



**Going back with a future?  
The case of rejected asylum seekers returning from Norway  
to Russia**

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June 2014

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my supervisors, without their attention and support the current research would not be completed. I sincerely thank my first supervisor, Professor Nils Olav Østrem, for outstanding guidance, useful advices and encouragement through the development of my thesis. I am also grateful to my second supervisor, Jan Kühnemund, without his assistance during the hard time of the forth semester this thesis would never have been possible.

Also, I would like to express my great appreciation to International Organization for Migration (IOM) Oslo and Larysa Pedersen, who shared her valuable experience, provided with necessary guidance and has been very supportive from the first day of my internship. My special thanks go to participants of the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme, who agreed to participate in the current research, spent their time and shared personal experience.

I am very grateful to my friends, Yogesh Kulkarni and Svetlana Kjoseva, for their priceless friendship and support in all my endeavors.

I owe special thanks to my family for their love and support on every step of the way.

## **Abstract**

The current thesis seeks to analyse if rejected asylum seekers, who return from Norway to Russia, do have possibilities for successful reintegration in their home region and if their return is sustainable. Research also aims to reveal main obstacles for successful reintegration as well as internal and external factors, which facilitate or complicate the process of effective reintegration. One of the sub-themes of the thesis is returnees' opinion on preferred ways of additional support that should be provided before or after their departure from the host country.

Current research is based on six interviews with families, who participated in the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme of IOM Oslo. Their socio-economic, housing, education, health, emotional and physical well-being was put under scrutiny in order to answer the research question.

Findings of the research provide insights in new trends of international migration, reveal main features of the return migration from Norway to Russia and give suggestions for further improvement. Moreover, by means of continuous interaction with rejected asylum seekers of Russian origin, current research gives them a voice. Presentation of the unique experience of returnees after arrival was aimed to create an impulse for the further research, conducted in cooperation of academia, IOM and government representatives.

## **Abbreviations**

ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
FSR	Financial Support for Return
GDP	Gross domestic product
GRP	Gross Regional Product
HIT	Stichting Hersteld vertrouwen In de Toekomst
IDP	Internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NOK	Norwegian Krone
UDI	Norwegian Directorate of Immigration
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Rejection of an asylum claim: what is next?

According to the statistics of European Commission the number of asylum applications in Europe is growing year by year.<sup>1</sup> Typically, the determination process of an asylum claim may result in producing two different outcomes: an asylum seeker is recognized as a person in need of protection or not. Statistic from Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) shows that asylum seekers of Russian origin constitute one of the biggest groups in Norway. Nevertheless, starting from 2009 the number of asylum seekers from Russia has been decreasing from 867 to 628 in 2010, 365 in 2011 and 371 in 2012. On the contrary, rejection decisions on asylum claims have been growing and constituted 54 percent of the overall number of asylum applications in 2009, 85 percent in 2010, 65 percent in 2011 and 73 percent in 2012.<sup>2</sup>

All rejected asylum seekers, according to the Norwegian legislation, are obliged to leave the country in two months after a final rejection of their asylum claim. Ideally, rejected asylum seekers leave the country of asylum voluntarily without need for intervention. By contrast, in practice there is a variety of problems. Some asylum seekers try to find another ground for asylum claim and apply again, others remain in the host country and become irregular. In order to facilitate the return of rejected asylum seekers to their home countries and ensure that it is organized in safe and dignified way, Norwegian authorities developed a Voluntary Assisted Return Programme. Nowadays, the programme is subsidized by Norway and coordinated by International Organization for Migration (IOM).

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<sup>1</sup> Official Statistic of European Commission

<sup>2</sup> Statistics of Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, *Asylum decisions in first instance, by outcome and nationality*, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012

The content of the programme varies greatly according to returnee's country of origin. In the particular case of returnees to Russian Federation, the supportive scheme consists of IOM's assistance such as information and counseling regarding return, assistance in obtaining travel documents, planning of return (transportation within country of asylum, flights to the country of origin and domestic transportation in the country of origin) and financial support to return (FSR) from the Norwegian government. Each family member could receive amount of 10,000; 15,000 or 20,000 Norwegian kroner (NOK). Additionally, every minor under 18 years old receives 10,000 NOK. Nevertheless, UDI has the right to decide on the amount of financial support, and some returnees had not been granted anything at all.

According to the official statistics, since 2002 rejected asylum seekers of Russian origin have been representing one of the largest groups of returnees assisted by IOM.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme does not imply assessing opportunities for building a sustainable livelihood in the country of origin or monitoring its participants after return.

Thus, the current research seeks to analyse if returnees from Norway to Russia do actually have possibilities for successful reintegration in their home region. One of the main questions is how does the process of reintegration go and what are its main obstacles and future opportunities. Moreover, I will try to reveal internal and external factors, which facilitate or complicate the process of effective reintegration of the returnees and try to identify if the return is sustainable. One of the subquestions is if support provided by the Norwegian government contributes to returnees' faster reintegration and what are the preferred ways of additional support that could be given to returnees of Russian origin.

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<sup>3</sup> Statistical updates of International Organization for Migration (IOM Oslo) on The Voluntary Assisted Return Programme.



In order to assess the process of reintegration, its main outcomes and overall sustainability of return, security situation in the region together with socio-economic, housing, education, health, emotional and physical well-being will be put under scrutiny. Furthermore, assessment of returnees' needs and resources will be undertaken; efforts of the home country and country of asylum in providing assistance will be also assessed and juxtaposed with the real needs of returnees.

The empirical part of the research is designed around interviews with participants of the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme. To collect rich and reliable data I maintained direct contact with family members since the UDI's approval for participation in the programme till the departure day. After return, due to different geographical locations of interviewer and interviewees, the contact had been maintained by means of telephone and e-mail. Prior to the process of interviewing possible challenges of telephone interviews were examined in order to minimize limitations of the research.

## 1.2 Relevance of the study

It is argued that nowadays return measures focus only on rejected asylum seekers' removal from countries of asylum without thinking about future of returnees. Webber states that: "The assistance the IOM provides returnees is by its nature very short-term and piecemeal. The IOM cannot ensure political stability or personal security for those returning home. The short-term and limited nature of the assistance provided, and the lack of monitoring, makes the IOM's claim to 'contribute to a more sustainable return' somewhat hollow."<sup>4</sup> By turn, the efficient return of rejected asylum seekers is closely linked with their successful reintegration in their home

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<sup>4</sup> Webber F. (2010) *The politics of voluntary returns*, Institute of race relations.

country. “Without this there is the likelihood that return will not be sustainable and migrants will try again to enter Europe illegally.”<sup>5</sup>

Literature monitoring on rejected asylum seekers of Russian origin revealed that there are no studies conducted and reports written on return to their home country. Socio-economic conditions of the receiving regions are not assessed even in theory based on the official statistic. Lack of pre-assessments and monitoring makes the future of returnees unpredictable and unknown. On the one hand one could only assume that they have returned to the place of origin and step by step tried to reestablish their livelihood from the very beginning. On the other hand they might have migrated to another country without even going out of the airport’s transit zone; or else they might have tried to come back to the country of asylum after several months spent in their home country. In addition, taking into consideration the past of rejected asylum seekers, the issue of security in the country of origin should be the greatest concern.

Moreover, it is necessary to consider that the majority of returnees to Russia originate and wish to return to the Chechen Republic or the Republic of Ingushetia, which are one of the most “problematic” regions in Russia. According to the official statistic of Russian Federation both regions have the highest unemployment rate and the lowest Gross Regional Product (GRP) index compared with other regions of Russia.<sup>6</sup> Thus, economic situation within two regions is not favorable for returnees and might create various barriers on the way to successful reintegration.

Furthermore, returnees to the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia are culturally and religiously different from the majority of Russian population. As a result, it might be very difficult for people of Muslim confession to settle among Orthodox Christians in the regions of

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<sup>5</sup> Koser K. (2001) *The Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants. An analysis of government assisted return programmes in selected European countries*, Migration Research Unit, Department of Geography University College London, p5.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

Russia other than their home regions. Also high level of discrimination towards Caucasian people limits possibilities to settle in other regions of Russia.

All above-mentioned factors show the necessity of conducting the current research and exploring return migration of rejected asylum seekers from Norway to Russia closely. Findings of the research will provide insights in new trends of international migration, reveal main features of the return migration from Norway to Russia and give suggestions for further improvements. On the contrary, lack of attention to return from the home country and country of asylum might lead to irreversible consequences in the future.

### 1.3 Benefits of the research

Research question for the current thesis arose during my summer internship with International Organization for Migration, Oslo mission. Observations and practical experience obtained during 6 months spent as a part of the organization gave me invaluable opportunity to closely observe and participate in internal meetings with IOM employees and other implementing partners of the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme. Notes and information obtained on the daily basis revealed challenges of the implementation of the programme. Moreover, I had an opportunity to explore the programme from two sides - IOM, as an implementation agency, and rejected asylum seekers, as target group of the programme.

Despite the fact that rejected asylum seekers of Russian origin constitute the largest group of applicants of the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme, supportive schemes for this group is quite standard and does not imply assessing the needs of the participants or monitoring the process of reintegration after return. In addition, unfortunately cost-effectiveness of the programme was never questioned and returnees were never asked to share their opinion about possible changes in the programme, which might positively affect their return to the country of origin. Thus, since the very beginning of the internship I noticed that the process of feedback

sharing was not established between IOM and applicants of Russian origin. Both actors of the programme were just following the established structure, even though both sides had their concerns about the developed scheme. By contrast, Russian applicants were quite open with me and ready to share their current challenges, concerns about return and future plans after return. As participants of the extensive network of Chechen and Ingush population in Norway, rejected asylum seekers were in close contact with Chechen and Ingush families from their reception centers and returnees, who returned to Russia nine-twelve months ago.

As a result of continuous interaction with rejected asylum seekers of Russian origin, with the help of the current research it was possible to give them a voice. Despite the fact that I had precise and narrow criteria for selection of research participants, majority of them agreed to participate without hesitation. Since the very beginning it was explained that their opinion about the programme, IOM assistance, financial support from the Norwegian government will be put under scrutiny in order to reveal the gaps and possible directions for programme's improvement. Moreover, it was mentioned that their living conditions after return, main challenges faced, future plans regarding possible remigration, reestablishment of livelihood and successful reintegration will be questioned. Potential interviewees were quite positive about participation, which contributed to the collection of rich and reliable data.

The current research is not large-scale and does not seek to generalize experience of the returnees and reveal generic solutions, which could be applied for all returnees of Russian origin, by contrast it is aimed at presenting unique experience of returnees after arrival. In addition, it aims to create an impulse for the further research, conducted in cooperation of academia, IOM and government representatives. Current programme for rejected asylum seekers has been implemented in Norway since 2002 and thus, in my opinion should be reorganized and adapted to the present conditions in the country of origin and needs of the returnees. As a result, both actors could get more benefits, while at the same time cost-effectiveness of the programme will be increased.

## 1.4 Structure of the Study

The thesis is subdivided into 6 chapters, followed by references.

Current chapter gives a brief overview of the research and explains the reason of choosing the topic. Furthermore, it outlines the key issues to be addressed in this thesis. The second chapter is entirely based on review of the theoretical framework. It gives a definition of rejected asylum seeker, return migration, sustainability of return, reintegration and embeddedness. Moreover, it reveals the main components of the sustainable return and emphasize the criteria of successful embeddedness. Different definitions of reintegration, embeddedness and return sustainability given by researchers are juxtaposed in order to establish the base for the further step of the current research.

Chapter three presents information about research methods, and main reasons for using qualitative interviews as the main source for data collection. Explanation for choosing the particular group of returnees to Russia for conducting interviews is also given in the chapter. Furthermore, it reveals main challenges and limitations of data collection as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter four introduces the roots of the current situation by giving a detailed explanation of history of the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia as parts of Russia, followed by events that have generated flows of asylum seekers from the region. The current socio-economic and political situation in the region is also examined in the fourth chapter, and possible barriers on the way to successful reintegration of returnees emphasized. Furthermore, prospective prognoses of the situation in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia made by Russian researchers are presented.

Chapter five gives in-depth analysis of the obtained data and interprets it according to the above-presented theoretical framework. Key findings of the interviews are further structured according to the various spheres of returnees' everyday life. As a result, main outcomes are outlined in the last chapter and sustainability of return is assessed. Conclusion in chapter six seeks to give a brief summary of the main results of the research together with the final remarks. Recommendations for further research are given based on the research findings and current situation in the regions of return.

## CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Return of rejected asylum seekers. Voluntariness of return

Forth Law of migration outlined by Ravenstein defines return migration as a “counter-currents of migration” and states that “each main currents of migration produces a compensating counter-current.”<sup>7</sup> Return migration according to Gmelch is “the movement of emigrants back to their homeland to resettle.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he argues that return migration is the last stage of a migration cycle. On the contrary, Eastmond states that return is “an open-ended process, which often takes place over a longer period of time and may involve periods of dual residence and considerable movement back and forth.”<sup>9</sup> Van Houte and de Konig emphasize that circular migration is particularly inherent in involuntary return migration, when return migrants “do not have the intention to return in the first place and therefore cannot be expected to remain where they do not want to be.”<sup>10</sup>

Main features of return migration such as motivation for return, preparation phase and outcomes of the return highly depend on the immigrants’ status in the host country. Thus, there will be differences in challenges and obstacles faced by returnees, who migrated in order to improve economic conditions or seek protection. It is argued those returnees, whose decision to return was well-founded, return unassisted and where returnees choose to rebuild their lives in the country of origin as a result of significant improvements of the conditions, overall situation and

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<sup>7</sup> Ravenstein E.G. (1976) *The Laws of Migration*, Ayer Company Publishers, Incorporated, p199.

<sup>8</sup> Marieke van Houte, Mirelle de Konig (2008) *Towards a better embeddedness? Monitoring assistance to involuntary returning migrants from Western countries*, Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen, p4.

<sup>9</sup> Eastmond M. (2006) *Transnational returns and reconstruction in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina*, *International Migration* 44 (3), p144.

<sup>10</sup> Marieke van Houte, Mirelle de Konig (2008) *Towards a better embeddedness? Monitoring assistance to involuntary returning migrants from Western countries*, Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen, p4.

infrastructure will have more possibilities for successful reintegration. “In such cases, reintegration occurs organically and does not need management or promotion.”<sup>11</sup>

On the contrary, return of rejected asylum seekers, who had been refused protection by country of asylum, has its specific characteristics and outcomes. Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration 1997 defines rejected asylum seekers as people who “after due consideration of their claims to asylum in fair procedures are found not to qualify for refugee status nor to be in need of international protection and who are not authorized to stay in the country concerned.”<sup>12</sup> Black and Gent argue that in the case of rejected asylum seekers return boundaries of voluntariness are blurred, different degrees of return voluntariness could be identified. Researchers argue that return decision might be a result of clear and well-founded choice made by returnees or “it can also be a choice between returning voluntarily when asked to do so, perhaps gaining financial or other incentives as a result, or staying and risking forcible return at some time in the future.”<sup>13</sup>

International Organization for Migration being the main implementing organization of Assisted Voluntary Return Programme “considers that voluntariness exists when the migrant’s free will is expressed at least through the absence of refusal to return, e.g. by not resisting boarding transportation or not otherwise manifesting disagreement.”<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, IOM states that often there is no “sharp and clear-cut distinction” between forcible and voluntary return.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> UN Chronicle (2013) *Homeward Bound? Questions on Promoting the Reintegration of Returning Migrants*, Vol. LN3.

<sup>12</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (1997) *Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration*.

<sup>13</sup> Black R., Gent S. (2006) *Sustainable Return in Post-conflict Contexts*, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, International Migration Vol. 44 (3), p19.

<sup>14</sup> International Organization for Migration (1997) *Return Policies and Programmes*, N5, MC/INF/236, p2.

<sup>15</sup> Noll G. (1999) *Rejected asylum seekers: The problem of return. New Issues in Refugee research*, Working paper No.4. UNHCR, p47.



Analyzing differences between forcible and voluntary return Noll argues that only presence of plausible (legal) alternative for returnees will insure voluntariness of the return.<sup>16</sup> According to Dimitrijevic the return should be considered voluntary only if “after reviewing all available information about the conditions in their country of origin, refugees decide freely to return home.”<sup>17</sup>

Dumont and Spielvogel define Assisted Voluntary Return Programme as “an alternative to expulsion,” which allows migrants to choose the conditions of return and receive an assistance from the country of asylum. They also characterize the boundary between voluntary and forced return as tenuous, as returnees do not have the option to stay in the country of asylum. Researchers also emphasize great benefits of Voluntary Assisted Return Programmes for the host countries. First, they contribute to the migrants’ repatriation to the countries of origin, with which the host country currently does not have readmission agreement in force. Second, Voluntary Assisted Return Programmes facilitate the return at a lower cost than a forcible remove from the country.<sup>18</sup>

Danish Refugee Council argues that return of rejected asylum seekers could not be defined as voluntary or “based on free choice,” because the targeted group do not have a legal option to remain in the country of asylum. While trying to draw a distinction between different types of return migration, they state voluntary return is only possible when returnees hold a temporary or permanent residence permit, and their decision to return is made after considering the present situation in the country of origin and reviewing all information about the conditions and potential

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<sup>16</sup> Noll G. (1999) *Rejected asylum seekers: The problem of return. New Issues in Refugee research*, Working paper No.4. UNHCR, p9.

