

DISCUSSION PAPER No. 291

A sustainable development approach to return and reintegration: DILEMMAS, CHOICES AND POSSIBILITIES

MIGRATION

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This paper explores the role of development cooperation in reintegration support, in the context of sustainable development and aid effectiveness. Policymakers in Europe and internationally have been giving renewed attention to sustainable return and reintegration of failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants. One of the aims of European governments is for return to take place in a dignified way and for reintegration to be sustainable (which means for returnees to reach levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities and psychosocial well-being).

Development actors have also increasingly been involved in the reintegration of returnees. They can address several factors at the individual, community or structural level – for instance, providing financial or psychosocial support, supporting community-based projects or capacity building for local and national government structures. These may matter for sustainable development and can influence the sustainability of the reintegration process. Yet, development actors have also been pushed into roles that follow migration-related priorities, which has led to scepticism about their engagement in this area.

While there is no ‘silver bullet’ for a development approach to sustainable reintegration, this paper provides guidance on how international development cooperation can best navigate the challenges and opportunities in the area of return, sustainable reintegration and development. It does so by summarising lessons, dilemmas and emerging good practices.

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Acronyms

AFD	Agence Française de Développement
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AU	African Union
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (<i>Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung</i>)
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
DIIS	Danish Institute for International Studies
ERRIN RIAT	European Return and Reintegration Network - Reintegration Assistance Tool
EU	European Union
EUTF	EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GCM	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GFMD	Global Forum on Migration & Development
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation (<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i>)
GMF	The German Marshall Fund of the United States
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
INTEGRA	Support Program for the Socio-Economic Integration of Youth (<i>in Guinea</i>)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ORION	Operationalizing an Integrated Approach to Reintegration
ITC	International Trade Centre
KNOMAD	Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoUs	Memoranda of Understandings
MPF	Migration Partnership Framework
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCD	Policy Coherence for Development
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SoP	Standard Operating Procedure
UN	United Nations
UNU-CRIS	The United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies

Executive Summary

Return and sustainable reintegration of failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants from countries of destination and transit has received renewed attention from policymakers both in Europe and internationally. One of the key aims of European governments is that return takes place in a dignified way and that reintegration is sustainable. Development actors have also become increasingly involved in supporting the reintegration of returnees with the aim to achieve the best possible development outcome for returnees and their communities.

From a humanitarian or development perspective, several factors at the individual, community or structural level, e.g. relating to economic, legal, social or psychosocial conditions, can be addressed as they may matter for sustainable development and can influence the reintegration process and its sustainability. Yet, development actors have also been pushed into roles that more strongly follow migration-related objectives, which has led to scepticism about their engagement in this area.

This guidance note explores the role of development cooperation and discusses reintegration support in the context of sustainable development and aid effectiveness. It aims to provide guidance for how international development cooperation can best navigate existing dilemmas and possibilities in the area of return, sustainable reintegration and development. Development actors can assume the following possible roles:



Working with or within existing systems to support national and community development and help strengthen local systems and capacities is in our view the most favourable role for development actors from a perspective of aid effectiveness. The aim is to systematically improve general conditions for citizens, including those of returnees, increase reception capacities of host communities for returnees and make migration and return journeys safer. This is in line with supporting governments in better managing all aspects of a migration cycle.



Mitigating negative impacts emerging from larger-scale returns with a focus on resilience, security and development can be another important role for development actors. This can take the form of accompanying large-scale return processes from the EU or elsewhere with different interventions to support reintegration. Here, the aim is to cushion negative impacts but not necessarily a more positive longer-term sustainable development agenda.



Accompanying return programmes with development reintegration assistance can be used to incentivise stronger cooperation of countries of origin on return as part of a partnership approach. While development objectives can still be pursued, this role bears a higher risk of instrumentalisation of development aid for migration-related objectives.



Incentivising individuals to consider voluntary return and start planning for the reintegration process, e.g. through including them in on-going development programmes. This role is very close to classical AVRR projects, though it may be tagged to broader community or government capacity support aspects. While individual support is important for sustainable reintegration, the link to longer-term development impact is less clear.

Following these roles, development actors, and those approaching reintegration from a sustainable development point of view may face various issues and dilemmas when designing and engaging in reintegration support programmes. These, as well as our suggestions on how to approach sustainable reintegration from a development perspective, are presented in the following summary tables.

Sustainable reintegration starts before return

Reintegration is part of a larger migration process and its sustainability is influenced by experiences during transit, at destination and during return. Conditions of stay and return and assistance received during the return process thus matter and have implications for prospects of sustainable reintegration. Development actors may not always be able to influence these factors but can focus on the following roles:

Suggested approaches for development actors

Focus on how to make migration journeys and return safer and improve conditions during transit and stay through support to partner countries for better migration governance, service provision and through lobbying for safe and legal pathways along migration routes.

Assess the prospects for sustainable reintegration and whether they can be linked to longer-term development rationales. Cooperate with migration and return actors in adequately assessing country situations and the viability of reintegration support from a long-term sustainable development perspective (e.g. provide input on country and context assessments) and adjust reintegration programmes and expectations.

Integrate the relationship between quality of asylum and the quality of (re)integration into planning. Aim to implement measures that can enhance experiences and resources during stay and that can contribute to longer-term development opportunities of individuals. Support the matching of origin country needs (labour market, skill needs) with short-term training and qualification measures in destination or transit countries.

Feed adequate information on reintegration and development programmes including returnees implemented in partner countries into pre-return counseling; Possibly play a role in connecting to relevant activities pre-return.

Priorities, ownership and joint approaches

Perspectives and interests concerning return and reintegration often differ between European states and partner countries of return. The underlying objectives of EU actors in the design of reintegration programmes will thus need to be squared with those of partner authorities – both at national and local levels – since a lack of ownership and political motivation can undermine sustainability and prospects to incorporate reintegration into longer-term development planning.

Suggested approaches for development actors

Promote reintegration as part of broader partnerships and dialogues at national and regional levels with a view to link the reintegration of returnees to wider development strategies of partner countries, so that benefits to all citizens is a key objective.

Design programmes from a needs-based, bottom-up perspective in line with national and local development plans and promote area-based planning in returnee-prone areas. Involve local actors from the start, while taking the context into account; several different ministries of the partner country should be involved, in order to make the approach multi-sectoral. The partner government and local actors ideally take lead roles in the planning phase and have a role in co-implementation or co-monitoring.

Open programmes to both voluntary and forced returnees from various locations as this is more in line with a development-based angle to reintegration and often favored by partner governments.

Include the structural level into sustainable reintegration, strengthen the State's infrastructure and institutional power. In fragile situations, this may include activities spanning humanitarian, security (peace- and statebuilding) and development fields, while integrating the needs of returnees and host communities.

Balancing individual and systemic approaches to sustainable reintegration

Individual support may be easier and quicker to organise and act as immediate incentive. Yet, to facilitate sustainable reintegration and to link it to longer-term development, national, local and community systems, structures and capacities will need to be reinforced. This requires a longer-term perspective and investment, as sustainable reintegration does not happen quickly. However, tensions may emerge between the needs and interests of individual returnees, return communities and local authorities.

Suggested approaches for development actors

Change the lens and support actors and existing community-based initiatives in areas of high return instead of supporting returnees to have an impact on the community.

Adapt funding procedures to be flexible so that more grassroots initiatives can be supported (versus donor-driven programmes that are often tendered and thus open to only specific and often larger actors).

Factor in the geographic mobility of return migrants in support programmes through designing flexible models of assistance.

Integrating returnees into existing development programmes and designing specific programmes

In some contexts, reconciling the need to target programmes from a migration logic with development principles (following poverty-, needs-, or vulnerability-based targeting) will not present a challenge as both returnees and host communities may be amongst the vulnerable groups and in need of assistance and failing to address (re-)integration can lead to worse development outcomes. In others, however, these groups may not be those worst-off and would not be prioritised applying humanitarian or developmental criteria.

Suggested approaches for development actors

Assess whether targeting programmes from a migration (return/reintegration) logic can be reconciled with aid effectiveness and development principles following poverty-, needs-, or vulnerability-based targeting in a specific context.

Open to all groups of returnees (voluntary, involuntary, from various locations) without discrimination or to both non-migrant citizens and returnees. Ensure that inclusion or targeting of the group of returnees does not create tensions.

Approach reintegration from a structural and community level perspective with a view to strengthen state, business and civil society institutional capacities and infrastructure rather than focusing on individuals only, which could be left to AVRR support programmes that complement broader efforts. A purely individual approach to sustainable reintegration may be favoured for returnees returning to areas with very few returnees – but this may be beyond the scope of development actors.

Integrated programming jointly with other actors versus centralised approaches

Whether returnees and hosting communities can be comprehensively and over the longer-term supported may depend on a combination of efforts of various actors. In practice, to date, the approach with different donors funding different programmes as part of the reintegration puzzle has not worked particularly well. While programmes often take an integrated approach on paper, there may be little preparation in thinking through practical implications of working across actors. Reintegration programmes that aim for longer-term sustainability and development impact will need to decide whether a more centralised approach or one that aims for a web of complementary actors will be more feasible and effective.

