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**Return and Reintegration Assistance  
External Evaluation**

**Sri Lanka**

**Final Report**

**June 2013**

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Contracting Authority

**Federal Office for Migration**

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## Abbreviations

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|      |  |
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| AVRR | Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration  |
| EC   | European Commission                          |
| FOM  | Federal Office for Migration                 |
| IOM  | International Organisation for Migration     |
| RAS  | Reintegration Assistance Switzerland         |
| RIF  | Reintegration Information Fund               |
| SDC  | Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation |
| SIM  | swissREPAT – IOM Movement                    |

Exchange rate 17 April 2013: 1 CHF = 134.950 LKR resp. 1 LKR = 0.00739 CHF

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The views expressed by the evaluators do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Federal Office for Migration or the International Office for Migration. The conclusions, recommendations and remaining errors are ours.

Michael Morlok and Harald Meier

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

The present report is part of the evaluation of the Swiss Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) mandated by the Federal Office for Migration (FOM) in 2012. The report aims at contributing to reaching the evaluation objectives and providing answers to the three principal questions (see box) by presenting data and experiences from Sri Lanka. At the same time, this report is a document in its own right, designed to be understood by readers without the necessity to consult additional documents, including the six other country studies (Georgia, Guinea, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, Turkey) and the overall evaluation report.

### Evaluation Objectives

- Determine the range and extent of outcomes of selected instruments of the Swiss return assistance for different target groups and countries of origin.
- Make an overall independent assessment of the outcomes achieved against the objectives envisaged.
- Identify key lessons and propose practical recommendations for the optimisation and further development of Return Assistance, especially with regard to different target groups and different native countries.

### Central Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent and how do country specific return assistance programmes and Individual Return Assistance to Sri Lankans promote voluntary return to Sri Lanka?
2. To what extent and how do country specific return assistance programmes and individual Return Assistance to Sri Lankans contribute to the process of social and professional reintegration of returnees and thus sustainable reintegration in Sri Lanka ?
3. To what extent and how do country specific return assistance programmes and individual Return Assistance contributes to an improved cooperation of Swiss authorities and authorities of the country of origin?

## 1.2 Evaluation Methods

The following report is based on interviews conducted in Sri Lanka, with

- 25 Sri Lankan returnees who received Swiss AVRR assistance;
- Representatives of IOM Sri Lanka and IOM Switzerland as the implementing partner of Swiss AVRR;
- Representatives of the Swiss government (Embassy and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC);
- Sri Lankan government officials (Port Authority Colombo and District Court in Jaffna);
- Representatives of UNHCR and the UK High Commission.
- A representative of a cantonal return counselling organisation

Furthermore, informal dialogues with local residents and workers (including for example hotel, restaurant and taxi staff as well as bus passengers) allowed gathering further background information on Sri Lanka and its migration patterns. The information obtained through interviews is complemented by a selection of reports (see bibliography in Annex 2).

The interviews with returnees were conducted in two regions: In the Colombo area (seven interviews) and in the Jaffna district (18 interviews). While this selection covers both city and countryside locations, it over-represents returnees from Jaffna and

neglects persons returning to other areas in Sri Lanka.<sup>1</sup> There does not seem to be a systematic difference in the answers (type of project, success of project etc.) between returnees from the two regions. Therefore, the information is presented as a summary of interview partners from both areas.

IOM contacted 38 returnees before the interview to obtain their approval. 27 agreed to be interviewed, 11 could not be contacted. Eventually 25 interviews were carried out. It is likely that the reintegration of persons who could not be contacted is lower than the one of persons who were met for an interview. This possible bias has to be taken into account in the interpretation of the results.

## 2 Presentation of Swiss AVRR

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### 2.1 Structure, Duration, Context and Logic

In four of the seven countries covered in the evaluation, Switzerland implements a specific country programme. Sri Lanka is not among them; instead, Sri Lankan returnees benefit from individual return assistance provided by the Federal Office for Migration (FOM). Three types of services can be used, in the following order:<sup>2</sup>

- RIF (Reintegration Information Fund)
- SIM (swissREPAT – IOM Movement)
- RAS (Reintegration Assistance Switzerland)

The RIF provides information to (potential) returnees while they are still in Switzerland, to prepare them for their return to Sri Lanka. Answers to questions asked by returnees are entered into the Fund so that they can be accessed both by other returnees via the return counsellors. In 2010, more than 60 % of the questions of Sri Lankan returnees were linked to medical issues. According to IOM Sri Lanka, the RIF sets the Swiss one apart from other AVRR projects in Sri Lanka. While this component is now also used by other countries, the Swiss used it early on and systematically. IOM Sri Lanka appreciates RIF as an important AVRR tool because it allows the returnees to make an informed choice about their return.

Travel arrangements for the returnees are made through SIM. IOM provides assistance such as assistance in transit and at arrival, social and medical escorts. Because of a high number of older returnees, these services are relatively often used by Sri Lankan returnees. swissREPAT pays out 1,000 CHF at the airport in cash (resp. 600 CHF to returnees processed under the Dublin treaty resp. returnees returning home directly from a reception and procedure centre).

Finally, through the RAS scheme the returnees are assisted financially in implementing a project. FOM finances projects up to a maximum amount of 3,000 CHF. IOM provides

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<sup>1</sup> In 2010, for example, 17 persons returned to the Jaffna district and 12 to the Colombo district, out of a total of 54 (source: IOM Bern (2011) and IOM Sri Lanka (2013)). The over-representation of Jaffna returnees was due to the facts that a) all interview-partners in Jaffna could be met as scheduled and b) travel was fast in Jaffna, therefore allowing more interviews than expected.

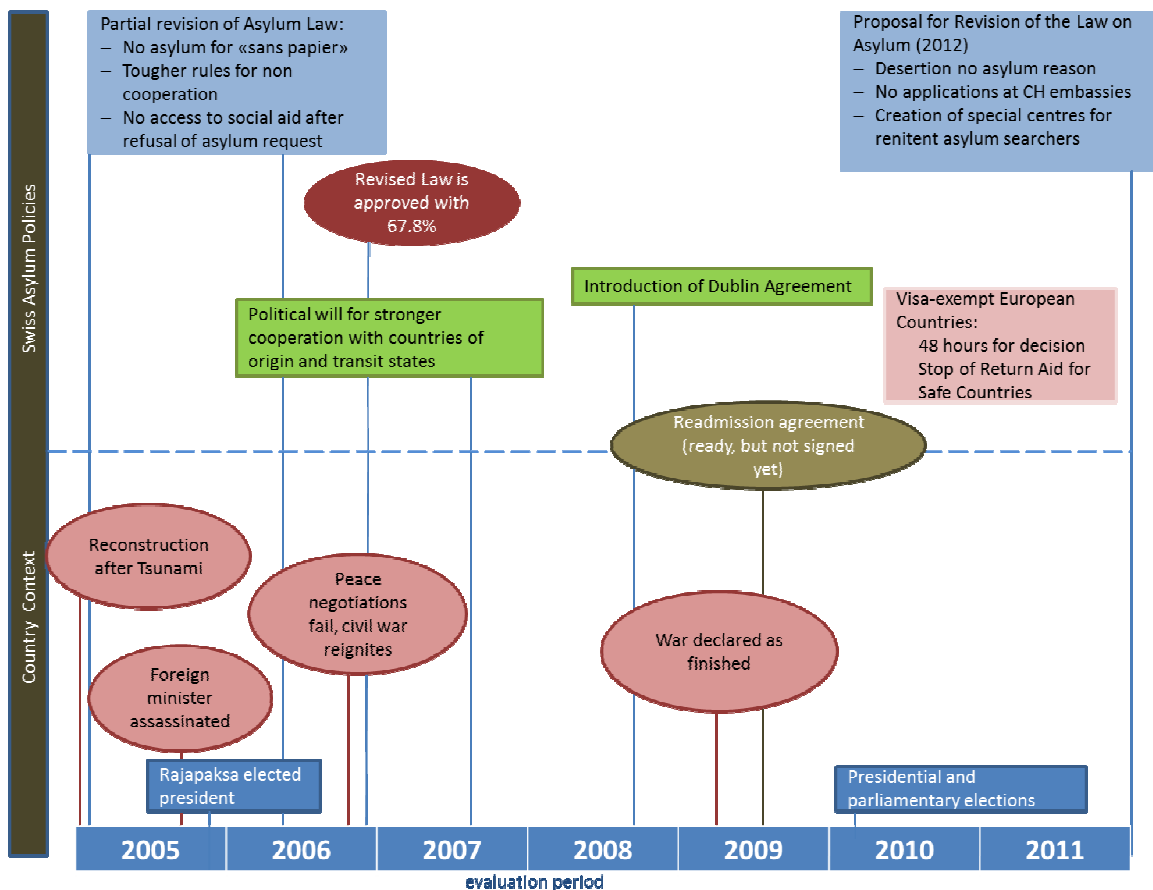
<sup>2</sup> The following description is based on i) information gathered in interviews with IOM officials in Sri Lanka as well as ii) the IOM Bern (2011) report.

counselling services to the returnees, administers the payments (usually directly to the vendor or service provider) and provides monitoring data to FOM. The projects cover a wide range of activities; from the five types of AVRR activities financed by FOM, three are found in Sri Lanka: Business projects, cash for care projects (family members of the returnee receive support, given that they take care of the returned person), and accommodation projects. Training / education projects and job placements have not been used yet as part of the Swiss AVRR assistance.

