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EMN STUDY 2026

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration AVR(R) programmes as part of return policy: aims, policy rationale and monitoring

EMN Estonia

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Disclaimer:
The following responses have been provided primarily for the purpose of contributing to a Synthesis Report for this EMN Study. The EMN NCP has provided information that is, to the best of its knowledge, up-to-date, objective and reliable within the context and confines of this study. The information may thus not provide a complete description and may not represent the entirety of the official policy of the EMN NCPs' Member State.

This document was produced by Eike Luik, the expert of EMN Estonia. This report was compiled based on public and available information. Furthermore, experts of this topic were consulted.

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TEMPLATE FOR NATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Common template of EMN Study: Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration AVR(R) programmes as part of return policy: aims, policy rationale and monitoring.

National contribution from Estonia.

TOP-LINE FACTSHEET

In Estonia, there is no separate AVR and AVRR schemes for third-country nationals. Return and reintegration assistance is provided via programme "Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration in Estonia" (hereinafter "VARRE") implemented by the International Organization for Migration (hereinafter "IOM") through its Country Office in Estonia. The programme is coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior and implemented under an agreement signed by IOM and the Ministry of Interior. The IOM programme VARRE (AMIF.1.03.25-0010) is co-funded by the European Union Asylum, Integration and Migration Fund and by national budget (the Ministry of the Interior). The current project period is 01.01.2024 to 31.12.2026. The total amount of budget is 796,905 EUR of which 597 678,75 EUR (75%) is financed by AMIF and 199 226,25 EUR (25%) by national budget. IOM has implemented VARRE programme since 2010, and programme has assisted more than 700 returnees to return. In recent years, the largest groups of beneficiaries under VARRE project have been citizens of Russia, Nigeria, Moldova, Uzbekistan and Türkiye.

Services provided under the IOM VARRE programme are available to third-country nationals to whom the Police and Border Guard Board has issued a return decision, and they are willing to depart voluntarily. Citizen of EEA countries (EU member states + Norway, Switzerland and Iceland) are not eligible for assistance under the IOM VARRE project. Third-country nationals to whom the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board has issued a return decision subject to compulsory enforcement of their obligation to leave (expulsion order) are also not eligible to receive IOM VARRE support. However, return counselling services are provided to all third-country nationals, regardless of their legal status in Estonia.

In Estonia, the national return policy is developed by the Ministry of the Interior. Designed policy aims to support the objectives of both national migration policy and the EU legislative and policy framework, incl. guidelines on the use of AMIF funds. The EU Common Return System[1], agreed in 2026, also encourage to accelerate the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the EU. Estonia supports EU´s efforts to make return system more effective, including the introduction of an obligation to cooperate for those subject to return. Both EU-level strategies and national return policies prioritize strengthening the assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programs, increasing the number of voluntary returns, and improving the return process and post-return reintegration assistance. The Ministry of Interior takes all these policies achievements into

[1] The EU Common Return System is available here: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/effective-firm-and-fair-eu-return-and-readmission-policy_en

account when developing national AVRR policy. Through the IOM VARRE programme, Estonia achieves its objectives to provide a swift, sustainable, dignified and well-informed voluntary return and reintegration assistance it should strengthen the EU's common return system.

Monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the IOM VARRE programme is carried out by the Ministry of the Interior. IOM submits an interim report (twice a year) and final report to the Ministry of the Interior on the progress of the project's activities, results and the achievement of indicators via the e-grant environment within 90 days of the end date of the project's eligibility period. In the final report, the IOM Estonia describes the activities carried out to promote the horizontal principles linked to the guiding principles and objectives of national strategy 'Estonia 2035', as well as the results achieved through those activities.

SECTION 1: NATIONAL RETURN POLICY FRAMEWORK

1. What is the legal and/or policy framework for return in your country?

- **Please list and briefly describe the main elements of this framework.**

The Estonia's long-term development strategy '**Estonia 2035'**[2] (hereinafter EE 2035) aim is to enhance and support the well-being of our people so that, twenty years from now, Estonia will still remain an attractive place to live and work. One of the strategy's objectives is to create a safe and high-quality living environment that takes everyone's needs into account. Estonia's long-term EE 2035 objectives and its activities are linked to objective (Governance Objective D): 'We will improve the country's international standing and ensure security and safety through the development of a reception system for beneficiaries of international protection, as well as through effective migration monitoring and a return policy that respects fundamental rights'.

Internal Security Development Plan 2020–2030[3] (hereinafter STAK) is Estonia´s national development plan covering internal security, including objectives related to the prevention of irregular migration and return policy. STAK was developed in close cooperation with all relevant sectoral partners and stakeholders, taking into account Estonia´s EU policy priorities and objectives, as well as the objectives of the EU Voluntary Return Strategy. According to STAK, the main objective of Estonia's migration policy is to facilitate entry into Estonia for foreign nationals who offer significant added value to society and whose presence in the country is consistent with the public interest, EU law, and fundamental freedoms. According to the STAK, the number of irregular migrants originating from countries to which returns of migrants is more difficult is increasing. To address this, Estonia aims to implement an effective return and readmission policy that respects fundamental rights. In this context, balanced migration policy

[2] Strategy Estonia 2035' is available here: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-04/nrp_2022_estonia_en.pdf

[3] Internal security strategy 2020–2030 Available here: https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/documents/202501/Siseturvalisuse_arengukava_2020_2030_48lk_final_ENG.pdf

include: prevention of irregular stay, living and working in Estonia, while ensuring faster and more efficient. expulsion of third-country nationals staying in Estonia without a legal basis.

