



Federal Office
for Migration
and Refugees



Assisted return from Germany: motives and reintegration

Key Findings of the study on the federal programme StarthilfePlus

Research report 34

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Forschung



Research Centre

Migration, Integration and Asylum

The StarthilfePlus Programme

In the context of a high number of foreign nationals who are not allowed to stay in Germany due to invalid residence entitlements, the German government introduced the assisted return and reintegration programme StarthilfePlus in 2017. The objective of the programme is to – particularly financially – support the voluntary return of persons obliged to leave the country and persons with limited prospects to receive an asylum or protection status in Germany. The programme is implemented by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (FOMR) in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Research questions

The FOMR Research Centre and IOM provide the programmes' monitoring and evaluation. Designed as the first part of a panel study, the research project is part of a long-term research initiative by the FOMR and IOM. In this framework, the research project focuses on the following questions:

1. What are the returnees' perception of and personal experiences with the StarthilfePlus programme?
2. What are the implications of the assistance participants receive on their decision to return?
3. What are the implications of the financial assistance returnees receive after their return?

Research design

The analysis is based on a quantitative, standardised and thematically broad-based survey with persons who returned with the assistance of the StarthilfePlus programme. At the time of the survey, participants had already returned to twelve countries. Ten of these countries – Iraq, the Russian Federation, Afghanistan, Ukraine, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Pakistan and Lebanon – are among the numerically most important return countries of StarthilfePlus participants (see figure 1). In 2017 85 percent and in 2018 76 percent of all StarthilfePlus participants returned to these countries. Additionally, the survey was conducted with participants returning to Nigeria and Ghana to take into account the experiences of returnees to African countries.

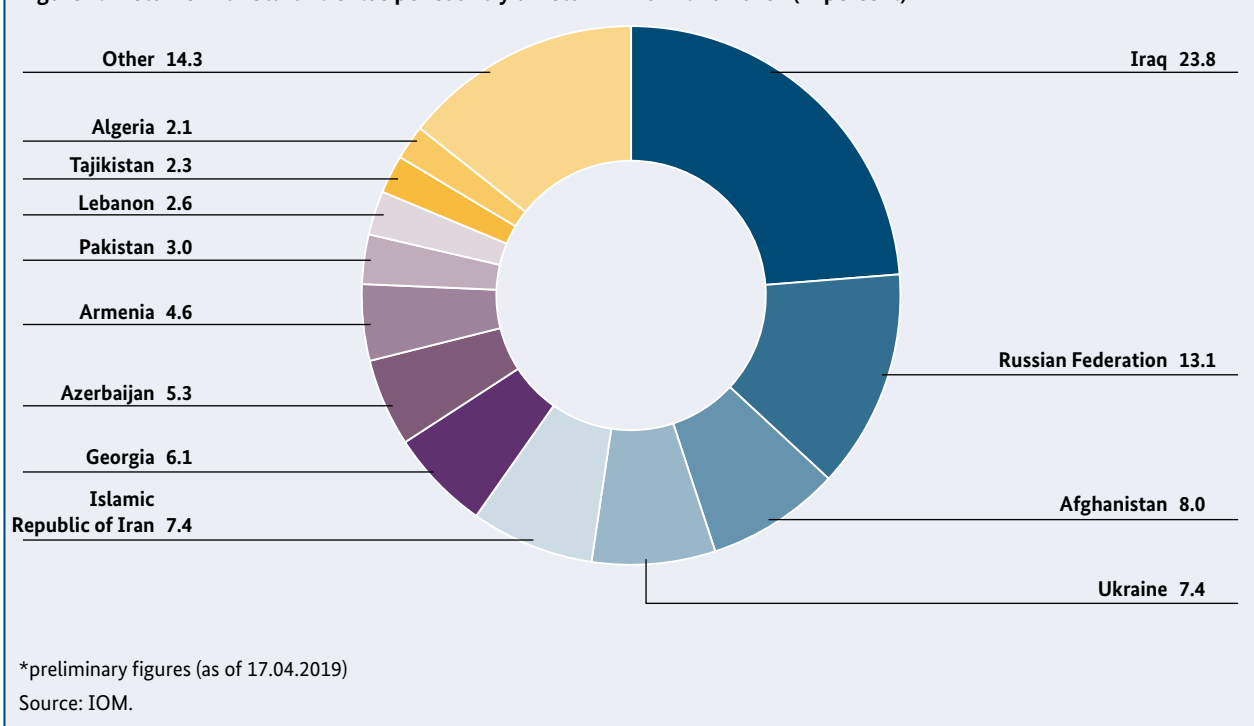
Of the 6,761 persons over 18 who returned with the StarthilfePlus programme between 01 February 2017 and 19 April 2018 to the selected countries, 1,367 returnees participated in the survey. Due to high return numbers and a very low survey response rate, the survey participation of persons returning to the Russian Federation was particularly unbalanced. The questionnaires of participants from the Russian Federation were, thus, not taken into account in the framework of the study. In total, the data from 1,339 survey respondents from eleven countries was analysed. The adjusted response rate is 19,8 percent.