<sup>17</sup> Marieke van Houte, Mirelle de Konig (2008) *Towards a better embeddedness? Monitoring assistance to involuntary returning migrants from Western countries*, Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen, p2.

<sup>18</sup> International Migration Outlook (2008), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, SOPEMI, p189.

obstacles they may face after return. Mandatory return could be applicable in the situation when person, who do not have a legal permission to stay in the host country, decides to return, while the return might be “induced by the court order or other threats of sanctions.”<sup>19</sup> Forced returnees are defined as “persons who have not granted their consent, and who may be subject to the use of force in connection with their departure.”<sup>20</sup>

Taking into consideration all above-mentioned definitions of the return, researchers of Danish Refugee Council label return of rejected asylum seekers as mandatory return. They argue that return “must always be based on positive incentives, not sanctions.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, they emphasize interconnection between positive incentives and sustainability of return. Black also supports the opinion that voluntariness of return is conducive to its sustainability and successful reintegration. He argues that conditions and decisions of return strongly influence the process of reintegration and sustainability of the return.<sup>22</sup>

European Reintegration Support Organizations, which aim to contribute to successful reintegration of voluntary returnees and return sustainability, also underline that those returnees who were forced to return to their country of origin struggle more on the way to successful reintegration.<sup>23</sup> Recent study on the return process of Armenian immigrants revealed that returnees’ decision and motivation for return have a direct influence on the process of reintegration. “Free-will and the readiness to return are two fundamental elements that go to

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<sup>19</sup> Chu B., Stec K., Dünnwald S., Loran T. (2008) *Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers. Lessons learned from return to Kosovo*, Danish Refugee Council, p12.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Black R., Gent S. (2006) *Sustainable Return in Post-conflict Contexts*, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, International Migration Vol. 44 (3).

<sup>23</sup> *Experiences with Voluntary Returns and Reintegration*, Caritas Europa Discussion paper for the workshop “Brainstorming on the December 2013 Return Communication” at the Return Contact Committee meeting on 20 June 2013, p2.

make up return migrants' preparedness."<sup>24</sup> Thus, while assessing opportunities for sustainable return it is absolutely vital to consider returnees' experience prior to return and the ground for return decision.

## 2.2 Reintegration, embeddedness and sustainability of return

It is argued that stable and successful return of rejected asylum seekers mostly depends on efficient reintegration in their home countries. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Executive Committee Conclusion on the return of persons found not to be in need of international protection emphasized that the return of people, whose claim for international protection was rejected, is an essential part of international refugee protection system and "should be undertaken in a humane manner, in full respect of human rights and dignity."<sup>25</sup> The importance of providing opportunities for sustainable return was also emphasized in the Conclusion.<sup>26</sup>

While discussing the sustainability of return, first and foremost it is necessary to define the general meaning of sustainability. Sustainability "primarily means that the returnee remains in his country of origin after returning there and doesn't leave again."<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Gibson states that "of all the buzzwords and catchphrases circulating in the academic and political worlds, sustainability may be the most slippery."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Chobanyan H. (2013) *Return Migration and Reintegration Issues: Armenia*, Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration, p7.

<sup>25</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2003) *Conclusion on the return of persons found not to be in need of international protection*, No. 96 (LIV).

<sup>26</sup> Morris H., Salomons M. (2013) *Difficult decisions. A review of UNHCR's engagement with Assisted Voluntary Return programmes*, p11.

<sup>27</sup> Kreienbrink A. (2007) *Voluntary and Forced Return of Third Country Nationals from Germany*, Research Study 2006 in the framework of European Migration Network, German National Contact Point, p56.

<sup>28</sup> Black R., Gent S. (2006) *Sustainable Return in Post-conflict Contexts*, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, International Migration Vol. 44 (3), p25.

Black emphasizes that there could be different understandings of sustainability among providers of projects and policymakers. He argues that general definition of sustainability should include the situation in the home country of rejected asylum seekers. As a result, Black states that “return is sustainable for the individual returnee if his socio-economic status and his fear of violence and persecution has not become worse one year after returning, compared to the situation at the time of the return itself.”<sup>29</sup> UNHCR considers sustainable return and reintegration as synonymous, and defines reintegration as “the re-entry of a former refugee into the social, economic, cultural structures of their original community.”<sup>30</sup> In addition, a 10-point Plan on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration developed by UNHCR states that “sustainability of return is best guaranteed if individuals who do not have a right to stay in a host country return home voluntarily.”<sup>31</sup>

Researchers of Danish Institute for International Studies argue that “sustainable return and reintegration implies that returnees will successfully embed themselves in their country of return and become self-reliant.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, the concept of sustainable return implies comprehensive embeddedness of returnees. Success in three main spheres characterizes the sustainability of return, namely economic embeddedness (an opportunity to build sustainable livelihood), social network embeddedness (access to social contacts and relations) and psychosocial embeddedness (sense of belonging to the country of origin and security).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kreienbrink A. (2007) *Voluntary and Forced Return of Third Country Nationals from Germany*, Research Study 2006 in the framework of European Migration Network, German National Contact Point, p56.

<sup>30</sup> Dimitrijevic, M., Z. Todorovic, N. Grkovic (2004) *The experience of decision-making and repatriation process. Return of Serbian Refugees to Croatia*, Belgrade: Danish Refugee Council, p38.

<sup>31</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2011) *Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration: The 10-Point Plan in Action*, p229.

<sup>32</sup> Whyte Z., Dan V. Hirslund (2013) *Assisted return of rejected asylum seekers - how can we create sustainability?* DIIS Policy Brief, p3.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

They emphasize a strong linkage between physical and socio-economic aspects of sustainability, and underline that the only way to prevent the phenomenon of circular migration among returnees is to ensure that return and reintegration were undertaken “in a safe, dignified and sustainable manner.”<sup>34</sup> “Sustainable return therefore implies the successful reintegration of returnees, and prerequisites the availability of the receiving community to receive and accept the returnee as well as social and physical stability in the area of return.”<sup>35</sup>

Ghosh states that the process of successful reintegration and sustainability of return greatly depends on the respective opportunities for further development that the country of origin can offer, such as jobs, housing, public infrastructure, education and security. If returnees find the lack of opportunities after arrival to the home country, they could migrate again at a later point.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Danish Refugee Council recommends the development of adequate support measures and various reintegration programmes implemented by home countries.<sup>37</sup>

HIT (Stichting Hersteld vertrouwen In de Toekomst) foundation in the final report on European cooperation on the sustainable return and reintegration of asylum seekers emphasized that return is sustainable when returnees “go and never come back to the individual member state; go and never come back to any other member state of the European Union; leave voluntarily and are ready to start a new life; establish a new livelihood in their country and can sustain their family; can make a meaningful contribution to the community they are returning to and are therefore

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<sup>34</sup> Chu B., Stec K., Dünwald S., Loran T. (2008) *Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers. Lessons learned from return to Kosovo*, Danish Refugee Council, p13.

<sup>35</sup> Ghosh B. (2006) *Return migration: Journey of hope of despair*, European Migration Network, Italian National Contact Point – IDOS, IOM, Geneva, p3.

<sup>36</sup> Kreienbrink A. (2007) *Voluntary and Forced Return of Third Country Nationals from Germany*, Research Study 2006 in the framework of European Migration Network, German National Contact Point, p56.

<sup>37</sup> Chu B., Stec K., Dünwald S., Loran T. (2008) *Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers. Lessons learned from return to Kosovo*, Danish Refugee Council, p15.

accepted when they return; contribute to economic and social development of the country of return; decide to use legal and official means of migration in the future.”<sup>38</sup>

The process of development sustainability measures identified three main dimensions: socio-economic, political-security, and physical. Thus, Black, Koser and Munk defined above-mentioned dimensions as follows:

1. Physical sustainability consists of subjective physical sustainability (achieved if returnees do not want to continue the refugee cycle and migrate again within a certain time after their return), objective physical sustainability (achieved if returnees do not actually leave the home country within a certain period of time after return), aggregate physical sustainability (achieved if there is no increase of emigration from the home country caused by the return process).<sup>39</sup>
2. Socio-economic sustainability is based on subjective socio-economic sustainability (achieved if returnee believe that they have corresponding level of income, assets, jobs and housing at a certain time after return), objective socio-economic sustainability (achieved if returnee actually reach an adequate level of income, assets, jobs, housing after a certain time after return), aggregate socio-economic sustainability (achieved if levels of income, assets, jobs, housing do not decline as a consequence of return process).<sup>40</sup>
3. Political sustainability is grounded on subjective political sustainability (achieved if returnee is satisfied with the level of security and access to public services in a certain time after return), objective political sustainability (achieved if returnee has an access to public services

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<sup>38</sup> HIT Foundation (2010) *Final Report on European cooperation on the sustainable return and reintegration of asylum seekers*, p8.

<sup>39</sup> Black R., Koser K., Munk K., Atfield G., D’Onofrio L., Tiemoko R. (2004) *Understanding voluntary return*, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, p27.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

and do not experience violence or persecution in a certain time after return), aggregate political sustainability (achieved if the level of returnees' access to public services is not worsened after return, and the level of violence and persecution did not increase as a result of the return process).<sup>41</sup>

As a result, the return of rejected asylum seekers is not sustainable if returnee and his/her family wish to re-emigrate, plan to re-emigrate or actually re-emigrate. Socio-economic sustainability could be measured as possibility for employment of all household members, level of income and its sources, opportunity for receiving humanitarian assistance, adequate access to education and health care. Political sustainability should be measured as feeling of security and access for public services.<sup>42</sup> Researchers of Sussex Centre for Migration emphasize that the return is unsustainable not only if returnees immediately re-emigrate, but also if they have a strong aspiration to continue the migration cycle, which is restrained by external force only.<sup>43</sup>

Van Houte and de Konig consider sustainability of return as a “continuum, which consists of different interrelated dimensions.”<sup>44</sup> They argue that sustainability of return could be assessed only by looking at all aspects of a livelihood of rejected asylum seekers after return, considering economic, social dimension and returnees' identity. It is also necessary to take into account that all above-mentioned dimensions continuously influence each other.<sup>45</sup> Defining the main conditions of sustainable return, van Houte and de Konig label it as a “process of mixed

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<sup>41</sup> Black R., Koser K., Munk K., Atfield G., D'Onofrio L., Tiemoko R. (2004) *Understanding voluntary return*, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, p27.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p25.

<sup>44</sup> Marieke van Houte, Mirelle de Konig (2008) *Towards a better embeddedness? Monitoring assistance to involuntary returning migrants from Western countries*, Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen, p6.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

embeddedness, rather than reintegration.”<sup>46</sup> They argue that embeddedness being a multidimensional concept implies “an individual finding of his or her own position in society and feeling a sense of belonging to, and participating in, that society.” Thus, in contrast to reintegration, embeddedness is “an ongoing process rather than a state of being.”<sup>47</sup>

Manual for sustainable return outlines four crucial factors for sustainable return, such as security and freedom of movement, access to public services (public utilities, social services, education and health care), access to shelter (housing reconstruction) and economic viability based on “fair and equal access’ to employment opportunities.”<sup>48</sup> In addition, UNHCR emphasizes differences in returnees’ prioritizing, which depends on the individual circumstances and life experience. As a result, following sectors will be given priority level during the process of reintegration - interethnic relations and community integration, economic sustainability, infrastructure and community services, housing reconstruction, security and freedom of movement.<sup>49</sup> In order to make return more sustainable various types of assistance should be provided for returnees, based on the prioritized sectors of reintegration.

Chobanyan emphasizes that awareness of the current situation in the region of return is one of the crucial prerequisites of successful reintegration process. Thus, information about legislative framework of the home country, rights of returnees as citizens, overview of employment, business and development opportunities should be provided for returnees prior to their return. Rising information awareness is also of major importance after significant time of returnees’ residing abroad. It is also argued that usually returnees do not return to the same living conditions

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<sup>46</sup> Marieke van Houte, Mirelle de Konig (2008) *Towards a better embeddedness? Monitoring assistance to involuntary returning migrants from Western countries*, Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen, p2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *Manual for Sustainable Return*, UNHCR & UNMIK, January 2003 edition, p5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p9.



and circumstances as before they fled. “Often, returnees return to a country affected by war, where the material living conditions are worse than when they left and often worse than living conditions during their time in the host country.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, to minimize the shock after arrival, it is necessary to provide returnees with clear and updated information about conditions in the home country and possible challenges they may face after return.

Together with acknowledgement of necessity of rising informational awareness, practical experience of Danish Refugee Council shows that rejected asylum seekers do not want to receive information prior to return “as they believe this will hinder their chances to stay in the host country.”<sup>51</sup> Taking into consideration that sometimes returnees do not have lots of time before departure, lack of information together with a lack of time will make returnees unable to constructively plan their return, prepare for it, assess all opportunities and potential challenges.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, Chobanyan states that returnees, who spent abroad long period of time, “face not only employment but also educational (especially language), cultural, social and psychological issues. In the reintegration process language plays an important role.”<sup>53</sup> For example, the study of returnees to Armenia revealed that language classes for returnee children could contribute to the process of successful reintegration in educational system of the country of origin and home society.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Chu B., Stec K., Dünwald S., Loran T. (2008) *Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers. Lessons learned from return to Kosovo*, Danish Refugee Council, p13.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p22.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Chobanyan H. (2013) *Return Migration and Reintegration Issues: Armenia*, Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration, p1

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Regional Cooperation Framework of the Bali Process outlines the importance of states in providing opportunities for sustainable return for returnees and calls for maximizing opportunities for greater cooperation.<sup>55</sup> European Parliament and the Council also argue “international cooperation with countries of origin at all stages of the return process is a prerequisite to achieving sustainable return.”<sup>56</sup> In addition, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) states “international cooperation with countries of origin in a spirit of solidarity at all stages of the return process is a pre-requisite to achieving sustainable return.”<sup>57</sup> It is also argued that the process of returnees’ reintegration should be carefully planned and based on a continuous cooperation between country of return and country of asylum. “Although return is often seen simply as a matter of removing the migrant concerned from a given territory, problems may arise if the return is not sustainable and if little is done to facilitate the reintegration of the returning migrant.”<sup>58</sup>

HIT Foundation argues that cooperation between involved countries “could lead to a more effective and efficient use of funding, increase the quality of monitoring and evaluation and improve the quality of reintegration services for returnees.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, by making Voluntary Assisted Return Programme more effective and efficient, better assistance will be provided to the participants based on the assessment of their needs and current situation in the home country.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Core Principles of the Regional Cooperation Framework of the Bali Process* (2011).

<sup>56</sup> Directive 2008/115/EC of the *European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals*, Official Journal of the European Union, L 348, 24.12.2008

<sup>57</sup> European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2005) *The Way Forward Europe’s role in the global refugee protection system. The Return of Asylum Seekers whose Applications have been Rejected in Europe*, p3.

<sup>58</sup> International Organization for Migration (2009) *Return Migration, Essentials of Migration Management*, Volume Three: Managing Migration, p9.

<sup>59</sup> HIT Foundation (2010) *Final Report on European cooperation on the sustainable return and reintegration of asylum seekers*, p23.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p15.

Thus, mutual cooperation and support in political, financial and economic spheres will result in gaining benefits for both host and home countries. Moreover, it will provide returnees with good chances for successful reintegration.<sup>61</sup>

It is also argued that support should not end after the return. According to European Council on Refugees and Exiles “in order to ensure sustainable return, it is important for states to assist in reconstruction and development in countries of origin and to support the reintegration of returnees. Successful reintegration in the country of origin is a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of return.”<sup>62</sup> Essentials of Migration Management also emphasize the need of post-return policies and programmes aimed at successful reintegration; it is argued policies should be developed in close cooperation between receiving and sending countries and ensure successful economic and social reintegration in the regions with large numbers of returnees. “Such initiatives will have a positive long-term impact on the prevention of migration to the destination country and improved social well-being for communities in countries of origin.”<sup>63</sup>

Based on the practical experience of returnees to Kosovo, researchers of Danish Refugee Council argue that integral part of the return sustainability assessment is mechanisms of follow-up monitoring of the programme participants during the first year spent in home country. It gives an opportunity not only to reveal returnees’ challenges for successful reintegration, but also evaluate outcomes of various supportive schemes and assistance programmes on sustainability; reveal possible ways of its improvement. It also gives an opportunity for implementing agencies to

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<sup>61</sup> European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2005) *The Way Forward Europe’s role in the global refugee protection system. The Return of Asylum Seekers whose Applications have been Rejected in Europe*, p3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p5.

