



THIS IS
MY STORY

GIVING VOICE
TO RETURNEES



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency

The stories featured in this publication are true and have been relayed globally by Country Offices of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

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IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

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MIGRANT IN AN IOM TRANSIT CENTER IN NIGER.

FOREWORD



Migration is often perceived as a one-way journey, starting from one's homeland to a new country of destination. The reality can be more complex, however. For some, the need to go back home is felt at a certain point. This can be triggered by several reasons, such as the desire to reunite with family, changed conditions in either host countries or countries of origin, or the lack of legal status and work opportunities.

Going back is not always easy. Often, it means finding a new job, adjusting to a new lifestyle, and reconnecting with family and friends. While the situation of each returnee is different, many remain in need of support.

Since 1979, IOM's assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes have been supporting those who decide to return to their homeland but lack the means to do so. Assistance provided under AVRR can help returnees in preparing for their travel, return and reintegration.

This booklet presents a collection of some of IOM's voluntary return and reintegration stories. It shows how people of diverse origins, age and backgrounds have used AVRR support to start their life anew.

Journeys narrated in these pages offer a glimpse into the multifaceted narratives of migration - struggles, dreams, hopes, disappointments, achievements and successes. They tell us about the past as much as the future. They speak of our common humanity.

These voices, together with those of millions of other migrants, deserve to be heard. They reflect on us all, and on our societies.

Their stories are our stories.

William Lacy Swing
IOM Director General

“I NOW SEE MYSELF BUILDING MY FUTURE INSTEAD OF LOOKING BACK IN REGRET.”

My family and I left for Greece in search of better opportunities.

When my parents decided to return to Iraq, I realized that it would be challenging to find my way on my own in Europe, and I decided to go back shortly after them. Since I had no means to do so, I sought help in organizing my return and planning for my future.

It was difficult to start from scratch back in Iraq. At first, I was worried that I would not find a job.

But my family and close friends helped me get back on my feet. They lent me money to buy electrical appliances and tools to open a small shop. With this, and with the reintegration grant I received, I was able to start my own business.

My community was of great support. I now see myself building my future instead of looking back in regret.



NAME
PESHANG
COUNTRY
IRAQ

PESHANG IN HIS SHOP IN IRAQ.

NAME

ALMA

COUNTRY

ALBANIA



“THIS DREAM SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE TO ME A FEW MONTHS AGO. IT IS NOW AN EXCITING CHALLENGE.”

I completed the compulsory school cycle in Albania. Although I would have liked to pursue my studies further, I was forced to drop out because my family could not afford to pay for my tuition costs. I had to help my mother with the housework.

I left Albania in March 2015 with the objective to continue my studies in Italy. I first went to live with my aunt in Genoa. Unfortunately, she was unable to take care of me since her husband had been diagnosed with cancer.

Since I did not have any other relatives who could help me, I ended up being hosted at a reception centre for minors. During the six months of my stay there, I established good relations with my peers and with the social workers.

I would have liked to stay in Italy but I soon realized this was not an option. In addition to travel assistance, I received support that allowed me to take professional culinary classes, and to find an internship in a restaurant serving traditional Albanian cuisine.

Since then, things have been moving really fast for me. After my internship, I found a job as an assistant cook in Tirana. Last summer, I moved to the South of the country to work as an assistant chef in a tourist resort during the high season.

Now that I am back in Tirana, I realize how impossible this dream seemed to me a few months ago. Now, thanks to the help I received, I finally see it materialize.

“EDUCATION IS A POWERFUL TOOL. IF YOU DON'T EDUCATE YOUR PEOPLE, YOU CAN NEVER GROW AS A COUNTRY.”

I used to work in Nigeria as a journalist and media consultant. However, due to the economic crisis, I lost my job. Like many other Nigerians, I left the country, hoping to find better conditions abroad.

I decided to go to Algeria. For the three months I was there, I was teaching English and doing some other temporary jobs. But life was tough, and opportunities were scarce. Without any option, I decided to return home.

