitals.

I require more support now to build a shelter for the cows and to expand my business. I am in the process of starting a cocoa farm too, which is going well so far. I provide for my family, and I employ eight farm labourers as well as two families to oversee the cocoa farm. I am very grateful for all of the help and assistance I received upon my return. I am trying to give back by providing employment for people in my village.



**“I could not imagine
returning empty-handed.”**



"I can finally walk through the streets without fear of being arrested."

My name is Mamadou.
I live in **Guinea**.

I returned to Guinea in 2012 after spending a few years in Europe. Prior to my return I lived in the Netherlands for more than five years and in Norway for almost one year. I spent several months in a detention centre in the Netherlands, and when I was released I applied for travel documents at the Guinean Embassy. I wanted to go back to Guinea to lead a more stable life.

It took me a few months to adapt to my own country. Much had changed and at first I felt like a stranger. Over time things became easier. Little by little I re-established contact with some of my family members and grew accustomed to the local culture.

I did extensive research in Conakry and discovered that mobile phones could be a very profitable venture. With the reintegration support and additional financial support from my uncle I started a mobile phone business.

I now have my own shop in 'La Medina', the most popular shopping area in downtown Conakry. I sell several types of cell phones to individuals and to companies. I sometimes travel to Dubai to purchase inexpensive Chinese phones for resale.

I am really happy with my decision to return home. I have a successful business, I have my family and friends around me and I can finally walk through the streets without fear of being arrested. The future looks promising. I am planning to expand my business and hope to specialize in preparing visa applications for businessmen interested in travelling abroad.

My name is Anand. I live in **India**.

I returned to India after eight years in the Netherlands. I managed to stay there without papers all this time. Many of my friends had to leave the country much earlier. It was a rather sad ending to my time in Europe as I was caught by the police and placed in administrative detention the day before I planned to seek return assistance.

I did well during those eight years. I shared a modest apartment and worked as hard as I could selling gift items. I earned as much working one day in the Netherlands as I would have earned working an entire month in India. But at some point I felt I reached my limit and missed having basic rights. For instance, my boss owed me a lot of money and paid me well below the Dutch minimum wage.

I now run a small business with my nephew selling artificial flowers, including tulips, in a big mall in Pune. I like to have the tulips in our collection as they remind me of all that is good about the Netherlands. We faced challenges starting up the business but we are now up and running. Pune is an Indian city with a booming IT sector. This has improved the economy and created a middle class. The average income here has increased tenfold over the past decade.

The money I make covers my family's expenses. My hope for the future is to expand our business by procuring products directly from China. We depend on the wholesale market in Mumbai at the moment, which results in less profit. Sometimes I think about going abroad again, but since the local economy has improved there is now less need to move. Should I decide to migrate again, I would only do so legally and with my wife and two children.



**“The local economy
has improved,
so there is now
less need to move.”**



**“I did not want
to be cheated
again.
I long for a quiet life.”**

My name is Jada. I live in **Indonesia**.

I come from a poor family. When my husband left me with our two-year-old son the only option I saw was to seek employment abroad. With two other women from my town we learned about an opportunity for well-paid work in the Netherlands. We were excited and hopeful at the start of the journey, but upon arrival we quickly realized we had been deceived. We decided to go home as soon as possible because we did not want to be mistreated by traffickers or do undignified jobs. I longed for a quiet life.

I used all the money I had to travel to the Netherlands, so I had nothing when I came back. I could not have returned without reintegration assistance. I did a small market research and decided to open a laundry and dry cleaning shop, which is a growing industry in Indonesia. The shop is doing well. I also wanted to continue my education, so I registered for an IT course. When I have enough money, I hope to buy a better apartment for my parents, my younger sisters and my son. I am the eldest, and it is my responsibility to take care of my family.

I am also receiving psychiatric treatment. I visit a therapist once a week and take pills which improve my condition. The therapist says it is normal to have problems after all that I have been through. Most nights I have trouble sleeping and I suffer from flashbacks. I still have not told my family and friends about my experience because they would not understand.

My name is Hiwa.
I live in **Iraq**.

I had to take a chance and travel to the Netherlands to request asylum. Others had done it and succeeded. When my request was rejected, it was a hard blow. It made me very anxious. I knew I would have to eventually return home but I had serious doubts as life in Iraq is not easy.

