



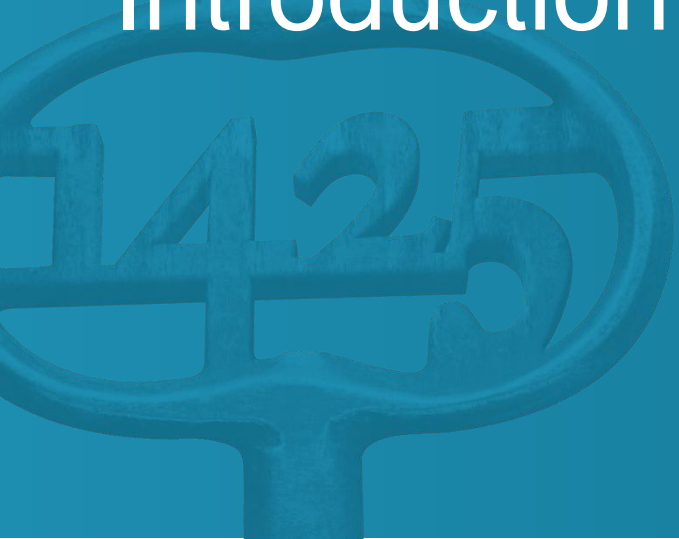
“Awareness and image of voluntary return”

The perspective of irregular migrants and their representatives in Belgium

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Introduction



Introduction

Study commanded by Fedasil (delivery: January 2016)

Mapping the awareness and image of voluntary return: focus on irregular migrants and their 'representatives'

Focus on two cities: Antwerp and Brussels

Interviews with

- 1) Frontline workers in organizations inside & outside the partner network, in regular contact with irregular migrants (Part 1)
- 2) Irregular migrants coming from 3 countries/country groups (Part 2)

Preliminary findings – Part 1 (Organizations)



Profile

28 persons interviewed

- Frontline workers (mainly)



From diverse set of organizations:

- 8 Return Partners (RP)
 - Social services, City of Antwerp, Return desk in Antwerp & Brussels, IOM, Caritas...
- 11 social services that are No Return Partners (NRP)
 - mainly small organizations (< 5 employees) delivering aid & guidance to irregular migrants

Role in information dissemination

RP: Formal role in information dissemination

- Receive a lot of questions on voluntary return
- “Inform but not persuade”

NRP: No formal role in information dissemination

- Know the program
- Receive (almost) never questions about the program
- Inform irregular migrants on own initiative on voluntary return: “no taboo”
- Approach: one of several possibilities for their future
- Refer to official return partners for more information:
Preference for social services (e.g. Caritas, CAW)



Role in information dissemination

“So, if it is someone without a residence permit, we will review: ‘What is your situation right now? What are the possibilities? And return is also a part of that.’ (NRP – A)

“For me, there rests no taboo on talking about return. I never feel like I’m ‘pushing’ someone to go back. I think a lot depends on your approach: Going back is one of the possibilities, but is it possible, is it worthwhile?” (NRP - Br)

Role in information dissemination

NRP:

- Notice that many social workers are still reluctant to bring up the subject

“There are social workers who say: “I don’t bring up the subject of return, because they may consider me a racist”. You shouldn’t underestimate that. A lot of social workers feel like “You shouldn’t talk about that”.” (NRP – Br)

Challenges in bringing up the subject

(1) Migrants resistance to the information on voluntary return

- Few questions ➡ social worker has to bring the subject up him/herself
- Irregular migrants are often suspicious
- Resistance when subject is brought up: “You want me to return?”
- Risk of ‘damaging’ relation of trust and losing connection

Challenges in bringing up the subject

“Let us talk about returning’. But then we lose them. And if we lose them, there are plenty of others in Brussels in the grey economy and the informal circuit that will probably give them the information they’d like to hear... (...) Losing the link with them, is the worst that can happen.” NRP – Br

“Sans-papiers are often suspicious. Who are you? What do you want to tell me? What are your intentions? Who pays you?” NRP – Br

Challenges in bringing up the subject

(2) Ethical objections of social workers:

- The program 'in se' is good
- They find however that most people don't want to return, but see no other options → How voluntary is voluntary return?
 - Coalition agreement: "Voluntary if possible, Forced if necessary"
- They find that sometimes the line between voluntary and forced return is very much blurred (e.g. open return centers)
- They believe that returning is not for everyone the best option

Challenges in bringing up the subject

“The questions is: is it ethical as social worker to talk about voluntary return, when people are standing with their back against the wall?” NRP -Br

“I often ask myself: ‘why is it put in the picture so much?’ That is possibly to get rid of as many people as possible. I understand that a bit, but I feel like I’m in a dual position there.” RP – Br

“I sometimes feel that, since it has been put in the picture so much, maybe even too much, that more and more the image of voluntary return gets damaged” RP-Br

Approaches, tools and methods used

Approach of 'Future orientation' (Toekomstoriëntering)

- Originating from the experience of front workers
- Different approaches in Antwerp & Brussels
- Idea: stimulating reflection by migrant about his/her future
 - Looking broader than “papers or no papers”
- Presenting voluntary return as one of several options
 - Other options: Legalization of stay, migration to other country or irregular stay
- Starting from the reason(s) for which the person migrated in the first place
 - Purpose = new migration project

