

# *Sustainable reintegration in Ukraine and Bulgaria after voluntary return*

Pilot project

Commissioned by: Caritas International Belgium

With the support of the European Refugee Fund

Project coordinator: Anne Dussart

Project leader: Bart Cosyns

Published by: Johan Ketelers  
Liefdadigheidstraat 43  
1210 Brussels

December 2004

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank all those who participated in this project, especially:

*Sabine Luppens, Eliane Stefanovic, Peter Verhaeghe, Carema Bajou, Anne-Marie Angenon, Johanna Vanraes, Marc Somers, Florence Lobert, Danièle Madrid, Kristin Vanoeveren and Jessica Hertsens*

From Caritas International

*Natalia Bandera, Olha Chereshnivska, Vita Horluts and Inna Syvolobova*

From the partner organisation Caritas Ukraine

*Tsveta Georgieva and Kristina Bekyarova*

From the partner organisation Caritas Bulgaria

*Don Pero Brkic and Davorka Topic-Simic*

From Caritas Sarajevo

The REAB partners who helped complete the questionnaires:

*Najib Kaliquar and his colleagues in the Protestant Social Centre (Antwerp);*

*Centre Social Protestant, Brussels;*

*Red Cross Flanders;*

*Intercultureel Netwerk Gent;*

*The City of Gent (Asylum and Migration Service);*

*Fedasil Gent.*

All the REAB partners, independent organisations and the municipal social services who referred people to the social service of Caritas International for assistance with repatriation, especially:

*The staff of the Embassy of Ukraine in Brussels*

*The staff of the Embassy of Bulgaria in Brussels*

*Omeljan Kowal, President of the Ukrainian Organisation for Refugees in Belgium*

Our thanks also go to the European Refugee Fund and Mrs Arena, former Minister of Social Integration, for the support she gave to this project.

## **Table of contents**

### **Acknowledgements**

### **Table of contents**

### **Preface**

## **1. The migration policy of the European Union**

## **2. The REAB programme**

2.1. Services offered

2.2. Trends

2.3. After return

## **3. Structure of the project**

3.1. Identified needs

3.2. Objectives

3.3. Target group of the project

3.4. Caritas partners in the countries of origin

3.5. The practical help offered by Caritas

3.6. Questionnaires on which the analysis is based

## **4. Analysis**

4.1. Introduction

4.2. The return to Ukraine

4.3. The return to Bulgaria

4.4. The survey carried out in Bosnia-Herzegovina

## **5. Conclusions**

5.1. The circumstances of voluntary return

5.2. Criteria for assisted return with a view to sustainable reintegration

## **6. Bibliography**

## **7. Annexes**

- Methodology and justification of the questions

## Preface

Voluntary return to the country of origin is one of the three sustainable solutions that are being developed for dealing with asylum and migration problems. This involves determining to what extent it is possible for the asylum seeker or the migrant to return to his country and how this can best be accomplished. The second possibility involves the procedures and the forms of assistance that make it possible for such persons to integrate in the country where the asylum application has been submitted. This framework is essentially intended for those for whom it appears that return to their country is not a feasible option. The third range of solutions is intended for people who cannot return and who cannot stay permanently in the country where they have submitted an asylum application. These persons must be offered the chance of settling and integrating in a third country. The three approaches should not be considered as successive stages. They are clearly complementary and can be developed in parallel. Although these three paradigms together cannot as yet offer a satisfactory solution to the sheer number of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers around the world, these models must be part of any caring and efficient migration and asylum policy.

In Belgium and in the European Union, more and more attention is being focused on the concept of voluntary return. In November 2003, the Council of the European Union again stressed the importance of voluntary return and called for greater cooperation among the Member States on this problem. At the same time, research into and combining of examples and ‘best practices’ is encouraged. This approach clearly suggests a change in direction that is gradually taking place in the policy of the Member States and within the general social context. While initially what was observable was a kind of social resistance that often led to confrontation, the idea is gradually developing that migration represents a new social challenge for which practical and caring solutions must be devised.

Although considerable importance is now being attached to voluntary return, we must not be misled into believing that these procedures will also resolve the individual human difficulties of those who choose to return. The policy must therefore include at least two components. The first component includes all the procedures governing cooperation, on the one hand, among the Member States and, on the other hand, between the European Union and the countries of origin. In parallel, the social component must offer more scope for a more individual human dimension, and, insofar as this can take into account the individual nature of certain situations and people, the policy will gain more widespread acceptance and the desired sustainability will be achieved.

Those who return voluntarily cannot be offered anything resembling a ‘travel contract’. Plane tickets guarantee the trip but offer no guarantees as regards reintegration. There is a pressing need for social research and social assistance. As far as repatriation is concerned, the same rule applies as for integration in the country of the asylum application or for integration in a third country: without a social framework most procedures are in danger of not producing the desired result. This means, among other things, that asylum seekers or migrants who return home will sooner or later try again. The policy on voluntary return must take into account not only objective factors but also subjective factors.

The subjective factors involve the elements underpinning the migrant’s initial motivation and decision to leave his country and his experience during the trip and during his stay in the country of the asylum application. Other subjective factors include the elements that contributed towards the decision to return to the country of departure. When it comes to

devising the return policy, we should not forget that asylum seekers and migrants are not only the victims of certain social, political or economic realities, but they are often also the victims of their own expectations and hopes. They are misled by inaccurate information, false expectations and even promises and actions in bad faith and have taken a decision on which they cannot simply go back without once again suffering some kind of loss (or at least loss of face). Very often, they see their experience during the trip, their hardships and the refusal of asylum as a litany of failures. Their decision to return voluntarily should therefore not turn out to be the nth in a string of failures but should offer them a long-awaited lucky break. Within the framework of social assistance, an effort should be made to provide the arrangements that offer guarantees of success. At this point, the question arises as to the criteria that can guarantee the quality of voluntary return and how such criteria can be incorporated in a policy.

Against this backdrop, Caritas set up the project “Sustainable reintegration in Ukraine and Bulgaria after voluntary return”. The social services of Caritas International in Belgium, Caritas Ukraine and Caritas Bulgaria have not only assisted a number of people who voluntarily chose to return to their country of origin to make their choice, but also offered the possibility of supporting them for a few months in their country after their return. Before their return, they were assisted in Belgium by Caritas International’s partner social services. When they reached the country of return, they were received at the airport by the social service of the local Caritas organisation, who provided them with the required material and psychological support to help them take the first tentative steps towards reintegration. In this way, they were also able to learn more about the situations which these persons had left behind and in which they would once again find themselves. Putting the pieces of their broken lives back together again and sifting through the debris of their shattered dreams takes a lot more courage and energy than we tend to think.

Based on the information we were able to garner from this experience, we endeavoured to draw a number of conclusions that would yield tentative indicators for action. For one thing, we discovered that the role of the social services in preparing for the return and the initial assistance in the country of origin is very important. Our cooperation also provided the social services in the countries of return with an opportunity to gain insight into the situation of one of the countries to which asylum seekers migrate. As a result, they are better equipped to talk to returnees, and this has increased the amount of information that they have been able to give potential migrants and asylum seekers. The importance of their preventive role cannot be stressed enough.

The results of this approach are outlined in this report. The project was of necessity limited by the imposed timeframe and should be continued and expanded in terms of geographical coverage and the number of participants. In addition, we found that when this type of project is launched it takes quite some time before the potential candidates overcome their initial apprehension and are finally persuaded that their file will be kept confidential by the social services. The number of people who were ultimately included in the data is therefore relatively small, but we believe that the results are indicative. We also found that the political and economic diversity of the three selected countries (Ukraine and Bulgaria, along with Bosnia-Herzegovina for certain aspects) was an important asset as it gave us a broader overview.

We would like at this point to express our gratitude to the European Refugee Fund and Mrs Arena, the former Minister of Social Integration, for their pledges of support for this project.

We aim to continue this approach and hope that the findings to date will yield useful pointers in the endeavour to improve our approach to voluntary return. Nevertheless, we must emphasise that voluntary return should be seen as one element in a whole range of possibilities and that it should not be seen as a separate solution. We must continue to interpret migratory movements as the result of inequality and poverty in the world.

Johan Ketelers  
Director

## 1. The migration policy of the European Union

In recent years, the European asylum and migration policy has been radically reformed, in particular on the basis of the Treaty of Amsterdam and the Tampere Conclusions. Because this forms the basis for the Belgian asylum and migration policy, we will summarise the key directives and developments in this area.

### The Treaty of Amsterdam

The Treaty of Amsterdam, which was signed on 2 October 1998 and subsequently entered into force on 1 May 1999, is the main legal basis for the European policy on asylum and immigration. Prior to the signing of the Treaty, these questions fell within the exclusive competence of the Member States, but now they are almost entirely European issues. They fall under Title IV of the Treaty of the European Union, which is entitled “Visas, asylum, immigration and other policies related to free movement of persons”. The Treaty provides for measures that:

- are designed to do away with all controls of persons who cross the internal EU borders, whether they be European citizens or nationals from third countries;
- concern the crossing of the external borders of Member States (visas, control standards and arrangements at the border);
- set the conditions whereby nationals from third countries can travel for three months on the territory of the Member States;
- concern asylum and, more specifically, the question as to which Member State is competent for an asylum application, minimum standards with which aliens must comply to claim refugee status, minimum standards with which a country must comply to grant or withdraw refugee status and minimum standards for the treatment of asylum seekers;
- concern refugees and displaced persons and, more specifically, the minimum standards for the granting of temporary protection to displaced persons, measures to deal with emergencies connected with a sudden influx of nationals from third countries and measures to spread the load among different Member States for the care of refugees and displaced persons;
- concern the immigration policy and, more specifically, the conditions for admission and residence, procedures for the issue of visas and long-term residence permits, the procedure for family reunification, clandestine immigration and illegal residence and the repatriation of persons who reside illegally in the country;
- concern the determining of the rights of nationals from third countries who reside legally in a Member State and the conditions under which they can travel to another Member State.

With the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the *acquis* of the Treaty of Schengen were incorporated in the Community structures. The Executive Committee of the Schengen Group was replaced by the Council of Justice and Home Affairs. This means that the

European Parliament will from now on be consulted, whereas in the past it was merely informed.

### **The Tampere Conclusions**

In Tampere, the European Council held a special meeting on 15 and 16 October 1999 devoted to the creation of a European area of freedom, security and law. The Tampere Conclusions set out the arrangements for the development of a common European asylum and immigration policy with four different objectives, namely partnership with the countries of origin, a common European asylum system, fair treatment for third country nationals and more efficient management of migration flows.

The European Union discussed in Tampere the political aspects, human rights and the development issues in the countries of origin and of transit. To that end, the Union as well as Member States were invited to contribute, within their respective competence under the Treaties, to a greater coherence of internal and external policies of the Union. Partnership with the third countries concerned would also be a key element for the success of such a policy, with a view to promoting co-development.

The European Council reaffirmed the importance the Union and Member States attach to absolute respect of the right to seek asylum. It agreed to work towards establishing a Common European Asylum System, based on the full and inclusive application of the Geneva Convention, thus ensuring that no one would be sent back to a country in which he runs once again the risk of persecution, i.e. maintaining the principle of non-refoulement.

The Union must ensure fair treatment of third country nationals who reside legally on the territory of its Member States. A more vigorous integration policy should aim at granting them rights and obligations comparable to those of EU citizens. It should also enhance non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural life and develop measures against racism and xenophobia.

The legal status of third country nationals should be approximated to that of Member States' nationals. A person, who has resided legally in a Member State for a period of time to be determined and who holds a residence permit, should be granted in that Member State a set of uniform rights which are as near as possible to those enjoyed by EU citizens (e.g. the right to reside, receive education and work as an employee or self-employed person). All discrimination must be done away with.

In Tampere, the need was stressed for efficient management of migration flows at all their stages. There were calls for the development, in cooperation with the countries of origin and transit, of information campaigns on the actual possibilities for legal immigration and for the prevention of trafficking in human beings. A common active policy on visas and false documents should be further developed, including closer cooperation between EU consulates in third countries.

The Tampere Conclusions must lead to a harmonisation of the asylum and immigration policy between the different EU Member States, including reasonable treatment and the control of external borders to combat clandestine immigration.

By accepting the Conclusions, the Member States took a decision on various important points:

- a global approach to migrations;
- respect for human rights;
- fair treatment of immigrants from third countries who live in a Member State of the EU;
- the need for a development policy;
- full application of the Geneva Convention;
- the assurance that no one will be returned to a country where he once again runs the risk of persecution.

On the basis of the Tampere Conclusions, the Commission very quickly put together an ambitious legislative programme that dealt first and foremost with legal immigration and the asylum policy.

In 2000, the Commission drew up two communications: “A Community policy on immigration” and “Towards a common asylum procedure and a uniform status, valid throughout the Union, for persons granted asylum”. A “communication on a common policy on clandestine immigration” would follow in 2001.

There are a number of common threads in the policies and statements of European officials: the fight against illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings, control of the external borders, the readmission agreements and the return programmes.

The European Council of Laeken (14 and 15 December 2001) called for the development of an action plan based on the Commission communication on illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings, on the determining of the cooperation mechanisms between the services responsible for the control of the external borders and on examining the conditions under which a mechanism or common services could control the external borders.

In June 2002, the European Council in Seville approved three levels of coordination of the actions of the Member States:

- a global plan to combat clandestine immigration and trafficking in human beings;
- a plan for the control of the external borders of the Member States;
- a programme of action on return.

The **action programme on return** includes the measures to be taken with a view to achieving the following objectives:

1. Strengthening of operational cooperation between the Member States: information on best practices, common return initiatives, etc.;
2. Determining the common minimum standards for security, detention of difficult persons, assistance with transit, legal appeals against deportation, the standards applicable to detention pending removal;
3. Setting up specific programmes for a third country: readmission negotiations, aid to countries of origin and transit to facilitate voluntary return;
4. Cooperation with third countries: agreement on the principle of readmission on the basis of association or cooperation. These agreements are intended, on the basis of reciprocity, to facilitate return and readmission on the territory of the third country.

At European level, a negotiating mandate for a readmission agreement for Ukraine was approved in June 2002 by the European Commission and Ukraine. The negotiations got under way in Kiev on 18/11/2002. This was followed by several rounds of negotiations. The last of these meetings took place in Kiev on 29 September 2004. The results are not yet known.

Five years after the Tampere Summit, it can be seen that in the area of asylum and immigration the partnership with the country of origin has focused on police and judicial cooperation to fight against clandestine immigration and trafficking in human beings and to promote the readmission of clandestine immigrants and rejected asylum seekers. At the Brussels Summit on 4 and 5 November 2004, it was decided that it is of crucial importance from 2005 to review the minimum standards for return to a third country and the development of a consistent return policy.

## 2. The REAB programme

### 2.1. Services offered

Since 1984, there has been an agreement between the Belgian Ministry for Social Integration and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) whereby the regional IOM office in Brussels provides support for voluntary return: the Return and Emigration of Asylumseekers from Belgium programme (the REAB programme).

Under the programme, the IOM representative handles the booking, purchase and any changes to the plane tickets. Under certain conditions, the IOM also refunds any extra transport or baggage costs<sup>1</sup>, and upon presentation of the original receipts refunds the cost of obtaining valid travel documents.

For many countries, moreover, the REAB participants receive a direct financial contribution of maximum 250 euros per adult and 125 euros per child, depending on age<sup>2</sup>. From June 2005, the REAB programme will no longer be open to citizens of the enlarged European Union.

Different categories of migrants are eligible for assisted return under the REAB programme:

- A. Asylum seekers who have withdrawn their asylum application;
- B. Asylum seekers to whom refugee status has been refused;
- C. All foreign nationals who may become dependent on the Belgian authorities and who wish to return to their country of origin<sup>3</sup>.

There are two conditions. Firstly, the decision must have been taken voluntarily, without any physical, psychological or material pressure being exerted. Secondly, there must be sufficient information available on the person in question to justify providing financial support for his return.

The IOM has an extensive network of partners throughout Belgium. The network includes local authorities (cities and towns), care structures for asylum seekers (Fedasil and Red Cross centres) and non-governmental organisations (such as Caritas International). In recent years, Caritas International has grown into one of the IOM's most important partners<sup>4</sup>. The social services of the REAB partners play a key role in the implementation of the programme. They provide information on the possibility of voluntary return, submit an application to the IOM and handle the social assistance arrangements prior to departure.

### 2.2. Trends

Statistical data for recent years provide a clearer picture of the trends within the REAB programme<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Maximum 50 euros per person

<sup>2</sup> 25 euros per year of life, not above the stated maximum. People who have been in Belgium for less than three months can receive maximum 75 euros.

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of recognised refugees and citizens of the EU or of a country of the Schengen Area.

<sup>4</sup> In 2003, 756 of the 2,814 returnees (or 28%) left through Caritas International in Brussels

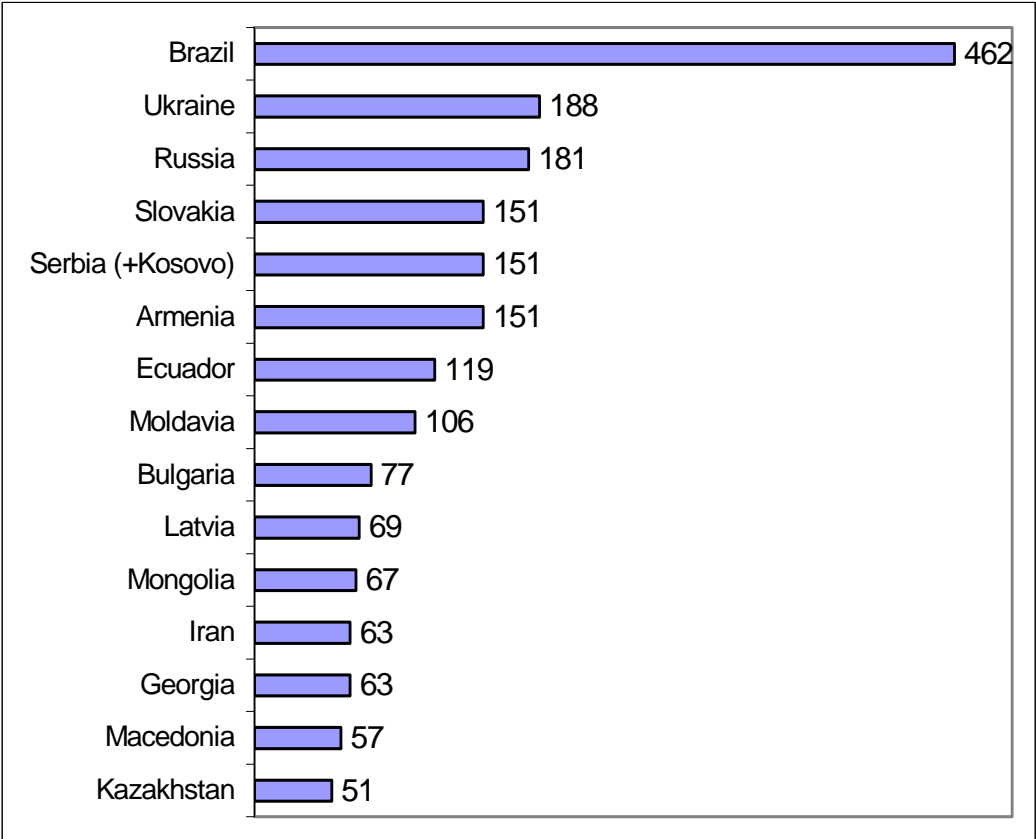
<sup>5</sup> [www.belgium.oim.int](http://www.belgium.oim.int)

Since 1984, already more than 27,000 people have returned to their country thanks to the REAB programme. Between 1998 and 2001, there was a sharp increase in the number of people who returned voluntarily. In 2001, there was a peak (3,546 people). In 2002 and 2003, the number of voluntary returns fell (2,814 in 2003).

