

REACHING OUT TO THE UNKNOWN

Native counselling and the decision making
process of irregular migrants and
rejected asylum seekers on voluntary return



IOM International Organization for Migration



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Maart 2008

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ABBREVIATIONS

AZC	Asielzoekerscentrum (Asylum centre)
COA	Centrale Opvang Asielzoekers (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers)
DT&V	Dienst Terugkeer en Vertrek (Return and Departure Service)
EU	European Union
G4	'Grote 4' (4 big cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht)
GGD	Gemeentelijke Gezondheidsdienst (Municipal Public Health Service)
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LP	Laissez Passer
NC	Country of origin speaking Native Counsellor
IND	Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst (Immigration and Naturalisation Service)
NMI	Netherlands Migration Institute
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
SIOD	Social Intelligence and Investigation Department

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 VOLUNTARY RETURN OF REJECTED ASYLUM SEEKERS AND IRREGULAR MIGRANTS

The return of rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants has - both on a national and on a communitarian level - over the last decade been a major political issue within Europe (Noll 1999; IOM 2003; Phuong 2004; Black et. al. 2004, EMN 2006; IOM 2006). After the denial of a refugee status, asylum seekers are supposed to return to their country of origin. 'Failed' asylum seekers can forcibly be repatriated from the host country, or decide to return voluntarily. The same applies to irregular migrants who never applied for asylum. For rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants themselves, voluntary return is preferred above forced return. This is also the case from the perspective of the host country. It is a more humane alternative to forced repatriation and a means of strengthening the integrity of regular asylum and immigration programs (IOM 2003). Moreover, voluntary return is more cost-effective than forced repatriation. The European Union acknowledges illegality in nation states as a problem and promotes programs that facilitate the voluntary return of migrants. The Council Meeting of Justice and Home Affairs in Luxembourg on 12 October 2005 stated that: "Voluntary return is an important component of a balanced, effective and sustainable approach to the return and, where applicable, reintegration of unsuccessful asylum seekers" (Council of the European Union 2005).

Voluntary return is in most instances facilitated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM acts as an intermediary for foreign nationals who wish to leave the Netherlands voluntarily. In general, those migrants who have applied for asylum in the Netherlands relatively recently, are during their procedure informed about the return options and packages offered by IOM. Within the asylum facilities information about return packages is available and promoted. A large group of less recent rejected asylum applicants and irregular migrants who have never applied for asylum however, are not 'automatically' informed about the possibilities IOM can offer with regard to voluntary return. This is particularly the case for migrants who live in the margins of society such as homeless persons, drug addicts and victims of trafficking.

The Dutch policy document on return - *de terugkeernota*¹ - published by the Ministry of Justice in 2003, raised the problem of approaching those undocumented migrants who live outside the scope of the authorities. Rejected asylum seekers and irregular residents who have never (or for long time not) been in touch with the authorities are difficult to approach and therefore not or ill informed about the possibility of voluntary return. At the same time local and national government have an interest in adequately informing this group. Firstly, government policy papers and academic literature agree that irregular migrants are prone to exploitation in many ways. Secondly, according to academic literature a relation exists between illegality and survival-crime (Van der Leun 2001, Leerkes 2007). From these perspectives it is constructive to reach out to this group of migrants and inform them about the possibilities of voluntary return. Especially from the perspective of local government it is

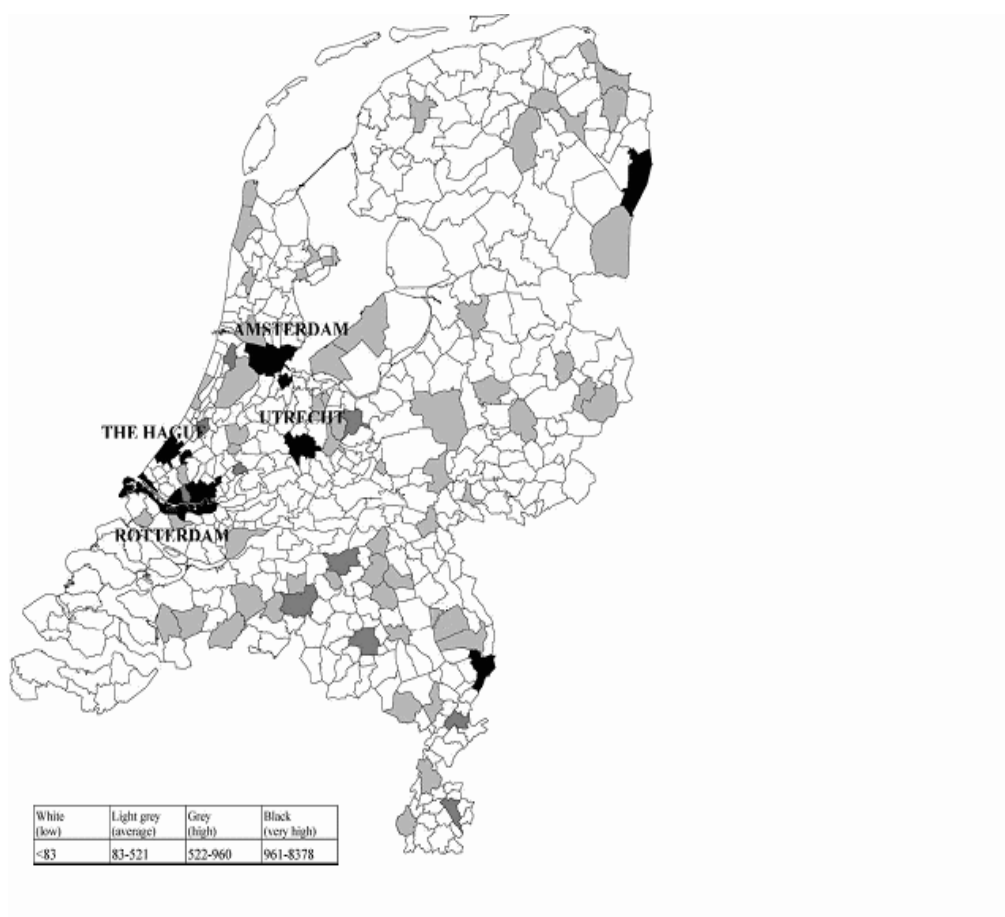
¹ Directorate-General for International Affairs and Immigration, Ministry of Justice, "measures for a more effective implementation of Dutch Policy on return.", AVT03?BZ73283, The Hague 21 November 2003.

important that IOM is be ready and low-key available to inform and assist this group with voluntary return.

From academic literature it is known that undocumented migrants in the Netherlands mainly reside in the metropolitan agglomeration that in Dutch is generally referred to as ‘*de Randstad*’. This comprises mainly the area of the four cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht (‘G4’). Research by Leerkes, Engbersen & Van San (2007) graphically exposes how irregular migrants are mostly centred in this *randstad*-region.²

FIGURE 1

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS ACROSS THE NETHERLANDS



Source: Leerkes, Engbersen & Van San (2007)

² The authors however do also note that irregular residence is not merely an urban phenomenon, for the highest *relative* concentrations of irregular immigrants were found in both the most and least densely populated areas. In rural areas, irregular residence is primarily connected with the demand for seasonal workers in the horticultural and agricultural sector. The increased degree of illegal residence in the south of the province of Limburg (D) is, in part, due to drug tourism from bordering EU member-states. Finally, a substantial proportion of the irregular immigrants is found in municipalities with detention and deportation centres for irregular immigrants and rejected asylum-seekers - for example, in Zevenaar (north of B), Ter Apel (near C) and Rijsbergen (near D).

1.2 THE PROJECT

From 2003 onwards the main objective of the Randstad Return Initiative (RRI) has been to reach out to rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants living in the four big cities who are difficult to get in touch with via conventional counselling. In other words, the goal of the project is to reach out to the ‘unknown’ migrant and try to interest, inform and facilitate him/her with regard to voluntary return. In 2002 IOM the Netherlands first implemented the project together with the Pauluskerk Rotterdam under the name “Return from the Netherlands and reintegration of (rejected) asylum seekers from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and the Caucasian States” (IOM 2003). This can be regarded as the kick-off - or predecessor - of the later RRI-projects. For this project IOM contracted a country of origin Russian speaking counsellor. Evaluation of the project proved that this counsellor because of her cultural background and knowledge of language was able to create an atmosphere of confidentiality with (potential) returnees. There were indications that asylum seekers and irregular migrants in this atmosphere of confidentiality more easily took steps to voluntarily return. The low-key access with almost no cultural barriers proved to be successful. An external evaluation of Rodenburg et. al. (2004) concluded that a further development of the project would be desirable.

Since 2003 IOM has been working on expanding and fine-tuning the native counselling methodology. In the RRI-II project that runs from May 2006 - January 2008, new native speaking counsellors (NC’s) with a variety of backgrounds and language knowledge have been contracted. As the following table shows, currently eight NC’s cover most of the languages spoken by rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants living in the Netherlands:

TABLE 1
BACKGROUND NATIVE COUNSELLORS RRI-II PROJECT

Country of origin	Spoken languages	Target regions/countries
Burundi	Kirundi, Kinyarwanda French, Russian, Swahili, English	Sub Sahara Africa
China	English, Mandarin	China
China	Cantonese, Mandarin, English	China
Ukraine	Russian, English	Central and Eastern Europe Balkan, Caucasus
Rwanda	Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Swahili, Russian, French, English	Sub Sahara Africa
Iraq	Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, English	Middle East
Eritrea	Amharic, Tigrinya, Arabic, English, French	Horn of Africa
Morocco	Arabic, French, Moroccan-Arabic	Maghreb region

The target group of the project concerns migrants who do not live in the regular asylum-housing facilities and who are usually difficult to be accessed for the purpose of return counselling. In the project document this target group is more specifically defined as follows: “Unsuccessful asylum seekers, other migrants whose application for permanent residence was

rejected or irregularly residing migrants.” Ever since the start of the RRI-project particular emphasis is given on informing and assisting persons for whom return preparations can be particularly complex such as drug addicts, persons with health problems, unaccompanied minors (or those who recently turned adult) and victims of human trafficking.

The approach of reaching out to the target group is twofold. Firstly, the NC’s are responsible to individually work in a flexible manner to establish contact with migrants from the target group. Secondly, the NC’s create and maintain contact with a network of 160 local organisations that support rejected asylum seekers or irregular migrants in the four big cities. These can be local NGO’s that specifically work with the target group, such as emergency shelters or migrant organisations. Yet, also individual gatekeepers who in the side line of their work may get into contact with the target group are approached. In this respect one can think of shopkeepers, street doctors, priests, imams or legal advisors. The NC’s and their network partners cooperate and refer (potential) returnees to each other, thereby trying to assist migrants as much as possible. The local NGO’s feel supported when the NC assists with the return process of ‘difficult’ cases such as persons with multiple problems like illegality, homelessness, addiction and victimization. At the same time the regular contact with the NGO’s help NC’s to develop and keep up a network in the respective migrant community.

After having established initial contact with clients, the NC’s usually make a follow-up appointment to further discuss the return process with the client in local offices in the four cities. In The Hague and Utrecht IOM makes use of the facilities of a local branch of the Dutch Council for Refugees. In Rotterdam IOM uses of the facilities of the Pauluskerk; a location frequently visited by drug addicts, homeless people and prostitutes. In Amsterdam IOM has a separate IOM office in a tranquil part of town. Whenever clients prefer to meet the NC at a different location such as a train station or a bar, the NC in most cases agrees. Depending on the wishes of the client and the agenda of the NC’s, meetings can also take place over the weekend or in the evening hours.

After the NC has informed and discussed the possibilities of return with a client, it is up to the client whether (s)he wishes to proceed having contact with the counsellor. When the client decides not to return, the NC closes the case and takes no further steps. When the client is in doubt or wishes further advice, the NC’s assist a client in a most flexible and creative way. The NC could for instance refer clients to other organisations that might take away any problems (legal, medical) faced by the client. The NC could also assist the client by searching information or intermediating between the client and family members.

When a client informs the NC that (s)he wishes to return, the case is directed to District Officers. These are IOM colleagues who work in close cooperation with the NC’s and manage the organisation and administration of the return process. When a client has special needs (medical problems, victim of trafficking) expertise from specialist-units within IOM are contacted. In the last phase of the return process, the Central Unit in The Hague assists arranging a Laissez Passer (LP) and the Logistical Unit at Schiphol Airport books a flight. A flow chart of the return process within the RRI context can be illustrated as follows:

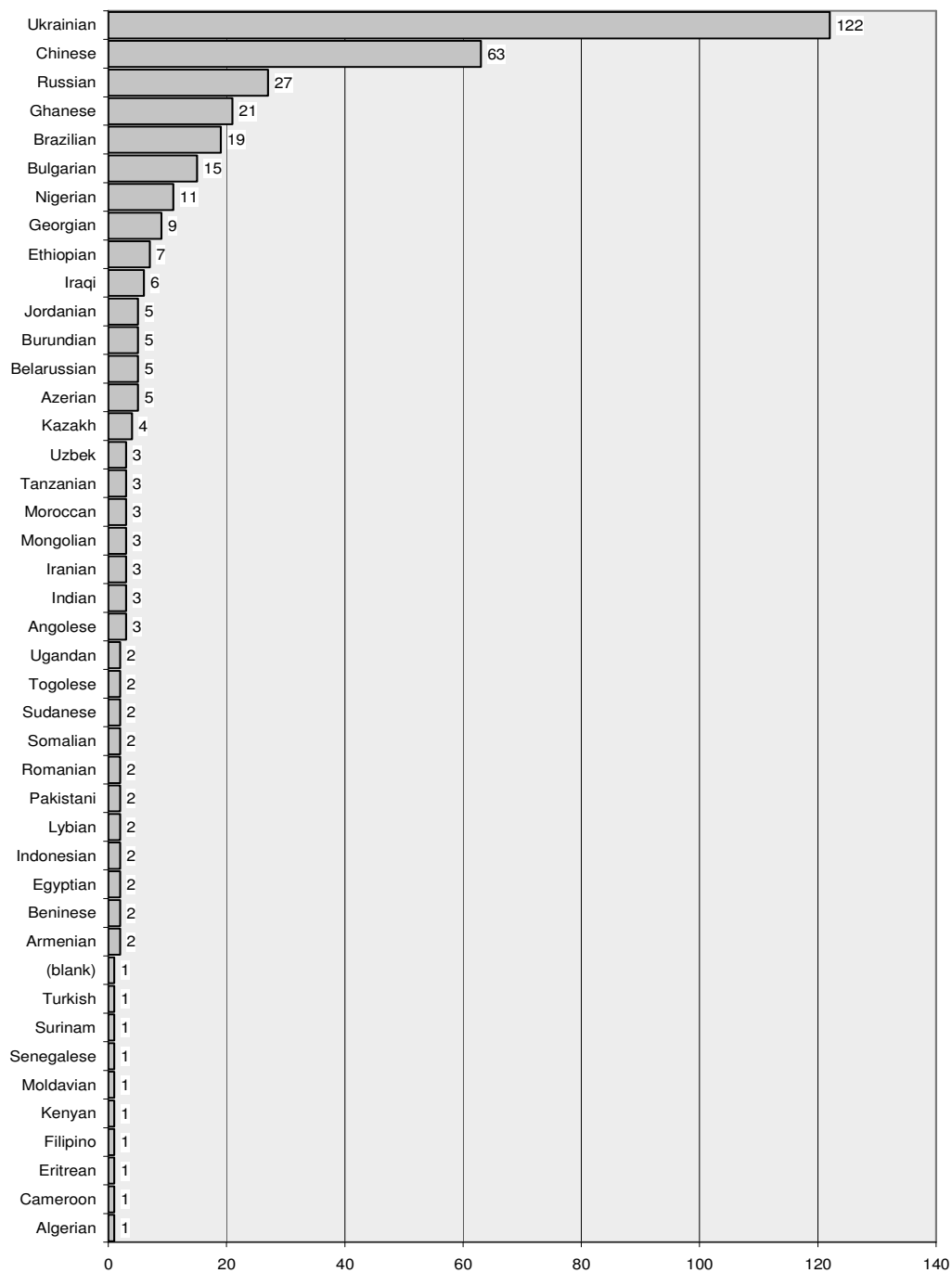
1. NC: approaches and informs potential client →
2. District Officer: subscribes client in IOM-system →
- (3. Specialist unit) →
4. Central Unit: arranges LP →
5. Logistical Unit: organizes flight →

1.3 RESULTS

In this paragraph a brief presentation of the results of the project will be outlined. In the first figure the number of clients that returned via the RRI-II project is presented.

FIGURE 2

NUMBER OF RRI-II RETURNEES FROM MAY 2006 – OCTOBER 2007 BY NATIONALITY



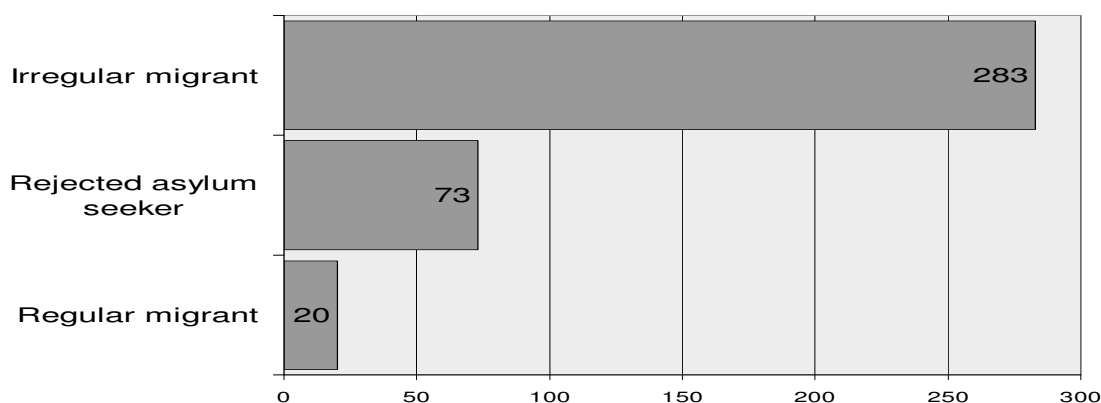
A ‘RRI-II returnee’ is any returnee whose return process can be linked to the activities of a NC. This means that a returnee is administrated within the RRI-project when:

- initial contact with the returnee is established by a NC, or
- the returnee is assisted by a network partner of the NC, or
- the returnee states to IOM that (s)he once received information from a NC, or
- NC assisted a District Officer with the process of return from a client in detention.

From May 2006 to October 2007 a total of 376 RRI-II returnees were registered. As can be seen in the figure below 75% of these were irregular migrants who never applied for asylum. 20% of were rejected asylum seekers. NC’s also assisted a further 20 persons (5%) regular migrants to return. These persons were predominantly asylum seekers with a temporary status.

FIGURE 3

NUMBER OF RRI-RETURNEES FROM MAY 2006 – OCTOBER 2007 DIVIDED BU STATUS



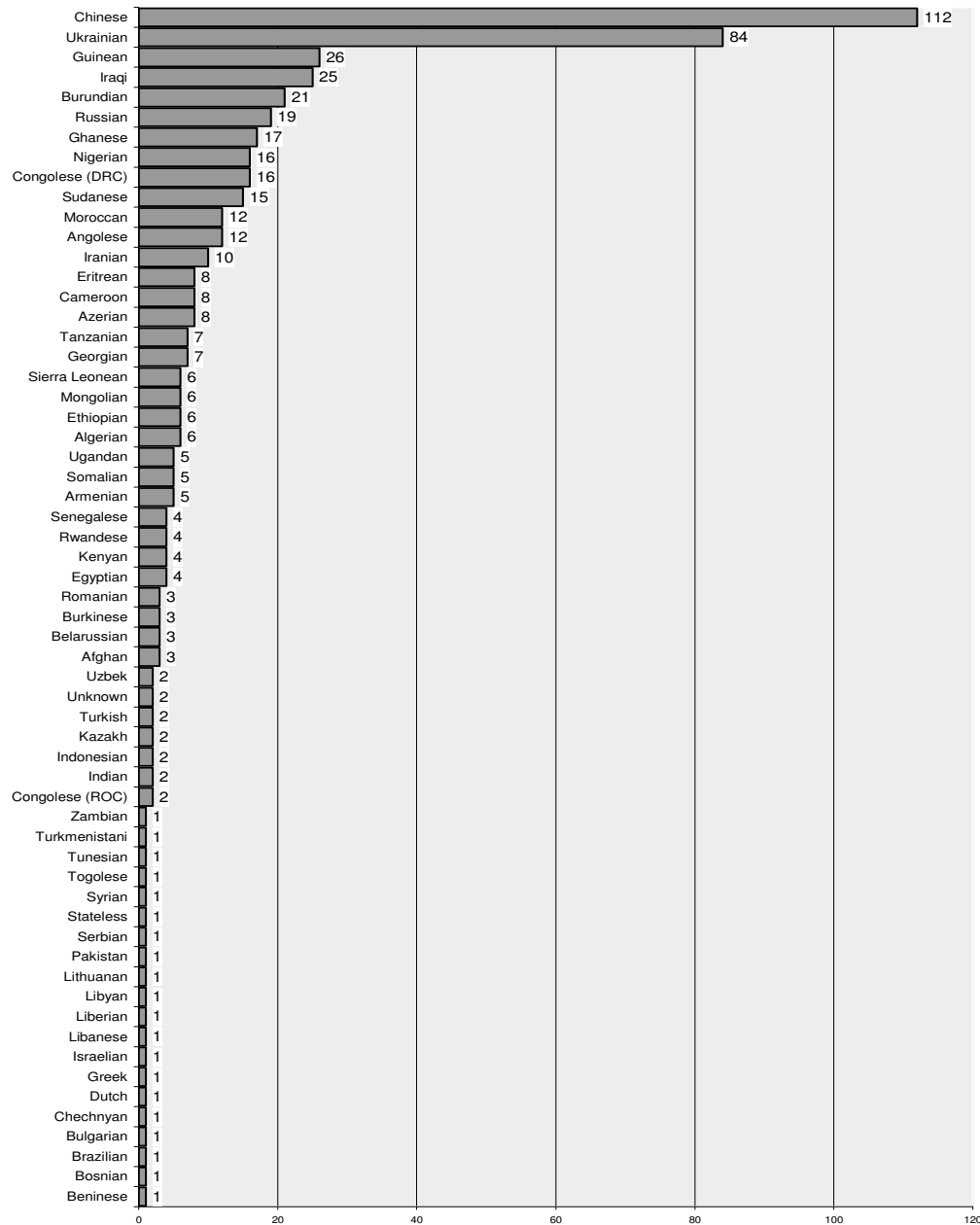
The table clearly indicates that more irregular migrants use the services of NC’s than rejected asylum seekers. A variety of reasons may explain this disparity. In the first place the number of irregular migrants living in the G4 is significantly higher than the number of rejected asylum seekers. Obviously this increases the chance for NC’s to establish contact with irregular migrants. Secondly, irregular migrants in general have fewer channels to obtain information on IOM than rejected asylum seekers. It is likely that rejected asylum seekers know IOM via contacts with the Dutch Council for Refugees, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) or social workers. When they consider return, they probably directly visit a District Office and do not seek contact with a NC. Consequently, more irregular migrants are registered as RRI-returnees. Thirdly, as will be further discussed in paragraph 3.4.1, a substantial number of rejected asylum seekers awaited the outcome of the (debate on) regularisation. During that period many postponed thinking of return as a viable option. Fourthly, as will be further discussed in paragraph 3.5.2, the disparity might also be explained by the fact that the migration motives of asylum seekers differ from the migration motives of irregular migrants.