The latest available numbers (2010) show that 25 RIF requests were processed; 43 persons took part in SIM flights; and 53 persons benefited from the reintegration assistance. For all three activities, a steep increase in numbers can be observed up to 2010 (also see chapter 3).

The following graph summarizes important changes in the Swiss context on one hand, and events in Sri Lanka on the other hand.

Figure 1: Swiss and Sri Lankan context development



## 2.2 Frame Conditions of the Relations Switzerland – Sri Lanka

Switzerland entertains good, normal diplomatic relations with Sri Lanka (see paragraph 6.2). There are no special treaties or agreements on migration, nor is a country programme for AVRR being implemented. While a readmission agreement between Sri Lanka and Switzerland has been prepared, it has not been signed yet. Until 2012 Switzerland was one of two countries that allowed lodging an asylum request directly in



the country (i.e. at the Swiss Embassy in Colombo). This practice has now been stopped following a corresponding decision of the Swiss parliament to cease such procedures worldwide (since October 2012).

## 2.3 Other Return Assistance in Sri Lanka

IOM Sri Lanka implements a number of programmes for European countries (bilateral programmes as well as one for the European Commission (EC)), Australia and Canada (see table below). Australia, Canada and the EC all finance offshore programmes: Australia funds AVRR for irregular migrants on the way to Australia, even if they are stranded in Indonesia, Malaysia or Thailand. Canada on the other hand supports Sri Lankan migrants arriving in African countries (“West Africa programme”). The European Commission’s programme covers all European countries not entertaining a bilateral programme.

In terms of monetary assistance, the programmes are similar (the new “West Africa programme” for example provides 400,000 LKR to single returnees); IOM Sri Lanka advises governments to align their support; it considers a project assistance of around 3,000 CHF a well-balanced amount.

*Table 1: Overview programmes currently (2013) implemented by IOM*

| Donor(s)         | Project Title   | Project Description   | Managing IOM Mission |
|------------------|---|---|----------------------|
| EC               | EC Readmission Agreement Project (Assistance to Readmitted Migrants) (since 2012)   | * Onward transportation cash<br>* Limited psychosocial and reintegration assistance   | IOM Sri Lanka        |
| Belgium          | Retour et Émigration des Demandeurs d’Asile de Belgique (REAB, since 2008)  | * On arrival assistance at the airport<br>* Reintegration assistance  | IOM Belgium          |
| Norway           | Financial Support to Assisted Voluntary Returns (since 2008)  | * On arrival assistance at the airport<br>* Reintegration assistance  | IOM Norway           |
| Italy            | Assisted Voluntary Return Programme (since 2008)  | * On arrival assistance at the airport<br>* Reintegration assistance  | IOM Italy            |
| UK               | Operation Hamelia/Charter Flights from UK (since 2007)  | * Onward transport cash provided upon arrival   | IOM Sri Lanka        |
|                  | Voluntary Return and Reintegration for Detained Migrants (VRRDM, since 2006)  | * Provision of financial assistance for reintegration   | IOM United Kingdom   |
| Australia and UK | Community Based Reintegration and Economic Recovery Support to Vulnerable Communities in the Newly Resettled Villages in the Northern and Eastern Districts in Sri Lanka (since 2012) | * Provision of productive infrastructure projects (small scale) in the North and East for returned individuals and families who are newly resettled | IOM Sri Lanka        |

|           |  |  |                             |
|-----------|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Australia | Reintegration Assistance for Irregular Migrant Returnees from Australia (since 2009) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* On arrival assistance at the airport</li> <li>* Reintegration assistance</li> </ul>   | IOM Australia and Sri Lanka |
| Canada    | Assistance to Address Irregular Migration and Smuggling in West Africa (since 2012)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Information, counselling, outreach</li> <li>* Pre-departure logistical arrangements</li> <li>* Return and transit assistance</li> <li>* On arrival assistance at the airport</li> <li>* Reintegration assistance</li> </ul> | IOM Ghana and Sri Lanka     |

Source: IOM Sri Lanka 2013

One country not using IOM as service provider is the United Kingdom. IOM Sri Lanka used to implement the UK until the British global programme was tendered and awarded to Refugee Action. Refugee Action uses The Siyath Foundation as local partner. As The Siyath Foundation is not present throughout the country, IOM assisted early on after the hand-over – this has now ceased. The new programme has not been evaluated.

UNHCR also implements a return and reintegration assistance programme, mostly for persons who come back from India (the programme is open for returnees from all countries, however). The profile of these returnees is different from the ones who have gone further away. On average, these returnees are poorer; going by boat to India was the cheapest way to leave the country. UNHCR does not promote their programme; they just facilitate the return process. The assistance includes 10,000 LRK for adults, and 7,500 LRK for minors. There are no conditions in regards to how this money has to be spent. Additionally, returnees receive 4,000 LRK as a transport grant, a pack of non-food items (such as mats and pots) at field offices, and food rations for six months (through the collaboration with other UN agencies). The numbers of people returning with the UNHCR programme has diminished since 2010: While there were 2,054 returnees in 2010, the number dropped to 1,728 in 2011 and 1'300 in 2012 (UNHCR 2012). The reasons for this decline are not self-evident: the programme itself has not changed in nature. One reason could be that the ferry between India and Sri Lanka stopped running (services started in 2011).

### 3 Dynamic of Returns

#### 3.1 Data Overview

Table 2: Data on Sri Lankan asylum seekers, 2005-2011

| Sri Lanka   | 2005  | 2006  | 2007  | 2008  | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | Total |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Persons in the asylum process</b>  |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| Total number of new asylum seekers  | 277   | 351   | 636   | 1,262 | 1,415 | 939   | 470   | 5,350 |
| Total number of persons in the asylum process in Switzerland                      | 2,505 | 2,266 | 2,356 | 3,101 | 3,964 | 4,201 | 4,037 | N/A   |
| Number of persons with approved asylum  | 58    | 62    | 92    | 170   | 170   | 194   | 90    | 836   |
| <b>Departures</b>   |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| Supervised, independent exits in % of persons in the asylum process <sup>1)</sup> | 22    | 10    | 15    | 12    | 15    | 43    | 61    | 178   |
| Forced Return   | 11    | 10    | 5     | 5     | 7     | 7     | 9     | 54    |
| Dublin returns  | -     | -     | -     | -     | -     | -     | -     | -     |
| Third country returns   | 1     | 0     | 2     | 6     | 4     | 0     | 3     | 16    |
| Uncontrolled departure  | 14    | 2     | 4     | 10    | 10    | 20    | 45    | 105   |
| Entries into asylum process   | 3     | 2     | 0     | 6     | 5     | 11    | 19    | 46    |
| Other exits <sup>2)</sup>   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1     | 14    | 50    | 40    | 105   |
| <b>AVRR participants</b>  |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| Participants  | 39    | 23    | 17    | 11    | 17    | 56    | 53    | 216   |
| In % of departures  | 76%   | 96%   | 65%   | 28%   | 31%   | 43%   | 30%   | 43%   |

<sup>1)</sup> Kontrollierte, selbständige Ausreisen; <sup>2)</sup> Until 2011 incl. so-called Dublin cases

Source: Annual asylum statistics, FOM

#### 3.2 Discussion of Data

According to the annual asylum statistics provided by FOM, asylum requests of a total of 5,350 newly arrived persons have been processed in the years between 2005 and 2011. The number has undergone large fluctuations: While relatively low in 2005 (277 persons), the number has doubled by 2007 (636 persons), the year the civil war has flared up again. By the time the civil war was declared finished in 2009, the number of new requests reached 1,415.

Until October 2012, the Swiss Embassy was one of few countries that processed asylum requests filed in the Sri Lanka. After a corresponding decision in parliament, FOM issued instructions to stop this practice effective from October 2012 onwards (with the exception of so-called "humanitarian visa").