Suggested approaches for development actors

Determine and set up complementarities between different funding instruments (e.g. of one donor government), which address parts of the puzzle ranging from return management to community stabilisation and development cooperation.

Decide on a good model for coordination and organising referrals. Involve local government actors and institutions (if sufficiently strong to play this role) and provide additional capacity support for their role.

Right actors to work (with) on sustainable reintegration from a development perspective

Both migration and development actors have worked on reintegration and some incorporate a long-term development approach more than others. Development actors are traditionally better at working with and strengthening country systems so they can integrate return and reintegration into service provision in the longer-term. IOM has led many reintegration programmes and usually has strong ties to migration-relevant ministries in partner governments, yet some interviewees for this study pointed out that they do not perceive it as an actor with strong experience on sustainable development outcomes. Government actors interviewed in Afghanistan, Senegal and Bangladesh feel that in order to foster longer-term and sustainable reintegration efforts, their involvement will need to increase. Private sector actors have also been found to be under-represented in reintegration programmes.

Suggested approaches for development actors

Select implementing agencies based on track record in working with government and through structures, focusing on longer-term sustainability aspects, avoiding to set up parallel structures while building trusted partnerships with local and bottom-up actors. Be aware of existing competition and overlaps (including both development and migration actors working with the same local partners and carrying out similar activities through subcontracting).

Link to existing structures and schemes (state-run programmes, local development initiatives, private sector activities, etc.) beyond what is offered by the programme or programme partners. This can help close gaps in support and also help broaden the options available for reintegration support.

Aim to identify common ground and cooperation with private sector actors (both large- and small-scale). Especially in areas of high return, support to larger firms may be able to include reintegration efforts while focusing on local economic development.

Important elements of sustainable reintegration programmes

Above dilemmas and challenges have pointed to the decisions that need to be taken when designing reintegration assistance with a view to facilitate development and sustainability in reintegration efforts. Irrespective of these choices that will have to enter into the design of reintegration support, there are a number of elements that the process of designing and implementing reintegration programmes should entail. These are summarised in the following.

1. **Context analysis:** Context matters greatly for designing good reintegration programmes from a sustainable development perspective. Reintegration assistance should thus be planned based on a contextual analysis of the return environment, which should entail the following elements: fragility aspects, available services, individual capacities, needs and preferences of returnees (or varying groups of returnees) and host communities, structural conditions, elements that can do harm (sources of tension, power dynamics, conflict issues), needs of labour markets, existing stakeholders and coordination mechanisms as well as political economy factors influencing the governance of reintegration.
2. **Clarity of expectations in relation to sustainable development:** Reintegration support programmes often only address parts of the elements of sustainable reintegration processes and for some it would be ambitious to claim that they can contribute to sustainable development. Being clear about these contributions (all of which are valid) can thus gauge the level of expectations on sustainability. Lastly, adequate human and financial resources, which match the objectives and levels of ambition, are key.
3. **Harmonisation and alignment:** These principles are valid for all development programmes. It seems to be especially important in areas of high return, where there has been an increase in donor programmes, which largely vary in terms of the benefits they provide. This can lead to tensions and is not in line with general aid effectiveness principles. So far, there has been little interest in funding more standardised reintegration programmes. Development actors will need to play a stronger role in pushing for harmonisation, alignment and coordinated measures.
4. **Coordination structures and MoUs:** Complementarities between programmes, which support different parts of reintegration support for individuals or communities, do not always work optimally. The following elements should thus be thought through and be part of support programmes aiming at sustainable reintegration prior to implementation: mapping the network of partners and assess their capacities (e.g. how many referrals they can take) as well as building trust with them; memoranda of understandings with government actors and other implementing partners, which include arrangements for practical cooperation; coordination structures to link to national actors and their development plans as well as coordination networks for referrals.
5. **Gender and diversity:** Ensuring that cross-cutting issues that matter for development agendas, such as gender equality and diversity aspects, are reflected in reintegration support programmes is another standard value that should be considered. This means that diverse reintegration needs and perspectives of key groups are reflected in the community and systemic support that is provided.
6. **M&E, learning and accountability systems for sustainable reintegration from a development perspective:** This would include a focus on longer-term and larger scale longitudinal analysis, which includes impacts not only at individual level but also on community development. There is room to carry out more comparative research in the field on how different approaches impact on these dimensions and to better understand conditions that make specific reintegration approaches successful in terms of longer-term development and structural effects.

1. Introduction and background

Rationale and scope of this note

Return and sustainable reintegration of migrants from countries of destination and transit has received renewed attention from policymakers both in Europe and internationally, culminating in the adoption of global commitments and the call for common standards. The facilitation of sustainable reintegration in the context of return is an element of both the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).¹ Migration, which includes return migration, is mainstreamed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN General Assembly 2015). The proposed ‘New Pact on Migration and Asylum’ of the European Union (EU) Commission also highlights that *“return is more effective when [...] accompanied with strong reintegration measures.”*²

Against this backdrop, the Swedish government has asked ECPDM to explore and analyse the issues of return and sustainable reintegration³ and illustrate with experiences of past and ongoing activities as well as principles and standards. One point of departure is that return takes place in a dignified way, that reintegration is sustainable and that it has the best possible development outcome for returnees and their communities. This includes a possible role for development cooperation. This guidance note will explore the role of development cooperation and discuss reintegration support in the context of sustainable development and aid effectiveness.

The note focuses primarily on return and reintegration of failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants from Europe⁴ but also includes experiences in the context of South-South return. It builds on a literature review of sources noted in the bibliography section as well as 19 semi-structured interviews with officials, international organisations, development agencies and researchers.⁵ The underlying assumption and starting point is that returns of migrants without the right to stay in the EU will take place. While the best scenario for return is for migrants to do so in a voluntary way, this is not always the case – either because migrants have no other viable options to stay or because they face detrimental conditions in their current location.⁶

¹ While the GCR calls for states to *“plan for and support measures to encourage voluntary and informed repatriation [and] reintegration”*, including through incorporating sustainable and inclusive reintegration into national development planning (See UNHCR 2018 (Paragraph 12)), objective 21 of the GCM advocates for *“cooperation on facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission as well as sustainable reintegration”*, through providing equal access to a range of services and opportunities to migrants, while addressing the needs of communities of return (See UN General Assembly 2019).

² The EU Commission is currently devising a forthcoming strategy on voluntary return and reintegration (see EC 2020).

³ The Swedish government has supported Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) implemented by IOM in the past. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) also has experience with providing support to the reintegration of returnees (e.g. in Northern Iraq).

⁴ In our analysis, this may not be the best starting point for approaching return from a development perspective as the link between the two are stronger in the context of voluntary return after a successful migration trajectory. Yet, it is the reality in which much of the discussion on linking return and reintegration with development takes place.

⁵ For a description of the methodology see Annex 1.

⁶ This return process is different from return and reintegration of ‘relatively successful’ migrants that voluntarily decide to leave after having gained resources and completed certain objectives of their migration trajectory. Return migration takes place along a continuous spectrum from voluntary to involuntary. International frameworks such as the GCM highlight that returns should be voluntary and Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes also operate under the assumption of voluntariness, yet are usually offered to migrants without the right to stay. Migrants whose return decision is an inevitable consequence of failed migration and integration experiences have a lesser degree of ‘voluntariness’ than those with an explicit intention to return having achieved their migration objectives. Some countries, like Norway, have dropped the notion of ‘voluntary’ return in the context of return of failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants and refer instead to ‘assisted return’ (See UDI N.d; Interview Scholar, September 2020).

Box 1: Conceptual clarifications: The nature of ‘sustainable reintegration’ and ‘dignified return’

There is no agreed definition of what ‘**sustainable reintegration**’ entails. Yet various concepts, which have evolved over time, aim to characterise its nature. IOM states that *“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.”* Others consider sustainable reintegration as a durable solution referring to criteria outlined in other frameworks.⁷ Adopting a holistic perspective, reintegration can further be considered as a two-way process with responsibilities not only at the individual level but also for the country of origin governing return and reintegration (Koser and Kuschminder 2015).⁸ Reintegration does not happen in a vacuum. A returnee’s ability to successfully reintegrate is influenced by the political, institutional, environmental, economic and social conditions in his/her country of origin (IOM 2015: 14 and IOM 2018b: 15). The GCM takes this into account and highlights conditions for reintegration to be sustainable relating to (i) conducive [environment] for personal safety, (ii) economic empowerment, and (iii) inclusion and social cohesion in communities.

Further mobility trajectories may well be part of sustainable reintegration processes.⁹ Definitions today thus acknowledge that returns can be circular *“with returnees migrating back to their host country, once or many times over a period of time, either as a planned strategy, or as a coping mechanism.”* (Samuel Hall 2019: 19). Yet according to IOM, this should be a matter of choice rather than necessity for the reintegration process to be successful (IOM N.d.b.: 2).