Apart from presenting the number of returnees via RRI, other figures are also important to measure the output of the project. IOM’s mission is to facilitate humane and orderly migration. This means that it is IOM’s main objective to inform (irregular) migrants with regard to voluntarily return and - in case a migrant indicates he/she wants to return - to facilitate and streamline the process of return. Whether migrants do actually or not return is in this respect not relevant. Rather than pushing migrants to return, it is the NC’s mission to introduce

voluntary return as a viable option and raise interest in return. Consequently, the success rate of the work of NC's does not primarily depend on the number of migrants that actually return, but (above all) on the number of migrants that are informed about the possibility of return. In order to objectify whether the actions of the NC's have been successful or not, the number of initial contacts³ between NC's and *potential* returnees are an important indicator. From January 2007 - October 2007⁴ NC's had 524 initial contacts with clients.

FIGURE 4

NUMBER OF INITIAL CLIENT CONTACTS JANUARY – OCTOBER 2007

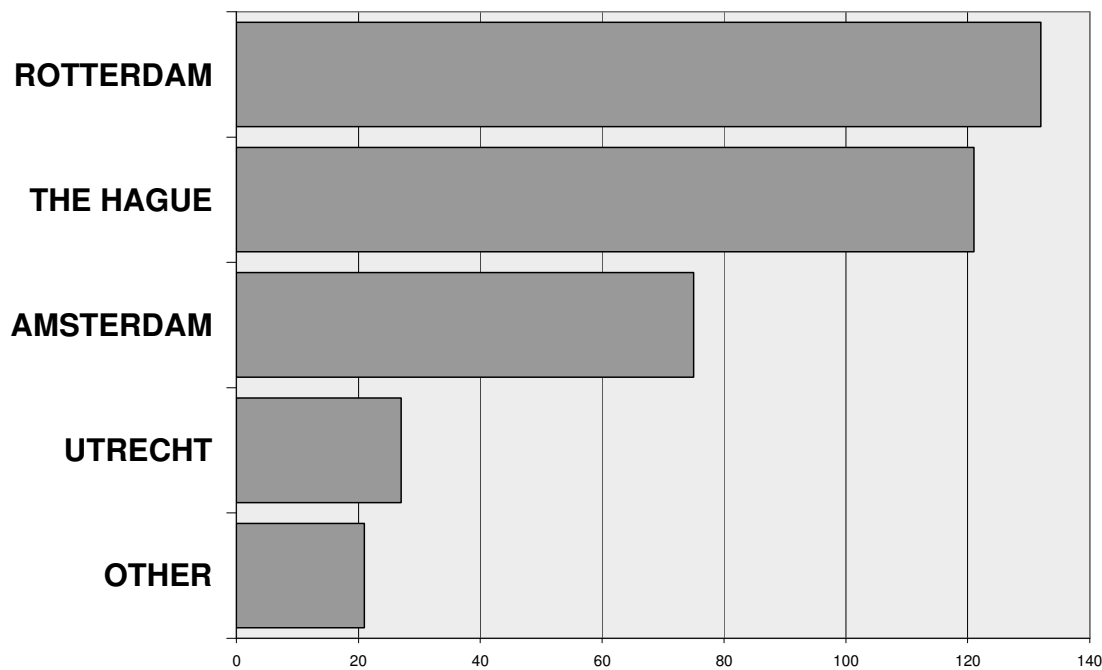


³ An 'initial contact' is every unique first contact between a NC and a client (follow-up contacts excluded).

⁴ Registration of the number of initial contacts started only January 2007; no earlier figures available.

The figure below represents the distribution of returnees across the four cities. As can be noted there are substantial differences.

FIGURE 5
DISTRIBUTION OF RRI-II RETURNEES ACROSS THE G4 MAY – OCTOBER 2007



Why the differences exist is difficult to pin down. At least the following factors are in all probability relevant.

- The four cities differ considerably in size. Although precise figures lack, it is likely that the bigger cities house more irregular migrants than the smaller cities.
- The distribution of nationalities among the four cities differs. The figures suggest that some nationalities are more likely to return via RRI than others. Obviously this affects the distribution of returnees among the four cities.
- Different NC's operate in different cities. Some NC's have better networks in the one city than in the other.
- Local policy with regard to irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers may differ from city to city. For example the number of emergency shelters or the level of intensity of police inspections may impact how many undocumented migrants wish to return.

1.4 THE RESEARCH

The project document of RRI-II states that in the sideline of operational counselling and networking activities data will be collected for the purpose of policy making and applied research on undocumented migrants in the G4-cities. The result should be a report that offers “better knowledge of the target population (...) to adapt counselling activities to newly evolving situations”. This means that the aim of the study is twofold: 1.) to gain more up to date knowledge about irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers living in the four big cities, and 2.) to improve the assistance regarding voluntary return based on this knowledge.

In order to realize the above mentioned aims, the following research questions are defined:

- 1) *What determinant factors and conditions influence the decision making process on voluntary return of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers living in the four big cities in the Netherlands? What factors and conditions are most critical?*
- 2) *How could the methodology of native counselling be further developed to assist and reach out to the target group?*

Engelhard (2004) observes in the IOM project “Return Migration and Health” that relatively little research is available about the decision making process of rejected asylum seekers in the Netherlands. Most literature relating to migration deals only with the ‘outward journey’ and not the return. Also a more recent report of the European Migration Network (EMN) (2006: 11) notes that “research into return migration from the Netherlands of asylum seekers who have exhausted all legal remedies is scarce”. With the report in hand IOM tries to fill the existing gap. This report firstly provides researchers and policy makers working in the field of (return) migration evidence based information about the decision making process on return. Secondly, suggestions for counsellors and their executives how to advance the native counselling methodology are presented.

1.5 READER’S GUIDE

After having discussed the methodological framework of this report in chapter 2 , in chapter 3 an overview is presented of the multitude of determining factors and conditions that shape the decision making process on voluntary return. In this chapter will be explored what push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers encounter in the process of voluntary return. A model is presented in which all relevant factors can be outlined. Chapter 4 provides an analysis how the RRI-methodology of native counselling could be developed. Throughout the chapter a number of recommendations to improve the counselling methodology are presented. Chapter 5 provides a general conclusion.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

Before discussing methodological aspects and answering the research questions, the underlying terminology used in this study will be defined. The following terms need a further introduction: ‘irregular migrants’, ‘rejected asylum seekers’ and ‘voluntary return’.

Irregular migrants

IOM defines irregular migration as “migration that takes place outside the norms and procedures established by States to manage the orderly flow of migrants into, through, and out of their territories.”⁵ Following this definition, in the context of this report an irregular migrant is understood to mean a person who enters and/or stays in a state without legal documentation. Moreover, in the context of this report it is understood that an irregular migrant has never applied for asylum in the Netherlands. In this document the terms ‘irregular migrant’ and ‘undocumented migrant’ will be used interchangeably.

Rejected asylum seekers

Following UNHCR/IOM (1997), a rejected asylum seeker is understood to mean a person who after due consideration of his claims to asylum in fair procedures, is found not to qualify for a refugee status, not to be in need of international protection and who is not authorized (any more) to stay in the country concerned. For the purpose of this text, it is generally assumed that asylum procedures are fair and fully-fledged (see Noll 1999: 271). This means that for the benefit of the argument it is not doubted if claims are rejected for good reasons or not. This however does not imply that the subjective perception of claimants is not considered. On the contrary: as will be argued after, the subjective perception of potential returnees about the outcome of their procedure may be of vital significance regarding their decision to return or not.

Voluntary return

IOM states that a voluntary decision to return consists of two elements (IOM 2006: 12). Firstly, there should be freedom of choice, which is defined by “the absence of any psychological, physical or material pressure”. Secondly, the decision has to be a well informed one. This means that “the migrant should have sufficient and correct information available on which to base his decision to return.”⁶ Over the last years it has continuously been debated to what extent the term ‘voluntarily return’ corresponds with reality (EMN 2006). How ‘voluntary’, it is argued, is voluntary return if the other option is to live in illegality or to be forcibly repatriated? Blitz, Marzano & Sales (2005: 183) go as far as stating that “the context in which voluntary return programs take place seriously compromises their voluntary nature.” They opt it is more appropriate to talk of a new category of ‘non-voluntary’

⁵ <<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/358>>, seen November 2007.

⁶ Slightly different, the website of IOM offers the following description: “The concept of voluntary return requires more than an absence of coercive factors. A voluntary decision is defined by the absence of any physical, psychological, or material coercion but in addition, the decision is based on adequate, available, accurate, and objective information.” <<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/358>>, seen November 2007).

return. In the framework of this report, it is not feasible to discuss the pros and contras of this highly politicized terminology in detail. It is acknowledged that although irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers have limited leeway to decide whether they return or not, they still have their own agency about what they perceive best for their (near) future.

2.2 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection for this study took place from May 2006 to October 2007. The research itself is executed from September 2007 to January 2008. In this study the following sources of information are used:

Quick scan of literature

A quick scan of available literature on the decision making process of rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants who wish to voluntarily return from the Netherlands to their country of origin is made and analysed.

Counselling reports

All encounters between NC's and (potential) clients are registered. Based on the conversations NC's have with clients, they produce reports in which they describe the personal situation of (potential) clients and the steps taken to further assist and inform them. For this research about 700 reports of individual clients are analysed.

Interviews with NC's

By means of semi structured interviews further information is obtained to complete the information from the counselling reports. By means of a topic list the researcher has conducted eight semi structured in depth interviews with NC's. Furthermore, the researcher has organised a group meeting with the NC's and upheld a large number of short individual contacts with the NC's.

Participating observation with NC's

On several occasions the researcher has joined NC's while they had meetings with their clients. In doing so the researcher could observe how the NC's approached clients. Because of the language barrier the researcher faced, it was deemed to be of no use to expand the use of this method.

Steering Committee

Quarterly meetings with a steering committee composed of representatives of the Ministry of Justice and representatives of the four big cities provided up to date information about local and national policy. The researcher has benefited from the input given by the members of the committee.

The extensive dataset that is created, sketches an interesting and rich representation of the various factors that are at play when irregular migrants or rejected asylum seekers consider returning. In the sideline of their operational tasks the counselling activities of the NC's offer a unique insight in the decision making process of migrants that a non-native speaking researcher would not easily obtain.

2.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When researching the situation of undocumented migrants various ethical considerations are at play. Clients provided the NC's with information about their personal situation. These details were not primarily reported for the purpose of research, but for the purpose of being assisted with their return process. Not always have the NC's specifically mentioned that they in the sideline of their operational activities gathered information for the purpose of research. Since all information provided by the clients is treated anonymously (also all names presented in this study are alter egos), this however does not constitute an insurmountable problem. Any information that might for any reason cause damage to the position of individual migrants is set aside and not used.

NC's have on a regular basis been confronted with confidential information about the background of clients and their asylum procedures. Sometimes NC's for instance received information about applied strategies to be granted asylum. Clients sometimes told that they had applied for asylum under a false name or a false nationality. During their work NC's were also confronted with information about illegal behaviour or criminal acts by their clients. Some NC's for example heard information about human smuggling, passport forgeries or fraud-schemes. Working for IOM, NC's have an impartial and neutral position. Confidentiality between NC and client is crucial. This implies that NC's do not report potential criminal offences to the police when they pick up information in the course of their work. This differs when the NC's receive information that could potentially harm people or is of such a serious nature that they feel an obligation to report. NC's have never been in the position they felt they had to report any information to the police.

2.4 CONSTRAINTS

In the RRI-project particular emphasis is given to persons for whom return preparations can be particularly complex, such as drug addicts, persons with health problems, unaccompanied minors or those who recently turned adult and victims of trafficking. Because of definition problems it has not been possible to register how many people from this specific group were contacted and how many of them returned. Defining an (ex)unaccompanied minor is relatively easy. But when to define someone as a drug addict? Should (s)he use hard drugs, or is the use of soft drugs sufficient to belong to this focus group? And what should the frequency of use be? And even if one agrees on the definition of a drug addict, the NC's would still have problems to determine whether someone does indeed fulfil the conditions set. How could the NC based on one or two conversations possibly know if someone is a frequent user or not? The same problems more or less apply for victims of trafficking. Is someone a victim if (s)he has reported to the police being a victim, or only when a criminal court has identified someone as a victim. In the end, the NC's agreed to specifically search for clients at locations that are known to be visited by drug users and (potential) victims of trafficking. Clients were however not specifically registered as drug addicts or victims of trafficking.

Finding and registering information for the purpose of research in the sideline of operational activities sometimes proved difficult and time consuming. During the daily work of the NC's, the operational activities (establishing contact with the target group, informing them about return and providing assistance) had priority. In this context it was not always easy to explore and identify extra information about a client for the purpose of research. All time invested in registering data on behalf of the research could not be invested in operational activities.

Various questionnaires were developed to assist NC's in structuring information for the purpose of research, but in actual practice it turned out to be difficult to design a so-called 'closed' questionnaire that could easily be filled in. Because of the immense variation in background, living conditions, survival strategies and family structures of the clientele, it was virtually impossible for the NC's to categorize and quantify any of these conditions. Apart from 'hard' data such as nationality, age and gender, most collected data are therefore of a qualitative nature. The research method further implicates that a substantial part of the client descriptions are made up of patches of marginal or incomplete information. When a NC speaks half an hour with a client it is unfeasible to sketch a detailed picture about client's background and future plans. Complete and in depth life histories therefore lack. On the other hand - as is noted above - the gathered information is very rich in nature because of the unique advantage that NC's were able to enter a world that a non-native speaking researcher would not easily obtain.

3. DETERMINANT FACTORS ON VOLUNTARY RETURN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the first research question will be answered. This question is: What determinant factors and conditions influence the decision making process on voluntary return of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers living in the four big cities in the Netherlands? What factors and conditions are most critical?

So as to improve voluntary return assistance of undocumented migrants it is useful to analyse what factors influence and affect the decision-making process of migrants in relation to voluntary return. In this chapter a snapshot is presented of the almost innumerable variety of factors the clients of NC's have coped with in the process of deciding to return or not. At first sight, one might expect that migrants predominantly base their decision on a rational cost-benefit analysis. However, as will be clarified in this chapter, also less rational and less individual considerations are at play. Previous studies indicate that the return decision is complex. It is often made on the basis of multiple factors that are hard to extricate even for the person making the decision (Black et. al. 2004:12). In order to disentangle and structure the variety of factors at play, in paragraph 3.2 the terms push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors will be introduced. This is followed in paragraph 3.3 by a description of conditions that may shape return on a macro- and micro-level. Discerning the various factors at play may allow the reader to obtain a better understanding of the complexity of the topic.

In paragraph 3.4 and 3.5 the multitude of factors and conditions that shape the decision making process with regard to return of clients within the RRI-project are presented. The list of factors and conditions is neither complete nor absolute. It represents the richness of features that shape and influence the decision on voluntary return. The world of migration is a world of rumours and rumours create hope. In their daily practice of counselling, the NC's are confronted with clients who adopted a range of tactics whereby they hope to prolong their stay in the Netherlands. Paragraph 3.5.3 sketches a palette of the various strategies that were applied by RRI-clients.

In paragraph 3.6 a model is outlined that may serve as a tool to conceptualize and visualize the various factors that are at play for migrants who are to decide on return. All relevant conditions a client could be confronted with can be placed within this model. As an illustration case studies of eight different (potential) returnees with widely differentiating problems are presented.

3.2 PUSH-, PULL-, STAY- AND DETER-FACTORS

In this study the widely used push-pull-paradigm will serve as a theoretical point of departure. Traditionally, push-factors are seen as those factors that make migrants leave their country of origin and pull-factors as those that attract migrants to a country of asylum. When discussing return migration, the perspective of the push-pull-model changes. Then push-factors can be defined as those factors that make migrants wishing or requiring to leave the host country.

Accordingly, pull-factors refer to the factors that make migrants wanting to return to their country of origin. When push-factors in the host country and pull factors in the country of origin are absent, it is likely that relatively *few* migrants will return.

Surprisingly, research on return migration mainly focuses on these push- and pull-factors. Factors that make people decide *not* to return are relatively rarely researched. Apart from push- and pull-factors, two other closely linked factors that also impact the decision making process of migrants are therefore introduced in this report. These are ‘stay’-factors and ‘deter’-factors. ‘Stay’-factors can be defined as the opposite of push-factors. These are those factors that make a person wishing to stay in the asylum country. ‘Deter’-factors should be regarded as the opposite of pull-factors; those factors that withhold a person to return to his/her country of origin. The common lack of interest in depicting these factors is surprising, since potential stay- and deter-factors might just as much play a role in the decision making process regarding return as potential push- and pull-factors. When stay-factors in the host country and deter-factors in the country of origin are absent, it is likely that relatively *many* migrants will return.

Based on the written reports and the interviews with the NC’s, a range of discriminating features that shaped the decision making process of clients within the RRI-project with regard to return can be distilled. In many instances certain conditions do not exclusively have the effect of either a pull-, push-, stay- or deter-factor. Depending on the personal situation of the client, his/her country of origin and the extensiveness of his/her social network, the effect on return migration of certain conditions can differ. When a client for example faces health-problems, this could constitute a *push*-effect because (s)he has no entry to medical care in the Netherlands. Health problems could also constitute a *stay*-effect when a client believes that (s)he is better off staying with family members who live in the Netherlands than returning to the country of origin. The presence of family members living in the country of origin might however *pull* a client with health problems to return. Unavailability of certain medication in the country of origin on the other hand could *deter* a client with health problems to return. To conclude, it is impossible to specifically label what effect certain conditions have on the decision-making process. Interlaced with case-material, in this paragraph an analysis is made to what extent certain conditions or circumstances had either a push-, pull-, stay- or deter-effect on the decision making process of clients.

3.3 CONDITIONS ON A MICRO- AND MACRO LEVEL

For conceptual reasons it is useful to make a division between conditions on a micro- and conditions on a macro-level. Conditions that (may) shape the return process on a micro-level can be defined as those conditions within the private domain of the migrant. When identifying conditions at a micro-level, the situation of the individual migrant is a starting point. Focus is on his/her personal, social and physical wellbeing and the interplay between the individual migrant and partners, family members, the social network.

When distinguishing conditions on a macro-level that (may) shape the return process, not so much events or relations within the private domain of the migrant are studied. Instead, features in the public domain are of key interest. The effects and impact of local or (supra)national policy on the decision making process of migrants are studied. As will be discussed soon after, alterations or adjustments on a local, national or even international policy level can directly impact the decision making process of migrants whether or not to

return. Apart from policy-effects, also the effects of economic- and security issues - in either the host country or the country of origin - are analysed.

Making a strict distinction between conditions on micro- and macro-level is not always easy, or even possible. When a client says he is frustrated because he faces problems in finding work at the informal labour market, this could for example be considered to be a condition on micro-level. The personal wellbeing of the client influences his decision with regard to return. At the same time, one could argue that the client would most probably face less problems if - based on national policy - police and other tracing services would inspect the informal labour market less strict. In that case the frustration is regarded to be a consequence on macro-level.

Although it is acknowledged that strictly discerning the two levels is not always possible, in the following paragraphs a division (still) is made for the sake of the argument. As a guideline is taken that only direct links between policy, economy, or the security situation are brought under conditions at a macro-level. Thereby it is accepted that certain choices in this respect might (still) be arguable.

3.4 CONDITIONS AT A MACRO-LEVEL

The data used in this study clarify that features in the public domain can be of key interest for the decision making process of individual migrants. Three main features at a macro-level can be differentiated. Firstly, policy (changes) can affect the decision making process. These policy changes may take place on a local, national or European level. Secondly, the security situation in the country of origin may impact the decision. Thirdly, the economic situation in the country of origin can be regarded as an important factor.

3.4.1 Policy

Local policy can affect the decision-making process of migrants with regard to return. The expanding or keeping intact of emergency shelters for undocumented migrants may for example serve as a stay-factor. When an irregular migrant is not forced to live on the streets, but - instead - may sleep in an emergency shelter, (s)he is less likely to feel a push to leave. Based on the data used in this study it is difficult to assess whether shelters do actually act as a stay-factor. Hardly any clients specifically mentioned to the NC's that they stayed in the Netherlands as long as there were emergency shelters available.

The findings clearly demonstrate that *European policy* can constitute a push-effect for irregular migrants in the Netherlands. There is a direct link between the legalisation of Polish migrant workers in the EU and the rise of Ukrainian irregular migrants returning via IOM. Many Ukrainian migrants who used to work illegally in greenhouses or construction told the NC's that they were not able to compete with legal Polish workers. The Ukrainian workers got unemployed, lost their savings and wished to return. The European policy to open up the labour market for Polish workers constituted a direct push-factor for Ukrainian workers.⁷

The findings suggest that European policy may also constitute a stay-effect. Within the European context, various government strategies have over the last years been deployed to try

⁷ For a more elaborate description of the competition between Ukrainian and Polish workers, see the case study on Ukrainians in paragraph 3.6.

to reduce the number of irregular migrants or asylum seekers crossing the European borders. Visa regimes have become stricter, walls have become higher and ships are patrolling in international waters trying to stop immigrants from entering Europe. As a consequence, migrants have to take more risks, invest more time and spend more money in trying to enter Europe. Migrants who manage to enter Europe through means of such high investments are not likely to return easily. A woman from Burundi for instance had paid 4.000 Euros to travel via Norway, Sweden and Denmark to the Netherlands. Her asylum claim was rejected. When the NC spoke her, she had been living in the Netherlands for about a year. Although she assessed her own position as futureless she decided not to return. She thought she had paid too much to give up living in Europe. De facto, the high investment of money acted as a stay-factor. In general migrants are more likely to start considering return once they have earned more money in Europe than they have spent on coming.

The research data indicate that especially (changes) in *national policy* influences the decision making process of migrants. National policy constitutes push-, stay- and even pull-effects. Clients' decisions were shaped by asylum policy and the (debate about) a regularisation scheme for rejected asylum seekers. Also (intensification of) investigation activities on undocumented migrants proved to affect the decision making process.⁸ Furthermore, clients indicated that the policy with regard to alien custody and resettlement schemes influenced their attitude on return.

Asylum policy

Evidently, the most direct influence of policy for an individual asylum migrant is a failed procedure. After a negative outcome of the procedure, the asylum seeker typically loses the rights to housing, social benefits and insurance. It goes without saying that this factor is of vital importance for rejected asylum seekers. Failed asylum claims constitute one of the most important push-factors to leave. From having a legal status, the right to housing, a weekly fee etcetera, the migrants become undocumented and are formally required to leave the country. Because of policy changes the rate of rejections of asylum claims has over the last years increased in various ways. The most important alteration in the Netherlands has been the introduction of the new Aliens Act 2000 (*Vreemdelingenwet*), effective since April 2001. The procedure is accelerated, mainly by limiting the possibilities for appeal. Another significant change has been the shift in final authority for appeals in asylum cases to the "*Raad van State*" (Council of State), the Netherlands highest administrative court. In general this has led to a more restrictive cast to Dutch asylum law.

The findings indicate that the circumstances under which asylum seekers have to await the outcome of their procedure may have a push-effect. Asylum seekers typically live collectively in asylum centres and enjoy relatively little freedom. They are not allowed to travel outside the Netherlands and there are strict limitations with regard to work. Clients complained about the administrative pressure, and the general lack of freedom. Some clients considered the asylum procedure to be a 'mania of organisation'. The weekly ritual of getting stamps, the continuing stress about the outcome of the procedure; it all fuelled the idea that migrating to the Netherlands had after all not been a very wise decision. Mainly Africans clients stated to the NC's they were annoyed with the 'organized' European life. To some, the news that they would not receive a status was a 'final blow' after a long range of other negative experiences.