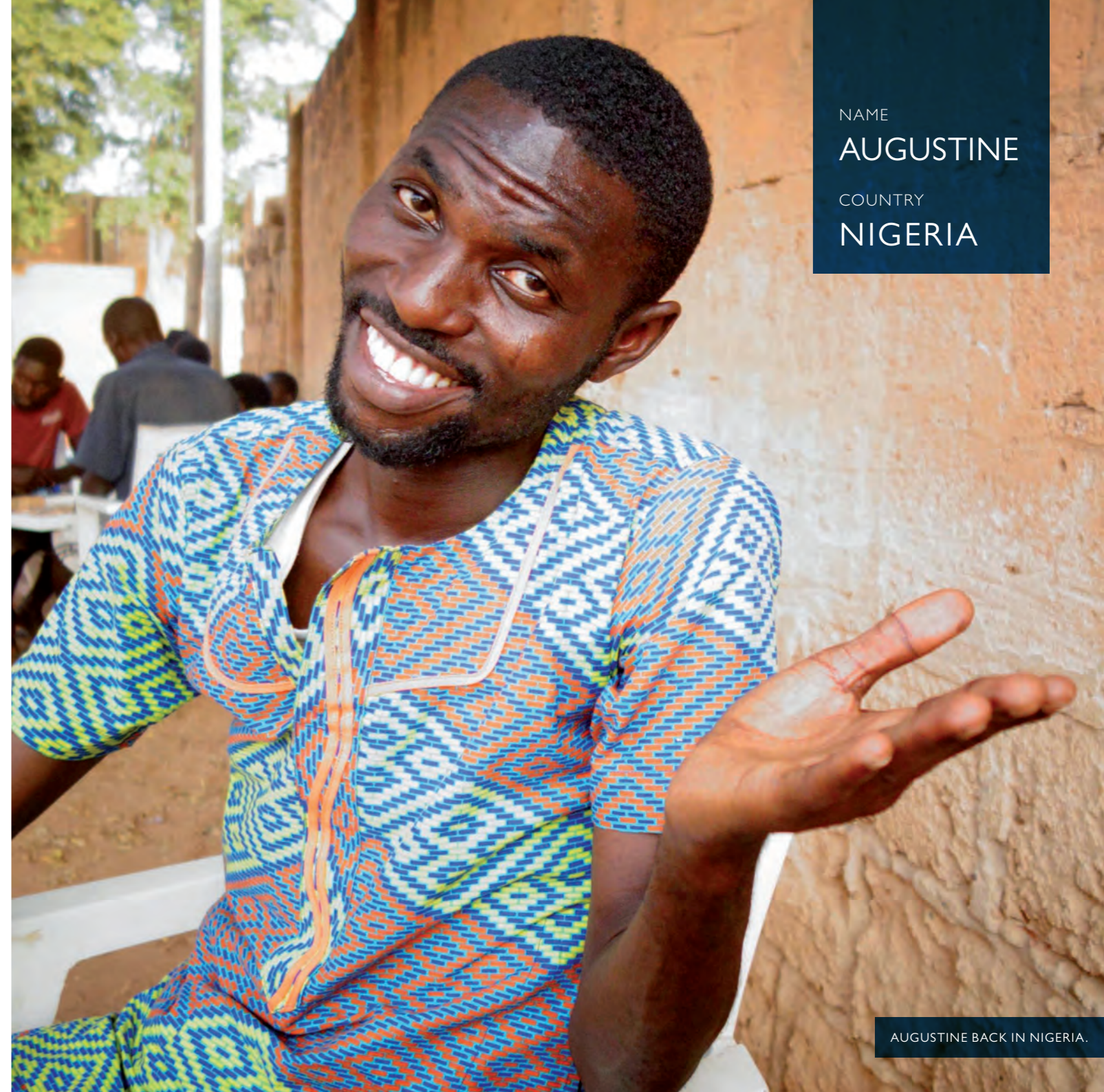
On the way back, our smugglers abandoned me and several other people in the desert. They took my bags, my money and my camera. I was left destitute. There was no one to help, no phone to call my family. It was a painful experience.

I finally arrived in Niger, and a couple of Gambians told me where I could receive the assistance I needed. So, I ended up going to the Agadez transit centre. During the month I spent there, I learned French and took free entrepreneurship classes. I did not want to come back empty handed. Thanks to the training I took in Agadez and the support I received, I founded an online radio channel in Abuja “Amebo FM” with other returnees and fellow classmates. I now feel like everything I have ever dreamt of is coming to fruition.

Amebo FM, “Nigeria first online radio station” aims to bring to light a diversity of issues relating to migration. We need to sensitize individuals and communities, both at home and overseas, about irregular migration and its alternatives.

I believe that education is a powerful tool. It helps people make the right choices. If you don't educate your people, you can never grow as a country. This is why people leave.

Africa is a place of hope, of hard working people, one does not need to leave.



NAME
AUGUSTINE
COUNTRY
NIGERIA

AUGUSTINE BACK IN NIGERIA.