<sup>63</sup> International Organization for Migration (2009) *Return Migration, Essentials of Migration Management*, Volume Three: Managing Migration, p12.

maintain constant contact with participants of the programme and adjust support schemes if new and unforeseen problems arise.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to similarities in reintegration processes, monitoring mechanisms are aimed at disclosure of the unique issues, which arose in the process of reintegration and should be taken into consideration when designing programmes. “Projects should be designed that comprise multifaceted contributions to meet the needs and support the rights of each type of returnee. They need to be flexible and able to adapt to the contextual circumstances, while still providing the necessary assistance to ensure a durable solution.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Chu B., Stec K., Dünnwald S., Loran T. (2008) *Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers. Lessons learned from return to Kosovo*, Danish Refugee Council, p14.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p21.

## CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODS

### 3.1 Choice of method

In order to answer the main research question of the study as well as sub-questions, I chose to employ qualitative interviews as research methodology. Positive factors and challenges to a sustainable return of rejected asylum seekers of Russian origin require deep understanding of returnees' social world, material circumstances, perspectives, history and their experiences before and after return. Thus, the process of collecting necessary data would be difficult through usage of quantitative methods.

To provide empirical evidence as an answer to the research question, it is necessary to grasp unique experience of research participants during the process of reintegration in the country of origin after coming back from Norway. According to Ritchie and Lewis, data collection using qualitative methods is based on establishment of close, “interactive and developmental” contact between interviewer and interviewees and allows “emergent issues to be explored.”<sup>66</sup> Moreover, they emphasize that together with “undiluted focus on the individual” qualitative interviews “provide an opportunity for detailed investigation of people's personal perspectives, for in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena are located, and for very detailed subject coverage.”<sup>67</sup>

Kvale states that interview is a “professional interaction, which goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, aiming at

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<sup>66</sup> Ritchie J., Lewis J. (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice. A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, SAGE Publications, p5.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p36.

<sup>68</sup> Kvale S. (2007) *Doing Interviews*, SAGE Publications Ltd, p7.

revealing feelings, hopes and future plans of returnees in the country of origin, I decided to use in-depth interviews in a format of general interview guide approach as the main method of data collection.

The main advantage of using in-depth interviews for the current research is a possibility to reveal the way research participants see and interpret the world around them. As a result, the process of capturing unique experience of returnees contribute to the avoidance of generalizations. Furthermore, by bearing “little resemblance to everyday conversation,”<sup>69</sup> in-depth interviews contribute to “collaboration between researcher and participant, sharing reflection” and put an “emphasis on free expression.”<sup>70</sup> I also decided to employ general interview guide approach, which gives an opportunity to interact with research participants in a more relaxed and informal way and contributes to openness and examining subjects in-depths. According to Turner, informal environment created while using general interview guide approach contributes to mutual understanding between interviewer and interviewees, which allows “to ask follow-up or probing questions based on their responses to pre-constructed questions.”<sup>71</sup> He states that during the process of interviewing questions could be changed “based on participant responses to previous questions”, which allows to employ “a more personal approach to each interview.”<sup>72</sup>

McNamara emphasizes the strength of general interview guide approach as it gives an opportunity “to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; thus provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree

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<sup>69</sup> Ritchie J., Lewis J. (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice. A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, SAGE Publications, p138.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p140.

<sup>71</sup> Turner D.W. (2010) *Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators*, The Quantitative Report Volume 15, N3, p755.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee.”<sup>73</sup> In addition, Leiyu Shi states that change the sequence of interview outline during process of data collection, while maintaining the essence, contributes to the process of collecting thick and rich data allowing interviews’ actual flows.<sup>74</sup>

Prior to the interviewing, I conducted a literature review on return of rejected asylum seekers, in order to build the base of the current research and have an opportunity to link the research with findings and discussions in the previous researches. Moreover, exploring and summarizing previous researches helped me to reveal limitations and challenges of studies in the field of return migration and the process of reintegration, as well as explore different methods employed for data collection. Furthermore, it allowed me to critically assess credibility and relevance of my research question in the field of migration.

### 3.2 Research Design

Design of the current research is based on seven stages of in-depth interview research introduced by Kvale. The first stage is named Thematizing and aims at clarifying the purpose of investigation before the process of interviewing starts. Thus, “the *why* and *what* of the investigation should be clarified before the question of *how* - method - is posed.”<sup>75</sup>

Designing is the second stage of in-depth interview conducting process, which implies formalizing the plan of interview process based on outlined earlier research question. Kvale emphasizes that “designing the study is undertaken with regard to obtaining the intended knowledge and taking into account the moral implications of the study.”<sup>76</sup> Guion, Diehl, and

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<sup>73</sup> McNamara C. (2009) *General guidelines for conducting interviews*.

<sup>74</sup> Shi L. (2008) *Health Services Research Methods*, 2nd edition, Thomson, p148.

<sup>75</sup> Kvale S. (2007) *Doing Interviews*, SAGE Publications Ltd. p35.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

McDonald argue that proper organized interview guide helps researcher to “focus on topics that are important to explore, maintain consistency across interviews with different respondents, and stay on track during the interview process.”<sup>77</sup>

Interviewing, which is the next stage, is defined by Kvale as the process of conducting interviews “based on an interview guide and with a reflective approach to the knowledge sought and the interpersonal relation of the interview situation.”<sup>78</sup> He also emphasizes the necessity of solving all ethical issues prior to the beginning of conducting interviews. Moreover, informed consent, which contains information about the research together with its purposes and risks, should be signed by interviewees. Informed consent implies “voluntary participation of subjects and informing them about right to withdraw from the study at any time.”<sup>79</sup>

The forth stage is Transcribing, which implies transferring audio recording of the interview into detailed verbatim report. Usually, it is difficult to analyze collected data in a raw format, thus researcher needs to transform it before starting the process of interpretation. As a result, the process of Transcribing helps to organize and structure collected data. Jones defined the process of transferring interviews’ transcripts to the software as thematic analysis. According to the definition, thematic analysis also includes extraction the core themes by researcher from the transcribed data that it “could be distinguished both between and within transcripts.”<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, Kvale separates Analyzing from Transcribing and mark it as a separate stage of conducting in-depth interviews.<sup>81</sup> Analyzing stage implies closer examination of collected data

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<sup>77</sup> Guion L.A., Diehl D.C., McDonald D. (2001) *Conducting an in-depth interview*, Publication #FCS6012, University of Florida IFAS Extension.

<sup>78</sup> Kvale S. (2007) *Doing Interviews*, SAGE Publications Ltd, p35.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p27

<sup>80</sup> Bryman A. (2012) *Social Research. Methods*, 4th edition, Oxford University Press, p13.

<sup>81</sup> Kvale S. (2007) *Doing Interviews*, SAGE Publications Ltd, p36.



and aims at identifying key themes emerging from the answers of research participants. Nevertheless, before starting the analysis it is necessary to choose an appropriate method, which will fulfill requirements of the research and complement method chosen for data collection.

Process of Verifying follows Analyzing and is based on the process of checking credibility and validity of interview findings. Credibility refers to how convincing and trusted findings are; validity implies consistency of the research, if the actual research question is being investigated.

The seventh stage is named Reporting and involves writing a report, which presents research findings and gives an opportunity to share the results with different stakeholders interested in the subject.

Considering above-mentioned stages, following is a research design of the current study:

1. Literature review;
2. Shaping the research question;
3. Establishing contacts with potential research participants;
4. Qualitative in-depth interviewing;
5. Transcribing collected data;
6. Analyzing key themes emerged from the interviews;
7. Discussion about research findings, suggestions for further research.

### 3.3 Research participants

Enormous contribution to the current research was made during my internship at the International Organization for Migration based in Oslo in Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Department. My internship lasted for 6 months and aimed at providing assistance to rejected asylum seekers of Russian origin in obtaining legal documents, which are vital for the process of return to Russia. During 6 months period I assisted more than 30 applicants, who originated from

the Chechen Republic or the Republic of Ingushetia. Profiles of every applicant were quite different from each other. Some of the applicants came to seek asylum in Norway alone, some in big families. Time spent in Norway also varied from 2 months to 4-5 years. During the process of waiting for final decision some families gave birth to more children, who as a result officially had neither Norwegian nor Russian citizenship.

The process of obtaining necessary return documents also varies for every case, it might take from three weeks to one year. It mostly depends on the documents every applicant possesses. Thus, during the processing time I was in constant contact with family members. Moreover, while waiting in line at the Russian Embassy in Oslo, informal exploratory conversations were held with family members.

In order to grasp reintegration experience of returnees in all fields of interest I set criteria for participation in the current project. Ideally, I was looking for families with children, who spent in Norway more than 6 months. I was also interested in examining families with children and with only one parent; families, who have children born in Norway, who haven't been to Russia before. As a result of informal conversations, consent forms were distributed among applicants of the programme; 7 families agreed to participate in the project and thus signed the consent form and shared their contact information. Unfortunately, one family have never replied on my e-mails and their phone number was blocked. Thus, there were only 6 families who participated in the research.

Literature review, which was done prior to the interviewing, revealed that in order to assess the success of reintegration process, different time frames for monitoring were considered in the previous studies. Monitoring of rejected asylum seekers of Georgian origin done by German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge) was

conducted no less than three months after return to the country of origin.<sup>82</sup> While Black argues that sustainability of return could be measured no less than one year after the return.<sup>83</sup>

Unfortunately, time frame of the current research did not give an opportunity to follow returnees one year after the return. Moreover, I think that in the case of rejected asylum seekers returning from Norway, three months are not enough for the process of fully capturing reintegration processes in the country of origin. Thus, while trying to find a balance between above-mentioned criterion, I decided to look for returnees who at the moment of interviewing have spent at least six months in their home region.

Consequently, interviewed research participants were the following (names are changed):

1. Zarina, returned 6 months ago, 2 children;
2. Yakha, returned 1 year and 2 months ago, 3 children;
3. Amina, returned 6 months ago, 3 children;
4. Farida, single mother, returned 1 year ago, 2 children;
5. Leila, single mother, returned 7 months ago, 1 child;
6. Magomed, returned 8 months ago, 1 child.

Interviews were conducted in Russian language, as all interviewees were fluent Russian speakers. I consider usage of Russian language as one of the most important trust building factors in the current research. Since the very first contact with research participants, they were very happy to have an opportunity to interact in Russian, as they could not speak neither English nor Norwegian fluently. Moreover, it prevented possible misunderstandings during interviews, helped interviewees to express their feelings more precise and thus provide additional benefits to

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<sup>82</sup> Baraulina T., Kreienbrink A. (2013) *Rückkehr und Reintegration. Typen und Strategien an den Beispielen Türkei, Georgien und Russische Föderation Beiträge zu Migration und Integration*, Band 4, Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge.

<sup>83</sup> Black R. (2004) *Understanding voluntary return*, Home Office Online Reports, Home Office, London.

the current research. Furthermore, my origin from neighboring region of Russia also was a great contribution to trust building and prevented cultural misunderstandings during the process of interaction.

### 3.4 Ethical consideration

Ethical issues play an important role in every research, which implies direct interaction with research participants. According to Seidman, ethical principles “guide researchers’ relationships with their participants”, outline rights of research participants, ensure their dignity and safety as well as protect them from potential harm.<sup>84</sup>

Researchers also benefit from clearly outlined ethical principles. While emphasizing the importance of participants’ dignity in the research, Hicks states that “honoring peoples’ dignity is the easiest and fastest way to bring out the best of them... Leading with dignity would mean that you know how to treat people as though they matter.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, bearing complex and demanding responsibility, researcher should be mindful of the ethical implications throughout the whole research process.<sup>86</sup>

Ethical considerations of the current research are based on five basic ethical issues outlined by Willig:

- informed consent - prior to the process of data collection research participants should be provided with extensive details about aims, methods and outcomes of the study and, as a result, ensure that they are entirely informed about the procedure. Informed consent should also include all possible risks of the interview;

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<sup>84</sup> Seidman I. (2013) *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and Social Sciences*, 4th edition, Teachers College Press, p139.

<sup>85</sup> Hicks D. (2011) *Dignity*, Yale University Press, p67.

<sup>86</sup> King N., Horrocks C. (2010) *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, SAGE Publications Ltd, p103.

- no deception - deception of research participants considers to be unacceptable. According to Willig “the only justification for deception is when there is no other way to answer the research question and the potential benefit of the research far exceeds any risk to participants”;<sup>87</sup>
- right to withdraw - in the very beginning of the research it is necessary to explain that participation is voluntary, and interviewees could refuse to participate or withdraw the results at any stage of the research without “fear of being penalised”;<sup>88</sup>
- debriefing - at the time when the process of data collection is complete, it is necessary to inform research participants about the usage of obtained data. “Ideally, they should also have an access to any publications arising from the study they took part in”;<sup>89</sup>
- confidentiality - as research participants share their personal information and experience, the researcher should provide them with necessary level of confidentiality during the whole research process and after research is complete.<sup>90</sup>

Following the above-mentioned set of basic ethical considerations, prior to the process of data collection I developed a text of informed consent, which includes title of the project, implementing institutions, contacts of the researcher and supervisor, aims, methods, duration and ways of using collected data. Right to withdraw was also clearly stated in the form of informed consent. It was mentioned in the consent form that the current research is independent from IOM and has no implications on the possibility to remain in Norway, return to the country of asylum or increase the amount of financial assistance from the Norwegian government. In order to avoid misunderstandings, the form was translated in Russian. As a result of clarification and

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<sup>87</sup> Willig C. (2001) *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p18.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

negotiations of the terms of involvement, informed consent in written format was obtained from members of seven families.

During the process of negotiations, interviewees showed reluctance to reveal their names, names of family members and their place of origin/return. In order to protect the identity of interviewees, requested anonymity was kept during all research stages. Thus, identifying information was removed from collected data and known only to the researcher.

### 3.5 Challenges, limitations and advantages of chosen research design

Undoubtedly, all research designs have their positive and negative sides. As a result the main responsibility of researchers is to find the most appropriate methodology and methods for the particular research question, find limitations of the research design and provide explicit account of them. According to Denscombe researchers' acknowledgement of limitations gives an opportunity to assess "what can, and what cannot, be concluded on the basis of the findings and it also serves as a warning to readers not to draw unwarranted conclusions from the findings."<sup>91</sup>

Due to different geographical locations of interviewer and interviewees telephone interviews were the only mean of data collection. Prior to the process of interviewing I examined all challenges and benefits of telephone interviews and tried to minimize possible limitations.

Groves argues that compared to face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews last not more than 20-30 minutes and elicit short and superficial answers.<sup>92</sup> Adler and Clark emphasize the importance of visual information absence during telephone interviews, which gives an opportunity to get a "sense of the honesty of the answers, especially if the interviewer pays

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<sup>91</sup> Denscombe M. (2010) *Ground Rules for Social Research. Guidelines for Good Practice*, 2d edition, Open University Press, p108.

<sup>92</sup> Biemer P.P., Groves R.M., Lyberg L.F., Mathiowetz N.A., Sudman S. (1991) *Measurement Errors in Surveys*, Wiley & Sons Inc.

attention to verbal and nonverbal cues.”<sup>93</sup> While planning interviews I also considered that during telephone interviews participants might avoid sensitive questions, hang up the phone if they do not feel comfortable, or else there could be connection problems.

Nevertheless, telephone interviews bear significant benefits when compared to face-to-face qualitative research. First, it helped to avoid travel expenses to the interviewees’ place of residence and thus overcome geographical barriers, as they reside in quite distant from each other areas. In addition, Dillman argues that “people today are as honest and open on the phone as they are when answering questionnaires or being interviewed face-to-face.”<sup>94</sup> Cargan emphasizes that “with an unseen interviewer, you may obtain more honest answers about socially disapproved topics.”<sup>95</sup>

In order to limit the challenges, prior to interviewing I sent a letter to every research participant asking if they are still interested in participating in the research. Taking into consideration that during telephone interviews research participants might be involved in other actions, which make the process more difficult or even dangerous, suitable time for both sides was set. Before interviewing I also checked that all costs for international call are covered by myself and not the interviewees. With the help of our time spent in a waiting line in Oslo, interviewees were very open and ready to answer even sensitive questions as they talked with me more like with a friend rather than with researcher or IOM representative. Thus, I managed to avoid short and superficial answers, by the tone of the voice and openness I realized that interviewees are open and honest with me. Moreover, they agreed to participate in a follow-up interviews if necessary.

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<sup>93</sup> Stier Adler E., Clark R. (2011) *An Invitation to Social Research. How it's done*, 5th edition, Cengage Learning, p225.

<sup>94</sup> Dillman D. (2007) *Mail and Internet surveys: the tailored Design Method - 2007 update with New Internet, Visual, and Mixed-Mode Guide*, New York: J. Wiley.

<sup>95</sup> Cargan L. (2007) *Doing Social Research*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p113.

CHAPTER 4. NORTH CAUCASIAN REGION OF RUSSIA: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES.