⁸ As Leerkes et. al. (2007: 1495) note, not only national policy, but also local police priorities may influence the number of apprehensions of undocumented migrants.

Strict asylum policy can however indirectly act as a stay-factor as well. As a strategy to increase their chances of receiving a status, asylum seekers sometimes present themselves during their interview with the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) with a bogus identity or nationality (Neumayer 2005, Van Wijk 2007). This might on the long term delay their return process or even withhold them from returning. Some of them do not wish to disclose their true identity or nationality to any authority or organisation (including IOM), because they are afraid this would have negative implications. They for instance fear repatriation to the wrong country or imprisonment.⁹ Consequently - even when they wish to return - they do not indicate to Dutch authorities or IOM that they consider return and stay in the Netherlands.

(Debate) regularisation scheme

Awaiting the outcome of the parliamentary elections of November 2006 proved another key stay-factor for rejected asylum seekers. Even the least integrated migrants who hardly understood any Dutch tried to keep up to date about the outcome of the elections and the formation of the cabinet. Left wing parties promised setting up a regularisation scheme (*pardonregeling*) so as to regularise a section of the thousands of rejected asylum seekers who lived in the Netherlands. The scheme would encompass a group of 26.000 rejected asylum seekers. Central and right wing parties were opposed to this idea. After a central-left cabinet was elected November 2006, it took another half year before the new government presented the conditions of the regularisation scheme. In short, rejected asylum seekers who applied for asylum before April 2001 were eligible for regularisation.¹⁰

Previous to the elections and in the aftermath of the elections until May 2007, the uncertainty about what was to come of the regularisation scheme acted as a stay-factor. Many clients told the NC's that they wished to await the outcome of the political process before seriously considering to return. The story of an unaccompanied minor from Benin who applied for asylum in February 2001 might serve as an example. In 2003 he received notification that his claim was rejected. Ever since he had lived with friends. Sometimes he was able to work in informal economy. October 2006 he contacted the NC for advice on return. The first meeting he hesitated if it would be wise to return or not; actually he wanted to earn more money to facilitate his family after return. On the other hand, he knew that his future perspective in the Netherlands was far from optimal. The second meeting in October he told the NC he still hesitated. November 27 he told the NC he decided to return. November 30, he called the NC to cancel all actions; he had talked to some people and decided to wait a bit more and see what the new cabinet might bring with regard to regularisation.

⁹ See paragraph 4.2.4

¹⁰ Under the scheme, the following foreign nationals will be granted a residence permit for the purpose of settling the estate of the 'old' Aliens Act: A) Whose first application for asylum was filed before 1 April 2001, or who reported before 1 April 2001 to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) or Aliens Police with a view to filing an application for asylum, B) Who has uninterruptedly lived in the Netherlands since 1 April 2001, and C) Who, insofar as applicable, has confirmed in writing in advance that they will unconditionally withdraw the pending proceedings when being granted a permit under the scheme. Those who have been convicted because of a serious crime are not eligible.

Inspection activities

As is mentioned in the introduction, the Dutch policy document on return - *de terugkeernota*¹¹ - published by the Ministry of Justice in 2003 stated that persons who are not eligible to reside in the Netherlands should leave, either voluntarily or forced. Partly based on this document, efforts to expel irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers from the Netherlands have over the years been intensified and reorganised. The Alien's Police (*Vreemdelingenpolitie*) together with the Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary (*Koninklijke Marechaussee*) traditionally execute the expelling of rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants. Apart from the above mentioned organisations a new body has been set up that acts as a push-factor for irregular migrants to leave the Netherlands. In 2006 the Return and Departure Service (DT&V) was established. This is an executive agent that focuses on achieving the (independent) return of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers. The intensification of government efforts to discourage employers contracting undocumented migrants constitutes a push-effect as well. The Social Intelligence and Investigation Department (SIOD) is a division within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment that among other tasks combats the misuse of social legislation and employment of irregular migrants.

Although most clients were not aware what type of organisations were set up and what type of work these organisations exactly exercised, they did experience that the government spent more energy in pushing them to leave the Netherlands. Various clients mentioned that they experienced stricter inspections and that they consequently encountered major problems with finding work. Since 2006 some Indian nationals for instance returned because of the stricter patrolling of the Alien's Police. A forty year old Indian man also told the NC that the stricter inspections were his primary reason to leave the Netherlands. He himself did not fear the inspections that much, but he noticed that potential employers did not dare to contract irregular migrants any more. Client had been living as an irregular migrant in the Netherlands for three years. All these years he had been working on a market. He had rented a room for 160 Euros from an Indian friend and most of the money he earned he sent as remittances to his family in India. The last months before contacting the NC he could not find any work any more. He wanted to leave since he paid more for housing and food than he could earn by working.

Because of the more strict police surveillance irregular migrants feel chased. They feel they in some way have to act and sometimes leaving is an option. One Moroccan client had lived as an irregular migrant in the Netherlands for sixteen years, of which seven in prison. He told the NC he had mainly been engaged in burglaries. When the NC met the man in 2005 he did not want to hear about returning. Two years later however, he said that he wished to return. He complained about the police chasing him all the time and hoped to find peace of mind in Morocco.

Alien custody

Fear to be detained or living in detention sometimes constitutes a serious push-factor. Take the example of the mother of an Uzbek family of six who was arrested and detained September 2006. Since it had been impossible to repatriate her she was released from

¹¹ Directorate-General for International Affairs and Immigration, Ministry of Justice, "measures for a more effective implementation of Dutch Policy on return.", AVT03?BZ73283, The Hague 21 November 2003.

detention April 2007. Directly after she left the detention centre she called the NC to ask for advice. She thought about returning because after all she went through she also feared for the future of her daughter. Her daughter had just turned eighteen. Especially after her experience in alien custody the mother wanted to leave, because she feared that her daughter would one day also run into the police and be detained.

Wake up call

In 2004 (during the RRI-I project) a NC met a Congolese man and his family who had been living in the Netherlands for thirteen years. They had applied for asylum, but their claim was rejected. They were able to survive in the Netherlands, because family members living in Canada, Belgium and Germany supported them financially. The NC and the head of the family very frequently contacted each other and made plans for return. Then suddenly, without notifying why, the client decided to stop preparing for return. The NC and the client kept having contact and a year later - in 2005 - the client told returning still crossed his mind. He saw no future for his children in the Netherlands. What would become of them when they would turn eighteen? He was told by the NC that he and his family could receive financial support of several thousands of Euros to build up a new life in Congo. But still, the client made no final decision. Another year passed. Then, in 2006, his fourteen year old son was arrested while threatening someone with an (empty) gun. He was detained for three months. This experience was a wake up call for the father. Suddenly he realised the vulnerable position he and his family were living in. The experience highlighted the vulnerable position he and his family were in. He realised that because of their illegal status all members of the family ran the risk of getting detained in alien custody. After three years of doubt he decided that returning was their best option.

Although alien custody obviously first and foremost constitutes a push-effect, to some clients it also has a stay-effect. As long as someone is detained (s)he cannot work and cannot save for substances to take home. When someone deems it crucial to return with a certain amount of money, (s)he is not willing to cooperate with return, even when (s)he is detained. Then there is a group of migrants that feel they are always better off suffering in the Netherlands than suffering in their country of origin. As one African client told a NC: "I can eat in this country, why would I leave?" If the pure basics of food, water and a place to sleep are sufficient to make someone stay, detention does not constitute a push-effect. Rather the opposite: as one NC noted, some clients feel more comfortable in the relative tranquillity of prison than living the hectic lifestyle outside. Although some of the detention centres of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands have been criticized for its living conditions (Van de Griend 2006), some migrants apparently do not consider the conditions to be that bad. When such migrants get arrested and detained they sometimes give false names and just wait a couple of months until they are discharged. Just after a forty year old Chinese irregular migrant was arrested by the police he told the NC he wished to return. The second meeting between the client and the NC took place at the 'notorious' detention boat in Rotterdam. The client said he had changed his mind and had no desire to return any more. Living conditions in the detention centre had been less tough than he had imagined and he preferred to stay a couple of months more. He decided to frustrate the return procedure, hoping to be discharged at a certain moment.

Resettlement assistance

Various organisations offer assistance packages for migrants who voluntarily return. Mostly these projects are financed by Dutch government and consequently these projects can be regarded as an outcome of Dutch policy. IOM provides an airline ticket for irregular migrants wishing to return. Rejected asylum seekers may on top of that also receive a financial contribution. In cooperation with other NGO's IOM may also offer assistance to set up small businesses or intermediate between returnees and potential employers. Persons who never applied for residence in the Netherlands are not eligible for the financial contribution of IOM. In most instances they are not eligible for other projects either. The assistance packages are primarily designed to take away deter-factors (and create pull-factors) in the country of origin. Based on the data used in this study it is not possible to indicate in how far the offered packages are decisive with regard to return. That resettlement assistance packages to some degree affect the decision making process on return, seems however to be expected.

3.4.2 Security situation in country of origin

When in a country of origin peace has come after a period of war, or a regime change after a dictatorship, such events are likely to speed up the process of voluntary return. When war and insurgency in some parts in the country of origin are ongoing, it is less likely that migrants return than when war is over. A study by Blitz et.al. (2005) clearly demonstrates that the Afghan community in the UK did not want to return because of the insecure situation in their home country. The study indicated that they in the first place longed for political stability and security, only then to be followed by economic stability and improvements in infrastructure. Not just in Afghanistan, but in various other countries of destination, the overall security situation has over the years been that bad that voluntary migration has not been considered as a serious option. In 2007, returning to Iraq was less appealing than returning to the former battlegrounds of Sierra Leone or Liberia. Many clients from Iraq, Somalia and some parts of Sudan therefore told the NC's that they thought their country to be too dangerous and instable to return to. The minority of Iraqis who *do* return are Kurds from the relatively secure northern region.

At the same time, originating from an insecure country can create less of a push to leave the Netherlands. When a country faces ongoing violence or an overall hazardous situation, the Dutch government may put a so-called categorical protection policy in place for these regions. This means that forced removals do not take place. This policy de facto acts as a stay-factor for some clients. A client from the Turkmen community from Bagdad for instance decided not to voluntarily return, because he knew that he did not run the risk to be forcibly expelled.

The subjective perception of a client about the security situation in his country of origin does not have coincide with the perception of Dutch government. In other words: even tough an asylum claim is denied by Dutch government, the client might still deem his/her country to be too dangerous to return to. The situation of 31 year old rejected asylum seeker from Syria is illustrative. While living in the Netherlands he stayed in close contact with his father in Syria. His father told him that the son was still looked for by the secret service. This was enough reason for the son not to return. Some Chinese migrants told that they did not dare to return to China since they had been politically active and feared prosecution. When a NC informed after the future plans of a Turkish Kurd, she got the following answer: "Return? I don't think about return. No one leaves heaven to return to hell!" Clients who truly fear their

live is at stake should they return, but do not come from a country that is 'protected' by a categorical protection policy, are likely to stay.

3.4.3 Economic situation country of origin

In general, a recuperated economy in the country of origin acts as a pull-factor for migrants to return. But a good economy might not always attract returnees. It may seem paradoxical, but to potential returnees the end of war in their country of origin can have a negative side-effect. It is an economic principle that prices of the few good houses that survived continuous fighting rise spectacularly. Both in Kabul (Blitz. et. al. 2005), the Eritrean capital Asmara (Koser 2002) and the Angolan capital Luanda (Van Wijk 2007), prices of housing have skyrocketed dramatically when war ended. Especially when migrants financed their travel to Europe by selling their property, it is virtually impossible to return and enjoy the same housing conditions as when they left. The financial packages offered by return programs - varying from hundreds of dollars for individuals to thousands of dollars for families - can never meet up. Someone who might have belonged to the upper class when leaving, might come back and find out that his former lower class neighbour now has more financial resources. This explains why earlier research concluded that owning property is considered to be a major determinant of the desire for return and not owning property acts as a deter-factor (King 2000). The Iraqi NC referred to the fact that real estate prices in Iraq can be very high. Renting an apartment costs minimally 300 USD a month, while minimum salaries are about the same amount of money. Except the fact that housing in a good neighbourhood is costly, also food and petrol are relatively expensive. As a result, clients not only consider the security situation in Iraq, but also the economic situation.

3.5 CONDITIONS AT A MICRO LEVEL

Conditions that (may) shape the return process on a micro-level are conditions within the private domain of the migrant. When identifying conditions at a micro-level, the situation of the individual migrant is a starting point. Focus is on his/her personal, social and physical wellbeing. Also the interplay between the individual migrant and partners, family members, the social network is studied. In this chapter conditions with regard to the personal situation of potential returnees are differentiated from situations shaped by the interplay between the potential returnee and his/her social network.

3.5.1 Personal situation

Tiredness

In many instances clients themselves could hardly pin down what specific motive was most crucial for them to leave. "I am tired" is an answer many clients give to the question why they consider return. Especially those clients without a fixed sleeping place said they were tired. Physically tired of moving around: sleeping the first nights of the week with the one friend, the last nights with the other friend and in between somewhere in a church. Moreover, many clients also indicated that they were psychologically tired. Tired of hiding from the Dutch authorities, tired of searching for work, tired of applying for asylum a second or even third time. Many face stress while trying to find work or awaiting the outcome of the asylum procedure. On top of that especially irregular migrants sometimes live a very unhealthy lifestyle. Frustrated by the fact that they cannot find a proper job and simply because they lack

the financial means they live as sober as possible. As a Russian speaking NC said about Ukrainians: "They live on bread, coffee and unfiltered cigarettes." Living this live may bring them in a negative spiral. Sometimes they become sick. As a consequence of their weak health employers do not want to contract them. Uninsured and not daring to visit a general practitioner their situation worsens. Tired, frustrated and weakened they call the NC, saying that they want to return.

Financial problems

Many clients who returned to their country did so, because of the troubling financial situation they faced in the Netherlands. Finding work often proved much more difficult than expected. A young Ukrainian man for instance had planned to save money in the Netherlands and return within a few years. With the money saved in the Netherlands, he wanted to study in his hometown. Though he had found work, the cost of living (illegal rent, buying food) turned out to be higher than his savings. Also an Iranian man wanted to return to Iran because he was not able to find work. His motivation was more subtle though. As a musician he wanted to make a living in the Netherlands with his music, but - as he told the NC - no one wanted to listen to it. A Brazilian woman had put her future in the hands of the love between her two employers. She migrated to the Netherlands in the slipstream of a well to do Brazilian family that she worked for as a babysitter. She did this work for about a year, but when the husband and wife broke up, she was sent away. Undocumented, without work and without a place to stay she approached a NC and told that she wished to return. A musician from Uzbekistan used to work in Germany. While he was on his way to the Netherlands to work as a street artist, his instruments were stolen in the train. Without his instruments he could not earn anything. In panic he approached a NC and said that he wanted to return as soon as possible.

No matter what nationality, many irregular migrants who come to the Netherlands for economical motives and do not succeed are at some point confronted with - as one NC described it - a 'Fata Morgana effect'. At the end of the horizon they see possibilities to find a good job, they just have to be lucky enough to encounter it, but it's there, waiting for them.... This 'Fata Morgana effect' may serve as a major stay-factor. A few cases are presented to illustrate this. An Egyptian client who has been living as an irregular resident in Amsterdam for fourteen years told the NC that returning to Egypt crosses his mind almost every year. Eventually he never takes the step, because there is just always a reason for him to stay. He works in the kitchen of a bar/restaurant. In summer he earns good money because of the tips on the terrace and at the end of year the tips are good over Christmas. The perspective of making this 'summer' and 'Christmas' money has kept him in Amsterdam season after season, year after year. NC's had similar experiences with several undocumented African clients from Guinea, Niger, Sierra Leone. Many young African undocumented migrants survive by working as a paperboy. When they loose their job they turn to the NC's for information about return. Typically, as soon as they find the same type of job again, they withdraw their claim.

Health problems

Rejected asylum seekers as well as irregular migrants in many instances report that they wish to return to their country of origin because they are facing health problems. In this case health problems constitute a push-factor. A 51 year old Eritrean man with a terminal disease for example told the NC that he preferred to die in his home country. A NC was approached by a

Rwandan mother of three children (aged thirteen, eleven and three). The mother had Aids and tuberculosis and wanted to return. She said she was not able to take care of the children and hoped that her expanded family in Rwanda would be. She started a return procedure, but never arrived in Rwanda. Ten days after the first contact with the NC she died. Older clients sometimes prefer the poor but secure and secluded situation in their home country above the insecure life of an irregular migrant in the Netherlands. When she was 63, a Moldavian woman moved to the Netherlands to live with her family members who have a status. Her application for a residence permit was not approved. When she was 66 years old she contacted a NC. Although she had sold her house in Moldavia, she insisted to return. She had diabetes and a high blood pressure and with these conditions she preferred to stay in her own country. She hoped to share an apartment with a friend

Health problems can also constitute a stay-factor. Migrants with diseases that are difficult to treat in the country of origin - such as HIV-Aids or cancer - often do not wish to return.¹² A NC had contact with an Iranian woman with a brain tumour and diabetes. Her asylum claim was rejected and she had just given birth to a baby. The NC informed if she wanted to return. Referring to her health situation she said she preferred to stay in the Netherlands. Should her situation aggravate she thought to be better off in the Netherlands than in Iran.

Homesickness

Hardly any of the NC's noted in their written reports that homesickness constituted a major pull-factor for clients to return. When specifically asked, the NC's however - interestingly enough - noted that homesickness for many of their clients *is* a vital factor to consider returning. They said that longing to return to the country of origin is intrinsically virtually always present as a pull-factor in the decision-making process of migrants. For many migrants it is such a logical reality that it is preferable to live surrounded by family members and friends that they do not specifically mention this as a reason wanting to return.

Mission accomplished

Sometimes the reason for a client to return is positive. An Angolan client for instance had just received his diploma when he contacted NC. The client had come to the Netherlands in order to study and from the moment he had reached his goal he was ready to leave. Other clients - for instance from Ghana and Ukraine - had come to the Netherlands with the objective to work, save money and send this to their relatives. They send the money either cash or via money transfer systems such as Western Union or Money Gram. Once they felt they sent enough, this constituted a 'positive' push to leave.

3.5.2 Interplay with social network

In many instances migration to Europe is a "household" or a "family" strategy (Massey 1990; Herman 2006). According to Mullan (1989: 69) migration is rarely undertaken as a completely independent event: "Rather it is often a decision made easier by being accompanied by, or received by, friends and relatives among whom a first or second-hand knowledge and information essential to facilitating the migration process is shared". Sending

¹² Return Migration and Health III project – IOM February 2008

remittances is mostly part of this family strategy. The choice to migrate, the place where to migrate to and the objective of migration are in other words not an individual decision. To some degree this is the same with return migration; just like out-migration return-migration is also not a purely individual choice. It is just as well influenced by the household strategy. When considering return, the migrant has more on his mind than just his own perspective. Just like the household in the country of origin decides on a 'go' or 'no go' to migrate to Europe, it sometimes also decides on a 'go' or 'no go' regarding voluntary return. Various dynamics within his/her social network act either as push-, pull-, stay- or deter-factors.

Health problems family in country of origin

Family members living in the country of origin can constitute a pull-effect in case they have health problems. A major pull-factor for migrants to return is a sick relative. Many clients indicate that for instance a sick brother, sister or parent is their most important reason to return. An Indian client told the NC he wished to return because his mother in law had to undergo a heart surgery. The client wished to be in India when this happened, because he wanted to support his wife and family in law during this stressful period. A man from Georgia had divorced from his wife before he had travelled to the Netherlands. While he worked in the Netherlands to finance the studies of his children, his children were living with his mother. The man deemed it necessary to return to Tbilisi when he received the news that his mother had become sick. The NC assisted him with priority.

Death of a relative

The death of a relative in the country of origin may also have a pull-effect. Many clients made clear that they want to return in order to attend the funeral of a loved one. A Chinese man did not even await a ticket arranged by IOM, but - instead - paid his own ticket when he heard about the death of his mother. A forty year old Ukrainian man also wanted to return because of the death of his mother. Attending her funeral was not the most important reason though. He was entitled to inherit part of the house, but feared that his sister might put the house on her name exclusively if he would not promptly return. The death of a relative may also have a stay-effect. A Sudanese man for example told the NC that he wanted to return. The next meeting however, he told that his mother in Sudan had passed away and that he wanted to postpone his flight. He first needed to save more money to finance his mother's burial ceremony.

Job offer in country of origin

A few clients told the NC's they were pulled to their country of origin because their family members could arrange them a job. A Sudanese man for instance was promised that he could work at the chicken farm of his brother. A Chinese ex unaccompanied minor was eleven years old when his well-to-do parents decided to send him to Europe. They thought him to be a difficult to handle child and decided it would be a good experience for their son to become more self sufficient in Europe. Before applying for asylum in the Netherlands at age fourteen, the son lived in other European countries for several years. At age twenty he decided to return, since his asylum claim was rejected and his father had offered him a position at his office.

Social debt

The same social network that may pull people to return (often) has the effect on migrants *not* to return. In many instances family members in the country of origin have an interest in keeping a migrant in Europe. They do not want him/her to return because this would lead them to lose the income they receive via remittances. Migrants in many instances borrow money from various family members in order to finance the trip to Europe. One migrant is 'the chosen' to migrate to Europe and (s)he is supposed to send remittances or to return with assets. Family members and friends in many instances do not directly and clearly state when and how this money should be refunded. A social, rather than a financial, debt is accumulated (Soudijn 2006: 15).

As long as the migrant has not been able to send remittances or save money, the peer pressure not to return can be enormous. An unsuccessful migrant can be a disgrace to his whole family when the investment in his/her travel never rendered. Migrants sometimes are pressurized by family-members in the country of origin to remain in Europe. The mere fear that family members back home will not accept that someone has 'failed' and returns empty handed causes stress with migrants in the Netherlands and has a stay-effect. The fear of stigmatization and being portrayed as a 'loser' after returning empty handed, can be a major cause not to return. Migrants themselves perceive that their social network will not be content if they return. Sometimes for good reasons: one client from Nigeria for instance had stolen money from his father to finance his trip. If he would return to Nigeria, he would surely need some diplomacy to smoothen the relationship with his family.

Especially African men are reluctant to return when they have not been able to earn any money. Particularly when other men in their village return(ed) from Europe as 'rich' men. As one irregular migrant who was living in a shelter said: "I am like half a man. My mother will say: 'other children return with goods and money, but you didn't. What have you done all that time?'" Since family members only hear the good stories about life in Europe, it is hard to understand how their relative in Europe could be unsuccessful. Sometimes they blame the relative for being lazy or spending all his money. The Chinese NC noted that some migrants have a weblog and write that life in the Netherlands is tough and rough. Still however, especially in the villages, family and friends cannot understand that migrants want to return. This makes that not only African, but also Chinese clients sometimes prefer to stay in order to be able to pay off their social debt. A twenty year old rejected Chinese asylum seeker had been working in a restaurant for three years. He told the NC that he was from a relatively well-to-do family and that there was no direct deterring factor that withheld him from returning. He preferred to stay in the Netherlands though and work for some years more in the informal economy. He said he would only return when he had saved enough money for his intended marriage.

