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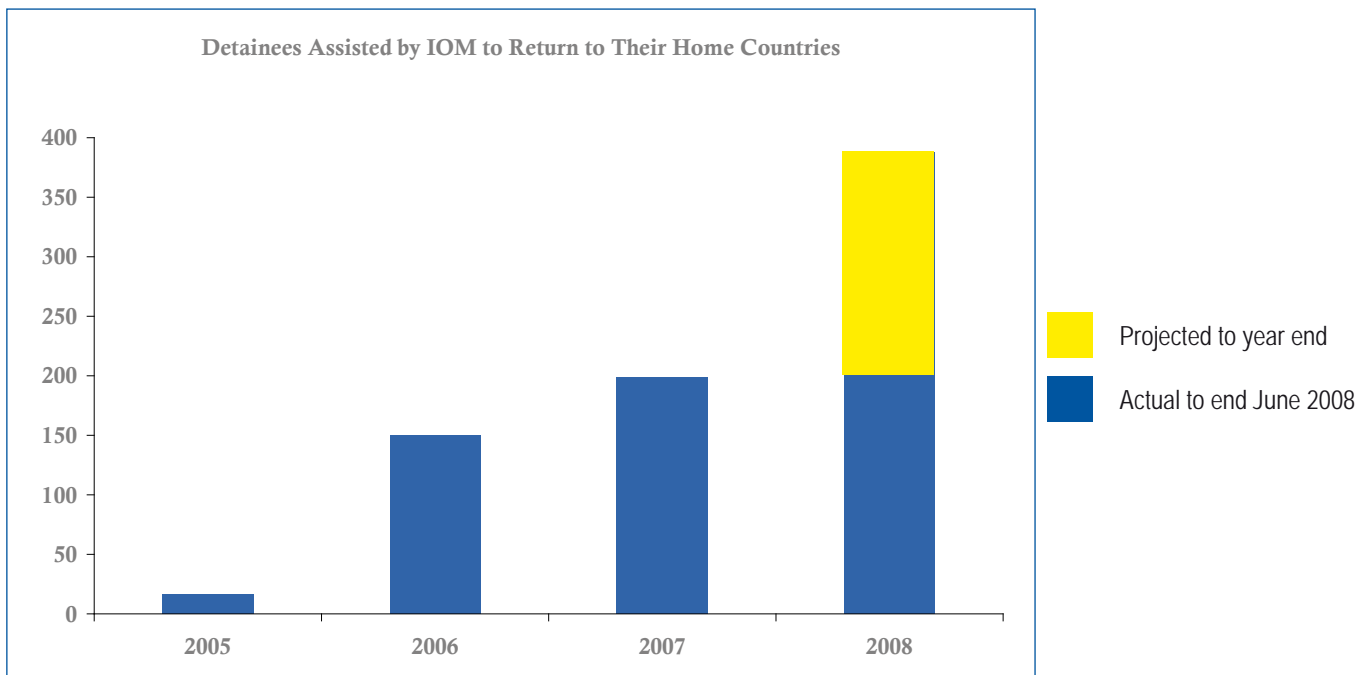
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Voluntary Return from Removal Centres

IOM UK started in a small way, in 2005, to assist migrants with voluntary return directly from Removal Centres (RCs). The recent significant increase in the number of people assisted is attributable to far better communication between all the ‘stakeholders’ – IOM, immigration officers, RC management staff, agencies and visitors and, of course, the detainees themselves – which very largely flows from the existence of the new regular IOM ‘surgeries’. Since the beginning of 2008, IOM has been sending caseworkers on a weekly or twice-weekly basis to the RCs to interview individual applicants and explain exactly how assisted voluntary returns work and how they can be of benefit to all concerned.



Since 1999, IOM UK has helped more than

27,000

individuals to return to

130

countries

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Information Seminars in **Leeds** & **Birmingham**

The raison d'être of IOM UK's sub-offices is to better serve the assisted voluntary return needs of asylum seekers and irregular migrants in the regions. They also act as a valuable local resource to a diversity of regional stakeholders.

To launch its office in Leeds, IOM UK held an Information Seminar at the city's Marriott Hotel on 30 May.