Most of my family lives in the Netherlands, so I knew it would be difficult to start a life on my own back home. I kept discussing the situation with my wife and after four months I finally accepted that I had to return to Iraq. A friend of mine told me about return assistance, which certainly helped me make my decision. When I took the plane to Iraq, I was determined and ready for a new start.

My wife and child returned to Iraq a couple of months after I did, so we are all together now. It was too hard to be separated. I had no savings or capital to invest, so I looked for a job. I now work for an estate agency owned by my uncle, using my prior experience in this field. I receive a monthly salary to sustain my family. I am learning how to run the business and to secure customers. Duhok is growing very fast and there is always a need for estate agents. As soon as I have enough money I want to open my own company.



**“Return assistance
certainly helped me
make my decision.”**



“It is good to be back home where everything is familiar and one can rely on family and friends.”

My name is Ganbold. I live in **Mongolia**.

My wife and I lived in the Netherlands for three years. My wife gave birth to our baby girl while we were there. We did not receive permission to stay so we decided to start anew in Mongolia. It was a difficult decision, especially taking our daughter into account. We had sold our house to pay for the trip to the Netherlands, so we had no home to return to.

We arrived in Ulaanbaatar in early December at the beginning of a harsh winter. We had to get used to the freezing temperatures again, but it was good to be back home where everything is familiar and one can rely on family and friends.

We used the reintegration support to rent a carwash and the necessary equipment. Mongolia has many dusty gravel roads, so we receive customers each day. The business is very successful, and we now employ ten people.

I am a bit worried for my daughter's future. Ulaanbaatar is one of the most polluted cities in the world. The air quality is very poor, and you can really feel the difference compared to Europe. I hope my little Bayarmaa will not have health problems and that the pollution issues continue to gain attention.

My name is Moussa.
I live in **Niger**.

I spent eleven years in Europe. When my asylum request was finally rejected I knew it was time to go home. Eleven years is a long time. During those years I was angry and irritable. When I made the decision to return, I found peace of mind.

I bought six goats with my reintegration grant. The deal was sealed with a handshake, which is how we do business in my country. A salesman does not give you a receipt if you purchase something; a handshake is enough. We Nigeriens keep our word. However, we did take a photo of the deal to prove it.

My business consists of buying goats, fattening them up, and selling them again. It is a decent business, and my bargaining expertise is key to my success. I only buy healthy goats, and my customers know they can trust the quality of my selection.

I do not want to migrate again. Now that I earn a stable income I prefer to stay with my family. They are good to me.

**“Now that I earn
a stable income,
I prefer to stay
with my family.”**



A woman with short black hair and glasses, wearing a purple patterned top, is smiling and standing in a small grocery store. The store is filled with shelves of various packaged goods, including instant noodle packets, canned goods, and snacks. A decorative white metal railing is in the foreground.

“Most of the money goes towards medical bills, yet the business does lessen my worries.”

My name is Gliceria.
I live in **the Philippines.**

When I decided to go back home to the Batangas province I knew I could count on a number of things: my family, my friends and my savings. I was also told I would be eligible for return assistance.

I have supported my extended family all of my life. In my culture, family is the top priority. I felt old age was catching up with me, as I will soon be sixty-two. I considered going back home to be with my family because I missed them a lot. When my husband became ill, my decision was clear.

I wanted to start a small business rather than look for a job. I am a good cook, so I was thinking of setting up a small place to sell food. I am also good with paperwork, and I used to work as an insurance agent, so I was confident I could succeed.

I used most of the money I received to set up a small restaurant, but life had other plans for me. My husband had a stroke and I had to care for him, so I could no longer manage the restaurant.

I changed plans and rented out the restaurant. I then converted the balcony of my house into a mini grocery store. My daughter is a pastry chef and a baker, so I take orders from clients and sell her products in my shop. The business is doing well and we have a steady stream of customers, but most of the money goes towards medical bills. We barely break even each month, yet the business does lessen my worries. If my husband gets better I may still be able to realize my dream and pursue the restaurant business.

My name is Vladimir. I live in **Russia**.

I was really anxious about going back. I stayed in the asylum-seekers' system for such a long time, and the idea of starting life on my own again made me feel insecure. It may sound strange but I felt safe and protected in the administrative detention centre where I stayed in the Netherlands.