Sustainability of reintegration is influenced by the process of return. The GCM commits states to cooperate for ‘**safe and dignified return**’, characterised by (i) due process, (ii) individual assessment and (iii) effective remedy.¹⁰

From a **development perspective**, ‘**sustainability**’ takes on another meaning. As the OECD (2020a) points out: *“A development perspective assesses sustainability by the extent to which reintegration support contributes to the development of the origin country. In addition to expecting the individual returnee to benefit, as above, it extends to consider overall impact – economically, politically and socially.”*

Types of support to sustainable reintegration and the role of international cooperation

Support can be provided to return and reintegration at **different levels, through different types of assistance** ranging from individual or community-based support to systemic governance reform and in **various areas** (social protection, justice, psychosocial assistance, financial services, vocational training, employment opportunities, skill recognition, housing, land and property, etc.).

In order to ensure that return takes place in a humane and dignified way, a majority of (voluntary) returnees returned from Europe are assisted with return incentives and reintegration support through ‘Assisted Voluntary

⁷ For instance, see the reference to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)’s 8 criteria for durable solutions noted in Samuel Hall 2019 p. 12.

⁸ Interview scholar, September 2020; See also Kuschminder (2017).

⁹ Based on its experience in return, IOM has changed its focus from the concept of ‘sustainable return’ to ‘sustainable reintegration’, reflecting the realities of mobility of returnees (see IOM N.d.b.) / Interview September 2020.

¹⁰ Principles of safe and dignified return are further specified and embedded in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000), in the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (2000). The European Convention on Human Rights (1950), and the European Directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals also apply.

Return and Reintegration Programmes’ (AVRR).¹¹ Such support programmes have taken various forms in the past, and have to a large extent focused on the individual also with a view to create incentives for voluntary return. They have been led by migration agencies and ministries together with partners. Limited evidence exists on their effectiveness and whether they have had a sustainable impact on reintegration.

In recent years, and especially since the ‘2015 migration crisis’, the number of actors active in return and reintegration programming has increased. Prior, the discussion on return and reintegration was one either of migration management or of humanitarian assistance (e.g. in the case of large-scale regional refugee returns). Since reintegration in host communities touches not only on individual but also systemic aspects in countries of origin, a stronger focus has been put on the role of development cooperation in supporting the *sustainable reintegration* of returnees. Development actors have thus started to devise strategies – at times together with migration actors – in support of (sustainable) reintegration. But actors traditionally engaged in return, such as IOM, have also shifted approaches to become more ‘developmental’ focusing on community and systemic governance aspects and linking assistance to longer-term development questions. This has led to a stronger attention to questions concerning the nexus between return, reintegration and sustainable development (IOM N.d.) (See Box 2).

From a humanitarian or development perspective, several factors at the individual, community or structural level, e.g. relating to economic, social or psychosocial conditions (IOM 2018b), can be addressed as they may matter for sustainable development and can influence the reintegration process and its sustainability. Moreover, there are several reasons, with different underlying motivations, why development cooperation may play a role to support the processes of return and sustainable reintegration (see graph on the next page for some examples). Not all of them follow a pure ‘development logic’ as they may result from a trend visible in a number of European countries, in which development cooperation is being utilised for migration-related objectives.

¹¹ IOM describes AVRR programmes as providing “*administrative, logistical and financial support, including reintegration assistance to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host/transit country and who decide to return to their country of origin*” (See IOM 2019b).

POSSIBLE ROLES OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION

ecdpm



ROLE

Working with or within existing systems to support national and community development:

- Economic opportunities
- Local systems for service provision
- Peacebuilding/statebuilding

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Improving general conditions for citizens, which may include the group of returnees, so that host communities can adequately receive returnees and all find livelihood opportunities in their community.

Addressing original drivers of irregular (re-) migration and displacement.

LONGER-TERM OBJECTIVES

- Sustainable long-term development from which all citizens (including returnees) benefit.
- Safe, orderly and regular migration as planned strategy, not as coping mechanism.

IMPLICATIONS FOR A DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

This role is in line with the typical approaches of development actors and can follow longer-term development objectives, though supporting migration systems may not be the top priority of partner countries.



ROLE

Accompanying return programmes with reintegration assistance or with broader development support for countries of origin.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Incentivising stronger cooperation of countries of origin on returning their nationals through a balanced and comprehensive approach.

LONGER-TERM OBJECTIVES

- Partnership approach to return and broader migration governance.
- Increasing effectiveness and efficiency of return process and increase return numbers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR A DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Objectives are migration and not necessarily development related. While development objectives can still be pursued, this role bears a higher risk for instrumentalisation of development aid for migration-related objectives.



ROLE

Accompanying large-scale return (from EU or elsewhere) with different reintegration interventions.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Ensuring that drivers of fragility or insecurity are not exacerbated.

LONGER-TERM OBJECTIVES

"Do no harm"; cushioning possible negative impacts of returns on communities but no longer-term sustainable development objectives.

IMPLICATIONS FOR A DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

This role aims to mitigate negative effects emerging from larger-scale returns and is thus important from a fragility, security and development perspective. It however contributes to minimise harm rather than to a positive longer-term migration and development agenda.



ROLE

Providing individual and community support to create start-up capital and livelihood opportunities.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Incentivising individuals to consider voluntary return and start planning for the reintegration process.

LONGER-TERM OBJECTIVES

Increase the number of voluntary returns and minimising the risk of re-migration.

IMPLICATIONS FOR A DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Objectives are migration and not necessarily development related. While individual support can be important, it may have fewer longer-term development impacts, especially if administered in a way which does not strengthen local systems.

Despite a certain rapprochement, there is not yet a full convergence of ideas, underlying philosophies, starting points and interests between migration and development actors. While from a migration management point of view, the sustainability of return and thus reintegration (and the functioning of underlying systems) is important, fostering sustainable development of origin countries or communities is not the main motivation or objective. On the other hand, there has been scepticism from the development community on whether the return and reintegration of migrants is a priority development objective. When looking at reintegration through the lens of sustainable development and aid effectiveness, a number of tensions thus emerge.¹² Some of the practical dilemmas described in the following section emerge from these tensions and it is thus worth keeping these in mind when reflecting on reintegration programmes from a development perspective.

Box 2: A link between return, reintegration and development?

The link between return processes, reintegration support and development outcomes is contested. This has led to some caution by development actors to fully buy into a migration and return & reintegration agenda and deliberations on where they may add value. In the migration literature, this link has been researched, especially in the context of fully voluntary return migration after completion of migration projects with some nuanced findings.¹³ The group of returnees with failed migration projects is different and one may not expect “*socially and economically marginalized “failed” return migrants to make a significant contribution to “development”*” (Haase and Honerath 2016: 11).

While the OECD Development Assistance Committee allows certain costs of AVR(R) programmes to be counted as Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), Kuschminder (2015) points out that the relationship between such programmes and development can “*only be labelled as spurious [...] as evidence is not strong enough to suggest that AVR has positive development impacts [...] [nor] negative development impacts*” (Kuschminder, 2015). Some also question whether reintegration of migrants is an important development objective relative to other priorities in a specific country. While this is context-specific, the relationship is questioned especially when returning migrants belong to groups that are generally better off than non-migrant citizens. Most interviewees working on current reintegration programmes have thus not been positive on the link between return, reintegration and development – at least not in the way reintegration programmes currently function. Newer approaches to return and reintegration, viewing it as part of broader migration governance, establish a link to development through the lens of governance, pointing to well-governed migration being beneficial for development.

In general, the following positive development benefits may emerge from reintegration programmes as further highlighted in this note. Some of these however take place in a context of voluntary return and after a successful migration trajectory and are less relevant for returning failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants. They may also not always lead to systemic longer-term development outcomes.

Returnees can boost the economy of origin communities by opening businesses upon their return.

A number of development programmes aim to create opportunities for returnees and local residents to earn income and support local economies taking a community-oriented approach. In some examples, businesses of returnees provide work opportunities for locals.

¹² For further background, Newland et al. (2018) describe a number of these tensions and the balance that needs to be achieved between the demands of various frameworks (rule of law, humanitarian, developmental, reintegration, security and stability, political).

¹³ See for example Akesson and Eriksson Baaz (2015) for the African context.

Returnees can bring skills and knowledge to origin communities.	<i>Some programmes provide pre-return vocational training and skills workshops to returnees in an area that is important for the origin community. Others aim to work on facilitating skill transfer and recognition.</i>
A focus on reintegration often sheds light on structural challenges that led to outward migration.	Reintegration and development programmes can then focus on such wider development challenges, which may include issues such as infrastructure to increase market access. ¹⁴

2. Key issues and dilemmas

EU and EU member state officials as well as development implementing agencies may face various issues and dilemmas when designing and engaging in support programmes in the context of return and reintegration, which aim to strengthen development outcomes. These, as well as potential responses, will be outlined in the following.

