Return Migration in Europe
A comparative analysis of voluntary return’s policies and practices in France and Sweden

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Abstract

This thesis aims to study both French and Swedish return migration policies with a practical perspective. The paper constitutes an attempt to understand how governmental institutions (such as migration authorities) deal with return migration and to clarify significant issues related to migrants’ needs for determining a successful return. Through analyzing competent literature and secondary material as starting point, the conducted study gives an interesting approach on the problematic gap between voluntary return policies in theory and in practice.
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1. Introduction

Over the years researchers have been studying through various angles the significant topic of international migration. While most researchers strived to analyze the process of immigration and emigration, others focused their studies on a more recent phenomenon, which is return migration.

More than analyzing return migration, this research paper has an ambition to discuss generally the sensitive concept of “voluntary return migration” in a European context. The subject was found to be very interesting to deal with since the internship at the French Agency in charge of immigration and integration (OFII) in October 2009 was a part of the author’s core subjects. Whereas assisting the work of the agent responsible for return migration in Nice, great reflections were taken on this specific topic and a lot of questions arose. With very limited or almost none knowledge about voluntary return migration in Sweden, this thesis was a good opportunity to learn more by collecting basic information. Further ambition was to compare and discuss the topic in theory and practice in order to get a better understanding of the whole procedure. While studying International Migration and Ethnic Relations at Malmö University, the author acquired a deep theoretical knowledge, which could easily be considered as a good starting point for conducting this research. At the beginning it seemed quite challenging to put academic theories into practice in a social context. Firstly, because it was found that previous studies on voluntary return migration frequently lacked a suitable theoretical framework. Secondly, it has to be said that voluntary return migration as a concept is still very unclear in its definition, not to mention that on a more global basis the concept seems to be confusing. Therefore the choice of studying this subject became very clear and discussing voluntary return migration would only give a great insight on what’s happening in Western societies for those migrants who are willing to return to their home countries. With regards to both French and Swedish return migration policies, the readers of this conducted study will certainly appreciate the comparative analysis, which makes it very clear that both France and Sweden have two dissimilar views on voluntary return migration. Both countries will be studied through using a qualitative
approach, which will scrutinize return policies’ implementation and practices. Moreover it is crucial to mention that the writer believes in future policies’ improvement which should be based on migrants’ experience with regards to voluntary return to their home countries. The idea of creating a strong cooperation between institutions and organizations will probably provide a successful return for the migrants. However, these assumptions will need to be verified with the hope of giving essential information and arguments to the readers through conducting this research. Therefore, this research seeks to demonstrate all these fundamental aspects from the theoretical framework to the final conclusion.

Since there is a need for delimiting the subject of this research regarding the short amount of time and because return migration is a broad topic including many different types of migrants, the thesis includes, in its analysis and discussion about “voluntary return migration”, both refugees that hold a permanent or temporary resident permit in the host countries and asylum seekers which have been refused the refugee status. Because it seems necessary to measure the degree of “voluntariness”, further explanations will be given taking under consideration the French and Swedish return procedures.

2. Aim and research question

The conception of the paper is to reveal the very significant and controversial questions:

› What are the similarities and differences between the French and the Swedish institutions as regards voluntary return migration?

› What are the causes of this particular type of migration flow?

This research paper has for main purpose to give the readers a deeper understanding of return migration in Europe. The aim is to analyze both French and Swedish policies through the selected topic of voluntary return. During this research, two different views on return migration were provided.
The first view considers return migration with an institutional perspective through investigating French and Swedish policies both in theory and practice. In relation to the institutional framework, facts about well-known international organizations such as IOM (International Organization for Migration) and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) were also gathered. The second view offers to the readers a great opportunity to learn more about migrants’ opinions on the subject.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction of theories

This paper attempts to give appropriate answers to the research questions that were stated through using different types of theories, which can easily be related to the subject of voluntary return migration. Some of these theories were also used in previous researches when it comes to analyzing and discussing on a more global level the phenomenon of international migration. Each theory is used as a link from research question to analysis of gathered material. Therefore there was a need to clarify these theories through giving a short overview while describing them in a particular context.

3.2 Discourse

The concept of discourse was initiated in the earliest work of the famous French philosopher, sociologist and historian Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984). The meaning of this concept could be to give a more flexible approach for finding solutions to various issues in our societies. As Foucault argued, “discourse is about language and practice” and “never consists of one statement, one text, one action or one source” (Hall, 2001:72). The choice of using a discursive approach on the topic of return migration was particularly relevant since it helped to clarify how French and Swedish institutions implemented voluntary return policies. What has been found meaningful in the discourse concept is that it was considered as a very fascinating active process. Even though migration policies often give the impression of being constructed around strong aspects of nationalism and conservatism, a discursive approach gives an opportunity to
many actors to improve law implementation with regards to real practice on the field. It has been argued that discourse:

“"a term associated with the linguistic turn in social theory, has come into use as a way of rethinking method and measurement in the social sciences. Discourse properly refers to the practical use of language (broadly conceived) for the purposes of examining or otherwise criticizing the normal course of actions. Here, actions would include, of course, the action of writing or speaking, as well as political, economic, and social actions. When used in social theory, discourse, thereby, might best be restricted to practices of language that run “to-and-fro” with the social actions under consideration; that is, a discursive practice goes forward-and-back over the subjects of social theoretical work.”

(Encyclopedia of Social Theory, 2009)

Therefore it was supposed that the concept of discourse for analyzing secondary material based on institutions’ work would illuminate the different issues while placing them in a specific context with a wish for elaborating a further discussion. A further discussion could have for purpose to emphasize institutions’ cooperation and coordination as a response for policies’ improvement and implementation. “As a simple expression, discourse found its existence in people and with that institutions are searching for order and coordination and therefore tries to anticipate and control life” (Berger & Luckmann, my own translation from Swedish, 1979:92). Taking this statement for granted; this research made it very clear that the concept of discourse could be used for analyzing return migration as institutional practice, an interesting thought described as “the typical process that should be able to control activities similar to Migration authorities’ work with voluntary return” (Olsson, my own translation from Swedish, 2001:9).