Only a minority of the applicants (16 % on average during the years 2005 to 2011) received a positive answer to their asylum request. In the same period, between 11 and 56 persons a year left Switzerland with AVRR assistance. On average, voluntary returns with AVRR assistance make up 43 % of all departures. The number of departures with AVRR has risen since 2009, which might be a sign that AVRR has grown in popularity among Sri Lankan asylum seekers and refugees.

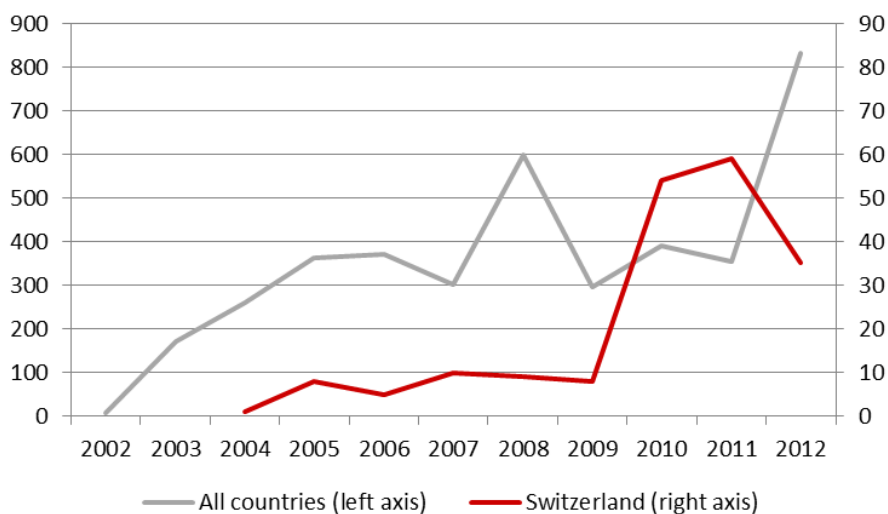
If the numbers of voluntary returns are compared to either the number of persons who arrived in Switzerland, or the overall population of asylum seekers and refugees from Sri Lanka (who constitute the potential AVRR beneficiaries), it has to be concluded that the interest to participate (resp. the actual “take-up rate”) is very low.

### Number of returnees from other countries

The number of persons returning to Sri Lanka with assistance through an IOM AVRR programme (from any host country) has fluctuated largely over the years, with a general upwards trend. While there were only 5 persons (from Germany and the UK) in 2002, ten years later 831 persons from 21 countries participated in an AVRR project implemented by IOM Sri Lanka. As shown in graph 2, there was a first short-lived peak in 2008, but since the end of the civil war in 2009 the number of returnees has continued to rise.

The number of persons leaving Sri Lanka is still much higher than the one of people returning to the country. In 2011, Sri Lanka ranked number 12 as country of origin for asylum seekers, with a total number of 8,521 applications (UNHCR 2012).

Figure 2: AVRR participants in programmes implemented by IOM Sri Lanka



Source: IOM Sri Lanka, “Total AVRR returns” (see data in annex)

### 3.3 Assessment

The number of returnees participating in the Swiss AVRR scheme is low if compared with the overall number of eligible persons (asylum seekers, provisionally admitted foreigners as well as recognized refugees). One has to bear in mind that a large number of the persons registered under the asylum law have a right to stay (at least provisionally) and have little incentive to return. The data also shows that the rate of participation has increased over recent years (measured as proportion of all Sri Lankans leaving Switzerland).

## 4 Individual Returnees

This chapter presents ten persons and their story of migration, return and reintegration. They were selected out of the overall sample of 25 persons to illustrate the range of experiences had. In order to secure anonymity, the names have been dropped (a selection of photos of returnees is shown in Annex 3).

The term “agent” is used repeatedly in the following accounts; it refers to a person / organisation organising the illegal entry to countries with visa-restriction (usually in combination with general travel arrangements).

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>A.A.</b>   |   |
| Gender, Age   | Male, 46                                    |
| Civil status  | Married, 2 children (family in Switzerland) |
| Education / previous experience   | O-Levels (mandatory school)                 |
| Return to Sri Lanka   | Spring 2010                                 |
| <p><b>Migration Trajectories</b></p> <p>A.A., then 24 years old, left Jaffna in April 1991 in light of the civil war. His parents contacted agents who arranged a visa and flight to Italy from where he was brought to Switzerland. They chose Switzerland as the final destination given that it was known through the media that Switzerland would grant Tamils asylum generously. He recalls being in Kreuzlingen for some six months during which time he received N-status. In 1996 he obtained an F-permit. Since 1992 he lived in Zurich. He later met his wife, a Tamil, with who he has two children (14, 16).</p> <p><b>Motivation for assisted Return</b></p> <p>A.A. has been working in different restaurants for almost 13 years and was happy to live in Switzerland. The motivation to return came following the peace deal in 2009. He heard from friends that the security situation is progressively improving and thought that it would be the right time to go home and “build up a new life” since Jaffna offered “opportunities for business”. He was bored by the prospect of never being able to progress in Switzerland, of being bound to a job as a dishwasher. Within one month IOM finished all necessary paperwork. He was surprised to receive return assistance; he had thought that he would have to invest some of his savings to finance his return.</p> <p><b>Reintegration</b></p> <p>Shortly after arriving in Jaffna in spring 2010 he opened his grocery shop (all supplies were purchased with the CHF 3,000 return assistance), in a house that he built some ten years before. Business went well for the first few months but it became increasingly difficult to make sufficient money to finance his life – also because he had no capital left to develop the business. He now rents out a floor of his house, which provides some extra income. His wife and two children remained in Switzerland and have no interest to return (also because of their marital problems).</p> <p><b>Plans</b></p> <p>He is eager to obtain his pension from Switzerland, which would provide him with sufficient means “to live a good life”. He will return to visit his family from time to time but cannot imagine living in Switzerland again.</p> |   |

|   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| <b>B.B.</b>   |                        |
| Gender, Age   | Male, 66               |
| Civil status  | Married, four children |
| Education / previous experience   | Mandatory school       |
| Return to Sri Lanka   | January 2011           |
| <p><b>Migration Trajectories</b></p> <p>B.B. left together with his wife in August 2007 and came to Switzerland (via India) the same year (cannot recall the date) with the support of an agent. It was their agent who decided that he would bring them to Switzerland. Their son had been shot dead in Chava and they were scared that the army would be after them as well.</p> <p><b>Motivation for assisted Return</b></p> <p>Both had a hard time in the asylum centres of which they recall to have been in St. Gallen and Zug. They felt isolated and alone since they had only very occasional contact with others, did not speak the language and did not always receive the support promised to them (e.g. help to see a doctor or when documents needed to be translated). Most of the year it was too cold for them and particularly his wife found it difficult to cope with the climate. They did not dare to turn to the social worker with the request to be brought home. However, another Tamil in the asylum centre, with whom they spoke from time to time about their problems, eventually informed the authorities about the couples' wish to return.</p> <p><b>Reintegration</b></p> <p>They felt at home again very quickly even though many things had changed since they left. The decision to use the reintegration assistance for the purchase of a three-wheeler, however, turned out to be wrong. Contrary to their plans they were only able to use it for their private purposes; very occasionally they can make some money with it (e.g. by renting it to others). Now they receive support from their children. They take care of the baby of their landlady and can use a room in her house in return.</p> <p><b>Plans</b></p> <p>B.B. has no particular plans apart from staying in Jaffna. He does not regret the decision to have gone to Switzerland – although the money he needed to pay to the agent is badly missed.</p> |                        |

|  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| <b>C.C.</b>  |                             |
| Gender, Age  | Male, 28                    |
| Civil status   | Single, no children         |
| Education / previous experience  | O-Levels (Mandatory school) |
| Return to Sri Lanka  | April 2011                  |
| <p><b>Migration Trajectories</b></p> <p>C.C. sought for asylum at a centre in Lausanne, where he arrived with the support of an agent in June or July 2010. Some three weeks thereafter he was transferred to Altstätten where he stayed until his return in April 2011. He was not allowed to stay with his uncle who lives in a small village in the Canton of Wallis. He had to leave Colombo because of “thugs” who came to his house and searched for him; he and his mother felt threatened. The threats had started soon after he took up a job in a company that wanted to launch what he calls a “Muslim TV station” in Colombo.</p> <p><b>Motivation for assisted Return</b></p> <p>In Altstätten he tried fighting boredom by learning German. While everybody was friendly and supportive, he was unhappy with the situation and felt stuck. The most important reason to return was, however, that his mother fell sick and that there was nobody else to take care of her. He advised the social worker about his wish to return and asked for reintegration assistance, about which he had heard of before in the asylum centre.</p> <p><b>Reintegration</b></p> <p>Being able to pay rent for a house for almost 1.5 years (the reintegration assistance was directly paid to the landlord) and to use the CHF 1’000 cash payment to settle bills of his mother’s medical treatment was of “great help”.</p> <p><b>Plans</b></p> <p>C.C.’s plan is to migrate again. He has been applying for different jobs in Sri Lanka and the Middle East; he thinks his chances of getting a job at Qatar Airways in Doha are very good. He does not regret having come back, not least because he could be there for his mother at the time she much needed his support.</p> |                             |