It is not only asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers who apply to benefit from the REAB programme. In recent years, the number of participants who have never submitted an asylum application has significantly increased. Only a few people (5% of the total in 2003) decide to return in the course of their asylum procedure. The average participant in the REAB programme decides to return after spending around 19 months in Belgium. Many people consider returning only when they are no longer eligible to receive assistance from a care structure<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, there is a clear correlation between the number of asylum applications and the number of REAB cases in the following year. For example, in the year following the record year (2000), when 42,691 asylum applications were submitted, there was a peak in the number of REAB participants. After 2001, the number of asylum applications began to fall again, and this trend continued last year. However, the number of people who return voluntarily is not dropping as sharply as the number of asylum applications. The explanation for this can be found in the fact that more and more people who have never submitted an asylum application are using the REAB programme.

*Table 1. Most frequently occurring REAB destinations from January to October 2004*



Source: [www.fedasil.be](http://www.fedasil.be), November 2004

<sup>6</sup> IOM 2002 Annual Report, p. 25

In 2003, the destination of returnees in more than half of the cases was Eastern Europe. The number of voluntary returns to South American countries such as Brazil and Ecuador is increasing.

People from the new European member states (such as Slovakia and Czech Republic) can still apply to participate in the REAB programme (which is not intended for EU citizens) until June 2005. Other Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria still belong for the time being to the destination countries. In their case, however, the additional reintegration grant of maximum 250 euros has been scrapped, because it is suspected that this grant is one of the factors that attracts people to Belgium. After the grant was discontinued, there was a drop in the number of voluntary repatriations to Eastern European countries through the IOM. On the other hand, for a country like Ukraine, for which the grant has been maintained, the number of participants has remained more or less constant.

### **2.3. After return**

The assistance measures within the current REAB programme generally stop at the airport of the destination country of the returnees, although in some cases the return trip to their place of residence is arranged.

When it comes to the care and assistance of migrants after their return, the situation varies from country to country. There is no official international organisation that takes responsibility for reintegrating these people. However, in some countries a number of initiatives and projects have emerged in an effort to improve the reintegration and to better the returnees' chance of success. These initiatives have in the past come from NGOs or from institutions (such as the IOM itself) in cooperation with the authorities or one or more NGOs. It should also be said that in most cases<sup>7</sup> adult migrants who return through the REAB programme receive a grant of 250 euros, so that they can at least cope with their most pressing problems, but obviously in the longer term a once-only payment makes precious little difference.

The lack of a clear structure makes the assistance process fraught with difficulty and arbitrary. There is a need for a structured policy based on sound knowledge of the needs and the general situation of the participants in the REAB programme. It is essential to investigate the reasons why people are willing or unwilling to agree to assisted return, what needs they have and how non-governmental organisations or the authorities themselves can fulfil these needs to give voluntary returnees more chance of success.

---

<sup>7</sup> Not for the countries of the Schengen Area, Bulgaria or Romania

### **3. Structure of the project**

#### **3.1. Identified needs**

Caritas has for several years been assisting migrants who return voluntarily to their country of origin. On the strength of this experience, we have identified the following needs:

- The need for social assistance when they decide to leave Belgium voluntarily.
- The lack of overnight accommodation possibilities just before the return. In fact, more and more REAB candidates are placed in a situation of total dependency for several days or weeks before they leave.
- The need for care and assistance of returnees by an independent and competent social service after their return.
- The lack (in most destination countries) of structured care.
- The lack of real opportunities for sustainable reintegration of REAB families and individuals.
- The lack of practical information on the needs and motivations of those who wish to return, to make projects more effective and more targeted in future.
- The lack of information on the situation of people after they return.

The above comments underpin the project “Sustainable reintegration in Ukraine and Bulgaria after voluntary return”.

#### **3.2 Objectives**

The project is in two parts: voluntary return to Bulgaria and Ukraine with the assistance of a social service before the departure and upon arrival with a view, on the one hand, to ensuring sustainable reintegration and, on the other hand, to analysing our experiences and findings within the framework of this return programme that should lead to the determination of criteria for assisted return with a view to sustainable reintegration. For this second part, an analysis is made of the situation of returnee asylum seekers from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

For the first part of this project, Caritas International is working closely with its foreign partners Caritas Bulgaria and Caritas Ukraine. At a preparatory meeting in Brussels in March 2004, we discussed with the foreign partners how we could help people who return voluntarily to become reintegrated. In addition to the practical and financial aspects of cooperation, we set the following general objectives:

- To develop a relationship based on trust with people who return, providing information, assistance and preparation for potential returnees.
- To assist people after their return for three months and even longer if necessary.
- To provide people who return with practical possibilities for reintegration and by offering housing, courses, help in finding a school, a job, medical help, information, mediation with the authorities, etc.
- To adapt or add to the programme, if necessary, based on interim reviews, so that the programme meets the needs of returnees more effectively.

The experience acquired by our partners in assisting victims of trafficking in human beings who have returned and in caring for asylum seekers in their own country offers a unique opportunity to use their existing structure and experience for the reintegration project.

For the second part, the objective is to put together criteria for sustainable assisted return based on an analysis of our assisted return programme for Bulgaria and Ukraine. We then test these findings against the situation of returnee refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Caritas Sarajevo was commissioned by Caritas International (as a supplement to our study) to follow up 74 people from different families who after their emigration decided to return to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The comparison of the circumstances of return to three countries which are politically, economically and culturally very different gives us an overall picture of the reality of assisted return.

### **3.3. Target group of the project**

The target group of our social assistance project for sustainable reintegration consists of asylum seekers and definitively rejected asylum seekers of Bulgarian or Ukrainian nationality.

We summarise below the reasons why we specifically chose Bulgaria and Ukraine for our pilot project:

- Both Ukraine and Bulgaria have in recent years been selected as REAB destination countries<sup>8</sup>.
- The difference between Ukraine, a very large country with a poor economic situation, and Bulgaria, a smaller country which is more economically developed and is regarded as an applicant for membership of the EU, lends more general validity to our findings and allows us to develop a model.
- In Ukraine and Bulgaria, there are Caritas structures which are members of the international Caritas network. Caritas International Belgium therefore has reliable partners in the countries with the same commitment and conviction, which of course promotes cooperation.
- Both Caritas Ukraine and Caritas Bulgaria have many years of experience with the care and integration of asylum seekers<sup>9</sup> and the reintegration of victims of trafficking in women, including from the European Union. Also, prior to this project both countries already had a robust care structure and a network of local organisations (through the local church structure) and partners (including the IOM representatives in the country, JRS, UNHCR, etc.).

### **3.4. Caritas partners in the countries of origin**

Caritas International Belgium is a member of Caritas Internationalis, a network of 162 organisations operating in 200 different countries. This offers the advantage that in most countries in the world we can call on reliable partner organisations, where people work with

---

<sup>8</sup> In 2003, 166 Ukrainians and 133 Bulgarians returned through the REAB programme, i.e. over 10% of the total number of REAB that year.

<sup>9</sup> Bulgaria in particular has in recent years had a wave of asylum seekers, including from Afghanistan and Iraq

the necessary knowledge of the situation on the ground. The international structure of Caritas ensures an effective exchange of information on social assistance, structural care and integration of migrants (e.g. a *migration* working group and *social policy* working group within Caritas Europa). Within the framework of our reintegration project, we therefore cooperate closely with Caritas Bulgaria, Caritas Ukraine and Caritas Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina).

Due to the economic and political differences between Belgium, Bulgaria and Ukraine, there are obvious differences in the social provisions and in the resources for the care of migrants and returnees. Like Belgium in the 1990s, Bulgaria and Ukraine are now facing a large increase in the number of asylum seekers, especially from Asia and the Middle East. As yet, however, there is no proper legislation to ensure the care and assistance of these people, as there is in Belgium. This gap is being filled, *inter alia*, by organisations like Caritas Bulgaria and Caritas Ukraine.

Caritas Bulgaria is a partner of the Bulgarian government for the care, social assistance and integration of hundreds of asylum seekers in the country, for the care and reintegration of victims of trafficking in women and for assistance with the reintegration of returnee asylum seekers, some of whom come from Belgium. The local IOM group is working closely with Caritas Bulgaria.

In Ukraine, for its part, Caritas Ukraine assists people who have fallen through the social safety net. Also, Caritas Ukraine, through *Coatnet* and with the support of the European Commission, has set up an international network to combat trafficking in women. In Ukraine, Caritas works with the IOM and other regional NGOs to help reintegrate victims of trafficking in women. Caritas Ukraine has used this experience in our project to help returnees become reintegrated.

Caritas Sarajevo, the partner who presented our questionnaire to returnees in Bosnia-Herzegovina, is regularly confronted with the problems of people who have voluntarily returned after the war to their country of birth and has experience in assisting such people.

### **3.5. The practical help offered by Caritas**

In Belgium, Caritas International has been assisting people with voluntary return since 1984. The social worker seeks to build a relationship based on trust with the person to make the return process as smooth as possible. He or she contacts the IOM to request plane tickets and sometimes makes arrangements to obtain valid travel documents. He or she refers people with housing problems to a reception centre where they can spend the last seven days before they leave. Social assistance at the time of departure is very important.

The existing assistance programme is being extended within the reintegration project. Caritas International puts people who want to leave in contact with the social services in Bulgaria and Ukraine by telephone. The emphasis is on continuity of assistance. People trust Caritas International Belgium but are often suspicious of organisations in their own country. We conduct interviews with people during which we try to find out more about their background, expectations and needs.

If necessary, the social services of Caritas Bulgaria collect the person at the airport. Depending on the needs of the persons concerned, they can live for three months in a house which is rented and paid for by Caritas. If necessary, they receive food parcels, medical assistance and accompaniment back to their region of origin. They can also attend computer classes offered by Caritas Bulgaria in three different cities (Sofia, Roesse and Plovdiv). This offer was initially intended for asylum seekers in Bulgaria. For other vocational training courses, Caritas Bulgaria contributes towards the costs. In addition to this material assistance, our Bulgarian partner also offers social assistance. Returnees are helped by the social services with all kinds of problems.

Also in Ukraine, those who return can be collected at the airport. In Kiev, people who return can stay for a maximum of three months in Caritas Ukraine's reception centre. This centre is close to the social service. Returnees receive food, they can enrol for vocational training courses (paid by Caritas) and they can receive a free medical checkup, a contribution towards medical care, help in finding a school, etc. In this situation too, social assistance is very important.

The amount of assistance returnees receive depends on needs and the demand. Of course, they are under absolutely no obligation to use Caritas's services.

### **3.6. Questionnaires on which the analysis is based<sup>10</sup>**

We have used questionnaires to get a clear picture of the situation and needs of people who return voluntarily to Bulgaria or to Ukraine (see annexes). Based on the questionnaire, we make up a profile of people who can be helped by our reintegration project. The first questionnaire is completed in Belgium prior to departure. It is designed to gather information on:

- personal details (age, region, language, family situation, etc.)
- background, both in the country of origin and in Belgium
- their present situation and status
- any needs and anticipated difficulties upon return.

Based on these data, we can learn more about the "average returnee" and compare and contrast the two groups. When drawing up the questionnaire, we tried to gather information as scientifically and objectively as possible. To this end, we followed the general guidelines suggested by Professor Billiet (KU Leuven University) in his manual "*Methoden van sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek*" ("Methods of Social-Scientific Enquiry") (1996) and especially the guidelines on drawing up a "standardised questionnaire" (p. 159-210). The questions were made as brief and clear as possible. In most cases, the questions deal with facts (age, place of residence, mother tongue, etc.). The answers to some of these questions can be checked against the general statistics of the IOM annual report.

A number of questions are designed to elicit the interviewee's (subjective) view of his expectations and current problems. For this we use a list of specific (practical) questions for which the answers "other" and "none (no opinion)" also appear on the list. The questionnaires

---

<sup>10</sup> J.B. Billiet: *Methoden van sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek: ontwerp en dataverzameling*, 1996, Chapter 8: *de gestandaardiseerde vragenlijst*. Leuven/Amersfoort, Acco.

have been tested with asylum seekers leaving the country and then adapted (some questions were omitted, and some questions were made more specific).

The questionnaires were in French, Dutch, Russian, Bulgarian and English. All the respondents were informed of the identity of the survey organisation (Caritas), the aim of the questionnaire (to gain more insight into the situation and needs of the participants in the REAB programme in order to guarantee better assistance in future), the confidentiality of the survey, the possibility of refusing to participate (no commitment) and the possibility of receiving further explanations. The interviewer provided the necessary information for the respondents to complete the questionnaires.

People who did not have legal residence and status were also invited to participate in this survey. Of course, no one was obliged to answer the questions (or for that matter all the questions). To reach more Bulgarians and Ukrainians (to make our survey more representative), we asked other REAB partners to get the questionnaires filled in.

As the role of the interviewer is very important, the interviewers of the other organisations were given comprehensive information on the structure of this survey. Some interviewers decided (after a brief perusal) to allow the returnees to complete the questionnaires on their own. Others interviewed the respondents directly and read over the questionnaire with them. However, both techniques (face-to-face interviews and surveys<sup>11</sup>) are scientifically acceptable, and a combination of the two will somewhat narrow the error margin.

Other advantages:

- From February to November, a total of 98 questionnaires were completed by Bulgarians and Ukrainians who returned voluntarily to their country of birth, which accounts for approximately half of all those who returned to either of these countries in that period in 2004.
- The survey was carried out in the first instance - voluntarily and anonymously - when the person concerned was already sure of the possibility of returning. In other words, there was absolutely no need for the interviewee to conceal or colour the truth. If someone was unable or unwilling to answer, his wish was respected.
- The relationship based on trust between the social worker and the interviewee, which is non-existent in conventional surveys, is an advantage in our case, because it helps guarantee that the answers are honest. Also, the interviewers are familiar with the issue and the problems involved. When the respondent himself completes the questionnaire, he does this in his own language<sup>12</sup>.

At this point, we should emphasise that this survey is designed as a means of gaining insight into the circumstances surrounding the return rather than as a scientific exercise. The interviewees' answers will not be presented as established facts but as pointers to help us develop our criteria for assisted return.

---

<sup>11</sup> J.B. Billiet, *Methoden van Sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek*, Chapter 9.1.: "Voor en nadelen van interviews en postenquêtes", p. 212 et seq.

<sup>12</sup> For ethnic Ukrainians, this is the second language (Russian), which is of course very closely related to their first language (Ukrainian). The first language of the Bulgarian minority groups is (among others) Turkish, Roma or Romanian, but the vast majority were educated only in Bulgarian in their own country and therefore can speak only Bulgarian fluently.

It is not easy to carry out surveys or even to have people fill in questionnaires on their own. Questions that might seem neutral to us can often be terribly painful or confrontational for the interviewee. We therefore stressed the confidential nature of the interview and the fact that it was anonymous, especially when dealing with people who had never submitted an asylum application. The questionnaire brought back some (negative) memories of the interview that the authorities carried out when they arrived in Belgium, after which they were rejected. A small minority were therefore unwilling to take part in the survey or were unwilling to answer certain questions.

To gain more insight into the return process and, more specifically, to answer the question “What happens to people after they return?”, it is also helpful to ask people about their situation a few months after they have returned. The social services of our partners in Bulgaria and Ukraine kept in touch with some people after they returned and asked them some questions about their professional and social reintegration. This aspect of the study was difficult to implement within the timeframe of this project. For this reason, the survey was extended with a study on people who had previously gone back to Bosnia-Herzegovina and had already been living in the country for more than six months.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Introduction

We asked the Ukrainians and Bulgarians who had left Belgium through the REAB programme to take part in our study before they left. A total of 98 persons (families<sup>13</sup>) were interviewed on why they were returning and on the problems they may face on arrival. Of the 98 questionnaires that were completed, 24 were filled in by persons (or families) who had at some time submitted an asylum application, while the other interviewees returned as REAB C refugees<sup>14</sup>.

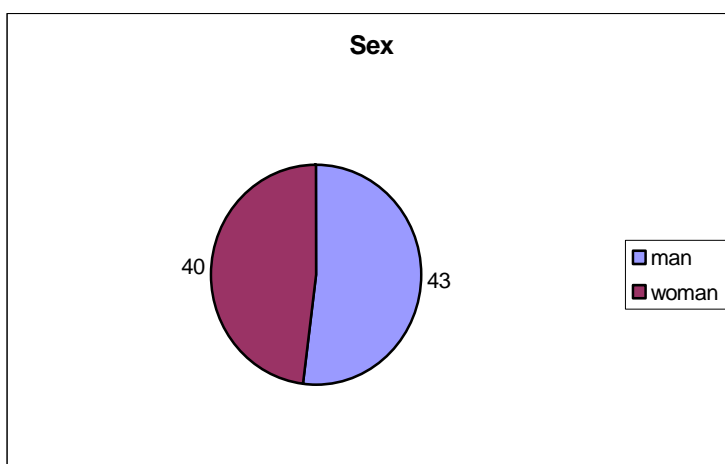
The questionnaires were filled in anonymously, either by the returnees themselves (in their own language) or by the social worker from Caritas International or some other social service in Belgium. The answers are those given by the persons themselves: the subjective, coloured views of the people who had returned to Ukraine or Bulgaria through the REAB programme in 2004, together with the answers given by Bosnians who had returned to their country of origin a few years before.

The views of asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers and migrants who have never enjoyed legal residence status in Belgium are very important. At the end of the day, it is these people who decide whether they want to return and when. And this decision is based largely on their experience and perception of the return. We found that very many people spoke honestly and openly about their stay in Belgium and their reasons for leaving. We therefore believe that our findings give a representative overview of the circumstances surrounding voluntary return.