2.1. Sustainable reintegration starts before return

Reintegration is part of a larger migration process and its sustainability is influenced by experiences during transit, at destination and during return. Conditions of stay and return and assistance received during the return process thus matter and have implications for prospects of sustainable reintegration as well as the contribution of returnees to sustainable development. Yet, development actors working on the reintegration-development nexus may not always be able to influence or are not directly concerned with them.

First, not all returns can lead to sustainable reintegration and not all support to reintegration may have a clear connection to longer-term development. This is subject to:

(i) the **vulnerabilities that individuals or families may face** in their country of return – some of which may be exacerbated by the return itself.¹⁵ Return procedures should thus include upfront **individual assessments** about not only whether areas of return are safe but also whether reintegration prospects exist and reintegration can in fact be sustainable from a development point of view based on individual factors. This can help adjust expectations for individual reintegration support and give guidance to development actors whether such support in certain cases is predominantly humanitarian with the aim to reduce negative impacts or whether a link to a longer-term development rationale can be established.

(ii) the **context in the country to which migrants return**, which strongly determines possibilities for sustainable reintegration. It makes an important difference whether return takes place after forced displacement or in the context of (other) irregular migration. Communities in fragile countries or countries in conflict, including in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, face challenges with absorbing returnees in large numbers, let alone offering services

¹⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2020b. Reintegration Assistance – Good, Promising and Innovative Practices. Practice #8: Revitalizing Economy and Enhancing Social Cohesion through Community-Based Planning and Community Prioritized Infrastructure Works: the Construction of a Bridge in Somalia. May 2020.

¹⁵ Vulnerabilities can be exacerbated by return. Research by Samuel Hall shows that “prematurely induced returns result in increased needs and exposure to risk among returnees such as cycles of displacement and exile.” (Samuel Hall 2019: 4; see also Alpes and Majcher, 2020).

for all of their citizens.¹⁶ While the aim is longer-term sustainability, **in some contexts, reintegration assistance will have to be initially more humanitarian in nature and expectations for sustainable development or reintegration outcomes may be slimmer than in others.** In many countries where EU member states invest in return and reintegration programming (e.g. through AVRR programmes), there are pressing structural development needs related to food security and water – which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 situation¹⁷ – which would need to receive priority attention. The strength of the rationale for linking return, reintegration support and longer-term development may thus differ and development actors will need to have realistic expectations based on such assessments.

Second, the prospects for sustainable reintegration and link to livelihood prospects upon return depend on the migration experience.¹⁸ This is influenced by the migration journey, the amount of time spent away, the socio-economic conditions during the stay, knowledge and resources gained, the networks built and maintained, etc. These experiences also interconnect with psychosocial well-being. Research in Afghanistan and Somalia revealed that those with greater financial, human and social capital fare better on return (Samuel Hall 2019). Returnees after ‘unsuccessful’ migration trajectories often face additional challenges caused by feelings of shame, loss and insecurity as well as possible stigma in their communities (IOM 2015: 14). While there may be limits and trade-offs, destination countries can implement measures to enhance experiences and resources, including through reduced detention, possibilities for training and temporary work (e.g. for asylum seekers) that transfers skills that can be useful upon return, support for keeping networks in countries of origin and counselling. These activities can strengthen positive links with sustainability and development after return. This requires **a whole-of-government approach characterised by a better strategic, policy and programmatic link between asylum and reintegration support and better coordination between migration, return and development actors.**

Third, the degree of ‘voluntariness’ of return decisions (see Box 2) and the ‘preparedness’ influence prospects for successful reintegration upon return and whether links to positive development opportunities can easily be established.¹⁹ The motivation of migrants, their active participation and ownership of reintegration processes are key factors in determining reintegration success.²⁰ While not all returns can be fully voluntary, migrants need accessible, neutral and comprehensive information about conditions upon return, possibilities and available assistance (including that provided through development actors) as well as their limits (possible risks, delays, etc.) in order to make informed decisions about further trajectories. Migrants may require the support of return counselling services for this.²¹ This can be the basis for openness to make return preparations and to discuss assistance that can help make a better return feasible, which in turn facilitates reintegration.²² Provision of information is also key to set expectations and avoid possible frustrations later on that negatively impact reintegration and should also set out obligations of and expectations on the returnee.²³ There have for instance been complaints about misinformation about the realities of reintegration processes and EU-funded assistance in

¹⁶ Returnees in Somalia and Afghanistan have ended up experiencing re-displacement upon return (Samuel Hall 2019).

¹⁷ Interview Implementing agency and Researcher, both October 2020.

¹⁸ A forthcoming DELMI study on Return and Reintegration will include questions about how the pre-return and migration experience influences reintegration processes. It will be available at <https://www.delmi.se/en/amif>.

¹⁹ Research findings have confirmed that involuntary return can be a considerable obstacle for personal development and reintegration (Haase and Honerath 2016) and IOM points out that “readiness to return and a freely taken decision support the reintegration process” (IOM 2015).

²⁰ Interviewees noted that from a psychological perspective, a returnee needs to be in the right mindset and have a positive attitude that enables proactiveness. For instance, in Afghanistan, reintegration success depends strongly on the ability to (re-)build a network (Interview Reintegration expert, September 2020).

²¹ Though not all returnees require such assistance and some return without it and further assistance.

²² Interviews Return and Reintegration experts, September 2020.

²³ Research in Afghanistan has shown that the lack of information pre-return has led to “frustration at the disconnect between the support [migrants] [...] were expecting to receive and the realities of this support once they returned.” (Samuel Hall 2019: 28).

African contexts.²⁴ **Development actors that may be involved in providing individual or community assistance upon return should thus ideally already be involved in the provision of adequate information as part of the pre-return process.** In this context, a key challenge will be the aim to speed up return as proposed again under the new European Pact on Migration. While understandable from a migration management perspective, it also reduces the time and window for preparing for later sustainable reintegration and to strengthen positive links to a development agenda.



Suggested approaches for governments of EU member states

Focus on how to make migration journeys and return safer , including support to establish better conditions during transit and stay (including access to services and integration prospects) and minimise trauma experienced during journeys as it impacts reintegration prospects later.	
Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies	Support origin and transit countries to better govern migration (protection, integration and migration governance systems) with a long-term development perspective Support the strengthening of service provision and access to services for migrants in transit and destination countries Lobby for possibilities to establish safe and legal pathways and support such pathways between partner countries and along particular migration routes
Ministry of Interior & Return agencies	Establish options for safe and legal pathways (e.g. humanitarian visas; legal migration channels) Include the psycho-social dimension in individual pre-return support
Jointly assess the prospects for sustainable reintegration and individual or wider development prospects of programmes depending on the context of return and individual factors. Decide what type of programmes are best advanced by which actors and base expectations regarding sustainability and development impact on context.	
Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies	Cooperate with migration and return actors in adequately assessing country situations and the viability of reintegration support from a long-term sustainable development perspective (e.g. provide input on country and context assessments) and adjust reintegration programmes and expectations
Ministry of Interior & Return agencies	Carry out assessments of individuals and country contexts as part of pre-return counselling and adjust support programmes as well as expectations
Integrate the relationship between quality of asylum and the quality of (re)integration into planning; Aim to implement measures that can enhance experiences and resources during stay and that can contribute to longer-term development	

²⁴ Interview Researcher, September 2020.

opportunities of individuals; **Engage in a whole-of government approach** characterised by good coordination between migration, return and development actors.

Foreign/Development
Ministry & Development
agencies

Support the matching of origin country needs (labour market, skill needs) with short-term training and qualification measures in asylum countries

Ministry of Interior &
Return agencies

Improve quality of asylum and access to skill development, training and other opportunities prior to return

Invest in **improving quality and timeliness of counselling and information provision** and start reintegration talks already in the country of destination before return; Include information about the asylum process, conditions upon return, available assistance (incl. timeframe, procedures, expectations and conditions), safety of the return journey, opportunities for jobs that match skills etc.; Connect individuals to family, returnees that have received assistance already, mentors or other relevant networks (social and business) as part of pre-return counselling. This will need to be organised efficiently given the aim to speed up return processes in the EU.

Foreign/Development
Ministry & Development
agencies

Feed adequate information of reintegration and development programmes including returnees implemented in partner countries into pre-return counselling; Possibly play a role in connecting to relevant activities pre-return

Ministry of Interior &
Return agencies

Improve quality and timeliness of counselling and information provision and link to other relevant actors (e.g. existing development programmes relevant for returnees)



Initiatives and good practices

- Interview partners highlighted Germany's pre-departure counselling. On the website returningfromgermany.de the potential returnee finds detailed information on his different options, his rights, the nearest counselling centre, available return programmes and the implication for his asylum application (if applicable). Partner organisations in countries of origin participate in the reintegration process, give information and participate in skills training and job market integration activities. This is part of a whole-of-government approach driven by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, with the aim to establish a stronger link between return and reintegration. This approach also incentivises voluntariness of return of those migrants that have little perspectives to stay through short-term training and qualification measures matching needs in origin countries and thereby preparing for better reintegration upon return. These measures, part of the Programme "Perspektive Heimat", are at the same time designed to avoid the prolongation of stay in Germany.
- A number of programmes, for instance assisted return programmes from Austria to Afghanistan, have linked returnees with IOM offices in origin countries and with returnees that have already received assistance. This has led to better preparation for returnees, not only on the details of the return process but also on reintegration opportunities (transportation, availability of housing, medicine and health support etc.).