Online survey in IOM country offices

The study was conducted as an online survey that could be answered by participants at home. As the second instalment of the financial assistance provided under the StarthilfePlus programme is disbursed six to eight months after the return, participants were moreover provided with the opportunity to respond to the survey questionnaire on tablet computers at the respective IOM country office. IOM staff supported the study participants in cases of comprehension difficulties. With 95 percent of all participants, the vast majority answered the questionnaire in IOM offices.

In addition to the quantitative survey, expert interviews were conducted with employees of German return counselling bodies as well as with reintegration experts in the respective return regions. The interviews had a validating function as they helped to interpret and analyse the results of the online survey.

Figure 1: Returns with StarthilfePlus per country of return in 2017 and 2018* (in percent)



Profiles of the surveyed returnees

Most of the study participants came to Germany during the peak of immigration entries from 2014 to 2017. The majority stayed in Germany for up to two years. The study shows that most returnees' (70 percent) applications for asylum were rejected before they made the decision to return (see chart 1). The population relevant for the study of 6,761 persons who returned to the selected countries assisted by the StarthilfePlus programme between February 2017 and April 2018 shows an equivalent distribution.

About 20 percent women and 80 percent men participated in the study. The distribution is slightly more

unequal than the gender distribution in the population (25 percent female / 75 percent male).

56 percent of the study participants returned to the places where they had lived before migrating to Germany. The security situation and proximity to family and friends were of central importance for the choice of residence.

The respondents show heterogeneous educational backgrounds the majority of whom hold no formal professional or academic degree.

What are the returnees' perception of and personal experiences with the StarthilfePlus programme?

Around 43 percent of the respondents learned about the possibility of financial return assistance under the StarthilfePlus programme through government agencies such as local foreigners authorities, social welfare offices or the FOMR. 18 percent of the respondents learned about respective funding opportunities through non-governmental organizations, mainly welfare organizations. Family, friends and acquaintances both in Germany (14 percent) and abroad (5 percent) are other important sources of information.

Before returning from Germany, respondents received information about the StarthilfePlus Programme and, if necessary, return counselling. They were moreover

Chart 1: Residence status at the time of return decision

	Share of all respondents (in percent)	Share of population (in percent)
Asylum application rejected	69.1	64.3
In process	30.0	33.4
Other cases	0.9	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: FOMR-IOM AVRR-study, n=1,339, weighted.

supported in organizing their departure and received financial assistance before and after their return (see figure 2).

Returnees who participated in the study are mostly satisfied with the assistance they received. Respondents are positive about the information and counselling they received with respect to the StarthilfePlus programme, the duration from the initial contact with the counselling center until their departure as well as the support they received in organizing their departure. Overall, more than 80 percent of the study participants stated that they were satisfied (see figure 3).

The percentage of dissatisfied respondents remains in the single-digit range.

The majority of survey participants are returnees who collected the second instalment of the StarthilfePlus financial assistance in the respective IOM country offices. However, not all returnees collect the second instalment. The study thus cannot make any statement about the perception and experiences of returnees who did not visit the IOM country offices to pick up the second instalment.