NAME

HAILU

COUNTRY

ETHIOPIA



“THROUGHOUT THESE YEARS, I HAD BEEN THINKING ABOUT HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF MY EXPERIENCE IN CASE I WOULD RETURN HOME.”

I left my country to join my wife in Belgium. When I got there, I started working in a fruit farm, which allowed me to develop strong skills and acquire valuable knowledge. Throughout these years, I had been thinking about how to make the most of my experience in case I would return home.

Unfortunately, my wife and I separated, and I decided to go back to Ethiopia.

When I arrived, I set up a farming business on a piece of land owned by my family in the outskirts of Addis Ababa. With the support I received, I purchased machinery and irrigation equipment.

Things are working well. My brother is managing the daily activities of the farm. Together, we raise cattle and grow various vegetables. We are now employing 12 persons.

I keep thinking about how to further develop the farm. I hope to start a poultry business and, who knows, build upon my network in Belgium to attract investment here.

I know how lucky I am. Many people here don't have the opportunities that I benefited from.

“MY GOAL IS TO MAKE FRENCH AND ENGLISH ACCESSIBLE TO LESS PRIVILEGED PEOPLE.”

I lived and worked in Switzerland for about 17 years and things were going well. But when my father passed away and the company I worked for went bankrupt, I thought it was time to return to my country and my family. I wanted to have my mother by my side and the support of my relatives. This is what triggered my decision to return.

Speaking different languages is so important nowadays. It's a pity that this privilege is not accessible to everyone. I had the chance to learn French and English when I was abroad, and now I want to enable less privileged people to have access to this knowledge by establishing my own language school in my home city.

This was my dream, however things were not that easy. Upon my return, I suffered serious medical conditions that forced me to postpone my plans for an entire year. Once I recovered, I couldn't wait to finally plan each detail of my school. I received support to pay for rent and buy furniture and school material. It made the official opening of the school an unforgettable memory.

NAME

FABIOLA

COUNTRY

BRAZIL



FABIOLA OUTSIDE HER SCHOOL IN BRAZIL.

NAME

MACYNE

COUNTRY

SENEGAL



“THIS JOURNEY PROVIDED ME WITH EXPERIENCE AND COURAGE.”

I decided to return to Senegal after realizing that my dream for a better future could not be achieved in Europe.

With the training I took in Italy, I was able to re-establish the retail and repair business I had started before leaving Senegal. Once back home, I was mentored by very active and experienced people.

I am not alone: I supervise four apprentices, while others work as repairers. They fix the material that I, as the business owner, buy for this purpose. This journey provided me with experience and courage. It taught me that determination and hard work always give results.

I also have a family now: a wife and a daughter. I don't regret my decision to come back.

MACYNE IN HIS RETAIL AND REPAIR SHOP IN SENEGAL.

“PHOTOGRAPHY
ALLOWS ME
TO TRANSFORM
CERTAIN EXPERIENCES
INTO SOMETHING
POSITIVE.”

I returned to Jakarta after a four-year stay in the Netherlands. I was homesick. Besides, I no longer had the permission to stay in the country. It was a difficult situation.

During my time there, I could earn some money thanks to household work and photography. I found out that I was actually quite talented and I thought of developing these skills further in my country.

Through my work, I seek to capture and document social themes such as migration. It is all about people. It allows me to transform tough experiences into something positive.

With the support I received, I purchased professional photography equipment. I am now back home where I manage to generate some basic income from assignments as a wedding photographer. In the future, I hope to work as a photo reporter.

*NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT IDENTITY.

NAME

GARIN*

COUNTRY

INDONESIA



GARIN ON HIS WAY BACK TO INDONESIA.



NAME
EMEBET

COUNTRY
ETHIOPIA

“I WANT MY CHILDREN TO GET A GOOD EDUCATION.”

When we moved to Sudan ten years ago, things were going well for us. However, with the family growing, caring for the children became difficult. My daughter was reaching school age and we could not pay for her tuition anymore. That is why we decided to begin a new life in our home country.

My relatives were very enthusiastic about our plans, but they also felt sorry because they had no means to help us in our journey.

We heard about assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes by word of mouth. In Sudan, we considered different options to make a living in Ethiopia.

Once back, we opened a juice shop, but the economic situation worsened and we went bankrupt. It was a tough start, yet we did not give up.

We had to sell all the shop equipment so that my husband could renew his driving license. Soon after, he found work, and our daughter could go back to school.

For now, I am taking care of my children. I want them to get a good education. Once they are grown up, my dream is to open a hair salon.

EMEBET AND HER CHILDREN BACK IN ETHIOPIA.