To do this,

- put in place, in cooperation with the public, third, and private sectors, effective measures to prevent and detect illegal migration and to address relevant cases, including through migration surveillance measures based on risk analysis;
- develop IT solutions for more efficient expulsion and readmission procedures and expulsion cooperation with EU Member States and third countries;
- strengthen the capacity to identify persons who pose a security threat or are involved in criminal activities in legal migration.

National return policy also takes into account the objectives set out in **the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration**[4], as well as the European Commission's recommendations on the use of AMIF funds.

in addition to aligning with European and national priorities, the activities contribute to international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular 10.7, which aims to promote orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including planned and well-managed migration policies[5]. They also contribute to objective 21of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)[6] which focuses on cooperation in facilitating safe and dignified return and sustainable reintegration.

In Estonia, main legislative act focussing on return is **the Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act**[7] (hereinafter OLPEA). The Act regulates the determination of the obligation to leave of a foreign national and provides the bases and procedure for the application of the obligation to leave and prohibition on entry in respect of a foreign national. under the OLPEA foreign nationals must have a legal basis for staying in Estonia. A foreign national who has no legal basis to stay in Estonia is required to leave immediately pursuant to law and a precept to leave (return decision) is issued to a person. A precept to leave:

- establishes that a foreign national is staying in Estonia without a legal basis;
- imposes an obligation on the foreign national to leave Estonia or, where applicable, also from the territory of other Member States of the Schengen Convention or of the European Union;
- sets a term for voluntary compliance with the obligation to leave;

[4] COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL The EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration, available here: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0120

[5] Sustainable Development Goals, available here: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality/

[6] Global Compact for Migration, available here: https://migrationnetwork.un.org/global-compact-migration-follow-and-review

[7] The Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act is available here: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/akt/510072026001

- issues a warning about the imposition of a non-compliance levy on the foreign national in the event of a failure to comply with the precept to leave;
- includes a warning about the compulsory enforcement of the obligation to leave; and
- where necessary, imposes an entry ban to the foreign national.

2. Does your country differentiate between voluntary and forced return in its return policies and/or legislation? Yes/No

Yes. The Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act[8] (hereinafter the OLPEA) stipulates that third-country national who has no legal basis to stay in Estonia is required to leave immediately Estonia. A precept to leave (return decision) is issued to a foreign national who is staying in Estonia without a legal basis for stay. The return decision will establish, whether the person should be granted a term for voluntary departure (voluntary compliance with the obligation to leave) or will be issued a warning about the compulsory enforcement of the obligation to leave. National legislative act is in line with the Return Directive, which gives priority to voluntary departure.

3. If yes to Q2, how does your country differentiate between voluntary and forced return in its return policies and/or legislation?

The OLPEA stipulates that a return decision must provide a period of 7 to 30 days for voluntary compliance, with the obligation to leave. The period for voluntary compliance with the obligation to leave stipulated in the return decision may be extended by up to 30 days at a time if the compliance with the obligation to leave turns out to be too disproportionately burdensome for a foreign national within the term stipulated, taking account of:

1) the duration of the stay in Estonia of a foreign national;
2) impact on a child attending school;
3) family and social relationships of a foreign national in Estonia and
4) other relevant circumstances.

The term for voluntary leave may be shortened and the obligation to leave enforced before the expiry of the term for voluntary leave if:

1) there is a risk of escape of a foreign national;
2) foreign nationals have been refused the issue of a residence permit or granting international protection because the application for residence permit or international protection is unjustified;
3) a foreign national has submitted false information or falsified documents about the circumstances relevant in the proceedings concerning the issue of a residence permit or international protection or
4) a foreign national poses a danger for public order or national security.

Upon expiry of the term for obligation to leave as assigned in the return decision the obligation to leave may be enforced with regard to a foreign national at any

[8] The Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act is available here: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/akt/510072026001

time. The obligation to leave regarding a foreign national shall be subject to enforcement by means of the detention and expulsion of him or her from Estonia.

4. Which national authorities and/or organisations are responsible for the design and implementation of AVR(R) programmes?

In Estonia, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for designing and implementing the policy of temporary stays, settling in Estonia, citizenship policy, asylum and return policy.

The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for designing national return policy and allocating funds to implement AVRR programmes. The Minister of the Interior has issued a Decree designating the IOM, to implement the „Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme in Estonia"(VARRE program). Under the decree IOM is responsible for implementing the AVRR programme, including providing return and reintegration counselling and travel related arrangements. IOM has been assisting people to return under VARRE program since 2010. The current VARRE programme eligibility period runs from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2026.