### 4.2. The return to Ukraine

#### A. Personal situation

A surprisingly large number of Ukrainians returned in 2004<sup>15</sup>. Our social service in Brussels and the social service of the Protestant Social Centre in Antwerp interviewed a total of 83 persons (individuals or family heads). Nineteen of them had at some time submitted an

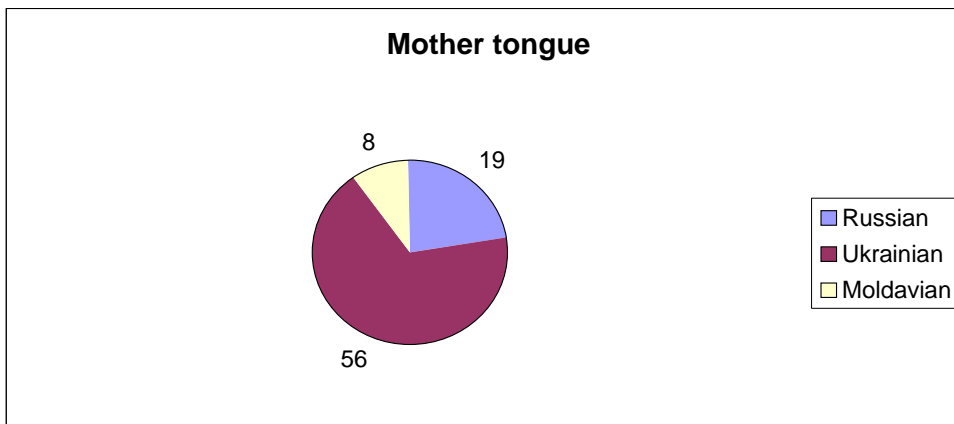
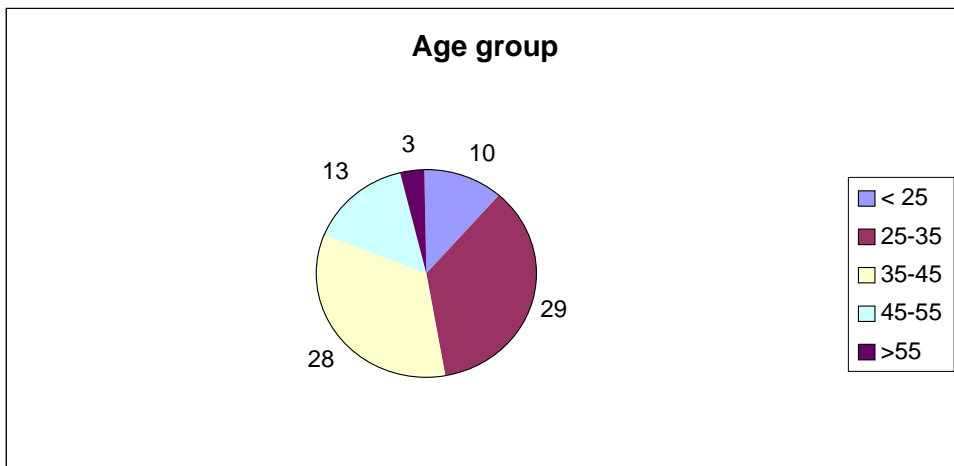
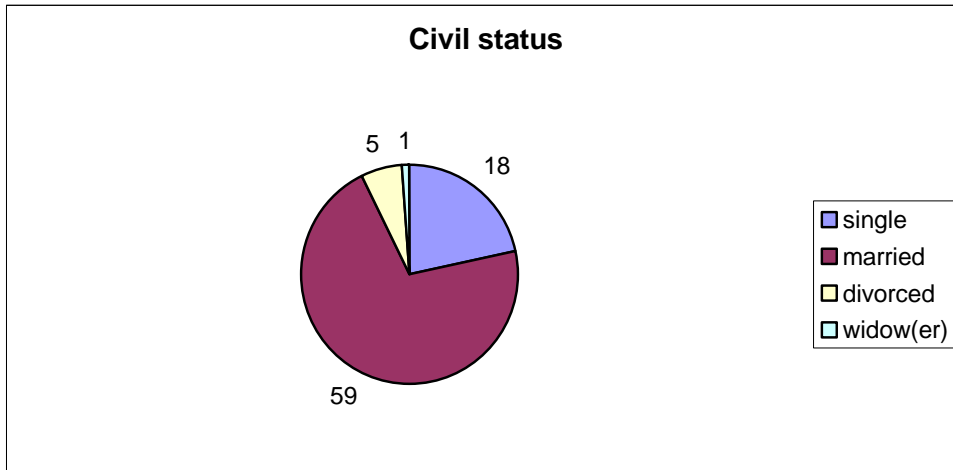


asylum application. Because we wanted to know in the first place who was willing to return voluntarily, we included all the 83 interviewees in our first set of statistics. It was only at the next stage (reasons for returning, problems upon returning, etc.) that we drew a distinction between (former) asylum seekers and people who never submitted an asylum application.

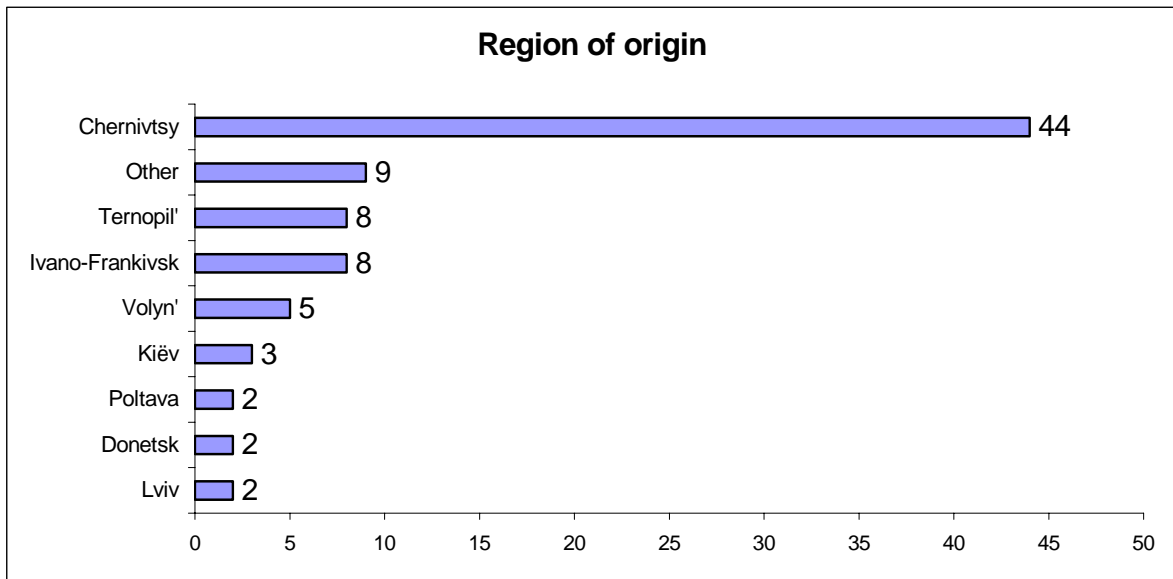
<sup>13</sup> Only one questionnaire was completed per family

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 2.1., REAB

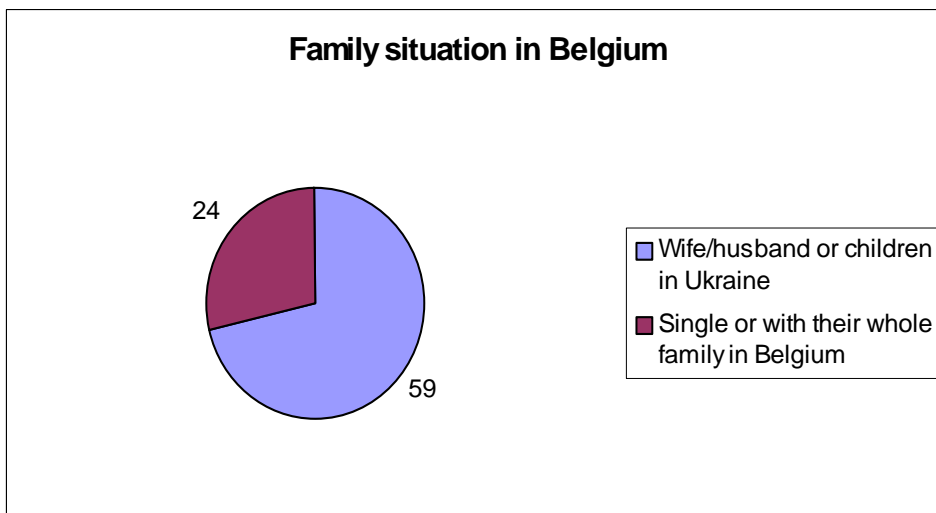
<sup>15</sup> At the time of publication, we had data only up to and including October 2004, but by that time 177 Ukrainians had already left, compared with 166 in 2003.



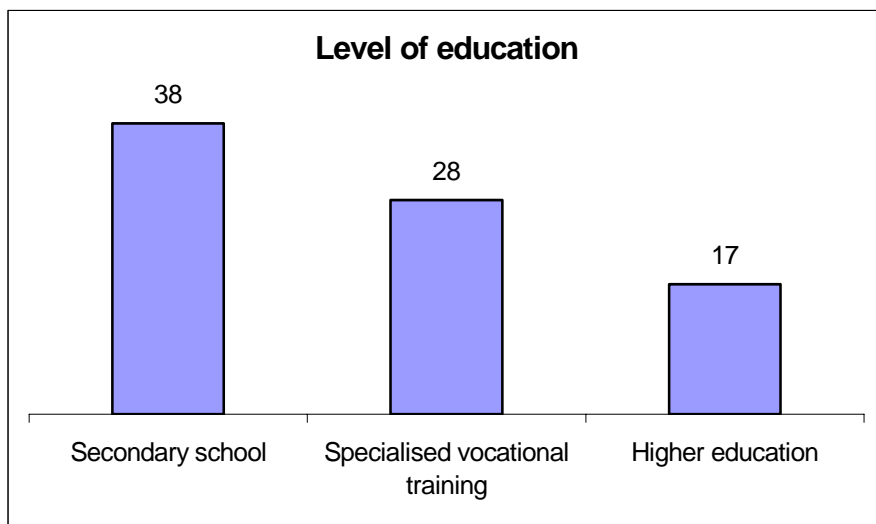
Somewhat more men have returned than women. Most of the interviewees were married. They were generally between 25 and 44 years of age. Children were not interviewed. As regards the mother tongue and ethnic-cultural background, it is often difficult to tell. There are many mixed marriages (Russian-Ukrainian), and Ukrainian is quite similar to Russian. It is therefore perhaps more interesting to determine what region the interviewees come from.



One immediately striking fact is the number of people from the region of Chernivtsy in western Ukraine. Also, the regions of Ternopil (8 persons interviewed), Ivano-Frankivsk (8), Volyn (5) and Lviv (2) are in the west of Ukraine. It is also striking that people from the same region also live in the same city. For example, the community from Ivano-Frankivsk lives mainly in Antwerp, while migrants from Chernivtsy generally live in Brussels. People from the other parts of the country (Kiev, Poltava, Donetsk and 9 other regions) are rather isolated. The western regions, where most people speak Ukrainian, are economically less developed than the eastern regions. Unemployment is very high there. Furthermore, since May 2004 these regions have been on the external borders of the European Union (Hungary, Slovakia and Poland).

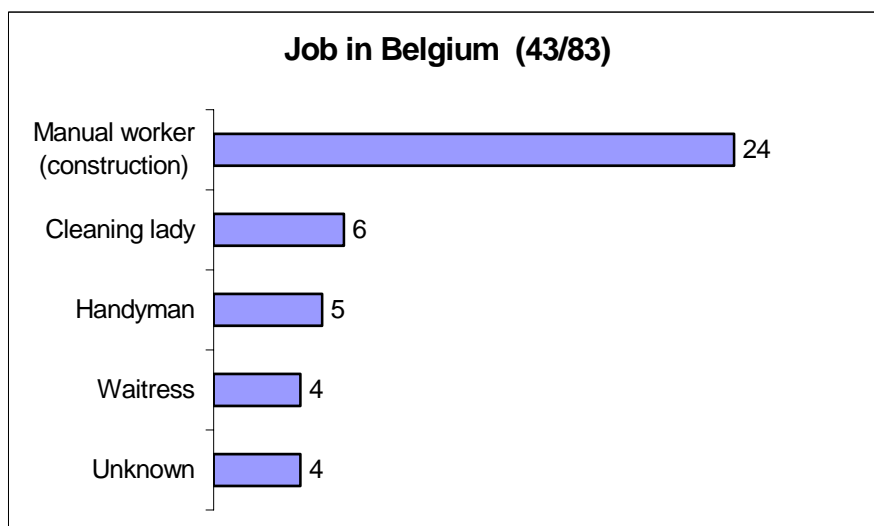


Most people had come to Belgium without their partner or children. When the children go to school or fall ill, many parents feel obliged to go abroad temporarily in the hope of finding work or better-paid work. 70% of the returnees who were interviewed (58 out of 83) have one or more children. These children attended school only in 4 of these 58 cases.



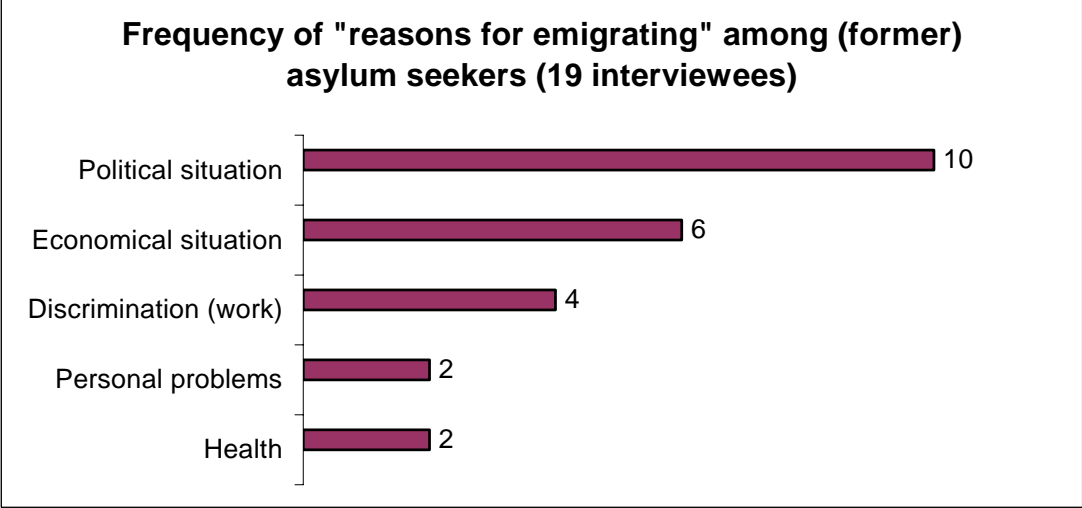
The educational level of the interviewees from Ukraine ranges from lower secondary school to university. All the interviewees had attended school until their 18th birthday. Only 12 of the 84 interviewees had been unemployed before they left the country. One of the interviewees had been a geography teacher before he left. It is not unemployment but low income that appears to be an important reason for leaving. Most people had received technical training (electricians, engineers, cooks, bricklayers, etc.), so that they could also find (unofficial) work in Belgium.

#### B. Residence in Belgium



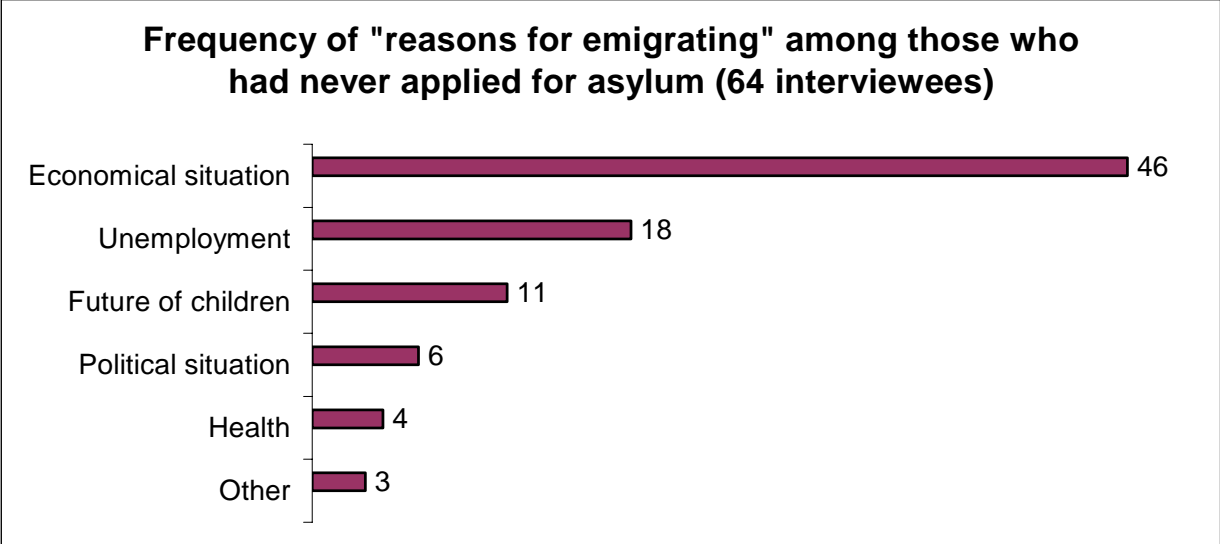
No fewer than 43 of the 83 interviewees said they had worked in Belgium. Also, 4 of the 19 rejected asylum seekers said they had worked after their asylum application had been rejected. Many had been manual workers, especially in the construction industry, while a number of women had worked as waitresses (4) or cleaners (6). Some interviewees were reluctant to discuss their activities in Belgium (4, indicated as “unknown”).

When asked the question “Why did you decide to leave your country?”, most interviewees mentioned the “economic situation”. In this regard, a distinction should be drawn between people who had at some point submitted an asylum application and those who had never submitted an application.



*More than one answer possible*

Most of the interviewees who had at some point submitted an asylum application mentioned “political situation” in answer to the question “Why did you leave your country at that time?”. These political reasons are seldom recognised by the asylum agencies, given the relatively calm and secure situation in Ukraine. People who belong to the Russian and Moldavian minority groups told us that it was very difficult for them to find work, because many employers give preference to ethnic Ukrainians. In most cases, the reasons for leaving are more complex than our categories “economical situation” and “political situation” can describe; it usually involves a combination of factors (including personal reasons).



*More than one answer possible*

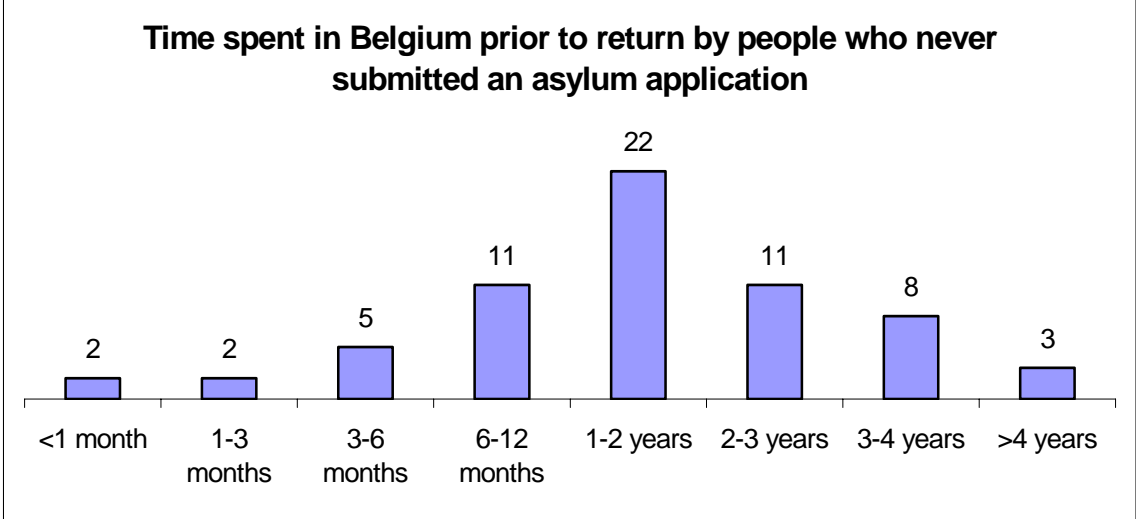
Furthermore, among the interviewees who had never submitted an asylum application there were people who had emigrated for (subjective) political reasons (for example, discrimination at work). However, they doubted whether these motives would be sufficient grounds for an

asylum application. Most of these interviewees said that they had left because of the poor economic conditions (low wages, unemployment, the high cost of rent, studies, etc.) in the hope of being able to work here.