3.3 “Push” and “Pull” factors

The mechanisms of return migration can be easier understood through using a theory, which is well known as “the theory of push and pull factors”. Therefore there is a need to give an historical background and overview of its purpose and practices. The push and pull factors’ theory in migration was originally introduced by Ernest Georg
Ravenstein (1834 – 1913), “German-born cartographer […] best remembered today for his pioneering work in statistics and population migration studies” (Oxford reference online, 2009). The principal purpose of this theory was to give explanation about the causes of migration in the nineteenth century through analyzing the factors that pushed and pulled the migrants to move from one place to another. Initially, Ravenstein’s studies investigated the migration flows in England and Wales on a national level and pointed out that “most migration was from the countryside to the towns” (Grigg, 1977:54).

However it has been argued that “many theorists have followed in Ravenstein’s footsteps, and the dominant theories in contemporary scholarship are more or less variations of his conclusions” (Ullah & Panday, 2008, abstract). Russell King has written numerous significant works inspired by Ravenstein. “Generalizations from the History of Return Migration”, one of his numerous publications, is particularly significant for the topic of return migration (King, 2000).

Recent studies have showed that there are different types of “push” and “pull” factors, which can be described as the source for causing return migration. These factors were divided into different categories such as: “economic, social, family/life cycle and political factors” (Figure 1). While choosing this theory as analytical tool, the writer always kept in mind that this could be a good opportunity to study why migrants are willing to return to their home countries. Therefore, the “push” and “pull” factors have been described and were put in a specific context while analyzing a variety of interview samples.

3.4 Definition of concepts

While reading and analyzing the significant amount of secondary material used for this research, it was very interesting to compare the definitions of the various concepts related to return migration. The first detail that came into mind was that the terminologies differed from a language to another. But this differentiation in defining
the concepts was not only a language matter and it was also noticed that there was also a clear divergence in the definitions between institutions and organizations.

“The states, EU and humanitarian organizations, to mention some actors, often use different concepts, or the same concepts but in a different way.”

(Nationella temagruppen asyl & integration, my own translation from Swedish, 2007:8)

Therefore there was a need for giving additional details about the specific terms used before conducting the analysis of secondary material.

Return:

The International Organization for Migration defines the concept of return as referring:

“broadly to the act of going back from a country (either transit or destination) to the country of previous transit or origin.”

(IOM website, 2009)

Migrants that are more or less concerned by return migration can be divided into different categories such as:

“return of skills, irregular migration, asylum seekers, refugees, ethnic returns and returns driven by global economic changes.”

(Ghosh, 2000, chapter 2)

However and as mentioned earlier in this paper, the conducted study will only analyze return migration flows that are not mandatory. In other words this excludes all types of return that are not based on migrants’ voluntary decision to return to their home countries, as it is the case of forced migration.
In the recent years, both national/international institutions and organizations have significantly discussed the concept of voluntary return. One of the main issues in internationalizing this concept was to define what was really voluntary or not for the migrants. In Sweden, the Migration Board (Migrationsverket) uses the concept of voluntary return:

"[...] when a person with his/her own free will choose to return to his/her homecountry, a process which assumes that this person has a real opportunity to choose, it means that he or she has a resident permit."

(Nationella temagruppen asyl & integration, my own translation from Swedish, 2007:8)

Voluntary return seems a little bit different in its definition since the concept is not only applied to migrants that possess a resident permit (e.g. refugees) but also to other categories of migrants. In France for instance the term of voluntary return is also used when rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants decide to return voluntarily in their home countries.

On the European level, the concept has been defined by IOM as a:

“return based on the voluntary decision of the individual. The concept of voluntary return requires more than an absence of coercive factors. A voluntary decision is defined by the absence of any physical, psychological, or material coercion but in addition, the decision is based on adequate, available, accurate, and objective information.”

(IOM website, 2009)

The definition of voluntary return is still very unclear and therefore this was found fascinating to open an interesting discussion around the concept in a constructive
analysis while scrutinizing the work of institutions and organizations in France and Sweden.

Repatriation:

The concept of repatriation concerns the return of refugees in their home countries. According to the International Organization for Migration:

“this term has a strict legal meaning, recognized in international law, and refers to convention refugees returning to their places of origin, prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and 1951, civilians in times.”

(IOM website, 2009)

Although certain events in the history showed that refugee repatriation was comparable to forced migration, there has been an attempt to create voluntary repatriation programs in order to protect refugees while giving them the choice to return home. Strong cooperation between host-home countries and international organizations such as IOM and UNHCR reinforced these efforts and strived for voluntary repatriation rather than criticized forced return.

Assisted return:

Without no doubt it is important to say that the migrants who are willing to return home need certain kind of assistance from the host countries in order to reach a successful return. This is when the concept of assisted return is applied and takes its entire signification. IOM explains for instance that assisted return:

“occurs where financial and organizational assistance may be offered for the return, and sometimes for reintegration measures, to the individual by the State or by a third party; for example an international organization.”

(IOM website, 2009)
In France, the French Agency in charge of Immigration and Integration (OFII) offers such assistance to rejected asylum seekers and other irregular migrants who are willing to return. In Sweden, the Migration Board (Migrationsverket) provides both regular and irregular migrants with a financial aid, for example when migrants cannot cover the travel costs by themselves. However there is a need to go deeper in the analysis in order to explain the idea of voluntary return from a country to another for understanding assisted voluntary return migration in practice. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) helps both returning migrants from France and Sweden in their reintegration in the home countries through providing a financial aid to returning migrants for developing their own small businesses. Assisted return will be further developed in the analyzing part of this essay and significant details regarding assisted return and reintegration programs will be given.

**Forced return:**

On the opposite of voluntary return where the migrants have the right to decide about whether or not they want to return to their home countries, forced return is mandatory which means that this is a:

“return that is not undertaken by the individual voluntarily.”