|  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| <b>D.D.</b>  |                            |
| Gender, Age  | Male, 43                   |
| Civil status   | Married, 2 children        |
| Education / previous experience  | A-Levels / Teacher Diploma |
| Return to Sri Lanka  | January 2010               |
| <p><b>Migration Trajectories</b></p> <p>The war situation in Jaffna, namely the abduction of his brother in law, led D.D. to leave Jaffna in 2007 without his family. With the help of an agent he came to Italy (Napoli),</p> |                            |

where he stayed and worked illegally for about a year – until he lost his job. He then paid another € 1'000 for being brought to Basel, where he applied for asylum in June 2008. He chose to come to Switzerland because of his uncle, who has been living here for more than 20 years.

**Motivation for assisted Return**

D.D. stayed in asylum facilities in Basel, Zürich and later in an apartment in Sempach. He tried repeatedly to find job but was not successful. As a result he could not support his family in Sri Lanka. He eventually came to the conclusion that it was time to go home. A few days before receiving an F-permit he contacted his social worker and asked her to help him return to Sri Lanka. Three months elapsed until he finally returned in January 2010.

**Reintegration**

His initial project idea, which was approved, was to open an English language school. Back in Jaffna he realised that there were too many competitors – information he had not received in Switzerland. He thus sought and received IOM's approval to change his business plan. He eventually used the assistance to purchase 5 cattle, a water pump and pesticides. Selling milk at the local market he was able to make some extra money. Meanwhile he owns ten cows which make a net profit of some LKR 15,000 per month and his relatives have started to take care of the cattle. K.K. also works as an English teacher at a school. With the cows and his teacher payment he has an income that allows him to pay for the needs of his four-member family. The biggest difficulties for him were managing the financial loss that he experienced by paying the agent and finding a job – though he acknowledges that he is in a much better position than many others who returned. He is overall very happy with the support and flexibility of IOM in Jaffna.

**Plans**

D.D. does his best to keep his job as a teacher and hopes that he will soon get an assignment close to his former house, which is currently undergoing reconstruction. The reconstruction is financially supported in the amount of € 5,200 from a Danish organisation to which he applied a few months ago.

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>E.E.</b>                     |  |
| Gender, Age                     | Female, 36   |
| Civil status                    | Single, no children                                      |
| Education / previous experience | A-Levels; worked in a government factory before she left |
| Return to Sri Lanka             | September 2011   |

**Migration Trajectories**

E.E. left Wellawatte, a majority Tamil suburb in Colombo, in April 2009 immediately after her then boyfriend, a Tamil, was killed in a bomb blast. Despite being a Sinhalese she no longer felt safe in Sri Lanka. The agent first brought her to Italy but then decided that it would be better to bring her to Switzerland – where she arrived approximately in May 2009. She was picked up by her cousin in Basel and stayed at his apartment, even after she filed her asylum request in the asylum centre. Three weeks following her



application she came to Lucerne where she stayed until her return.

### **Motivation for assisted Return**

In Lucerne E.E. had the possibility to work in a Caritas shop. She felt comfortable in Switzerland and put in efforts into learning German. However, when she learned in early 2011 that her mother developed cancer, she decided to return to Colombo in order to take care of her. She informed the migration office in Lucerne first but discussed all return and reintegration issues with a social worker. While everybody was supportive it took almost three months until she finally could return.

### **Reintegration**

Three weeks after her return to Colombo her mother died. Only then did she take care of the reintegration project (a grocery store), such as contacting IOM, obtaining permits and concluding contracts. After one year of operation she decided to close the store in December 2012. The location wasn't suitable; building up a client stock took more time than she anticipated and the time she had to spend in the grocery store was not commensurate to what she was able to get back in return. R.P. somewhat regrets the decision of this investment and believes that a three-wheeler would have helped her more.

### **Plans**

Had her mother not fallen sick she definitely would have tried to stay in Switzerland for good. Overall, she cannot say whether she is better off now than without the reintegration assistance. Trying to migrate again is not an option; she simply cannot afford it. E.E. is now looking for a job as a shop assistant. Yet if the opportunity of finding any self-employment opens up, she would try to seize it. At present she believes that she will continue to live with her brother's family.

|   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <b>F.F.</b>   |                                       |
| Gender, Age   | Female, 58                            |
| Civil status  | Civil status undisclosed, no children |
| Education / previous experience   | Mandatory school                      |
| Return to Sri Lanka   | August 2010                           |
| <b>Migration Trajectories</b>   |                                       |
| <p>F.F. was displaced in different places in Jaffna and in Colombo due to the heavy fighting that was going on in the Chava area. An agent organised her migration to Italy and Switzerland in March 2008. She sold almost all of her belongings to pay the fee of LKR 1,000,000 (approximately 7,500 CHF). She cannot recall in which asylum facilities she stayed and has only a vague memory of the time in Switzerland.</p> |                                       |
| <b>Motivation for assisted Return</b>   |                                       |
| <p>The time in Switzerland was frustrating: She spent almost all day in the Asylum Centre and had very limited contact with others; work was not available and the language too difficult to learn. Returning to Sri Lanka was the only way out and she thus informed officials in the asylum centre about her intentions to return.</p>  |                                       |
| <b>Reintegration</b>  |                                       |

Once she learned that she would receive some money she had the clear idea that she would want to earn her income with farming. She thus requested the money to be used for seedlings, seeds, pesticides and a three-wheeler in order to take the products to the local market. Her idea was immediately approved and realised within 2-3 months upon her return. Reintegrating in Jaffna was not difficult as far as her social contacts are concerned. She was happy to be back to her home town and to be able to work again, able to care for herself. If assistance would not have been provided, she reckons it would have been difficult to restart her life. For a three-wheeler she would have incurred debts equivalent to about 5 years of savings.

### Plans

F.F. does not have particular plans, certainly no plans to migrate abroad again. She thinks that she is too old to start all over again.