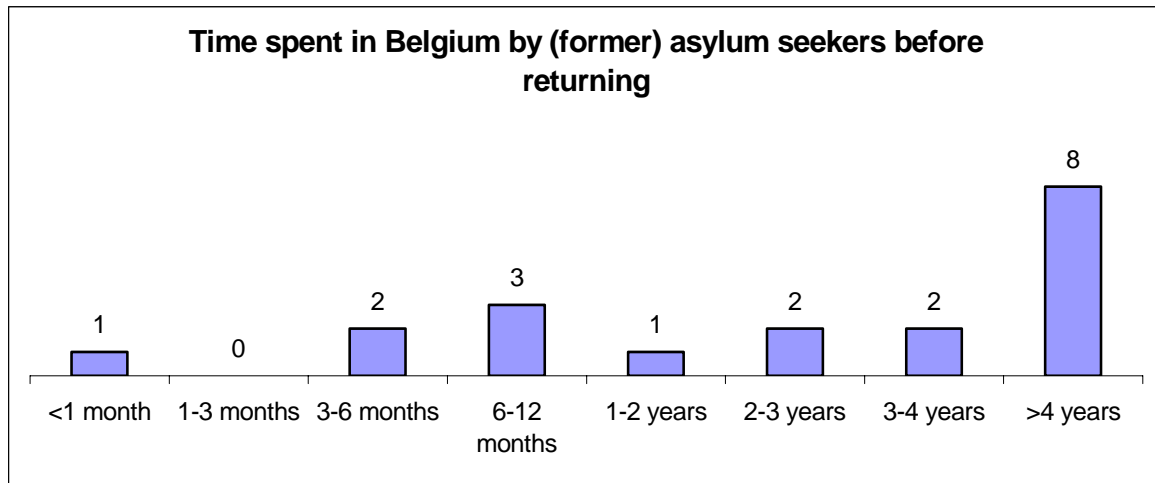
A total of six interviewees said that their health (in other words, the high cost of medical treatment in their own country) had been an important factor in their decision to emigrate. Furthermore, we regularly came across victims of trafficking in human beings who had been promised legal work by shady travel agencies, adverts and false promises. IOM Ukraine, Caritas Ukraine and other local organisations have already been working for several years on campaigns against trafficking in human beings and trafficking in women. During a working visit to Kiev, we were able to see for ourselves that the national newspapers feature advertisements in the style “*Want to work in Western Europe? Call...*”.

However, many people are willing to face the risks of illegal residence and to pay large amounts of money to obtain travel documents through mafioso intermediaries. Even if they find work, they have no protection and they are badly paid. Nonetheless, there is a real chance of success, that is, of going back home with enough money to cover all the basic needs of their family for a few years.

The reason why the interviewees went specifically to Belgium and not, for example, to France or Germany, appeared to be a difficult question to answer. It could be that the choice of a Western European emigration country depends on feedback from returnees and traffickers, on contacts and what the local “travel agency” has on offer.



A small minority decided to go back home after a short stay. These people often lived in Belgium isolated from their compatriots, sometimes even on the street, and they had been misled before they left. Another reason for returning after a short period was some event or other in their country (sickness, death of a family member, etc.) that prompted them to go back home as quickly as possible. 44 of the 64 Ukrainians who had never submitted an asylum application stayed in Belgium for a few years before returning home.



The (rejected) asylum seekers we interviewed often said that they had been living in Belgium for more than four years when they applied for voluntary return. Through the federal centres (including the federal centre in Broechem), we came in contact with people who had recently received a negative decision as a result of which they could no longer stay in the centre and therefore opted for voluntary return. However, there are very many people who, after a negative decision, decide to stay in Belgium and to look for work (in the black economy). Very many people decide to return only when all hope of recognition of their refugee status is lost.

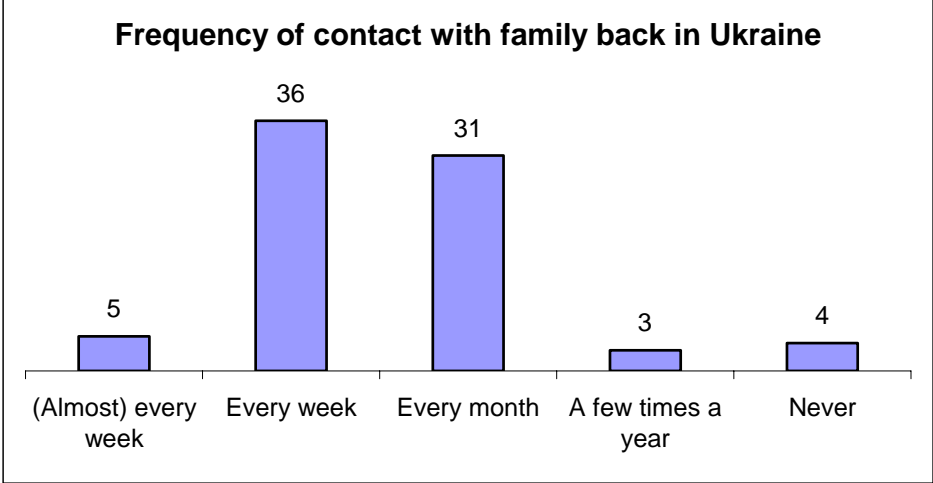
Although the reasons for coming to Belgium are often different from those given by people who have never submitted an asylum application, they suddenly find themselves in the same situation. In our view, it is no longer possible in these circumstances to draw a strict distinction between REAB B and REAB C refugees.

### C. Problems experienced by returnees

For people who have at some point submitted an asylum application, the fact that they receive a negative decision is often the most important reason for returning home. However, because by no means everyone decides to return immediately after receiving a negative reply to their asylum application, we feel it is more useful to put all the 83 questionnaires together in the following table.

<b>Reasons given for returning</b> (83 interviewees - more than one answer possible)	<b>Frequency of answers given</b>
Lack of money	46 x
(Fear of) illegal residence	36 x
No hope of obtaining legal residence status (as a recognised refugee or through regularisation)	34 x
Sickness or death in the country of origin	15 x
Disillusionment with the situation in Belgium	12 x
Changed situation in the country of origin	6 x
Unemployment	4 x
Poor living conditions	4 x

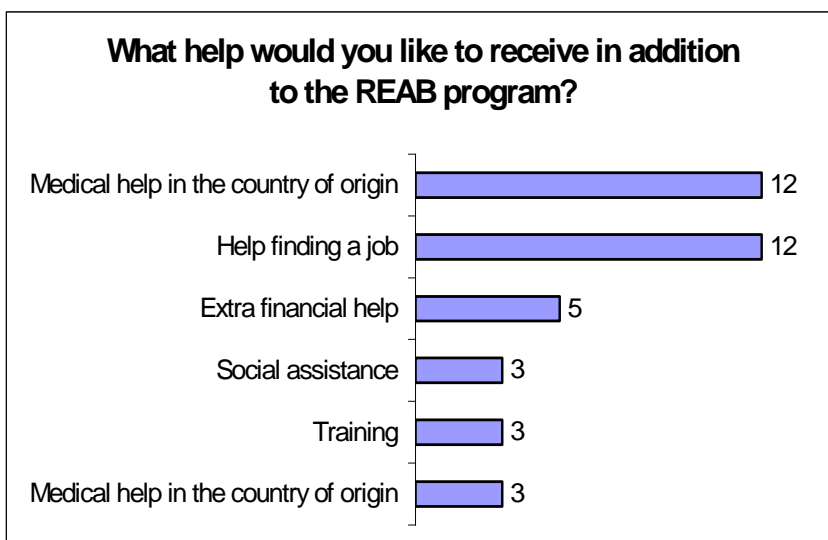
A large number of people, including those who have never submitted an asylum application, are in a precarious situation (“lack of money”, “unemployment”, “poor housing or no housing”, “illness”, etc.), and the voluntary return programme is seen as the last chance of getting out of their plight in Belgium.



The majority of Ukrainians, including the asylum seekers, have regular contact with their family back home. As we have mentioned, many people who are married or divorced come to Belgium without their partner or children. However, they still have close ties with their country of origin. This may suggest that only a few people intend to settle permanently in our country.

Of all the interviewees, 5 people were staying in a (federal) reception centre just prior to their departure. 2 people were homeless. The others shared the rent for private accommodation with people from their country (41 people) or rented a room themselves (35 people).

Of the 83 persons interviewed, 36 people requested some form of assistance in addition to what is provided by the REAB programme. The table below gives an overview of what they requested.



*More than one answer possible*

17 families/persons of the 83 Ukrainians<sup>16</sup> interviewed had submitted an application to be helped by Caritas International within the framework of the reintegration project. Eight of them had at some point submitted an asylum application. Also, 9 people who had never submitted an asylum application were given assistance. We found that help with finding a job and requesting medical assistance in their own country is important for these people. Those who do not have legal residence status in Belgium and who fall ill can no longer work and can therefore no longer afford to stay here. Fear of forced repatriation and the high medical costs prevent them from obtaining treatment in Belgium. Out of sheer necessity, they eventually decide to return voluntarily. Medical care in Ukraine is very important to them.

A number of interviewees call for a system whereby Ukrainians could come here to work legally for a certain time (for example, for one year). This type of system already exists in Portugal. Furthermore, the Consul of the Ukrainian Embassy and the President of the Ukrainian refugee organisation in Belgium<sup>16</sup> inquired into the possibility of contracts of this kind for their compatriots.

From the standpoint of the returnees, the existence of the REAB programme is always something positive. After all, it allows them to return home with dignity, anonymously and free of charge after spending some time in Belgium. Most of the persons who participate in the REAB programme are in a difficult situation. For one thing, their plans in Belgium have met with only partial (or temporary) success, and in any case their situation in Belgium is very precarious: they have no protection in their place of work, they constantly face the risk of forced repatriation, and their accommodation is very expensive or very substandard. If something goes wrong (they fall ill in Belgium, they lose their income, etc.), upon their return they are often worse off than when they left the country. For people in such precarious situations, it is by no means always enough to receive help through the straightforward REAB programme.

<sup>16</sup> Including children and family members who had left, they represented 20 people

#### D. Help offered within the framework of the reintegration project

17 interviewees requested additional assistance in the context of their return for themselves or for their family. Here is an overview of these requests:

<b>What kind of help would you like to receive?</b> (17 interviewees - more than one answer possible)	<b>Frequency of answers given</b>
Medical assistance in Ukraine	10 x
Help with finding work	3 x
Housing in Ukraine	2 x
Training and courses	3 x
Contact with social services in Ukraine and assistance	6 x
Contact with family members (from Belgium, by telephone)	5 x
Accompaniment to the Embassy, to the airport, etc.	2 x

A number of people decided to leave before they learned of the existence of an additional reintegration project. They saw the services offered by Caritas mainly as additional support to facilitate their return somewhat and to make the process more reassuring. For others, the existence of this project was what prompted them to leave.

**Medical assistance in Ukraine** is important to them. They often request medical care not only for themselves, but also for their children (newborn baby, daughter sick at home, etc.). Caritas Ukraine works within the framework of this project with a regional hospital in Kiev. According to Ukrainian social legislation, only people who are registered in the district of the hospital receive free treatment, which is often a problem for returnees. Caritas Ukraine has negotiated with the hospital in Kiev so that people who do not (yet) have official registration or proof of identity can nonetheless receive free treatment. They must in any case pay for medicine and the use of equipment. Caritas has provided financial assistance in a number of cases.

Some people who insisted on additional medical care in Belgium and phoned the social services in Kiev did not present themselves immediately after they arrived. However, they received the address and phone numbers of Caritas Ukraine and left in the knowledge that they could go somewhere in case of need.

**Helping people find work** is not easy. Caritas Ukraine works with the regional official employment centres (similar to the Belgian VDAB). In Ukraine, people who register in these offices are entitled to a (modest) payment after 6 months' unemployment. However, none of the people who left Belgium were aware of the existence of these job centres before they left. Caritas Ukraine had several contacts with the "employment centre" for the regions of Krym and Chernivtsy and passed on the information (an overview of vocational training opportunities, courses and openings in the local labour market) to our social service, and they in turn passed on this information to the people concerned. In two cases, the people concerned asked Caritas for a loan to start up their own business in Ukraine. It was not possible to agree to this. After all, starting up your own business is not by any means easy, as the administrative costs alone can be prohibitive.

Three people followed **vocational training** to help them find work more easily. These courses are given by the employment centres, and in principle they are free of charge. These

persons were informed by Caritas Ukraine of the existence of these offices and of the administrative formalities to be completed (the necessary documents, the address and opening hours of the offices, etc.). Sometimes, however, there were other problems (e.g. the possibility of childcare for single mothers), so the additional financial assistance offered by Caritas Ukraine was very useful.

Caritas was able to help when people requested **housing in Ukraine**. Two returnees stayed in the transit house in Kiev (in the building of Caritas Kiev). In both cases, the people accommodated were unaccompanied and had no house or family where they could go. The possibility of obtaining (temporary) food and accommodation in Ukraine was a condition *sine qua non* for return. However, we always make a point of stressing the temporary nature of such forms of accommodation. In the meantime, people can seek solutions (work), with the help of the local social services.

To be able to make plans for the future, it is important for returnees to have accurate information so that they can revise their expectations according to the situation in the region where they live. In this context, we found that **contact** and **consultation** with the social service of Caritas Ukraine is very useful. Some people preferred to contact their family or friends. With the help of Caritas International, people themselves could telephone to make better preparations for their return. The return home is likely to be more successful if returnees are well informed of what they might expect. Their **trust** in the social services in Belgium and in the REAB program is strengthened through personal contacts and practical arrangements such as picking them up at the airport, temporary care, help with finding work, etc.

Some returnees just want help with one specific problem (supply of information, accompaniment to the airport, etc.), while others request more long-term social assistance in their country of origin (accommodation, work, food, financial problems, etc.). It is only for the latter group that we can assess their reintegration and the sustainability of their return. As for the persons whom we have supported over a longer period of time, we have found that social assistance has genuinely produced results. None of the persons concerned has expressed the desire to emigrate again, and they have found work or are still following training with a view to obtaining employment. Their relations with the social services are good; there is a genuine relationship based on trust.

Of course, given the economic situation in Ukraine we cannot guarantee work within the framework of our project. However, we endeavour to make the reintegration process as problem-free as possible by first eliminating any individual obstacles to reintegration, such as administrative problems, housing problems, medical care, lack of training, lack of facilities for the children, lack of money to contact family members, etc.

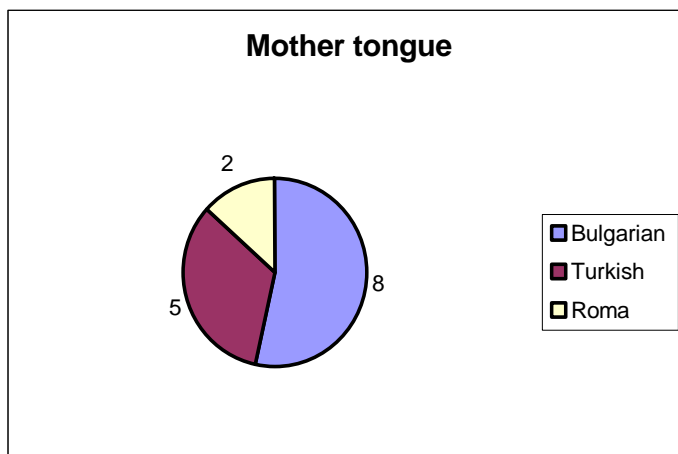
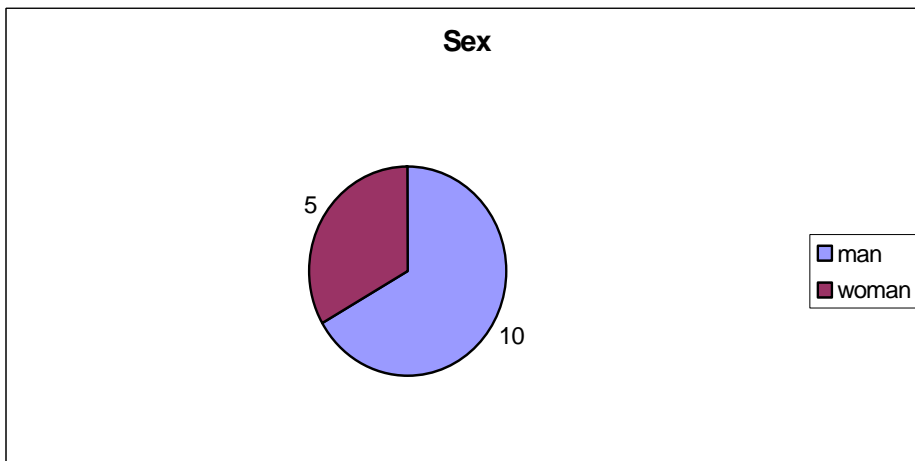
The number of people who have been helped through the project is only a relatively small percentage of the number of Ukrainians who left in 2004 (21 persons out of a total 188 as of mid-December 2004). Not everyone who leaves needs extra help, but for those who have been helped this project really makes an important difference. However, we will have to wait a few years before we get a clear idea of the long-term impact of the project on sustainable integration.

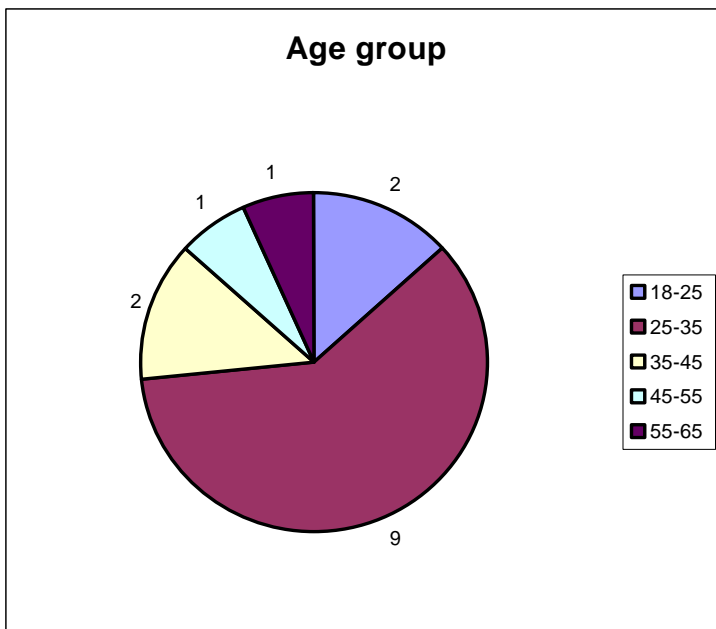
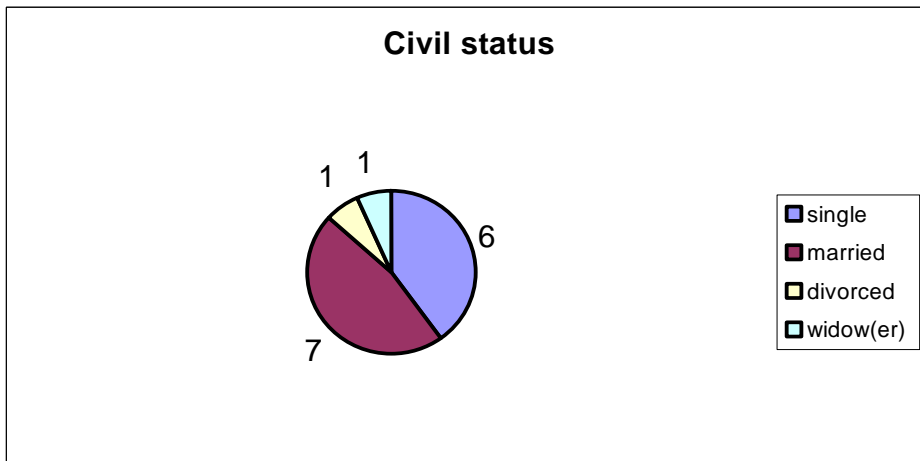
### 4.3. The return to Bulgaria

#### A. Personal situation

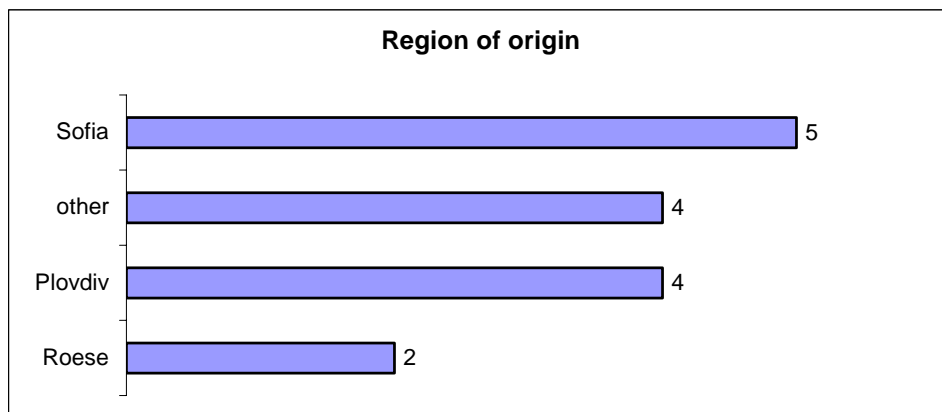
Traditionally, fewer Bulgarians than Ukrainians turn to the social service of Caritas International in Brussels. A large proportion of the Bulgarian community lives in Gent, and most of those who returned thanks to the REAB program went through the Asylum and Refugee Policy service of the City of Gent (a REAB partner until 30 June 2004) and Fedasil Gent (from July 2004).