(IOM website, 2009)

This type of return mostly concerns rejected asylum seekers who do not decide to voluntary return to their home countries after that they received a negative response to their applications. However, forced migration can also be applied to refugees, in particular for those who decide to renounce to their refugee status for personal reasons and with regards to their incapacity to stay in the host countries under a new status (e.g. student, worker, pensioner, persons with sufficient founds). National institutions and authorities make use of the forced return procedure for all types of irregular migration.
4. Presentation

4.1 Selection of the subject

The choice of studying return migration and voluntary return procedures was definitely not a coincidence and it was more considered as a result from my own experiences and personal interests. As a French citizen living in Sweden since 2005, my intention was to show the relation between government institutions and migrants regarding return migration policies and practices. Initially, the actual reason for selecting this topic was the consequences of a personal experience with the Swedish Migration Board (SMB) that took place in summer 2009 when I received, by mistake, a deportation letter where I was asked to leave the country within three weeks. This decision was the result of a great incompetence from one of the SMB employee, who could not make the clear distinction between “residence permit” (uppehållstillstånd), which is applied to all non-EU citizens and “right of residence” (uppehållsrätt), which is exclusively delivered to EU-citizens since April 30th 2006. In my particular case, I was granted the “right of residence” as a French citizen studying in Sweden, which is valid as long as the migrant fills the requirements. The deportation letter was sent as the result from a negative answer to a “residence permit” application, which was based on my family links with a Swedish citizen. However, this decision was a considerable error since I still had the “right to stay” in Sweden in relation with my studies at Malmö university.

The following three weeks after that I received this letter were extremely stressful and many questions regarding my “potential” return to France arose about how this would be organized. Even if I was pretty sure I had the right to stay in Sweden, I kept thinking about the return procedures. This is exactly when I decided that return migration would be the subject of my thesis. Since I had no significant knowledge about return migration laws and practices both in Sweden and in my own country, I knew that such interesting study would give me more information on the topic. Moreover, the four weeks’ internship at the French Agency in charge of Immigration and Integration (OFII) in October 2009 reinforced the choice of this subject. Considering the short amount of time available, I was able to delimitate this study to the specific area of “voluntary
return”, which happened to be one of the most fascinating experiences at the workplace. Therefore I chose to analyze and compare voluntary return policies and practices in:

- **Sweden** - as a result from a private experience with SMB
- **France** - as a result from a professional experience at OFII

### 4.2 Selection of the material

The selected material consists mostly of secondary sources including both substantial literature on the topic of return migration and additional information from SMB and OFII (brochures and website). While using extensive literature, the purpose was to give to the reader both a theoretical knowledge and a global approach on the subject. This is why the study was based on classical work (Bovenkerk, 1974) but also on more recent publications from the International Organization for Migration (Ghosh, 2000 & IOM, 2004).

In spite of a willingness to give some interesting nuances about the causes of voluntary return, samples from previously conducted interviews with migrants were gathered from Börjesson’s work in “Återvandra eller...?” (Börjesson, 1989). The statements from these interviews do not have for intention to give a direct answer to the research question but more to give explanation about what migrants might actually think about returning home on a volunteer purpose. Bearing in mind time-shortage and a lack of available resources, similar studies could not be analyzed from the French side with respect to the migrants who decided to return to their home countries.

However, participant observations were also used since there was a need to bring up more interesting details on the French institutions’ practices with regards to voluntary return procedure. It is important to say that these participant observations were not planned from the beginning. My ambition was nevertheless to share significant events that occurred during the internship at OFII while assisting the work of the agent responsible for the “Return and Reintegration” department in Nice.
5. Method

5.1 Qualitative methods

This research was conducted through using a qualitative method based on secondary material and participant observations related to the topic of return migration. The choice of this specific method was in order to conduct a reflective analysis of the selected issues. The qualitative method makes it easier to “explain and interpret the different aspects of research issues through opinions, relations or complex events” (Lundberg, 2009). This is the reason why the paper uses different types of sources, which have for positive aspects to study the research questions through different angles. While quantitative methods typically focuses on facts and statistics, the aim with this thesis is to make use of the qualitative methods in order to put more attention on institutional practices and on migrants’ own experience as regards voluntary return. Participant observations were based on reflections, which were taken from internship’s experiences while assisting to a voluntary return migration procedure, which was being applied, in a real environment. Further, professional handbooks for OFII employee reinforce the method used.

5.2 Validity and reliability

For reinforcing the validity of this research paper, the author always related his progressive work to the specific research questions that he already defined in the very beginning. The concept of validity particularly matters when researchers are “using the right thing at the right time” and “formulating a discussion of the problem” (Lundberg, 2009). Therefore it seemed essential to use other’s research while comparing their results to this conducted study. Using “communicative validity” (Lundberg, 2009) while carrying out this research was supposed to help to describe exactly how the empirical data were collected and how the work was performed.

Once again the author believes that a good researcher should always keep in mind his or her research question in order to be trusted. Additionally, if it can be proved that the
research is useful and if the issues are being discussed from different angles, validity will be easier to obtain. That is why the essay regards to returnees from Sweden and France and discusses problematic from different point of views with the conception of using it in further researches within migration issues.

Another aspect of social research, which was also taken into consideration, is the notion of reliability. While some argue that “high reliability does not guarantee high validity”, others think that “there is a need of reliability in order to prove validity” (Lundberg, 2009). This concept implies that the readers should be able to trust the conducted research. Consequently, it is required to describe everything in details to gain the reader’s trust what is mostly significant taking into account the analysis of empirical data.

6. Analysis

6.1 Analytical methods

The empirical data were categorized by using relevant analytical methods, which were put in a theoretical framework. On one hand, the purpose of such analysis was to get a better insight and interpretation of voluntary return practices in France and Sweden. On the other hand these analytical tools were very helpful for gathering information about migrants’ opinion on the subject while explaining the reason of their return to the home countries.

The analytical part of the thesis always kept in focus the research questions as point of departure, and significant analytical tools for conducting such qualitative study were collected and scrutinized:

- Secondary material
- Interview re-sampling
- Participant observations
6.2 Secondary material

Essential information was collected from relevant literature regarding return migration policies for Sweden and France. In order to analyze both French and Swedish policies and practices with regards to voluntary return, the paper intention was to gather and compare and discuss data from diverse institutions and organizations. Brochures and additional information from the French and Swedish migration board websites were investigated.