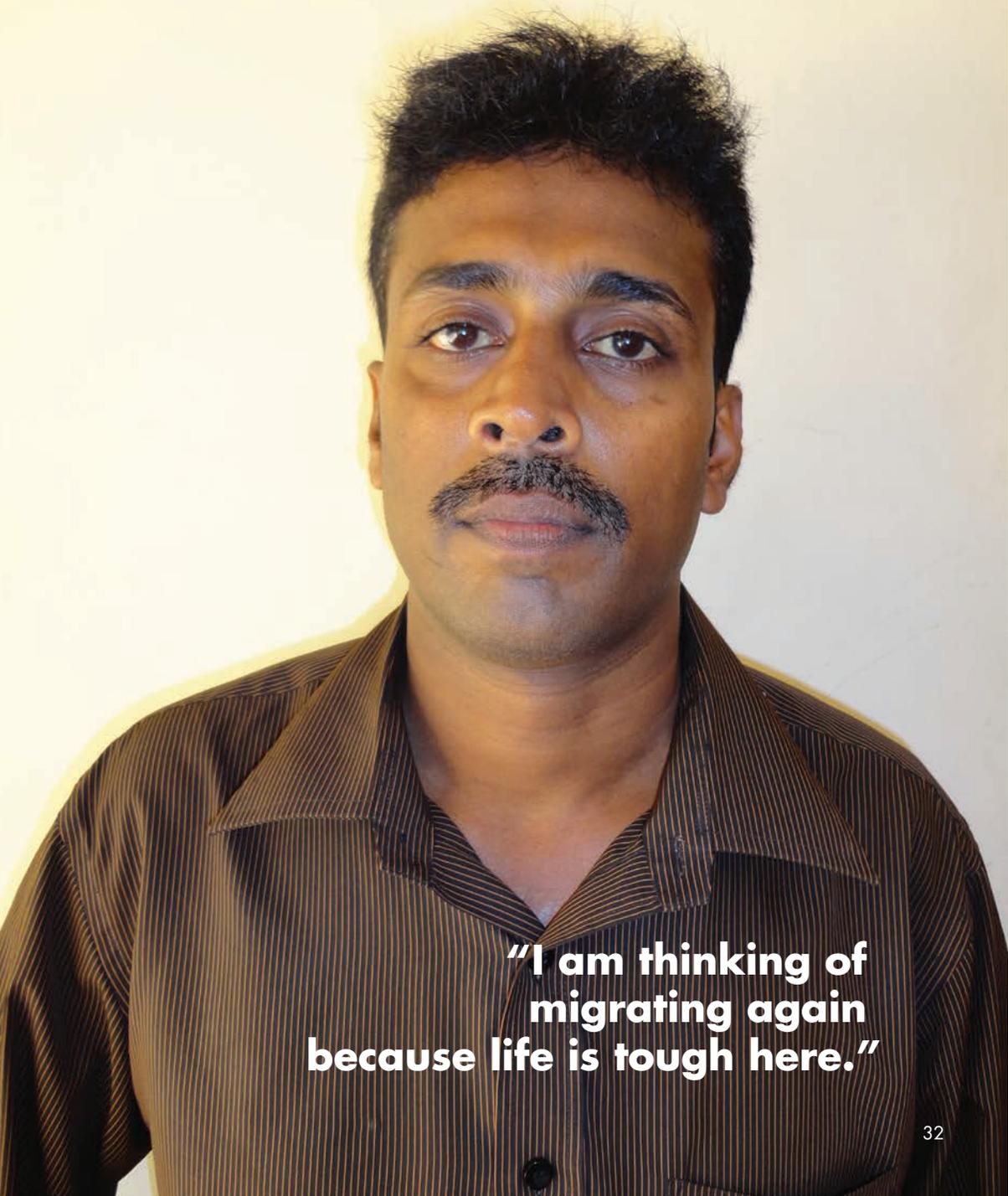
I had no savings, no family, and no contacts left in Russia after being away for such a long time. I had to think long and hard about going back. I am not a person who easily trusts others, but I gained trust in others when I received help. For example, I received an orthopaedic shoe for my injured foot and this lifted my spirits. In the end, I decided to go back home to Russia thanks to the support and assistance I received.

While still in the Netherlands, I did a lot of internet research on computer companies in Russia. This was work I could do despite my foot problems, and I preferred to work for an existing company instead of starting my own business. I learned I would need a diploma for this type of work, but by the time I arrived in Russia the courses had already begun and I could no longer register. After some additional job counselling, I completed a training to become a welder, and I now have a job in this field.