In addition, the Police and Border Guard Board (hereinafter the PBGB), which is an institution of executive power within the area of government of the Ministry of the Interior, is responsible for maintaining public order, organisation of matters of border management and carrying out functions in the area of citizenship and migration. The PBGB has been implementing the EU Reintegration Programme (EURP) project since autumn 2023. As part of the AMIF-funded project (AMIF.1.03.23-0003), the PBGB has recruited two qualified return counsellors who provide counselling on return and reintegration. The project runs from 1 July 2023 to 31 July 2028. The PBGB has also recruited councillors specialising in international protection and legal migration. This enables to provide migration related counselling to foreign nationals through all stages of the proceedings (asylum, legal migration, return). The PBGB may require a foreign national staying in the country unlawfully to attend counselling sessions. Counselling is compulsory for foreign nationals placed in a detention centre (both those subject to return and applicants for international protection).

5. How are AVR(R) programmes financed (e.g. national budget, EU funding, mixed funding, other sources)?

The IOM programme "Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme in Estonia"(AMIF.1.03.25-0010) is co-funded by the European Union Asylum, Integration and Migration Fund and by national budget (the Ministry of the Interior). The current project period is 01.01.2024 to 31.12.2026. The total amount of budget is 796,905 EUR of which 597 678,75 EUR (75%) is financed by AMIF and 199 226,25 EUR (25%) by national budget. The project assists third country nationals to return to their home countries safely and with dignity, whilst also providing them with reintegration support in their country of destination.

6. Please complete the table below in order to provide a brief overview of the types of programmes available in your country.

Please indicate by marking (X) whether the following programmes exist in	YES	NO

your country (multiple answers possible):		
AVR programme	x	
AVRR programme	x	
EURP programme	x	

7. If in Q6 you have indicated that there are assisted voluntary return programmes in your country, please clearly list and briefly describe the main characteristics of each programme.

As current study excludes from its scope the EURP programme, the main characteristics are provided only on the IOM VARRE programme.

The main objective of the IOM VARRE programme is to facilitate the voluntary and sustainable return of third-country nationals from Estonia to a third country. The programme aims to ensure coordinated, humane and cost-effective returns of third-country nationals who cannot or do not want to stay in Estonia and wish to return voluntarily to their country of origin. The programme also offers assistance to migrants with reintegration into their society upon their return through reintegration grants.

Core principles of the IOM VARRE programme are:

- voluntary choice of returnee, based on informed decision;
- respect to safety and dignity of the migrant;
- free of charge;
- migrant centred and individualized.

8. If in Q6 you have indicated that there are assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes in your country, besides EURP, in countries of origin, please clearly list and briefly describe the main characteristics of each programme.

In Estonia, there are no AVRR programmes in countries of origin. IOM provides general reintegration services through its worldwide network of offices.

SECTION 2: THE DESIGN OF THE AVR(R) PROGRAMMES

Please answer Q9- Q15 separately for:
(a) AVR programmes;
(b) AVRR programmes, when your country distinguishes between the two.
If your country does not distinguish between those programmes, you can answer this section only once for the combination of return and reintegration assistance (AVR(R)) programmes.

Estonia does not distinguish between AVR and AVRR programmes, thus answers cover both programmes.

9. Which third-country nationals are eligible to make use of the programmes?

a) AVR

b) AVRR

IOM VARRE programme services are to be used by third-country nationals to whom the PBGB has issued a return decision, and they are willing to depart voluntarily. Citizens of EEA countries (European Union countries+ Norway, Switzerland and Iceland) are not eligible for assistance under the programme. Third-country nationals to whom the PBGB has issued a return decision subject to compulsory enforcement of their obligation to leave (expulsion order) are also excluded from VARRE support.

However, return counselling may exceptionally be provided to all TCNs under the VARRE programme. As this study excludes persons who have voluntarily given up their residence permit in order to make use of return assistance, the provision of support for them is not covered here.

In terms of cooperation and exchange of information, IOM has in place a data exchange arrangement to inform the PBGB about a person who benefits from assistance under the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRE). As a good practice, PBGB return counsellors share information about IOM VARRE programme to returnees, who have been issued a return decision and refer them to available assistance and services. Additionally, the PBGB distributes informative leaflets to returnees outlining support measures available to them. Leaflets are translated into English, Russian, French, Spanish, German, Arabic, Uzbek, Pashto, Dari, Georgian, Bengali, Hindi, Romanian, Persian, Turkish, Portuguese, Azerbaijani, Ukrainian, Kazakh, Somali, Urdu and Tigrinya.

Aliens are prohibited to stay in Estonia, another Member State of the Schengen Convention, and the European Union without a legal basis

NEED HELP FOR RETURN?



Police and Border Guard Board can offer or mediate free of charge support and assistance tailored to your needs for a quick return and reintegration in your home country.