6.2.1 The Swedish Migration Board (SMB)

While the concept of voluntary return is applied in France to all rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants, who are willing to return voluntarily in their home countries, it was remarked that the Swedish view on the subject was completely different. In Sweden, two types of “voluntary return” are defined:

‡ Frivillig återvandring

This is the first concept that comes into mind while discussing about voluntary return from a Swedish perspective. The National Thematic Network on Asylum and Integration (NTG) defines for instance “frivillig återvandring” as:

“The process in which a person with a permanent resident permit
decides deliberately and voluntarily to travel back to his/her own
country for a longer period.”

(Nationella temagruppen asyl & integration,
my own translation from Swedish, 2007:9)

With regards to this definition it is crucial for the SMB “to make matters easier for those, refugees and other people, in need of protection holding permanent residence permits, who wish to repatriate to their countries of origin (Migrationsverket Swedish website, my own translation from Swedish, 2009).
Återvända självmant

The Swedish Migration Board (SMB) uses another concept in the case of rejected asylum seekers. Translated into English the notion of “återvända självmant” means:

“that you have chosen to return on your own initiative or that you at least accept the decision that you are not permitted to remain in Sweden and are prepared to comply with this and actively participate in making it possible for you to return. Should you choose to return voluntarily, you may, in certain cases, qualify to apply for various types of support and aid in resettlement once you have returned.”

(Migrationsverket Swedish website, my own translation from Swedish, 2009)

Even though both concepts seem quite clear for the reader at the first sight, interesting details that perfectly illustrate the issues of defining “voluntary return” as a concept from a language to another were observed. Both the Swedish and the English versions of the Swedish Migration Board’s website were visited. It was noticed that both concepts were used differently on the English webpage and that the translation was really confusing for a reader that has Swedish and English knowledge. In English, “frivillig återvandring” (Figure 2) was translated into “repatriation” (Figure 3), while “återvanda självmant” (Figure 4) (spontaneously return) was translated into “returning voluntarily” (Figure 5). Once again if the readers have a closer look on Figure 2, the Swedish term “stöd vid frivillig återvandring” which literally means, “support for voluntary return” is translated on Figure 3 as “support in connection with repatriation”. While reflecting about the difficulty of translating such important concepts, it was clear that confusion was not only the result of an error in the translation. Rather than that, the SMB used the English words “repatriation” and “returning voluntarily” (or voluntary return) intentionally. As a matter of fact different concepts have been discussed in Sweden, and “within the European Union, the harmonization of immigration and political asylum conveyed a need to coordinate the concepts of return on a European
level” (Nationella temagruppen asyl & integration, my own translation from Swedish, 2007:8).

On the margin, what can be pointed out is that the two different types of voluntary return that exist in Sweden ("frivillig återvandring” and ”återvända självmant”) should be renamed in Swedish so that it would make it easier for both migrants and for various actors from the Swedish institutions and organizations to characterize the difference between them, without going through law texts. It is important to mention that the purpose of such remarks is not to criticize the work of the SMB. To a certain extent, some suggestions in order to improve return migration policies’ implementation were given.

6.2.2 The French Agency in charge of Immigration and Integration (OFII)

The French government already started to implement the notion of assisted voluntary return in the national laws after World War II.

“France has, exceptionally, allowed for assisted voluntary return for decades, with its 1945 Ordinance on the conditions for Entry and Residence of Foreign nationals in France.”

(IOM, 2004, intro)

In France voluntary return is mentioned under the name “retour volontaire” and has for principle to give assistance to those migrants who have no longer any right to stay in France but who are willing to return voluntarily in their home countries rather than being deported by the French authorities. Rejected asylum seekers and illegal migrants are the types of migrants that are concerned by this notion of return. Financial and administrative aid is provided through the “Assisted Voluntary Return program” (AVR - Aide au Retour Volontaire), which is administrated by the OFII, Figure 6.

When it comes to refugees who are willing to return to their home countries, the French government does not use the notion of “retour volontaire” (voluntary return). Where Sweden uses the term “frivillig återvandring” (which should literally be translated as
voluntary return) in relation with refugees, The French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) calls it “rapatriement volontaire” (voluntary repatriation). Unfortunately more information on this particular type of return assistance program in France could not be gathered.

However another type of assistance “Assisted Humanitarian Return” (AHR – Aide au Retour Humanitaire), which can also be referred to as being in the scope of voluntary return practices was found particularly meaningful (Figure 7).

Such assistance is particularly relevant to this analysis since the program concerns:

1. Any foreign national, including European Union nationals, who are destitute or in difficulty. The French state will offer them and their spouse and children the opportunity to return to their home country or to a host country;

2. Any unaccompanied foreign national child at the request of a magistrate or, as applicable, as part of a family reunification in the child’s home country or a host country;

3. Any foreign national in an irregular situation who does not fall within the scope of the voluntary assisted return program (AVR) and who has not previously benefited from it (students, foreign nationals covered by clause IC5, foreign nationals refused asylum that originate from a safe home country).

(OfII English website, 2009)

Humanitarian Return Assistance is a very interesting program since it does not exclude EU-citizens, which find themselves in a precarious situation and are willing to return to their home countries. Similar types of assistance in Sweden could not be identified, whereas voluntary/humanitarian return of EU citizens was never mentioned on the SMB’s website.

Nevertheless, the conducted study showed that there were parallel issues comparable to the Swedish case regarding the use of concepts from a specific language to another. For a reader that has little knowledge in French, “retour volontaire” mentioned on the OFII brochures, can easily be understood as “voluntary return”. However the same brochure
was available in English but this time, “retour volontaire” was curiously translated into “voluntary repatriation” (Figure 6).

Keeping in mind that in France the concept of “voluntary repatriation” (rapatriement volontaire) is used for refugees who are willing to return to their home countries it is hard to explain such confusing translation. Like in Sweden, using different concepts from a language to another (French to English) makes it difficult for both institutions’ actors and migrants to do a clear distinction between these concepts.