Figure 2: Assistance provided under the StarthilfePlus programme in 2017 and 2018

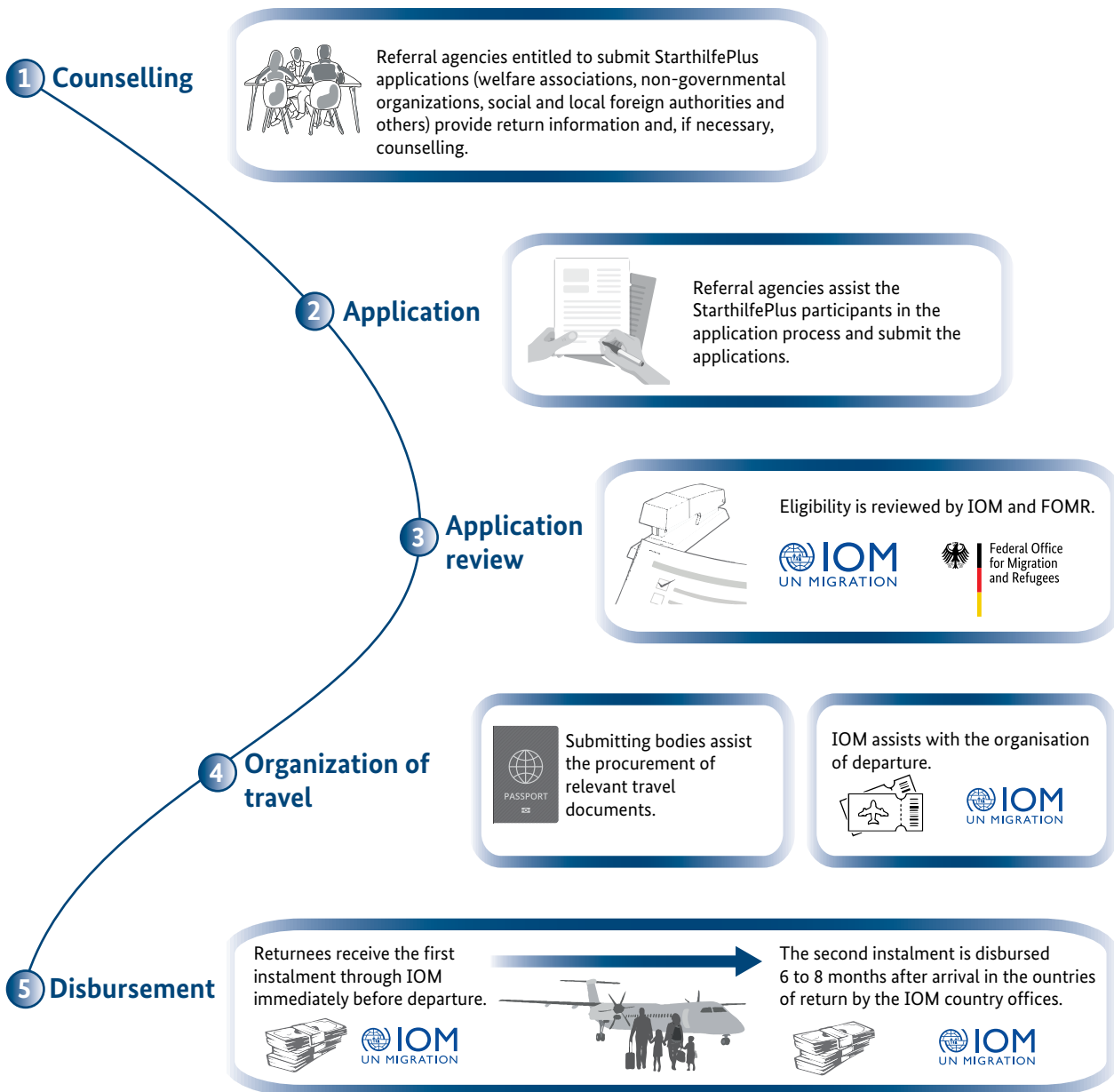
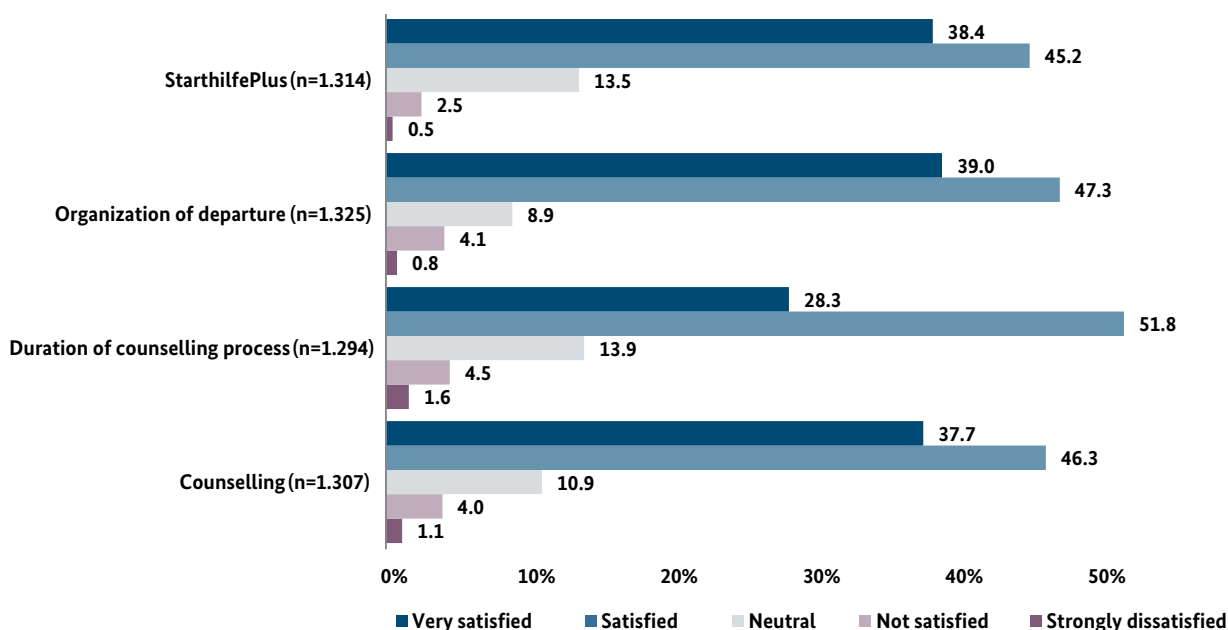