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| <b>G.G.</b>   |                     |
| Gender, Age   | Male, 64            |
| Civil status  | Married, 2 children |
| Education / previous experience   | O-Levels, Carpenter |
| Return to Sri Lanka   | March 2010          |
| <p><b>Migration Trajectories</b></p> <p>G.G. arrived in Switzerland in June 2008 with a three-month tourist visa to escape the war situation in Jaffna. He stayed with his daughter who has lived in Geneva since 1997; his son lived there too but died in 1996. Once the time for his legal stay in Switzerland was over he went to the asylum centre and applied for asylum. He recalls to have stayed some three weeks in the asylum centre and to have later again stayed at his daughter's apartment.</p> <p><b>Motivation for assisted Return</b></p> <p>In May 2009 he learned about the peace deal in Sri Lanka and planned to return, not least because he stated during his asylum application interview that he would return as soon as the security situation allows. Also, because he had no work in Switzerland and mainly stayed at home. The migration office in Geneva informed him about the return and reintegration assistance of which he was not aware beforehand. His project idea to purchase welding equipment was quickly approved. Furthermore, he recalls to have gone through a medical check which he much appreciated.</p> <p><b>Reintegration</b></p> <p>G.G. did not experience any difficulties reintegrating in Sri Lanka again – at least as far as his social contacts are concerned. He was able to make much use of the welding equipment in the beginning and it contributed significantly to the family income; currently he earns some LKR 6,000-7,000 per month. Still, he had to take up a second job in order to earn sufficient money.</p> <p><b>Plans</b></p> <p>He might come back to Switzerland to visit his daughter.</p> |                     |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>H.H.</b>  |   |
| Gender, Age  | Male, 32  |
| Civil status   | Married, 1 child  |
| Education / previous experience  | O-Levels, worked in transport, farming and as a cashier |
| Return to Sri Lanka  | July 2011   |
| <p><b>Migration Trajectories</b></p> <p>He left Sri Lanka in December 2008 due to threats which arose because he wasn't willing to give up his van to the army as requested. Two of his sisters live abroad, one in Canada, one in Switzerland. He decided to try for Canada. After paying an agent 3.5 million LKR (approximately 25,500 CHF), he embarked on a six months journey (through Syria, Turkey, Greece, Germany and France). Leaving for Canada from France, he was arrested at the airport in Paris. Now on a temporary visa, he decided to go to Switzerland. After having arrived at his sister's place first, he went on to the asylum centre in Liestal.</p> <p><b>Motivation for assisted Return</b></p> <p>After two years in Switzerland, he lost hope that his application for refugee status would be successful. He also was not able to work in Switzerland. He decided to come back to Sri Lanka. Friends told him about AVR and so he enquired about it. He originally insisted that everything would be paid out in cash, but his demands were refused.</p> <p><b>Reintegration</b></p> <p>Within 3 months of coming back to Sri Lanka, he bought a 3 wheeler with the assistance. He himself invested 20,000 LKR in order to pay for the vehicle. He earns about 10,000 LKR a month (after accounting for fuel and minor repairs) which he says is very little for his small family (wife and toddler) to live off. He does not mind the work though. Moreover, he also leases a van which he uses for transports, and two orchards from a family member. Both activities provide extra income. Because he was only away for 2.5 years, he did not find it any problems in reintegrating socially.</p> <p><b>Plans</b></p> <p>His plan is to stay in Sri Lanka, and continue in the same business.</p> |   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>I.I.</b>  |   |
| Gender, Age  | Male, 73  |
| Civil status   | Married, 2 children (one in Australia, one in Canada) |
| Education / previous experience  | Retired, used to work as a business man               |
| Return to Sri Lanka  | Late 2009   |
| <p><b>Migration Trajectories</b></p> <p>I.I.'s two children live abroad; one in Australia, one in Canada. The separation grieves him, and after retirement, he decided to move to Canada. His daughter arranged his travels with an agent (who charged 4 million LKR for his services, equivalent to approximately 30,000 CHF). He travelled by plane to Singapore, then by land to Malaysia and from there on to Thailand. From Bangkok he organised a flight to Canada, via Zurich. The Swiss police arrested him at Zurich airport, as the photo in his travel documents did not match. He was asked to fly back to Bangkok but requested asylum. For 50 days, he stayed at the airport facility in Zurich. He was brought to the Sri Lankan Embassy to obtain a passport. His brother who lives in Zurich was able to visit him.</p> <p><b>Motivation for assisted Return</b></p> <p>His request for asylum was refused. He received 1,000 CHF cash at the airport. As he got back he heard that others got more. He is still very dissatisfied because of that.</p> <p><b>Reintegration</b></p> <p>I.I.'s retired. Social reintegration was not an issue as he was only away for a short period of time and lives with his wife and further family members.</p> <p><b>Plans</b></p> <p>He still wants to go to Canada or Australia. But he says that he is not even successful in obtaining a tourist visa.</p> |   |

|   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| <b>J.J.</b>   |                            |
| Gender, Age   | Female, 76                 |
| Civil status  | Widow, several daughters   |
| Education / previous experience   | O-Level (mandatory school) |
| Return to Sri Lanka   | March 2011                 |
| <p><b>Migration Trajectories</b></p> <p>In 2009, in the final stage of the war, she was arrested by soldiers. With a granddaughter, she went to a camp for internally displaced persons and from there to Colombo. J.J. contacted one of her daughters who moved in 1992 to Switzerland together with her husband and several children. The daughter arranged an agent to bring her to Switzerland (for 2 Million LKR, approximately 15,000 CHF). She flew to Italy and from there to Zurich. She registered at an asylum centre, but stayed at her</p> |                            |

daughter's place in Zurich.

**Motivation for assisted Return**

She found the winter in Switzerland very hard. In the second winter of her stay in Switzerland, she decided that she could not cope with the cold weather any longer and decided to return to Sri Lanka. She did not know about the return and reintegration assistance until she was back in Sri Lanka. Her grandson talked to the officials in Switzerland in German: he was probably informed.

**Reintegration**

She was met by family upon returning to Colombo, and travelled to Jaffna the next day. She now lives with her granddaughter in a house, most of the family lives in another area of Sri Lanka. For 12 months, each month 31,000 LKR were paid to a bank account to which her relatives had access (cash for care assistance). That money is now gone but she is supported through her family.

**Plans**

She plans to stay with her granddaughter.

## 5 Reintegration

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### 5.1 Frame Conditions for Reintegration

#### Security

The latest UNHCR eligibility guidelines for assessing the protection needs of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka (December 2012) summarizes the situation in the country as one “where ongoing human rights concerns are reported, including in particular with regard to reports of post-conflict justice, torture and mistreatment, disappearances, arbitrary detention and freedom of expression.” In February 2013, Human Rights Watch has published a report, detailing accounts of rape and abuse against Tamils by the armed forces, police and paramilitary groups. Among the 75 cases described were also two of deported asylum seekers from Britain. Also, according to the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, Sri Lanka is one of the countries with the highest numbers of disappearances in the world (2011: 5,700 outstanding cases).

Upon return, returnees often undergo questioning by Immigration Officials and State Intelligence Service which can take up to several hours. More questioning often follows after people have arrived back at their home or at their new destination (source: interviews and UNHCR 2012). For most returnees however, security does not seem to be the most pressing of their issues; according to an UNHCR survey of returnees, the top three concerns are, in descending order: lack of livelihood opportunities, the lack of documents and the lack of shelter. In the interviews conducted for the evaluation at hand, safety concerns were mentioned in a few interviews.

#### Political Situation

On a political level, recent developments in Sri Lanka have worried international observers. The president of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, has created himself a very powerful position through the amendment of the constitution (2010), removing term limits, receiving legal immunity and the final say in appointments to civil service, judiciary, and the police. Critics accuse him of running the government “like a thriving family-run conglomerate” (The Economist 2013a and 2013b). In February 2013, the chief justice was impeached and sacked, prompting international criticism. Freedom of expression is curbed, and there have been reports of threats to human rights defenders and journalists (UNHCR 2013).

#### Economic Situation

Economically, however, Sri Lanka has fared rather well over the last few years, enjoying what sometimes is called the peace dividend. According to the Asian Development Bank, GDP growth was 8.3 % in 2011, and 7.2 % in the first half of 2012 (ADB 2013). Even adjusted for purchase power parity, and calculated per capita, the growth rate between 2008 and 2011 stands at an impressive average of 7 % per annum. Of course, income levels are still very low: Sri Lanka ranks at 125 out of 246 entities covered by the World Bank tables on GDP per capita (PPP adjusted), just above Paraguay, Georgia and Bolivia (World Bank 2013).

High economic growth is one of the reasons why unemployment is very low (2011: 4.3 %, according to ADB 2013). Other reasons for a decline of the unemployment rate over the last decade are the demographic change and outward migration.

Unemployment is still high among young people, educated and skilled workers. Furthermore, labour force participation of women is very low (one of the lowest in the world, in fact). Informal work is common (ILO 2009).

Many Sri Lankans remain poor: ILO reports for 2009 that 15 % of all Sri Lankans (outside the Northern provinces) remain poor.<sup>3</sup> Some relief is provided through the free access to health care and free education for all Sri Lankans (WHO 2011). In the Northern provinces, however, the situation is yet much grimmer. The UNHCR (2012) report refers to a widespread lack of basic infrastructure and inadequacy of essential services, such as access to water, sanitation, health care, food, housing and education. The presence of landmines and the economic and security restrictions make it difficult to use the local resources.

Despite the improved situation, the number of Sri Lankans who seek asylum abroad is still larger than the one who return to the country (UNHCR 2012). In 2011, there were 137,000 refugees from Sri Lanka living in 65 countries around the world. 101,000 Sri Lankan refugees live in India alone (two thirds of them in camps). The target countries and means of irregular migration change over time: Australia for example observed a 25-fold increase from 2011 to 2012 of Sri Lankans arriving by boat (Australia Network News 2012). It is not just irregular migration which has increased however; for example regular migration to Arabic countries has also risen. Workers remittances constitute the largest source of foreign income (in 2005, the volume of remittances was three times that of Development Assistance). Overall, the number of Sri Lankans abroad is at least 1.5 million people (2006) – but some think the number is yet much higher (Source: Karunaratne 2008).

## 5.2 Assessment of the Quality of the Reintegration

Returnees were asked about both their social and economic reintegration after their return to Sri Lanka. In regards to social reintegration, most reported that such reintegration did not constitute a problem: Family members often came to receive them at the airport, and they had family and friends to return to. Out of the sample of returnees who were visited, two were away from home for more than five years, and one returnee for more than 10 years. While such long absence did not necessarily result in a lack of a social network, it did lead to a slower re-adaptation process to a country which had changed (and the returnee with it). Some reported difficulties to adjust to a less organised and regulated country than Switzerland. Others, particularly elderly people, had problems adjusting to the culture and climate in Switzerland and were happy to return to their homeland.