6.2.3 Facts about organizations

Many organizations both in France and in Sweden are engaged with different types of support for the migrants, who are willing to return back as regards the situation of refugees and rejected asylum seekers. Intergovernmental organizations and commissions such as IOM and UNHCR play a central role in providing assistance to migrants. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), established 1951, is an intergovernmental organization, which works with migrants, governments, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and international organizations. One of IOM main activities is to develop reintegration programs for migrants in order to improve their life conditions in the home countries. In Sweden, IOM and UNHCR work in strong collaboration with the SMB through creating various reintegration projects and providing a reestablishment support. A perfect example of this collaboration between the SMB and international organizations is demonstrated through the different services available to the rejected asylum seekers from Afghanistan.

Returning to Afghanistan:
- IOM's helpline for returning Afghans in Sweden
- IOM's reintegration project in Afghanistan
- UNHCR's counseling services for Afghans

(Migrationsverket website, 2009)

In France, IOM and UNHCR also offer similar services to returning migrants even though it is slightly different than in Sweden since OFII can provide such services with
the help of the European Fund for Refugees and NGOs based in different countries. The OFII is not only represented in France but also abroad in eight countries: Algeria, Mali, Morocco, Quebec, Romania, Senegal, Tunisia and in Turkey (OFII website, 2009). OFII services abroad have for main consequences to maintain the link between the migrants and the host/home countries after their returns.

6.3 Interviews

6.3.1 Sampling selection
Since full qualitative researches that are only based on interviews require much time and that the circumstances did not recommend performing such an advanced study, it was decided to use previously conducted interviews from another researcher. It has to be clarified that only interviews with migrants that decided to return from Sweden to their home countries are analyzed.

In the bibliographic essay “The Sociologic of Return Migration”, Bovenkerk specifies that: “the overwhelming majority of studies about return migration is based on interviews with smaller or larger samples of already returned migrants” (Bovenkerk, 1974:40). Even though the selected study from Sweden was conducted in 1989 by Sven Börjesson in the publication “Återvandra eller...?”, the interviewed migrants still represent a good starting point for giving explanations regarding the causes of return migration (Börjesson, 1989). In order to facilitate the analysis of the previously conducted interviews, every quote was examined. Additionally, the purpose was to connect these quotes to the second research question through using the push and pull theory, which was previously introduced in this paper.

6.3.2 Quotes analysis
The secondary material was mostly written in Swedish and for that particular reason, the relevant part was translated into English and the original page numbers were mentioned. All selected quotes refer to Sven Börjesson’s work in “Återvandra eller...?” (Börjesson, 1989). In addition and through using Figure 1 as a theoretical model,
migrants’ opinions were investigated and comments to the presented quotes have been added below:

- “I was gone for ten years but already from the first day, when I went downtown, I felt like I was at home. I will never leave my country again.” (p. 42)

Here it appears clearly that there is a notion of “homesickness”. The migrant lived many years in Sweden but still did not feel like at home. He felt like he had lost his time in Sweden and that it was a mistake to leave his own country.

- “Our parents wrote to us that everything would be alright when we would return home. It has been one year since we came back and nothing has been organized.” (p. 41)

This is a relevant example where the migrants were influenced by other members of their family in their decision to return back home. While reading between the lines, it is obvious that family ties sometimes give a false picture about the home country and its everyday reality.

- “I felt like myself when I returned home. I didn’t have any integration issues. This is here I belong and I will never leave the country again. There are a lot of differences between people here and in Sweden. In Sweden, you are “black”. Here we are all “black” [...] In Sweden people live with their neighbors many years without knowing each other. If you move to a new neighborhood here, you are very quickly associated with the rest of people. When you play record player a bit too loud in the evening, Swedes call the police, especially if you are black”. (p. 18-19)

Racism and integration issues seemed to considerably affect this migrant. He explained that his skin color made him being excluded from the Swedish society. Another mentioned aspect was the divergence in the way of life between Sweden and the home country. This difference was often the result of small details from everyday’s life that differed from one country to another.

- “I live now in a different environment than I did before my exile. It means that I need to build up a new social life, at least to some extent. And I wasn’t gone for a long time. But even though I feel that I’m home. Returning home is like to be born again.” (p. 20)
This woman seemed to encounter significant social problems in her return home because she probably had to find new friends, who would enhance a better social life for her. But still, she felt at home more than in Sweden. She associated return as an opportunity to start a new life and thought that her home country would be a perfect place for happiness.

- “We didn’t come to Sweden in order to have fun. We were political refugees. We lived like refugees and the only thing that was interesting for us was what was happening in Uruguay […]. We lived isolated from the Swedish society. The only Swedes we have met were marginal, one-way or the other. We didn’t have contact with the middle class Swede.” (p. 21)

Once again these migrants were not well integrated in the Swedish society since they could not forget their home countries and believed that the events in Uruguay were more important than what was happening in Sweden. Moreover, they felt excluded because they had nothing in common with many Swedes and it was hard for them to meet new friends.

- “We always thought about returning home so it was pretty natural even for our daughters and even if we lived in Sweden for more than 9 years.” (p. 21)

Living in Sweden was not something that was established from the very beginning. It felt like a random event and this was not the life these migrants had wished for. That was why they still kept thinking about their return home while they pictured Sweden as something negative that took their own dreams away.

- “We were forced to live in Sweden and it felt like we were always on a trip.” (p. 29)

The same issue happened here. The migrants were forced to leave their home country and never felt at home in Sweden because they could not be fully integrated as they already planned to return from where they came from the first day they arrived in Sweden.
“I felt like I was imprisoned the first time in Sweden. An attitude that affected my children. It was wrong. We should have lived life like we were going to stay long.” (p. 31)

Living in exile showed that people find it hard to integrate in a foreign environment. Therefore migrants’ only wish was to return to their home countries where they belong. This comment illustrated parents’ negative influence on their children when it came to portray Sweden and everything that was related to Sweden as negative.