For assistance, please feel free to contact return counselors via e-mail returncounsel@politsei.ee

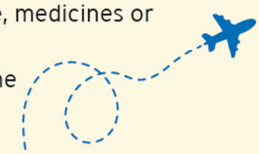
Politsei- ja Piirivalveamet

Kaasrahastatud Euroopa Liit

Some options for return and reintegration support:



- obtaining a travel document
- accommodation before travelling
- emergency medical care, medicines or toiletries
- clothes, travel bag, phone
- flight tickets
- travel money



- in your home country: airport pick-up, short term accommodation, medical assistance, onward transport, family reunification and limited financial support
- reintegration support in your home country: long-term housing and related costs, regular medical assistance, education (schooling and vocational training), job counselling and assistance in accessing the labour market, assistance in setting up a small business, legal counselling and administrative support, psychosocial support



The availability of assistance under IOM AVRR programmes may vary depending on the country of origin. For certain countries, specific clearance may also be needed prior to return in order to ensure compliance with protection requirements.

10. What are the profiles of the third-country nationals admitted to the programmes? (e.g. age, gender, nationality, legal status, vulnerability)
a) AVR
b) AVRR

The AVRR return consultations are open to all third-country nationals, regardless of their age, gender, nationality or legal status. Nevertheless, to be eligible for assistance under VARRE programme, a person has to be issued a return decision granting a period for voluntary departure. Third-country nationals to whom the PBGB has issued a return decision subject to compulsory enforcement of their obligation to leave (expulsion order) are not eligible to receive IOM VARRE support.

While providing services under IOM VARRE project, the return counsellor has to ensure that returnee understands the consequences of joining the VARRE project. According to the IOM there may be situations where persons with mental health needs may not qualify as beneficiaries, because the principle of voluntariness cannot be complied with.

In recent years, the largest groups of beneficiaries under VARRE project have been citizens of Russia, Nigeria, Moldova, Uzbekistan and Türkiye.

Number of beneficiaries under AVR(R) programmes 2023-2025

Programme	2023	2024	2025
IOM VARRE project	91	39	37
EURP project	1	16	8

Source: the PBGB and IOM Estonia

11. What types of assistance are included in these programmes (e.g. cash assistance, in-kind assistance, vocational training, housing solutions, employment opportunities)?
a) AVR
b) AVRR

Under the IOM VARRE project, in-kind and cash assistance is provided. Additionally, pre-departure assistance is provided (incl. accommodation, meals, medical care if needed and support with obtaining travel-related documentation). In-kind assistance and post-arrival cash assistance are provided in the country of origin. The maximum amounts are 1400 EUR for in-kind assistance and 350 EUR for post-arrival cash assistance.

12. Does the assistance mentioned in Q11 have a degressive nature (i.e. progressively reduced over time or depending on migration status)? If Yes, please explain.
a) AVR
b) AVRR

The IOM VARRE programme does not have a degressive nature.

13. What pre-return/pre-departure assistance is available (e.g. assistance with the necessary steps for departure, like help to fill in applications, obtaining travel documents, arranging flight tickets, developing a plan for reintegration in the country of origin, assistance during departure at the airport)?
a) AVR
b) AVRR

Under the IOM VARRE programme, available support consists of:

1) Individual counselling and information activities

To enable persons to make an informed decision about return, foreign nationals are provided with high-quality return counselling, which provides them with sufficient, objective and up-to-date information. IOM offers return counselling to all foreign nationals interested in voluntary return, in accordance with the coordination arrangements between the PBGB and IOM. Information days are also organised to raise awareness among various stakeholders regarding the possibilities for voluntary return.

2) Provision of pre-return assistance

Pre-return assistance covers support provided to a returnee while they stay in Estonia to arrange their return. Such assistance may consist of obtaining the travel documents, travel insurance, visas or other documentation, or the fulfilment of other requirements necessary for return. Additionally, pre-return assistance may include providing the returnee with short-term lodging and meals in Estonia or translation assistance related to return arrangements.

3) Provision of assistance related to return

Return-related assistance refers to helping the returnee travel to the receiving country. This primarily includes the provision of travel tickets, most often airline tickets, although in some cases other types of travel tickets may also be arranged. If the return takes place via a transit country, the assistance may include accommodation and/or meals during the transit.

4) Provision of post-arrival assistance

the assistance covers immediate support provided to a returnee upon arrival in the receiving country and/or country of origin, whether at the airport or upon entering the country by other means.

5) Provision of Reintegration Assistance

Reintegration assistance aims to enhance the sustainability of the return by, providing non-monetary, needs-based, assistance. The costs associated with providing reintegration assistance may not, as a general rule, exceed 1,400 euros per beneficiary. In exceptional cases and in consultation with the Ministry of the Interior (as a donor organisation), the amount of reintegration assistance may be increased.

Under conditions of current IOM AVRR programme, reintegration amount is 1400 EUR in-kind assistance, 50 EUR cash assistance for the day of departure to be used while travelling and 350 EUR post arrival cash grant. However, these numbers can be exceeded if there is a justified need. In exceptional cases and in consultation with the Ministry of the Interior, the amount of reintegration assistance may be

increased, but IOM Estonia usually do not exceed more than 10% of these sums. There is no limit for travel or medical costs, which are provided on a case-by-case basis and according to various considerations, including vulnerability, protection needs.

14. Which actors are involved in the pre-return/pre-departure assistance mentioned in Q13?
a) AVR
b) AVRR

In Estonia, actors involved in the pre-return / pre-departure assistance of the AVRR programme, are IOM under VARRE project (as a programme implementor), the Ministry of Interior (as a donor institution and supervisor) and the Police and Border Guard Board. Additionally, the PBGB return counsellors also provide persons return counselling and can refer them to IOM VARRE service.