Approaches, tools and methods used

Approach of 'Future orientation' (Toekomstoriëntering)

- In group or individually
- Development of different tools & working methods
- Strengths (according to the organisations)
 - Less resistance
 - The social worker 'does not have to judge'
 - Emancipating & liberating

Approaches, tools and methods used

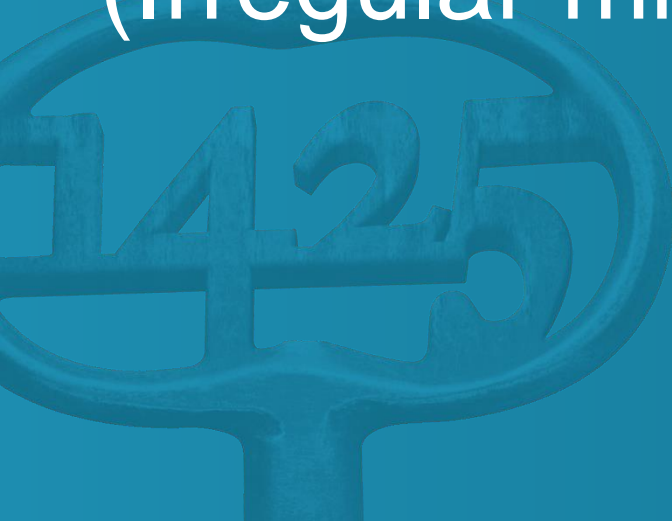
“I think that’s a big difference, when people feel ‘It’s still my decision and I can come here to talk freely about it, but I can also place it alongside a number of other alternatives that are being discussed. That makes it more credible” NRP - Br

“That is a very different atmosphere, very different, and that makes it much easier to talk about it [voluntary return].”

NRP – A

“Actually... they learn people how to take their own lives back in control and to makes decisions again. (..) For a long time, they have had the feeling that everything has been decided for them” NRP - Br

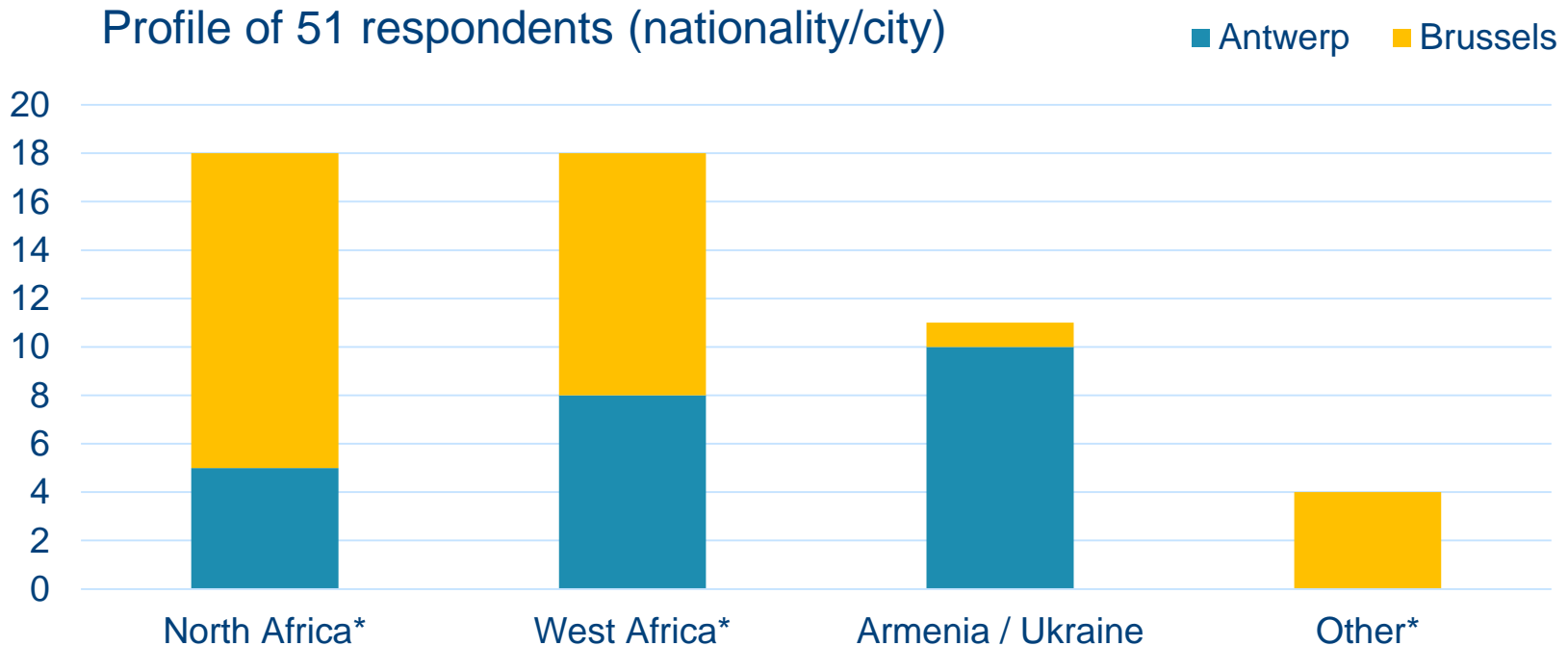
Preliminary findings – Part 2 (Irregular migrants)