“When we could, we returned”. There was no longer a reason to live in Sweden anymore. We knew our place, after those politicians prisoner were released.” (p. 33)

This statement showed that there are also political issues that caused the return to the home country. Political situation before moving to Sweden was unstable or considered as a threat. The migrants always thought about coming back when the situation would stabilize. Sweden was just a parenthesis in their life.

“Here the attitudes towards immigrants are more positive than in Sweden, and it was one of the reasons of our return here. In Sweden, my husband would always be an immigrant, always feel like an outsider and would never be fully accepted.” (p. 36)

The migrants were subjected to daily racism, which resulted in their unwillingness to stay in Sweden. Racism strongly affected immigrant’s integration in the host countries and it felt like there were only two alternatives, to deal with racism or to return home.

“The one who was once thrown away by his/her country always wants to return.” (p.40)

This was an interesting quote that perfectly demonstrated the original issue of forced displacement with regards to refugees.

“I returned home because I couldn’t feel like at home in Sweden, but also because it was time for my children to know where their future was. They are 14 and 16 years old and we thought that they should study either in Sweden or here [...] I’m here to build up my country again.” (p. 19)
Homesickness was emphasized in this comment and the migrant once more did not feel at home in Sweden. In addition, the parents thought that their children should know more about their home countries. A choice had to be made for the future. Finally, there was a need to participate in the redevelopment of the home country, which could without any doubt be considered as an interesting project challenging for the migrants.

- “I have a place to live and money. I planned carefully before I moved here. In Sweden I worked for something that was far away. Here I work for something that is here. Life is more valuable in that way.” (p. 29-30)

Meanwhile she was working in Sweden this woman was still thinking about her home country. She probably sent remittances to other members of her family in her home country. Obviously, she could not see what positive effects this financial aid had on her relatives. After she returned in her own country, she felt more useful and she could notice the results of her own work.

6.3.3 Causal factors of voluntary return migration

In order to analyze the different quotes from the interviews and to give answers to the second research question: “what are the causes of this particular type of migration flow?” Figure 1 was used as a pattern, which gave significant details about the causal and effect factors of return migration. Since the purpose of this analysis was to demonstrate why migrants do return to their home countries, only causal effects from this diagrammatic summary were detailed.

The “push” and “pull” factors referred in the theoretical part of this paper are strongly related to Figure 1 and represent the foundation of this particular model about causes and effects. Therefore and in order to give more signification to the conducted study, migrants’ arguments in their willingness to return home have been investigated in relation with the chosen theory. Taking under consideration Figure 1, the analysis below tried to connect the quotes with the different categories of factors: economical, social, family/life cycle and political. The results of this analysis are showed below in Table 1 - 4.
## ECONOMIC FACTORS

**Sum up:** Economic factors are those, which make that we depend on money from another social resource than our own when we need to support our families and us.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Push”</th>
<th>“Pull”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Unemployment or employment with very low wages and working conditions often not related to education</td>
<td>- Job opportunity especially in the same education areas and on better conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Rebuilding the home country is an economic challenge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

## SOCIAL FACTORS

**Sum up:** Being a part of a society is to fully integrate with people, joining them and taking part of their lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Push”</th>
<th>“Pull”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Racism</td>
<td>- Home belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Discrimination</td>
<td>- Children’s education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Integration issues</td>
<td>- Striving for a better position in the society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Homesickness</td>
<td>- Social network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Exclusion</td>
<td>- Inclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
FAMILY / LIFE CYCLE FACTORS

**Sum up:** Integration by making friends, building families and becoming a part of a new country are necessary for existence among society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Push”</th>
<th>“Pull”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Wish to retire in the home country</td>
<td>- Relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Children’s non-experience in the home country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

POLITICAL FACTORS

**Sum up:** Government policy at sending and receiving ends affects considerably all immigrants in their decision to return to the home country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Push”</th>
<th>“Pull”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Initial forced displacement to Sweden</td>
<td>- Better political situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Financial and administrative support</td>
<td>- Political promises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reintegration programs and language training</td>
<td>- Patriotism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
6.4 Participant observations

Doubtless it can be said that an unclear definition of voluntary return can have negative effect for policy implementation. For instance if the authorities in charge of the return procedure have a different interpretation of the concept, they might someday break the law one-way or another. As a result from a personal experience in France, the paper aims to summarize significant participant observations, which had to deal with the voluntary return procedure. Before going into details and giving comments about this event, there was a particular need to explain the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) procedure in its whole, from the agent’s first meeting with the migrant at OFII to organizing the departure, since these participant observations were taken in special circumstances along with an irregular migrant from the Chechen Republic.

6.4.1 First meeting with the migrant

When the OFII agent meets the migrant for the first time, he or she has to decide which type of assistance the migrant can be provided with. There are two different types of assisted return. The first one, “Assisted Voluntary Return” (AVR), is applied to any rejected asylum seeker or irregular migrant, who are willing to return to their home countries. The second program, “Assisted Humanitarian Return” (AHR), supports migrants, who are in a precarious situation and need financial and administrative aid in order to travel back home.

Afterward, the agent gathers all relevant information about the migrant: identification, address in host and home country, phone number, asylum application and others significant facts about the migrant’s actual situation in France. When all these information are collected, the agent explains the whole procedure while going through all the available brochures summarizing details about the type of assistance: travel documents, costs, baggage allowance and financial aid. It is always important to ask the migrant if he or she would be interested to send an AVR (Assisted Voluntary Return) application. If it feels necessary, the agent would have to give the migrant enough time to reconsider the offer. The OFII agent cannot force the migrant to accept the
propotional; instead he or she has to provide the migrant with a maximum of information. A second meeting is arranged with the migrant where the agent gives additional details about reintegration programs provided by OFII and assisted by NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in the country of origin.