When migrants feel they can not meet up to the expectations this might lead to the situation that they start lying to their family members back home. NC's noted that young rejected asylum seekers whose parents had paid the trip to Europe to enable their children to study feared going back without a diploma (see also Van Wijk 2007). Although the children are not entitled to go to school any more, they sometimes communicate to their parents they are doing fine. Ultimately, the pressure to succeed may lead to completely losing contact with family members and not even daring to return anymore. One NC for example encountered this situation with a Congolese client. The client was a rejected asylum seeker who had been living undocumented in the Netherlands for three years. He had visited many lawyers and

NGO's and every time he heard the same thing: you do not stand a chance of receiving a status or starting a new procedure. When the client contacted the NC he firmly claimed he did not want to return. The chief reason not wanting to return was the fact that he feared his family would regard him as a loser upon arrival. He was depressed and was an excessive drugs user. He had not been in touch with his family in Congo for three years. During the conversation with the NC it turned out he had an aunt who lived in Belgium. The NC suggested calling the aunt. Client agreed and the NC explained the situation of her cousin. The rationale behind this was that the aunt could perhaps act as an intermediate between the client and his family members. After the first telephone contact the aunt insisted to come to the Netherlands and meet up with her cousin. After this meeting she called the parents and explained the situation of her cousin. Also living in Europe, she was able to explain and inform the parents why their son had ran into problems and had not been able to build up a successful life in Europe. The parents did not need much more explanations and wanted to speak to their son. They asked him to come home. Only seven months after the first contact with the client the NC could 'close the file.' Two weeks after his arrival in Congo the client called the NC. He had been received very well by his parents and other family members.

Other migrants found creative ways of saving their honour. A rejected asylum seeker from Uganda was able to carry on living in the Netherlands by working as a cleaner in five houses. The proprietors of these houses noticed the social pressure he was facing and loaned him some money to send to his family. He wished to return after he had paid off the debts.

Financial debt

Although African migrants who cannot meet up with the expectations of their family sometimes have a financial debt, they mainly perceive their problem as a 'social debt'. Predominantly fear of the possible social consequences causes African migrants not to return. Although Chinese migrants are also confronted with social pressure, many of them also have a financial debt that deters them to return. It is commonly known that Chinese migrants pay high smuggling fees in order to reach the Netherlands. Sometimes payment takes place in the country of destination, but as Soudijn (2006: 101) notes, payment of the smuggling fee usually takes place in China before leaving. Migrants borrow money from family members or lend money from loan sharks at a high interest rate to finance their trip. This alternative method is called 'pre-financing'. In this case, the transfer is often done by relatives or friends who are willing to act as a guarantor for the migrant. Either way - borrowing money in China or in the Netherlands - the smuggled migrants upon arrival have to start working to pay off their debts. Other than in the African context the debt is perceived more as a financial, than a social debt. This is especially the case when the collector is relatively unknown to the migrant or when the amount of money is high. One Chinese woman for instance told the NC that she and her husband were indebted 20.000 Euros to their family members. Although she sometimes considered returning to China, she told that she first had to pay off her debt by working in Europe.

Another type of financial debts often related to Chinese migrants are gambling debts. It is a known fact that many Chinese have a love for gambling. Chinese migrants in the Netherlands gamble partly for joy of the game, but according to a NC sometimes also to fight boredom. They work long nights and - having no family members near them - little to do. The NC's met some migrants who gambled so much that they ended up losing all their savings. Even worse, some also created debts because of gambling. The debt can act as a push-factor when

migrants try to escape the collector by retuning (fleeing) to China. If the collector however has a record of chasing down debtors and happens to know family members in China, the debt is more likely to act as a stay-factor. The migrant will see the need to stay in the Netherlands and try to pay off his debt. Gambling debts can also have the effect of a deter-factor. Some migrants moved to Europe in order to escape collectors in China. Knowing that the collector would be waiting for them withholds him to return. A NC was brought into contact with an undocumented Chinese man who was detained in alien custody. His pregnant girlfriend lived in Rotterdam in an asylum centre. They had just planned to move to Italy when the man was arrested. The NC discussed the possibility to return with the man, but he was not interested. He said he had debts in China. He first wanted to earn enough money so that he could pay off. The NC and the client agreed that the man could call the NC when he would be in the position to return. Half a year later he called and returned.

Emotional 'debt'

A third type of debt that can withhold clients from returning is an emotional debt. Clients sometimes feel they are to blame for not keeping in touch with family members. This constitutes a stay-effect. An Iranian man for example lived in the Netherlands from 1993 onwards. He applied for asylum and received a status, but because of psychological problems he had forgotten to apply for an extension. When he met the NC he was 45 years old and undocumented. He told the NC that he saw no future any more in the Netherlands, but feared to return to his family in Iran. Over time he had lost contact and was anxious: how would his children react, what had become of them, how would his wife react? The client felt guilty he had not contacted his family for such a long period of time. In this case social or financial expectations did not withhold the migrant to return. It was rather the emotional blockade of the unknown and potentially negative reaction of his peers that made him doubt.

Human smuggling

The influence of human smugglers can constitute a push-effect. Some clients were promised the 'classical' golden European mountains by their smugglers. Upon arrival they found none. As a result they wanted to leave the Netherlands as soon as possible. A tragic example is the case of a minor Nigerian soccer player. His parents had paid a broker to bring their son to the Netherlands and introduce him to trainers and coaches of professional clubs like Ajax and PSV. When the youngster arrived in the Netherlands the 'broker' left him alone in a hotel. The youngster wanted to return to Nigeria as soon as possible. Another case was reported to the NC by the Army of Salvation. A 32 year old man from St. Petersburg (Russia) had asked for help. He had arrived eight days earlier with a short term visa. Someone in Russia sold him the visa for 2.000 Euros, promising that a friend would wait for him at a specific train station in Amsterdam. The person waiting at the station would arrange housing and work. The client went to the station and waited for hours, but no one showed up. Since he had no money whatsoever he had been forced to sleep outside. He too, considered return.

Social network in the Netherlands

To irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers their social network can be of crucial significance. They lack entry to the formal social security system and in many instances fully

depend on the assistance of third parties when it comes to finding housing or work. It is striking that many migrants who returned via RRI come from relatively 'new' migration countries, such as Brazil and Ukraine. More 'traditional' migrant groups such as Turks and Moroccans hardly return via the RRI-project. Notwithstanding that it is likely that a substantial number of undocumented Turks and Moroccans live in the G4. The overrepresentation of returnees from 'new' migration groups might be related to the fact that these migrants lack a social network in the Netherlands.¹³

Migrants from Central Europe and Russia have few unions or self help groups. More importantly, they also lack a strongly locally embedded network of fellow countrymen that can assist. Because they lack a network of 'rooted' fellow countrymen in the Netherlands, they encounter problems finding decent and cheap housing. Some Ukrainian clients paid as much as 900 Euros a month for a room, or 250 Euros a month for a bed in a room shared with others. In many instances they have to pay in advance. Compared to these Ukrainians, migrants from Morocco and Turkey in general know more people who are stronger embedded in Dutch society. They generally have family members or acquaintances who can help with housing or work (Staring 2001, Leerkes et. al. 2007: 1502). Turkish, but also Moroccan shopkeepers sometimes employ irregularly residing family members. Undocumented Moroccan woman mainly work as cleaners, babysitters or in bars/restaurants. The references for these jobs often come from within the social network. Since the social network takes care of the migrants, there is less of an incentive to return.

The Ghanaian community constitutes a special group of sub Sahara African migrants in this respect. Unlike most other Africans, they have quite a long history of migration to the Netherlands. Just like Turkish and Moroccans, Ghanaian migrants are less likely to sink in the swamps of illegality. The Ghanaian community is relatively well embedded in Dutch society, especially in Amsterdam. In the 1980's a substantial number of Ghanaians received an asylum status. More recently arriving Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands hardly ever apply for asylum. Instead, they live with friends or family members who help them to find work. They borrow each other passports, refer each other to employers and generally live low profiled. Because of this assistance Ghanaians can manage to live illegally for many years without being noticed by Dutch authorities. Some clients have irregularly been living in the Netherlands since 1994. Other than Turkish and Moroccan migrants, Ghanaians however do at some moment return.

Some clients felt that the ties with their new social network in the Netherlands had grown so strong that they did not wish to return. A Moroccan man told the NC he had nowhere to return to in Morocco. He had been illegally living in the Netherlands for 25 years and had no social network whatsoever in Morocco. A Chinese man lived illegally in the Netherlands for eleven years. He had no wife or children and ceased having contact with his family in China for a long time. He had financed his trip to the Netherlands by selling his house. When the NC met him, he had health problems and could not work. He was living with friends. After having lived in the Netherlands for such a long time, his Chinese friends in the Netherlands were actually the only friends he had.

Other clients were caught in a classic catch 22. They had fallen in love with a Dutch man or woman and at the same time felt a desire to return to their family. They were confronted with

¹³ Another important reason might be that Moroccan and Turkish migrants prefer to return without interference of IOM. Then they make sure they are not in any way registered. Especially compared to Brazil flight tickets to Morocco and Turkey are relatively cheap.

a difficult situation. What proved stronger: the social network in the Netherlands or family ties abroad? As long as these clients doubt, they are likely to stay in the Netherlands.

Living apart together

Cases of love and marriage become even more complex and problematic in a situation where couples or families - either by force or voluntarily - live apart together. Men typically migrate to Europe and women stay behind in the country of origin. A variety of reasons can lead marriages not to survive a migration process. Men fall in love with women in Europe, women fall in love with men in the country of origin. Less romantic, but sometimes with the same effect: men arrange a marriage of convenience in Europe or women who cannot get by without financial assistance of their man decide to marry someone else in the country of origin. When such situations lead to a divorce, this can have the effect that men do not wish to return any more. One client for example indicated he had left his partner behind in country of origin and got engaged in a new relationship in Europe. He never contacted his former partner any more. Obviously, returning would mean facing an angry (former) family in law.

Apart from the deter-effect of the family *in law*, also the consequences of *family law* in the country of origin may withhold men to return. In Morocco for example, women with children can go to court after a divorce and force their ex-husband to pay maintenance allowance. As a consequence, ex-husbands who have not paid maintenance allowance while living in Europe are on return confronted with an obligation to pay several months or even years of maintenance allowance to their former wives. Someone who has not returned in fifteen years, may for instance be obliged to pay around 6.000 Euros. The NC said that indebted husbands used to be arrested on arrival in Morocco. Nowadays (ex) husbands are not directly arrested any more, but they do have to present themselves at court. Evidently, if they do not present themselves, they run the risk to be arrested.

Clients also faced situations in which (execution of) alien policy forced them to separate. A Ukrainian woman and her daughter contacted the NC after they had been living in the Netherlands as irregular migrants for two years. The husband/father worked illegally until he was arrested by the Alien's Police. He was to be expelled. The woman and daughter did not dare to live in their house any more. Without the salary of the husband/father they were not able to afford it either. Because the husband/father was to be expelled, they wanted to return as soon as possible as well. An undocumented woman from Cameroon with two children was more or less in the same position. Her husband was expelled. He and his family wanted her to return with the children. Other than the Ukrainian woman, she did however not want to return.

Children

Individual migrants more easily decide to return than families with children. Children mainly act as a stay-factor. Some migrants have children who are born in the Netherlands. The children speak Dutch, visit a Dutch school and have Dutch friends. Parents named a range of practical problems they feared should they return. They for example fear that their children would not be able to build up a successful social life in the country of origin. Sometimes they neither speak nor write the language and have little knowledge about the local culture and habits in the country of origin. Parents also often foresee that finding a good - and affordable - school for the children would be difficult. At the same time families with children are more

often assisted by NGO's and churches than single migrants. Such assistance may have a stay-effect.

Migration motive

As is mentioned in paragraph 1.3 about four times as much irregular migrants returned via RRI than rejected asylum seekers. Apart from a range of other factors, an important explanation could be that the migration motive of clients might affect the decision on return. A migrant who temporarily wishes to work in the informal economy is better of staying undocumented than applying for asylum. Economic migrants feel more comfortable living a low-profile life as an irregular migrant than live in the highly regulated 'big-brother-world' of asylum procedures, asylum centres, stamping ceremonies etcetera. For most Ukrainians and Ghanaians their primary reason for coming to the Netherlands was to temporarily work. They either wished to return because they had saved enough money, or because it turned out to be too difficult to save money. The same more or less applies to Indian and Pakistani migrants who hardly ever apply for asylum. They also mainly come to the Netherlands for economical reasons. Strict police inspections at the places where they use to work (markets, shops, greenhouses) deter employers to employ undocumented migrants. Consequently the migrants faced unemployment and wished to return.

Asylum seekers in general have more of a long term view on migration. Although there are indications that some asylum migrants migrate to Europe for economic reasons, the majority does not have a short term agenda of finding work, saving money and returning home. They mainly fled insecure countries and are strongly opposed to return. After receiving the news that their claim is rejected, they sometimes have the feeling that they 'uselessly' invested much time and energy in the procedure. This may act as a stay-factor. Since rejected asylum seekers have invested much time and energy to receive a status, they do not easily accept return as a viable option. Before coming to terms with reality that return might be their best option, they first want to try their luck by other means and strategies. The next paragraph some of these strategies are presented.

3.5.3 Rumours

The world of migration is a world of rumours. In many instances information that circulates in migrant networks is incorrect and incomplete. Most rumours in the country of origin make people wanting to leave their country of origin. In Ukrainian villages fairytales about life in Europe still exist. One of the myths a NC heard was the following: Every Thursday people in the Netherlands place microwaves, televisions and refrigerators at the side of the road, because they buy new equipment nearly every week. Rumours often create a disparity between reality in the host country and the expectations migrants have prior to arrival.

In a similar way, rumours also influence and guide migrants living in the Netherlands. Within the extensive social network (potential) returnees continuously pick up and spread tips, tricks and tactics how to better their situation. Migrants tend to have a stronger believe in positive news than in negative news. Any string of hope might trigger a migrant to adopt some sort of strategy. The combination of rumours and hope is a recipe to stay. In this paragraph a palette of rumours is presented, as well as a variety of strategies applied by clients to (try to) prolong their stay in the Netherlands. The reader will learn how naïve, creative, but also how vulnerable irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers trying to survive can be. Some try

to do everything in their power to raise their chances of being granted a status or to avoid being deported. As is noted before, for assistance with finding a job or housing, migrants virtually always have to turn to third parties. This is the same with regard to finding information; sometimes migrants fully depend on the information from within their social network. This is especially the case for low educated people who do not speak any European language like Dutch, French or English and lack any knowledge of asylum regulations. While trying to improve their situation, migrants run into the wrong people, decide to take steps based on incorrect information, or are prepared to take irresponsible risks. The strategies they adopt make them vulnerable for exploitation. The NC's heard various hart breaking stories of thoughtless and seemingly irrational choices, deceit and exploitation. This paragraph illustrates some of the adopted strategies the NC's heard off.

Regularisation scheme

Particularly rumours and hope about the upcoming regularisation scheme has kept many clients staying in the Netherlands. For as long as no final clarity was given, clients expressed hope. Over the years, asylum seekers got used to waiting and hoping. After a rejected claim many still expressed hope and waited. The combination of rumours and hope made clients who did not stand any chance to fall under the regularisation scheme stay in the Netherlands. A Chinese NC for instance spoke with a man who had lived in illegality for almost ten years. He never applied for asylum and had several convictions for minor offences. Ever since the start of the political discussion about the regularisation scheme it has been clear that persons who never applied for asylum would never fall under the scheme. Still, the client told the NC he first wanted to await the outcome of the political discussion about the regularisation scheme before considering returning. He had heard from a friend that he still might stand a chance. As the NC said: "Many clients do not rely on the rules, but on the rumours."

Better sure than sorry

End 2006 a Chinese rejected unaccompanied minor contacted a NC. He told the NC that he had family members living in China and - although he had not shown the Immigration Services (IND) - that he possessed a passport. He was from a relatively well-to-do family and had come to the Netherlands in 2003 "just to see more of the world". Since he had become undocumented, he said he wanted to return and signed a return contract. Just a few days later he contacted the NC and said he had heard rumours about an upcoming regularisation scheme and withdrew his cooperation. He wanted to await the outcome of the political discussion.

Not only Chinese clients reacted this way. After their claim was rejected a Kurdish family moved to Sweden. They applied for asylum, but were sent back via a Dublin claim. The NC explained that they would not stand a chance to get regularised, because the IND had sufficient proof that they had left the Netherlands. Still, they did not consider returning, because - as the father said - "one never knows".

Strangely enough, the political discussion about the regularisation scheme for some clients had the effect of a push-factor. Not because the information the clients received was false, but because it was inadequate. Via their network some clients were at a certain moment aware of the fact that they would not be eligible for regulation under the general regularisation scheme when they were sentenced for a crime. In the collective mind of the migrant community this

lead to the following formula: crime + punishment = no regularisation. What most migrants however did not know, is that this is only the case if one is sentenced for a so-called '*misdrijf*', a serious crime. Being sentenced for minor criminal offences (*overtredingen*) such as fare dodging does not exclude people from falling under the regularisation scheme. Lack of adequate knowledge led people to return. Some returned even when they might have had a chance to fall under the regularisation scheme. An Iranian client for instance had a criminal record. Even before parliament had made the decision what requirements were necessary to fall under the regularisation scheme, he told the NC that he wished to return. He was convinced not to fall under the regularisation because of his criminal record.

Financial allowances

Another persevering rumour among migrants is that returnees who use the services of IOM can receive financial allowances of up to thousands of Euros. This has in the past indeed for some specific groups of rejected asylum seekers been the case. At the moment of writing rejected asylum seekers who apply for return via IOM and reside in an asylum centre can receive grants of up to two thousand Euros. For most of the clients in the target group however, there are hardly any financial benefits. Rejected asylum seekers who do not reside in asylum centres are eligible to receive two hundred Euros plus a small supporting contribution for inland travel upon arrival. Irregular migrants who never applied for asylum are only eligible to receive the supporting contribution for inland travel. When NC's tell irregular migrants that they are not eligible for a substantial financial allowance, this is sometimes received with much frustration. An irregular migrant from Guinea Conakry who worked as a paperboy, for example wanted to return. He informed with the NC how much money he could receive from IOM. When the NC said that IOM would only be able to finance the ticket, the man was not interested anymore. Friends had told him that he might receive up to 2.500 Euros.

Trust the wrong people

Ukrainians are relatively easy to deceit because they often neither speak Dutch, nor English. Sometimes they only speak a little bit of German. Fellow countrymen can easily take advantage of their vulnerable position by making false promises. This is exactly what a Ukrainian man living in The Hague has done. He contacted about ten Ukrainian men and told them he could arrange work for a couple of weeks. He wanted a fee in advance for his intermediating role. All migrants agreed to pay him and on a Saturday morning they were brought in a minibus to a small village where a new road was constructed. One part of the road was open, machines were on the side, but since it was Saturday no one was working. The middle man ordered the migrants to start removing tiles from the road. He left after telling that a Dutch supervisor was soon to come. The men started working and the villagers gazed at the bizarre stage play of ten Ukrainians removing tiles from a new road that had been constructed just the day before. They asked what the Ukrainians were doing, but communication failed. The police arrived soon after and found out that all men lacked proper documentation. They were all sent to alien custody. The intermediate who set up to whole scheme was never found.

Wound yourself

Especially low educated African rejected asylum seekers who have invested much time, money and energy in their trip to Europe do not easily take a negative outcome of their procedure for granted. They go far in creating new circumstances in order to lodge a second or even third claim. A young African woman for example applied for asylum in the Netherlands in 2002. Her claim was rejected in 2005. She confided the NC that she wanted to start a second claim, knowing that this would only be possible if she presented 'new' evidence. Her plan was as follows: although this had not happened in reality, she was planning to tell that she had been raped in her country of origin before heading for Europe. She wanted to tell during the interview that she had not dared to tell this intimate story during the first interviews. To support her claim - she told the NC - she had recently cut herself with a knife in her genital area. She hoped this would raise her chance of receiving a claim. When the wounds would be scarred she planned to apply for asylum. Shocked by her story the NC advised her to visit a doctor.

Another African NC was faced with a more or less identical story. A 42 year old African woman contacted the female NC. When the client and the NC entered the consulting-room the client started blinding the windows. She took off by telling that she had lived in the Netherlands for six months without applying for asylum. In tears she showed burn injuries all over her body. It turned out that she had been advised by fellow countrymen how to apply for asylum. They had told her she had to show some sort of proof that her life had been in danger in the country of origin. She had decided to burn herself in order to raise her chances during the application. She did not know what to do and asked the NC for advice. The woman had severe health problems because of her wounds. The NC tried to calm her down and arranged that she could visit a doctor.

Act like a madman

One NC who had frequent contact with a female African rejected asylum seeker noticed that her behaviour could change rapidly. Whenever the woman spoke to representatives of the Dutch authorities or NGO's, she faked to be mentally ill. When she met a doctor or psychologist she fainted, acted absent and sometimes cried. Yet, when the NC spoke with the woman, she acted normal. She recounted that she purposely acted like a madman. Doing so, she hoped to receive a residence permit on medical grounds.

Have a baby

A nineteen year old woman from Burundi applied for asylum in 2002. Shortly before her first interview she met two Congolese men who suggested her to tell the IND that they were her brothers and came from Burundi as well. This is what she did. The Congolese men had prepared their interview very well and told a sound story. The young woman however had not prepared the interview and was confronted with a negative decision. Both Congolese men advised her to apply for asylum in the UK. This is what she did and within four months she was sent back to the Netherlands via a Dublin claim. Based on rumours that she could receive Dutch nationality when she had a baby in the Netherlands, she started a relation with a Congolese man with a temporary residence permit. Her plan worked out and within a year she

had a baby. She contacted the NC in tears when the baby was two months old. She just found out that neither she, nor the baby would receive Dutch nationality.

Marry a Dutch national

A 'golden' strategy for irregular migrants to prolong or even sustain their stay in the Netherlands is to find and marry a Dutch partner. There are signals that certain migrant groups specifically target certain communities in the Netherlands for the purpose of marriage. NC's heard for example that catholic Burundian and Tanzanian women regularly visit Protestant church services hoping to meet a religious man. Protestant men, it is thought, are more faithful than Catholic men. NC's report that many of these strategies are not successful. To start with, quite some migrants have insufficient knowledge of the Dutch legal system with regard to marriage. Irregular migrants who wish to marry a Dutch national have to return to their country of origin. At the Dutch embassy they have to apply for a temporary visa to return to the Netherlands, the so-called '*Machtiging Voorlopig Verblijf*'. When NC's tell clients about this procedure, this is new to many. Then it also regularly occurs that migrants are abandoned by their Dutch partner before they can marry. They invested time and energy in a relationship that did not stand. Cases of women who were abandoned from the moment it turned out that they were pregnant are not exceptional. The result of such a failed strategy is that the woman encounters even more problems: she does not only have to take care of herself, but also of her baby.

Fake passport

Irregular migrants who are fortunate enough to arrange or buy false passports are best off. Among Ukrainian migrants especially passports from the Baltic States¹⁴ are popular, since these countries are part of the European Union. Just like some migrants from the Baltic States Ukrainians speak Russian and therefore employers and government authorities hardly question the validity. Getting a hand on such a passport however, is not easy. One has to be prepared to contact obscure people and pay up to 5.000 euro's. These prices are normally inaccessible for stranded irregular migrants.

Move on

Various clients who did not want to return, said that they rather tried their luck in some other country. Rejected asylum seekers sometimes try to apply for asylum a second time. Via their friends and family members they receive information about new 'hot spots'. Iraqis are likely to try their luck in Scandinavian countries, the UK or Germany. Many Iranian migrants wish to migrate to Canada. Especially the UK is popular among Somalis. Many rejected asylum seekers from West Africa consider migrating to Southern European countries such as Spain or Italy.