Figure 3: Satisfaction with the StarthilfePlus programme (in percent)



Source: FOMR-IOM-AVRR-study, weighted.

What are the implications of the assistance on returnees' decision to return?

Financial assistance facilitates return decision

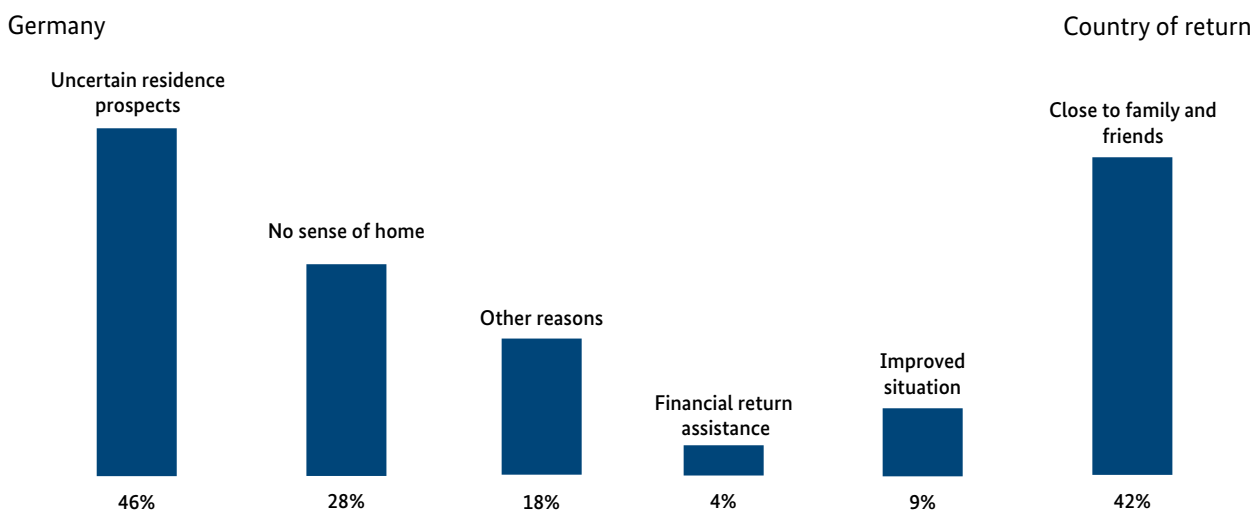
The study highlights that the financial assistance received by the StarthilfePlus participants only rarely favours the basic willingness to return (see figure 4). For persons who already consider to return for other reasons but have not yet taken a final decision, the financial assistance can be a significant factor. About 53 percent of all respondents stated that the financial

assistance influenced their decision to return (see figure 5).

Key return motives – absence of prospects to stay in Germany and family in the country of return

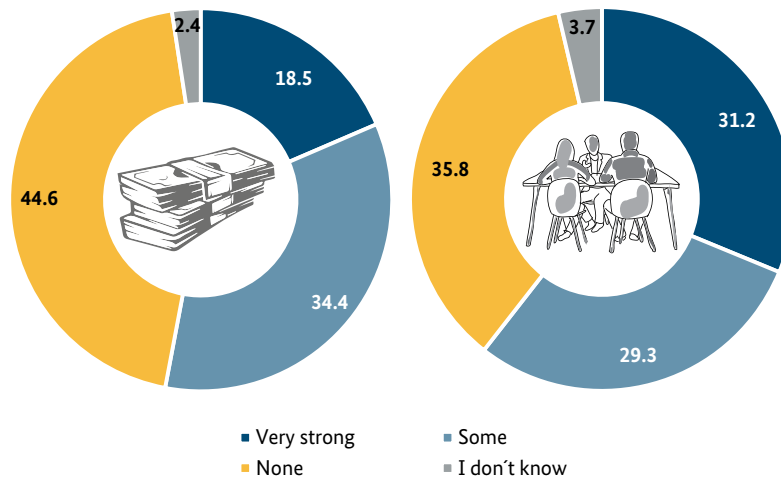
With respect to the StarthilfePlus programme's target group, it is of no surprise that the absence of long-term prospects to stay in Germany is the most significant motive for return. However, the legal situation is rarely the only reason. In most cases, there are several motives that lead to the decision to return. The wish to

Figure 4: Return motives of respondents



Source: FOMR-IOM-AVRR-study, multiple responses possible, n=1,288, weighted.

Figure 5: Significance of the financial assistance and counselling for the decision to return (in percent)



Source: FOMR-IOM-AVRR-study, multiple responses possible, n=1,288, weighted.

be close to family and friends in the country of origin plays a key role (see figure 4).

Return counselling is as important as financial assistance

In the decision-making process to return, information and counselling play an important role. For the majority of the study participants the counselling is as important as the financial support (see figure 5).

What are the implications of the financial assistance after return?