The main objectives of the Information Seminar included the following:

- to provide the refugee and asylum stakeholders in the Yorkshire & Humberside region with a better understanding of the assisted voluntary return programmes of IOM UK;
- to facilitate an exchange of views among the participants; and
- to introduce IOM Leeds to key stakeholders in the region.

IOM launch in Leeds



IOM office in Birmingham

IOM UK's Birmingham office was officially launched at the Marriott Hotel on the 25 June 2008.

Representatives of various NGOs, community groups, local government, and the UK Border Agency were invited to the event.

In all, thirty-five participants from twenty organisations attended the launch. They were provided with detailed information about the voluntary return assistance and related services.

Marek Effendowicz, IOM UK's Communications Director talked about IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes and Reintegration Assistance.

Staff at the IOM Birmingham office then introduced the services which would be available to local stakeholders.

IOM's New Associates

Scottish Refugee Council

The Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) is an independent national charity dedicated to providing advice, information and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees living in Scotland.

It works closely with the Welsh Refugee Council and the British Refugee Council, its two sister refugee councils in Wales and England, in influencing UK policy and public awareness. All three councils operate independently of each other.

SRC also provides specialist services in areas such as housing and welfare, education and employment, family reunion, women's issues, community development, the media and the arts to refugees in Scotland. Services are delivered from SRC offices in Glasgow and in outreach services in Edinburgh. It also seeks to influence policy and practice through working with the Scottish Parliament and other key stakeholders.

As they say on their website: *"We play a leading role in policy development and campaign on refugee issues to ensure that Scotland plays a full role in meeting the UK's legal and humanitarian obligations under the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees."*

IOM UK's branch office in Scotland has established a close rapport with the SRC and joint collaboration on AVR issues between the two offices can only benefit voluntary returnees from Scotland. IOM UK is happy that an agreement has been reached with the SRC. It welcomes the SRC as a new associate and looks forward to a fruitful collaboration with them over the coming years.

Chinese Welfare Association

IOM UK is also pleased to count among its associates the Northern Ireland-based Chinese Welfare Association (CWA).

Set up in 1986, CWA Northern Ireland aims to assist the local Chinese community in the areas of health, education, law and welfare.

CWA's mission is to secure the community's future in Northern Ireland within a framework of racial equality and enable all sections of the community to fully participate in both their development and that of the wider society.

The community is far from homogeneous and the reasons for its members coming to Northern Ireland are quite diverse.

As CWA states: *"A high proportion of the Chinese residents here were born outside Northern Ireland, with seven out of ten of those having been born in Hong Kong. Other places of origin include China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore."*

The search for a job is by far the most common reason for the arrival of the Chinese in Northern Ireland. This is followed by those coming to study and others who wish to join their British spouses.

More recently, CWA has seen an increase in the number of Chinese nationals applying for political asylum.

IOM UK's office in Scotland will work closely with the CWA and provide assistance to its clients who wish to return voluntarily to their home countries.

Live Video Conference with Returnees in Nigeria

The Nigeria Live Video Conference, the latest in a series of live video conferences facilitated by IOM UK in London, was held on Wednesday 2 July 2008 and was well attended.

At the end of the conference, more than two-thirds of the attendees returned a completed Evaluation Form. Of these returnees, 83% were women and 17% were men.

Representing a wide cross-section of the Nigerian diaspora community in the UK, the participants came from religious organisations, women's groups, advice centres, welfare associations, the media, the Nigeria High Commission and a firm of solicitors.

As at previous live video conferences, each delegate was given an Information Pack which contained further information about IOM UK's voluntary return & reintegration assistance programmes.

The attendees rated highly various aspects of the conference: the information materials, the presentation about VARRP, and the live video link with Nigerian returnees itself.

One delegate said afterwards: "I do believe that this programme [VARRP] will give hope to the hopeless."

Another thought that "with good information", Nigerians wishing to return home should know that "the help is there if one needs it".

Several community leaders expressed a wish to work together with IOM to stage community events.

So, a good turn-out and very positive responses all-round from the representatives of the Nigerian community who were pleased that IOM UK had also thought of providing them with specially prepared Nigerian food.

Future live video conferences in the pipeline will cover returnees in the Sudan and in South Africa.