According to the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, territory of the North Caucasus is the northern part of the Caucasus region within European Russia between the Black and Caspian Seas. It is always called “a land bridge between two seas and a link between two continents.”<sup>96</sup> The region consists of Krasnodar kray, Stavropol kray, Republic of Adygea, Karachay-Cherkess Republic, Kabardino-Balkar Republic, Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, Republic of Ingushetia, Chechen

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<sup>96</sup> Henze P.B. (1983) *Fire and Sword in the Caucasus: The 19th Century Resistance of the North Caucasus Mountaineers*, Central Asian Survey, Vol.2, N1.



Republic and Republic of Dagestan.<sup>97</sup> On 19 of January, 2010 North Caucasian Federal District was established following the President's Decree. Seven federal subjects were assigned as parts of new district, namely Stavropol kray, Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, Karachay-Cherkess Republic, Kabardino-Balkar Republic, Republic of Ingushetia, Chechen Republic and Republic of Dagestan. The overall territory of the North Caucasian Federal District is 170,439 square kilometers (1 percent of Russian territory). The population of the federal district was estimated as 9,428,826 people according to the Country Census in 2010.<sup>98</sup>

For Russia the North Caucasus region is vital both geopolitically and economically. Being a vital supply route for oil from Caspian Sea, the region brings economic benefits to the country and provides a source of income for other republics in the federal district.<sup>99</sup> The North Caucasus has always been dominated by the Islamic population. Henze calls the North Caucasus as “a region where cultures have crossed and clashed.”<sup>100</sup> Despite the population diversity, population cohesiveness and regional unity was developed in the region.<sup>101</sup>

#### 4.1 Wars in the Chechen Republic: prerequisites, operations and outcomes.

The territory of Chechnya (15,647 square kilometers)<sup>102</sup> is located on the northern side of the Caucasus mountain. The Chechen Republic is almost entirely surrounded by Russian territory, but also shares the southern border with neighboring Georgia.<sup>103</sup> According to the population

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<sup>97</sup> *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, Moscow 1969-1978.

<sup>98</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

<sup>99</sup> German T.C. (2003) *Russia's Chechen War*, Taylor & Francis e-Library.

<sup>100</sup> Henze P.B. (1983) *Fire and Sword in the Caucasus: The 19th Century Resistance of the North Caucasus Mountaineers*, Central Asian Survey, Vol.2, N1.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service

<sup>103</sup> BBC News Europe Chechnya profile (2013).

Census in 2010 there were 1,268,989 people living in the republic. The majority of republic's population profess Islam.<sup>104</sup> The main advantage of geographical location of Chechnya is Rostov-Baku highway and Rostov-Baku railroad, which are used as a linkage between northern Russia and Transcaucasia as well as the countries of eastern and southern Europe. It has also been a vital center for oil industry.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the above-mentioned cohesiveness of the region, Seely emphasized the geographic difference between north and south Chechnya, which can be seen in people's attitudes. People, who reside in northern part of the republic, tend to be more accommodating to Russia over the years. Southern Chechens are more often characterized as rebellions. Their fights for independence were longer and more severe. Southern Chechens perceive themselves as "the guardians of Chechen identity and honour."<sup>106</sup>

The Chechen Republic of Russian Federation had many attempts on the way to an absolute independence. For more than two centuries the Republic tried to escape Russian dominion. Since then periods of independence and obedience were constantly alternating. Long bloody campaign in 1859 was carried by Russian forces in order to overcome the resistance of Imam Shamil and claim North Caucasus region as a part of Russia. Nevertheless, during the chaos of the October revolution in 1917 the Chechens claimed independence, which they had been enjoying until 1922.

In December 1922, with the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), North Caucasian Republics had been "forced back into the Russian fold". Composed of fifteen republics, the USSR was a multinational federation with variety of national groups. Many of the

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<sup>104</sup> German T.C. (2003) *Russia's Chechen War*, Taylor & Francis e-Library.

<sup>105</sup> Evangelista M. (2002) *The Chechen wars: will Russia go the way of the Soviet Union?* The Brookings Institution, p3.

<sup>106</sup> Seely R. (2001) *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800-2000: A Daily Embrace*, London, UK, Frank Cass, p8.

republics lacked political recognition as separate and independent nations. According to Constitution of the USSR, every republic had the right to separate from the Union, nevertheless, in reality leaders of the Soviet Union were constantly blocking ways to genuine independence for the republics.<sup>107</sup>

Tishkov explains that the will of the Chechen Republic to separate from Russia was caused by increased mistrust as a result of Stalin's deportation before and during World War II. Massive deportation of Chechens and Ingush began on February 23, 1944 and lasted for a few days. Nevertheless, by February 29, 478,479 people including 91,250 Ingush were evicted from their place of residence and moved to the new designated areas.<sup>108</sup>

In 1991 at the time of collapse of the Soviet union, while Russia struggled to find effective ways to manifest its interests, Dzhokhar Dudayev, a Soviet Air Force general, took an advantage of Russia's weakness and declared independence of the Chechen Republic. The major aim was to create "an Islamic republic from the Black to the Caspian seas."<sup>109</sup>

In 1994, expecting quick victory over rebellious region, Russian government sent poorly prepared forces to the Republic. By contrast, the Chechens put up unexpectedly strong resistance towards Russian forces, which was the beginning of fierce confrontation.<sup>110</sup> In December 1994 the war against the Chechen separatist was launched by Russian government. "It lasted nearly two years, killed tens of thousands of people, and turned hundreds of thousands more into refugees."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> German T.C. (2003) *Russia's Chechen War*, Taylor & Francis e-Library.

<sup>108</sup> Tishkov V. (2004) *Chechnya: Life in a War-torn Society*, University of California Press, p25.

<sup>109</sup> Sakawa R (ed.) (2005) *Chechnya: From Past to Future*, Wimbledon Publishing Company Ltd, p16.

<sup>110</sup> German T.C. (2003) *Russia's Chechen War*, Taylor & Francis e-Library.

<sup>111</sup> Seely R. (2001) *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800-2000: A Daily Embrace*, London, UK, Frank Cass, p1.

Peace agreement was carried out and signed in 1996 and thus Moscow withdrew its forces from territory of the Chechen Republic. In accordance with the agreement, Chechnya gained substantial autonomy, but not the absolute independence from Russia. Thus, de facto Chechnya had achieved its independence, but the cost was enormous.<sup>112</sup>

In 1999, Chechens' incursion into Dagestan and terrorist attacks in Moscow on Guryanov Street on 9 September, 1999 (100 people died), on Kashirskoe Highway attack on 13 September, 1999 (124 died) and in Volgodonsk attack on 15 September, 1999 (19 died) created lots of fear and anger against Chechens, even though their involvement was not officially proved.<sup>113</sup> In September 1999, the inevitability of the second invasion was obvious. New army forces were sent to Chechnya to bomb towns and villages in the Republic. "This bombardment irreversibly led to displacement of over three hundred thousand civilians, which constituted a third part of the Chechen population."<sup>114</sup>

It was acknowledged that the failure to evacuate the civilian population of the Chechen Republic were the greatest failure in both Chechen wars. Analysis of the situation made by Giligan concludes "while the political questions at play were far from uncomplicated, safe evacuation of Chechen civilians should have been an uncompromising feature of this war."<sup>115</sup>

During bombings in the Chechen Republic some civilians managed to flee from the violent events. Thus, the Republic of Ingushetia received flows of Chechen internally displaced persons (IDPs). At this time the neighboring republic was not ready to receive IDPs and thus first arrived Chechens tried to find temporary shelter wherever they could. Some of them had means to rent

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<sup>112</sup> Evangelista M. (2002) *The Chechen wars: will Russia go the way of the Soviet Union?* The Brookings Institution, p1.

<sup>113</sup> Sakawa R (ed.) (2005) *Chechnya: From Past to Future*, Wimbledon Publishing Company Ltd, p16.

<sup>114</sup> Giligan E. (2003) *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the tragedy of civilians in war*, Princeton University Press, p2.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p103.

an apartment, others stayed with their relatives, lots were forced to live in tent camps, barns, railway wagons, hangars, cellars and in abandoned factory buildings.<sup>116</sup> The life of Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia was very difficult especially for those with children and with no means of subsistence. Every day was full of considerable deprivation and fear; their lives heavily relied on aid-food, clothing, and medical care. It was unclear how long the war would last and what is going to happen next. Thus, they were caught in limbo.<sup>117</sup>

A controversial referendum in March 2003 approved a new constitution, giving Chechnya more autonomy, but stipulating that it remained firmly part of Russia. Since then there has been increased investment in reconstruction projects and the shattered city of Grozny is being rebuilt. Russia is keen to highlight these signs of rebirth.<sup>118</sup> Later Putin assured “today the situation in Chechnya has undergone a qualitative change, people are returning to normal life there.”<sup>119</sup>

Nevertheless, according to the estimations of the Russian human rights organization Memorial the number of people disappeared in the period 1999-2005 is between 3,000 and 5,000.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, the existence of forty-nine mass graves with approximately 3,000 civilians were confirmed by local officials of the Chechen Republic.<sup>121</sup> There is no absolutely reliable information on deaths of civilians during two conflicts in Chechnya, but the most reliable data calculates a figure between 65,000 and 75,000.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Giligan E. (2003) *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the tragedy of civilians in war*, Princeton University Press, p103.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p105.

<sup>118</sup> BBC News Europe Chechnya profile (2013).

<sup>119</sup> Giligan E. (2003) *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the tragedy of civilians in war*, Princeton University Press, p2.

<sup>120</sup> Statistical updates of International Organization for Migration (IOM Oslo) on The Voluntary Assisted Return Programme.

<sup>121</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

<sup>122</sup> Giligan E. (2003) *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the tragedy of civilians in war*, Princeton University Press, p3.

Material and economic losses during Chechen conflicts are tremendous. The Republic was devastated. It is estimated 380 villages were bombed out of the 428; two-thirds of houses were destroyed in the republic, and large parts of Grozny were destroyed completely. Industry inside the republic was significantly damaged as well as agriculture. More than 30,000 hectares of land were enormously damaged by explosions. Air and rail communications were disrupted. The majority of the local population became and later remained unemployed. Irrecoverable after two wars remained cultural losses in the region. The Academy of Science, three universities, research institutes, technical colleges, schools, hospitals and libraries were eradicated. Regional museums, theaters, archives and libraries were looted.<sup>123</sup>

Thus, as a result of the armed conflicts in Chechnya, since 2003 thousands of Chechens started to move towards Western Europe. Usually they have been using the route through Belarus to Terespol, Poland or thorough the Carpathian mountain range, Ukraine to Slovakia.<sup>124</sup>

#### 4.2. Conflict in the Republic of Ingushetia.

In addition to asylum seekers from the Chechen Republic, European countries receive a great amount of asylum seekers from the neighboring Republic of Ingushetia. There is a couple of reasons which has driven Ingush population from Russia. First and foremost, 60,000 Ingush were expelled from the Prigorodny District as a result of Ossetian-Ingush conflict in 1992. In addition, several thousands of Ingush population, who resided in the Chechen Republic, had to flee from the Chechen War.<sup>125</sup> Together, both factors created unbearable refugee problem in the Republic.

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<sup>123</sup> Sakawa R (ed.) (2005) *Chechnya: From Past to Future*, Wimbledon Publishing Company Ltd, p40.

<sup>124</sup> Giligan E. (2003) *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the tragedy of civilians in war*, Princeton University Press, p118.

<sup>125</sup> Cole J.E. (ed.) (2011) *Ethnic groups of Europe: an encyclopaedia*, ABC-CLIO, LLC. p194.

Originally, Ingush population is comprised of an indigenous people of the Northern Caucasus and is estimated less than half a million people. Ingush's traditional place of residence was located between the Terek River and the Caucasus range. In present time, majority of Ingush population settle in the Republic of Ingushetia, which was established in June, 1992.<sup>126</sup>

There are lots of similarities between Ingush and Chechen population of the North Caucasus. Both population groups belong to the "vainach" ethnolinguistic family, and thus their languages resemble one another. Both groups identify themselves as "vainach-speakers"; in both regions the taip system (clan system) still exists. Moreover, some taips consist of both Ingush and Chechen family members. Thus, population groups are closely linked by ties of a kinship.<sup>127</sup>

As well as Chechens, Ingush population of Russian Federation were subjected to deportation in 1944. Both groups were forcibly removed to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. After deportation the Prigorodnyi district officially became a part of the North Osset Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), and thus Ossets started to settle on its territory. Although the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was reestablished in 1958, and Ingush population could officially return to the former place of residence, the Prigorodnyi district remained a part of the North Ossetian ASSR.<sup>128</sup> As a result, without legal permission, Ingush population started to settle in the Prigorodnyi district. Originally, deportation was aimed at destruction of Ingush collective identity, but in reality it strengthened feelings of ethnicity and ethnic cohesion among representatives of the group.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Cole J.E. (ed.) (2011) *Ethnic groups of Europe: an encyclopaedia*, ABC-CLIO, LLC. p194.

<sup>127</sup> Kritski E.V. (1995) *Chechnya's Refugees Within North Caucasus: Reality and Problems*, Refuge, Vol.14, No. 10, p13.

<sup>128</sup> Rezvani B. (2010) *The Ossetian-Ingush Confrontation: Explaining a Horizontal Conflict*, Iran and the Caucasus N14, p424.

<sup>129</sup> Rezvani B. (2010) *The Ossetian-Ingush Confrontation: Explaining a Horizontal Conflict*, Iran and the Caucasus N14, p424.

Thus, in order to return the Prigorodnyi district, in 1973 Ingush population started massive demonstrations.<sup>130</sup>

The conflict between Ingush and Ossets over the Prigorodnyi district escalated in October-November 1992, after the dissolution of the USSR. All-out ethnic war, which lasted six days, did not result in solving controversies over the Prigorodnyi district. By contrast, human rights violations were committed by both sides involved. Thousands of houses, which mostly belonged to Ingush population, were completely destroyed; around 260 individuals, mostly of Ingush ethnic group, disappeared.<sup>131</sup> In addition, according to the report of Helsinki Human Rights Watch, the Ossetian militia supported by Russian Interior Ministry and army troops carried out a campaign of ethnic cleansing towards Ingush population, which caused the deaths of approximately 600 Ingush civilians and forcible refoulement of more than 60,000 Ingush from the Prigorodny District.<sup>132</sup> Despite the fact that religious factor in the above-mentioned conflict should not be underestimated, Rezvani states that religion was not a determinant factor in the ethnic tensions between Ossets and Ingush.<sup>133</sup>

In order to establish peaceful relationship, Ingush, Ossets and Russian representatives developed joint action program, which came into force in 1997. The main aim of the action program was overcoming tensions between two ethnic groups.<sup>134</sup> In addition, in 2002 presidents of the Republic of Ingushetia and North Ossetia signed an Agreement for Promoting Co-operation and Neighborly Relations between two Republics. However, terrorist attack in North Ossetian city

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<sup>130</sup> Cole J.E. (ed.) (2011) *Ethnic groups of Europe: an encyclopaedia*, ABC-CLIO, LLC, p196.

<sup>131</sup> *Russia. The Ingush-Ossetian Conflict in the Prigorodnyi Region* (1996) Human Rights Watch/Helsinki.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Rezvani B. (2010) *The Ossetian-Ingush Confrontation: Explaining a Horizontal Conflict*, Iran and the Caucasus N14, p423.

<sup>134</sup> Minahan J. (2000) *One Europe, Many Nations: A Historical Dictionary of European National Groups*, Greenwood Press, p329.



Beslan in 2004, was followed by rumors about participation of Ingush terrorists, which created new wave of tensions between Ingush and Ossets.<sup>135</sup> The situation became even more strained after Vladikavkaz (North Ossetia) bombing in 2010. Thus, tensions between two groups, which seemed to be frozen, started to reemerge. Many people feared that together with the tensions, old conflict between Ossets and Ingush may erupt.<sup>136</sup> In the aftermath of the above-mentioned events, Ingush population have started to seek asylum abroad.

#### 4.3 Seeking asylum abroad. Case of North Caucasian residents.

According to the Report of the Norwegian Refugee Council, asylum seekers from the Russian Federation, the majority of whom are of Chechen and Ingush origin, in 2003 and 2004 constituted the largest group of asylum seekers in Europe.<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, the way of getting international protection for Chechens and Ingushs is full of various barriers. One of the main barriers on the way of seeking asylum for Chechens and Ingushs is visa policies of European countries. Airplane companies do not accept travellers without valid visas. However, European embassies in Russia are very reluctant to issue visas for people of Chechens and Ingushs origin. Thus, the majority of asylum seekers travel by land in order to enter European countries.<sup>138</sup>

Refugee recognition rates among European countries vary considerably. According to the statistics of Norwegian Refugee Council, Austria, Poland, and the Czech Republic received the greatest amount of asylum seekers from the Russian Federation in 2003, followed by Germany, France, Norway and Slovakia. Some of them were registered as asylum seekers in more than one

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<sup>135</sup> Fouskas V.K. (2007) *Politics of Conflict: A Survey*, Taylor & Francis e-Library.