Also irregular migrants try their luck in other countries. Irregular Moroccans for example have a tendency to move to Brussels or other Belgium cities. Their social network takes care of them and police inspections are (thought to be) less strict. Ukrainians - just like Africans -

¹⁴ Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

sometimes plan to move on to Southern European countries, hoping to find work. Quite some Ukrainians who returned to Ukraine, foresaw that they would move on from Ukraine to the Northeast of Russia, hoping to find work in the gas- and oil sector.

Rumours with a deter-effect

Rumours may also constitute a deter-effect. Several Chinese clients were reluctant to return to Fujian province, since they were told by fellow countrymen that they would be fined upon arrival. It was said that the administration of Fujian province fined returning migrants who worked abroad after having illegally departed the province. Apart from Fujian province, this is also said about “Wenzhou”, a region where many traders come from. To what extent this practice actually exists or not, the Chinese NC’s could not tell. But as long as these stories circulate within the Chinese community and as long as this perception exists, the rumour acts as a deter-factor. Another deterring rumour that circulates is that migrants who return via IOM are on return searched (‘stripped’) by border police. The police is said to be interested in collecting the IOM-allowance. Especially on certain airports in Ukraine, India and Congo this is said to happen. The NC’s have no knowledge to what degree these practices occur. Again, the fact that these stories go around, do affect the decision making process with regard to return.

3.6 TOWARDS A MODEL

After having described what relevant conditions and factors influence the decision making process on return, the next step to answer the research question is to present what factors and conditions are most critical. Black et. al. (2004: V) note that existing literature on voluntary return suggests that non-economic factors generally weigh more heavily than economic factors, and that pull factors in the country of origin are more important than push factors in the country of destination. The same authors remind us however that literature also stresses how the decision to return is likely to involve discussions at a household and community level. Voluntary return, they conclude, is indeed a very complex issue.

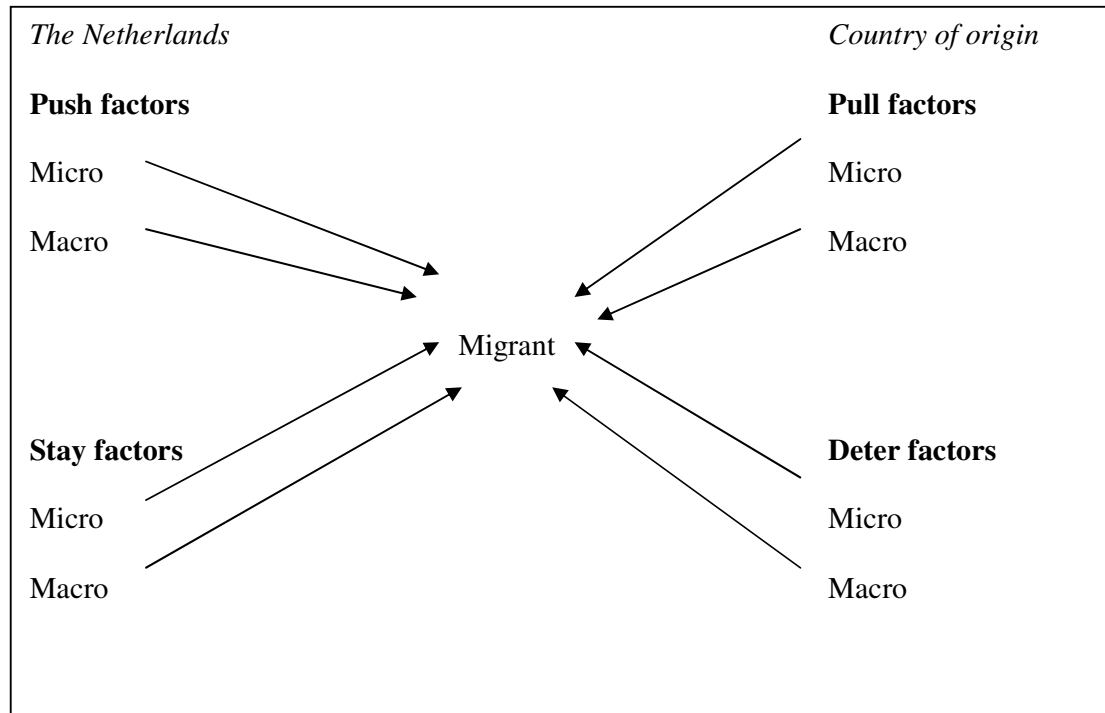
Because of this complexness identifying *the most* critical factors and conditions is extremely difficult. Based on the type of data presented in this study it is hardly feasible. The qualitative nature of the data make that it is not possible to specifically classify what factors are most determining. One could even question if the issue could be solved when the data would be more quantitative in nature. The case studies indicate that every migrant has his/her highly particular and individual background and migration history. What factors are most critical with regard to the decision making process on return differs from person to person. As a general rule not one single condition, but a vast variety of conditions affect the decision making process on return.

Virtually all rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants are hovered between a variety of push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors when it comes to voluntary return. They may hope to find work, to find housing, or to be granted a status. At the same time they may fear to be detained, to be expelled to their hazardous country of origin, or to be confronted with negative reactions of their social network. They may be advised and pressurized by friends and family members living in the country of origin and the Netherlands to take a certain decision. They may have

financial, medical or psychological problems. In other words, clients of the target group are generally confronted with a multitude of relevant aspects, both on micro and macro level.

Rather than trying to classify what factors primarily affect the complete target group, it is useful to map what variety of factors the individual migrant may be confronted with. For that reason a ‘push-, pull, stay- and deter-model’ is introduced. In this model all relevant factors that influence the decision making process on return can be mapped.

FIGURE 6
PUSH, PULL, STAY AND DETER FACTORS



The division between factors on a micro- and macro-level predominantly serves a conceptual objective. As will be presented in paragraph 4.3 this division however may also have practical value.

By filling in the model with the various factors and conditions that influence the decision making process of an individual migrant, a clarifying representation of his/her situation can be created. To demonstrate the difficult and indistinct situation irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers can face, eight cases that were dealt with by NC's are presented in this paragraph. The cases represent a cross section of the clientele that the NC's work with. Cases from Africa, the Middle East, China and Eastern Europe are selected, since these are the regions where most clients have their roots. Note that cases of irregular migrants as well as cases of rejected asylum seekers are presented.

Case 1: Family Khatibi - Iranian rejected asylum seekers

When the NC meets him in 2006, the Iranian rejected asylum seeker Mr. Khatibi has been living and working illegally in Amsterdam for almost five years. He says he himself, his wife and his two children can manage financially. He considers his living conditions not luxury, but reasonable. The couple knows however there hardly is a future for their undocumented children in the Netherlands. MR. Khatibi is stressed. Although he is aware that he has to start all over again and strongly dislikes the Iranian religious regime, Mr. Khatibi sometimes seriously considers returning. He notes that he and his wife will probably manage financially and economically when they return. "But what about the children?", he wonders. Because they have lived in the Netherlands for such a long time they hardly speak Farsi. All their friends live in the Netherlands. And then there is this discussion about the general regularisation scheme....He thinks he better waits for a while....

The Netherlands

Iran

Push factors

Micro

Father has stress

Macro

Threat to be expelled

Pull factors

Micro

Father wishes to return

Macro

-

Clients

Stay factors

Micro

Social network children / school

Macro

Hope regularisation

Deter factors

Micro

Children do not speak Farsi

Macro

Iranian religious regime

Final decision: The Khatibi family never contacted the NC again.

Case 2: Mr. and Mrs. Wu - Chinese irregular migrants

Mr. Wu was thirty years old when he arrived in the Netherlands in 2001. He has been working illegally in a restaurant in The Hague ever since. His wife has been living as an irregular migrant in The Netherlands since 2004. She also works illegally. In the spring of 2007 Mr. Wu is arrested during a police inspection. He is detained in alien custody. The NC meets Mr. Wu for the first time when he is in detention. He feels his situation is a blind-alley and wishes to return. Mrs. Wu continues working while her husband is detained. She fears to be arrested as well and is hesitant about her future plans. On the one hand she considers it logical to return because her husband feels like returning. She also looks forward meeting up with her sixteen year old daughter. On the other hand she recounts to the NC that her marriage is not really good and that she considers to divorce from her husband. She knows she can never make the same money in China as in the Netherlands. She also fears that her husband will start gambling again once he has returned in China. In the past he made a lot of debts. He left China without paying off creditors and they might still be waiting for him.

The Netherlands

China

Push factors

Micro

Husband wishes to return

Macro

Strict police inspections

Husband is detained

Pull factors

Micro

Wife wishes to visit her daughter

Macro

-

Clients

Stay factors

Micro

Wife has a job and earns well

Wife is hesitant/marital problems

Macro

-

Deter factors

Micro

Husband has to pay of creditors

Macro

Worse economic perspective

Final decision: Mr. and Mrs. Wu returned to China

Case 3: Boris - Ukrainian irregular migrant

Boris is forty years old and does not speak any Western European language. After having worked illegally in Poland for seven years for a salary of about ten euros a day, he had decided to migrate to the Netherlands. He had heard from a Ukrainian friend who worked in greenhouses near The Hague that he could easily make ten euros an hour. Boris travelled to The Hague. Soon after his arrival he found a place to sleep: he paid 250 Euros a month for a room that he shared with another migrant. Things however did not work out the way he had planned. When he contacted the NC he had been searching for work for two months, but without success. Employers were not keen on contracting Ukrainians, fearing to be fined. In two months Boris spent all his savings he had build up in Poland. He is frustrated, knows that he drinks too much and tells the NC he sometimes considers suicide. When he told friends of his plans to present himself to the police in order to be deported, they gave him the cell phone number of a NC. Boris wants to return, though he has nothing to go back to. He sold his house ten years ago in order to buy the false documents he needed to travel to Poland. His parents died. He hopes he can live for a while with his sister and move on to Siberia. He has heard that workers can earn up to 1.000 Euros a month.

The Netherlands

Ukraine

Push factors

Pull factors

Micro

Micro

No work in NL, frustrated

-

Macro

Macro

Strict police inspections

Labour market in Russia

Clients

Stay factors

Deter factors

Micro

Micro

-

No housing

Macro

Macro

-

Unemployment in Ukraine

Final decision: Boris returned to Ukraine

Case 4: Ahmed - Iraqi rejected asylum seeker

23 year old Ahmed arrived in the Netherlands in 1998 together with his father. Father received an asylum status and Ahmed is still in procedure when he meets the NC. After the American invasion, father returned to the (northern) Kurdish part of Iraq. Father runs a successful business and lives with his wife and other children. Ahmed in the meantime, has a hard time in the Netherlands. He has psychosomatic problems, frequently uses hard drugs and is involved in petty crime. He has repeatedly been imprisoned for short periods and does not stand a chance to be regularised. More than once father has asked Ahmed to return. Father claimed the northern region of Iraq was safe, economically booming and that the family members could take care of Ahmed and get him back on track. Ahmed's psychiatrist in the Netherlands strongly advises Ahmed not to return. Ahmed himself also has reservations to return to Iraq because of the overall hazardous situation.

The Netherlands

Push factors

Micro

Mental problems, drug abuse

Macro

No regularisation possible
boom

Iraq

Pull factors

Micro

Family wants him to return,
offer support
Homesick

Macro

Safe Kurdistan, economic

Clients

Stay factors

Micro

Psychiatrist advises to stay

Macro

-
Iraq

Deter factors

Micro

-

Macro

Hazardous overall situation

Final decision: Ahmed returned to Iraq

Case 5: Kennedy - Nigerian irregular migrant

Forty year old Kennedy travelled from Nigeria to The Netherlands with the help of human smugglers in 2001. He never applied for asylum, but tried - without much success - to find work in the informal economy. When the NC meets him, Kennedy has been living in The Hague in a shelter for a year. He is sick and thinks he has problems with his liver. He can however not receive treatment in the Netherlands since he is not insured. The NC arranged that Kennedy could visit a 'street doctor' in the Netherlands. Although the doctor noticed some problems, he concluded that it was safe for Kennedy to travel. Kennedy told the NC he considered returning. He has informed his family about this plan and they accept and support his choice. Kennedy however has not been completely honest about his situation. He never told that he has saved no money whatsoever and tells the NC he cannot return empty handed. In Nigeria he used to work as a shoe repair man and he wants to start his business again.

The Netherlands

Nigeria

Push factors

Pull factors

Micro

Sick, lack of work, frustrated

Micro

Family welcomes him and offers support

Macro

Medical treatment impossible

Macro

-

Clients

Stay factors

Deter factors

Micro

-

Micro

Return empty handed

Macro

Possibility to sleep in a shelter

Macro

If the sickness becomes life threatening, he is safe in NL

Lack of work

Final decision: Kennedy returned to Nigeria

Case 6: Sergej - Ukrainian irregular migrant

29 year old Sergej has a university degree. The degree alone did not bring much prosperity so in 2002 he decided to travel to the Netherlands hoping to make some money. He found work as a handyman. He sent virtually all his savings to his newly wed wife in Ukraine so she could buy a house. 2006 would turn out to be the worst year in his life. He became sick and moreover received news that his wife made plans to divorce from him. On top of that, it turned out that his wife had bought a house with his savings on her own name. He felt betrayed, became depressed and told the NC he saw no future any more in the Netherlands. All he wanted was to return. On return he would live with his mother, try to get healthy and put his life on track again.

The Netherlands

Ukraine

Push factors

Pull factors

Micro

Micro

Sick, depressed

Homesick, live with mother

Macro

Macro

-

-

Clients

Stay factors

Deter factors

Micro

Micro

-

No house, problematic relation with (ex) wife

Macro

Macro

-

Bad economic situation

Final decision: Sergej returned to Ukraine

Case 7: Angelo - Angolan rejected asylum seeker

23 year old Angelo applied for asylum in the Netherlands as an unaccompanied minor in 2002. When he meets the NC he lives illegally in Amsterdam and knows he does not stand a chance to fall under the regularisation scheme. During his stay in the Netherlands he saved about 4.000 Euros. He kept this money in a plastic bag in his drawer. One day he was caught by the police and sent to alien custody. To safeguard his money, he called a friend to collect the money from the drawer. When he was released from detention, Angola asked the friend to return the money, but the friend had spent half of it. On the one hand Angelo wants to leave the Netherlands. He had hoped to study, but knows that this would never happen without documents. His parents want him to return and his father - who has a good job in administration - says he can probably arrange a job. On the other hand, Angelo has a Dutch girlfriend and only wants to return once his friend has paid him the 2.000 euros. He also picked up a rumour that a special regularisation scheme for ex unaccompanied minors would soon be presented.

The Netherlands

Angola

Push factors

Pull factors

Micro

Micro

No perspective for future

Family wants him to return, father can arrange job

Macro

Macro

Rejected asylum claim

Economy is booming

No regularisation possible

Fear of detention

Clients

Stay factors

Deter factors

Micro

Micro

Dutch girlfriend, collect money from debtor

-

Macro

Macro

Hopes for regularisation scheme fro UMA's

Corrupt / disorganised country

Final decision: Angelo still lives in the Netherlands

Case 8: Abdoul - Nigerien irregular migrant

Abdoul was referred to a NC by the Niger consulate. He arrived in Netherlands three months earlier after a staggering eight month journey via Morocco, Spain, France and Belgium. All in all he had paid about 5.000 USD for his trip. Life in Europe was much tougher than he had imagined. Abdoul speaks only French and he had difficulties finding work. Sometimes he slept on the street, sometimes he could sleep at a friends place. Before heading for Europe he had imagined he would earn about 2.000 Euros a month. Once in Europe he came to realize this would never happen. He was broke and told the NC he was ashamed to return to his family empty handed. Abdoul told the NC he wanted to return. In Niger he used to work as a tailor and with the 350 euros he plans to start a tailor shop again. A church offered Abdoul 350 euros. A date was set and a ticket arranged.

The Netherlands

Niger

Push factors

Pull factors

Micro

Micro

Frustration, lack of work,

-

Macro

Macro

Invested much time and money to enter Europe

-

Client

Stay factors

Deter factors

Micro

Micro

-

Shame / 'failed' migrant

Macro

Macro

-

Poverty in Niger

Final decision: Abdoul never showed up at the airport.

Apart from using the model to portrait the situation of individual migrants, it can also be used as a tool to clarify and visualise why certain migrant groups tend to voluntarily return on a larger scale than others. Figure 2 in paragraph 1.3 indicates that many Ukrainians tend to return via RRI, whereas relatively few Iraqi return. This disparity can be elucidated by mapping the determining conditions of these two nationalities in the push-, pull-, stay-, deter-model.

Case study Ukraine

Hard data about the number of undocumented Ukrainians living in the Netherlands lack. Most Ukrainians in the Netherlands come from the Western part of Ukraine, from the provinces L'viv, Ivano-Frankivs'k, Ternopil and Volyn. The economic situation in this part of Ukraine is worse than in the East. Moreover, Ukrainians from the Eastern part focus on Russia when they consider migrating. Since the migrants from Western Ukraine live relatively close to the they do not have to invest much time or money in travelling to Europe. Sometimes they manage to cross the Ukrainian-Polish and Polish-German border on their own. Shadowy travel agencies also sell packages for 1.000 up to 2.000 USD to travel by bus with a Schengen visa.

Ukrainians hardly ever apply for asylum. The migration process serves as a typical case study of economic migrants. In many cases the migrants are however not the typical young single men that come from the African continent, but men in their thirties, forties or even fifties with a family. They themselves could benefit from the free education offered by the Soviet communist government. Because of the expanding corruption in Ukraine the quality of most types of education has deteriorated. Parents want to make sure their children can visit the best universities. The best universities however, are the most expensive. Hence, parents search methods to save money and migration is one of these methods. This explains why most of the Ukrainian migrants are relatively old. They hope to save money in the Netherlands and send remittances in order to financially support the studies of the children.

In the early years of 2000 Ukrainians generally encountered few problems finding illegal work. They could send remittances and in some instances at the same time even save enough money to buy a car. They mainly worked in greenhouses or construction. Based on (false) promises of recruitment agencies or romanticised tales from former migrants newly arrived migrants entered the Netherlands with the idea that they could earn more money than they could in reality. Some told the NC that arrived with the idea that they could earn 1.500 to 2.000 Euros a month. The expectations were in many instances too high. Theoretically it is possible to make good money by working twelve hours a day, six days a week for a salary of five Euros an hour. Reality however proved unrelenting: many could not find an employer who wanted to employ them for that many hours. They ended up spending time searching for labour than actually working. Working only ten days a month was not exceptional.

Things got worse from 2004 onwards, when the Ukrainians encountered tough competition from Polish migrants who could legally enter and work (in) the Netherlands. Coupled with stricter inspections, employers preferred to employ legal staff. Employers were only willing to contract irregular migrants for very low salaries. Sometimes they only offered two euro's an hour. In the meantime the migrants who spoke no Dutch and had no social network that could provide cheap housing paid disproportionately high rents. Numerous Ukrainian clients who contacted IOM had been fired. After having consumed most of their savings while unsuccessfully trying to find new work they wished to return.

Case study Iraq

It is estimated that in 2003 roughly 40.000 Iraqi citizens resided in the Netherlands. The majority (25.000) is composed of Kurdish citizens, Arabs (12.000) follow and Christians (4.000) make up the rest. They virtually all applied for asylum and reside mainly in the G4 (Forum 2003).

Between 1945 and 1965, the first Iraqis came to study in Western and Eastern Europe. In 1968, a faction within the Ba'ath Party, with Saddam Hussein at its top, conducted a coup. The party's main goal was to create a new Iraqi society by spreading the so-called 'eternal message' of pan-Arabism. At this time, the international emigration of mainly Kurds increased. The first patch of Iraqi refugees in the Netherlands came as a result of the First Gulf War between Iraq and Iran in the 1980's. Immediately after the Second Gulf War in 1991 refugees started to leave Iraq as failed uprisings against Saddam Hussein by the Kurds and Shiites were met by repression and ongoing human rights violations. Many Iraqi (rejected) asylum seekers in the Netherlands fled their country during this Second Gulf War or the decade that followed. A new group of Iraqi migrants entered the Netherlands because of the invasion of the 'coalition of the willing' that started in 2002 (Van Liempt 2007: 82-85).

Most Iraqis in the Netherlands come from the northern part of Kurdistan. It was very difficult to depart directly from this region. There was no international airport in the area, hardly any other infrastructure and there were only very few countries with which Iraq maintained diplomatic ties. People leaving Iraq first had to travel to a neighbouring country before they could continue their journey. Many travelled via Iran to Turkey. From Turkey they flew directly to the Netherlands. Another option was to travel with human smugglers who transported them overland (mainly in the back of lorries) to the Netherlands (Van Liempt 2007). In short; the journey was unpleasant, sometimes dangerous and expensive.

Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands are relatively well educated. Those were the ones who could afford to go to the West in the first place. Still, most people had to use their savings, sell their house, car, land, or family jewellery to finance a trip to Europe (Van Liempt 2007). Not just single men, but also complete families moved to Europe. A study by Choenni (2002) states that three quarters of the first Iraqi arrivals were men initially travelling by themselves. Only after they arrived and applied for asylum they were joined by their wives and children.

As a consequence of the ethnic cleansing activities that have over the years taken place in Bagdad and other Iraqi cities, some migrants in Europe cannot return to their old house. Many neighbourhoods that used to be a mixture of Sunnites and Shiites have turned mono-ethnic. Even if a house is still listed as property, returning to the house is virtually impossible.

Since almost all Iraqi migrants applied for asylum, they live(d) in asylum centres. While awaiting the outcome of their asylum claim they were not allowed to work. Because of the ongoing violence and overall hazardous situation in Iraq, a categorical protection policy has been in place for central and southern Iraq. Consequently, rejected Iraqi asylum seekers from these regions cannot be expelled.

Placed within the model, one can see that the decision making process of Ukrainians is fairly comprehensible. The driving force for the single men to leave is lack of work and the discomfort related to being undocumented. The driving force to return is to join family members who stayed in Ukraine.

Ukraine	
<i>The Netherlands</i>	<i>Ukraine</i>
Push factors	Pull factors
<u>Micro</u>	<u>Micro</u>
Loneliness, frustration, high rents	homesick, family living in Ukraine
<u>Macro</u>	<u>Macro</u>
Lack of work	-
Strict police inspections	
Clients	
Stay factors	Deter factors
<u>Micro</u>	<u>Micro</u>
Hope to find a proper job	-
<u>Macro</u>	<u>Macro</u>
-	Poor economic situation
Most likely final decision: Return to Ukraine	

Compared to the Ukrainian community, the decision making process for the Iraqi migrant group is more complex. Some parts of Iraq are relatively safe, while other parts are extremely insecure. Many migrants invested a great deal of time and energy in travelling to the Netherlands. Some sold virtually all their belongings. Most Iraqis applied for asylum. They may be eligible for the regularisation scheme or they may still live in an asylum centre. Depending on their origin it may be impossible for Dutch authorities to expel them because of the categorical protection policy. In many instances complete families migrated from Iraq to the Netherlands, the neighbourhood where they lived may have become dangerous to them. As aforementioned, prices of housing are high in Iraq.

Iraq	
<i>The Netherlands</i>	<i>Iraq</i>
Push factors	Pull factors
<u>Micro</u>	<u>Micro</u>
-	-
<u>Macro</u>	<u>Macro</u>
Rejected asylum claim	Economic growth (Kurdistan)
Clients	
Stay factors	Deter factors
<u>Micro</u>	<u>Micro</u>
Family members living in NL neighbourhood	House sold / wrong
High smuggling fee is paid	Language problems for children
<u>Macro</u>	<u>Macro</u>
Potential regularisation scheme	Insecurity / war
Categorical protection policy	Extremely expensive
Most likely final decision: Stay in the Netherlands	

3.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter an attempt is made to answer the first research question: What determinant factors and conditions influence the decision making process on voluntary return of irregular migrants living in the four big cities in the Netherlands? What factors and conditions are most critical?