15. What kind of support is available directly upon arrival in the country of origin (e.g. immediate support for the first few days, for example with airport pick-up, short-term housing, medical assistance, onward transportation and family reunification, special support for vulnerable groups)?
a) AVR
b) AVRR

Under the IOM VARRE programme, available assistance provided upon arrival in the country of origin is usually limited to transportation and transit assistance. Depending on individual needs also accommodation, meals, medical assistance and if needed medical escort is provided.

16. In the context of AVRR programmes, what kind of long-term assistance (up to 12 months or more) is available in the country of origin (e.g. regular medical assistance, job counselling, legal counselling, administrative support, psychosocial support)?

Long-term reintegration assistance is implemented by IOM missions in the country of origin in coordination with IOM Country Office in Estonia. Reintegration assistance is tailored to the beneficiary's individual needs and circumstances and may include educational courses, vocational training, support for starting a small business, employment-related assistance, medical support, accommodation assistance, and other in-kind goods or services that contribute to sustainable reintegration. Reintegration plans are developed jointly with beneficiaries to support their long-term social and economic reintegration. In cases involving beneficiaries in vulnerable situations, additional support measures may also be arranged where required. In cases involving beneficiaries in vulnerable situations, additional support may be arranged on a need's basis. For example, accommodation in social welfare facilities and medical care have been provided for victims of trafficking.

17. What is the timeframe during which the assistance mentioned in Q16 is available?

IOM doesn't provide long-term assistance in the country of origin.

18. Which reintegration partners are involved in the long-term assistance mentioned in Q16?

IOM provides assistance in the countries of origin through its offices worldwide.

19. Do you have any policy or coordination mechanism in place to prevent overlap in the policy design of the AVRR programmes with:
a. the European Reintegration Programme (EURP)?

There is a working arrangement on information exchange between the PBGB and IOM that governs how communication between agencies takes place and provides guidelines for how voluntary return cases are assigned. The IOM and the PBGB are cooperating on a case-by-case basis to provide applicants with the best and swiftest possible support for return and/or reintegration.

b. programmes of other Member States?

To avid repeated use and duplication of AVRR programme, the PBGB will register all AVRR beneficiaries into Eurodac system (since June 2026).

20. Do you have any policy mechanisms in place to prevent repeated use of AVR(R) programmes by beneficiaries, including cross-border situations involving different Member States? If yes, please explain.

In your explanation please indicate, where relevant, whether such mechanisms include (a) national tracking systems (e.g. registration or recording of beneficiaries receiving return, restrictions to assistance within a certain timeframe etc.) and (b) EU-level coordination mechanisms (e.g.. information-sharing, cross-border coordination etc.).

To prevent repeated use of AVR(R) programmes by beneficiaries, IOM registers all cases in a dedicated IOM global database. Beneficiaries who are registered in the database within 5 years of receiving of the AVR(R) support are not eligible to apply for new support.
The IOM is obliged to inform the PBGB about the person who has received support under the Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme. The PBGB will register all information related to beneficiaries into Eurodac system. In addition, national database on irregularly staying persons, Illegal2, registers all persons to whom return decision is issued and return support provided.

SECTION 3: THE AIMS AND POLICY RATIONALE OF THE PROGRAMMES

Please answer these questions separately for;
(a) AVR programmes;
(b) AVRR programmes, when your country distinguishes between the two.

If your country does not distinguish between those programmes, you can answer this section only once for the combination of return and reintegration assistance (AVR(R)) programmes.

Estonia does not distinguish between AVR and AVRR programmes, thus answers cover both programmes.

21. What are the main aims of the specific programme designs?

Note: Please briefly specify the intended outputs (direct results of activities) and outcomes (short-, medium-, and long-term effects) of these programmes (e.g. increasing voluntary return, ensuring sustainable reintegration, reducing irregular stay).

a) AVR
b) AVRR

In Estonia, the national return policy is designed by the Ministry of Interior. Designed policy should support to achieve both, national migration policy and legislative frameworks goals set at the EU-level, incl. guidance's on use of AMIF funds. The EU Common Return System[9], agreed in 2026, also encourage to speed up the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the EU. Estonia supports EU goals to make return system more effective, including the introduction of an obligation to cooperate for those subject to return.

Designing national AVRR policy, the Ministry of Interior take into account all policy achievements listed under Q. 1.

Through IOM VARRE program, Estonia aims to achieve the objectives to provide a swift, sustainable, dignified and well-informed voluntary return and reintegration assistance.

22. What is the policy rationale behind the specific design of the programmes and how this relates to the aims? (e.g. the kind of assistance offered, eligibility criteria and specific incentives provided to promote assisted voluntary return?)