<sup>136</sup> Rezvani B. (2010) *The Ossetian-Ingush Confrontation: Explaining a Horizontal Conflict*, Iran and the Caucasus N14, p419.

<sup>137</sup> *Whose responsibility? Protection of Chechen internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees*, Report by the Norwegian Refugee Council, May 2005, p4.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, p32.

country at the same time.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, in many countries, the majority of asylum seekers from the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia were considered as victims of war who do not qualify for refugee status. Usually, only those who ask for international protection on the base of their political opinion were granted asylum. Fewer countries granted asylum to Chechens because of their ethnicity only. Other European states were providing other forms of protection. Thus, forms of protection varied from country to country. As usual, rights given to Chechens and Ingushs were not the same as those provided to persons recognized as refugees.<sup>140</sup>

In accordance with estimation of the Norwegian Immigration authorities only 7-8 percent of asylum seekers from Chechnya or Ingushetia can be qualified as refugees. Norwegian lawyers state that only those Chechens who can prove the fact of being persecuted by Russian authorities, were fighting with Chechen separatists, those who are well-known political activists or their relatives have a chance to obtain a refugee status.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, in many European countries asylum seekers from the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia are denied protection, because it is assumed that they can settle in other regions of Russia.<sup>142</sup>

In the particular case of Norway, Chechens were generally granted at least some kind of protection until October 2003. Those who was not granted asylum in 2003 were given Norwegian residence permits on protection grounds. Few of asylum claimants were granted a residence permit on humanitarian grounds.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Whose responsibility? Protection of Chechen internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees*, Report by the Norwegian Refugee Council, May 2005, p39.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, p7.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, p43.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p7.

<sup>143</sup> *Whose responsibility? Protection of Chechen internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees*, Report by the Norwegian Refugee Council, May 2005, p45.

In October 2003, in order to evaluate practices towards asylum seekers from Russia, the Norwegian immigration authorities stopped processing their asylum claims. The authorities were considering return of rejected asylum seekers from Chechnya and Ingushetia to other regions of Russia. Being updated about growing discrimination towards Chechens and Ingushs in Russia Norwegian NGOs made campaigns against it. Thus, in 2004 the immigration authorities started to accept applications for asylum from Chechens and Ingushs again.<sup>144</sup>

#### 4.4 The Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia: present situation and future perspectives for returnees

Continuous conflicts in the Republic of Chechnya and the Republic of Ingushetia left both regions devastated. Economic networks and transportation links developed in the republic before the conflicts were relocated to another regions of Russia, which limited development opportunities and shrank labour market.<sup>145</sup>

In addition to psychological trauma caused by hostilities in the region, local population faced the challenge of future uncertainty. The majority of villages were destroyed, houses were burnt down; industry together with agriculture were significantly damaged. Eradication of universities, research institutes, technical colleges, schools, and libraries deprived Chechens and Ingushs of an opportunity for rapid development and recovery.

Vendina, Belozarov and Gustafson argue that despite enormous losses, the conflicts did not entirely demolished opportunities for economic development in the regions. Moreover, it enabled

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<sup>144</sup> *Whose responsibility? Protection of Chechen internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees*, Report by the Norwegian Refugee Council, May 2005, p46.

<sup>145</sup> Vendina O.I., Belozarov V.S., Gustafson A. (2007) *The Wars in Chechnya and Their Effects on Neighboring Regions*, Eurasian Geography and Economics, 48, N.2, p 186.

economic redistribution and gave new stimulus for further development.<sup>146</sup> After being assigned as President of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov has started to develop reconstruction projects of the Republic. He stated that infrastructure in the Chechen Republic will be reconstructed by 2009 and unemployment rate will be decreased to 15 percent. He also tries to attract foreign investments to Chechnya's petrol industry. Thus, Chechen refugees who migrated to neighbouring regions of Russia or abroad are being urged to return to the Republic.<sup>147</sup>

In addition, federal government also makes attempts to reestablish infrastructure, solve social problems, improve living conditions for civilians in the Republic and provide them with job opportunities, by introducing range of programmes in Chechnya and Ingushetia. Thus, on July 15, 2008 Russian government enacted a Decree N537 "On Federal Programme of Socio-economic development of the Chechen Republic in 2008-2012", aimed to establish the base for stable socio-economic development of the Chechen Republic, increase welfare and standard of living. According to the Decree, 106,342,28 million rubles (2,262,6 million euros) will be invested in order to achieve the goals of the federal program. Thus, by 2012 it was planned to increase Gross Regional Product in 1,49 in comparison with 2007, raise labor demand in the Republic and as a result provide 95 thousands of people with job in social and economic sphere, increase housing availability such as 14 square meters for one person; increase capacity of hospitals such as 93,1 places for ten thousands people and 95 medical staff for ten thousands people; increase capacity of schools such as creating of 15,512 available placements.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Vendina O.I., Belozarov V.S., Gustafson A. (2007) *The Wars in Chechnya and Their Effects on Neighboring Regions*, Eurasian Geography and Economics, 48, N.2, p179.

<sup>147</sup> Brouwers J. (2007) *Rebuilding Chechnya: from conflict zone to house of cards*, Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior, p4.

<sup>148</sup> Decree of Government of Russian Federation N537 "On Federal Programme of Socio-economic development of the Chechen Republic in 2008-2012" 15.07.2008.

According to the results of the federal programme's implementation, amount of money spent for development of the Chechen republic increased in five billion rubles (102 million euros) during the period of implementation. Report shows that the goals were almost fully achieved, but more time is needed for a complete recovery of the region.

As a result, to achieve comprehensive development of the North Caucasian region of Russia, the National Program of the Russian Federation for Development of the North Caucasian Federal District until 2025 was approved by the government on December 17, 2012. The program is focused on seven regions of the Federal district, namely the Republic of Dagestan, the Republic of Ingushetia, the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, Stavropol Krai and the Chechen Republic, and aimed at promotion of economic development in the above-mentioned regions by “creating new economic growth centers, as well as coordination of state infrastructure investments and investment strategies of enterprises with regard to spatial development and resource limitation.”<sup>149</sup>

Although President of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov has achieved a “semblance of stability” in the region, detailed analysis revealed ineffective spending of given investments. “Numerous hotels and a football stadium were built in Grozny, and a high-quality road was constructed from Grozny to Gudermes. Yet, the city still lacks many basic elements of social infrastructure such as kindergartens, schools and quality health care facilities.”<sup>150</sup> Unfortunately, there are no official reports available on the processing of implementation of the National Programme. Thus, present situation in the regions of return could be assessed only by quantitative analysis of main socio-economic indexes available on the official web-site of Russian Statistics Service.

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<sup>149</sup> North Caucasian Federal District Investment Portal.

<sup>150</sup> Šmíd T. (2013) *Chechnya and Russian Federal Center Clash Over Subsidies*, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, p11.

According to the Federal State Statistics Service of Russian Federation the population of the country in August 2013 constituted 143,5 million people.<sup>151</sup> The overall population of the Chechen Republic in August 2013 was estimated as 1,337 million people (constituted 0,9 percent of Russian population).<sup>152</sup> The labor force among the overall population in Russia is 75,676,1 thousands people,<sup>153</sup> while in the Chechen Republic 596,769.<sup>154</sup> Thus, despite the fact that average unemployment rate in Russia is the lowest in comparison with the last ten years and estimated to be 5,5 percent,<sup>155</sup> the same index in the Chechen Republic is 29,8 percent.<sup>156</sup> Population in the Republic of Ingushetia is 430,500 people, 201,900 of them is labor force; unemployment rate in the region is 47,7 percent.<sup>157</sup>

Statistical comparison between regions of Russia clearly shows that unemployment rates in the Republic of Ingushetia and the Chechen Republic are the highest. Employment opportunities are extremely limited not only for returnees, who might have lost their qualification during certain period of time spent in Norway, but also for permanent residents of the above-mentioned regions.

Gross Regional Product (GRP) is one of the main measures of economic development for every region of Russian Federation. Similar to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), GRP index is based on the market value of all final goods and services produced within a certain region in a given period of time. According to official statistics, among 83 regions of Russian Federation the Republic of Ingushetia has the lowest GRP index, while the Chechen Republic is on the 73 place

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<sup>151</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

<sup>152</sup> Federal Statistics Service of the Chechen Republic.

<sup>153</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

<sup>154</sup> Federal Statistics Service of the Chechen Republic.

<sup>155</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

<sup>156</sup> Federal Statistics Service of the Chechen Republic.

<sup>157</sup> Federal Statistics Service of the Republic of Ingushetia.

in the list.<sup>158</sup> Above-mentioned numbers show that economic situation within two regions is not favorable for returnees and thus might be a barrier on the way to successful reintegration of returnees. Thus, should employment opportunities and stable income be expected for returnees when there are no jobs available for other members of society?

The fact that returnees are not provided with employment assistance from both asylum country and country of origin should be also taken into consideration. As was mentioned above, Norwegian government provides rejected asylum seekers with financial support, nevertheless it is not enough to cover long-term unemployment. As a result, lack of employment opportunities for returnees could facilitate the wish to migrate and actual migration in the future.

Based on the analysis and official statistics on socio-economic indexes and my personal experience of interaction with rejected asylum seekers prior to their return, I can make few assumptions about possible difficulties, which might be faced by returnees in their country of origin. As was mentioned above there are two categories of returnee groups - families and single returnees. Taking into consideration that single returnees are in their twenties I could assume they stay with their families or relatives after arrival. The situation of families is quite different, because accommodation of 5-7 family members is not an easy task. Head of the family needs to take care of obtaining private apartment in the short term. Despite the fact that average prices for accommodation in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia are not high (3914 NOK and 4287 NOK per square meter respectively),<sup>159</sup> the financial support received from IOM would be enough for paying the rent during couple of the first months only. Moreover, during the process of finding an apartment for rent, lack of money is not the only obstacle. According to the research conducted by Council of Europe and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 2007, Chechens are less desired neighbours as well as undesirable customers for landlords. It

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<sup>158</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

<sup>159</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

emphasizes additional difficulties in residing in regions other than Chechnya, even those of North-Caucasus region.<sup>160</sup>

Moreover, returnees will not have an opportunity to buy their own accommodation for the support given from Norwegian government. Furthermore, it is necessary to keep in mind that there is no support from Russian authorities. In that case the only solution is to take the loan from the state. Nevertheless, according to the legislation of Russian Federation it is not possible if returnee is unemployed and cannot provide bank with security deposit.

Education opportunities are the field of concern for returnees with families. The majority of children of rejected asylum seekers were born in Norway or moved to Norway with their parents in the very early age. Despite the fact that returnees' native language is Chechen or Ingush, school curriculum is in Russian (the only official language of the Russian Federation). Being raised in Norway by families originated from Chechnya or Ingushetia, children usually speak only two languages: norwegian and family language. Thus, it might affect the process of their reintegration after arrival, because no assistance is provided by asylum state or by the home country.

In addition to the language barrier on the way to successful placement in school, returnee children might face lots of problems as a result of curriculum differences. Despite the fact that children were enrolled in Norwegian schools and showed good results, the curriculum in Norwegian schools is enormously different in comparison with Russian schools. Thus, children do not have enough knowledge to be placed in the group with their peers. As a result, absence of reintegration courses for children may make them feel excluded and lost in Russia. Moreover, the procedure of school enrollment creates another barrier for returnees. Child could be accepted by

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<sup>160</sup> European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2007) *Guidelines on the Treatment of Chechen Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Asylum Seekers & Refugees in Europe*, p14.



school authorities if he/she is registered in the region of residence, which is only possible if the family have permanent place to stay. Furthermore, the procedure of placement usually takes approximately two months and thus may increase the knowledge gap of returnees' children.

In addition, it is very difficult to enroll children in kindergarten. Russian system of enrollment is quite complicated and requires parents to sign up for the place in a kindergarten during the first four weeks after child's birth. According to the rules only in that case the child will get the place in the kindergarten at the end of mother's maternity leave (two-three years).

Moreover, official statistics show that there are not enough kindergartens in Russia and in the Chechen Republic in particular. It is estimated there are 105 children for 100 places in kindergartens in Russia,<sup>161</sup> and 129 children for 100 places in the Chechen Republic.<sup>162</sup> Obviously, lack of available places together with the absence of pre-arrangements after birth complicate the procedure of enrollment.

Federal Statistics Service also reveal the worsening of health care system within two regions of concern. The outpatient help provision in 2012 decreased by 0,2 percent in comparison with 2011<sup>163</sup>. Despite the fact that Government of Russian Federation introduced "The plan for development of North Caucasian Federal District", the improvement so far does not fulfill the plan, leaving behind those who are in need of high-quality health care.

The foregoing analysis shows that the lack of opportunities for rejected asylum seekers after return to the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia might lead to additional stress and require development of necessary coping strategies. Nevertheless, conditions after return depend on individual characteristics, networks and personal background. Thus, to assess return's

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<sup>161</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

<sup>162</sup> Federal Statistics Service of the Chechen Republic.

<sup>163</sup> Statistics of Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service.

sustainability, level of embeddedness and future opportunities, rejected asylum seekers should be individually monitored and further analysis should be undertaken, considering internal and external factors, which could possibly influence above-mentioned processes.

## CHAPTER 5. THE INTERVIEWS. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Sustainability of return was presented in earlier chapters as a complex phenomenon, which embraces all aspects of returnees' everyday life. To reveal the experience of returnees after arrival to their country of origin six interviews were conducted with participants of the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme. Nevertheless, findings of the research are not aimed at generalizing experience of returnees to Russia, but conversely reveal the diversity of return conditions depending on the family composition, experience before migration, conditions in the country of asylum and established social networks.

Following established structure of the research, key findings are divided according to various aspects of everyday life such as employment, housing, education opportunities, security, health and interaction with the local community. Moreover, returnees' opinion about assistance from receiving and sending countries is presented in the chapter. As a result, every aspect will be closely examined, capturing unique experience of every returnee family. Moreover, internal and external barriers to successful embeddedness will be revealed. Key findings will not only give an opportunity to assess present situation of the returnees, but also show their future perspectives.

### 5.1 Economic Reintegration

Researchers of Danish Institute for International Studies argue that “sustainable return and reintegration implies that returnees will successfully embed themselves in their country of origin and become self-reliant.”<sup>164</sup> Self-reliance implies receiving an income which is “sufficient, stable and independent.”<sup>165</sup> Thus, the subchapter is aimed at investigation of the current employment situation for the returnees, obstacles faced at the present moment and job opportunities in the

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<sup>164</sup> Whyte Z., Dan V. Hirslund (2013) *Assisted return of rejected asylum seekers - how can we create sustainability?* DIIS Policy Brief, p3.

<sup>165</sup> Marieke van Houte, Mirelle de Konig (2008) *Towards a better embeddedness? Monitoring assistance to involuntary returning migrants from Western countries*, Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen, p23.

future. Question if they are able to cover all expenses of their families without additional help from friends and extended family will be raised. Taking into consideration that being able to cover all necessary economic expenses for oneself and ones children gives an opportunity to ensure stable future for the next generation, future perspectives of returnees' children could be identified.

According to the overview of economic situation in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia, employment opportunities are quite scarce for the local community. High level of unemployment force them to take low-skilled jobs and try to save money for opening their business in the future. In addition to the weak economy of the region as a result of being absent in the region for a long time, returnees might bear supplementary barriers. Zarina, mother of two children says she spends almost all her time at home. She cannot work because children could not stay at home by themselves yet. Although she tries to find part-time employment opportunities, all her efforts are not successful:

*There are no job opportunities at all. Every week I buy a newspaper and there are lots of open job position. Nevertheless, when I start to call they say that someone was already hired for the position. Some people say these job openings are fake, just to show that there are opportunities. But there is nothing. Simply nothing.*

Moreover, she also emphasizes that employment in the region is very corrupted sphere and positions with a decent salaries are “inherited” or distributed among family members only. Amina also emphasizes that because of high level of corruption in the region her husband still cannot find permanent job (six months after return). Currently, he is earning some money by buying broken cars and selling it after fixing. Herself, Amina despite having work experience as a civil servant, continues making some money on on-line consultations with students, which she has started

while living in Norway. Nevertheless, this job is temporary and highly depends on the examination periods at the universities.

Yakha also states that all opportunities are temporary. At present time she is very grateful to her family, which sometimes support them financially. She says that before migration to Norway her husband had his own small business, but today there are no money for establishing one.

Even though security of the return is the main prerequisite for the “organized, safe and dignified” return according to IOM definition, for some returnees security concerns are the main obstacle for employment after return. Farida says:

*I cannot work here officially. I cannot show that I came back to the region. You should understand... I cannot show my passport to anyone. Then everybody will know that I'm here.*

Even though returnees were highly qualified before migration, they experience downward social mobility<sup>166</sup> after return to Russia. Leila, who is a qualified post office operator, works as a housekeeper and says there are no jobs in Russia. She states that in order to get a job with a monthly allowance around 12,000-15,000 rubles (250-320 euros) you need to have a “correct” network. Thus, she is forced to look for the part-time opportunities not only as a housekeeper but also as a dishwasher personnel on weddings and other celebrations.

