



VAPAAEHTOINEN PALUU  
ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN  
FRIVILLIGT ÅTERVÄNDANDE

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## 550 have voluntarily returned to their home countries

The number of asylum seekers is decreasing as interest in assisted voluntary return is growing

To date, 550 foreigners who have arrived to Finland mainly as asylum seekers, have voluntarily returned to their home countries in the Assisted Voluntary Return project organised by IOM Helsinki (International Organization for Migration) and the Finnish Immigration Service. The project, entitled 'Developing Assisted Voluntary Return in Finland', was launched at the beginning of 2010. Its purpose is to help people from outside the EU resident in Finland to return to their home countries voluntarily.

Assisted voluntary returns have so far been arranged to more than 40 different regions, mainly Iraq, Russia, Serbia, Kosovo and Afghanistan.

The number of applications for assisted voluntary return has increased rapidly, even though at the same time the overall number of asylum seekers has decreased. In 2010, 386 persons applied for assisted voluntary return, whereas the figure in 2011 was 422 – an increase of 9%. At the same time, the overall number of asylum seekers decreased by about 30% (4,018 in 2010, 3,086 in 2011).

### Reception centres and police help distribute information

"The increasing number of applications shows that the project provides a valuable and appreciated assistance for both the returning migrants and the partners contributing to the service in Finland. Our partners, including reception centres and the police, are increasingly distributing information about this option to people who are considering returning back home. This has helped raise awareness of the project around the country, and we have had very good results. Moreover, the target group of the project has expanded to include vulnerable persons such as victims of human trafficking. Returns of victims of trafficking are organised in collaboration with the Joutseno Reception Centre," says Jacob Jørgensen, coordinator of the project.

Assisted voluntary return procedures have been developed in the project with the aim of harmonising the procedures nationwide. The aim is to make the return arrangements as humane as possible, with the special needs of the most vulnerable groups taken into account. The returnees are paid reintegration support, and they are assisted in obtaining the necessary documents and in making travel arrangements.

### Permanent system from the beginning of 2013

The project is set to run for three years, to the end of 2012. It is divided into three project phases, the last of which will begin on 1 March 2012. The project is being funded by the European Return Fund and the Finnish Immigration Service and implemented by IOM which is running similar projects in several European countries.



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The Finnish Immigration Service is currently setting up a permanent assisted voluntary return system, which will be incorporated into the immigration administration from the beginning of 2013.

#### Further information for the media

Further information (e.g. statistics) on the Assisted Voluntary Return project is available from the contact persons listed below and at [www.assistedvoluntaryreturn.fi](http://www.assistedvoluntaryreturn.fi). Media representatives may request a USB press kit from IOM, containing project materials in electronic form.

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The International Organization for Migration (IOM), founded in 1951, is the leading intergovernmental organisation in its field. IOM works to promote orderly migration in the interests of all parties: countries of origin, transit and destination, and the migrants themselves.