“MIGRANTS ARE EXPECTED TO COME BACK WITH A CERTAIN SUCCESS; IT WAS NOT EASY.”

I went to Belgium to improve my living conditions. For me, this meant finding a home or buying a car. But living abroad was not easy, and after several unsuccessful attempts of regularization, I decided to go back to Morocco.

Migrants are expected to come back with a certain success; it was not easy. But thanks to my experience, and with the support I received upon return, I set up a small bakery business. However, after a few months, despite good feedback from my customers, I felt that this activity would not be profitable enough in the long term. I took a closer look at the market, and I concluded that selling sewing accessories would be a more sustainable option.

I therefore invested my gains into this new activity. I feel like a real entrepreneur and I am confident to take appropriate risks to develop my business.

I am now reassured about the stability of my situation.

NAME
ABDELHAK
COUNTRY
MOROCCO



ABDELHAK OPENED A SEWING SHOP IN MOROCCO.

NAME

ALTANCHIMEG

COUNTRY

MONGOLIA



“WITH MY MOTHER,
WE AIM AT GIVING
WATCHMAKING
LESSONS.”

I spent eight years in Switzerland. One day, my mother called me: my father was very ill and she wanted me to come back to Mongolia to help her take care of him and provide for the family.

I took my kids with me and we left. It was a long time since I had set foot in my country. Everything had changed. My kids adapted well and after a few months they were able to speak Mongolian. But for me, I must say, starting a new life was hard.

My mother already had experience working in the watch industry. With the family's own resources and the additional support I received, we decided to open a watch retail shop. It is going well. We are now in the process of opening a second one. We are also planning to expand our activities and propose watchmaking lessons.

I am happy to be back: I can see a future here.

ALTANCHIMEG IN HER SHOP IN MONGOLIA.

“I WAS TORN: I FELT THE URGE TO GO BACK BUT DID NOT KNOW HOW.”

I left to get medical treatment in Spain. When I recovered, I first thought I could stay and try my luck there.

I started working with my uncle, but as months went by, I considered returning home. Many people from my community in Spain told me: ‘Think twice, it is hard to make it here, you may miss the opportunity to build something there.’

I was torn: I felt the urge to go back but did not know how. I found a solution after discussing with return and reintegration counsellors who helped me reconsider my future in Senegal.

Upon return, my family saw that I was determined. They supported me emotionally and did their best to help me financially.

It was heartening to receive such an encouragement. However, it was also a huge responsibility. I felt I could not fail them: I had to succeed.

I now have a job working for a custom clearance company close to the port, in Dakar. It is a good start, but I don’t intend to stop here. My goal is to create my own business. It is not easy, there is competition, and you need a lot of money to obtain a commercial license. For now, I am focusing on improving my skills and gaining trust from clients.

I think that wherever you are, be it in Europe or in Africa, you can succeed. Here in Senegal, if you are motivated to work hard and have ideas, you can make it.

NAME

AMEDY

COUNTRY

SENEGAL



AMEDY NOW WORKS FOR A CUSTOM CLEARANCE COMPANY IN DAKAR.

AVRR AT A GLANCE

Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes provide administrative, logistical and financial support to migrants who decide to return home, but lack the means to do so. This includes individualized counselling with IOM or its partners and is often complemented by reintegration assistance to help beneficiaries rebuild their lives within the communities to which they return.

Beneficiaries of AVRR programmes may include stranded migrants, irregular migrants, regular migrants, asylum seekers who decide not to pursue their claims or who are found not to be in need of international protection. AVRR assistance can also be provided to migrants in vulnerable situations, such as victims of trafficking, elderly people, unaccompanied migrant children or migrants with health-related needs.

AVRR is an indispensable component of a comprehensive approach to migration management, as it contributes to achieving safe, orderly and regular migration in line with target 10.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, safeguarding the rights of migrants and upholding international principles and standards.

IOM's AVRR programmes provide a means of meeting the most challenging aspects of return and reintegration, in that they address migrant aspirations and government concerns concurrently:

FOR MIGRANTS

AVRR represents a humane and dignified approach to return, enhancing reintegration perspectives at home. For migrants who decide to return home but lack the means to do so, assisted voluntary return and reintegration is often the only way to address their immediate plight. AVRR allows migrants concerned to plan for their return, thereby facilitating the sustainability of their reintegration.