For conceptual reasons a division is made between push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors. When discussing return migration, push-factors can be defined as those factors that make migrants wishing or requiring to leave the host country. Accordingly, pull-factors see to the factors that make migrants wanting to return to their country of origin. Stay-factors can be defined as those factors that make a person wishing to stay in the asylum country. Deter-factors withhold a person to return to his/her country of origin. When analysing factors at a micro-level the private domain of the migrant is the starting point. When analysing factors at a macro-level, features in the public domain are of key interest.

Disentangling the determinant factors and conditions with regard to voluntary return of the RRI-II clientele proves complex. Identifying *the most* critical factors and conditions is extremely difficult. The qualitative nature of the data makes it impossible to specifically classify what factors are most decisive. What factors are most critical with regard to the decision making process on return differs from person to person. As a general rule not one single condition, but a vast variety of conditions affect the decision making process on return.

Most clients were hovered between a variety of push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors, both on micro- and macro-level. Rather than classifying what factors primarily affect the decision making process on voluntary return, a ‘push-, pull-, stay- and deter-model’ is introduced in which all relevant factors that influence the decision making process on return can be mapped. This model helps to structure and visualise the multitude of relevant factors that are at play for an individual migrant.

Based on the analysis it is possible to map a range of factors that had a push-, pull-, stay-, or deter-effect on the target group of the RRI-II project. Because some factors can constitute different effects, it is possible that these factors are record twice or more.

Push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors RRI-II clientele	
<p><i>The Netherlands</i></p> <p>Push factors</p> <p><u>Micro</u></p> <p>Tiredness/frustration Financial problems/lack of work Health problems (individual client or family) Mission accomplished False promises human smugglers Lack of social network in the Netherlands High rent</p> <p><u>Macro</u></p> <p>Opening up labour market in EU Stricter asylum policy ‘Many of organisation’ asylum regime</p> <p>Stricter inspections Alien custody</p>	<p><i>Countries of Origin</i></p> <p>Pull factors</p> <p><u>Micro</u></p> <p>Homesickness Health problems family member Death of a relative in country Job offer</p> <p><u>Macro</u></p> <p>Resettlement assistance Improving or safe security situation Improving or good economic situation</p>
Clients	
<p>Stay factors</p> <p><u>Micro</u></p> <p>‘Fata Morgana effect’ / hope Health problems (individual client or family) Death of relative (save money) Social network in the Netherlands Children Rumours</p> <p><u>Macro</u></p> <p>Availability of emergency shelters Stricter entrance regime EU</p> <p>Stricter asylum policy (debate) regularisation scheme Alien custody Categorical protection policy</p>	<p>Deter factors</p> <p><u>Micro</u></p> <p>Social debt Financial debt Emotional debt Divorce from wife/husband Rumours</p> <p><u>Macro</u></p> <p>Worsening or bad security situation Worsening or bad economic situation</p>

The analysis indicates that the influence of the social network of migrants is very important. Social or family ties can seriously affect the decision making process on return. When a migrant has a strong social network in the Netherlands (s)he is more likely to stay. Apart from giving emotional support the network can assist with finding work and housing. When family members in the country of origin have high expectations of the migrant, this is likely to constitute a stay-effect. When family members in the country of origin however have health problems or have passed away, this is more likely to make a migrant return. Clients who are single, can more easily make choices than clients with family members living in the Netherlands. Single clients only have to take care of themselves. Especially when the children go to school and when the family has been living in the Netherlands for several years, the decision making process with regard to return becomes much more complicated. The findings suggest that just like the decision to migrate to Europe, leaving Europe is a decision that is strongly influenced by the social network.

Not surprisingly, the security and economic situation in the country of origin heavily impact the decision on return. Especially the deter-effect of a worsening security situation - like in Iraq - in general withholds migrants to seriously consider returning. There are indications that a rising economy in the country of origin does positively affect return, but the relation between the economic situation and return seems less strong than the security situation and return.

Given that especially the social network and the situation in the country of origin determine the decision making process on return teaches policy makers to be modest about the possibilities to manage return migration. The impact policy changes have on the actual decision making process of an individual migrant is limited. This does however not imply that policy does not at all influence return migration. The analysis proves that - among many other factors - policy changes can (in)directly affect the decision making process on return. Opening up the labour market for Polish workers has had a direct push-effect on Ukrainian irregular migrants wanting to leave the Netherlands. The findings suggest furthermore that strict border patrols in the EU may have a stay-effect on migrants. Once they managed to enter the EU after having invested much time, energy and financial means, they are less likely to consider returning. The (debate) about the regularization scheme had a significant stay-effect, whereas intensified police- and labour inspections acted as a push-factor.

With some prudence it is possible to create typologies of clients. The client most likely to return, is someone who is confronted with hardly any stay- or deter-factors and many push- and pull factors. This means (s)he:

- has no other relatives in the Netherlands;
- has not invested (time, money, risk) in his/her travel;
- has not applied for asylum;
- has stayed only for a couple of years in Europe;
- has regular and open contact with family members in his/her country of origin;
- comes from a country with good economic and security perspectives.

The client most likely to stay, is someone who is confronted with hardly any push- and pull-factors and many stay- and deter-factors. This means (s)he:

- has relatives living in the Netherlands who have a status;
- has invested much (time, money, risk) in his/her travel;
- applied for asylum (especially before 2001);
- stayed more than five years in Europe;

- lost contact with family members in his/her country of origin;
- comes from a country with bad economic and security perspectives.

It goes without saying that in the actual target group just a very small percentage of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers can be positioned in one of these two templates. The overwhelming majority is caught in a situation where they are on the one hand pushed to leave and pulled to return, and on the other hand triggered to stay and deterred to return. In the next chapter will be described how NC's within the RRI-II project tried to establish contact and assist migrants who are in this complicated situation.

4. REACHING OUT TO AND ASSISTING THE TARGET GROUP

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the second research question will be answered. This question is:

How could the methodology of native counselling be further developed to assist and reach out to the target group?

In paragraph 4.2 the work of the NC is described. The reader essentially follows the process of counselling and is introduced to some of the strategies NC's apply and the dilemmas they face in their daily work. In paragraph 4.3 suggestions are presented how NC's could make practical use of the push-, pull-, stay- and deter-model that is presented in the previous chapter.

Throughout this chapter a number of recommendations to develop the counselling methodology are presented. A leading thought has been that recommendations should be practical in nature. At the same time the author did not turn away from suggestions that might take much time and energy to implement. A division is made between two types of recommendations. Firstly, recommendations are directed to the NC's and their management. Based on findings in the previous chapter and new insights presented in this chapter ideas are presented how NC's or their manager(s) could improve the native counselling methodology. In some cases they themselves are not in the position to ascertain that recommendations are implemented. Therefore secondly, a small number of recommendations are also directed to the IOM organisation as a whole. These mostly encompass recommendations that might improve the methodology, but also have a much larger impact.

4.2 NATIVE COUNSELLING IN ACTUAL PRACTICE

The main goal of native counselling is to reach out to the 'unknown' irregular migrant or rejected asylum seeker and try to interest, inform and facilitate him/her with regard to voluntary return. The methodology of native counselling is already briefly introduced. In this paragraph a more profound picture of the daily practice of native counselling is sketched. Narratives on native counselling alternate with practical suggestions how to further develop the methodology.

4.2.1 Establishing contact

Local organisations

The NC's try to reach out to potential clients via a variety of different locally embedded organisations that act as 'gatekeepers'. They for example stay in close contact with representatives from shelters for the homeless, churches, mosques, 'street doctors', the Alien's Police, 'regular' police, refugee organisations and legal counsellors. Representatives of these organisations refer potential clients to the NC's, but NC's also refer their clients to these organisations. As is described in the first two chapters, NC's specifically searched for

clients at locations that are known to be visited by (potential) drug addicts and (potential) victims of trafficking. Since both types of migrants are a very diverse and dynamic group, it is not easy to target them at specific places. Drug addicts could most easily be targeted at for instance the Pauluskerk or comparable institutions. Advertising in hospitals or with street psychiatrists further enhanced contact with people from this focus group. Specific places to track (potential) victims of trafficking are difficult to find.

A Russian speaking NC noted that advertising via migrant foundations or unions can be difficult because these organisations do not have a fixed meeting point. Whenever they organise something, they rent a place. The NC claimed to have better results targeting the Russian community by distributing posters and information leaflets in Russian shops. Russians from all echelons visit these shops, while foundations and unions in many instances have a more or less static group of visitors.

Advertising

Apart from trying to reach out to potential clients via local organisations or shops, NC's apply a diversity of other creative strategies to establish the first contact with their target group. As part of the RRI-II project, NC's in close cooperation with the IOM communication department for example place advertisements in migrant media. A Russian speaking NC for instance advertised in the Dutch-Russian newspaper *bnlnews*. Chinese NC's gave an interview for *Chinese Radio Amsterdam*. The Moroccan NC gave an interview for a Moroccan program at the *NPS*. The African NC's presented their work in the *African Bulletin*. The mobile telephone numbers of the NCs and their names were mentioned in the adverts. The adverts proved successful; counsellors were called on a regular base by migrants who referred to the adverts. These migrants however did not all belong to the target group of the project. Advertisements or publications in native media are not only read in the Netherlands, but also abroad. Papers and magazines are distributed to and read in neighbouring countries Belgium, Luxemburg and Germany. In some instances migrants living in the neighbouring countries contacted the NC's in the Netherlands. In this scenario the NC's referred the clients to the IOM-branches in the respective neighbouring country. The contrary happened as well. Chinese migrants in the Netherlands for example had read an advertisement of IOM in a Chinese newspaper that was published in the UK. They first contacted IOM in the UK, before speaking with NC's in the Netherlands.

Recommendation RRI: Advertise wise. Be creative and think out of the box.

Rejected asylum seekers generally are well aware of the objectives and function of IOM. They gain this knowledge via employees working with COA, the Dutch Council for Refugees or other NGO's. The past years IOM the Netherlands has less actively promoted its objectives and activities in a communication campaign directed to the group of irregular migrants. One of the objectives of the project is to target and inform this more difficult to reach group of irregular migrants who never applied for asylum.

Some NC's have come across situations that elucidated that IOM within this group is not always well known. An interesting finding is that especially Moroccan and Turkish clients sometimes have difficulties distinguishing IOM from NMI (Netherlands Migration

Institute).¹⁵ This is not surprising, since some of the services of NMI offers are comparable to the services of IOM. NMI for example provides resettlement schemes for recognized asylum seekers or elderly migrants who wish to return to their country of origin. Likewise the Turkish and Moroccan community, NC's met Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants who mix up NMI with IOM.

What's more, NC's encountered migrant organisations that were not aware of the services IOM offers. Two Nigerians for example confided the NC that their church community normally gathers money to finance the return of church members. Asked by the NC why they do not contact IOM, the organisers said that they were not aware of the assistance IOM could offer. According to an Arabic speaking NC there is still a world to win in his target group as well. He noted that mosques and Arabic self-help organisations for instance had little knowledge about the activities of IOM. Imams said that they used to try to collect money from mosque visitors to assist irregular migrants with return. A Chinese NC experienced also that IOM could improve its brand awareness. She had to explain many people in the Chinese community what kind of organisation IOM is. The Chinese migrants could not understand why an organisation offered to pay a return ticket without 'wanting' anything from the migrant. They felt there had to be a snag somewhere. Many were reserved: there must be something in it for this organisation?

The NC's have learned from such experiences and whenever they notice IOM is new to clients they give a brief history of the organisation and its objectives. They emphasise that IOM is an international non governmental organisation with offices in more than 120 countries. By providing this information they try to take away prejudices and create a better understanding. Still it can sometimes take a lot of time to convince migrants that IOM is a reliable organisation. Some migrants still accuse IOM of joining up with the police or the Immigration Services. This led many NC's to suggest that they would consider it wise to adapt and expand IOM advertisement activities.

In order to reach out to group of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers living on the streets, IOM could develop its advertisement strategy. Irregular migrants in the Netherlands should know that if they have any questions regarding voluntary return, IOM is *the* organisation they should contact. Various methods could be applied. IOM could for instance invest more in marketing at places that may attract irregular migrants. Counsellors could man stalls at migrant-festivals such as Kwakoe in Amsterdam or Festival Mundial in Tilburg.

Another interesting idea in this respect is to invest in advertising IOM in international perspective. Obviously this has implications that reach much further than the RRI-project, but it is worth to reflect how this could be done and what impact it may have. It varies from group to group and individual to individual, but some NC's reported that their potential clients hardly read local migrant papers or listen to local migrant radio. Many African migrants (and their peers in Africa) for example read French newspapers or watch *TV5 (Afrique)*. When the Iraqi NC asked members of her target group what media they use, she was told that the migrants use their own satellites and internet. They watch the broadcasting corporations they used to watch back home like *Al Jazeera* and read the papers they read back home like *Al Hayat*. The migrants said they hardly ever read Arabic media that is produced in Europe. Especially relatively new immigrants have a stronger focus on the media from their home country than on media printed in Europe. Apart from advertising in typical migrant media,

¹⁵ See: <http://www.nmigratie.nl/portaal.html>

IOM could therefore consider to advertise on more global forums. The main focus should be to improve the brand awareness of IOM. Again, migrants and their family members - whether living in the Netherlands or elsewhere in the world - should be aware that IOM is *the* organisation to turn to if assistance with return migration is needed. An international organisation like IOM might consider advertising itself on an international platform like *Al Jazeera*.

Recommendation IOM: Think big. Apart from advertising in typical migrant media in the host countries, advertise in international media.

Out in the field

NC's approach potential clients on the street. They for instance start conversations with fellow countrymen they meet in public transport and ask if they themselves need assistance or if they know of people who do. This is how a Russian speaking NC met a couple from Ukraine at a bus stop. He started chit chatting about the weather, informed where the couple was from and what they were up to. They turned out to be undocumented migrants. The NC explained that he worked with IOM and informed them that he could assist should they ever consider returning to Ukraine. He handed over his name card. One month later the couple called him and said they wished to return. Another Russian speaking NC visited abortion clinics, expecting to possibly encounter pregnant woman who might had become victims of human trafficking. Then there is a NC who actively approached buyers of second hand cars at the 'Veemarkthallen' in Utrecht. Many buyers are immigrants who make a living of buying, exporting and selling second hand cars. The NC's strategy had success; one day he met a man from Benin who knew a lot of irregular migrants from Benin who were in trouble. The NC gave him a few of his name cards and was called the following week. A Beninese man wished more information about return.

Another NC visited a conference on Unaccompanied Minors. Many rejected asylum seekers were present and the NC talked to several of them. One of them called the day after. She wanted to have a conversation about her future. The Moroccan NC visited a soccer tournament organised by *Royal Air Maroc*. He was able to reach out to many migrants from francophone African countries. The same NC chose to specifically visit mosques more regularly during Ramadan. Many irregular migrants without perspectives in this period turn to the imam searching for help. The last example of a 'creative' place that was visited by a NC in search of possible clients was a so-called 'illegalencafé'. This is an unlicensed bar mainly frequented by undocumented migrants. An acquaintance of the NC once said: "Come with me, you should see this bar, it feels like Africa". And indeed, the NC found an African style bar filled with irregular migrants.

Almost all NC's make use of their personal network to get into touch with potential clients. Friends, family members, former colleagues; in many instances they are all aware of the job the NC fulfils. These persons refer interested persons to NC's.

Recommendation RRI: Motivate NC's to try to expand their network at all possible places they can think of. Invite them to explicitly make use of their personal network to identify potentially interesting places.

Flexibility and accessibility

Being a NC is not a nine-to-five job. In order to successfully fulfil their job they have to be flexible and accessible. Their cell phone is a crucial piece of machinery for the NC. This makes them accessible at all times. When one NC left IOM, his successor took over the same phone number. Numerous times she was called and could benefit from the work of her predecessor. Giving away as many cards as possible and having their name and phone number circulate is of utmost importance.

Flexibility gives the NC's the possibility to meet up anywhere the client wants. Sometimes this is at the office of for instance the Pauluskerk, or the Dutch Council for Refugees, but it could just as well be at the meeting point of a train station or at someone's home. Although the mapping-figure of Leerkens et. al. (see paragraph 1.1) shows that most irregular migrants live within the 'Randstad', especially rejected asylum seekers might very well live outside the four big cities. Rejected asylum seekers who used to live in asylum centres in provincial cities like Leeuwarden, Nijmegen, Eindhoven or Maastricht, frequently decide to stay in or around these cities. This is where their new Dutch network lives and in many cases this is where they can find housing and work. These migrants can formally not be helped by the NC's, because they live outside the city boundaries of the G4. This rule is both by the NC's themselves as the clients sometimes regarded to be too much of a restriction. As a try-out and after deliberation with The Hague Office the rule is therefore not always strictly complied with. Chinese NC's have for example given presentations in alien custody for Chinese women and on occasion individual clients who live outside the G4 were assisted. The prospects of reaching out beyond the borders of the *Randstad* are promising.

Counsellors are not only flexible in a geographical sense. Sometimes the NC's are called upon to assist literally day and night. When a client has started a return procedure with IOM, he/she is given a document that states that he/she is working on return. Dutch authorities in that case do not send the migrant to alien custody. When the Alien's Police encounter a migrant with such a document - or even more so, without such document - they sometimes telephone the NC to check whether the migrant is truly registered with IOM. Some NC's have been called at night on their mobile phones, being asked to approve that the migrant has indeed lodged a claim to return with IOM.

***Recommendation RRI:** Promote NC's to be as available, creative and flexible as possible when establishing and upholding contact with clients.*

4.2.2 Wake up call

Not all irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers experience a period in which they ask themselves the question whether they should stay or return. As we have seen in the previous chapter, rumours create hope and hope makes many migrants stay. As one NC said: "Everyone hopes to play a last card". In paragraph 3.5.3 we could read how creative, but also how vulnerable and naïve irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers who adopt stay-strategies can be.

When migrants do not themselves question their future, the NC's feel it is their task to give the migrant a 'wake up call': this is where you stand in life, what is going to be your next step? The main intention of the NC's is to assist a migrant in making a well considered deliberation about his/her future. The NC's feel that informing about voluntary return should specifically

be presented *a* possible option, but not as *the only* option. Whether the client wishes to voluntarily return or not, is the choice of the client. The NC is there to guide the client through this process. One NC told about his approach: “I do not sell dreams. You’ll have to be realistic. I don’t want to manipulate. I am there to assist them in their own thinking process about the future.”

In many instances irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers have difficulties overseeing their position in life and the options they (may) have. NC’s feel that their role is to sometimes confront the migrant with his/her situation. In situations like these, the background of the NC can be most valuable. Since they have the same background and culture, they are in a good position to create an atmosphere in which the migrant ‘releases’ his focus solely on living in the Netherlands and focuses on the ‘broader picture’ again. NC’s note that especially rejected asylum seekers too often repeatedly focus on failed procedures, lost opportunities to fall under the regularisation scheme or other lost chances. They live in the past instead of the future. NC’s are in the position to change this mindset. As one NC uses to say to his clients: “Start thinking the African way again!” With this, he means that the client has to become the independent, creative and self-determining person he used to be before setting foot to Europe. Many rejected asylum seekers have to free themselves from the institutionalized passiveness of waiting, hoping and having all kind of officials and organisations arranging their life. The same NC said to a client: “You are frozen, you need some son on your head”. The NC tries to trigger the migrant to regain his/her own agency in life.

Some NC’s have a strong personal belief that returning to the country of origin may be the best option for stranded migrants in Europe. Some even assisted migrants with return before working as a NC with IOM. One of them is convinced that Africans who have lived in Europe for a couple of years are in a better position to succeed in their country of origin than those who stayed in Africa. As he said: “Migrants have learned so much in Europe. An Angolan young man told me: ‘Where I go back to, there won’t even be no shower.’ I told him: ‘You’ve lived here for five years, you know how a shower works, create one yourself!’” This NC tries to energise the client rather by focussing on the positive experiences and learning opportunities he has had, than by pinpointing negative elements.

***Recommendation RRI:** While counselling, do not only focus on negative, but also on positive experiences clients have had in the Netherlands. Invite the client to start thinking positive (again).*

4.2.3 ‘Nativeness’

As discussed above, the ‘wake up call’ can be a lot more effective when given by a fellow countryman. Migrants are sometimes more open to a fellow African, Iraqi, Chinese or Moroccan counsellor than by a Dutch counsellor. Establishing personal contact and creating the right atmosphere is of key-interest when trying to inform and assist irregular migrants. As one of the NC’s said: “If you ask in a room full of people: ‘who wants to return?’, no one will raise his finger.” Therefore establishing a situation of trust is the primary goal of a NC.

The ‘nativeness’ of the NC’s is an important asset to create this trust. The Chinese community may serve as an example. Entering the Chinese community of irregular migrants is for instance virtually impossible for a non-Chinese counsellor. A first asset of the Chinese NC’s is that they speak the language; many irregular Chinese migrants do not speak any other language but Chinese. This could even be the case when they have been living in the

Netherlands for more than ten years. If a counsellor does not speak Chinese, (s)he would not stand a chance of starting a conversation. Apart from the language, a second important asset the NC has, is the shared cultural background. Irregular Chinese migrants in many instances spend most of their lives in Chinese restaurants. This is where they eat, sleep and meet, almost parallel from Dutch society. When a non-Chinese person tries to contact them for having a conversation about migration, migrants tend to be frightened and insecure what this ‘stranger’ wants. Someone with a shared cultural background and the same physical appearances is less judged upon. Still, even the Chinese NC’s in most instances do not have initial contact directly with the irregular migrant. In many instances a friend or family member of the migrant starts contacting the NC to inform about the role of IOM and the possibilities of assistance. Only at a later stage, when trust is established, the NC gets to meet the client. This prudence illustrates the sensitiveness discretion of counselling.

After the NC has established a trustful relation with one or more members of a certain migrant community, (s)he should be ready to expect more clients. The NC’s clearly indicate that their work has a ‘domino-effect’. Friends and acquaintances of clients who are in the process of returning via RRI await the outcome of the counselling activities. Sometimes they literally say: “We’ll observe first, and decide later”. After a Chinese NC had assisted a client, the friend of this client specifically asked to be assisted by the same NC. When NC’s are more experienced they need to reach out less and less. The news that they can be contacted for questions or assistance travels fast by word of mouth. The Ukrainian NC, who has been working as a counsellor for IOM since 2002, frequently receives phone calls from clients who picked up her name in their network.

Apart from the practical advantage that NC’s speak the same language and share the cultural background, they may also have practical knowledge about the country of origin of clients. District Officers now and then ask NC’s for assistance when they deem this convenient or practical. For instance when birth-certificates from certain countries of origin are required. The NC in many cases also has knowledge where, when and how to apply for travel documents. Their knowledge sometimes proves useful. For Armenian and Azerbaijani who do not possess valid travel documents, returning to their country of origin can for instance be very difficult. What is their country of origin? During the communist era Armenia and Azerbaijan both belonged to the Soviet Union. After the perestroika, the regions of Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent. Migrants who have been living in Europe for a long time, sometimes do not know which diplomatic post to turn to in order to apply for travel documents. One client who is an ethnic Armenian, born in Azerbaijan complained to the District Officer that both the Armenian and Azerbaijani embassy refused to issue travel documents. The NC was able to assist. When she heard that the client had been living in Russia for a few years, she told him that he could apply for travel documents with the Russian embassy. She intermediated between the embassy and the client and eventually the client was able to return to Russia.