Magomed also has been experiencing the loss of economic and social status. Prior to migration to Norway he used to work as an accountant in the City Hall. Nowadays University degree in accounting and previous experience do not facilitate employment process. Nevertheless, he takes

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<sup>166</sup> According to Kornblum downward social mobility is “loss of economic and social standing” in W.Kornblum Sociology in a Changing World, 2008, p249.

short-term accounting assignments from different organizations and hopes one day he could get a permanent job.

By contrast, returnees state they were permanently employed in Norway during the process of waiting for their asylum decision. Even though it was not high-skilled positions, it was enough to cover all expenses of big families and save some money for their future. Zarina says she was lucky as she was employed as a nurse in the local hospital in Kristiansand. Moreover, her manager noticed a real potential and promised her that the hospital will refund half of her tuition fees if she decides to get an official nurse certificate in Norway.

Definition of return's sustainability in the theoretical framework emphasizes that return is sustainable when returnees establish a new livelihood in their country of origin and can sustain their families. Findings of the current research show that interviewees are still not permanently employed in 6-14 months after return. Taking part-time positions appears to be the only solution and produces the feeling of constant insecurity as returnees do not know if they get any money in the next month. For returnees' families income insecurity is unacceptable at the present moment as they have at least two children to take care of.

In my opinion, in the case of rejected asylum seekers coming back to Russia, employment is a first-priority problem to solve. Employment affects all spheres of returnees' everyday life. First and foremost, it generates income and provide financial stability for the whole family, contributes enormously to establishment of appropriate housing conditions and provide additional opportunities for education. With the help of stable employment, even though returnees do not have money, they can take a housing loan from the government and thus make sure their family is well accommodated. Moreover, if returnees have sufficient income, their children could be placed in a private kindergarten or school immediately after return and no educational gaps will be created. In addition, kindergatern/school placement of returnee children without delay might

positively affect the process of reintegration and contribute to faster inclusion in the local community.

Financial insecurity forces returnees to work in low skilled positions, even those returnees who have higher education and previous work experience. Thus, generating a stable income is one of the biggest challenges for returnees after return. Findings of the interviews revealed two main barriers on the way to successful employment. In addition to the lack of employment opportunities in the region, corruption also plays a big role in the process of job-seeking. In September 2013, Vladimir Putin stated that corruption in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia is high and more than 1,600 corruption-related crimes were uncovered there from January to June.<sup>167</sup> Strategic Studies Institute also emphasizes the widespread corruption in two regions of concern.<sup>168</sup> As a result, without necessary network returnees are put in a very vulnerable position. Taking into consideration that Russian government does not support returnees after arrival, there are two solutions for them: to depend on their families and good friends or look for economic migration opportunities. Moreover, previous work experience in the country of asylum might facilitate the decision to remigrate.

## 5.2 Housing

Defining socio-economic sustainability Black, Koser and Munk emphasize the need of corresponding housing conditions at a certain time after return. In addition, Ghosh states that successful reintegration depends on the housing opportunities that the country of origin can offer.<sup>169</sup> Often accommodation becomes the first concern of returnees after return, especially those

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<sup>167</sup> *Russia Must Respond to "Baseless" Reports on Caucasus* - Putin, Information Agency Ria Novosti, September, 2013. <http://en.ria.ru/russia/20130909/183307609/Russia-Must-Respond-to-Baseless-Reports-on-Caucasus--Putin.html> accessed 5 March 2014.

<sup>168</sup> Cohen A. (2014) *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences*.

<sup>169</sup> Kreienbrink A. (2007) *Voluntary and Forced Return of Third Country Nationals from Germany*, Research Study 2006 in the framework of European Migration Network, German National Contact Point, p56.

who have children. Van Houte and de Konig argue that “access to housing is therefore for all returnees one of the most indispensable assets immediately after return.”<sup>170</sup>

During the interview Zarina says that most of the time she lives with her sister. Nevertheless, she is still on the move as sometimes she has to move to her brother’s house. Due to the high prices for housing she could not afford buying her own apartment or even renting one. Moreover, she cannot think about improvements of housing conditions in the near future as she is still unemployed.

Yakha is also concerned about her housing situation. Together with her husband and three children she used to live with parents of her husband after return. Nevertheless, after a brother of her husband were forced to move to parents’ place as a result of personal difficulties, it was necessary to find another solution “because it was impossible for eight people to live in one small house”. Nowadays, Yakha lives with her mother, while her husband and three children are in his parents’ place. Thus, she argues that difficult conditions after return are tearing her family apart:

*In Norway we used to live all together like a real family. Right now we are separated. I miss my children and sometimes feel that relationship with my husband are not the same as before. But what can I do? The rent is so high.*

Prior to fleeing from Russia Magomed had his own house and fortunately it remained unchanged while they were in Norway. So, luckily they have the place to live after return. By contrast, after migration to Norway Farida’s house were burnt down by her persecutors. Nowadays she lives with her sister in another city, and despite the fact that she still owns the land in her home city, Farida is scared to come back because of security reasons.

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<sup>170</sup> Marieke van Houte, Mirelle de Konig (2008) *Towards a better embeddedness? Monitoring assistance to involuntary returning migrants from Western countries*, Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen, p23.



Results of the interviews reveal that unfortunately returnees do not have appropriate living conditions. Nowadays the only solution for them is to live with their close relatives. Nevertheless, it is not clear how long the family will have possibilities to accommodate them. Housing difficulties are especially related with the number of family members. As the culture of Chechens and Ingushs implies tradition of having large families with at least four members, their accomodation together with other relatives might be quite difficult. Thus, taking into consideration above-mentioned factors, situation might change very quickly and returnees should be very flexible and ready to find another place and move there. Presence of children does not give them lots of flexibility as usually they are accepted to schools according to the place of residence. As a result frequent movements even within one city will cause stressful situation for minors and require additional efforts for adaptation to the new circumstances.

These particular cases show the direct interconnection between employment and housing conditions, as returnees simply cannot afford renting or buying their own apartment without having a stable income. Financial insecurity does not give an opportunity to rent even the cheapest apartment as returnees are not sure if they can pay for it in the next month. As a result, housing situaion possesses additional challenge on the way to successful reintegration and sustainable return. Moreover, housing situation, as for example in Yakha's case, creates realtionship difficulties and tensions between family members. In addition, absence of attention from the Russian government does not give an impulse for development of supportive schemes for returnees. All aforesaid factors create the feelings of dissatisfaction among returnees and entrap them in the range of circumstances, which might create an additional push factor for future migration.

### 5.3 Education/kindergarten

In order to capture all spheres of reintegration process, returnees with at least one child were chosen for the current research. All of them are under 14 years old and thus in need of school education or kindergarten placement. The need in school or kindergarten placement arose not only as a result of education necessity, but also as a prerequisite on the way to future employment of returnees. As all of children are under 14 years of age, they could not stay home alone and take care of themselves, as a result one parent should stay at home with them. As a result, family income might be reduced in two times. Moreover, for those families with only one parent lack of kindergarten/school placement hinders possibilities to be employed.

Zarina states that she did not manage to find a place for her two children in six months after return. She openly says that she does not have any opportunities. Her son, who was born in Russia before migration to Norway is five years old and could not go to kindergarten as he is “too old” for it.<sup>171</sup> Her daughter, who was born in Norway and is currently three years old, cannot be placed in the kindergarten due to multiple reasons. First, she does not speak Russian at all, as she was raised in Chechen family and thus communicated in Chechen at home. In addition, while playing with other children she learned Norwegian perfectly. Zarina says they really hoped for a permanent protection in Norway and thus did not think that their children will ever need Russian. Nevertheless, Russian is essential for schooling as it is official language of the country, and all subjects are taught in Russian. Unfortunately, lack of financial resources hinder possibilities for hiring a personal teacher of Russian language. Thus, she tries to teach them Russian by herself, but obviously it will take time before they reach the level necessary for attending a school and kindergarten. Second, her daughter was born in Norway and thus her birth certificate was issued by Norwegian authorities and Russian Embassy in Oslo. Despite the fact that it is legal and made

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<sup>171</sup> In Russia children start going to school at the time they are 6 years old. Thus, kindergarten do not accept children, who will finish it in 5-6 months.

in accordance with all requirements, Russian authorities do not recognize the certificate. Thus, without official recognition in Russia she could not enjoy the benefits such as children monthly allowance, insurance, health services and education. Zarina says:

*I have already been to many organizations, talked with many lawyers, but they do not know how to help me. Civil registrars cannot recognize the certificate as it does not have the ordinary form, so they doubt it is legal. Even though it has seals of Russian Embassy in Oslo they think it is fake. When I ask them what shall I do then, they just shrug their shoulders. They do not know what to do, how then I should make it work?*

Moreover, officers at Civil Registrars Office doubt that it is Zarina's daughter. She gave a birth when she was 45, which is considered to be very late in Russia. Registrar openly told her he is not sure that this is her daughter. Thus, they started to talk about undergoing DNA Test. Nowadays, in order to solve the problem, registrar needs an official proof from the Russian Embassy in Oslo that certificate is original. In December she was told that the inquiry about legality of the birth certificate were sent twice to the Embassy of Russian Federation in Oslo. In March, at the time of the interview she still did not get a reply.

Unfortunately, Amina also could not place her three children in the kindergarten. She states that there are too many children in the Republic and not enough places in kindergartens. In accordance with Russian system, to get a placement in the public kindergarten it is necessary to apply for it four weeks after child's birth. Children are put on the queue, so the placement is secure and child will be placed in the kindergarten by the age of two. All of her children were born in Norway, so Amina did not follow this procedure. Two weeks after return to Russia Amina put them in the queue, but they are number 480 in the list, which gives them an opportunity to be placed in a kindergarten in one and a half year. As a result, the only solution that was found is

private kindergarten, which is quite expensive for the family. Moreover, Amina also emphasizes language difficulties faced by her children:

*It is very difficult for my children in Russia. Their first language is Norwegian, but no one speaks it here. So now we are trying to learn Russian. It is hard... Their kindergarten educator allows us to speak only Russian at home, so the process will go faster.*

She also says that as a result of enormous hope of getting protection in Norway she did not speak Russian with her children and never thought they would need it. Later in the interview she states that in addition to rejection of their asylum claim they wanted to come back because no place in the kindergarten were found for her daughters in Norway. Amina argues education and development are very important for her as it is the only way to insure better opportunities in the future. Nevertheless, in contrast to her expectations, public kindergartens are also not available for her children in Russia

Together with Amina's children, Yakha's family also faces language barriers. Her children spoke better Norwegian than Chechen and Russian. While living in Norway she thought it would be better for them to interact with Norwegian children and thus integrate faster in the receiving society. She says after five and a half years spent in Norway she never thought they would have to return to Russia.

Legislation base of the Russian Federation states that only those children who are officially registered on the territory of the particular city/village are entitled for the placement in the kindergarten. As was-mentioned before, Farida is scared to come back to her city of origin as a result of ongoing threat. She cannot be registered in the current place of residence as she does not want to reveal her presence in Russia. Thus, her two children remain deprived of kindergarten and education at the present moment, and she does not know when the problem will be solved.

Leila is happy that it was quite easy for her to find a placement in school for her son. Nevertheless, he was accepted in a fourth grade instead of the fifth. Teacher claims that he lost one year of education while being in Norway. Despite the fact that he attended school in Norway and he has an official certificate, teachers do not want to recognize it and state that curriculums in Russia and Norway are very different.

The absence of cooperation between the country of asylum and country of origin is shown in the education sphere. While cooperation is not established, children have to loose their opportunities for education and stand behind their peers. Norway does not assess the needs of returnees and does not provide them with necessary assistance (such as courses of Russian language or official transcription of courses taken in Norway). As a result, in addition to stress after return, children feel themselves out of the place. At the same time Russian authorities simply try to make the problems related to return migration invisible and as a result do not provide any kind of assistance to returnees. On the contrary, nowadays Russian government tries to activate the policy of inclusion towards newcomers from the Post Soviet countries by providing them with courses of Russian language and culture.

Findings of the interviews show both countries' indifference towards returnees. While one side tries to send them home without thinking about their future, another tries to avoid the problem and let things go with the flow. Moreover, Russian side doesn't only show unwillingness for providing assistance and support to returnees, it also build barriers on the way to successful reintegration. Zarina's case is a clear example of indifference towards returnees. Despite all her attempts and efforts to prove the legality of her daughter's birth certificate, there were no results in four months. In addition to indifference, representatives of Russian authorities show incompetence as could not give her any advice about solving the problem.

Amina's case is an example of the absence of humanity attitudes towards returnees. Even though, according to the Russian legislation, families with three or more children are entitled to special benefits, she has to follow the regular procedure of applying for a kindergarten placement.

As a result of the current circumstances, new generation is deprived from necessary opportunities for development, which might greatly affect their future. Moreover, results of the interviews emphasize interrelation of education opportunities and future parents' employment. Returnees argue both problems should be solved at the same moment, otherwise it will be too hard to prioritize. Thus, returnees feel themselves entrapped in the current situation with very limited solutions of the current problems. Thus, lack of education opportunities in Russia might serve as a push factor for future migration.

#### 5.4 Security

Another important issue for rejected asylum seekers after return is their security in the home country. The main reason of fleeing to Norway for asylum seekers of Russian origin was insecure and unstable situation in both Republics. All of them were looking for a bright future for themselves and their children in Norway. Prerequisite for development of Voluntary Assisted Return Programme was the assumption by Norwegian authorities that the situation in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia is secure and stable, so there is no threat for asylum seekers' lives and they could come back. Unfortunately, no references were mentioned to prove this assumption. Thus, security situation after arrival was one of the main topics discussed during the interviews.

Zarina sounds satisfied with the current situation in the Republic. She says today there are no military operations and the region is safe. Even though it is not absolutely safe, it is much better than it used to be before their migration. Nevertheless, she also does not want to generalize the whole situation and states that it depends on the individual circumstances.

Amina also supports Zarina's opinion and claims it is much better today. However, after the pause she adds that it is dangerous to live here. Quite opposite security situation is revealed by other interviewees. Yakha argues:

*Situation here is very dangerous. I often hear that our neighbours were killed and even my relatives... Sometimes I hear explosions. This kind of things happen here very often. I am scared...*

While Farida is more concerned about her individual security:

*No, I cannot officially reveal that I am here, back in the region. You know... I cannot show my official documents to anyone. I cannot come back to the place we used to live before. I cannot go out without a fear insight, I cannot live the life I want. Honestly... I think it would be better to be imprisoned.*

Interview results show that security is still a big concern of the research participants. Even though situation has improved since years of wars and there are no military operations in the regions, returnees do not feel themselves secure. Unfortunately, these particular circumstances were never considered by Norwegian government during the process of development of the programme and nowadays returnees do not have any other options, but try to survive and protect their families. Moreover, Russian government also pretends that situation in the regions of concern has improved significantly and there are no threats for its residents. By contrast, findings of the interviews show that some returnees do not feel safe enough to live their daily lives freely.

Current security situation reveals that the voluntariness of the programme should be questioned. Returnees fled to Norway because of the lack of security in their home regions, and even though situation have been improving, they feel restricted in their everyday life. Thus, person who states that their life might be in danger and it is better to be imprisoned, could not come back to the

country of origin voluntarily. Moreover, implementation of the principle of non-refoulement<sup>172</sup> should be investigated, as according to the interviews some of them were returned to danger and persecution.

I also assume that returnees' perception of security might be affected by years spent in Norway and nowadays be subjective. During years of seeking asylum they felt protected and free, far away from their problems. Nevertheless, level of crime in Russia has been always higher than in Norway,<sup>173</sup> and thus Russia will not be as secure as Norway in the foreseeable future as regions still remain unstable.

According to the interviews, even though today interviewees are not satisfied with the level of security, they are able to tolerate unstable situation in the region and try to find their own way to survive. Nevertheless, the situation could escalate at any moment, which will produce new refugee flows to the European Union countries.

## 5.5 Health

Being in contact with returnees before their departure from Norway, I have noticed that health services might be of a great concern for some of them. Prior to the return, Zarina asked me to postpone the whole procedure as her son was about to be operated. Since his birth he had problems with his eyes and even though the operation was quite expensive, it was made for free as a support from the Norwegian government. Although operation was successful, the child needs to be regularly checked by professional doctor. Thus, nowadays Zarina is concerned:

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<sup>172</sup> "This principle reflects the commitment of the international community to ensure to all persons the enjoyment of human rights, including the rights to life, to freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and to liberty and security of person. These and other rights are threatened when a refugee is returned to persecution or danger." *UNHCR Note on the Principle of Non-Refoulement, November 1997.*

<sup>173</sup> International Statistics on Crime and Justice, European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, Affiliated with the United Nations, HEUNI Publication Series N.64, 2010.



