



ENHANCING MIGRANT WELL-BEING UPON RETURN THROUGH AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO REINTEGRATION

Building upon the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted on 19 September 2016, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) will set out a range of principles, commitments and understandings among Member States regarding international migration in all its dimensions. The GCM should make an important contribution to global governance and enhance coordination on international migration. For the consideration of Member States, the “Thematic Papers”, developed by IOM, outline core topics and suggestions to inform actors involved in the 2017 consultation process that will lead to the inter-governmental negotiations and final adoption of the GCM.

INTRODUCTION

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) is an integral part of a comprehensive approach to migration management. It contributes to humane and dignified return and reintegration of migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries. It is often implemented in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and diaspora communities and provides vital assistance to tens of thousands of migrants returning home voluntarily every year under a range of diverse circumstances.¹

Reintegration assistance in countries of origin is essential to enhance migrant well-being upon return and is therefore a crucial component of AVRR programmes. It is equally relevant for those migrants who are forcibly returned and in vulnerable situations due to extended periods of time spent abroad, lack of preparedness before return, stigmatization linked to deportation, or otherwise. These migrants, too, and the communities to which they return, are in need of post-arrival support through comprehensive reintegration assistance, as much as voluntary returnees.

Reintegration assistance should address individual/household,² community and structural factors that impact the economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions of returnees’ reintegration. It relies on partnerships, cooperation and ownership. Evidence-based reintegration policy and programming must be based on data collection, monitoring and evaluation.

In the New York Declaration and its Annex II³, AVRR is an important component of (e) (“The facilitation of safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people”) and (s) (“Return and readmission, and improving cooperation in this regard between countries of origin and destination”).⁴ Reintegration also features in the recommendations of the Sutherland Report.⁵ Recommendation 7 specifically calls on States “... to start a dialogue among countries of origin, transit and destination on return practices... with a view to establishing... shared principles to govern cooperation on return and reintegration in all world regions.” In addition, Recommendation 12 calls for improved “data for fact-based migration policies and accountability” – a key requirement for evidence-based reintegration programming.

This paper outlines the existing approaches and key gaps faced by States and stakeholders involved in supporting the reintegration of migrants returning to their home countries, and makes recommendations for concrete actions and commitments that could be included in the Global Compact on Migration.



EXISTING PRINCIPLES

The normative framework

The human rights of migrants and the responsibilities of States are outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), as well as in the nine core international human rights treaties, which apply to all persons, including migrants, and in all contexts, including migration.⁶ Additional regional instruments may also apply, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), or the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981).

Under the international human rights framework, governments are under obligation to respect the human rights of migrants. Specific rights related to their reintegration process include: the right to health and access to social and health-care services;⁷ the right to education;⁸ the right to work;⁹ and the right to take part in cultural life.¹⁰

Reintegration of returning migrants is also embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,¹¹ as defined by the UN Summit of September 2015.¹² The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) make numerous direct and indirect references to migration, starting with the preamble:

“We recognize the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development. We also recognize that international migration is a multi-dimensional reality of major relevance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination, which requires coherent and comprehensive responses. We will cooperate internationally to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration involving full respect for human rights and the humane treatment of migrants regardless of migration status, of refugees and of displaced persons. Such cooperation should also strengthen the resilience of communities hosting refugees, particularly in developing countries. **We underline the right of migrants to return to their country of citizenship, and recall that States must ensure that their returning nationals are duly received.”**

Reintegration assistance contributes directly to SDG Target 10.2 – *Empower/promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status* by supporting returnees in their economic, social and psychosocial reintegration process in their countries of origin and communities to which they return. Reintegration assistance is a core component of well-managed migration by assisting returning migrants. It also plays an important role for Member States, in addressing any challenges associated with return migration and re-inclusion. Therefore, reintegration contributes directly to Target 10.7 – *Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies*. Through local partnerships and cooperation in the implementation of and referrals for reintegration support, AVRR also contributes to Target 17.17 – *Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnership*. Furthermore, by engaging all relevant stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels, AVRR programmes foster a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the importance of reintegration assistance within return management policies, thereby contributing to Target 17.9 – *Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation*.