Approach

- Getting in touch through different organisations
 - Brussels: social services (Link = Brussel vzw, CAW, Caritas, Samusocial) & Return Desk of Fedasil
 - Antwerp: social services (EVA vzw Ekeren, Filet Divers vzw, De Loodsen vzw)
- Interviews were conducted in Septembre – Novembre 2015
- Focus on 3 nationality groups
 - North-Africa (lower return rate)
 - West-Africa (lower return rate)
 - Armenia/Ukraine (higher return rate)

Respondents profile



*North Africa : Morocco, Algeria, Sudan, Tunisia

*West Afrika: Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Cameroon, Congo

*Other: Romania, Somalia, Pakistan

Respondents profiles

- 24 male , 27 female
- Mean age of respondents: 38 years
 - Youngest person: 17 years; oldest person: 74 years
- Mean time in Belgium: 5,7 years
 - Shortest: 2 months, longest: 17 years
- 56 % of respondents has asked for asylum in the past – 44% never asked for asylum
- 41 % of respondents waiting for a decision on their regularisation or appeal procedure

Familiarity with organisations (linked to RP)

1. OCMW/CPAS → *almost everyone*
2. City → *almost everyone*
3. IBZ DVZ → *large majority*
4. Fedasil → *more than half*
5. Caritas → *more than half*
6. CAW → *50 / 50*
7. IOM → *less than half*



Trust in organisations (linked to RP)

- Highest trust in **CAW, Caritas**, or the organization where we conducted the interviews (non-governmental)
- Medium trust in **OCMW / CPAS**. High trust associated with medical guarantee, low trust when dissatisfied with their support
- Medium trust in **Fedasil**
- Lowest trust in **IBZ DVZ** (negative decisions)

Familiarity with program of RP

- About **71 %** of respondents know the program / have heard about it / are aware it exists, ...
- Of respondents
 - who asked for asylum: 80 % is familiar with the program
 - who never asked for asylum: only 47 % is familiar with the program
- Nationality groups
 - Armenia/Ukraine: 82% is familiar with the program
 - West-Africa: 71% is familiar with the program
 - North-Africa: only 60% is familiar with the program

Information dissemination

“How did you hear about the RP?”

- When receiving the letter of the negative decision or expulsion order
- In the asylum centre or reception facility
- Via social assistant of CAW, Caritas or OCMW

- Via other irregular migrants or migrant community
- Poster / leaflet seen at CAW or OCMW/CPAS
- I looked for information myself (internet, ...)
- Via friends

- Via lawyer, via person of IOM at the busstation of Eurolines, via police

Information dissemination

Have you ever seen this poster/leaflet?

47 % of respondents say they have seen it

Impression of the poster/leaflet?

- Image:
 - negative connotation ('take your belongings and leave!')
 - even insulting (we don't travel like that, we use a *nice* suitcase)
 - unclear (going to the market, on a holiday?)
- Slogan
 - Majority doesn't understand English
 - 'Everyone misses home, but sometimes going back is just not a solution / nor possible'



To return or not to return...

- Only three respondents say they want to go back !
- A few respondents would want to go back in the future
 - When the situation in their country would be better
 - When they have a permit of residence and they can travel back and forth
- So ... almost everyone wants to stay !
 - Even without permit of residence, they prefer a life in Belgium over going back to their home country

Opinion on the program

- Good for people who want to go back (but not for me) (14)
- Good, especially because of the re-integration (although the reintegration aid seems limited) (7)
- Not good: I don't trust it, I don't believe people will get the support / aid they are promised (because of corruption in the home country) (4)
- Not good (because I don't want to go back) (3)
- Not good: Is it really "voluntary"? (2)
- Not good because of the term and conditions (not possible to come back, limited luggage) (2)
- Good for countries where there is peace (but not for my country) (2)
- Good because I want to go back (2)

Steps forward



Steps forward

- Continue to work on ‘different tracks’ :
 - Dissemination of information during asylum process + at the moment of refusal
 - Dissemination of information and assisting migrants at the Return Desk and through free hotline: easy accessible
 - Involving civil society organisations
 - Higher level of trust of irregular migrants in these organizations
 - Reach irregular migrants not in contact with authorities
 - Prepared to inform migrants on their options (not ‘persuading them to return’) – developed own approach and tools
 - Can offer psycho-social guidance in taking a decision

Steps forward

- Be careful to keep a good image of the RP
 - = important to keep civil society organisations involved & for a good 'word-of-mouth' advertising
 - How?
 - Clear separation of forced return and voluntary return (!)
 - Monitoring & evaluating experiences of returned migrants
 - Providing migrants enough time to reflect on return decision
- Re-think the leaflet and poster: more positive/inspiring image, language of the slogan