I have not forgotten my initial idea though. I earn a small amount of money by filling in online surveys and writing articles on technology. Each month I save a bit of my earnings, so that in the future I can pursue my goal of working with computers.



“The idea of starting life on my own again made me feel insecure.”



“I am thinking of migrating again because life is tough here.”

My name is Sadun.
I live in **Sri Lanka**.

I went to the Netherlands to look for a better future for my family and to escape from the conflict in my home country. My asylum request was rejected by the Dutch Government, so I did not have the legal means to stay. At the asylum-seekers' centre, I spent my time waiting, eating and sleeping. Above all, I missed my family. Family is very important in my culture.

I decided to go home. My first idea was to work as a cameraman, but this was not a viable option. Then my wife and I decided to set up a garment business. I received support from a Dutch foundation that shipped second-hand items, sewing machines and other necessary materials and tools to Sri Lanka for me. I received assistance clearing the shipment and also advice on how to run a business.

We set up the business, but most of our equipment and tools were stolen. I was upset, angry and unsure of what to do as I had invested all of my savings in this plan. Luckily a friend of mine offered to purchase the remaining equipment. I am now working as a full-time technician at an international school. The salary is not much, but it is better than nothing. Life here is tough. There are very few employment opportunities and salaries are low. I am thinking of migrating again, though I have not decided where I would go.

My name is Grigor. I live in **Ukraine**.

I am Armenian, but I was born in Iraq and have lived in various parts of the former Soviet Union. At a certain point in my life, I had no job, no health insurance and no treatment for my heart disease, so I travelled to Europe. I enjoyed the three and half years I spent in the Netherlands. I was treated with respect by the staff at the asylum-seekers' centre, and they called me 'father' because I often mediated when problems would arise. I received medical care for my heart disease, I cycled and I slept well.

I returned to Ukraine because I had no other choice. I am known in my village, and after so many years abroad people were curious to see what I could do. I was a chicken farmer in the past, so I restarted this business. With the reintegration support I built a hen house on my land and obtained a loan to buy one hundred and twenty chickens as well as food, medicine and vitamins for them. My main task now is to pay back the bank loan as soon as possible, because I do not like to have debts.

I take good care of my chickens, helping them to grow and then selling them for a profit. My goal is to increase the poultry to one thousand. I receive a pension from the state, which is barely enough to survive, so this business is a valuable source of income.

I do not want to go to Europe again. I am content with my business, and I am too old for a new adventure. Now I prefer to stay in my country despite the difficulties of finding treatment for my heart condition. I tell the young people from my village not to go to Europe unless they have a residence permit.



**"I am too old
for a new adventure."**

Thinking about returning to your home country?

IOM can help you!

Here's how it works:



Decide to Return

- Many different situations can lead to the decision of leaving the Netherlands and returning to your home country: irregular status, illness of a family member, rejected asylum application, detention, or simply the wish to return home.
- If you are considering return, you can get in touch with IOM and discuss your options without any obligations.



Prepare

- You can call IOM at +31.88.746 44 66 and meet an IOM counsellor to explain your personal situation.
- IOM will give you advice and information on what you need to know about your return.
- IOM will help you step by step to prepare for your departure.
- Depending on your personal situation, you may be eligible for an IOM reintegration grant.
- IOM the Netherlands will contact the IOM office in your country of origin to make sure you receive help after arrival.



Travel

- Airport assistance is provided to all migrants travelling with IOM.
- We assist with check-in and boarding procedures, and with the exit formalities at the border.
- You can also receive social or medical assistance during the flight and upon arrival.
- If necessary, special transport and escorts can be arranged.



Build a new life

- The assistance you receive upon return to your home country depends on your personal situation.
- IOM can arrange arrival assistance, in-kind assistance and medical support.
- You can discuss your options with IOM.

IOM offers a free and confidential information service to migrants who would like to discuss their return and the reintegration support available.

To make an appointment to discuss with an IOM worker, please call:
+31.88.746 44 66

The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes of IOM the Netherlands are open to asylum-seekers and irregular migrants from outside of the European Union who would like to return home.

Information in different languages is available on our websites:

www.iom-nederland.nl/en/voluntary-return
www.buildyourreturn.nl/

You can contact IOM the Netherlands at:

Tel +31.70. 31 81 500
E-mail iomthehague@iom.int
www.iom-nederland.nl



Return: not necessarily a step backward



International Organization for Migration (IOM)



Government of the Netherlands