2.2. Priorities, ownership and joint approaches

Return and reintegration processes take place transnationally and thus require dialogue and cooperation between policy makers and implementing agencies in both countries. Perspectives and interests concerning return and reintegration often differ between European states and partner countries of return. Return and reintegration support may predominantly emerge from and be driven by migration interests of returning countries. The underlying objectives of EU actors in the design of reintegration programmes will thus need to be squared with those of partner authorities – both at national and local levels – since a lack of ownership and political motivation can undermine sustainability and prospects to incorporate reintegration into longer-term development planning. Development actors find themselves in the position to mediate and bridge different positions. The ownership principle of the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness and the Accra agenda for Action²⁵ are key when linking reintegration to development planning. The following aspects will need to be considered.

First, assisting returnees with reintegration may not be the top priority for governments that deal with several development challenges or crises. The EU and some of its member states have increasingly aimed to create positive and negative incentives for partner countries to strengthen return cooperation and reintegration efforts, including through development cooperation. These have had mixed results and are questionable from a development and aid effectiveness perspective, as explored in Box 3.

Box 3: Return and reintegration conditionality

Calls to make EU development cooperation conditional on cooperation of partner countries in the area of return and sustainable reintegration have been growing. After having been part of the EU Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) ('more for more' or positive incentives) and the EU Migration Partnership Framework (MPF) (EC 2016), the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (EC 2020) consolidates the operationalisation of conditionality through regular evaluations of cooperation, on the basis of which the Commission will propose measures to take in relation to partner countries.

Conditionality of aid covers a spectrum of different types of engagements ranging from allocating additional funds (positive conditionality)²⁶ to holding off on agreed cooperation programmes prior to their launch (middle ground), to freezing or suspending existing cooperation programmes and committed funding (negative conditionality). **Introducing mechanisms for the use of EU development cooperation as leverage for migration objectives poses several risks for sustainable development and aid effectiveness** (for the predictability of financing and planning, ownership and because of their negative impacts on relations), especially when there is a predominant or sole focus on return and readmission and if not embedded in a balanced and comprehensive approach to migration (ACVZ 2015). Negative aid conditionality may in addition worsen prospects for or conditions of development in areas where support is needed (depending on where aid is cut), by increasing the focus on geographic areas and partners that are important from an EU migration perspective. It may also be opposed to the **principle of policy coherence for development** that many EU member states have committed themselves to (Knoll and Sherriff 2017).²⁷

Previous experiences of EU member states and as part of the EUTF implementation have shown that at large aid conditionality does not lead to the desired effects and improved cooperation. For many countries, EU cooperation

²⁵ [Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action](#).

²⁶ For instance, judgements on whether a country cooperates sufficiently on return or other aspects of migration management have been a factor in allocating additional funding under the EU Trust Fund for Africa (e.g. as part of an incentive package).

²⁷ The EU's 2013 PCD report states that subordinating development assistance measures to migration policy priorities stands in contradiction to PCD commitments (COM 2013), which in the area of migration rather aim to support development objectives through development-friendly migration policies. Since then the EC PCD reports have adopted more accommodating positions regarding conditionality given an increased use of aid as leverage.

(whether used through positive or negative conditionality) may not have the sufficient leverage and incentivise change concerning return if not used in combination with other instruments (e.g. EU visa policy under the new visa code) (Bisong 2020). The EU's offers or threats to date have in many cases **not sufficiently changed the incentive structures on return and readmission** (e.g. the flow of remittances, political sensitivities associated with return in domestic politics).

Cooperation on migration policies, especially opportunities for visa facilitation agreements, student mobility and labour migration, can provide a useful leverage, as many countries value these. Yet, there are questions whether there is political will to offer such additional mobility options to countries producing irregular migrants.

Incentive packages need to be tailored specifically to the partner context based on a good understanding of the political economy and existing interests. Negative conditionality can damage external relations. Most success seems to have been achieved through a balanced dialogue and exchange of incentives, which have strengthened trust (ACVZ 2015).

During the past years, more and more countries of origin have been devising strategies for reintegration and development.²⁸ Yet, partner governments can still face political risks regarding cooperation on these aspects. Returns can generate uncomfortable domestic debates and support for reintegration (or broader development support linked to return) is at times perceived by the population as “buying off” their governments. In others, return may only be acceptable together with reintegration support. EU member states will have to navigate these tensions together with partner governments. An option is to integrate return and reintegration into a broader partnership approach and fund partner governments’ priorities to compensate for the political risk – as has been the approach under the EU Trust Fund (EUTF) for Africa. Another one is to simultaneously establish other forms of cooperation, such as legal migration opportunities.²⁹ For some governments that accept returnees and aim to provide assistance for their nationals, the focus may be on how to integrate returnees into existing services, rather than creating specific programmes for them.³⁰ This may be more or less successful depending on the partner country.³¹ Support at the systemic and governance levels that strengthens capacities for local actors to support reintegration processes (including integrating return into local development plans) is another option that has received more openness from partner governments and is also more in line with a long-term development approach.

Second, individual reintegration assistance from European states often target a subset of returnees to the country that may not be the largest in number. In Bangladesh, government authorities feel that current EU reintegration support should focus on returnees overall and not only target those from the EU, lobbying for the programme scope to be expanded.³² According to interviewees, the Somali government is more interested in refugee returns from other areas than the EU as it concerns bigger numbers. Similarly, some African states have emphasised that there should not be a distinction made between returnees.³³ Opening programmes to both voluntary and forced returnees irrespective of where they return from is often more meaningful for partners.³⁴ From a development perspective, such targeting may also not be adequate as further explored below. Interviewees also noted that AVRR packages target relatively few returnees with large amounts of resources, which from a development and partner government perspective, could perhaps be more efficiently invested to reach more people.

²⁸ Interview Reintegration expert, September 2020.

²⁹ Some view the option for regional labour mobility also as an alternative for return. See Samuel Hall, 2017.

³⁰ Interview Researcher, October 2020.

³¹ Haase and Honerath (2016) point out that “*even significant increases in ODA can rarely compensate officials from origin countries for the economic and political risks of appearing to cooperate on returns*”.

³² Interviews Implementing agency Bangladesh, February 2020.

³³ Interview Researcher, September 2020.

³⁴ Interview EU official, March 2020.

Third, reintegration-related activities should be “*shaped in line with the needs and priorities identified by governments and civil societies*” (IOM 2018b: 15) in origin countries in line with agreed development principles. From a long-term development perspective, government agencies, civil society and the private sector should provide services to returnees and host communities as returnees should be integrated not only into their communities but also into existing support systems. The ability of countries to manage reintegration as part of broader development plans is in line with the principles of aid effectiveness. Co-design and possibly co-implementation together with these actors may lead to a different framing, avoidance of parallel systems for reintegration support and the inclusion of other partners.³⁵ This requires a focus on the strengthening of national systems and capacity-building for concerned institutions and actors, to enable their involvement and lead in the return/reintegration efforts (EC 2019). Yet, it can also lead to further challenges. Especially in countries where return and reintegration support are not on top of the government's priority list³⁶, implementation through government systems can be cumbersome³⁷ and at worst involve financial risks and compromise effectiveness. If this is the case, finding a balance can be difficult. Yet, even in these circumstances there are windows of opportunities to strengthen ownership and involvement, e.g. in the form of joint monitoring of reintegration programmes and trajectories of beneficiaries, joint field monitoring missions, and in accountability mechanisms.³⁸



Suggested approaches for governments of EU member states

Promote reintegration as part of broader partnerships and dialogues at the national and regional levels with a view to link reintegration of returnees to wider development strategies of partner countries, so that benefits to all citizens are a key objective.	
Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies	Broader partnerships require a ‘whole-of-government’ approach and the readiness to enter into dialogue that leaves room to balance own interests with the concerns of partner countries and results in a benefit to all of their citizens (e.g. through systemic support to strengthen service sectors and integrate returnees; broader economic support; legal migration opportunities).
Other relevant ministries important for a broader partnership approach	

³⁵ While reintegration programmes under the EUTF for Africa aimed to consult governments, research indicates a certain level of frustration of governments that they have not been involved enough and that they would have done things differently. Interview Researcher, September 2020.

³⁶ There may be good reasons for this given that other challenges may take priority from a development perspective and receive more focus within the context of limited capacities.

³⁷ For instance, in Senegal, a programme supporting the government in setting up structures for reintegration support through local offices stalled due to a difficult relationship between two ministries (Interviews March 2020).

³⁸ Interview Researcher, September 2020.