Note: Please explain the reasoning behind the programme design, including underlying assumptions on how the measures are expected to work. Indicate how and why specific design choices (e.g. assistance types, eligibility criteria, incentives) were made to achieve the policy aims.

a) AVR
b) AVRR

While designing specific programs, it is ensured that they are in line with:

- the general selection criteria approved by the Monitoring Committee for the Internal Security Policy Funds;
- the principles of non-discriminatory and transparency;

[9] https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/effective-firm-and-fair-eu-return-and-readmission-policy_en

- the horizontal principles set out in Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/10604 of the European Parliament and of the Council;
- the Charter of Fundamental Rights, taking into account the principle of equal opportunities, including the avoidance of discrimination and the guarantee of accessibility.
- Adherence to these principles and the achievement of the EE 2035, particularly those relating to gender equality, equal opportunities and accessibility. Compliance with these principles are measured using the following EE 2035 indicators: the 'Gender Equality Index', to which contributions are made through activities aimed at raising awareness of gender equality; the 'Care and Cooperation Indicator', to which contributions are made through raising awareness of equal treatment; and the 'Accessibility Indicator', to which contributions are made by ensuring accessibility for people with special needs to physical and virtual environments and to communication;
- the 'no significant adverse effect' principle, whereby no significant adverse effect is caused to any of the environmental objectives set out in Article 9, as referred to in Article 17 of Regulation No 2020/8525;
- the horizontal conditions of the AMIF Operational Programme.
- the Return Directive, which gives priority to voluntary departure.

23. If there is tailored or differentiated support within the AVR(R) programmes for specific group, what is the policy rationale for providing differentiated assistance to specific groups?
a) AVR
b) AVRR

No, assistance under the IOM VARRE programme is not differentiated based on membership of a specific group. Assistance is provided based on individual needs and circumstances and is guided by the principles of voluntary, safe and dignified return and sustainable reintegration. At the same time, IOM pays particular attention to migrants in vulnerable situations and seeks to ensure that their specific protection needs are appropriately addressed throughout the return and reintegration process. Where vulnerabilities are identified, additional support measures may be arranged on a case-by-case basis. The rationale is not to provide preferential treatment to specific groups, but to ensure equitable access to AVR(R) services and appropriate support for beneficiaries with specific vulnerability.

24. Was there any evidence guiding the choices of programme design mentioned in section 2? (e.g. evaluations, pilot projects, academic research, EU guidance)

Yes, EU guidance is taken into account.

25. If your country makes use of both EURP and other AVR(R) programmes within the national return framework, was there a

specific policy rationale behind this policy design? (e.g. are both types of programmes used for different purposes or profiles?)

Rationale behind this policy is that IOM has missions and offices in many countries around the world, whilst the EURP programme has partners in limited number of third countries.

Additionally, the humane aspect – the EURP assistance has to be applied through the PBGB, but for some persons it is easier to apply assistance through the IOM Country Office.

26. What are the policy considerations behind the budgeting and allocation of AVR(R) programme resources (source of funding, distribution across different components of the programmes)?

The VARRE programme is co-funded by the European Union Asylum, Integration and Migration Fund and by national budget (the Ministry of the Interior). The total amount of budget is 796,905 EUR of which 597 678,75 EUR (75%) is financed by AMIF and 199 226,25 EUR (25%) by national budget. The granting of AVRR assistance is on a case-by-case and needs-based basis. The main objective is to assist with returns. According to the Ministry of the Interior, given that the number of beneficiaries of AVR has increased, they had to reduce or discontinue with reintegration support in order to allocate more resources to return-related assistance (travel tickets, preparation of documents etc).

27. Are there currently any changes planned or under discussion in your country related to the AVR(R) programmes? If yes, please explain.

Yes, discussions on extension of the VARRE program are in progress.

SECTION 4: MONITORING OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMMES

Please answer these questions separately for;

(a) AVR programmes;

(b) AVRR programmes, when your country distinguishes between the two.

If your country does not distinguish between those programmes, you can answer this section only once for the combination of return and reintegration assistance (AVR(R)) programmes.

Estonia does not distinguish between AVR and AVRR programmes, thus answers cover both programmes.

28. Has your country defined effectiveness in relation to different activities in the AVR(R) programmes? Yes/No. If Yes, how is effectiveness defined?

a) AVR

b) AVRR

The responsible organisation of monitoring and assessing effectiveness of the VARRE programme, is the Ministry of the Interior. Effectiveness of the programme is defined in the Ministerial Decree governing the relationship between the Ministry of the Interior and IOM. According to the Decree, the implementing body (IOM) submits an interim report (twice a year) and final report to the Ministry of Interior on the progress of the project's activities, results and the achievement of indicators via the e-grant environment within 90 days of the end date of the project's eligibility period. In the final report, the project implementer will describe the activities carried out to promote the horizontal principles linked to the guiding principles and objectives of 'Estonia 2035', as well as the results of those activities.

29. Do you monitor the effectiveness of the AVR(R) programmes? Yes/No

a. During the pre-return/pre-departure phase? Yes/No (e.g. number of counselling sessions, number of returns, number of vulnerability grants etc.)