6.4.2 How to register an application?

The OFII agent has to contact the Prefecture in charge of administrative procedures in the county where the migrant lives. Verification has to be made in order to know if the migrant isn’t already registered in the national database. If the migrant has travel documents, the agent can already register the file. If not, the agent has to fill a paper with migrant’s personal identification and send it to the nearest embassy or consulate for obtaining a “laissez-passé” which is:

\[
\text{“a document allowing the holder to pass [...] A permit to travel} \\
\text{or to enter a particular place.”}
\]

(Oxford Reference Online, 2009)

A “laissez-passé” is for instance delivered when a migrant does not have any valid travel documents. Foreign embassies in France have to verify the identity and nationality of the migrant before such document can be provided on a temporary matter, for example when it comes to a voluntary return procedure. Doubtless it is important to mention that OFII assistance programs can only be provided once for each migrant. Therefore, the agent has to control if the migrant is eligible to such aid or not. Finally, the plane tickets to the final destination are booked and the agent has to finalize the procedure before the date of departure.
6.4.3 Organizing the departure

✧ **Convocation before departure:**

A note that contains the travel information is provided to the migrant, which includes: flight timetable, baggage maximum allowance, date and time for the meeting with the agent.

✧ **Departure from Nice airport:**

The agent has to gather migrants’ travel credentials, verify if his/her baggage does contain forbidden objects and assist the migrant with baggage check-in. Once this is done the migrant has to wait in a delimited area before the boarding while the agent goes to the Border Police bureau and a police officer has to make a copy of the migrant’s passport, travel credentials, and of the agent’s professional ID-card. One part of the financial aid is provided while the other part is given through an order of payment and the migrant has to proof with his/her own signature that he or she received the money. A green access card is then provided to the agent so that he or she does not have to go through the control zones and the police officer escorts both the agent and the migrant to the boarding gate. Here it has to be said that during the escort the migrant does not have any handcuff since it is not a forced return procedure and the police officer only guides and assists both the agent and the migrant in order to reduce the time of the procedure.

✧ **Departure from Roissy or Orly airport in Paris:**

When the final destination cannot be reached from Nice Airport, the migrant has to travel to Paris by train and the costs for the tickets are provided by OFII. An OFII agent who follows the previously mentioned procedure takes the migrant in charge at its arrival at the airport.
6.4.4 Observations:

The French AVR (Assisted Voluntary Return) procedure has been clarified in order to put the readers in a specific context before giving further observations resulting from a personal experience with an OFII agent and a migrant at Nice airport. These participant observations are described below:

“While I was performing my internship at the French Agency in charge of Immigration and Integration (OFII) I experienced interesting situations that I didn’t expect to observe or to be acting with. The most extreme situation I encountered took place at Nice airport while I was assisting to a voluntary return procedure. Once we helped an irregular migrant to check-in, my colleague and I had to pass through the police office in order to get special access to certain restricted areas of the airport. Before entering into the police station, my colleague talked to the police officer on the intercom who let us came inside the reception room. My partner came in first, followed by the migrant and I. As we first stepped into the room, the police officer that was sitting at the desk stood up and started to scream at us in a very aggressive way. He asked me to leave the room (with the migrant) and argued that we were not allowed to stay in the police office and that my colleague didn’t respect the official procedure. At first he thought that I was an illegal migrant and for the first time I felt persecuted by his behavior but my partner finally fixed the problem while discussing with him. The police officer did not respect the law since he didn’t make the clear distinction between “voluntary” and “forced” return. “Forced return” is not performed by the French Agency in charge of Immigration and Integration (OFII) and in that particularly case the migrants are escorted by the police through all the procedure. Besides, the police officer asked the migrant to leave the office anyway. Before the boarding I felt that the migrant was very stressed because of what happened in the police office and we could see that he wasn’t in the better conditions before leaving the country with dignity.”
7. Results and discussion

7.1 France/Sweden - Similarities and differences

While analyzing both French and Swedish institutions through using a discursive approach on the concept of voluntary return, various similarities and differences have been observed.

As it is mentioned in the theoretical framework of this paper, “discourse is about language and practice” and “never consists of one statement, one text, one action or one source” (Hall, 2001:72). This assumption can visibly be confirmed since both French and Swedish institutions showed great similarities while discussing and applying the concept of voluntary return. Using for instance the English language for EU-harmonization clearly demonstrated the difficulties of coordinating major concepts so that they would successfully be applied to return migration policies of each member states. Both OFII and SMB showed similar issues by translating important information available to public into English.

Even if there is no such thing as a positive/negative or right/wrong discourse, the working methods would probably be more efficient if the different actors from both national and international levels could discuss the concepts taking for granted that still, there is a strong need to encourage international cooperation for a better policy harmonization. Different languages should not mean different interpretation of the concepts from one country to another. For instance, Foucault’s discursive approach is an interesting tool and all different actors should use it in order to find solutions to the existing gap between theory and practice in the laws of return migration.

The difference between France and Sweden is that the Swedish government seems to pay more attention to refugees who are willing to return to their home countries through providing various “voluntary repatriation program”. Sweden offers a more comfortable option since the refugees (who return to their home countries) can still use their permanent residence permit if they feel the wish to move back to Sweden.
This is not the case in France where it seems more difficult to find information about voluntary repatriation programs since there is a lack of communication between institutions and organizations. OFII can only provide such assistance if the refugees renounce to their status and in that case, become irregular migrants, which means that they have no right to stay in France. In that particular matter, these migrants can apply to the AVR (Assisted Voluntary Return) program instead and return voluntarily to their home countries.

Another interesting difference is that France offers a way out to both EU and non-EU citizens that are in situation of financial precariousness through providing the AHR (Assisted Humanitarian Return) program. This program could easily be described as an equivalent to an assisted voluntary return. The degree of voluntariness would however need to be discussed since the main reason for applying to such AHR program is migrant’s lack of financial resources in order to stay in the host country.

Even though Sweden offers a great assistance for all those refugees who are ready to come home on a voluntary purpose, nothing in the available material has been founded regarding EU and non-EU citizens who have financial issues and would like to travel back home. Therefore, SMB should develop an assisted “voluntary” or “humanitarian” return program in order to assist the migrants who are destitute.

In practice voluntary return migration seems to be something difficult to understand for the institutions, the migrants but also for the authorities. Even if participant observations could not be conducted in the Swedish case, France practices show that the concept of voluntary return can be difficult to discuss since every actors seem to have its own interpretation on the subject.