Of all returnees visited, 21 provided information regarding their age: nine were above the age of 55 and could therefore be considered as retirees (the normal pension eligibility age for retirement in Sri Lanka is 55 years for men, 50 for women, OECD). This reflects the fact that the average age of Sri Lankan returnees who leave Switzerland is generally higher than the age of returnees to other countries. Economic reintegration clearly had a different meaning to these returnees, who planned to live either off savings or the support of their families. The flexibility of AVRR, which is not restricted to business projects, is certainly needed for this group. The elderly made use of the cash for care

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<sup>3</sup> This number is calculated using an absolute consumption poverty line determined by the Department of Census and Statistics, using the Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) approach. See ILO 2009.

assistance, through which family members looking after the returnee are supported. Also medical assistance and accommodation projects were more often used by this group of returnees.

This assistance alleviated the “burden of return” and made sure that particularly those returnees, who have lost all their money or have even gone into debt to migrate abroad, have at least some basic needs covered, and a chance to pick themselves up on return. These types of assistance have an expiration date, after which the returnee must have found other means to support her or himself. Nevertheless, these types of assistance can be the basis for (lasting) change through creating a more tolerable situation right after return and improving thus the starting situation, including the one for economic activities.

*Table 3: Types of assistance*

| <b>Types of assistance</b> | <b>Examples</b>                        | <b>N</b> |
|----------------------------|--|----------|
| Business project           | Tuk-tuk, small shop, welding equipment | 11       |
| Accommodation assistance   | Rent coverage, renovation              | 5        |
| Medical assistance         | Medication                             | 4        |
| Cash for Care              | Family looking after returnee          | 3        |
| Education / Training       | -                                      | -        |
| Other (...)                | Community internet café, transport     | 3        |
| None                       | N/A                                    | 3        |

*Note: Some returnees have implemented projects of two types; therefore, the number of projects displayed in the table is higher than the number of returnees visited*

The type of assistance most often used is the business type (see table 2). Almost half the returnees interviewed have implemented a business project such as the purchase of a tuk-tuk used for transportation of goods or people, a small grocery store, agricultural projects (such as the purchase of seedlings and pesticides, or cattle) or a small tradesman project (such as sewing or welding equipment).

These projects were mostly successful (in 7 out of 9 cases; 2 unknown) if the indicator to judge success is the fact whether or not the returnee is still running the business (note: we are not accounting for the fact that the returnees came back at different times, between 2009 and 2011). Some returnees can cover their living costs (i.e. their own and their immediate family's needs) through the project, others are only able to cover some costs and are dependent on additional income through other work or assistance. A business taking off in a way that the returnee was even able to employ people could only be observed in a single instance. In two cases the project failed economically but the returnee was able to benefit in other ways from the project (for instance, retaining the asset for other than business purposes). However, in a majority of instances the project made clearly a (great) difference to the returnees. A great feeling of gratitude was expressed in many cases.

*Table 4: Success of the business projects of returnees interviewed*

| <b>Indicator</b> |   | <b>N</b> |
|------------------|---|----------|
| A                | Project successful, returnee can cover living costs fully with proceeds of business                   | 3        |
| B                | Project successful, living costs partly or minimally covered / supplemented with proceeds of business | 4        |
| C                | Partly failed, but had some impact ("personal benefit")   | 2        |
| D                | Failed, same situation or even worse than before  | -        |
|                  | Unknown   | 2        |



The interviews have shown that it is not easy to identify the success factors. It seems to be a combination of personality traits, existing market conditions (such the existence of clients and competitors) as well as a bit of luck that are responsible for the success of the business projects – much like such endeavours elsewhere. Although not everyone might be a born entrepreneur, many of the returnees seem to have been successful to a certain degree in implementing their project, at least in the short run. This might also be due to the fact that some of the returnees have been able to benefit from previous experience or assistance of their family, and that many businesses are more freelance outfits or one-man-enterprises than companies understood in the Swiss sense.

The returnees from Switzerland do not receive any kind of business training which would support them in the process of setting up their businesses. While the returnees did not mention a desire to participate in such trainings, it is striking that many other countries do finance such training courses with a local provider (organised through IOM). IOM Sri Lanka considers these training highly helpful.

Apart from accommodation and medical assistance and the business projects, there was one project in the category “other”; a returnee renovating his house and at the same time setting up an “internet cafe”, which he says is not for profit but rather to provide a service to the community. There were no projects in the category “education / training” or “job placements”. This might be due to a wish for immediate results, or due to the fact that many returnees have received very minimal education themselves: mostly they have finished mandatory schooling before starting to work.

Finally, there were three persons who have not received any further assistance (yet), apart from the 1,000 CHF they have received in cash through swissREPAT (at the airport). These cases differed in their background: One person did not want to commit to staying in Sri Lanka; another says he was not informed (and was angry); at least one is still planning to implement a project.

Apart from the immediate success of the business projects (as displayed in table 3), a possible indicator for the success of reintegration are the wishes to migrate again. We asked the returnees about a possible plan to migrate again, which a third of the returnees (i.e. 8 persons) confirmed. 5 plan to move back to Switzerland, at least in the medium run; 3 elsewhere (migrate regularly to work in Arab countries, or to move closer to children abroad). Again, it is hard to make out the common pattern apart from the obvious age criterion: People who talk about migrating again are younger than the ones who do not. Furthermore, the most successful projects are implemented by people who plan to stay (however, there is only weak evidence for this hypothesis, and some returnees with some success also plan to leave).

### **5.3 Effects on and Perception of non-migrant Populations**

There is little evidence for a pull-effect of AVRR, understood as an incentive for Sri Lankans to leave for Switzerland because of the offered return and reintegration assistance. None of the interview partners (returnee or other stakeholder) believes in its existence: the costs (financial and non-financial) of migration are too high in comparison to the potential benefits through the AVRR package. The large majority of the interviewees reported that they used an agent to migrate to Switzerland (only six returnees reported that they came with a tourist visa; two did not want to specify this). The interviewees who disclosed the amount paid for such services indicated that the charges are very high (between 1 and 4 million LKR). A decision to migrate to

Switzerland with an agent, purely to access AVRR, can certainly be excluded. Even more so because other countries offer very similar programmes and some of them (e.g. Australia) are much cheaper to reach (albeit much riskier, if the travel is done by boat).

Because the AVRR packages of different host countries are similar in nature, a second type of pull-effect – that the Swiss AVRR would motivate Sri Lankan asylum-seekers to move to Switzerland once there already in Europe – can also be excluded.

It was striking however, that 9 out of 25 returnees told us that they have relatives in Switzerland (resp. already had relatives when they moved there). The relatives provided information (and sometimes money) and were a first port of call upon arrival in Switzerland. Often, relatives in Switzerland also informed them about AVRR once they decided to go back (or were forced to go back due to a negative answer to their asylum request). The existence of family and friends in Switzerland provide a certain pull-effect (although this well-known phenomenon of migration pattern is known in the literature as “network effect”).

### **Comparison with reintegration successes of other countries’ programmes**

IOM implements a host of very similar activities in Sri Lanka for other countries. According to IOM Sri Lanka, the success rate of these programmes are very similar (at least if taking into account the different profiles of returnees). The success rate of the project implemented by Refugee Action and The Siyath Foundation is not known yet.

## **5.4 Assessment**

The Swiss return and reintegration assistance can be considered a success in regards to its goal, to help the returnees to reintegrate socially and economically. The flexibility of the scheme is important, particularly taking into account the profile of returnees (there are some very aged persons among the returnees). The business projects are successful insofar as most returnees are still working on their project. A few can cover all their livelihood cost with their business project (even if this remains a struggle). For others, the projects supplement another activity (or a host of other activities) generating income streams.

# **6 Cooperation Switzerland – Sri Lanka**

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## **6.1 Assessment by Sri Lanka’s authorities**

As part of the evaluation mission, representatives of the Port Authority in Colombo, which is responsible for immigration / emigration management, and the District Secretary in Jaffna, were met. Both representatives consider AVRR an important activity and appreciate the contribution Western countries provide to improve the reintegration of returnees back in Sri Lanka.

Switzerland’s contribution is not standing out among the different programmes implemented by IOM. This low visibility may, inter alia, be explained through the facts that FOM does not implement a country programme in Sri Lanka, that the Swiss assistance does resemble the one of other countries in content and incentives, and that

the number of returnees is relatively low (6 % of all AVRR returns handled by IOM in the period 2005 to 2011).