Such an approach is particularly relevant for countries facing challenges and/or limited capacity to reintegrate returning migrants.

The IOM Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF)¹³ provides a comprehensive overview of the essential elements for planned and well managed migration. With regards to reintegration programmes, MiGOF Objective 1 – good migration governance and related policy should seek to advance the socioeconomic well-being of migrants and society – clearly highlights the need for strong, results-focused reintegration and social cohesion programmes.

ISSUES

Understanding the integrated approach to reintegration

The provision of reintegration assistance to migrants in their countries of origin is an essential part of a comprehensive approach to return migration. Reintegration is typically understood as the re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or process, for example, of a migrant into the society of his or her country of origin or habitual residence.¹⁴ Various elements influence a person's ability to re-integrate into their society and they are not dissimilar from the drivers that resulted in the decision to migrate in the first place. If these are not addressed, they will continue to result in migration as a coping mechanism to actual or perceived inadequate standard of living, insecurity and opportunities.

Factors affecting reintegration can be of an economic, social and psychosocial nature. Reintegration does not only concern the individual returnee, but also communities to which migrants return, and is contingent on the structural conditions in the external environment where the return takes place. The economic, social and psychosocial dimensions of reintegration are in turn shaped by different aspects, such as the circumstances of the return, personal abilities and preferences, acceptance and support by family and peers, and economic, security and other structural conditions in the country of origin.

Reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice rather than necessity.¹⁵ As such, reintegration support can only be successful if there is a certain level of re-inclusion across all economic, social and psychosocial dimensions, which in turn requires an integrated approach, encompassing different levels of interventions at the:

- 1) Individual level: to address the specific needs of beneficiaries and to support them in their first steps upon return;
- 2) Community level: to respond to the needs and concerns of communities to which migrants return (families and non-migrant population alike) by helping to tackle the drivers of irregular migration, forging of social links and increasing the reintegration capacity of communities in regions of high levels of return;
- 3) Structural level: to promote good governance of migration and to ensure continuity of support through adequate local public services.



Existing approaches and gaps

Reintegration assistance in the field of AVRR is typically delivered following an individualized approach, based on the needs and interests of the returnees, and allowing them to lead and take responsibility for their reintegration process. In most cases, support is provided in the form of tailored reintegration packages granted either in cash, in-kind or a combination of the two. Whereas the level of support and the way the assistance is delivered differ depending on the specific context of the return, reintegration measures usually promote the returnees' economic self-sufficiency, for instance by supporting the creation of small businesses, promoting their (re)insertion in the local labour market and increasing returnees' skills through enrolment in education or vocational training courses and/or utilization of newly acquired skills and knowledge.

A migrant-centered perspective is crucial to ensure specific attention to their rights and needs of the individual returnee. Particular areas of concern are access to essential services such as healthcare, shelter, education or access to justice. This is particularly important for migrants who have experienced situations of violence or exploitation, such as victims of trafficking, or for migrants in other vulnerable situations such as unaccompanied migrant children and migrants with medical needs.¹⁶

At the same time, there is an increasing understanding that sustainable reintegration is only achieved when linked to the broader context, as returning individuals are situated within a broader physical and social community structure. Such a holistic approach needs to recognize that the role communities play in migrant reintegration can be manifold. When return is seen as a failure or the decision to migrate in the first place is seen as abandonment, leading to a more hostile environment, reintegration efforts will be negatively impacted. Resentment among communities may also be generated, if the reintegration assistance received by individual returnees is perceived as an undue reward to returnees as opposed to local populations. However, the opposite is also true, as communities can provide a conducive environment for reintegration in terms of safety nets, support of strong social networks, as well as financial resources. When communities perceive return positively, it allows the migrant to return without the risk of being stigmatized, enabling them to re-establish social ties, and facilitating re-insertion into society.

Similarly, structural factors in the external environment play a crucial role in the reintegration process and need to be addressed. Indeed, cooperation between various government departments at the local and national level, policies and legal instruments, and access to employment and basic services (for example housing, education, health, and psychosocial referrals), all greatly impact a returnee's ability to reintegrate successfully. To achieve its full potential, reintegration support targeting individuals and communities should therefore be complemented by measures enhancing institutional capacities, livelihood opportunities and fulfillment of rights.