Involve local actors and partner governments from the start, while taking the local context into account; Aim to involve several different ministries of the partner country for a multi-sectoral approach. The partner government and local actors ideally lead in the planning phase of reintegration programmes.

Foreign/Development Ministry &
Development agencies

Ministry of Interior & Return agencies

Fostering local ownership and a multi-sectoral approach should be a principle for all types of reintegration engagements – yet is even more important when aiming to link reintegration with longer-term development objectives.

Follow principles of aid effectiveness when supporting sustainable reintegration

Foreign/Development Ministry &
Development agencies

Open programmes to both voluntary and forced returnees from various locations (beyond EU returnees) as this is more in line with a development-based angle to reintegration.

Design programmes more from a needs-based, bottom-up perspective in line with national and local development plans and promote area-based planning in returnee-prone areas. If the government at the national level is focused on other priorities, links with regional or sub-national actors can be explored. Engage in co-implementation or co-monitoring with government actors where possible.

In countries such as Afghanistan and Somalia, unstable security situations are a key obstacle to reintegration. It is thus important to focus on structural aspects of sustainable reintegration, strengthening the state's infrastructure and institutional capacity. This includes activities spanning humanitarian, security (peace- and statebuilding) and development fields, while integrating the needs of returnees and host communities.



Initiatives and good practices

- In recent years, the African and the European Union have cooperated more strongly on sustainable reintegration. This not only included the activities part of the UN-EU-AU initiative for returns from Libya but also a series of technical meetings to foster joint understanding. For instance, the EU-AU technical workshop on sustainable reintegration in 2018 led to agreements to address knowledge gaps in the area of return and reintegration (through the EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub on Return and Reintegration) as well as to establish a community of practice to share information related to reintegration initiatives (AU, EU and IOM 2018).
- In Nigeria, EU-funded return and reintegration programmes have worked together with federal level authorities to operationalise the national level Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) on return and reintegration. At the federal level, the government drafted an action plan identifying projects. In this context a working group on return and reintegration has been established bringing together various actors (incl. ministries). The next step is to work at the state level with the aim to put into practice the action plan and to introduce state level working groups called Reintegration Communities convening under the initiative and leadership of government agencies. The overall aim is to strengthen the government structures to accompany reintegration in a more sustainable fashion.³⁹
- In Somalia, an innovative Participatory Programme Monitoring Meeting tool is tested, which aims to strengthen feedback and accountability mechanisms while fostering local ownership (IOM 2020a).

2.3. Balancing individual and systemic approaches to sustainable reintegration

Traditionally, Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes have taken the form of individual and direct personalised assistance in the form of in-kind or cash grants (Altai 2016: 29). Individual support may be easier to organise. Yet, to facilitate sustainable reintegration and to link it to longer-term development, national, local and community systems, structures and capacities will need to be reinforced. The support of communities and networks (both social and professional) are often key to the sustainable reintegration of individual returnees.⁴⁰ A development perspective would consider *“the needs of the individual returnees, the needs of the communities to which they return and the priorities of concerned governments”* (IOM 2018b: 2) and strengthen broader capacity of origin countries to meet the needs of all citizens (including returnees). One can distinguish between the following approaches to reintegration support, which have varying links to sustainable development:

³⁹ Interviews IOM, March and September 2020.

⁴⁰ An IOM study on reintegration outcomes through a comparative analysis highlights the importance of community support especially in the case of Ethiopia (Samuel Hall and University of Sussex 2020).

INDIVIDUAL AND SYSTEMIC APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION

ecdpm



Supporting individuals



Type of assistance

Individual assistance (in-kind, cash, training).



Starting point

Need of returnee.



Community involvement

Returnees may involve community in project.



Link to sustainable development

Limited or questionable impact on longer-term development, yet benefits for individuals and from a humanitarian perspective.



Supporting collective groups of returnees



Type of assistance

Group-based assistance (in-kind, cash for collective projects).



Starting point

Need of returnees.



Community involvement

Returnees may involve community in project.



Link to sustainable development

Possible longer-term benefits for individuals and groups, yet questionable impact on longer-term development.



Supporting community projects⁴⁴



Type of assistance

Assistance to communities (projects designed with/for communities in which returnees are located). This can take the form of projects that include some community members together with returnees in a group, and approaches that truly extend benefits to entire communities (with less strong link to individual returnees).



Starting point

Community needs.



Community involvement

Projects aim to include benefits for host community and returnees.



Link to sustainable development

Possible stronger link to a development agenda and impact through strengthening community approaches structurally.



Supporting governance structures



Type of assistance

Capacity building and technical assistance for local and national government structures to accompany reintegration at individual or community level (through infrastructure for services and assistance)



Starting point

Government capacity.



Community involvement

Community can be involved through consultations and benefit from improved governance.



Link to sustainable development

Possible stronger link to a development agenda and impact through strengthening government approaches structurally.

While these different approaches do not necessarily exclude and can complement each other⁴¹, there can also be a number of tensions between the needs of individual returnees, return communities and local authorities. Key questions for development actors approaching reintegration from a longer-term development and aid effectiveness agenda are: How can programmes be adapted so that individual assistance can have broader community effects? How can capacity building and community programming integrate the needs of returnees? Finding the right balance can be difficult when individual and community-based perspectives are not easily reconcilable.

First, community-based approaches take place in a specific location. For them to support the reintegration of returnees, the assumption would be that returnees remain in one area. In reality, returnees, especially young ones, are often very mobile. Experiences of existing programmes have shown that implementing agencies often struggle to stay in contact with returnees.⁴² In Afghanistan, returnees have at times been excluded from support because they were not present at the moment of registering, which can also be due to a lack of knowledge of specific programmes. The sedentarity that characterises community projects does not always match the geographic mobility of migrants and their value for sustainable reintegration may thus be limited. Individual assistance may be more flexible in this regard. But individual reintegration has also faced such challenges depending on how it was organised. Evaluations have shown that beneficiaries of IOM programmes have had to travel for long distances from remote areas to the IOM office to claim individual reintegration assistance, which can take several months (Altai 2016: 44).

Second, there may not be a strong interest from returnees to join collective or community-based programmes or projects that could lead to more sustainable or long-term outcomes. Experience as part of the EUTF Joint Initiative in the Sahel seems to indicate that return migrants often prioritise individual self-sufficiency goals over sharing benefits or being dependent on the engagement of others. Their preference for having immediate needs met and the time horizon for assistance they imagine do not match the timeline for community-based programming.⁴³ Moreover, risks for failure may be higher in some of the sectors where community projects make sense, such as agricultural projects, that can fail due to climatic events or crop diseases. In Afghanistan, existing programmes have shown that returnees are often more interested in earning money quickly rather than investing into longer-term education or training. Vice-versa, communities and local authorities may be much more concerned with other development issues than focusing on the integration of returnees, making it difficult to accommodate this target group in community-based programmes. Still, if such interventions can be designed in a way that they involve and benefit both returnees and non-migrants, they may help to decrease the stigma that migrants face and can improve social cohesion and the perception that communities have about returnees.⁴⁴

Third, there needs to be a certain number of returnees in a geographic area for it to be efficient to organise collective or community-based assistance. Such assistance is thus easier for cities and villages of high return. Yet, for a lower number of returnees scattered in a larger region, it may be too costly. The alternative is to delink community projects from the idea that they need to support individuals or groups of returnees, yet this may then not directly contribute to reintegration processes of returnees.

Fourth, there may be technical dilemmas linked to the way funding instruments or structures are set up. This is specifically the case with the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), funding reintegration support from the European perspective and aiming to create incentives for voluntary return. While not development funding, it aims to fund reintegration assistance that is sustainable. Yet, it puts limitations on the extent to which community

⁴¹ IOM points out that reintegration programmes should address all levels simultaneously.

⁴² This is also because returnees at times do not see the value for them of staying part of programmes. Interview Researcher, September 2020.

⁴³ Interview Researcher, September 2020.

⁴⁴ See for instance the outcomes of an IOM community project in Somalia strengthening social cohesion between returnees and the host community (IOM 2020b).

projects can be financed. AMIF specifies target groups (asylum seekers, and other migrants staying on EU territory who return) and without the link to these individuals, community projects cannot be financed. Development funds work with different timelines and have more flexibility for linking reintegration and development, yet as further explored below, they also face challenges when linking to the individual level through integrating returnees into existing programme structures.

IOM has invested more in community-based programming during recent years and given that this is a new approach in the context of returns of failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants from the EU, current activities are still in a phase of ‘learning by doing’.⁴⁵ Comparative evidence on what works and what does not and what conditions need to be in place is not yet fully available⁴⁶, yet early experiences show that **a prerequisite for a community-based intervention to be successful is a minimal and critical mass of returnees in a certain area**. If returns are scattered, community-based reintegration programmes may not make sense. One researcher interviewed noted that, in practice, ‘community-led programming’ in fact does not yet live up to the approach as formulated on paper.⁴⁷



Suggested approaches for governments of EU member states

Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies	Ministry of Interior & Return agencies
Factor in geographic mobility of return migrants in support programmes (incl. those focused on communities) through designing flexible models of assistance. For individuals, pre-return assistance will already need to focus on trust and preparedness, so as to create a relationship that can last and the reintegration trajectories of returnees can be followed and accompanied. Building confidence and trust as part of a reintegration plan, which is then followed up after return as agreed, is an important element for sustainability.	
Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies Change the lens and support actors and existing community-based initiatives in areas of high return instead of supporting returnees to have an impact on the community. Adapt funding procedures to be flexible so that more grassroots initiatives can be supported (versus donor-driven programmes that are often tendered and thus open to only specific and often larger actors).	