The results from the participant observations are a clear example of what it means to misinterpret a concept. In other words, it seems very complicated to put policies into practice when the law in definition is misinterpreted from one actor to another. Even though this thesis cannot generalize about whether or not this exact situation is a typical
representation of voluntary return practices in France, such a significant event has to be mentioned because it is not possible to consider the police officer’s behavior as something normal.

The author of this paper might think that the previously mentioned participant observations could lack objectivity while he was directly involved in the situation. But on the migrant’s view, it did not feel like a voluntary return based on dignity. Rather than, the migrant was the target of the authorities and even if there was no physical coercion like this is the case of a forced return, psychological persecution seemed to be really hurtful.
7.2 Causes for migrant’s return

People have been migrating with or without force since decades. Without compulsion, the migrants can easily decide whether they want to stay in the foreign country or not. The boundaries to the home country are not sizably strong at the particular time.

Migrants who had not the possibility to decide if they even wanted to leave the home country always feel a stronger connection to it because it was taken from them.

In both cases, families represent a significant factor whether or not migrants return to the home country. The level of migrant’s accommodation in the host country seems to reinforce the importance of family links. For instance, a migrant who decided to move alone in a new country will probably feel the notion of homesickness sooner or later. A notion that is, after all, strongly connected to relatives and friends. If the migrants do not feel at home in the host country, they might think that there is a need for them to return to their home countries on a voluntary purpose. Friends and family are necessary to people in order to build a social network through which migrants become a part of the society. People’s home is where their family is.

Unemployment in the host country and redevelopment in the home country reinforces the wish for migrants to move back in the country they come from. New job opportunities in the home country give a second chance to migrants, which have not succeed in their attempt to integrate in a foreign society. It can be argued that economic factors have an important role in migrants’ decisions.

However, the great influence of social factors should not be underestimated during the analysis of voluntary return migration as a phenomenon. Previous studies show that: “non-economic factors strongly influence the decision to return. […] Appropriating the long-established “pull-pull” framework, return migration is largely determined by socio-cultural pull-factors in the home society rather than dissatisfaction with conditions in the receiving country” (Potter et al. 2005:90).
8. Conclusion

Without no doubt it is important to say that return migration is a subject that requires attention for the academic world. The migrants who return to their home countries do not always experience voluntary return as something positive and some migrants for instance make the decision to return to the host countries. However, this type of return is often considered as a way out for the migrants, whether they are refugees, rejected asylum seekers, irregular or destitute migrants. Both in France and in Sweden, voluntary return is also about dignity. More than providing a financial assistance to the migrants, The French Agency in charge of Immigration and Integration (OFII) and the Swedish Migration Board (SMB) offer the choice to leave the country on a voluntary purpose in order to create new opportunities for the migrants. Administrative and social services have showed that the migrants are assisted from the first discussion with the agents in charge of return procedures (and with social workers) to the date of departure. A lot of efforts could however be made in the communication between the EU-commission, national institutions and international organizations with the hope of harmonizing voluntary return procedures at least on the European level.

Whether it is about voluntary or forced procedures, still many questions have to be answered and more research would be welcomed in this field. The conducted paper did not have for purpose to give definitive answers on the selected research questions. Even though this thesis constituted a first attempt to compare to some extent both French and Swedish return migration policies in theory and practice, it would have been very pretentious to pretend that this study has been fully achieved. This type of qualitative research would need more time and additional resources in order to be fulfilled.

Further research should be made between France and Sweden and it would be very interesting for instance to conduct interviews with the migrants who moved back from France to their home countries. Such a comparative study would have for effects to give more credible results while reinforcing the reliability of future research. A fascinating idea would be to use a different theory in qualitative research having for purpose to analyze migrants’ thoughts before and after their return to the home countries. The
transnationalism theory could be of a greater help for studying migrant’s behaviors when visiting their home countries. “Transnationalism has been used to explain the social ties that individuals maintain in multiple localities […] As a conceptual framework, it helps provide, to some extent, a functionalist interpretation of the meaning behind the return visit in the context of return migration” (Potter et al. 2005:247). Analyzing to which extent do family ties and friends influence migrants’ decision to return to their home countries would be a great source of motivation for conducting a new research.
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10. Appendices

10.1 Glossary

**AHR**: Assisted Humanitarian Return

**AVR**: Assisted Voluntary Return

**IOM**: The International Organization for Migration

**NGO**: Non-Governmental Organization

**OFII**: The French Agency in charge of Immigration and Integration

**OFPRA**: The French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons

**SMB**: The Swedish Migration Board

**UNHCR**: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
10.2 Documentation

Figure 1: Causes and effects of return migration (Ghosh, 2000:1-14)
Figure 2: SMB website in Swedish – “Återvandring” and “Stöd vid frivillig återvandring”.

Figure 3: SMB website in English – “Repatriation” and “Support in connection with repatriation”. 
Figure 4: SMB website in Swedish – “Återvända självmant”.

Figure 5: SMB website in English – “Returning voluntarily”.
Figure 6: OFII’s brochure on the AVR (Assisted Voluntary Return) program.
IF YOU ARE A FOREIGNER WITH NO INCOME, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER OR NOT YOUR PAPERS ARE IN ORDER: you could qualify for repatriation assistance.

OFII CAN HELP YOU ORGANISE YOUR REPATRIATION BY PROVIDING:

- A confidential interview with an OFII counsellor.
- Payment of all your transport costs to your final destination in your home country.
- Organisation of your return journey, including reserving and paying for your travel tickets, obtaining all necessary transport documents, etc.
- Financial grant aid.

TO APPLY FOR ASSISTANCE:

- File your request with the OFII Delegation or regional office that is closest to where you live.
- Alternatively you may download an application form from our website at www.ofii.fr.
  This should then be completed in full and mailed to the OFII office that is nearest to where you live.

*Algeria, Armenia, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, Congo the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Georgia, Guinea, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Moldavia, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, Surinam, Togo, Tunisia, the Ukraine, Vietnam.

Figure 7: OFII’s brochure on the AHR (Assisted Humanitarian Return) program.