Furthermore, close partnerships among local governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs, local or regional authorities, legal service providers, health service providers, academic institutions, the private sector and the like) are essential to ensure that migrants have access to necessary and complementary services prior to departure and after arrival.

Finally, there is a need to improve systematic data collection on return migration in general, but also to foster systematic and long-term monitoring and evaluation plans in the context of AVRR, allowing practitioners to identify and address gaps to strengthen future reintegration programming. Until now, the impact of reintegration assistance has been evaluated on a programme basis only. However, harmonized



sets of indicators and monitoring procedures are necessary for comparative research and to analyse the impact of the reintegration assistance for beneficiaries returning under different circumstances and in different contexts, between different countries, as well as in comparison to the local population.

SUGGESTED ACTION

Reintegration assistance should contribute to the management of migration in a way that benefits migrants and society, by advancing their socioeconomic well-being and ensuring dignity and respect for rights. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to approach migrant reintegration in a more integrated manner, accounting for the various factors that affect reintegration and addressing them in a way to respond to the needs and rights of individual returnees, to involve their families and communities to which they return, and to recognize the importance of structural factors.

Achieving the adoption of an integrated approach to reintegration requires several inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing actions at the policy level:

- 1) **Support the provision of comprehensive reintegration assistance for all returnees.** While the provision of comprehensive assistance may be limited at each individual level, community-based approaches and structural interventions should not be dismissed. Only if all levels are properly considered and relevant stakeholders work together, can a truly integrated approach to reintegration be achieved.
- 2) **Address the drivers of irregular migration,¹⁷** including structural, community and individual factors, which may impact reintegration plans: lack of respect for human rights, unemployment/lack of economic opportunities, possible discrimination or stigma, access to adequate housing and health services, psychosocial vulnerabilities, expectations, and so on.
- 3) **Promote a whole-of-government approach** to return migration, in both host countries and countries of origin to enhance cooperation across different sectors and between relevant ministries with different mandates (for example interior, foreign affairs, and labour and social affairs).
- 4) **Identify complementarities between different funding instruments,** namely those used to address return management and those supporting community stabilization and cooperation for development.
- 5) **Support actions encouraging exchanges of information and best practices** among practitioners and allowing for synergies and scaling opportunities through the implementation of joint initiatives at the transnational level.
- 6) **Foster cooperation between all involved stakeholders,** governmental and non-governmental, public and private, local and international, to ensure coordination, complementarity and coherence across reintegration-related activities implemented by different stakeholders.
- 7) **Align reintegration programming with national and local development strategies** and the needs of communities to which migrants return.
- 8) **Mainstream gender in the field of return migration** so that gender is taken into account in the provision of reintegration assistance, and to prevent discrimination based on sex or gender.
- 9) **Ensure that age-related needs are taken into account** in reintegration assistance interventions, and most particularly the specific needs of migrant children – this is even more relevant for those who stayed away for a long time or never lived in the country of return.



Suggested programmatic responses include:

Individuals:

- 1) **Effectively refer migrants to available socioeconomic opportunities and psychosocial support** through systematic mapping and collection of information on reintegration stakeholders and type of specialized assistance offered.
- 2) **Improve pre-departure preparation** of the reintegration process to allow for returnees' ownership of their individual reintegration plan, empowerment and increased self-reliance.
- 3) **Increase flexibility** of reintegration assistance schemes to allow adaptable provision of support to the returnee's profile, needs and skills, preferences and motivation, and to the return context. An adequate balance between cash and in-kind support should also be considered.
- 4) **Ensure adequate follow-up** during the first 12 months following return to accompany returnees.

Communities:

- 1) **Conduct an assessment of the main communities to which migrants return** to ensure that reintegration activities respond to their needs and priorities.
- 2) **Promote reintegration activities linking individual returnees with non-migrant populations** (e.g. joint income-generating activities, local employment schemes). Such initiatives could also be developed and implemented with the support and involvement of diasporas.
- 3) **Encourage the re-establishment of returnees' social networks** by involving family members, friends and the local community in the reintegration process.