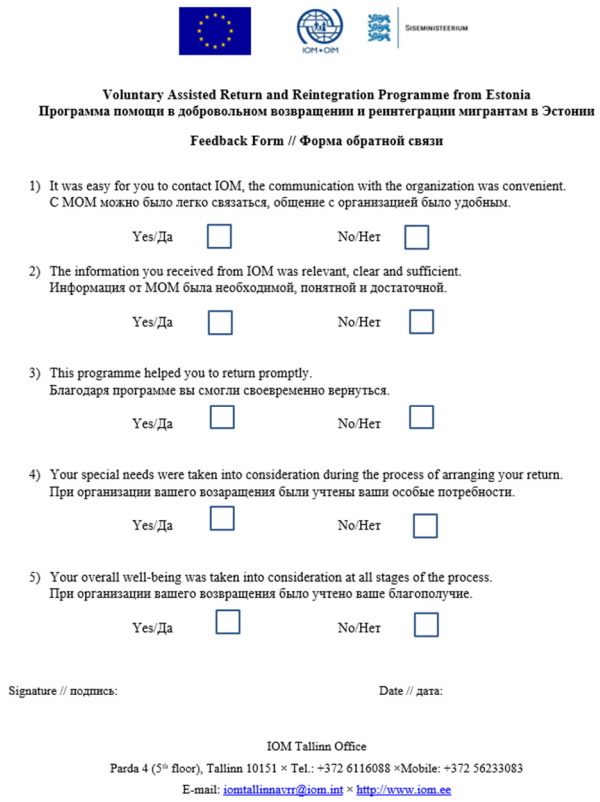
Yes. Regular meetings are held between the Ministry of Interior, the PBGB and IOM to provide an overview of the program's implementation. In addition, IOM is obliged to provide to the Ministry of Interior an annual statistic on the number and nationalities of beneficiaries who have received:

1) counselling;
2) pre-return assistance;
3) return-related assistance;
4) post-arrival assistance;
5) reintegration assistance.

b. Post-return? Yes/No (e.g. the measuring of the outcomes of the reintegration on individual level post arrival)

- **If Yes to a and/or b, please answer Q30 onwards:**

IOM collects initial feedback from returnees via feedback form. Feedback questions concern beneficiaries' satisfaction with assisted voluntary return and reintegration services.



Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme from Estonia
Программа помощи в добровольном возвращении и реинтеграции мигрантам в Эстонии

Feedback Form // Форма обратной связи

1) It was easy for you to contact IOM, the communication with the organization was convenient.
С МОМ можно было легко связаться, общение с организацией было удобным.

Yes/Да ☐ No/Нет ☐

2) The information you received from IOM was relevant, clear and sufficient.
Информация от МОМ была необходимой, понятной и достаточной.

Yes/Да ☐ No/Нет ☐

3) This programme helped you to return promptly.
Благодаря программе вы смогли своевременно вернуться.

Yes/Да ☐ No/Нет ☐

4) Your special needs were taken into consideration during the process of arranging your return.
При организации вашего возаращения были учтены ваши особые потребности.

Yes/Да ☐ No/Нет ☐

5) Your overall well-being was taken into consideration at all stages of the process.
При организации вашего возвращения было учтено ваше благополучие.

Yes/Да ☐ No/Нет ☐

Signature // подпись: Date // дата:

IOM Tallinn Office
Parda 4 (5th floor), Tallinn 10151 × Tel.: +372 6116088 ×Mobile: +372 56233083
E-mail: iomtallinnavrr@iom.int × http://www.iom.ee

30. What specific instruments (e.g. quarterly reports, statistics, surveys, audits, etc.) do you use in order to monitor the AVR(R) programmes?

a) AVR
b) AVRR

According to agreement, the implementing body (IOM) submits an interim report (twice a year) and final report to the Ministry of the Interior on the progress of the project's activities, results and the achievement of indicators via the e-grant environment within 90 days of the end date of the project's eligibility period.

Additionally, the Ministry of the Interior and IOM have agreed on a format for the statistics. IOM submits annual statistics to the Ministry of the Interior regarding the number of beneficiaries and their nationalities who have received:

1) counselling;
2) pre-return assistance
3) return-related assistance
4) post-arrival assistance
5) reintegration assistance.

31. What type of data is collected during the monitoring and how?

a) AVR
b) AVRR

In the final report, the project implementer will describe the activities carried out to promote the horizontal principles linked to the guiding principles and objectives of 'Estonia 2035', as well as the results of those activities.

During the monitoring of the IOM VARRE programme operational data (related to returnees) is collected. These include:

- the number of persons assisted to voluntary return;
- the number of persons who return voluntarily;
- the number of beneficiaries of the IOM VARRE programme, broken down by nationality, country of return and assistance provided;
- the number of vulnerable persons who return voluntarily (families, persons with medical needs etc).

32. Do you measure the effectiveness against the policy aims mentioned in Q21?

a) AVR
b) AVRR

No.

33. What criteria are used to measure progress towards the desired policy aims and/or effectiveness?

a) AVR
b) AVRR

Annual statistics and the number of individuals who have actually returned through the VARRE programme serve as the basis for evaluating the program's effectiveness.

34. Has your country done any official evaluations of the existing AVR(R) programmes? If yes, what were the results?

a) AVR
b) AVRR

No.