*Currently I'm looking for a qualified doctor or good private clinic. It is very hard to find someone good as everyday I hear about doctors' mistakes. For me it is very hard to trust doctors, especially when my son is the one who needs help. It is just sometimes they give you prescription, but you do not feel better. Later another doctor might tell you that the previous prescription was absolutely wrong. Is it normal? It was not like that in Norway.*

Both daughters of Yakha have asthma and thus need regular medical assistance and supply of inhalers. While in Norway they were under permanent control of the municipal hospital and all necessary medicaments were provided, no one really cares about them in Russia. She says that in Russia sickness is a problem of individuals and support from the government is not expected. Even if one need very expensive medicines, the government does not provide any assistance and people should find financial means by themselves. Nevertheless, at least she is happy about having an opportunity to have consultations with qualified doctor free of charge. Nevertheless, lots of money are spent afterwards for the necessary medicines and she does not know what to do in case of emergency. Yakha is very grateful to IOM for financial assistance, which gave her an opportunity to buy medicines and bring both girls for the consultations to the regional hospital in Stavropol.

Amina struggles with health problems also. After arrival to Russia, the doctor found benign tumor in her body. At the present moment she needs an operation, but she is very worried about it. Her doctor said it appeared as a result of a strong stress, and thus she blames Norway for that. Together with her family she spent four years waiting for a final decision on her asylum claim. Nowadays she is getting ready for her operation and the only thing she asks is to shorten the decision process for those who are currently in Norway.

Farida had a heart attack in Norway after she was informed about her mother's death. Despite the fact that she received a necessary treatment there, at the time of interview she could hardly walk. She also could not find a qualified doctor, who could help her:

*Our doctors are unjustifiable killers! Killers! They want me to fill their pockets with money. Money, money and even more money! And if you do not have it you will die alone on your bed. Nobody cares.*

Above-mentioned results of the interviews gave practical evidence that health services in Russia are limited and do not meet the needs of the population. Both Amina and Farida argue that nowadays there are no qualified doctors, whom they can trust. Interviews show that it is not only their assumptions, but there are real cases, which proves doctors' ignorance. Thus, in addition to unemployment and lack of adequate housing conditions, returnees face health problems. In order to provide one with necessary medical treatment, great financial means are required, which creates additional challenges for returnees. Unfortunately, there is no government support available for medical purposes. As a result, in solving health difficulties, returnees also can rely on themselves only. Thus, already vulnerable people in need of special medical attention has to overcome additional struggles.

Moreover, health sphere also shows lack of cooperation between sending and receiving countries and their overall indifference towards returnees. Four years of asylum claim investigation made Amina's life enormously stressful and led to additional health problems. Nevertheless, nowadays no one wants to bear responsibility for this consequences: neither Norway, who protracted the process, nor Russia, who is responsible for well-being of its citizens. Despite the fact that Amina learnt how to accept the current situation and deal with it, she only asks for fastening the process of claim investigation for other applicants.

## 5.6 Process of refugees' reintegration in the home regions

Rogge argues there are two different outcomes of the return. It can result in a total return following by successful reintegration in the home region, or else it could be extremely difficult and problematic process. He states process of readjustment depends on the willingness of returnees to come back to their home country, “hospitality” of the home government and local population, assistance after return and time spent in the country of asylum. Rogge also emphasizes for second-generation returnees “return to their country of “origin” does not always necessarily mean going home.”<sup>174</sup>

Experience of returnees to Russia fully reflects above-mention Rogge’s theory. Zarina says that return was a great shock for her family, she had to think about everything at the same time. All problems and troubles were hard to resolve, especially as she was by herself with two children. Her younger daughter was born in Norway and the son moved at the age of 1,9:

*They were scared. They miss Norway a lot and do not let me go even for five minutes. All the time they compare everything: food, landscape and other things. Everything here is new for them. When we walk down the street people notice they did not grew up here. But what is the difference? Naivety? I do not know...*

Zarina also says that everything is much more complicated in the home region now, more complicated than earlier. She still does not understand lots of things. The process of readjustment is quite difficult for her also. Children of Yakha also encounter difficulties. Family returned one year ago, her children forgot Norwegian, but still remember their barnehage (kindergarten in Norwegian):

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<sup>174</sup> Rogge, J. R. (1994) *Repatriation of Refugees: A not so Simple ‘Optimum’ Solution*. Paper for Symposium on social and economic aspects of mass voluntary return of refugees from one African country to another, p1.

*Very often they ask me when are we going to board the airplane and fly back home. I keep telling them that your home is here.*

Together with her children Yakha faces reintegration difficulties also. She states that the only advantage of return to the home region is being close to her relatives. Otherwise everything around is a mess, Ingushetia and Chechnya are very unorganized nowadays.

While trying to cope with conditions in the home region, Farida is disappointed with reintegration process of her children:

*They always ask me why we came back and why I took them away from Norway. They say we had our house there, food and everything we needed. Here we do not have anything. When they say that my heart bleeds for them.*

While all above-mentioned concerns are psychological, Amina's daughter during the first two months after return did not talk at all. Due to enormous stress she was just mumbling. Amina says they were very scared as they did not know how to deal with the problem. Fortunately, after two months her daughter little by little started to talk. Sometimes she even talks in Norwegian, in addition to Russian and local language.

Outcomes of the interviews clearly show that returnees are mostly concerned about reintegration process of their children. Being fully responsible for them, returnees think that their own adjustment process will be successful "somehow", while reintegration process of their children has to be structured and requires a lot of external inputs as well as individual efforts. In my opinion, difficulties of children reintegration also highly depends on the parents' attitudes towards return. During the interviews I noticed that returnees also miss Norway a lot and quite often discuss their mutual memories about Norway with their children. Thus, children as well as parents are always involved in the process of comparison, where Russia is not in favour. As a

result, this process might contribute to the strengthening the ties with Norway and slowing down the process of reintegration in Russia.

Lack of cooperation between sending and receiving countries is also shown during this phase. No courses before return or after arrival were organized, which gives the only one option for returnees' reintegration - to figure out everything by themselves. Zarina argues that lots of things changed in the region, so sometimes it is hard to understand how everything works. Nevertheless, no one gave returnees a guidance and updates about changes that happend while they were in Norway. As a result, it become an additional barrier to the quick reintegration process.

Considering that all research particiants spent quite a lot of time in Norway waiting for a decision on their asylum claim, did not have a genuine desire to return to their country of origin, and from the very first day in Russia have been experiencing the lack of “hospitality” of the home government, their reintegration process will be difficult and problematic according to the definition of Rogge. Nevertheless, no attempts to change the situation were taken from the receiving and sending states, which demonstrates that returnees' removal from the country of asylum was implemented in order to meet immediate country needs only.

### 5.7 Local community and process of reintegration

Returnees' reintegration in the local community is an essential part of successful and sustainable return. Acceptance after return will not only facilitate reintegration process, but also will make it smoother and provide returnees with necessary support. Researchers of Danish Institute for International Studies argue that sometimes local communities have high expectations towards returnees from countries with high level of economic development, “notwithstanding the mode of return.”<sup>175</sup> However, as findings of the current research shows, there is a high possibility that

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<sup>175</sup> Kleist N. (2013) *Life after deportation and migration crisis: the challenges of involuntary return*, DIIS Policy Brief.

rejected asylum seekers return without savings. Some of them have not ever had an opportunity to earn money in the country of asylum.<sup>176</sup> Also, there could be lots of rumors about the reasons for return, which might be followed by lack of understanding and condemnation. As a result, for some returnees these consequences might be unbearable and thus they will try to “isolate themselves” to “avoid gossip and social degradation.”<sup>177</sup>

Leila says after return it was quite hard to meet someone from “the past life”:

*They keep asking me why I came back to Russia. They say I'm crazy. Parents of other children at school wondering how could I come back after putting so much effort into migration to Norway. They do not understand. They would not understand. For them my life in Norway seems like paradise. But you never understand before you experience it.*

Zarina tries not to expose her return from Norway. However, her family and relatives are happy to see her again. Even though she came back without any savings and foreseeable opportunities, her sisters are happy to support her as much as they can. They do not blame her that it never worked in Norway and are ready to share everything they have.

Amina argues that local community was very welcoming towards her family. Everybody was very happy to see them, but were in contact only while they had money. Unfortunately, at the time when their money was over, only family members were there to support them. Yakha also emphasizes there were no support from the local community. Nevertheless, she is very happy that her family accommodates her and three children in one small house. At least they have place to stay. After return from Norway her friends say she is crazy and thoughtless:

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<sup>176</sup> Kleist N. (2013) *Life after deportation and migration crisis: the challenges of involuntary return*, DIIS Policy Brief.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, p3.

*People are shocked. All the time they wonder why we came back, while others are still fleeing from the region. They think it was our wish, but no one come back voluntarily. Only stupid ones. We did not have another choice. We did everything possible to stay. We were fighting for protection till the very end.*

Before migration to Norway Arbi had a very good position in the local community as he used to work for a local government. Nevertheless, respect from his colleagues and extensive network disappeared even though he spent in Norway less than a year. His job is taken, and none of his “former” friends want to help. He says his brothers are the only ones who help him; it is in their culture that they should support each other regardless of all circumstances. Among Chechens and Ingushs it is unacceptable to leave your family member in a difficult situation.

As a result, analysis of the interviews reveals absence of positive attitudes of local communities towards research participants. People who never migrated and never overcame these difficulties would not understand troubles faced by asylum seekers in the country of migration. Leila claims they could not understand before they try everything themselves. Life in Norway seems as a paradise for them and they genuinely do not understand the reasons of return. It is never considered by the local community how difficult was the trip to Norway, years spent in asylum centres without knowing what is going to happen tomorrow. Moreover, they cannot imagine that return could be involuntary and how difficult it is to return after residing for four or five years in a different country.

Thus, it is also necessary to raise awareness among locals and prepare the community for the processes taking place in the region. By informing them it will be possible to make reintegration process easier. Changing the attitudes of the local community will contribute to the hospitality of the region, decrease pressure on returnees and thus facilitate the process of reintegration.

Moreover, assessment of returnees' individual characteristics and experience acquired in the country of asylum will give an opportunity for community development.

In contrast with the local community, returnees' family members remain loyal and ready to share everything they have. Culture of North Caucasian ethnic groups implies mutual support and prioritizing family ties in all circumstances. Results of the interviews show that in the most cases, families provide returnees with housing and help them financially, even though they have their own hardships and some of them are also not employed. As a result, relation with relatives is highly valued by returnees and their support is highly appreciated.

#### 5.8 Assistance provided by sending and receiving countries

According to the definition of European Parliament and the Council “international cooperation with countries of origin at all stages of the return process is a prerequisite to achieving sustainable return.”<sup>178</sup> Nowadays, as was mentioned above there is no cooperation between two governments neither in the process of development of the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme nor in its implementation. There is also not so much assistance and support for the return. The supportive schemes of the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme for rejected asylum seekers of Russian origin consist of IOM's assistance such as information and counseling regarding the return, assistance in obtaining travel documents, planning of return (transportation within country of asylum, flights to the country of origin and domestic transportation in the country of origin) and financial support to return (FSR) from the Norwegian government (10,000; 15,000 or 20,000 Norwegian kroner (NOK) per person). The criteria of granting money for rejected asylum seekers is quite transparent. After the rejection of asylum claim UDI sets the deadline to leave Norway for every rejected asylum seeker. Thus, 20,000 NOK are granted to those applicants who applied

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<sup>178</sup> Directive 2008/115/EC of the *European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals*, Official Journal of the European Union, L 348, 24.12.2008



for voluntary return with IOM before the deadline. If rejected asylum seekers submit their application within two months after the deadline, they are usually granted 15,000 NOK per family member. 10,000 NOK are usually given to those, who applied for voluntary return after two months of the deadline's expiration. Additionally, individual factors and personal history of rejected asylum seekers may influence the decision for granting FSR. IOM has no influence on the amount granted for returnees.

Interview results show that returnees are enormously grateful for the financial support, which were crucial during the first months in Russia and facilitated establishment of their livelihood. Financial support helped Amina's husband to establish his own business as he could not find any job. She says without this assistance they would not have any means for survival. She also states that Norway helped them a lot during years they spent there. Nevertheless, she hopes that asylum decisions could be made faster in the future as in her case stress caused serious disease, negatively affected health of her children and their psychological well-being. Yakha also argues that cooperative assistance and support from the Norwegian government and IOM is a great contribution for every returnee:

*It was hard in the very beginning. When we came back everything was as on uninhabited island. I do not know what would we do without this money. It would be very difficult. Money is the solution for all problems here.*

As her children have asthma she spent most of the money on medicines and appointments with doctors in another cities. Today, under constant control of the doctor they feel much better. Moreover, their family doctor found health problems that herself and her husband has. Both of them are caused by stress and appeared after return from Norway. Thus, part of the received money were spent on medicines for them also.

By contrast, they compare assistance from the Norwegian government with the support of Russian side. As was mentioned above, Russian authorities cannot issue an official birth certificate for Zarina's daughter. Thus she could not get any financial support, which is assigned to every Russian child under the age of 18. Moreover, when she tried to apply for child allowance for her son, officer suggested to wait until she gets a certificate for her daughter and then submit two applications together. As a result, for six months she has not received any financial support from the government.

After six months in a desperate employment seeking process, without any help from the Russian government, she often thinks about opportunities that she lost in Norway. In Norway her former boss promised her medical trainings and further carrier opportunities. Moreover, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) was considering possibilities for financial contribution for the training. Zarina is also very grateful for Norwegian course provided by the state, even though they did not have a refugee status. By contrast, Russian government does not provide any educational support for her family, and thus it hinders opportunities for development.

Amina argues that assistance from the Norwegian government was very helpful. She attended courses of Norwegian language and first aid courses. She also states that there is no such support from the Russian government, which makes the process of reintegration more difficult.

The following discussion was about additional assistance that could have been provided by the governments in order to facilitate the process of returnees' reintegration. In my opinion, returnees' suggestions will reveal the main spheres of their concern. For example, Zarina would like to receive employment assistance together with language courses for her children. For her this is the first priority. Amina's suggestion was to organize qualification courses for returnees:

*Not only we need these courses, but also other returnees. It would be very helpful if another profession could be acquired with the help of short courses.*

*For example, I know couple of returnees without education, who do not know what to do after money given by the IOM are all gone. It is very difficult for them here.*

She argues that it does not matter if the courses are organized in Russia or in Norway. The only thing which matters is profession demand on Russia's labour market, because there are lots of educated people in Chechnya and Ingushetia who could not find the job according to their profession at the moment. In addition, Leila emphasizes the need of assistance with accommodation:

*If you could only help me with accommodation! It is very hard with two children. We have been living here already for one year and still have to be a burden for our relatives. If you could only help somehow...*

Findings of the interviews show that financial support for return provided by the IOM was very helpful for returnees and helped them to overcome the first difficulties after return to Russia. Money were spent according to their needs and gave an opportunity for further development. Nevertheless, I think that amount of the financial support were given to every returnee randomly, regardless of their individual situation. It seems that financial support was aimed to cover unwillingness of the Norwegian government to monitor individual cases of every family of rejected asylum seekers and assess their real needs. For example, results of the interviews show that some families had their property in the home region, so they have not ever faced housing problems after arrival. While other families with only one parent and two children did not have anything in Russia, and nowadays rely on the family support only. In both cases the same financial support were granted to the families, by contrast, their needs differ significantly.

Nevertheless, returnees are very thankful for the assistance of Norwegian government. At the same time they emphasize that no assistance or support were provided by the Russian side.

Russian government does not support returnees as well as does not assess their needs and does not give them a voice. As a result, at the point when financial support is over, returnees suddenly come to reality and had to find their own way to survive.

Suggestions for providing an additional support varied from one family to another. Every family has their own hardships, and it also emphasizes the need of individual assessments prior to the return. Nevertheless, all of their suggestions were very practical and essential for returnees' after arrival in Russia. Possibility of support in housing, employment and language courses were prioritized by research participants and thus should be considered by the both governments involved, which might be the first step towards cooperation aimed at achievement of mutual goals.

### 5.9 Sustainability of return

Kreienbrink states that sustainable return “primarily means that the returnee remains in his country of origin after returning there and doesn't leave again.”<sup>179</sup> HIT foundation also supports the above-mentioned opinion of Krienbrink and considers return sustainable when returnees “never come back to the individual member state.”<sup>180</sup> In addition to the actual repeated migration to the country of asylum, researchers of Sussex Centre for Migration emphasize that the return is also unsustainable if returnees have a strong aspiration to continue the migration cycle, which is restrained by external force only.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Kreienbrink A. (2007) *Voluntary and Forced Return of Third Country Nationals from Germany*, Research Study 2006 in the framework of European Migration Network, German National Contact Point, p56.

<sup>180</sup> HIT Foundation (2010) *Final Report on European cooperation on the sustainable return and reintegration of asylum seekers*, p8.

<sup>181</sup> Black R., Koser K., Munk K., Atfield G., D'Onofrio L., Tiemoko R. (2004) *Understanding voluntary return*, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, p25.