We did not receive any completed questionnaires from these services, but thanks to different discussions with the staff of the Asylum and Refugee Policy service and with the staff of Intercultureel Netwerk Gent we have a general idea of the situation of assisted return from Gent. We ourselves interviewed 15 family heads and individuals (representing a total of 24 people). The statistics given below therefore relate to 15 dossiers, but we have supplemented these findings with the experiences of the aforementioned services.

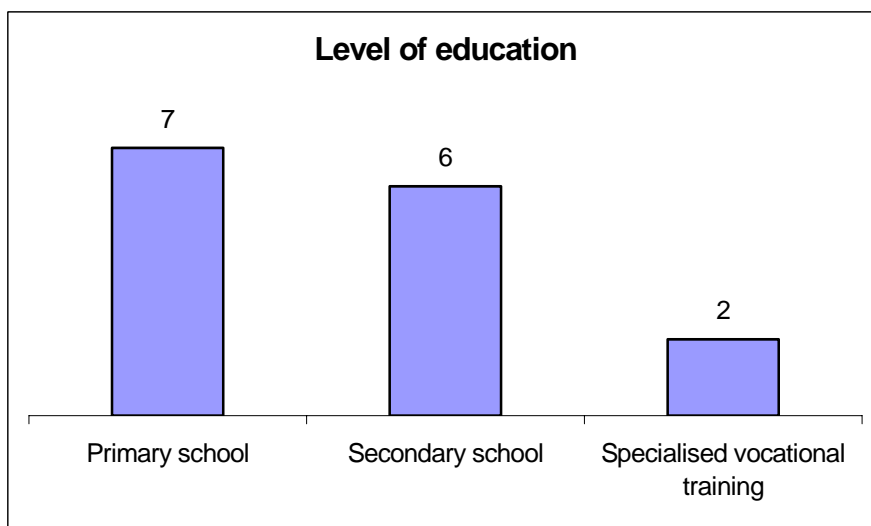




If we can draw any conclusions from these figures, it is that almost half of the persons who have left (7 out of 15) belong to an ethnic minority (the Turkish-speaking minority and the Roma). Also in Gent, most of the Bulgarians belong to the Turkish-speaking minority. Most people come to Belgium when they are professionally active. Our social service in Brussels regularly assisted married people as well as single ones. We have found that, especially in the case of asylum seekers, a relatively large number come to Belgium with children. Some interviewees clearly initially intended to settle permanently in Belgium.

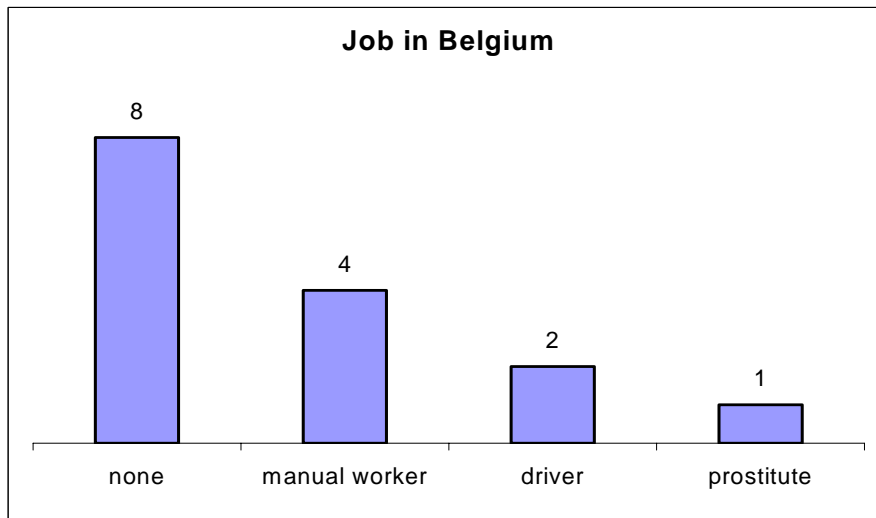


The people who have left through Caritas International come not only from the agricultural districts on the external borders of the country, but also, *inter alia*, from the capital. Most of the Turkish-speaking Bulgarian community lives in the east, and they generally also return to that part of the country.

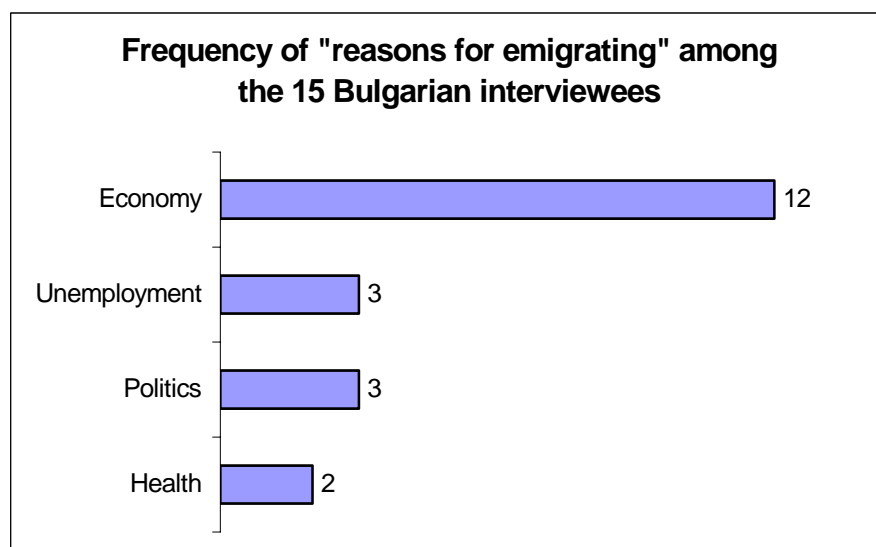


A more important finding is that the educational level of Bulgarian returnees is generally low, especially in the case of the minorities. Only 1 person out of 7 from the Turkish or Roma minorities had completed lower secondary education. If our figures are representative, this would mean that it is mainly the less well-off and socially underprivileged Bulgarians who come to our country. This suspicion was confirmed by our discussions in Gent. Emigration from Bulgaria is probably linked to minority problems.

## B. Residence in Belgium



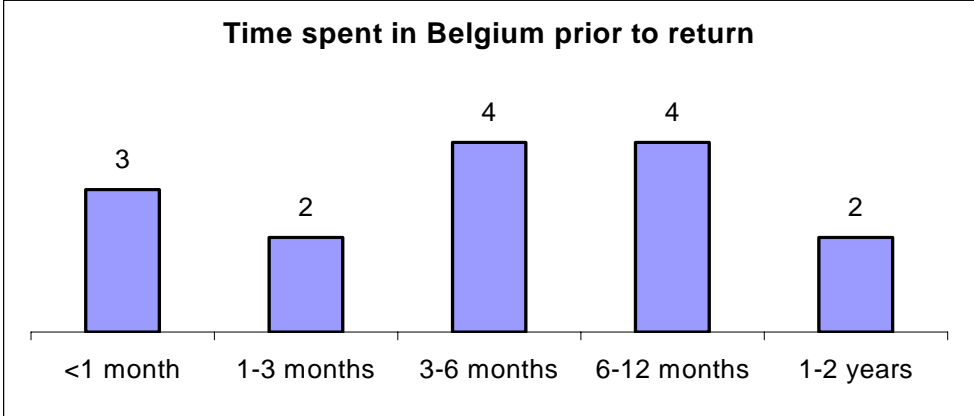
A number of migrants without legal residence status are first and foremost victims of smuggling or even trafficking in human beings. They claim that they were promised (legal) work in Belgium by vague “acquaintances”. The main target group of the traffickers is low-educated unemployed people. Three of the six women who left through Caritas International had been taken to Belgium under false pretences, and once they landed here they were forced to earn the money that had been advanced to come to Belgium by working as prostitutes. Two of them managed to escape immediately and were referred by the Bulgarian Embassy and Pagasa to Caritas International for arrangements to be made for voluntary return. Because of their great fear of reprisals or shame on returning to the country, most victims prefer not to lodge complaints with the police. Also, some Bulgarian men said they had been working in the construction industry or as drivers. 6 of the 15 interviewees had been unemployed before they left Bulgaria, and once again they belonged to the minority groups.



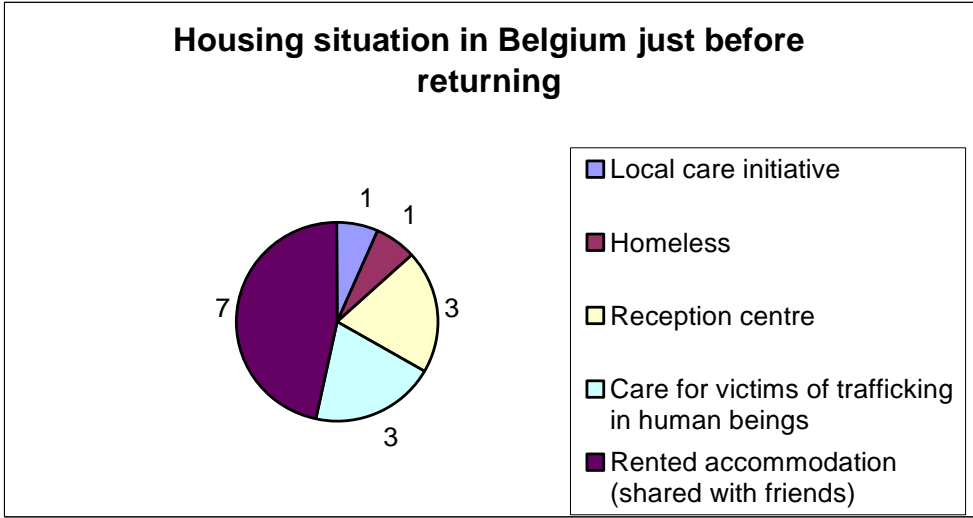
*More than one answer possible*

Most people give “economic reasons” as their motivation for leaving Bulgaria. The (former) asylum seekers give political reasons (discrimination and/or fear for their safety) as their most

important motivation for emigrating. For two interviewees, poor health (and lack of affordable health care in their own country) prompted them to leave.



Three interviewees decided to go home very soon after they arrived (two of them were victims of trafficking in human beings and the third a rejected Roma family). People who have not applied for asylum in Belgium and who have not immediately found work take the decision to leave more quickly than those who have found work. The (former) asylum seekers who have returned through Caritas International did not stay in Belgium for more than two years.

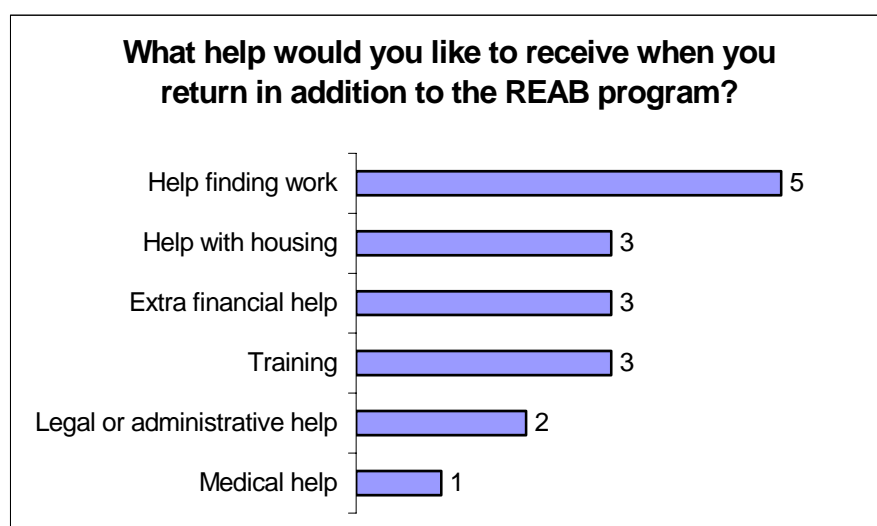


A “rented house (shared with friends)” is sometimes simply a one-bedroom flat shared with compatriots and people in the same situation as themselves. The Bulgarian community in Gent does not generally come into contact with the asylum authorities in our country and therefore in most cases has no contact with the reception centres.

### C. Problems experienced by returnees

<b>Reasons given for returning to Bulgaria</b> More than one answer possible	<b>Frequency of answers given (out of 15 interviewees)</b>
Lack of money	10 x
Sickness or death of a family member in the country of origin	5 x
No hope of obtaining legal residence status	4 x
(Fear of) illegal residence	3 x
Disillusionment with the situation in Belgium	3 x
Changed situation in the country of origin	2 x
To escape trafficking in human beings	2 x
Poor living conditions (homeless)	1 x

The reasons why people decide to return to Bulgaria have to do with lack of money, sickness or death of someone back home or the fact that they have no hope of obtaining legal residence. Here too, we must add that the answers given are subjective and cannot be checked. Most people still have regular contact with their family back home in Bulgaria.



*More than one answer possible*

11 of the 15 interviewees requested assistance in addition to the facilities of the REAB programme for themselves or for their family. For Bulgaria, the IOM does not offer grants for returnees. A number of people therefore asked for money. One person asked for the help of a lawyer on his return because of his specific (inheritance) problems. The main concerns are: work, training, money and housing.

#### D. Help offered within the framework of the reintegration project

<b>What kind of help would you like to receive?</b> 11 interviewees - more than one answer possible	Frequency of answers given
Accompaniment and mediation at the Bulgarian Embassy in Brussels and transport to the airport	4 x
Contact with family members	2 x
Contact with social services in Bulgaria and assistance	7 x
Medical assistance in Bulgaria	2 x
Training and courses	4 x
Housing in Bulgaria or help with housing	4 x

Eleven Bulgarian families or persons, representing in all 19 persons, received additional help from Caritas International through the reintegration project.

In four cases, Caritas International helped with the **accompaniment of the person to and from the Bulgarian Embassy** in Brussels, with transport to the airport and with the renewal of a birth certificate in the municipal offices in Liège. The first major obstacle to assisted return is often obtaining the correct documents. Especially for poorly educated persons who are accustomed to reading only the Cyrillic alphabet, who do not speak French, Dutch or English and have difficulty just finding their way around Brussels unaided, this type of support can be very useful. In one case, accompanying the person to the Embassy was also a form of protection, as this woman was afraid she might meet certain persons.

The preparations for departure and accompaniment to the Embassy or even to the airport are all part of the social assistance programme. After all, this kind of assistance helps forge a relationship based on trust with the social worker.

Some people have **phoned family members back home** through Caritas International to inform them of the arrangements for their return (the date and time of arrival). Proper planning is one of the conditions for a successful return.

Also, people have often phoned the **social service of Caritas in Sofia** from Caritas International. It is very reassuring for the persons concerned to be able to explain themselves in their mother tongue the problems they anticipate on their arrival and to be able to discuss the possible solutions with the social worker in Bulgaria. Knowing that someone is there who will be waiting for them on their arrival and who can then help them makes a difference. People sense that, as it were, there is continuity in the social assistance that starts in Belgium and continues when they arrive back home. The social service discusses with the person concerned what can and cannot be done and arranges an initial meeting in Bulgaria, either at the airport or in the offices of Caritas Bulgaria.

Good **health** is essential if people are to be able to work, and paid work is an important reason not to emigrate again. In four cases, a contribution was made towards medical costs through the project. For Bulgaria, the IOM does not offer the repatriation grant of 250 euros. According to the social legislation in Bulgaria, a person who has lived abroad is not entitled to social benefits (with the exception of emergency medical treatment) for the first 12 months after his return.

People who leave Belgium after finding themselves in a precarious situation immediately face similar problems when they return to their country of origin: finding somewhere to stay the night, finding money for the return trip to their region of origin, food for their children, etc. The presence of a social service with a budget to help people with their pressing basic needs (such as **food** and **accommodation**) is very important.

A Turkish-speaking family with three children who had stayed in the reception centre in Broechem left to return to their region of origin near the city of Ruse with financial problems. They were immediately helped, so they did not have to spend the night at the airport. In addition, this family did not have a house to go back to, since they had intended to settle definitively in Belgium. In close consultation with the local municipal authorities, Caritas Bulgaria was able to arrange accommodation to be found in the village that this family had originally left. The rent for the house was paid through the project for the first few months until the father could find work and was able to support his family independently. We also worked closely with the local offices in the village, so that the costs were checked.

Another Bulgarian went back to his parents' house after his asylum application was rejected. He contacted the social service of Caritas Bulgaria and asked them to pay for his studies. As he had never completed secondary education, he wanted to obtain a qualification through a central jury. He started looking for a job and was offered work on a military base near his home on condition that he knew English. The cost of the secondary education examination and of an English language course came to 140 euros altogether. This was paid through the project. It turned out that he was a very motivated student. Pending his actual recruitment on the military base, Caritas Bulgaria helped him, among other things, with his heating costs. If it had not been for the reintegration project, this man would probably never have obtained his diploma and he would not have got the job.

Thanks to this project, people who leave in difficult circumstances could be helped to escape from a vicious circle of unemployment and poverty and once again have the prospect of work, better health, qualifications, affordable housing, etc. Whether this involves the transmission of information, a financial contribution or intensive social assistance, all these initiatives contribute towards sustainable reintegration. Even with intensive assistance, the life of returnees is not trouble-free, but nonetheless (with a lot of effort and a bit of luck) this gives them a genuine opportunity to build a decent life for themselves.

### 4.3. The survey carried out in Bosnia-Herzegovina

#### A. Methodology

In addition to the study on reintegration in Ukraine and Bulgaria, Caritas Sarajevo (Davorka Topić) visited 74 returnees and asked them what were the greatest difficulties they experienced. As in Ukraine and Bulgaria, we used a (similar) questionnaire. A number of obvious differences between the political situation, on the one hand, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, on the other hand, in Bulgaria and in Ukraine will somewhat qualify our conclusions on assisted return:

- Civil war raged on for several years in Bosnia. The circumstances of and reasons for emigrating and returning will obviously be different from the situation in Bulgaria and Ukraine.
- In Bosnia, we interviewed people who had returned a long time ago, which allowed us to assess the long-term repercussions of return.
- 26 interviewees had returned from a country of the European Union, the others from Croatia (34), Serbia-Montenegro (9), Israel (4) and Canada (1). We will first discuss the general trends and then analyse in more depth the problems of those who returned from the EU.
- The questionnaires (for the two other countries submitted prior to departure) were summarised here in one document and handled by a member of the staff of Caritas Sarajevo.

#### B. Results of the survey in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Through research and existing personal contacts, 74 persons/families were interviewed. They included Bosniaacs (Muslims), Serbians and Croats (only one person per family was interviewed). Although each refugee had his own story to tell with specific problems, what we looked for was the general pattern of these accounts. This added input to our research affords us a picture of the existing practical problems that people experience when they return voluntarily to their country after a war. The decisions supplement our findings on voluntary return to Ukraine and Bulgaria. Also, they provide us with material to give more complete answers to the question as to how voluntary return can be improved.