## 6.2 Assessment by Swiss Authorities

Both countries entertain good, normal diplomatic relations; tensions however occurred during the civil war time when Switzerland admitted many Tamils as refugees or temporary admitted persons. Also, the Sri Lanka government takes issue with the fact that Switzerland is vocal about human rights as well as the disappearances in Sri Lanka (e.g. in April 2011 Switzerland supported the UN expert panel report on accountability with respect to final stages of Sri Lanka conflict (see UN Secretary General 2011) and in March 2012, it supported the resolution of the Human Rights Council (see Human Rights Watch 2012)).

Switzerland has a considerable presence in Sri Lanka (embassy in Colombo, SDC in Colombo and Jaffna) and has thus a considerable pool of resources and knowledge. SDC's development work concentrates on post-war rehabilitation of houses and community infrastructure, improvement of livelihoods and sustainable development in the North of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, SDC supports labour migrants and their families (with, for instance, legal services, psychosocial support and economic capacity building as well as awareness raising) as well as the government to *“strengthen national policy ... towards ensuring decent and productive employment opportunities for migrant workers”*.<sup>4</sup>

There is no link between AVRR and the projects implemented by SDC. According to representatives of the Swiss institutions on-site, FOM does not use these resources to the extent possible; e.g. FOM has not accessed information about the security situation, economic or legal environment for businesses; information the embassy would be happy to provide. There is relatively little exchange between FOM and the embassy on return/migration issues, and similarly between FOM and SDC.

Representatives from the Swiss Embassy conclude that individual return assistance is a “non-issue” in the bilateral relations; it is likely too small to be noticed. In Sri Lanka, Switzerland does not promote its return and reintegration assistance but rather, for instance, its engagement in the northern part of the country (SDC Return and Rehabilitation Programme). In bilateral negotiations (e.g. on readmission agreement) the Swiss support to individual return is mentioned however.

Representatives from the Swiss Embassy are of the opinion that a plan for the remaining 700 persons in Switzerland, who are likely need to return home, is in the process of being developed. In their opinion, the plan should “profile” the persons and provide them with specific tailor-made support.

## 6.3 Basis of the Cooperation

Migration between the two countries is not regulated by a bilateral treaty yet. A readmission agreement has been ready to be signed since 2009, but in the past years there has been little interest by Sri Lankan authorities to push the agreement forward. It could also be that the authorities are slowed down by cumbersome internal decision

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<sup>4</sup> [www.swiss-cooperation.admin.ch/srilanka](http://www.swiss-cooperation.admin.ch/srilanka)

making processes and that many authorities / departments are involved in this process, additionally contributing to slow procedures.

In 2012 a national coordination initiative for migration issues was established. This is seen by relevant actors as a positive step; this initiative is led by Department for immigration and emigration, of the Ministry of Defence (DIE). Switzerland made clear to Sri Lankan authorities that signing of the readmission agreement would allow access to complementary support to Sri Lankan authorities; this would not constitute a “country programme” or “migration partnership”, but would be steps into that direction (resp. provide similar advantages). Against this background it is likely that the readmission agreement will finally be signed until mid-2013.

The diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Sri Lanka on return issues, including readmission of persons residing without authorisation in Switzerland, are good, even in the absence of a readmission agreement; hence, the admission agreement will very likely not have significant impact to current practice (in the opinion of the representatives of the Swiss Embassy ).

A readmission agreement Sri Lanka - EU entered into force on 1 May 2005 (OJ L 124, 17.05.2005) in order to combat illegal immigration more effectively; however, implementation has not started since then given that respective legislative provisions (“implementation protocols”) have not been signed yet.

## **6.4 Assessment**

Because of the nature of the Swiss AVRR in Sri Lanka (similar conditions to other donor countries; no country programme), its low visibility is not surprising. Through more interaction between FOM and representatives of other Swiss institutions in the country (i.e. embassy, SDC), the visibility of AVRR could be raised – first with Swiss representatives, and through more active cross-promotion across different platforms also with Sri Lankan stakeholders. Changes in the assistance scheme or the upcoming signing of the readmission agreement mark milestones to intensify the visibility of Swiss AVRR.

## 7 Conclusions

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The following chapter provides a summary of the findings presented in chapters 1 to 6, and the evaluators' conclusion on the effect of Swiss AVRR in Sri Lanka. It should be pointed out that the assessment is primarily based on 25 interviews with returnees who agreed to meet the evaluators, and who could be contacted in the first place. Many returnees expressed a feeling of gratitude; such feelings can have an impact on the feedback. Finally, cultural differences in providing feedback / criticism (e.g. vigilance in regards to saving face) have to be considered when comparing these results to the ones provided in reports of other countries (such as the ones from the other six countries covered in the evaluation).

### 7.1 Return

Practically all returnees confirmed that the information they received in Switzerland on AVRR – on topics such as the course of events, the requirements and conditions – was well explained. Looking back, the returnees think that they received all the information they needed. Often returnees had heard about the assistance through their friends or family members, or, in the absence of a strong network (e.g. when relatively new in the country), through information letters, fliers or “social workers” (i.e. counsellors from different institutions).

The information provided seems sufficient and is satisfactory to the returnees themselves. Once back in Sri Lanka, the events took place as they were described in Switzerland, which shows that the institutions involved (FOM, cantons, IOM) are well coordinated. Through feedback loops (information spreading through the network), this provides safety to the refugees / asylum seekers considering a return, and contributes to the promotion of AVRR.

The fact that many of the Sri Lankan asylum seekers had already family who are familiar with the asylum system in Switzerland, and that the Sri Lankan community is a tightly connected group (see More et al. 2007), obviously ensures that information is passed around. The network of Sri Lankans in Switzerland seems to have a good knowledge about the AVRR offered.

The reason to return to Switzerland most frequently mentioned was a negative response to the asylum request (9 out of 22 responses to this question). Other common reasons were family issues (a member of the family fell sick or died) or the returnee didn't see a chance to settle successfully in Switzerland and was fed up with the asylum system (apart from one exception all interviewed returnees stayed more than a year). Some of the older returnees also found it hard to cope with the Swiss weather and culture.

The situation back home changed dramatically over the seven years covered in the evaluation: In 2007 the civil war reignited, and it came to an end two years later. While there are many pressing questions regarding the security and political situation, the economy is currently booming. It is likely that this change had a big impact on the number of returnees. The AVRR itself did not seem to influence the Sri Lankan returnees in their decision to return (such assertion was denied in all interviews).

The AVRR package is not strong enough to be a major incentive to return home (neither is it a pull-factor for people to leave Sri Lanka or to travel on from another European

country). While AVRR might not be the decisive cause, it probably still acts as a contributing factor as it opens up a perspective in the home country.

## 7.2 Reintegration

Social reintegration upon return was considered a problem only by a minority of the returnees interviewed. Most returnees were met by their family at the airport or soon after, and returned to the region they used to live before leaving the country. Returnees, who were absent for a long time, found it hard to readjust to life in Sri Lanka. A minority of returnees faced problems after having come back similar to those prompting them to leave (such as harassment through security forces).

The returnees accessed different types of assistance: Business projects, housing assistance and cash for care projects. There were no education or vocational training projects or projects assisting returnees to find a job. The absence of such projects might be explained, inter alia, by the lack of suitable jobs in some regions of Sri Lanka, the generally low level of education and the wish to have something tangible already in the short run.

Considering the number of elderly persons among the Sri Lankan returnees, it can be considered beneficial that a range of projects can be accessed (and in practice, is implemented).

The low interest in education / vocational training is not a problem as such. However, it should remain an option and recommended to returnees if their profile / interest match. This would provide FOM and IOM with relevant experience in this field.

Generally, a high success rate of the business projects (7 out of 9; see table 3) could be observed. In many cases the returnees could support themselves and their family, at least partially. A number of returnees reported that they supplement their income with other activities. Only one of the interviewed returnees reported that his project was so successful that he could employ people (other than himself).

Non-business projects such as “cash for care” or medical assistance also have lightened the burden of return and have, at least in the short run, made life easier for returnees. By the time of visit, the money was used up (in all cases) and the returnees had to rely on alternative sources (mainly family support) or forgo the services accessed.

Finally, the interviews have shown that few returnees plan to go back to Switzerland. A minority of the returnees plans to move to other countries in a regular way and plans to work there (e.g. countries of the Middle East).

The financial support provided through AVRR seems to be well-adjusted from the beneficiaries' point of view: it is clearly possible to establish a business project and run the business with modest success. The amount is not excessive. In many cases the returnees still have to supplement their income with other activities.