⁴⁵ Interview International Organisation, September 2020.

⁴⁶ IOM has however commissioned comparative studies to reflect on the relative successes of different interventions and approaches.

⁴⁷ Interview Researcher, October 2020.

Explore how financial instruments can overcome existing limitations in terms of funding individual reintegration support or community-based initiatives (e.g. through looking at the criteria and requirements; eligibility criteria or other programme requirements).



Initiatives and good practices

- The project ‘Strengthening the return of Somali refugees and internally displaced persons through a community-oriented approach to reintegration in Somalia’ commissioned by BMZ and implemented by GIZ in South Somalia (Kismaayo Town) aims at creating opportunities for returning refugees, IDPs and local residents by helping people to set up businesses and earn an income and securing basic services and food supplies. Equal opportunities are ensured through a 30% quota for each category. Also in Somalia, Community Action Plans aim to integrate durable solutions planning with a long-term development focus for the whole community.

2.4. Integrating returnees into existing development programmes and designing specific programmes

Development actors have increasingly aimed to facilitate the reintegration of returnees by including this group in existing development programmes. Others have specifically designed new programmes integrating a migration/return dimension with a focus on longer-term development.

A first principled question is about **reconciling programmes that adopt a migration logic (e.g. through targeting criteria) with development principles** (following poverty-, needs-, or vulnerability-based targeting and criteria). In some contexts, this will not present a challenge as both returnees and host communities may be amongst the vulnerable groups and in need of assistance and failing to address (re-)integration can lead to worse development outcomes. In others, however, these groups may not be those worst-off and would not be prioritised applying humanitarian or developmental criteria.

A number of already existing development programmes targeting returnees and host communities jointly have applied a specific target for returnee beneficiaries (e.g. 30% of beneficiaries) in order to integrate returnees (see Box 4). This has led to some operational and practical challenges for development programmes and many have not met their initially planned targets due to practical obstacles along the way. Knowledge is also still scarce on the reasons for this and it is likely a combination of factors that will need to be considered and addressed during planning and implementation. Three main obstacles can be identified.

Box 4: Quotas and targets for returnee beneficiaries

Some development programmes include targets or quotas for returnees. For example in Bangladesh, the EU-financed PROTASHA programme⁴⁸ includes the objective to reach 3,000 returnees from Europe with reintegration assistance, during the course of the support programme. In Guinea, some components of INTEGRA financed by the EU Trust Fund for Africa aim to have 30% of their beneficiaries from the group of EU returnees. Meeting these targets is not always easy. The targets should be realistic⁴⁹ and be based on a contextual analysis or feasibility studies. It should also be clear who counts towards the target (e.g. through eligibility criteria, which balance migration and development considerations).

Obstacle 1: Existing programmes may have not been designed with returnees as a target group in mind and they may thus not be sufficiently appealing or **matching the preferences of returnees**. The result is little motivation to engage in activities, either because they are not viewed as a real alternative to the type of life that has led to the motivation to migrate in the first place⁵⁰, because they are too far from where returnees stay, or because their timeframe may be too long. For example, a 9-month training programme in Guinea did not spark strong interest from returnees due to the long timeframe and little immediate return. Experience in Afghanistan echoes this.⁵¹ As noted above, ‘impatience’ and the need for immediate resources can prevent returnees from engaging in longer-term programmes.⁵² Programmes that are designed with a specific target group in mind may be able to better take such preferences into account.

Obstacle 2: Eligibility criteria and ‘labelling’. Development programmes usually have specific criteria (e.g. vulnerability, age, needs, etc.) for selecting beneficiaries in order to make it a fair and transparent process. Not in all cases can these criteria be easily applied to returnees. This in turn can lead to challenges to integrate returnees and makes it difficult to reach quotas. Altering eligibility criteria just for the group of returnees (so that more can be included) can create tensions and is thus likely not an option for development programmes. Moreover, not all returnees like to be singled out. Research has shown that affording special treatment to returnees can lead to further challenges for social inclusion and cohesion. For instance, in Somalia, returnees were found to *“want to blend in rather than stand out based on their migration status”* (Samuel Hall 2019: 46). Eligibility criteria will further need to be supported by local authorities, who often aim to open reintegration support to all returnees, irrespective of where they migrated to. As noted above, development actors also often aim to be more flexible and include a wider set of returnees since it would strengthen equity in return and reintegration operations.⁵³ Such flexibility may have to be built in both in the design and in the funding instruments in order to overcome challenges incurred by programme parameters.

Obstacle 3: Whether tailored or not, programmes catering to specific returnees (especially if the target group is returnees from Europe) will need to work with partners in order to identify eligible beneficiaries. Development agencies and return agencies (incl. migration actors such as IOM) have entered into MoUs with each other in order to organise referrals. While an important element of return and reintegration processes, referrals have not always

⁴⁸ Sustainable Reintegration and Improved Migration Governance.

⁴⁹ In the case of Bangladesh, programmes did initially not meet targets because fewer returns than the envisaged number took place.

⁵⁰ Interview Researcher & Interview Implementing Agency, September 2020.

⁵¹ Interview Implementing Agency, September 2020.

⁵² Interview Implementing Agency, September 2020.

⁵³ Research points to the current lack of equity in return operations, illustrated by unequal assistance given to different groups of returnees, depending on where they migrated to/from. See Samuel Hall 2019; Interview EU official, March 2020.

worked well to date.⁵⁴ The following issues have been identified and would need to be addressed beforehand and operationally thought through in each programme jointly for a smooth cooperation between actors:

- **Caseload:** A high caseload of returnees in a short amount of time, with the aim for all to receive reintegration support, has led to more centralised approaches of return actors and fewer referrals as it is easier to control the process. **Coordination and communication** are time-intensive and need to be planned for. The **capacity of partners** to take on caseload is another element to consider and, in some instances, may have to be built first.
- **Privacy and data security** have been raised as reasons why returnees' data is not shared across actors. Sometimes it took a long time to get MoUs and data sharing agreements in place, which should ideally exist beforehand so as to enable the transmission of data.⁵⁵ Other times, the eligibility criteria of development agencies may not match the data that is available about individuals, making referrals of specific target groups more difficult.
- **Timelines:** Timeframes and schedules of development programmes may not match the timeline of return agencies or IOM.
- Other factors that may be more difficult to address may relate to the **institutional or organisational culture** that can facilitate or inhibit cooperation and referrals. A question to ask is thus whether selected partners have such a culture, a track record and experience in functioning referral systems and whether there is openness to find creative solutions together to obstacles that may exist.

Moreover, the issues around **selection criteria**, **geographic match** of return locations and programme location as well as **preferences of returnees** already described above also matter for whether referrals can work in practice.



Suggested approaches for governments of EU member states

Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies

Assess whether targeting programmes from a migration (return/reintegration) logic can be reconciled with aid effectiveness and development principles following poverty-, needs-, or vulnerability-based targeting in a specific context.

Ensure that existing development programmes that aim to integrate returnees have a minimum understanding of their needs (vs. those of the host population) and keep this in mind when setting targets or quotas. Programmes that are flexible or specifically designed with the needs of various target groups in mind have a better chance of providing support that is taken up and that quotas can be reached.

Ensure that the inclusion or targeting of the group of returnees does not create tensions and remain flexible to include a wider set of returnees rather than focus on subsets (e.g. focus on all returnees rather than returnees from Europe; focus on non-migrant host citizens and returnees together).

⁵⁴ For instance, referrals in a number of EU-funded reintegration programmes in African countries (e.g. in the Sahel region) but also in Bangladesh have experienced these obstacles (Interview Researcher, September 2020; Interview Implementing agency February 2020).

⁵⁵ And it is clear that migrant privacy and personal data security will need to be in place with safeguards.

An individual approach to sustainable reintegration may be favoured for returnees returning to areas with very few returnees – but this may be beyond the scope of development actors and could be left to classical AVVR support. In communities that receive a high number of returnees, the three different levels (individual, community and structural) can be better addressed and an integrated approach should be favoured.

Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies

Ministry of Interior & Return agencies

When identifying eligible beneficiaries and working through referrals together with other actors, identify jointly and factor in operational obstacles and questions (caseload, privacy and data security, timelines, institutional and organisational culture, selection criteria, geographic match of return locations with programme location, preferences of returnees). Establish adequate structures to deal with these upfront.