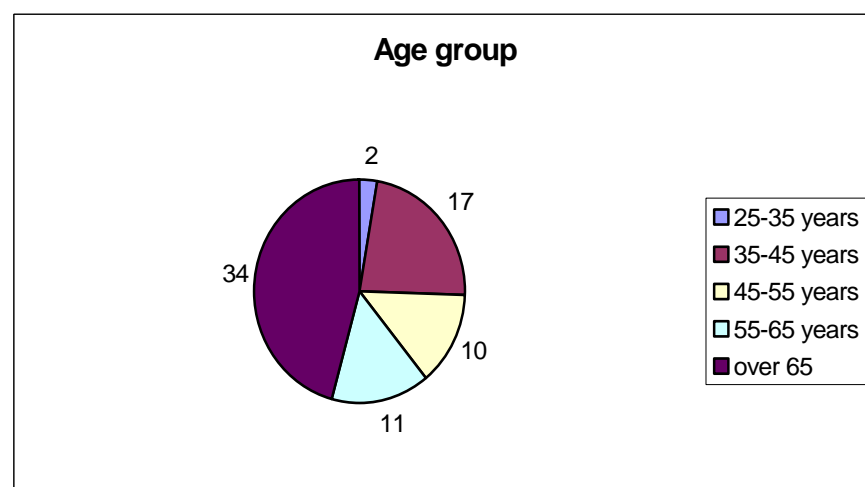
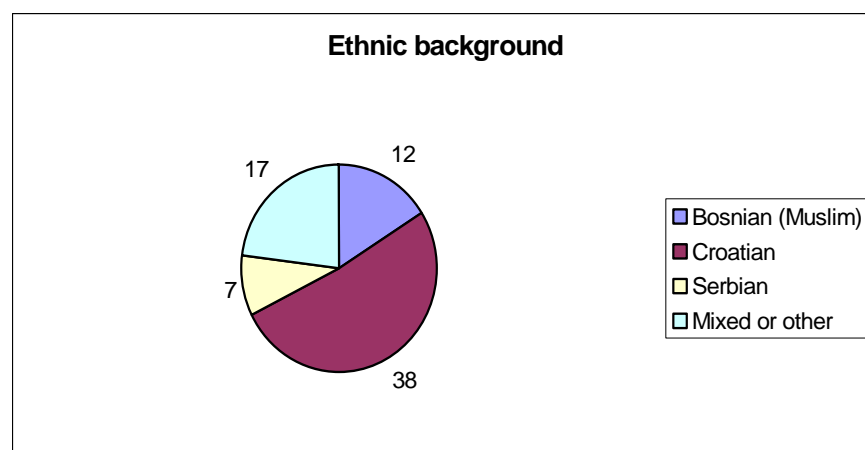
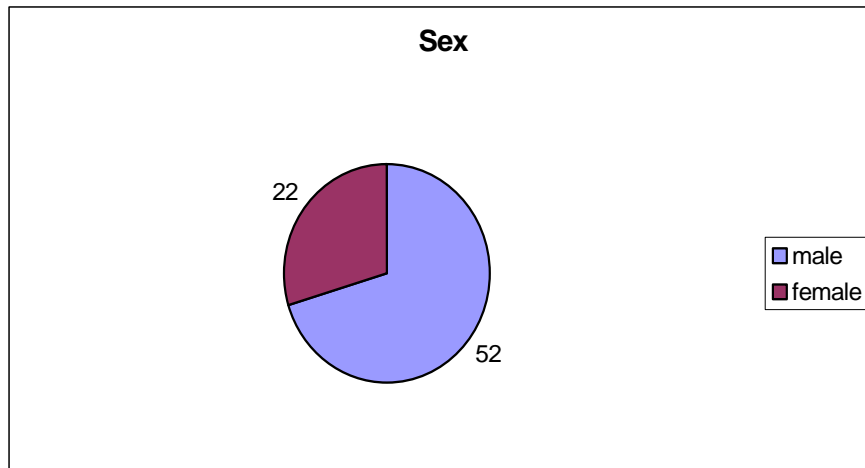
The percentages and statistics given on the following pages concern the 74 interviewees, unless otherwise specifically stated. The methodology (already discussed in detail in chapter 3.6<sup>17</sup>) is the same that we used with the questionnaires for Ukrainians and Bulgarians who wanted to leave Belgium voluntarily. Some questions were slightly adapted to the local situation, and we took into account the fact that at the time of the interview most of the interviewees had already been back in their country for several years.

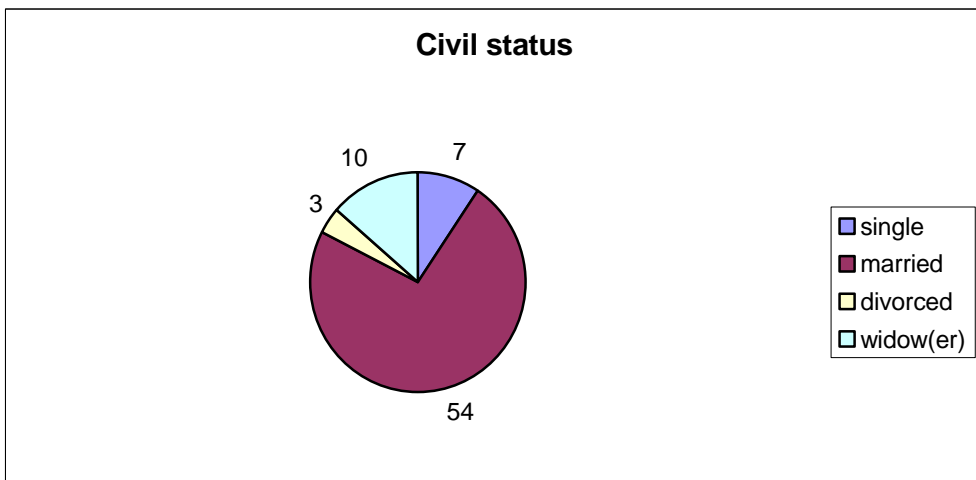
---

<sup>17</sup> Billiet, J. B.: *Methoden van sociaal-wetenschappelijk Onderzoek*, Acco, Leuven (1998).

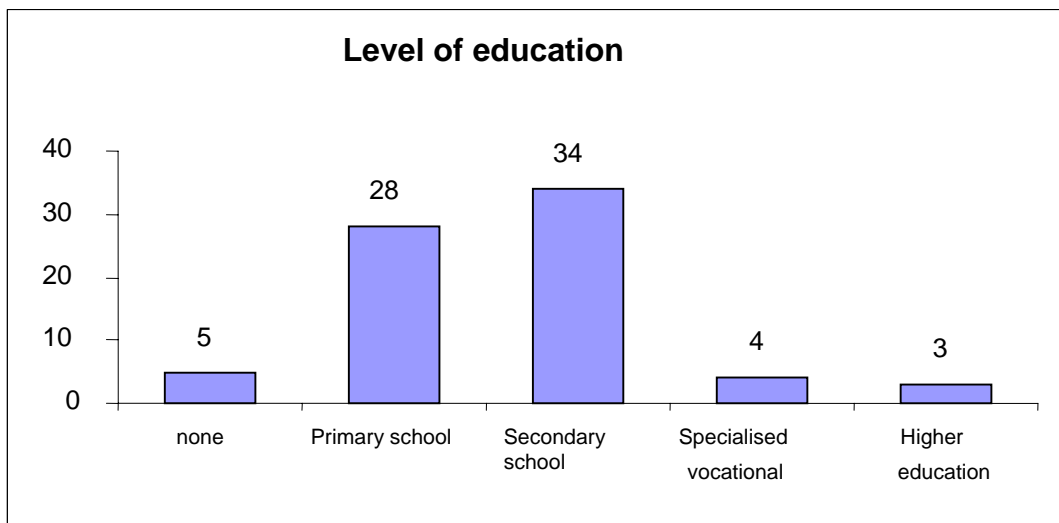
### C. Personal situation

All the interviewees had fled Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s (most of them during the civil war) and had returned between 2000 and 2004.

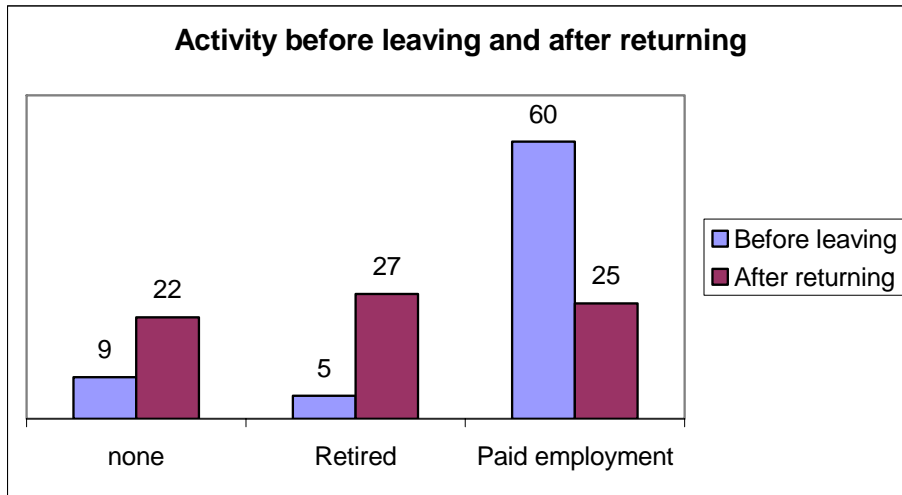




52 men and 22 women were interviewed. 54 persons were married, 7 unmarried, 10 widows/widowers and 3 divorced. Around half of the interviewees referred to themselves as Croatian Bosnians, 7 people had a Serbian background, 12 people were Bosniac, and the remaining 17 were from mixed marriages or were Jewish or Roma.



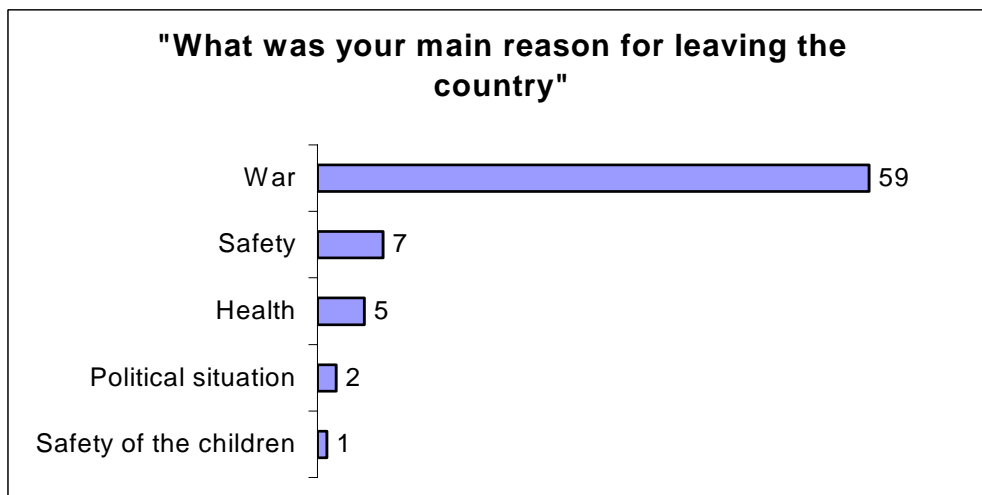
The level of education of the interviewees ranged from absolutely no education to higher education.



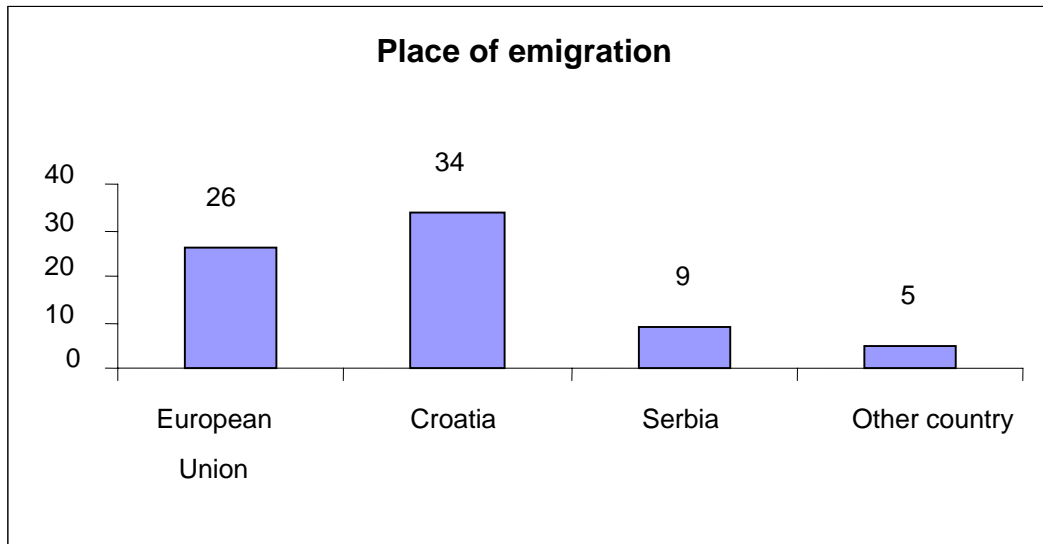
The answers to the question “What job did you do in Bosnia-Herzegovina before you left?” revealed that 60 of the 74 interviewees had a paid job, while the 14 others answered “housewife”, “none” or “retired”.

A few years after they returned, only 25 interviewees still had a paid job, many of them after months of unemployment. With the exception of 5 people who were already over 65 before they left, a further 22 people had meanwhile reached retirement age. 22 interviewees still had no paid work.

#### D. Residence in the host country

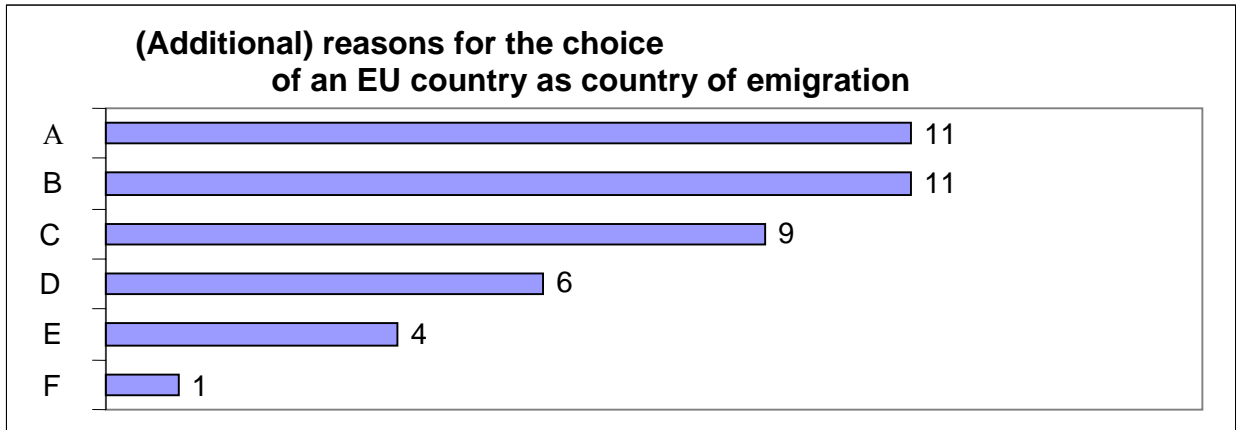


We found that 69 of the 74 interviewees gave as their main reason for temporarily leaving their country the war, the political situation or fear for their own safety or the safety of their children. Five interviewees gave “health” as the main reason for emigrating. The interviewees could give up to maximum four reasons in order of importance. Some answers were chosen such as “unemployment” or “the economic situation”, but as the second, third or fourth (and therefore incidental) reason.



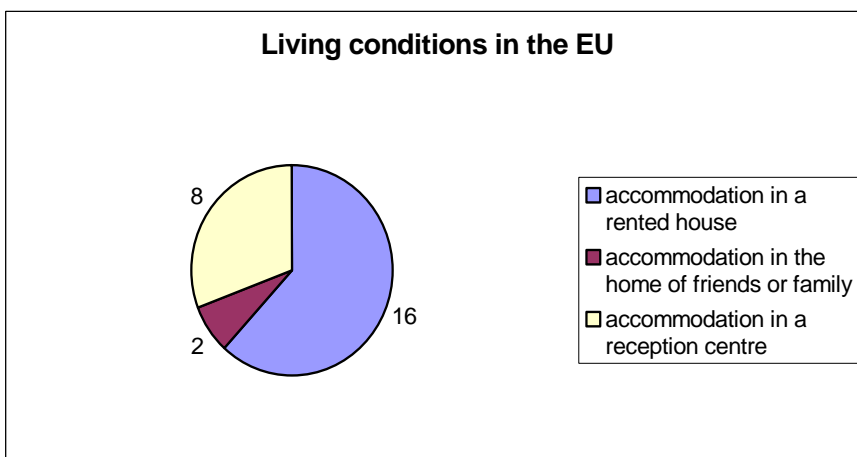
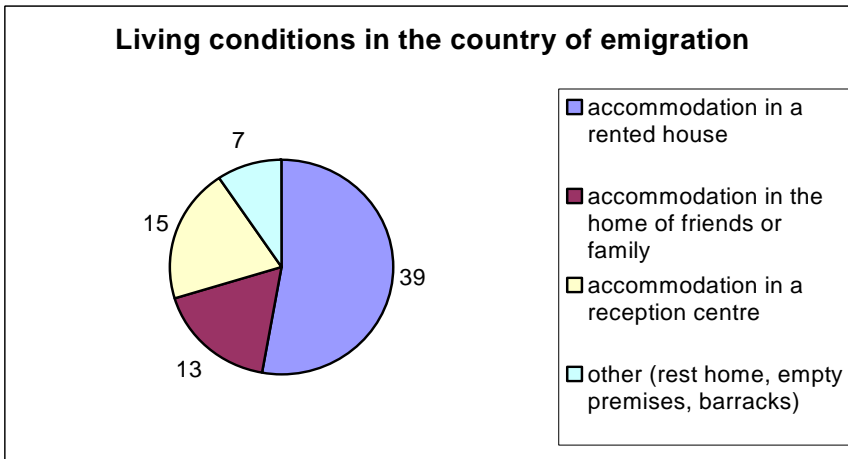
As we mentioned earlier, 26 of the 74 interviewees had stayed in the European Union, most of them in Germany. When we talk about migration, we must always bear in mind that those who applied for asylum within the EU are only a minority. We will show later in this chapter any differences in education, background, family situation, problems after returning, etc. between the interviewees who had lived in the EU and those who had not. By “other country” we mean Israel (4) or Canada (1).

Furthermore, we looked into the reasons why people had emigrated specifically to Croatia or Germany and not to some other country. Once again, up to four different reasons could be given. Most people said in reply to this question that their departure was not by any means a well thought-out decision, but rather a (forced) flight from the civil war. The most common reasons given were “war”, “the well-being of the children” and other reasons that had more to do with the reason for their flight than with their choice of country of emigration. Croatian Bosnians tended to escape to Croatia, while Serbian Bosnians went to Serbia-Montenegro, on ideological, religious and ethnic grounds and often also because of the presence of (distant) relatives. It is particularly interesting to see the reasons given by the 26 people who emigrated to a Member State of the EU. Also, the interviewees who at that time lived in an EU country, stressed the fact that they were forced to emigrate. All 26 persons gave the civil war and safety as the first reason for their choice of emigration country.



*Key to abbreviations:*

*A = good reputation for the care of asylum seekers*      *D = hope of work*  
*B = high level of safety/security*                              *C = good health care*  
*E = presence of friends or family*                              *F = high standard of living*



The vast majority of interviewees had been abroad for more than four years. They stayed with friends or relatives, rented their own accommodation or were placed in a reception centre. Some people who fled to Croatia said they had squatted in abandoned houses or cellars, in one case with no electricity or running water.