Recommendation RRI: Promote NC’s to invest time in understanding and studying alien policy regulations of their country of origin. This knowledge could be beneficial to assist clients with their return process.

The renowned Dutch ex soccer player Johan Crujff introduced the famous expression that “every disadvantage has its advantage”. Likewise, every advantage has its disadvantage. This is also the case with regard to the nativeness of NC’s. Although they above all perceive their background as beneficial in the fulfilment of their task, their origin sometimes works out

negative. For the purpose of research, but also while performing operational tasks co-ethnicity might be a disadvantage As Jacobsen & Landau (2003: 12) note on native research assistants: "it is quite possible that a research assistant may be associated - by name, appearance, accent, style or dress - with a group the respondent either fears or despises." This is what sometimes also happened within the RRI-project. A Rwandan client who had initial contact with a Russian speaking NC, for example said that she did not want to speak with the Rwandan NC. She feared that the NC would belong to a different clan. Such a reaction is however an exception. In general NC's and clients hardly encounter such problems. The Eritrean NC for example does not report any problems with Ethiopian clients. Also the Iraqi NC - who is Kurdish - hardly ever encounters problems. Her background rarely refrains her from executing her job effectively. She tries to evade speaking about politics with Iraqi or Turkish clients. Whenever clients do start talking politics, she interrupts them and says: "Leave politics, let's start discussing the options of return."

4.2.4 Providing objective information

Given that the wake up call has had success, the client is to answer the fundamental question: "Am I better off staying undocumented in the Netherlands, or am I better off when I return to my country of origin"? For the individual migrant, answering this question can be very hard. What they mostly lack is objective information to make a sound judgement.

As is described in paragraph 3.5 the world of migration is a world of rumours. What most potential returnees need is a realistic, objective and up to date overview of the situation they are in and what options they have with regard to their potential future situation. As is mentioned earlier, undocumented migrants in many cases are completely dependent on third parties for housing and work. This is the same with regard to information. Whether it is information about migration policy(changes), the legal system or the economic- or security-situation in their country of origin, clients have to depend on third parties. In general, fellow countrymen, family members, smugglers, legal advisors and social workers are their 'walking encyclopaedia'. These are the sources they first contact for information on any of these issues. That clients tend to rely on their social network is not strange, since many are not able to independently enquire for official information. They neither read, nor speak Dutch or English. Especially those living under the most difficult circumstances (drug addicts, trafficked women) have little or no access to traditional media or internet. Although fellow countrymen, family members, smugglers, legal advisors and social workers all can offer patches of specific information, they often cannot provide a complete overview. Furthermore, they in many instances lack objectiveness. Family members and friends are not - or not accurately - aware of policy issues and have their own interests. Legal advisors and volunteers of NGO's are not always capable of understanding factors that are related to the cultural context of the migrant. Obviously human smugglers may have their own specific profit-oriented agenda in advising.

Only when an irregular migrant or rejected asylum seeker is fully informed he will be able to independently assess his situation and make a well-founded decision what steps are best to take. A most significant contribution of the NC is that (s)he is in the position to assist a client by providing objective, up to date and correct information. NC's have access to the complete information infrastructure of IOM International and they are in the position to obtain reliable and up to date information. For giving up to date information on the country of origin NC's can for example use information that is available via the IRRiCO-project.¹⁶ NC's can also

¹⁶ IRRiCO is a project piloting a multilateral approach on return information among IOM missions in countries of origin and their European counterparts. IRRiCO aims to gather and consolidate information on countries of

consult IOM-colleagues with specific knowledge whenever this helpful. By providing information the NC can create a situation whereby the client does not solely depend on tales from the rumour circuit. If the NC him/herself cannot give sufficient information, (s)he can refer the client to other actors within the field of migration that might be able to do so. The same network contacts that are used to establish initial contact with migrants are also used to refer clients to. Rejected asylum seekers who do not want to return but consider lodging a second claim are for instance referred to legal advisors of or the Refugee Counsel. Sick people are referred to 'streetdoctors' or the Municipal Public Health Service (GGD). A Ukrainian woman who called the NC and said she needed food was referred to the Food Bank (*Voedselbank*).

Alleged victims of trafficking are referred to specialised organisations or the police. The NC never directly sends a client to the police, but acts as an intermediary. A Russian woman approached a NC because she wished to return. While discussing the return procedure with the NC, client said that the NC should not share any personal information with anyone, because she was afraid that human traffickers might find her. In tears she told how scared she was. The NC called the police to ask for general advice about the situation of the client and the steps she could take. The police advised the client to report her experiences. The client however decided not to follow this advice and continued with the process to return. Another alleged victim of trafficking who was referred to the police did decide to report her experiences. When the young woman from Guinea Conakry contacted the NC, the NC noted that there were indications that the woman was a victim of trafficking. In tears the client told the NC that she had been beaten and raped during the transport. The client agreed with the NC that it might be best to contact the police. Client reported to be a victim of human trafficking and started a so-called B9-procedure to be taken up in a witness protection programme.¹⁷

When a NC is trusted within the migrant community, the objective information (s)he provides can take away rumours and fears that withhold migrants from starting a return process. When migrants during their interview with the Immigration Services for example lied about their true background or presented themselves under a false name, this could act as a stay factor. Many fear to disclose their true identity to any authority or organisation (including IOM), because they are afraid this could have any negative implications. This is discussed in paragraph 3.4.1. NC's are well aware of this fear and when they open up the conversation they try to clarify that such a situation does not have any negative effect on their return process. One NC was for example called by a young man who used to live on the border region of Guinea and Sierra Leone. When the youngster called he was confused, anxious and concerned about his situation. He confided the NC that he had applied for asylum for three times; all three times with different names, sometimes with different nationalities. He had heard a lot of buzz and was anxious: "I lied, they'll consider me to be a criminal, I'll go to prison!" The NC could ease him down and reassure him by telling that having lied during the asylum procedure would not be a reason to get imprisoned. After having calmed down the client, the NC started discussing client's future plans.

Ethiopians who during their asylum procedure claimed to originate from Eritrea sometimes fear to have contact with Dutch authorities or an IOM office for the same reason. The Eritrean NC is in the position to provide them with objective information. Take the following case: a

origin, which will help social workers and return counsellors in providing migrants considering to return with reliable and up-to-date information on return and reintegration possibilities and socio-economic conditions

¹⁷ More cases on referring trafficked women, see paragraph 4.2.5

young man lived in Ethiopia with his parents. His father owned a few shops in Addis Ababa and the family was relatively prosperous. The son paid 10.000 dollar to a human smuggler to bring him to the United Kingdom. While in transit at the Dutch Schiphol airport he was arrested by the police for using forged documents. He decided to apply for asylum as an Eritrean refugee. A few months later, he met the NC at a party and made an appointment to discuss his situation. The two met and the Ethiopian man told his story. He was terribly afraid that he would be sent to Eritrea when his claim would be rejected. The idea of being sent to the country he had known since childhood as Ethiopia's fiercest enemy caused sleeping problems. The mere idea of being sent to Eritrea made him consider suicide. The NC could calm him down and explained that there was no reason to be afraid. As long as he would tell his true background, he would not be sent to Eritrea. For the client this news suddenly meant that he had an extra option in life; returning to Ethiopia. The NC and the client agreed that the client would await the outcome of his asylum procedure. If his claim would be approved client would stay in the Netherlands. If his application would fail he would call the NC and return. So far the NC has not been called.

A side-effect of the asylum policy is that some of the clients are to some extent 'institutionalised'. This is especially the case for unaccompanied minors. Ever since they arrived in the Netherlands - sometimes just twelve years old - they have had other people deciding for them where to live and where to go. All unaccompanied minors have mentors and they assist them with a broad range of issues. Many wait for years in a relative safe and 'arranged' world. When they turn eighteen they are suddenly confronted with the fact that they themselves - and no one else - are to decide what actions to take. They have to make up their mind if it is wise to lodge an application for voluntary return or try to find work in the informal economy and try to survive illegally. Making decisions with that much impact are difficult and these migrants need guidance from an objective actor. The NC can act as such a guide.

Recommendation RRI: *Have the NC's file what rumours are most prevalent and rigid. Have The Hague headquarters gather information about policy and policy changes with regard to these rumours and pass this on through to the NC's. Having access to such information enables the NC's to improve their return assistance.*

Recommendation RRI: *Encourage NC's to regularly use IRRiCO.*

Several NC's report that they maintain contact with former clients who returned on a regular base. This improves the information position of the NC's. They contact returnees to make enquiries about the situation in the country of origin so that they can better inform other potential returnees. In some instances NC's also try to 'couple' a potential returnee with a specific question to someone who has already successfully returned. If the potential returnee has questions about the condition of the country of origin, the NC can call his overseas contact and have the potential returnee and returnee chat. Returnees can sometimes provide practical information that a NC would not easily find somewhere else. One client for instance had specific questions about the taxi sector in his country of origin. He wanted to know what the current taxi-fares and petrol prices were and what a licence would cost. The NC knew a returnee who had a taxi, phoned him and could answer client's questions. The Eritrean NC also maintains contact with a Dutch national who owns a big chicken farm in Ethiopia. The NC arranges that clients who wish to start a farm in Eritrea are brought into contact with this farmer. Some NC's visit their country of origin during holidays. While on holiday, they also visit clients who have returned. As is mentioned before: being a NC is not a nine-to-five job!

Apart from advancing their information position, keeping in touch with returnees may have another positive effect on the NC's. As one NC said, it is very encouraging when returnees thank him for the assistance he provided. Such gratitude gives him positive energy to go on working as a counsellor.

Recommendation RRI: *Encourage NC's to keep into contact with returned clients. The returnees can provide up to date information and are an 'advertisement' for doubting clients. Contact between NC's and returnees stimulates NC's in their work.*

4.2.5 Investment of time

The various tasks in the job description of the NC create a field of tension regarding their time expenditure. NC's have to navigate between the following tasks: establish contact and assist (potential) clients, establish and keep up a network of NGO's and individual gatekeepers and search and report data for research. They should give particular emphasis to persons for whom return preparations can be particularly complex, such as drug addicts, persons with health problems, unaccompanied minors or those who recently turned adult and victims of trafficking. Since it is impossible to prioritise all tasks, NC's have to compromise. The difficult question they face is; what to compromise on? This paragraph will discuss what challenges NC's encounter with regard to time investment related to establishing and upholding contact with clients and NGO's and providing assistance to clients with special needs.¹⁸

Establishing and upholding contact with (potential) clients

During the period of uncertainty about the outcome of the discussion of the regularisation scheme NC's were frequently called by persons within the migrant community to explain the (proposed) policy changes. Giving such advice is not the core business of the NC's. They are no legal advisors and consequently do not present themselves as such. Still, most NC's said that they sometimes thought it wise to give some sort of advice, because this could improve their position within the migrant community. If people knew how to find the NC when they wanted advice about possibilities to stay, they would also know to find the NC should they wish to return, it was argued. Up to a certain level the NC's feel they need to be able to give information and assistance with regard to alien policy. Finding the proper balance between establishing 'rapport' with the target group and turning down questions for legal advice, is difficult though.

Recommendation RRI: *Create awareness that NC's are no legal counsellors. Discuss what type of advice they can(not) give, without limiting their possibilities to establish trust.*

Sometimes migrants promise themselves that they will return if a key event has happened: "I'll go after new years day", "I'm gone when my appeal fails". The same promise is made when they have earned a certain amount of money they can send home as remittances: "When I've saved 3.000 Euros I'll return". One NC said that he feels it is task to have the client stick to his original plans. Experience taught him that migrants are very good at finding new excuses to stay. He therefore sometimes actively approaches clients and informs on the

¹⁸ The issue of prioritisation of duties with regard to research activities is touched upon in paragraph 2.4.

progress they make. Not as a manager who decides how and when to return, but as a coordinator he assists and facilitates the return process. Being too involved with a single case may however cause problems. When the NC is seen as some kind of 'buddy', this might eventually turn against him/her. Many clients feel lonely and the NC's sometimes have the idea they are being used as some kind of social company. A rejected asylum seeker from Lebanon for example has been living in the Netherlands for thirteen years. Without any doubt he would fall under the regularisation scheme. Still, he frequently contacted a NC with questions. He wondered if he should not return because of the illness of his mother. The position of the NC is difficult; on the one hand he could assist with the voluntary return of this person, but at the same time it is well possible that this man would in a later stage regret his return. He just has to wait until he receives a status. In the meantime having contact with these clients is time consuming and the NC sometimes has the feeling the client just wants attention. In cases like these, it is up to the NC and his/her manager to react adequately and come to a decision if investing time in this client is opportune or not.

Making such a decision is not easy, since investment of time sometimes does pay out. A case where the investment of time from the NC proved positive is the following: A nun from an African church introduced a NC to a 33 year old Togolese man. Client used to work as a car mechanic in Togo. He had arrived in the Netherlands five year earlier, never applied for asylum and ran into problems when he had no work. The NC told him IOM could pay his ticket and referred him to a District Officer in Amsterdam. A couple of days later the client called the NC; before going to the IOM-office he again wanted to discuss his situation with the NC. The client and the NC agreed to meet at central station in The Hague. Client never showed up and called afterwards that he did not dare to travel to central station because there were police inspections in the metro. The NC agreed to meet him another day at church. After this conversation client felt more comfortable and secure on return. He could however not finance the trip to Brussels to arrange travel documents at his embassy. The NC made sure IOM fixed a day ticket to the Belgium border. This enabled the client to fetch his documents. Three months after the first contact with the NC the client returned to Togo.

Establishing and upholding a network of NGO's and individual gatekeepers

Not only with regard to individual migrants, but also with regard to their network contacts NC's face the time investment dilemma. Investing in building up a network is useful, but when to stop? NC's invest in networking, because a good relationship with NGO's and individual gatekeepers is vital to obtain new clients. This means that NC's sometimes also invest time and energy by talking to people who themselves do not want to leave. Again, investing time in these persons may in the end pay out, but it may just as well be useless. In this respect it is sometimes difficult to set clear boundaries when to stop investing time in network partners or gatekeepers. A Chinese NC for example met a Chinese irregular migrant who made clear that he himself did not consider return. This person however frequently kept seeking contact with the NC and requested assistance with the translation of letters and visits to hospital. Although the NC was aware that her contact would most probably - at least on short term - never lodge a request to return via IOM, she decided to keep in touch with this man and assist him. He was a key-figure in the Chinese community of irregular migrants and she felt that the investment of time could eventually pay off. An African NC said that he also sometimes chooses to keep into contact with people who say that they do not wish to return. "They know who I am and what I do. When they hear of migrants who wish to return, they can refer them to me."

Recommendation RRI: NC's have to assess on a regularly base if (further) investment of time and energy in a network contact or gatekeeper is sufficiently useful.

Another NC was confronted with the following situation. A twenty year old woman (rejected unaccompanied minor) from Guinea Conakry described the NC during their first conversation in tears how she had come to the Netherlands. After her parents had died the friend of her deceased father decided to bring her to Europe. The man accompanied her to the Netherlands and raped her on arrival. Then he left. The woman feared this man would hurt her if she would return. After the NC had heard this story, she referred the woman to a foundation for victims of human trafficking. The foundation took the case seriously. They asked the NC to fill in a four page form. The NC however thought that it was not her task to work this all out. After a long discussion with the foundation both parties agreed that the foundation was responsible to file these documents.

Recommendation RRI: After having referred a client to another organisation the NC has to focus on his/her core activities (informing and assisting with voluntary return).

It is interesting to note that this same client kept close contact with the NC for half a year. All in all, the NC and the client had about fifteen conversations. Client reported her case to the police and was taken to a special shelter for potential victims of trafficking. Up to the moment of writing this report she has not returned. Although the client obviously appreciated the moments of contact with the NC, the NC questioned openly whether she had not invested too much time in aftercare.

Assisting clients with special needs

Particularly counselling the group of vulnerable clients proofs difficult and extremely time consuming. The experience of the NC's is that the return process of these clients requires much more investment than counselling 'ordinary' clients. NC's in most instances have to start return trajectories of vulnerable groups by referring to, or working together with other actors. Medical experts have to be contacted when clients have health problems. Drug addicts first have to kick the habit and are often referred to clinics. Potential victims of trafficking are mostly advised to report to the police. As is already mentioned above, in some instances up to fifteen or more meetings with individual clients took place, only to conclude after all that the client did not (wish) to return.

In the last case presented above, the time invested by the NC can surely not be considered as ineffective or unsuccessful. The NC identified a potential victim of trafficking and made sure she was given a safe haven. Although the client did not return, her conditions improved considerably. There are also other cases where the investment of time in assisting and facilitating vulnerable clients paid off. These are the cases that give the counselling team the positive energy and power to continue their work. One of these cases concerns a Russian man who arrived in the Netherlands in 2001. He applied for asylum, but his claim was rejected. The years that followed he wandered through Europe, got frustrated and addicted to drugs. He had no travel documents whatsoever and told the NC he wished to return. After the NC arranged that the man could sleep in an emergency shelter she made an appointment with a general practitioner who performed a medical check. The following weeks the NC talked to the client almost on a daily base. She tried to make sure he did not breach any rules of the

shelter and cooperated with his return process. In the meantime the client caused a lot of nuisance in the shelter. He used drugs wherever and whenever he could and infringed various other regulations. The NC contacted the Dutch Communal Health Services (GGD) and asked for assistance. The GGD however replied that it could not take care of the client, because he was not aggressive, not suicidal and caused no life threatening situation. The weeks after, the NC kept busy with the case. Until the third of January 2007 - one and a half month after the first contact was established - client returned to Russia.

Another client where the persistent attitude of the NC led to return, concerns a nineteen year old Russian woman. April 2006 the woman was referred by the Rotterdam police to visit the Russian speaking NC. She had been transported to the Netherlands by human smugglers who had promised her study- and work opportunities. None of this had come about and her visa expired. After the NC explained in what way IOM could assist her, the young woman left and was never heard of any more. Until September 2006, six months later. It turned out that the woman applied for asylum after her first conversation with the NC. Her claim was rejected and she moved to Belgium back and forth, thereby losing her travel documents. She came back to the NC, because she wished to return. Together with the NC she telephoned her mother in Russia. The NC explained the mother what kind of documents the daughter needed in order to apply for a LP. The NC kept into contact with the woman until November 2006, when the woman returned to Russia.

There are however also cases whereby the investment of time by counsellors is not easily directed to success. Two cases of clients with special needs that cost a lot of time but did eventually not result in the return of the client or any other positive outcome are resented below. The first case concerns a 62 year old Ethiopian woman who has been living in Amsterdam since 1999. She has a temporary status and a valid Ethiopian passport. Since 2003 she has been living in a nursing home because she has severe mental problems. She does not recognise her son any more. Via an African migrant organisation the son contacted a NC. He informed if IOM could arrange the return of his mother to Ethiopia. He told that his sister and other relatives living in Ethiopia could take care of her. After a few conversations with the son and representatives of the nursing home, the NC did not fully trust the son's motives. He focused a lot on the financial issues and became quite aggressive when the NC explained that the mother would not receive financial assistance until her death. Together with the migrant organisation the NC discovered that the son was a drug user. It was decided that IOM could not assist in the given situation. The mother could not decide for herself, nor could her son.

The second case concerns a blind man from Ghana. Because of the dependent situation he lives in, he has severe psychological problems. When he contacted the NC, he told he wished to return as soon as possible. The NC told on Tuesday she would be able to make an appointment on Thursday. This took the man too long; he called another NC. She also could only set an appointment on Thursday. The result: lots of correspondence between the NC's and District Officers and lots of changes in their schedules. In the end it turned out that the same man had started a return procedure two years earlier with an IOM colleague in Amsterdam. Those days the client had gone through the complete return procedure, but never shown up at the airport.

Probably any actor in the field of migration agrees that having contact with and assisting the difficult and most vulnerable persons to regain their future is of utmost importance. Whether seen from a ethical perspective, from a human rights perspective, from a civil order perspective, from a legal perspective or an economic perspective; one will undoubtedly

conclude that investing time and energy to assist these vulnerable cases to better their situation is critical. At the same time, one however has to realise that the ‘investment’ of time and energy just in very few instances pays out. The above mentioned success stories are in some way the exception to the rule. This causes an intrinsic area of tension for the NC. Should (s)he focus on the problem group, or not? And if (s)he does, whom to invest in primarily and who not?

Recommendation RRI: Regularly coach the NC’s with regard to the amount of time they spend on a single client. Create a platform where NC’s can jointly discuss the progress of their cases. The following questions could be examined: Is further time investment in a client opportune or not? What further steps could be taken? What organisation could the client be referred to?

4.2.6 Other practical issues

A number of other practical issues that are related to the work of NC’s are presented below. These are aspects that are interesting to note, but difficult to place under the previous paragraphs.

Location consulting-hours

Location matters. Locations used for consulting-hours can attract potential returnees to contact NC’s, but can also discourage them to come. To complicate things; locations can be adequate for the one group, and discouraging for the other. Take for instance the Pauluskerk in Rotterdam. The RRI-project once started by offering consulting-hours at the Pauluskerk in Rotterdam. Because this church was the first local partner of IOM within the RRI-project it is therefore a well known location for some migrant groups. The fact that the Pauluskerk offers all-in-one assistance (social care, medical care, psychological care *and* assistance with return migration) makes it attractive for irregular migrants to visit. This is especially the case for migrants from Eastern and Central Europe, as well as vulnerable groups like drug addicts and prostitutes. To get into contact and inform these migrants, the Pauluskerk is the perfect place to organise consulting hours. On the other hand, the place is considered to be too ‘scary’ or ‘dodgy’ for some other migrant groups who might wish to contact a NC. Once it has happened that a Brazilian client did not want to come to the Pauluskerk because - as he confided the NC - he thought this to be a place for junkies and prostitutes. Chinese clients are in general positive that the Pauluskerk is close to the Rotterdam Chinatown. At the same time they also informed NC’s that they do not always feel comfortable and secure.

Recommendation RRI: Location matters. Consider the location where to organise consulting-hours for the target group.

Antenna function

NC’s are the antennas of IOM within the community of irregular migrants in the G4. They are antennas that both transmit and receive information. They transmit information by introducing IOM in the world of irregular migrants. This study clarifies that the target group sometimes has prejudices about IOM. NC’s often can take away prejudices and fears by explaining IOM’s role and function. Since the NC’s have such a central position in the immigrant community it is pivotal that they are well-informed about the positioning and the overall

objectives of IOM. Although the NC's have received training on this subject, it could be useful to offer a short internal course to inform them more in depth about the history and objectives of the organisation.

Recommendation RRI: *Organise a meeting for the NC's to inform them in depth about the role, position and objectives of IOM.*

The NC's at the same time act like receiving antennas. They are deeper rooted in the world of (irregular) (asylum) migration than most IOM-staff. In that sense they are in a unique position to signal new trends and developments. Long before media or academics highlighted this, the Russian speaking NC for instance noted that the Polish regular migrants were pushing Ukrainian irregular migrants off the labour market.

Recommendation RRI: *Encourage NC's to share new signals and insights on the world of (irregular) (asylum) migration with other IOM employees. Establish channels in the IOM organisation through which the NC's can communicate these signals and insights.*

Directors function

In many instances various organisations are - or want to be - involved in informing and assisting a single migrant. This is especially the case for rejected asylum seekers. Lawyers, emergency shelters, the Dutch Council for Refugees, churches and other NGO's that offer return programmes: they all have 'something to do' with the migrant. The migrant is to decide when to make use of what kind of assistance. Some migrants themselves are good at 'shopping' for help and know how to arrange the most attractive living conditions in the Netherlands or the most attractive return package. Others however are not capable in finding their way in this field. An objective and well informed NC can assist a client and guide him/her to the most reliable organisations.