Among the business projects observed, it is hard to make out obvious success factors, which should be considered or strengthened. Some returnees have had success despite difficult market situations; others had a hard time to implement their project although the idea seemed plausible. Personality traits certainly have a large impact; not everybody is suited to running a business.

In this regard, basic training could improve the results even further (depending on the project idea, the profile and skill set of the returnee). The Swiss AVRR in Sri Lanka does not provide such training although IOM Sri Lanka implements it as part of the programmes of other countries and considers it an important factor.

## **8 Recommendations**

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### **8.1 Preconditions and their Shaping**

If FOM wishes to increase the visibility of the Swiss AVRR in Sri Lanka, we recommend using the platforms Swiss Embassy and SDC, with their strong presence in the country, offer. FOM could inform these actors more pro-actively about the assistance and use, conversely, their input in planning and implementing AVRR.

Structural aid (as provided by SDC in Jaffna for example) has the advantage that a larger proportion of the population benefits; i.e. also people who have not left the country or who have not been able to reach a western country. If FOM desires to do add such a component, we recommend using an existing platform / initiative.

### **8.2 Incentives for Return**

While the information seems to be considered sufficient and appropriate by the returnees interviewed, the data shows the pick-up rate is very low. The embassy estimates that 700 people will have to return in the coming years. These asylum seekers and persons with temporary admission should be contacted proactively and informed about their options.

AVRR seems to have very little impact on the decision to return, and the amount could therefore be reduced or scrapped altogether (from a return perspective only). Conversely, we see a positive impact of the payment on the success of reintegration; from a reintegration perspective we thus advise against reducing the amount.

### **8.3 Implementation of Reintegration Assistance**

The success rate of the business projects is already satisfactory so changes should be incremental. One such change could be the provision of business trainings (using existing trainings offered in other AVRR programmes implemented by IOM). This could make the projects more viable and successful.

While projects based on medical and cash for care assistance are providing very welcome relief (and thereby, by covering the particularly difficult period immediately after return, lasting change), the financial assistance stops usually within 12 or 18 months. One means to increase the sustainability of the assistance is for SDC to implement structural aid projects in regions people return to (see above).

## **8.4 Follow-up of Reintegration**

The evaluators were not able to access comprehensive and systematic monitoring data, e.g. indicating which projects were still running after one or two years (because AVRR in Sri Lanka is not implemented through a country programme but through the individual assistance scheme instead, the monitoring is currently done only during special monitoring periods). The cost of such a systematic monitoring would be relatively low if done by a very short phone interview and would provide relevant data for the adaptation of AVRR.



**Persons interviewed in Sri Lanka (other than returnees) and in Switzerland**

In chronological order:

- Richard Danzinger, IOM Sri Lanka, head of office. 5 February 2013
- Priyantha Kulathunga IOM Sri Lanka, Programme Manager – Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programmes, 5 and 8 February 2013
- Jenaraj Thevatas, IOM Sri Lanka, IOM office Jaffna, 5 February 2013
- Thomas Litscher, Ambassador, Embassy of Switzerland to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, 8 February 2013
- Fiona Elze, First Secretary / Head of Asylum Section, Embassy of Switzerland to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, 8 February 2013
- Sanjitha Sathyamutyi, Assistant Protection Officer, UNHCR, 8 February 2013
- Roshie Sandrasegaram, Returns Liaison Assistant, Migration, British High Commission Colombo, 8 February 2013
- Genevieve Contesse, Head of Office, Swiss Cooperation Office Sri Lanka, Jaffna, 6 February 2013
- Martin Studer, Project Officer, Swiss Cooperation Office Sri Lanka, Jaffna, 6 February 2013
- Rubini Varathalingam, Additional Government Agent/ District Secretary, Jaffna District, Jaffna, 6 February 2013
- R.S.L. Rajapakshe, Deputy Controller (Ports), Department of Immigration and Emigration, 8 February 2013
- Ulrike Dobretsberger, IOM REZ, EVZ Kreuzlingen, 21 March 2013
- Karin Litchfield, IOM REZ, EVZ Basel, 3 April 2013
- Rachel Schipper, Rückkehrberatung bei der Kirchlichen Kontaktstelle für Flüchtlingsfragen, Kanton Bern, 8 April 2013

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- International Labour Organisation (2013) : [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcm\\_041779.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcm_041779.pdf)
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## Number of persons participating in AVRR programmes implemented by IOM in Sri Lanka

| County       | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |       |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Albania      |      | 1    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1     |
| Australia    |      |      |      |      |      |      | 14   | 41   | 24   | 1    | 99   | 179   |
| Austria      |      |      |      |      | 1    |      |      |      | 1    |      | 1    | 3     |
| Belarus      |      |      | 12   | 2    | 1    |      |      |      | 1    |      |      | 16    |
| Belgium      |      |      | 2    | 2    |      |      | 1    |      | 6    | 6    | 17   | 34    |
| Bosnia       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1    |      |      | 1     |
| Bulgaria     |      | 3    |      |      |      |      |      | 1    | 3    |      |      | 7     |
| Benin        |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 203  | 203   |
| Chile        |      |      |      |      |      |      | 3    |      |      |      |      | 3     |
| Czech Rep.   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1    |      |      |      | 1     |
| Dominic Rep. |      |      |      |      |      | 1    |      |      |      |      |      | 1     |
| East Timor   |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1    | 5    | 1    |      |      | 7     |
| Egypt        |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6    |      |      |      | 3    | 9     |
| Finland      |      |      |      | 1    |      |      |      |      | 9    |      | 3    | 13    |
| France       |      | 1    | 1    | 8    | 5    |      | 12   | 25   | 55   |      |      | 107   |
| Germany      | 1    | 2    | 11   | 17   | 8    |      | 3    |      | 1    |      |      | 43    |
| Ghana        |      |      |      |      |      |      | 3    |      | 1    |      | 17   | 21    |
| Guinea       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 102  | 102   |
| Indonesia    |      |      | 2    |      | 21   | 47   | 5    | 22   | 19   | 12   | 75   | 203   |
| Hungary      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1    | 1     |
| Iraq         |      |      |      | 1    |      | 31   | 16   |      |      |      |      | 48    |
| Ireland      |      |      |      | 1    |      |      | 1    | 1    |      |      |      | 3     |
| Italy        |      | 5    |      | 1    |      |      |      | 1    | 2    | 6    |      | 15    |
| Jordan       |      |      |      |      | 1    |      |      | 1    |      |      |      | 2     |
| Kenya        |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 5    |      |      |      | 5     |
| Kuwait       |      |      |      |      |      |      | 359  |      |      |      |      | 359   |
| Kyrgyzstan   |      | 2    | 8    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 10    |
| Libya        |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 22   |      | 22    |
| Malaysia     |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1    |      | 2    | 1    | 4    | 8     |
| Mali         |      |      | 1    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 21   | 22    |
| Mauritania   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1    | 1     |
| Netherlands  |      | 15   | 20   | 35   | 10   | 4    | 4    | 5    | 10   | 6    | 6    | 115   |
| Norway       |      | 1    | 7    | 6    | 2    | 4    | 2    | 4    | 24   | 51   | 51   | 152   |
| Nigeria      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 2    | 2     |
| Papua N.G.   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 4    |      | 4     |
| Poland       |      |      |      |      |      | 3    | 2    | 2    |      |      |      | 7     |
| Romania      |      |      |      |      | 3    |      |      |      |      |      |      | 3     |
| Russia       |      |      |      | 3    |      |      | 3    | 1    |      |      |      | 7     |
| Sierra Leone |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6    | 6     |
| Senegal      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1    | 1     |
| Spain        |      |      |      |      |      | 7    |      |      |      |      |      | 7     |
| Sweden       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1    |      |      | 1     |
| Switzerland  |      |      | 1    | 8    | 5    | 10   | 9    | 8    | 54   | 59   | 35   | 189   |
| Syria        |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 3    | 3     |
| Thailand     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 5    |      | 5     |
| Togo         |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 180  | 180   |
| Turkey       |      |      | 1    | 3    | 5    | 6    | 19   | 31   | 6    | 1    |      | 72    |
| UK           | 5    | 142  | 193  | 273  | 310  | 182  | 127  | 137  | 168  | 180  |      | 1,717 |
| Ukraine      |      |      |      | 2    |      | 7    | 6    | 5    |      |      |      | 20    |
| TOTAL        | 6    | 172  | 259  | 363  | 372  | 302  | 597  | 296  | 389  | 354  | 831  | 3,941 |

Source: IOM Sri Lanka, "Total AVRR returns"

**Photographs**

(Photographs of 5 out of a total of 25 returnees interviewed)