We found that just over half of the interviewees (39/74), even of those who had emigrated to a Member State of the EU (16/26), had stayed in their own rented accommodation. In most cases (65/74), the interviewees had a temporary status. 7 of the 26 people who had emigrated to an EU Member State did not ask the local authorities for any status or support whatsoever.

In their assessment of their period of temporary residence abroad, most of the interviewees had positive things to say. When they were asked what was their biggest problem during that time, 28% of them said that they had no major problems at all. We also found that people who had lived in an EU Member State spoke of having the same problems as those who had fled to a neighbouring country: problems finding accommodation, lack of money or unemployment, problems adjusting (administrative problems with the asylum procedure, homesickness, etc.) and health problems. In spite of the fact that “health” was a major problem only for four interviewees during the time they had spent abroad, 53 out of 74 interviewees (over 71%) had received medical treatment at least once.

<b>Problems experienced abroad</b>	<b>Frequency of answers given by the 74 interviewees</b>	<b>Frequency of answers given by the 26 persons who had stayed in the EU</b>
Financial problems / unemployment	27	8
No problems to speak of	21	5
Problems finding (good) accommodation	20	6
Adjustment problems (“homesickness”, “administrative problems”, “language problems”, etc.)	14	7
Health problems	4	3

#### E. Problems experienced by returnees

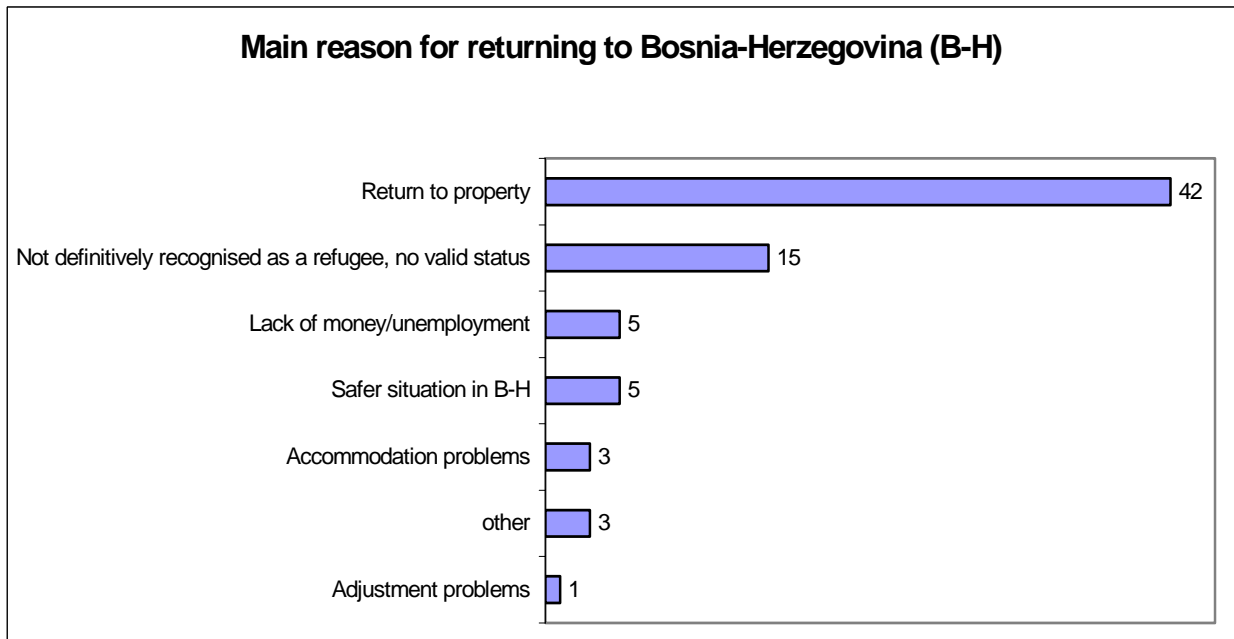
Almost all the interviewees had (temporary or definitive) refugee status, but there were also people who did not request any form of government support. In Serbia-Montenegro and Croatia also, people could stay legally as refugees, but the government support (social benefits, reception centres, etc.) that the governments of the EU Member States provided were generally not provided there. Organisations like Caritas (Croatia and Serbia), Kruh Svete Anton (Croatia), the Red Cross (Serbia) and IMC (Croatia), sometimes with the financial support of the international community and the local authorities and sometimes not, gave the refugees help to cover their pressing needs. For the interviewees who had been refugees in an EU Member State, Canada or Israel, the authorities of the host country had played a more active role. We asked 74 people the question: “What were the main reasons for returning to Bosnia-Herzegovina?”, whereby the maximum of four different answers could be given, in order of importance.

Here are the possible answers:

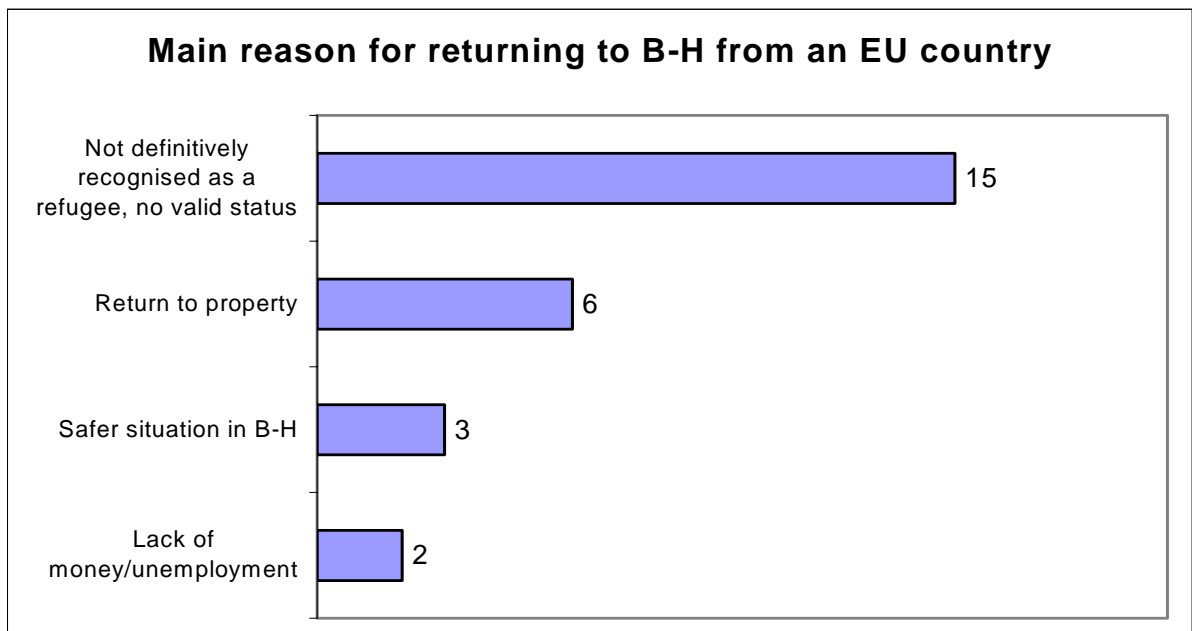
- Return to property in Bosnia-Herzegovina
- More secure political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Better economic situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Lack of money

- Adaptation problems
- Illegality
- Unemployment
- Unable to obtain permanent residence status
- Disillusionment
- Death or illness of a family member
- Other reasons

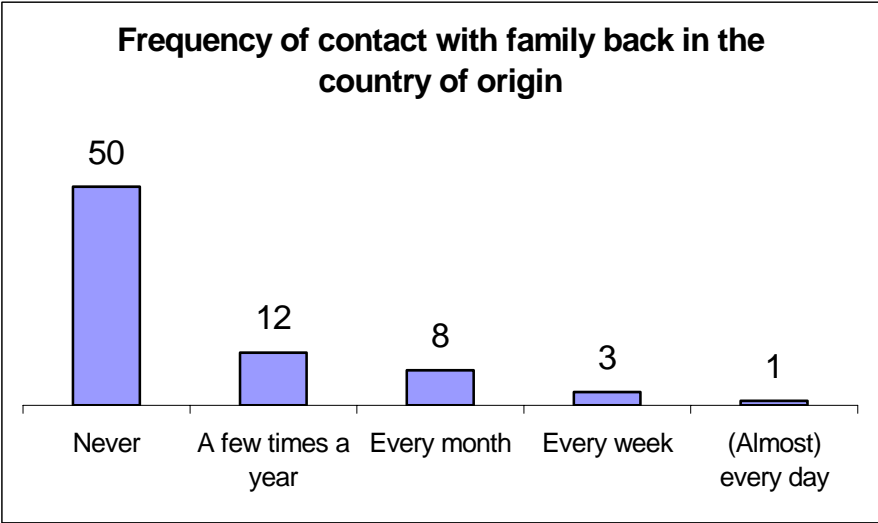
The answers to this question varied considerably according to the country of emigration. When we investigated the main reasons, we found that 56% of the interviewees had returned in the first place to (and because of) their own home.



When we examined individually the answers given by the 26 people who had lived in an EU country, we found that very different motives were behind the decision to return than those that had prompted people to return from Serbia-Montenegro or Croatia.



Very often, people returned from the EU for negative reasons. In most cases, Bosnians in Croatia and in Serbia-Montenegro give more positive reasons in response to precisely the same question and more often place emphasis, for example, on their property in Bosnia.



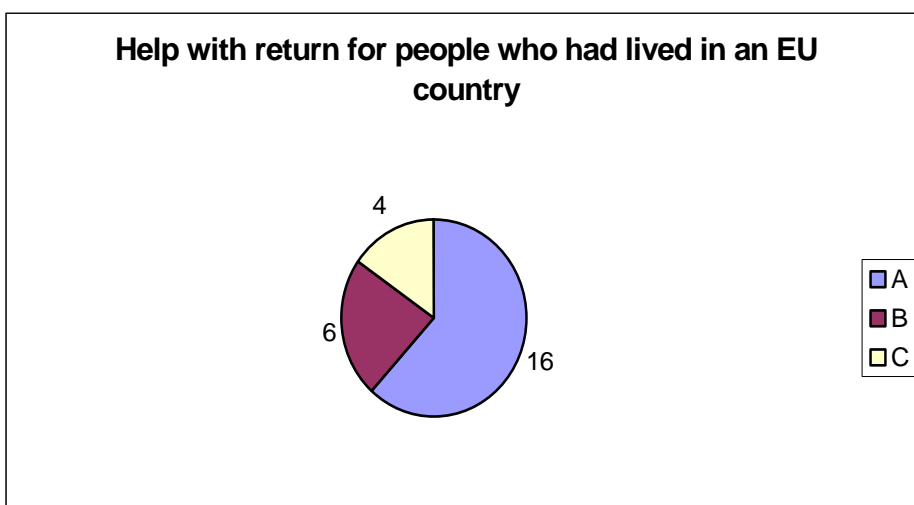
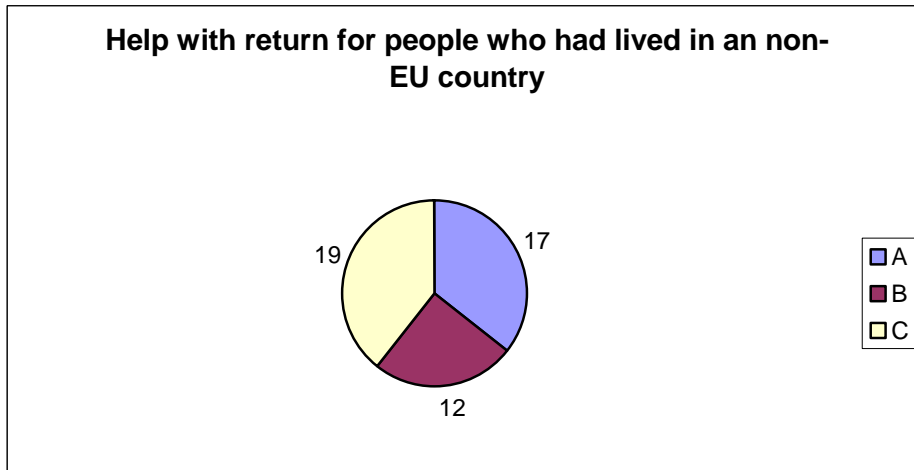
Nonetheless, this does not mean that those who return from an EU Member State do not have their own house: 20 of the 26 returnees now live once again in the same house or apartment they lived in before the civil war<sup>18</sup>.

Although all the interviewees had returned voluntarily to their country of origin, a number of those who had returned from an EU country explained that they had no choice: their temporary refugee status had expired. Without valid residence permits or work permits, they felt obliged to go back.

A possible explanation for the relatively little interest in returning lies in the fact that very few people had kept in contact with their country of origin while they were abroad. In reply to the question “How often did you contact your family in Bosnia-Herzegovina while you were abroad?” (see table below), 68% of the interviewees said that they had had no contact with their family. Without reliable information, it is very difficult to get an accurate idea of the security situation in one’s region of origin or of the condition of one’s house.

It is not really surprising that people prefer to stay in a safe country of emigration and are not keen to go back to an unknown situation fraught with unpredictable problems and a slowly recovering economy. However, in Serbia-Montenegro (during the Kosovo crisis in 1999) and in Israel, the political and economic situation was certainly not trouble-free, which for a number of people probably overcame their resistance to the idea of returning. Almost all the interviewees had paid for their return themselves, but 5 had returned from the EU through the IOM voluntary return programme.

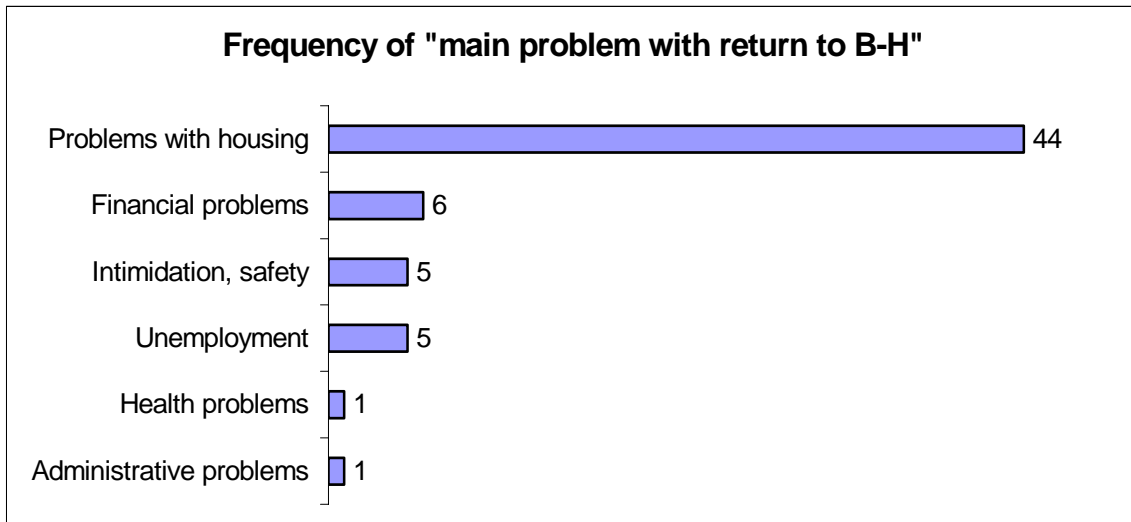
<sup>18</sup> Compared with 42 out of 48 people who emigrated to non-EU countries.



Key to abbreviations: A financial support (plane tickets, money or repayment of construction costs)  
 B only material support (food, second-hand clothes and furniture)  
 C no support of any kind

Of all the interviewees, 23 people (31%) wanted absolutely no assistance to return. The other 51 were financially or materially assisted by several NGOs and government development programmes (food aid and help with repairs to their houses).

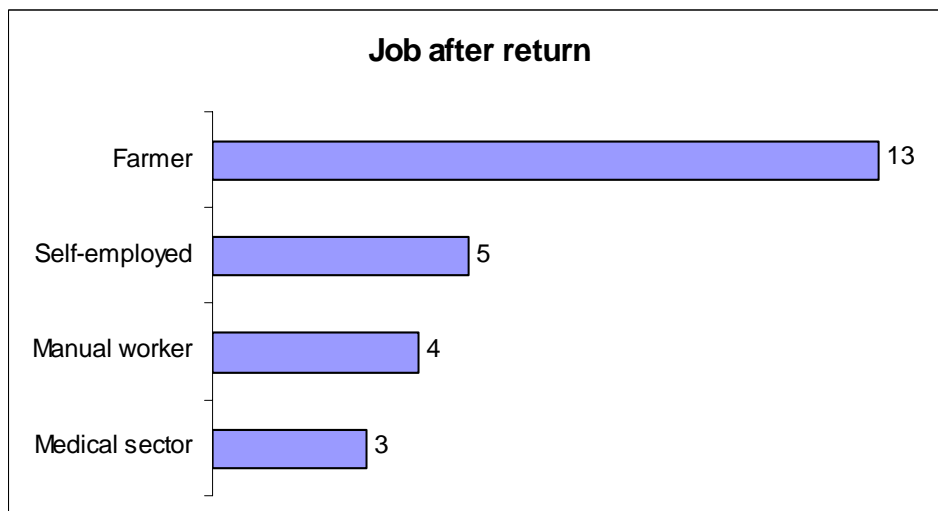
33 of the 74 interviewees were financially assisted through different projects and aid organisations (including the five persons who received IOM grants). The interviewees who had stayed in an EU country received proportionally more often financial support than people who returned from Croatia and Serbia-Montenegro.



*More than one answer possible*

According to their own statements, 18 of the interviewees did not have any particular problems on returning to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Of the 56 who said they had problems, 44 said these problems concerned their house. Thousands of houses were damaged during the war, and a number of houses became uninhabitable. In spite of the housing problems that people faced when they returned, 84% of the returnees are now living in the house they lived in before. There is no notable difference between the problems of those who returned from an EU Member State and those faced by the people who returned from a country that does not belong to the European Union.

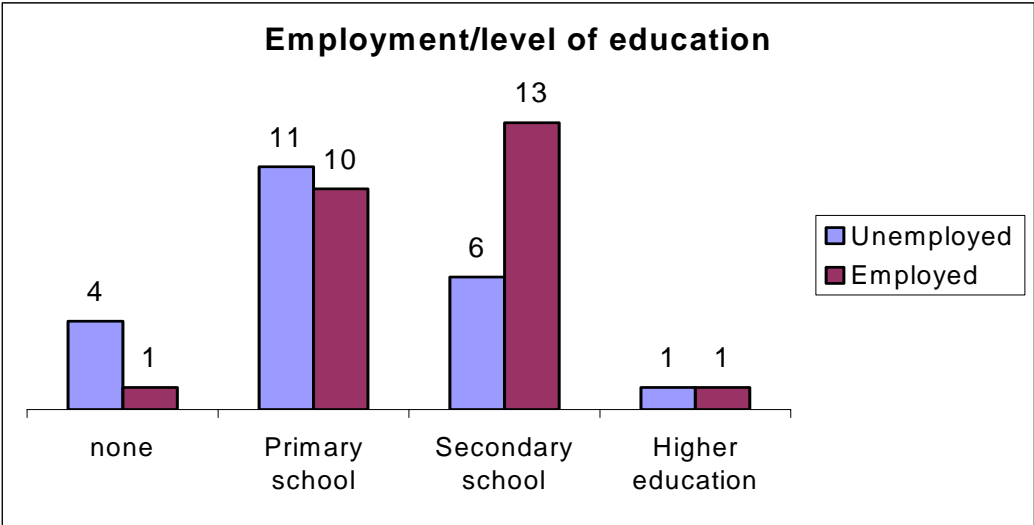
Apart from housing, a number of other major problems were mentioned, such as unemployment and financial problems. Also, people who received support through a project for the reconstruction of their house sometimes faced financial difficulties. Another notable problem that was mentioned by interviewees is (fear for) their own safety. Ethnic Serbians whose houses suddenly became part of the Bosnian Republic (or vice-versa) following the Dayton Agreement in 1995 still faced discrimination and intimidation after the war.