Structural interventions:

- 1) **Engage countries in reinforcing local capacities** to deliver reintegration-related services through technical and institutional support: legislative reviews, adoption of guidelines, set-up of inter-ministerial committees, and establishment of referral mechanisms.
- 2) **Reinforce the provision of essential services** and fulfillment of rights in key areas such as education, health, employment and housing for returnees and non-migrant populations alike.
- 3) **Increase sustainability** of reintegration interventions by promoting their **ownership** by local authorities and stakeholders in countries of origin.

Reintegration assistance programming at all three levels of intervention (individual, community and structural) should be evidence-based. This could be achieved by encouraging long-term and systematic implementation of comprehensive and harmonized data-collection and monitoring and evaluation schemes. This will allow for the assessment and comparative analyses of the relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of reintegration assistance programming at all three levels of intervention (individual, community and structural).

¹ While reintegration is a process taking place in different return contexts (for example following spontaneous, forced or assisted voluntary returns, or internal displacement), this paper focuses on reintegration assistance in the context of international return migration). As such, it should be read in conjunction with other IOM Thematic Papers: *Supporting Safe, Orderly and Dignified Migration through Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration*, and *Return and Readmission*.

² Depending on the specific circumstances, families may be part of either the returnees' target group (when they also return from the host country with the main beneficiary) or the communities' target group (if they remained in the country of origin).



³ UN General Assembly resolution 71/1, *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* (3 October 2016), A/RES/71/1.

⁴ It is also relevant to items (c) (“The need to address the drivers of migration, including through strengthened efforts in development (...”), (f) (“The scope for greater international cooperation, with a view to improving migration governance”), (i) (“Effective protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants, including women and children, regardless of their migratory status, and the specific needs of migrants in vulnerable situations”), and (x) (“Cooperation at the national, regional and international levels on all aspects of migration”).

⁵ Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration, A/71/728, 3 February 2017.

⁶ The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990); the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006); and the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

⁷ See, for example, the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*, (1990), Art. 28.

⁸ See, for example, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, (1976), Art. 13.

⁹ *Ibid*, Art. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Art. 15.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² United Nations General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1, (New York, 2015).

¹³ Adopted by the IOM Council in 2015, the MiGOF lays out the essential elements for facilitating orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration: C/106/40, 4 November 2015. Available from <https://governingbodies.iom.int/system/files/en/council/106/C-106-40-Migration-Governance-Framework.pdf>.

¹⁴ International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on Migration*.

¹⁵ While there is no universally agreed definition of the term “reintegration” and a consistent conceptual or policy framework applying to sustainable reintegration is still lacking, this approach to sustainable reintegration is also highlighted in: Z. Whyte and D.V. Hirslund, “International Experiences with the Sustainable Assisted Return of Rejected Asylum Seekers”, *DIIS Report 2013:13*, (Copenhagen, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2013). Available from www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/97061/1/774510943.pdf; Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, “Assisted Voluntary Return: An Opportunity for Development?”, *Briefing No. 20/2009*, (Brighton, 2009). Available from www.migrationdrc.org/publications/briefing_papers/BP20.pdf; R. Ruben, M. Van Houte, and T. Davids, “What Determines the Embeddedness of Forced-Return Migrants? Rethinking the Role of Pre- and Post-Return Assistance”, *The International Migration Review*, Vol. 43, No. 4. Available from www.jstor.org/stable/20681735?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents; K. Khoser and K. Kuschminder, *Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants*, (Geneva, International Organization for Migration / University of Maastricht, 2015). Available from www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/What-We-Do/docs/AVRR-Research-final.pdf.

¹⁶ See IOM Thematic Paper: *Effective protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants, including women and children, regardless of their migratory status, and the specific needs of migrants in vulnerable situations*.

¹⁷ See IOM Thematic Paper: *The need to address the drivers of migration, including through strengthened efforts in development, poverty eradication and conflict prevention and resolution*.