Based on these definitions one of my interview questions was whether returnees would like to return to Norway or not and what are their plans for the future. Nevertheless, even before my actual question, in the very beginning of the interview Leila asked me if she actually can come back to Norway right now. Zarina also said she would give a lot to come back to Norway, but only if protection and residence permit will be guaranteed by Norwegian authorities; otherwise it is too energy-consuming. Moreover, it requires lots of financial expenses, which she could not cover at the moment. As a result, she says she will try to find her way here “somehow” instead of migrating to Norway again. Her plan for the future is to find a placement at school for both children in September. Nevertheless, she says first and foremost it is essential to find a permanent place to live and permanent job position.

Yakha also would like to return to Norway. Nevertheless, she states it is only in her dreams and in reality she will not go there. She claims it is too difficult - the trip itself and the process. She believes whenever she wants something it is not going to happen. She regrets that they returned to Russia, but also acknowledges they did not have another choice. It was a better option, than being deported with small children. Yakha also states return to Norway is only in her dreams, but in reality her head is full of problems. Nevertheless, she is ready to move to Norway even without her husband:

*I do not feel well psychologically. If I would have an opportunity to remigrate I am ready to do so right now. If only I could... But these are my dreams only.*

Farida explicitly shows her desire to return to Norway. She says she does really regret they came back to Russia:

*It hurts. Honestly, I can swear on my children's health, I would take their hands right now and go there by feet. Just like that. I would go there or somewhere else. Would do everything just to escape from my everyday life here.*

Nowadays, she does not have future plans. She says she lives in present as one needs money to plan something. Arbi would also return to Norway if someone would give him another chance and listen to the story of his life. Only if someone would be willing to help, he would come back. Nevertheless, he does not plan to go there as he has an impression that everything will be the same again and he will lose another couple of years.

Interview results clearly show that returnees would like to remigrate to Norway driven by different circumstances. Some of them find lack of opportunities in Russia, such as high unemployment rate, lack of security and unstable living conditions. Others are ready to remigrate to ensure bright future for their children and protect them from the hardships in the unstable regions. All research participants and their children carry lots of positive memories about their life in Norway. Nevertheless, migration to Norway seems to be an aspiration only and none of them are actually making plans to remigrate, and try to apply for asylum again. Every returnee has its own reasons to remain in the country of origin. The first reason is extensive financial expenses required for migration. Nowadays, finding themselves unemployed, returnees do not have opportunities to save the money and the trip to Norway is very expensive, considering that there are at least four family members. The trip also requires lots of psychological efforts. Nowadays, returnees still remember all struggles they overcame during the process of reaching Norway, applying for asylum and going through long process of waiting, which might last for many years. Moreover, they observe the implication of seeking asylum abroad on their children. Children do not speak local language well, hardly speak Russian, face lots of obstacles on the way to education, overcome difficulties of reintegration process and thus are left behind their peers. As a result, another couple of years spent in Norway could negatively affect their psychological well-being, widen an educational gap and thus hinder opportunities for a bright future. Thus, the only thing some of them hope for is student or work migration for their children, but only if invitation from Norwegian side will be received prior to migration.

Third obstacle on the way to remigration is the lack of hope. While being in Norway, returnees did everything possible to receive a positive decision on their asylum claims. They openly shared their life stories, which force them to come through war and persecution memories again, they had been changing the lawyers, who were supposed to present their interest and contribute to the positive decision of the Norwegian authorities. Nevertheless, none of the efforts made a difference. Their asylum claims were rejected as well as following appeals.

Thus, returnees would like to remigrate, but only external forces will facilitate the real movement. Different circumstances could act as influential external forces, such as escalation of security situation in the region, absolute lack of opportunities in the future and financial contribution for remigration from friends or family. All abovesaid factors will contribute to the renewal of refugee flows and thus might put additional pressure to the country of asylum. As a result, in order to prevent negative effects of the return, extensive system of assessments of individual needs and returnees' monitoring should be developed in cooperation of the home country and the country of asylum. It will not only give awareness benefits to the both governments, but also contribute to the well-being of the returnees in the future.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of the current research was to assess if the return of rejected asylum seekers from Norway to Russia is sustainable and if returnees' reintegration in their home regions could be successful. In addition, the research includes assessment of contributions of home country and the country of asylum to the sustainability of return. In order to answer the research question, six interviews were conducted in addition to the literature review on the subject, historical perspectives of the conflict, theoretical framework and analysis of the current economic, social and political situation in the region. Qualitative interviews were chosen to capture the unique experience of returnees to Russia.

Despite the fact that Voluntary Assisted Return Programme has been implemented since 2002, its cost-effectiveness for actors involved was not assessed and thus no measures were implemented to ensure benefits for all. The originality of this thesis is in presenting the experience of rejected asylum seekers, who returned to Russia and spent six or more months in their home region. Thesis captures all aspects of returnees' everyday life such as employment, housing, education, security and health in order to assess sustainability of the return and find gaps in the supportive schemes of both sending and home countries. Moreover, it is aimed to explore present hardships of returnees, their plans for the future and possibility for circular migration to Norway. Considering the fact that returnees were never asked about their feelings after coming back to their country of origin and they were never monitored, the current research seeks to give a voice to returnees and provide them with an opportunity to reveal their opinion and suggest possible directions for development of the programme based on their individual stories of return.

The value of this thesis is in providing the readers with insights in the process of return of the research participants to the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia after years of seeking asylum in Norway. Moreover, being the only research based on the interviews with



citizens of Russian Federation, it will contribute to a better understanding of the return realities to Russia, considering specific of the home country, current policies in the region and cultural characteristics.

Before presenting the main conclusions of the research it is necessary to mention its limitations. First and foremost, during the process of conducting interviews, I acknowledged the need of conducting one or even two follow-up interviews with returnees after longer period of time spent in the country of origin. I have noticed the tendency of being more passionate about Norway among those who returned to Russia six to eight months ago, while those who have been living there for more than a year have weaker ties with the country of asylum. Thus, follow-up interviews might give an opportunity to reveal the progress in the process of reintegration after a certain period of time. Another limitation is the small sample of the research, which was caused by the desire to capture all aspects of returnees' everyday life and thus not so many families could meet necessary criteria for participation. Moreover, despite returnees from both regions of return were interviewed, it is necessary to acknowledge that their individual experience could not be representative for the whole flows of returnees to Russia and thus could not be used for further generalizations.

## 6.1 Findings of the research

Range of the questions and subquestions were set in the introduction as the main subjects of the study. Analysis of current possibilities for returnees' successful reintegration in their home regions was presented above together with main obstacles of the process and future opportunities for returnees. Sustainability of return was assessed in addition to the support provided by the home country and country of asylum; internal and external factors, which influence the process of effective reintegration of the returnees, were also emphasized in the analysis. Thus, findings of the research will be presented accordingly.

### Current opportunities in the country of origin

Results of the interviews with rejected asylum seekers after return to Russia confirm the concerns, which arose from the analysis of the socio-economic indexes, based on the official statistics of two regions. With the highest unemployment rate in the country, in 6-14 months after return interviewees are still not permanently employed. Moreover, such obstacles as high level of corruption and lack of professional network hinder possibilities for returnees' employment in the future. In addition to the hardships of job seeking, returnees shared their concerns about lack of appropriate living conditions. As a result of financial insecurity, returnees could not take a loan from the government as well as rent their own apartment, so the only solution for them is to live with their close relatives. Current situation makes their lives insecure and requires flexibility as the present conditions might change at any time. However, flexibility is quite limited in the lives of the research participants as they have at least two children, for whom frequent movements even within one city might cause additional stress.

Beside the lack of employment and housing opportunities, second generation of returnees is deprived from opportunities for development, caused by various barriers on the way to placement in kindergarten and school. On top of the above-mentioned challenges, interviews provide the readers with evidence that health services in Russia are limited and do not meet the needs of the population. As a result, already vulnerable people in need have to overcome additional struggles.

Analysis of the interviews shows that opportunities for returnees in the home regions are very limited at the present moment. Low socio-economic indexes in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia could not ensure stable livelihood for its current residents as well as for newly-arrived returnees. Moreover, after return they can rely only on themselves as there are no assistance or additional support. Gaps in all spheres of everyday life affect returnees differently, nevertheless contribute to the general feeling of dissatisfaction. Nowadays the only solution for

them is to rely on temporary job offers, live together with their families and try to save some money, which could be spent on private kindergarten for their children.

Opportunities for returnees as well as local population are also quite limited in the future. Despite the fact that programmes for development in the regions have been implemented since 2008, there is no significant progress in the situation. As a result, returnees' hardships are going to be protracted for undefined number of months or even years, unless they will find solution by themselves. Taking into consideration definition of sustainability presented by Danish Institute for International Studies, which implies successful comprehensive embeddedness and self-reliance, return of rejected asylum seekers from Norway to Russia could not be defined as sustainable, as results of the interviews revealed the gaps almost in every sphere of every day life of returnees and their dependance from family and friends' support. Today they are able to tolerate the variety of difficulties, which are covered by euphoria of being together with their friends and family. Nevertheless, situation in the future is hard to predict. Feeling of dissatisfaction might increase and as a result could produce new refugee flows to the European Union countries.

#### Main challenges and barriers on the way to successful reintegration

During the interviews main barriers on the way to returnees' effective and smooth reintegration were revealed. First and foremost, all returnees hoped to get a protection in Norway, and thus return to Russia after considerable period spent in Norway appeared to be unexpected for them. They did not prepare their return, and as a result, their children did not have legal documents valid in Russia and did not speak Russian language. Lack of official documentation resulted in a set of difficulties during the process of applying for benefits, while language barrier lessened chances for the fast reintegration process. The aforesaid challenge fully reflects the necessity of preparation phase prior to the return, outlined by Danish Refugee Council. Thus, returnees cannot

consider all possible difficulties by themselves, and feel entrapped after arrival to the country of origin.

Moreover, returnees themselves were not psychologically prepared and thus struggle while trying to understand how “the new system” works. Unfortunately, at this stage of the reintegration process there were no one, who were able to help them and provide necessary support and assistance. In addition, one of the greatest concerns remains security situation in the home regions. Even though it has improved since years of two wars and there are no military operations in the regions, returnees do not feel themselves secure and have to live following the everyday restrictions. Restrictions vary differently and depend on individual situation. Some of the interviewees are just worried about escalation of the conflict in the future, while others cannot return to their former place of residence and have to keep their return in a secret. Thus, current security situation in the region hinders opportunities for return and reintegration developing “in a safe, dignified and sustainable manner.”<sup>182</sup> As a result, as long as situation in the regions is not entirely stable, sustainability of return is hardly possible.

Another challenge for the returnees is the lack of support from the local community. While returnees had different experience with the locals, none of them faced positive attitudes. Resulted from the lack of understanding of the asylum life in Norway, local community could not understand the behavior of returnees and driving factors for their return. As a result, instead of using qualifications acquired by returnees and their experience for development, the local community tries to condemn them.

Results of the interviews also show that without any assistance from their home country they feel no one wants them to be back. Indifference to their everyday problems stimulates them to think

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<sup>182</sup> Chu B., Stec K., Dünnwald S., Loran T. (2008) *Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers. Lessons learned from return to Kosovo*, Danish Refugee Council, p13.

about Norway, where they argue the state took care of them. Importance of the opportunities in the home country was outlined earlier by Ghosh. He emphasized its direct influence on the process of successful reintegration and sustainability. According to the results of interviews, in Norway children were placed in kindergarten or at school, they were granted a temporary place to live during the asylum procedure, and they also had opportunities for employment. By contrast, comparison of opportunities available in Norway and Russia is not in favour of Russian side. As a result, it might contribute to the willingness of remigration to Norway.

### Support from countries involved

Despite the fact that necessity of cooperation between the home country and country of asylum was outlined in the Regional Cooperation Framework of the Bali Process and by European Council on Refugees and Exiles, it was not considered during the process of development Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme. The absence of cooperation between the countries could be traced in different aspects. Considering examples of Zarina and Leila from the conducted interviews, it is possible to notice the lack of cooperation towards official documents' recognition. Birth certificate of Zarina's daughter was issued in Norway, and Russian authorities could not find a mechanism to recognize it during the last 6 months. Leila's son is forced to go to the fourth grade at school instead of fifth as a result of difficulties in transferring school certificate. While two countries struggle to find a way for cooperation, its absence directly influences returnees. Without birth certificate Zarina's daughter cannot be placed in a kindergarten or receive benefits from the government, while Leila's son has to be behind his peers at school.

Lack of cooperation between two countries involved is also shown during the process of providing support for returnees. Nowadays, returnees receive assistance only from the country of asylum, while Russia does not have any supportive schemes. Benefits of return could be found

for both sides: while Norway will avoid the phenomenon of changing the status of rejected asylum seekers to irregular migrants, Russia will have an opportunity to improve demographic situation and fulfill the obligations towards its citizens. Collaboration during the process of return planning will also positively affect returnees and give them assurance that after arrival to the country of origin they will not be left to the mercy of the fate. Nevertheless, at the point when countries do not discuss the current situation and needs of returnees are not assessed, it is quite difficult to contribute to the sustainability of return separately. On the contrary, with the contribution of two countries, courses of Russian language could be organized together with general orientation course, which will be aimed at providing information about possible difficulties after arrival and best solutions.

### Sustainability of return

During the process of interviewing, returnees were talking about their will to remigrate to Norway, caused by different circumstances. Revealed reasons are individual and depend on their conditions after arrival. Some of them find lack of opportunities in Russia, such as high unemployment rate, lack of security and unstable living conditions. Others are ready to remigrate in order to ensure bright future for their children and protect them from the hardships in the unstable regions. Positive memories also contribute to the will to return one day.

Nevertheless, returnees emphasize the lack of financial means for migration together with overall psychological exhaustion and concerns about future of their children. They acknowledge that another couple of years spent in Norway could negatively affect their psychological well-being, widen an educational gap and thus hinder opportunities for their children's development. Thus, nowadays they try to make all possible efforts to reintegrate in the local society and ensure bright future for their children. Nevertheless, life of a returnee in Russia is a process of balancing between two countries. Results of the interviews show that returnees would like to remigrate, but

only external forces will facilitate the real movement. Different circumstances could act as influential external forces, such as escalation of security situation in the region, absolute lack of opportunities in the future and financial contribution for remigration from friends or family. All aforesaid factors might contribute to the feelings of dissatisfaction among returnees and entrap them in the range of circumstances, which could create an additional push factor for future migration.

Thus, research findings illustrate the will of returnees to remigrate to Norway, which is restricted by different external factors at the moment. Nowadays, they remain in a dependent situation with a scarce opportunities in the future. Moreover, inability to improve the situation in the home regions together with the lack of support after arrival decrease the percentage of return's sustainability. As a result, based on the theoretical framework presented above and definitions of sustainable return developed by HIT foundation, Sussex Centre for Migration and UNHCR, return of rejected asylum seekers from Norway to Russia could not be considered as sustainable.

In my opinion, shaped by the current research and interaction with returnees, following action should be taken to increase the sustainability of return:

- individual assessment of the returnees' needs prior to the departure to the country of origin and developing a supportive scheme, based on the personal needs and present circumstances;
- development of preparatory courses, including Russian language course, qualification courses and course of general orientation;
- returnees' monitoring during the first years after arrival and acquiring comprehensive feedback;
- development of collaborative schemes between the home country and the country of asylum;
- development of supportive scheme by the home country, considering the needs of returnees.

As a result, changes, based on constant interaction with returnees, should contribute to the return migration for the benefit of all.

## 6.2 Recommendations for future research

As was mentioned above, the return of rejected asylum seekers of Russian origin is not explored and not covered by academics. Taking into consideration that the flows of return migration increase every year, the process is in need of comprehensive investigation. In my opinion, following are the priority areas for future research:

- long-term exploration study on the process of reintegration - two-three years study will give an opportunity to follow the process of reintegration from the very beginning and track the changes of returnees' perception on possibility of circular migration;
- policy analysis of Voluntary Assisted Return Programme - will give an opportunity to have a look at the programme from the government's point of view. Moreover, reasons for the particular design of the programme might be revealed;
- voluntariness of return - being one of the factors, which affects reintegration process, the genuine voluntariness of return should be assessed;
- research on the returnees' needs - various spheres of possible assistance should be investigated in order to improve the programme, contribute to the sustainability of return and well-being of returnees;
- exploration study on possible cooperation of two countries involved - assessment of possible ways of cooperation between the home country and the country of asylum will give an opportunity to find a balance in collaboration and reveal possible ways of additional contribution to the successful reintegration and sustainable return;
- impacts on local communities - assessment of the current contribution of the returnees in the local community and potential spheres of contribution, will give an opportunity to reveal



positive aspects of the return migration and encourage positive attitudes of the local community towards returnees;

- gender aspects of return migration - exploration of the gender factor after arrival in the country of origin and assessment of possible changes in gender roles in returnee families will contribute to understanding the influence of Norwegian culture on returnees;
- future of second generation returnees - assessment of the role of Norway in the lives of second generation returnees, those who was born in Norway in particular.

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