Of the 60 people who had paid employment before they left, only 25 now have a job. Of the 74 interviewees, 27 are now retired and 22 are unemployed. However, the 25 people who found work were often without a job for several months.

Of the 25 people who now have a paid job, 13 are working in agriculture. 5 people are plumbers (3) or traders (2) (“self-employed”), 4 are manual workers, and the rest work in the medical sector as nurses, physiotherapists, doctors, etc.

The returnees do not always work in the same profession as before they left. People who used to be technicians, cobblers or electricians now work in agriculture, and one who was a trader now works (out of sheer necessity) as a construction worker. There is work in some sectors, while in others there is none.



For the two employment tables, we interviewed only people who had not yet reached retirement age. Most of the 22 interviewees who were unemployed were poorly educated (no education or only a primary school certificate). The poorly educated people who did find a job were working in agriculture. There are no striking differences in terms of employment between those who returned from an EU Member State and those who returned from a country that is not a member of the EU.

6 of the 22 interviewees who were unemployed at the time received no support of any kind on their return, while 13 people were helped to rebuild or repair their house. There is no correlation between the present employment and the once-only financial support provided shortly after their return through different projects. Of course, this does not detract from the value of such projects. Indeed, a once-only payment for the renovation of a house can make all the difference for returnees.

At the end of the survey, we asked the returnees two extra questions, to which they could respond by choosing one of five possible answers.

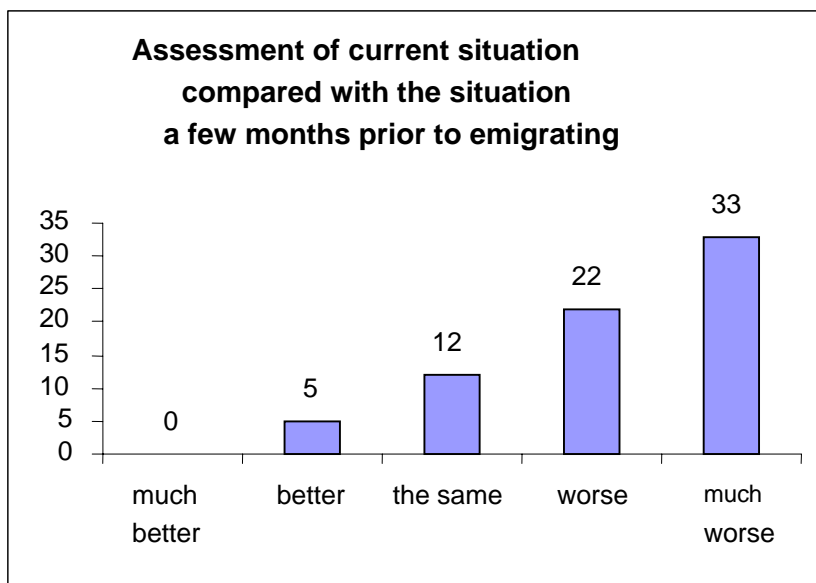
- How would you assess your current situation compared with your situation a few months before you left Bosnia-Herzegovina?
  - much better

- better
- the same
- worse
- much worse

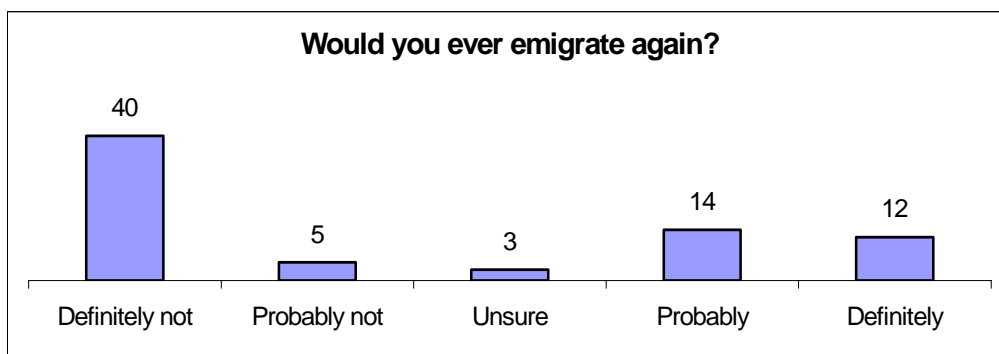
▪ Do you think it is possible that you would ever decide to emigrate again?

- definitely not
- probably not
- unsure
- probably
- definitely

Overview of the answers:



The vast majority said that their present situation was “worse” or “much worse” than their situation a few months before they left Bosnia-Herzegovina. The time spent in another host country had led to an improvement in the situation for only 5 interviewees. None of the interviewees who had stayed in the European Union said that their present situation was “better”. Of the 33 people who said “much worse”, 9 were unemployed. People who were over 65 were very negative about their situation. Around 95% of the interviewees who were over 65 had a (meagre) pension. From their standpoint, the civil war therefore had similar impact to that of the demise of the Communist welfare state in which the elderly and the sick were better off than now in the “new” free market economy in Bosnia-Herzegovina.



In this case, it was mainly elderly persons who said “definitely not” (24 out of 40), and also farmers (10 out of 40) appeared to be attached to their place of birth. Of the 12 people who answered “definitely”, no fewer than 11 had lived in the European Union during their period of emigration (the 12th had been in Israel).

It can clearly be seen that there is a difference between the refugees who had returned from the EU and those who had returned from the other countries of emigration. Clearly, paying for plane tickets and giving people once-only grants did not provide a lasting solution. There is no point getting people to return home with the financial support of the European Union when only a few years later they say that they “definitely” want to emigrate again. What these people should be given is local assistance to ensure sustainability in their country.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. The circumstances of voluntary return

There were a number of **differences** in the circumstances surrounding return in the three countries:

- In Bulgaria, migration is linked to minority problems. Most of the people who requested assistance were Turkish-speaking or Roma. The Bulgarians interviewed had little or no education.
- As regards the return to Ukraine, it is noteworthy that it was mainly people from the western border region who came back from Belgium. It would appear that it was not particularly the minority problems, but the regional differences that played a role in the migration process.
- In Bulgaria, the law states that after spending time abroad people must live in the country for 12 months before they are entitled to any social benefits<sup>19</sup>.
- In Ukraine, people who do not have proof of registration are not entitled to legal work, free medical care or social benefits. It sometimes takes months to get valid proof of registration. Particularly in Ukraine, there appears to be a difference between the legislation and the day-to-day reality.
- In Bosnia-Herzegovina, emigration was clearly caused by an underlying political problem: the civil war. People from the three ethnic population groups had similar problems after they returned home, in many cases housing problems.

In each of the three countries there were different political, legal, social and geographical circumstances that led to different practical problems for returnees. In other countries and on other continents, other difficulties may emerge with the return process.

In addition, the situation of the interviewees varies considerably (family or individual, whether or not the person has qualifications, region of origin, whether or not the person belongs to a minority, age, profession, etc.), so that it is difficult to generalise.

An important conclusion that we drew is that assisted return should be mainly **individual**. In some cases, a once-only grant is a good solution for returnees, but in many cases this is not enough. The problems people face cannot be reduced simply to “financial” or “economic” problems.

The project included 40 people who requested help with their reintegration process of the 265 who had gone back to Ukraine or Bulgaria in 2004, i.e. 15%. In spite of the major differences between the circumstances of these people’s departure and their personal situation, there were some striking **similarities** between the problems and needs after their return.

The following problems with return were mentioned:

---

<sup>19</sup> Except in cases of urgent medical care or death. Regulation on the Implementation of the Social Assistance Act, chapter II, article 11 § 7.

- **Lack of money after returning, so that basic needs such as housing, food and medical care were in jeopardy.**
- **Administrative and practical problems in Belgium with arrangements for returning (travel documents and transport to the airport).**
- **Unemployment on arriving.**
- **Lack of information on social legislation, basic rights, training in the country of origin, need for social assistance in the country of origin.**
- **No entitlement to social benefits during the first months after return.**
- **Fear of reprisals by traffickers in human beings and smugglers in the country of origin.**

In certain countries, some problems were more common than in others. For example, in Bosnia-Herzegovina more people have housing problems after they return than in Ukraine.

In most cases, the interventions within the framework of the project yielded good results. In some cases, the situation remains unsure, and in certain cases social assistance is required for more than just a few months.

We found that the **target group** of our sustainable reintegration project varies considerably. People decide to return for different reasons. The people whom we helped within the framework of the project were all in a **precarious situation**, whatever their nationality or status. It became clear to us that reintegration projects must be based first and foremost on the needs of the people who are leaving. We have received requests for assistance from asylum seekers, from rejected asylum seekers and from people who did not have legal residence status. When they returned, all of them were confronted with one of the problems mentioned above, i.e. obstacles that prevented their reintegration.

## **5.2. Criteria for assisted return with a view to sustainable reintegration**

The individual circumstances of the returnee must be taken into account. Assisted voluntary return must be geared towards seeking a sustainable solution for *everyone* who returns voluntarily and must therefore offer a wide and flexible range of options. In order to achieve these different solutions, further assistance is required, also in the country of origin.

### ▪ **Individual approach**

It is very important to be able to deal with the individual problems and needs of returnees, which can differ from person to person.

Based on his needs and possibilities, each returnee can be helped to find a sustainable solution. Voluntary return can offer a valid alternative, even for people in a precarious situation, and this can be done through intense consultation with the social services in Belgium and in the country of origin with the persons concerned, by building a relationship based on trust and by providing clear and accurate information.

### ▪ **Consultation between the social services in Belgium and in the country of origin**

The part played by local partners in exchanging information, social assistance and welcoming, advising, monitoring and supporting returnees in a precarious situation is very important.

Social services that engage in intense consultation with the social services in Belgium and with the person concerned are a real asset, as this ensures **continuity of social assistance**.

Our projects in Ukraine and Bulgaria clearly demonstrated the importance of having a local partner who is aware of the specific legislation, the possibilities offered by the local authorities, the local job vacancies and existing training courses and the functioning of the health care system and who can anticipate unpredictable problems and circumstances.

- **A flexible budget based on the real needs**

To ensure sustainable reintegration, several needs must be met (information on and financing of training, housing, social assistance, psychological assistance to come to terms with the failure in Belgium, medical care, work, etc.).

It is not desirable to pay a certain grant in advance or to set a maximum amount to be disbursed. Some people need only information. For other people, medical assistance and help with housing and vocational training are needed, which means that the cost can be relatively high.

- **More long-term planning and more continuity**

Especially in the case of long-term assistance, project continuity is essential. However, if people are to be helped as efficiently as possible to build a new future for themselves, such long-term assistance will require planning, time and consultation (and therefore also considerable resources).

- **The offer of reintegration in several countries**

Efforts must be made to offer arrangements for voluntary return to any country outside the European Union. In most countries, there is already a network of organisations that have experience in the field of refugees. Partners can be found through international networking. Caritas already has its own “Caritas Network” within and outside the European Community. It is essential to examine how existing partnerships can be extended and improved.

- **More exchange of know-how and good practices with other European Member States**

At the present time, different countries are still working too much in isolation. In the Netherlands, Austria, France and other Western European countries, there have been (and still are) pilot projects on reintegration, some supported by the European Refugee Fund, some not. It would be interesting to collate their results and findings.

Our research has shown that a large proportion of those who return voluntarily to their country of origin needs additional support with a view to reintegration.

As far as possible, the content of these reintegration arrangements must be geared towards addressing the individual problems of those who return from a precarious situation. The *solutions* offered for these persons differ according to the situation. In order to help the persons concerned find a solution for their individual needs, the presence of a local partner or a local network of partners is essential.

In future, on the strength of the “good practices” of this project and thanks to good cooperation with organisations, services and care providers who have referred people within the framework of this project, Caritas International will continue to devote itself to ensuring that voluntary return offers a genuine opportunity for sustainable reintegration.

## 6. Bibliography

- Billet J.B. *Methoden van sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek: ontwerp en dataverzameling*. Leuven, Acco, 1996.
- Caritas International & LUCAS  
*Asielbeleid: gevolgen voor leven en welzijn van de asielzoeker*. Antwerpen-Apeldoorn, Garant, 2003.
- Vermeersch Commission  
*Final Report*, 1999.
- Detrez, R. *De sloop van Joegoslavië*. Antwerp, 1996.  
*Bulgarije: mensen, politiek, economie, cultuur, milieu*. Brussels, Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, 2000.  
*Inleiding tot Oost-Europa. Syllabus*, 2001.  
*Actuele problemen van Oost-Europa. Syllabus*, 2001.  
*Geschiedenis van Zuid-Oost-Europa. Syllabus*, 2002.
- European Commission  
*Integratie van Migratievraagstukken in de betrekkingen van de EU met Ontwikkelingslanden (3.12.2002)*, 2002.  
*Bulgaria: general report November 2003*
- International Organisation for Migration  
*Annual Report 2002*  
*Annual Report 2003*  
*Return Migration: Policies and Practices in Europe*, 2004.
- International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Advisory Committee on Aliens Affairs, The Netherlands  
*Return Migration: Policies & Practices in Europe*, 2004.
- Vandenhove, L.  
Press release on the study visit to Ukraine, Moldavia and Romania from 27/09/04 to 03/10/04 - Senate Domestic Affairs Commission, 2004.
- United Nations  
*Human Development Report*, 2003.
- World Bank *World Development Report*, 1996.
- Wets, J. *Internationale migratie, een Introduction*, 2003.

**Internet sites consulted:**

<http://www.antiracisme.be/nl/wetten/vluchteling/internationaal/conventie.htm>

<http://www.belgium.iom.int/> (*'Newsletters', 'Standard Country Sheet Ukraine', etc.*)

<http://www.fedasil.be/> (*'Cijfers over de terugkeer'*)

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/bu>

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/ua>

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/bh>

<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ukraine>

<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bulgaria>

<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/belgium>

<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bosnia>

<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/bulgaria/>

<http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/>

<http://www.undp.org/hdr2003/>

## 7. Annexes

### Methodology and justification for the questions

There are already statistics on participants in the REAB programme. These data were collected by the IOM (see chapter 2.1.). However, our intention was not to collect only data, but also to elicit the (subjective) views of the interviewees on the REAB programme, whether they wanted to return and their expectations.

#### A. Personal details

In the first part of the survey, we wanted to gain more insight based on objective data into the participants in the voluntary return programme (from Bulgaria and Ukraine). In practice, we asked the persons concerned for the following information:

- sex;
- age;
- civil status;
- nationality;
- mother tongue;
- region/city of origin;
- ethnic-cultural background;
- level of education;
- job(s) in the country of origin and in Belgium;
- number of children;
- other details concerning the children's age, level of education, etc.

To which social class do voluntary returnees belong? Do they belong to a minority group? Do people come to Belgium with all their family or individually? Do the people concerned come from a rural district or from a city (or the capital)? What is the family situation? Are there any striking similarities between the interviewees (region, sex, family situation, age, etc.)? We can already answer such questions by analysing the personal details. These results can be tested to some extent against existing figures given by the International Organisation for Migration.

#### B. Background

The second part of the survey concerns the background of those who decide to return. This part is more delicate than the first. It was stressed that this questionnaire was anonymous and that no information of any kind would be passed on to the official authorities, but not all the asylum seekers were willing to talk about their (sometimes painful) experiences. We therefore tried not to go needlessly into detail with our questions, but to look for general patterns. The overall tone of the questions and possible answers was conducive to confidentiality and therefore increased the likelihood that people would give honest answers.

Here is one example:

(question 19) "What were your main reasons for leaving Bulgaria?" (more than one answer possibly)

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> health reasons                     | <input type="checkbox"/> economic reasons       | <input type="checkbox"/> political reasons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> earlier departure of family member | <input type="checkbox"/> future of the children | <input type="checkbox"/> unemployment      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> safety                             | <input type="checkbox"/> education/studies      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other .....                        |   |  |

The answer “political reasons” is less confrontational for asylum seekers than a detailed account, which they had already been required to give (among other things) to the *Commissariaat Generaal voor Vluchtelingen* (General Commission for Refugees). The answers might overlap; there is an obvious correlation between “economic situation” and “unemployment”. However, a slight distinction should be drawn here. Someone who worked in his own country for 40 euros a month might put down “economic reasons”, but not “unemployment”. The interviewees give the answers that best describe their situation or give an answer of their own (“other”).

To be specific, in this second part we asked the following questions:

- What were your main reasons for leaving [*your country*]<sup>20</sup>?
- Why did you come to Belgium in particular?
- After you left [*your country*], did you stay in another country, and if so, which country and for how long?
- How long have you been in Belgium?
- Which authorities have you approached for assistance? What kind of assistance?
- In what towns or cities have you lived in Belgium?

*(The following questions are answered by the social worker himself)*

- Has the interviewee applied for asylum in Belgium?
- (If so) did the interviewee stop the procedure himself?
- How much time elapsed between his arrival and his asylum application?
- Has the interviewee ever submitted an application for regularisation?

The research issues underpinning these questions are more complex. This information is compared with the data gathered from the previous questions, so that we derive an answer to the following questions:

- What correlation is there between level of education, mother tongue, age, family situation and reasons for emigrating?
- What is the correlation with the status (illegal, rejected, ongoing) and the (anonymous and confidential) reasons for coming to Belgium?
- Why do people choose Belgium as their country of destination?
- How much time do people stay before they decide to return?
- Which organisations have they been in contact with, and, by extension, which organisations can play a role in providing information on voluntary return?
- Is there a correlation between the interviewees’ place of residence and their wish to return (see also the figures of the IOM<sup>21</sup>)?

### C. Current situation

In this part of the questionnaire, we examined the situation of the interviewee just before he leaves. We asked the following questions:

- Do you still have family in [*your country*] and, if so, who?
- Do you still have contact with your family and, if so, how often?
- If you go back to [*your country*], what are your main reasons?<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> To avoid misunderstandings, the questionnaire referred to the country from which the returnee came. Therefore, “Bulgaria” or “Ukraine” was specifically written in the questionnaires.

<sup>21</sup> IOM: 2003 Annual Report

- What are your reasons for staying in Belgium? What is keeping you here?

Based on these questions, we seek to establish to what extent there is any correlation with the country of origin (presence of family, reasons for returning, etc.). Is there any correlation with the status (illegal, rejected asylum seeker, asylum seeker) of the interviewees and their ties with the country of origin? To what extent is a person who wants to return already integrated in Belgium (presence of friends, family in Belgium)?

#### D. Needs and expectations

In this last part, we asked questions about the interviewees' needs, any difficulties they may have after they return and their willingness to participate in Caritas International's reintegration project.

- If you return, what services will you go to for assistance?
- Will you approach the social services of Caritas in [*your country*]?
- What do you expect to obtain within one month after you return (with regard to work, accommodation, etc.)?
- What do you expect to obtain within three months after you return?
- What do you expect to obtain within six months after you return?
- Where (in what region) would you like to go when you return to [*your country*]?
- Once you get back to Ukraine, what will be your most pressing problems?

What we wanted to find out in this part, in short, were the needs and expectations of returnees. We tried to group the questions by theme, so that the interviewee could give the answer that best described his situation (see above, question 19).

By carrying out a comparative study of the questionnaires and comparing all the answers to the questions in the survey, we hope to be able to answer the following **key questions**:

1. What difficulties do returnees experience?
2. What is the correlation between, on the one hand, the status, the family situation, the level of education, etc. and, on the other hand, the needs of returnees?
3. Are there specific "types" of people who use the REAB program? If so, what are these types?
4. For which "type" of people is an additional reintegration project useful?
5. Are there clear differences between the people who return to Bulgaria and those who return to Ukraine? If so, what are the differences?

---

<sup>22</sup> Not all those who apply to return actually return to their country. Hence the phrasing of this question.