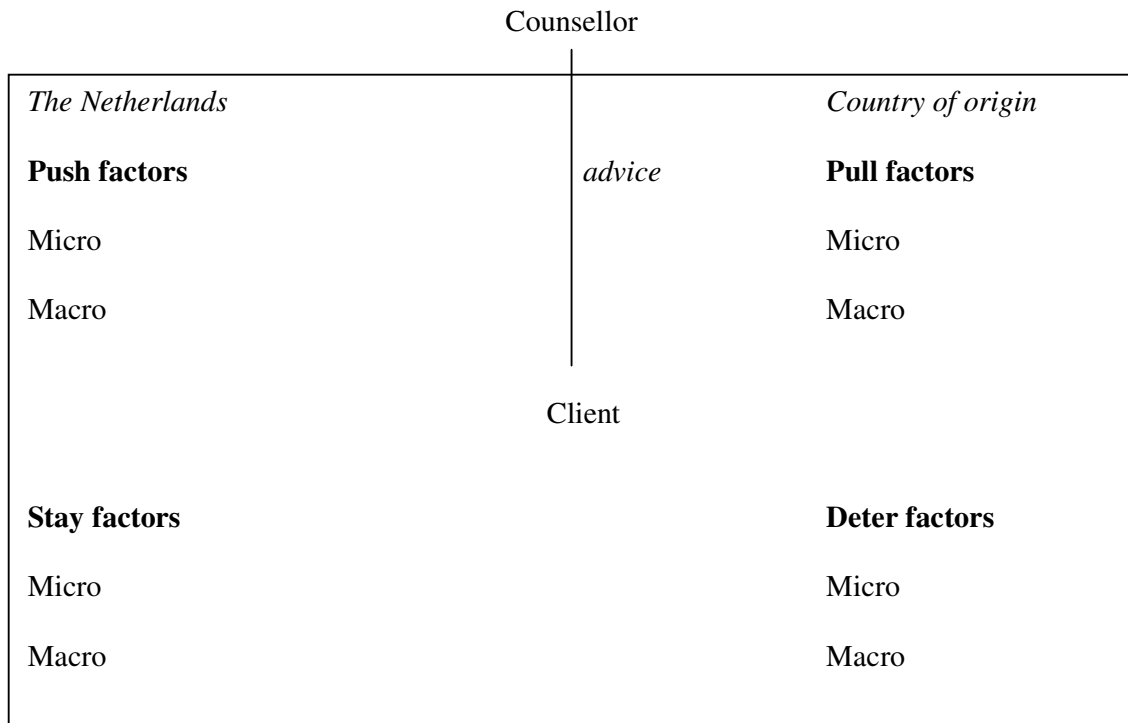
4.3 PRACTICAL USE OF THE MODEL

So far the push-pull-, stay- and deter-model introduced in paragraph 3.6. has primarily been used as a conceptual tool to provide insight into the various factors that are at play during the decision making process on return. The model could however also be used in a more practical sense. Making use of the model could further enhance the assistance of the NC. It can assist the NC to objectively guide the client what steps are best to be taken. When the NC fills in the model with a client, this could help both the NC and the client to gain insight into client's situation. Both macro-factors and micro-factors that determine the decision on return can be visualised and structured.

Merely by structuring and visualising all relevant factors that determine the individual decision of the client, (s)he can be assisted. Stress, rumours, hope and uncertainty make that the multitude of factors that determine return are hard to disentangle. For many migrants it is difficult to individually mention all relevant factors that impact their decision. By mapping his/her situation, his/her line of thinking on return could be simplified and streamlined.

Based on the ‘social picture’ of the situation of the client that emerges, the NC and the client can jointly assess what are the best steps taken to improve client’s situation. ‘Improving’ can - within the framework of the law - both mean to improve the situation of illegality or to create enhanced conditions to return. The experience and expertise of the NC, coupled with his/her objective perspective enable him/her to advise the client in a professional but involved way.

FIGURE 7
RELATION NC – CLIENT



Recommendation RRI: *Have a NC based on the push-, pull-, stay- and deter-model map what factors influence clients’ decision on return. Make a plan what problem(s) could be targeted by the intervention or assistance of a NC.*

When the situation of the client is mapped, the NC and the client jointly conclude what further steps can be taken. Because of the of highly individual factors that influence the decision making process of all potential returnees, there is no one-size fits all solution how to best approach or assist clients. A family for example is confronted with completely different push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors than an individual. Hence, a tailor made approach is essential and the individual qualities of a NC determine to a large extent how successful (s)he can be.

Most probably the NC and the client come to the conclusion that the NC can only have a relatively small impact on assisting the client. NC’s are generally not in the position to change, influence or manipulate deter- or pull-factors on a macro level. These conditions are a given fact and NC’s lack the tools to bring about change. Economy in countries of origin or host countries either grows or not. There is not much a NC can do about it. Dictatorial regimes come or go. Violence and civil wars occur or not; no NC who has an impact.

The consequence is that NC's cannot offer much assistance if migrants doubt returning to for example central Iraq or Southern Afghanistan. The macro deter-factors are just too manifest. Obviously, migrants are more likely to return to a country where pull-factors are manifest. The case of Angola teaches for example that a steady peace and rising economy can act as such a pull-factor. One option is to have NC's invest most time and energy in counselling clients from countries with few deter-factors and many pull-factors.

Recommendation RRI: Do not invest time and energy in counselling migrants from countries where macro deter-factors are most ominous and distinctive in nature. Invest time and energy in counselling migrants from countries where potential macro pull-factor are present.

Another option - but this is a fundamentally different line of thinking - is to have NC's deliberately invest time and energy on assisting migrants from countries with many macro deter-factors and few macro pull-factors. These are the countries where most probably fewest people wish to return to. The backing of a NC might change the mindset of people who would otherwise never seriously consider returning. In this case it is however to be expected that despite the investment of time and energy, this will probably lead to few returnees.

Recommendation RRI: Invest time and energy in counselling migrants from countries where macro deter-factors are most ominous and distinctive in nature. Do not invest time and energy in counselling migrants from countries where potential macro pull-factor are present.

Many macro push- and stay-factors in the Netherlands also fall outside the scope of the field of activity of NC's. These factors mainly depend on policy decisions made by the local or national government. New laws or more strict police inspections have a push-effect. The setting up of emergency shelters and 'gedoogbeleid' (policy of tolerance) may have a stay-effect. Lobbying to change (supra)national or local policy is not in line with the activities of IOM, let alone the NC's. The best NC's can do is to make sure that they can provide up to date and objective information about proposed policy changes.

Deter-factors on a micro-level sometimes also fall outside the scope of assistance of NC's. When a migrant does not wish to return because his wife has divorced from him and sold the house he owned, there is for example little a NC can do. This is the same when a client does not wish to return because he has a relationship with someone who lives in the Netherlands.

Does this all mean that NC's can do nothing to assist clients in their actual return process? The answer is: certainly not. Some conditions on a micro-level may very well be targeted by a NC. In some situations NC's are in a unique position to take away negative-, or create positive conditions on a micro-level. Their personality, background and networking capacities are in this respect essential.

Most importantly, NC's can act as an intermediary between the migrant and his/her social network. Various studies suggest that family members living in the country of origin lack a realistic view on the living conditions of irregular migrants in Europe. Success stories of migration dominate the headlines of *Radio Trottoir* in Africa, Eastern Europe and China. Success is the rule, failures are directed to laziness and languor. The latest information human smugglers sell and tell about Europe, does not focus on the negative stories. Rather the possibilities and hope Europe offers are highlighted. Clients are aware that their peers back

home may still have an unrealistically positive image of Europe. As is discussed in chapter 3 the pressure to succeed withholds many migrants to return. Family members in the country of origin might - deliberately or not - pressurize migrants to stay. Children fear returning to their parents empty handed. It is mentioned earlier: just as the household decides a 'go' or 'no go' with regard to heading for Europe, it also influences a 'go' or 'no go' regarding voluntary return.

When the NC and client conclude that fear to return empty handed acts as a major deterring factor, the NC can play an important role by intermediating between the client and his/her social network. Various cases presented earlier in this study clarify that establishing communication between a migrant and his/her social network in the country of origin can be of vital importance with regard to the decision making process on return. NC's can advice and intermediate with regard to the 'social debt' some clients may withhold from returning. When family members in the country are well informed about the (sometimes difficult) realities irregular migrants in Europe face, they might be more understanding and cooperative with regard to the voluntary return of their family member who lives in Europe. The case study of a Congolese young man (see paragraph 3.5.2) who wanted to return only after the NC intermediated between his aunt in Belgium and parents in Congo, is in this respect most illustrative. The mediating role of the NC proved essential in establishing contact between the family in Congo and the client in Europe.

Recommendation RRI: *When NC's notice that clients fear returning because of a 'social debt', it is recommended that NC's try to contact family members in the country of origin and act as a mediator between the client and his/her family.*

Recommendation IOM: *IOM missions in countries of origin could intensify providing up to date and objective information about migration policy in Europe.¹⁹ This might not only prevent new migrants coming to Europe ill informed, but may also help returning migrants to explain their family members why they wish to return.*

When NC's cannot take away stay-factors on a micro-level by intermediating between the client and his/her social network, they can assist clients by referring them to colleagues within IOM or to partners within their network. Health problems could potentially be taken away by referring to street doctors or IOM's Migration and Health project. Victims of trafficking can be referred to police or NGO's.²⁰

4.4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The central question answered in this chapter is: 'how the methodology of native counselling could be further developed to assist and reach out to the target group?' A description of the daily work of the NC's is alternated with practical recommendations.

Establishing contact with the 'unknown' and difficult to reach migrants is one of the major challenges the NC's face. In order to reach as many potential returnees it is wise to advertise creative and think out of the box. Think big; apart from advertising in typical migrant media

¹⁹ Such as the 'Campagne d'information publique sur les dangers de la migration irreguliere au depart du Cameroun' as implemented in Cameroun.

²⁰ For more referral options, see paragraph 4.2.4

in the host countries, it can be considered to advertise in international media. NC's should expand their network at all possible places they can think off. Invite them to explicitly make use of their personal network to identify potentially interesting places. Furthermore encourage the NC's to be as available, creative and flexible as possible when establishing and upholding contact with clients. Their flexibility is a unique asset.

NC's can trigger migrants to seriously think about their future. The shared background of NC's and their clientele helps them to give the client a 'wake up call'. NC's should not only focus on negative, but also on positive experiences clients have had in the Netherlands. This may invite the client to start thinking more positive about his/her future. When NC's invest more time in understanding and studying alien policy regulations of their country of origin they are better equipped to assist clients with their return process.

The world of migration is a world of rumours. A key asset of the NC's is that they can provide up to date and objective information on return policy and regulations. Fully informed clients are in a better position to assess their decision on return. When NC's file what rumours about policy and policy changes are most prevalent and rigid in the migrant community, and when objective information in this regard is sought, they are in a better position to assist with the decision making process on return. Translating laws and policy discussions in foreign languages could further take away buzz from the rumour circuit. By encouraging NC's to regularly use the IOM information system IRRiCO and keeping in touch with returned clients, the NC's could improve their information position with regard to the countries of origin.

The various tasks in the job description of the NC create a field of tension regarding their time expenditure. Regularly coach the NC's with regard to the amount of time they spend on a single client and create a platform where NC's can jointly discuss the progress of their cases. Regularly discuss what type of advice NC's can(not) give, without limiting their possibilities to establish trust. NC's should assess on a regularly base if (further) investment of time and energy in a network contact or gatekeeper is sufficiently useful. After having referred a client to another organisation the NC should focus on his/her core activities (informing and assisting with voluntary return).

NC's have a double antenna function. They transmit the objectives and services of IOM in the world of irregular migrants. Therefore it is useful that they are in depth informed about the role, position and objectives of IOM. At the same time the NC's receive much information about the world of irregular migrants. By establishing channels in the IOM organisation through which the NC's can communicate this information new signals and insights could be shared within the IOM organisation as a whole.

NC's have limited options to assist migrants with their actual return. A NC can hardly play a role to change macro push- or stay-factors in the Netherlands. There is also little assistance NC's can offer to take away macro deter-factors. Investing time and energy in migrants who originate from countries where such factors are ominous, might therefore be less functional than investing in migrants from countries with potential macro pull-factors. Another option - but this is a fundamentally different line of thinking - is to have NC's deliberately invest time and energy on assisting migrants from countries with many macro deter-factors and few macro pull-factors. The backing of a NC might change the mindset of people who would otherwise never seriously consider returning.

All of this does not mean that NC cannot assist in any way with return. They can invite their clients to fill in the push-, pull-, stay- and deter-model. This may give clients a better understanding of their situation. Furthermore NC's can play an important role as intermediary between the clients and his/her family members in the country of origin. When NC's notice that clients fear returning because of a 'social debt', it is recommended that NC's try to contact family members in the country of origin and act as a mediator between the client and his/her family. In addition NC's can assist clients by referring them to organisations that might be better equipped to assist.

Because of the highly individual factors that influence the decision making process of all potential returnees, there is no one-size fits all solution how to best approach or assist clients. Clients are confronted with completely different push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors. Hence, a tailor made approach is essential and the individual qualities of a NC determine to a large extent how successful (s)he can be.

5. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

5.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This report is meant to offer better knowledge of rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants living in the four big cities in the Netherlands. Based on this knowledge suggestions are presented to improve the native counselling methodology. This concluding chapter provides a summary of the foregoing chapters and discusses prospects for the future.

In order to realize the above mentioned aims, the following research questions were defined:

- 1) *What determinant factors and conditions influence the decision making process on voluntary return of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers living in the four big cities in the Netherlands? What factors and conditions are most critical?*
- 2) *How could the methodology of native counselling be further developed to assist and reach out to the target group?*

5.2 DETERMINANT FACTORS ON VOLUNTARY RETURN

In order to answer the first research question a division is made between push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors for conceptual reasons. When discussing return migration, push-factors can be defined as those factors that make migrants wishing or requiring to leave the host country. Accordingly, pull-factors see to the factors that make migrants wanting to return to their country of origin. Stay-factors can be defined as those factors that make a person wishing to stay in the asylum country. Deter-factors withhold a person to return to his/her country of origin. When analysing factors at a micro-level the private domain of the migrant is the starting point. When analysing factors at a macro-level, features in the public domain are of key interest.

Disentangling the determinant factors and conditions with regard to voluntary return of the RRI-II clientele proved very complex. Identifying *the most* critical factors and conditions is extremely difficult. The qualitative nature of the data makes it impossible to specifically classify what factors are most decisive. What factors are most critical with regard to the decision making process on return differs from person to person. As a general rule not one single condition, but a vast variety of conditions affect the decision making process on return. Most clients were hovered between a variety of push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors, both on micro and macro level. Rather than classifying what factors primarily affect the decision making process on voluntary return, a 'push-, pull, stay- and deter-model' is introduced in which all relevant factors that influence the decision making process on return can be mapped. This model helps to structure and visualise the multitude of relevant factors that are at play for an individual migrant.

Based on the analysis it is possible to map a range of factors that had a push-, pull-, stay-, or deter-effect on the target group of the RRI-II project. Because some factors can constitute different effects, it is possible that these factors are recorded twice or more.

Push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors RRI-II clientele	
<p><i>The Netherlands</i></p> <p>Push factors</p> <p><u>Micro</u> Tiredness/frustration Financial problems/lack of work Health problems (individual client or family) Mission accomplished False promises human smugglers Lack of social network in the Netherlands High rent</p> <p><u>Macro</u> Opening up labour market in EU Stricter asylum policy 'Many of organisation' asylum regime</p> <p>Stricter inspections Alien custody</p>	<p><i>Countries of Origin</i></p> <p>Pull factors</p> <p><u>Micro</u> Homesickness Health problems family member Death of a relative in country Job offer</p> <p><u>Macro</u> Resettlement assistance Improving or safe security situation Improving or good economic situation</p>
Clients	
<p>Stay factors</p> <p><u>Micro</u> 'Fata Morgana effect' / hope Health problems (individual client or family) Death of relative (save money) Social network in the Netherlands Children Rumours</p> <p><u>Macro</u> Availability of emergency shelters Stricter entrance regime EU</p> <p>Stricter asylum policy (debate) regularisation scheme Alien custody Categorical protection policy</p>	<p>Deter factors</p> <p><u>Micro</u> Social debt Financial debt Emotional debt Divorce from wife/husband Rumours</p> <p><u>Macro</u> Worsening or bad security situation Worsening or bad economic situation</p>

The analysis indicates that the influence of the social network of migrants is very important. Social or family ties can seriously affect the decision making process on return. When a migrant has a strong social network in the Netherlands (s)he is more likely to stay. Apart from giving emotional support the network can assist with finding work and housing. When family members in the country of origin have high expectations of the migrant, this is likely to constitute a stay effect as well. When family members in the country of origin however have

health problems or have passed away, this is more likely to make a migrant return. Clients who are single for instance, can more easily make choices than clients with family members living in the Netherlands. Single client only have to take care of themselves. Especially when the children go to school and when the family has been living in the Netherlands for several years, the decision making process with regard to return becomes much more complicated. The findings suggest that just like the decision to migrate to Europe, leaving Europe is also a decision that is strongly influenced by the social network.

Not surprisingly, the security and economic situation in the country of origin also heavily impact the decision on return. Especially the deter-effect a worsening security situation - like in Iraq - in general withholds migrants to seriously consider returning. There are indications that a rising economy in the country of origin does positively affect return, but the relation between the economic situation and return seems less strong than the security situation and return.

Given that especially client's social network and the situation in the country of origin determine the decision making process on return teaches policy makers to be modest about the possibilities to manage return migration. The impact policy changes have on the actual decision making process of an individual migrant is limited. This does however not imply that policy does not at all influence return migration. The analysis proves that - among many other factors - policy changes can (in)directly affect the decision making process on return. Opening up the labour market for Polish workers has had a direct push-effect on Ukrainian irregular migrants wanting to leave the Netherlands. The findings suggest furthermore that strict border patrols in the EU may have a stay effect on migrants. Once they managed to enter the EU after having invested much time, energy and financial means, they are less likely to consider returning. The (debate) about the regularization scheme had a significant stay-effect, whereas intensified police- and labour inspections acted as a push-factor.

With some prudence it is possible to create typologies of clients. The client most likely to return, is someone who is confronted with hardly stay- or deter-factors and many push- and pull factors. This means (s)he:

- has not other relatives in the Netherlands;
- has not invested (time, money, risk) in his/her travel;
- has not applied for asylum;
- has stayed only for a couple of years in Europe;
- has regular and open contact with family members in his/her country of origin;
- comes from a country with good economic and security perspectives.

The client most likely to stay, is someone who is confronted with hardly any push- and pull-factors and many stay- and deter-factors. This means (s)he:

- has relatives living in the Netherlands who have a status;
- has invested much (time, money, risk) in his/her travel;
- applied for asylum (especially before 2001);
- stayed of more than five years in Europe;
- lost contact with family members in his/her country of origin;
- comes from a country with bad economic and security perspectives.

It goes without saying that in the actual target group just a very small percentage of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers can be positioned in one of these two templates. The overwhelming majority is caught in a situation where they are on the one hand pushed to

leave and pulled to return, and on the other hand triggered to stay and deterred to return. In the next chapter will be described how NC's within the RRI-II project tried to establish contact and assist migrants who are in this complicated situation.

5.3 REACHING OUT TO AND ASSISTING THE TARGET GROUP

The second research question answered in this study was how the methodology of native counselling could be further developed to assist and reach out to the target group. Because of the of highly individual factors that influence the decision making process of all potential returnees, there is no one-size fits all solution how to best approach or assist clients. Clients are confronted with completely different push-, pull-, stay- and deter-factors. Hence, a tailor made approach is essential and the individual qualities of a NC determine to a large extent how successful (s)he can be

Establishing contact with the 'unknown' and difficult to reach migrants is one of the major challenges the NC's face. In order to reach as many potential returnees it is wise to advertise creative and think out of the box. Think big. Apart from advertising in typical migrant media in the host countries, IOM could consider advertising in international media. NC's should expand their network at all possible places they can think off. Invite them to explicitly make use of their personal network to identify potentially interesting places. Furthermore encourage the NC's to be as available, creative and flexible as possible when establishing and upholding contact with clients. Their flexibility is a unique asset.

NC's can trigger migrants to seriously think about their future. The shared background of NC's and their clientele helps them to give the client a 'wake up call'. NC's should not only focus on negative, but also on positive experiences clients have had in the Netherlands. This may invite the client to start thinking more positive about his/her future. When NC's invest more time in understanding and studying alien policy regulations of their country of origin they are better equipped to assist clients with their return process.

The world of migration is a world of rumours. A key asset of the NC's is that they can provide up to date and objective information on return policy and regulations. Fully informed clients are in a better position to assess their decision on return. When NC's file what rumours about policy and policy changes are most prevalent and rigid in the migrant community, and when objective information in this regard is sought, they are in a better position to assist with the decision making process on return. Translating laws and policy discussions in foreign languages could further take away buzz from the rumour circuit. By encouraging NC's to regularly use the IOM information system IRRiCO and keeping in touch with returned clients, the NC's could improve their information position with regard to the countries of origin.

The various tasks in the job description of the NC create a field of tension regarding their time expenditure. Regularly coach the NC's with regard to the amount of time they spend on a single client and create a platform where NC's can jointly discuss the progress of their cases. Regularly discuss what type of advice NC's can(not) give, without limiting their possibilities to establish trust. NC's should assess on a regularly base if (further) investment of time and energy in a network contact or gatekeeper is sufficiently useful. After having referred a client to another organisation the NC should focus on his/her core activities (informing and assisting with voluntary return).

NC's have a double antenna function. They transmit the objectives and services of IOM in the world of irregular migrants. Therefore it is useful that they are in depth informed about the role, position and objectives of IOM. At the same time the NC's receive much information about the world of irregular migrants. By establishing channels in the IOM organisation through which the NC's can communicate this information new signals and insights could be shared within the IOM organisation as a whole.

NC's have limited options to assist migrants with their actual return. A NC can hardly play a role to change macro push- or stay-factors in the Netherlands. There is also little assistance NC's can offer to take away macro deter-factors. Investing time and energy in migrants who originate from countries where such factors are ominous, might therefore be less functional than investing in migrants from countries with potential macro pull-factors. Another option - but this is a fundamentally different line of thinking - is to have NC's deliberately invest time and energy on assisting migrants from countries with many macro deter-factors and few macro pull-factors. The backing of a NC might change the mindset of people who would otherwise never seriously consider returning.

All of this does not mean that NC cannot assist in any way with return. They can invite their clients to fill in the push-, pull-, stay- and deter-model. This may give clients a better understanding of their situation. Furthermore NC's can play an important role as intermediary between the clients and his/her family members in the country of origin. When NC's notice that clients fear returning because of a 'social debt', it is recommended that NC's try to contact family members in the country of origin and act as a mediator between the client and his/her family. In addition NC's can assist clients by referring them to organisations that might be better equipped to assist.

5.4 PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Native counselling has proven to be a successful tool to reach out to and assist irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers with regard to voluntary return. Their specific cultural background and language knowledge enables them to assist migrants in a tailor made way. Given the multitude of factors that may influence the decision making process of potential returnees, the guidance and objective information NC's offer can be most helpful for the target group. The fact that NC's are flexible and available, cultural sensitive and informed is one of their strongest assets.

The methodology proves to be sustainable as it has been exported to Austria and Germany. At national level the strengthening of networks and the acceptance of 'return' as a realistic option by many organisations and individuals are promising developments which emphasize the high relevance of native counselling.

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