35. What challenges, if any, have been identified in monitoring success or effectiveness?

a) AVR
b) AVRR

The PBGB offers return and reintegration assistance to returnees (both voluntary and forced) using EURP programme. As a result, the number of beneficiaries under the VARRE programme has decreased significantly. At the same time, the administrative costs of the VARRE programme have been steadily increased.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSIONS

In this final Section, NCPs are asked to provide concluding reflections based on their analysis of Sections 1-4. The questions proposed below shall simply support NCPs to reflect the main topics of the study template and to synthesise and link the main points:

a. What role do AVR(R) programmes play in the national return policy framework?

In Estonia, voluntary return is preferred to enforced removal. Accordingly, in 2025, 85.8% of all return decisions are provided for a voluntary departure deadline. It is seen as more humane, effective, and sustainable than forced removal. Voluntary return is also the preferred type of return under the EU migration policy. This strongly supports our national policy on AVRR programmes.

In Estonia, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for designing and implementing the policy of temporary stays, settling in Estonia, citizenship policy, asylum and return policy. The Ministry of the Interior is also responsible for designing national return policy and allocating funds to implement AVRR programmes. The Ministry of Interior takes both EU level and national policies achievements into account when developing national AVRR policy.

The Minister of the Interior has issued a Decree designating the IOM, to implement the „Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme in Estonia"(VARRE programme). Under the decree IOM is responsible for implementing the AVRR programme, including providing return and reintegration counselling and travel related arrangements. IOM has been assisting people to return under VARRE programme since 2010. The current VARRE programme eligibility period runs from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2026.

Through IOM VARRE programme, Estonia achieves its objectives to provide a swift, sustainable, dignified and well-informed voluntary return and reintegration assistance, which should strengthen the EU's common return system.

b. Who are these AVR(R) programmes intended for?

IOM VARRE programme services are to be used by third-country nationals to whom the PBGB has issued a return decision, and they are willing to depart voluntarily. Citizens of EEA countries (European Union countries+ Norway, Switzerland and Iceland) are not eligible for assistance under the programme. However, return counselling may exceptionally be provided to all TCNs under the VARRE programme.

c. How does your country prevent overlap with EURP and/or AVR(R) programmes of other Member States?

There is a working arrangement on information exchange between the PBGB and IOM Estonia that governs how communication between agencies takes place and provides guidelines for how voluntary return cases are assigned. The IOM and the PBGB are cooperating on a case-by-case basis to provide applicants with the best and swiftest possible support for return and/or reintegration.

To avid repeated use and duplication of AVRR programme, the PBGB will register all AVRR beneficiaries into Eurodac system (since June 2026).

d. What are the aims of the specific design of AVR(R) programmes in your country?

In Estonia, the national return policy is designed by the Ministry of Interior. Designed policy should support to achieve both, national migration policy and

legislative frameworks goals set at the EU-level, incl. guidance's on use of AMIF funds. The EU Common Return System, agreed in 2026, also encourage to speed up the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the EU. Estonia supports EU goals to make return system more effective, including the introduction of an obligation to cooperate for those subject to return.

Designing national AVRR policy, the Ministry of Interior take into account all policy achievements listed under Q. 1.

Through IOM VARRE programme, Estonia aims to achieve the objectives to provide a swift, sustainable, dignified and well-informed voluntary return and reintegration assistance.

e. What is the policy rationale of the specific design of AVR(R) programmes in your country?

While designing specific programs, it is ensured that they are in line with:

- the general selection criteria approved by the Monitoring Committee for the Internal Security Policy Funds;
- the principles of non-discriminatory and transparency;
- the horizontal principles set out in Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/10604 of the European Parliament and of the Council;
- the Charter of Fundamental Rights, taking into account the principle of equal opportunities, including the avoidance of discrimination and the guarantee of accessibility.
- Adherence to these principles and the achievement of the EE 2035, particularly those relating to gender equality, equal opportunities and accessibility. Compliance with these principles are measured using the following EE 2035 indicators: the 'Gender Equality Index', to which contributions are made through activities aimed at raising awareness of gender equality; the 'Care and Cooperation Indicator', to which contributions are made through raising awareness of equal treatment; and the 'Accessibility Indicator', to which contributions are made by ensuring accessibility for people with special needs to physical and virtual environments and to communication;
- the 'no significant adverse effect' principle, whereby no significant adverse effect is caused to any of the environmental objectives set out in Article 9, as referred to in Article 17 of Regulation No 2020/8525;
- the horizontal conditions of the AMIF Operational Programme.
- the Return Directive, which gives priority to voluntary departure.

f. In what way is the effectiveness of the AVR(R) programmes monitored?

The responsible organisation of monitoring and assessing effectiveness of the VARRE programme, is the Ministry of the Interior. Effectiveness of the programme is defined in the Ministerial Decree governing the relationship between the Ministry of the Interior and IOM. According to the Decree, the implementing body (IOM) submits an interim report (twice a year) and final report to the Ministry of Interior on the progress of the project's activities, statistics, results and the achievement of indicators via the e-grant environment within 90 days of the end date of the project's eligibility period. In the final report, the project implementer will describe

the activities carried out to promote the horizontal principles linked to the guiding principles and objectives of 'Estonia 2035', as well as the results of those activities. Main criteria to measure progress of effectiveness of programme is annual statistics and the number of individuals who have actually returned through the VAR.