Financial assistance stabilizes in the initial period after return

In the first months after their return, StarthilfePlus participants mainly use the financial assistance to

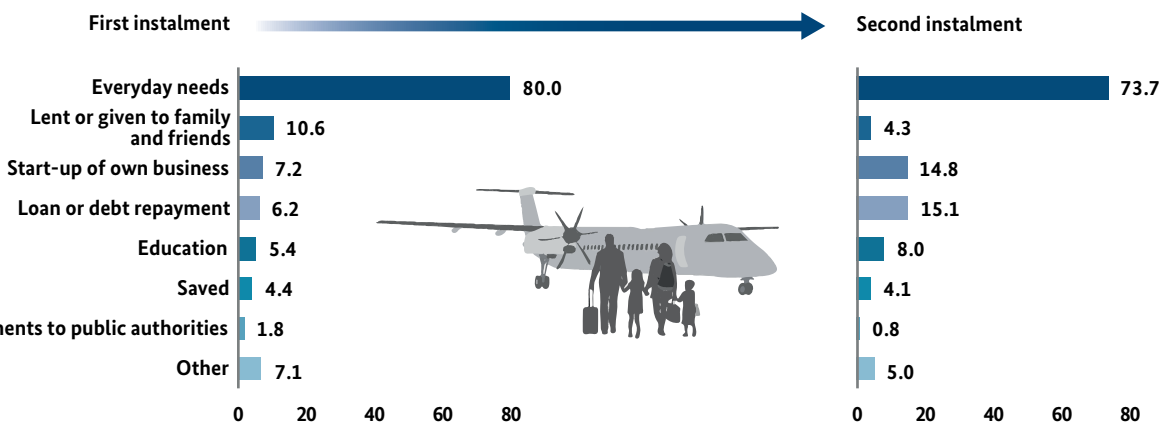
cover their daily needs. This is of utmost importance, because most of the returnees do not earn sufficient income initially after their return. With the provided assistance, they can bridge the economically uncertain period and develop an individual reintegration strategy such as starting their own business (see figure 6).

The majority of respondents stated that in addition to the financial assistance they would like to receive further reintegration support. For both men and women, employment-related assistance is a major concern. Around 40 percent of the study participants would like to receive support in the search of work. For 18 percent of the respondents, assistance in starting their own business is the first priority.

General satisfaction with life at the place of return

70 percent of the respondents are generally satisfied with their life at the place of return or take a neutral

Figure 6: Expenditure of the first and second instalment of the StarthilfePlus financial assistance in comparison (in percent)

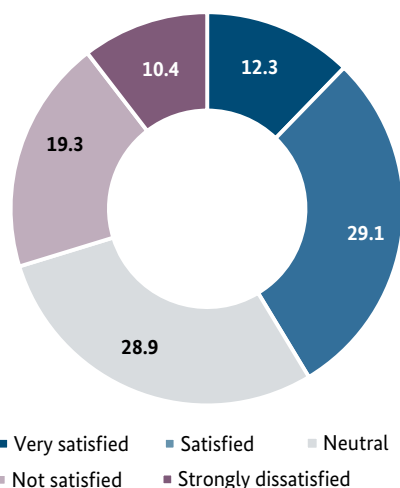


Source: FOMR-IOM-AVRR-study, n=1,332 (first instalment), n=1,209 (second instalment), weighted.

position. Around 30 percent are dissatisfied (see figure 7). The study participants most satisfied with their situation live in Armenia.

The overall life satisfaction is higher when respondents are in an income-generating employment. Access to medical care at the place of return has a positive influence on the life satisfaction of the returnees.

Figure 7: General satisfaction with life after return (in percent)



Source: FOMR-IOM-AVRR-study, n=1,304, weighted.

Income

On average eight months after the return, the respondents have moderate employment rates of around 39 percent.

Security

Satisfaction with the security situation varies depending on the distinct place of return. The results of the study highlight satisfaction levels of over 60 percent in Armenia, Azerbaijan but also in Iraq. In Lebanon, every second respondent is not satisfied or very dissatisfied with the security situation.

Access to medical care

85 percent of the returnees surveyed in the study stated that they had the opportunity to see a doctor if necessary. In rural areas, the respondents' access to medical care is limited.

Social life

Contrary to the widespread assumption that returnees are regarded as "failures" and thus stigmatized in the respective return region, the study participants stated that they rarely face rejection from relatives, friends and the community. The vast majority of respondents (79 percent) are satisfied with their relationships with family and friends. About 68 percent of the surveyed returnees are satisfied with their relationships within the community at their respective place of return.

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