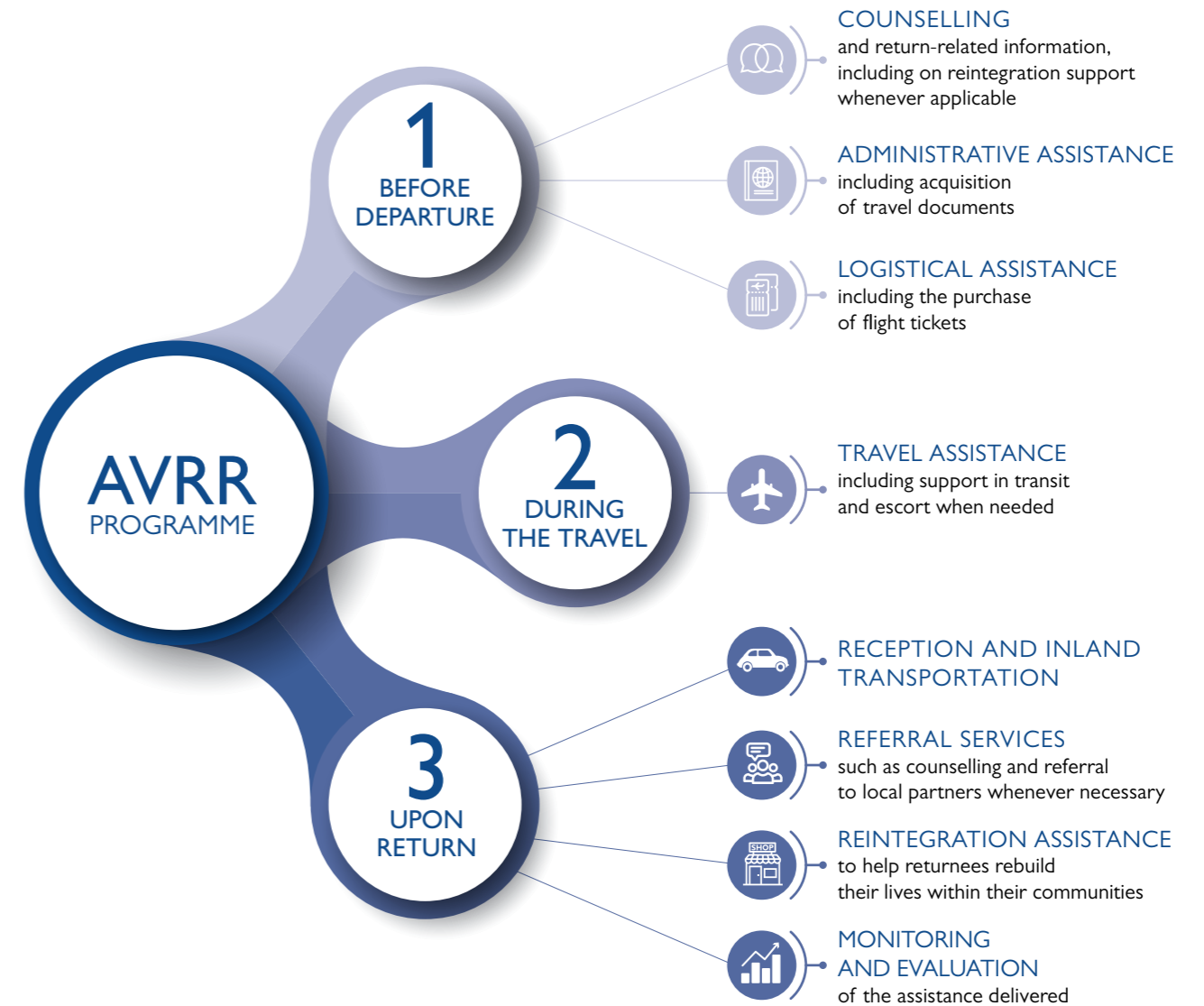
FOR GOVERNMENTS OF HOST AND TRANSIT COUNTRIES

AVRR is a consensual and cost-effective option that helps strengthen the integrity of regular migration and asylum systems, as opposed to more arduous and often more costly law enforcement means.

FOR GOVERNMENTS OF COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

AVRR is an acceptable option to support the reinsertion of returning nationals. IOM assists governments of countries of origin in the development of strategies and programmes facilitating the management of return migration and strengthening capacities for reintegration in these countries. AVRR also facilitates and enhances a cooperative approach to return between the relevant authorities in host and transit countries and countries of origin.

THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF AN AVRR PROGRAMME*



* THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF SUPPORT PROVIDED UNDER AVRR VARY DEPENDING, AMONG OTHER FACTORS, ON THE BENEFICIARIES' NEEDS, THE PARAMETERS OF EACH PROGRAMME AND THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES.

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