2.5. Which support elements are important for sustainable reintegration?

Integrated approaches to reintegration support of returnees and host communities have recently emerged as a new best practice to strengthen sustainability through combining the three dimensions of support: economic, social and psychological. Traditionally, reintegration assistance focused on economic reintegration with the objective to provide work and employment opportunities and thereby generate income and access to finance for returnees. The social and psychosocial dimensions, as well as legal support, have often been neglected.

Economic reintegration support (including financial support, training, start-up business support, etc.) is still the predominant form today⁵⁶ and, according to interviewees, still the most important form of assistance from a development point of view. Social reintegration as well as psychological well-being may depend on economic reintegration and the availability of financial resources. There are often high expectations on returnees to do well economically and to raise finances. The stigma that comes with debt that returnees may have incurred in their communities or families (e.g. to finance the migration journey) can put additional pressure on them.⁵⁷ Support measures that can help lower this financial burden can thus also have positive psychological effects and help social integration (Samuel Hall and University of Sussex 2020). A guarantee of receiving reintegration assistance alone can help mitigate the perception of the failure of migration (Altai 2016: 39).

Still, support in the other two (as well as further) dimensions is also key, but their necessity may depend on the experiences during the migration and return journey⁵⁸ and how long individuals have been abroad. Research carried out as part of the IOM ORION project found that, while the economic dimension is the foundation, social and psychosocial assistance are essential to consolidate reintegration gains.⁵⁹ In this, the re-building of and connection to networks is key. Approaches that integrate mentor relationships with a view to building such networks, such as the IOM ORION project, have a comparatively – albeit small – positive impact on reintegration compared to those without such a relationship. Support for network creation should go beyond the social and also include professional

⁵⁶ Interviews with International Organisation, Implementing Agency and Researchers, September 2020.

⁵⁷ In some contexts, the social acceptance of returnees is low. In Afghanistan for example, the shame resulting from rejection by the local population of those who “failed” in their migration projects has greatly influenced the re-emigration desires of returnees (Altai, 2016: 40).

⁵⁸ Victims of trafficking, unaccompanied migrant children, and migrants with health-related needs to be given special attention in this regard (IOM 2015).

⁵⁹ See footnote 56.

network links (incl. businesses, schools and training centres).⁶⁰ Economic success may also depend on wider access to resources, including land. In Somalia for instance, returnees from neighbouring countries often risk becoming IDPs in Somalia as there is uncertainty over one's access to land.

The form of support can create specific incentives and thus can have different impacts on the dimensions of reintegration. While cash assistance has been valued by returnees in Afghanistan and can meet immediate financial or economic needs, in some cases (e.g. Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria) it has led refugees to reluctantly return to unsafe areas so as to access this money (Samuel Hall 2019:31). Cash payments may alleviate immediate needs and pressures (both economic and psychosocial) and are at times a pre-condition for returnees to accept voluntary return. Yet, they may not be sustainable for the longer-term reintegration of returnees, since they are used to pay off incurred debts and because families or other network members may demand access to this finance.

Given that the prospects for sustainable reintegration and impacts on development are influenced by how returnees fare in all of these dimensions over time, programmes will need to assess where additional support may be needed, so that lack of progress in one dimension does not negatively impact the others.

For development actors aiming to strengthen structures and local capacities for reintegration, the focus may equally have to include various dimensions and sectors to integrate reintegration into legislation and administrative practice and complement individual-based approaches.



Suggested approaches for governments of EU member states

Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies

Take a holistic and comprehensive view on reintegration and strengthen local capacities in various dimensions, complementing individual-based approaches, so that returnees and all citizens have access to adequate services (economic, social, psychosocial, legal etc.).

Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies

Ministry of Interior & Return agencies

A case management and mentoring approach for individuals, which are closely followed, can lead to stronger and more sustainable reintegration outcomes with better prospects to contribute to development. Determine vulnerable groups of returnees that need additional support (e.g. psychological) upfront and provide comprehensive support together with partners.

Mentoring relationships have been found to be able to support and link various dimensions of reintegration assistance – be it for individuals or community groups. Yet, mentors will also need to be given the flexibility to support the mentee(s) (e.g. through flexible funds that can be used to help a returnee to set up a viable project as part of the mentoring process;

⁶⁰ Interview Researcher, October 2020.

to support establishing links to communities). Currently, bureaucratic procedures and the lack of tools or access to support prevent mentors from tailoring assistance and linking the social with economic reintegration dimensions (IOM 2020c).

Reintegration assistance to individuals can tag on to development programmes that strengthen the capacities or reach of local actors by providing additional resources to which local (government) service providers can refer beneficiaries. This can also span various sectors so that assistance can complement each other.

Ministry of Interior & Return agencies

Explore upfront any unintended consequences of specific forms of assistance (e.g. cash-based) so as not to increase vulnerabilities.

2.6. Select between integrated programming with other actors and a more centralised approach covering various components in one programme

As just discussed in the previous section, there are different components to sustainable reintegration, and addressing all of them may be beyond the scope of one actor's engagement alone. Whether returnees and hosting communities can be comprehensively and over the longer-term supported may thus depend on a combination of efforts of various actors. In theory, the integrated approach of IOM follows this model of different actors building on each other's work and creating synergies, complementary actions and a web of referrals. EU funding (e.g. as part of the EU Trust Fund for Africa) has also encouraged the establishment of referral networks between IOM and development agencies. This requires strong coordination efforts and a strong referral system across various partners that is steered by a relevant actor (OECD, 2020). In practice, to date, the approach with different donors funding different programmes as part of the reintegration puzzle has not worked particularly well (see also the detailed discussion on referrals above). Delays in the start of programmes and issues with the timely sharing of information and referrals across different programmes meant that support to individuals or communities have fallen between the cracks or that returnees have lost interest and reverted to other coping strategies in the meantime. While programmes often take an integrated approach on paper, there may be little preparation in thinking through practical implications of working across actors.

Some have thus recommended to replace this fragmented approach to reintegration by a larger programme by one donor including several components of support to returnees. These different components could be sequenced over time including both individual and structural reintegration support and be focused on longer-term development. Others feel that siloed approaches should be overcome through better coordination, functioning referral systems and the identification of complementarities upfront, especially in areas where numbers of returnees are low and cooperation with existing development programmes may be more cost-effective. While there is not one 'right' model, reintegration programmes that aim for longer-term sustainability will need to think about whether a more centralised approach or one that aims for a web of complementary actors will be more feasible and effective and how to set up appropriate coordination approaches.



Suggested approaches for governments of EU member states

In either of the two approaches (centralised or with partners), the following aspects will need to be included into programmatic approaches upfront by both return and development actors.

Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies	Ministry of Interior & Return agencies
Determine and set up complementarities between different funding instruments (e.g. of one donor government), which address parts of the puzzle ranging from return management to community stabilisation and development cooperation. Establish contact with other actors active in the field of return and reintegration, determining scope for cooperation and possibility for referral webs. If cooperation is part of the approach, think through practical ways of working together and foresee strategies on how to deal with risk factors (e.g. delays in support). Actively support referral, exchange and good communication between all implementers of structural, community-level and individual reintegration support programmes. Decide on a good model for coordination and organising referrals. Involve local government actors and institutions (if sufficiently strong to play this role) and provide additional capacity support for their role.	

2.7. Who are the right actors to work (with) on sustainable reintegration from a development angle?

There is a growing number of actors active in the field of return and reintegration, many with the aspiration to tackle it from a development perspective and foster sustainable outcomes. This has led to strong competition between actors, which – according to interviewees – may partially explain challenges in cooperation and referrals.⁶¹ Development actors are traditionally better at working with and strengthening country systems so they can integrate return and reintegration into service provision in the longer-term. IOM has been criticised in some instances for setting up parallel structures for reintegration without much focus on sustainability – yet more recently, as noted, they have focused more on the community and structural aspects of reintegration. IOM also often has a monopoly on working with government actors on migration policy and governance specifically – yet a limited number of government officials in Bangladesh and Afghanistan interviewed for the study did not feel that IOM was the most efficient and effective actor when it came to working on longer-term reintegration efforts, especially not when aiming for long-term sustainable development outcomes.

Government actors interviewed in Afghanistan, Senegal and Bangladesh felt that in order to foster longer-term and sustainable reintegration efforts with a link to development, their involvement would need to increase. This is in line with the principles of the aid effectiveness agenda. While they are often associated with programmes and are part of consultation processes, they are not frequently co-implementers of reintegration assistance. Involvement of the government at local and municipal level seems even lower. As indicated above, even if the environment is not

⁶¹ One interviewee highlighted the strong competition between IOM and development actors.

conducive to select modalities that directly involve government actors as (co-)implementers, there are still ways to involve them better from the outset in the implementation and monitoring phase.

Private sector actors have also been found to be under-represented in reintegration programmes.⁶² Yet, they play an important role along the migration cycle, including when it comes to reintegration (Bisong and Knoll 2020). Especially in areas or countries where there is a large group of migrants returning, involving larger companies can be beneficial for achieving longer-term development outcomes. However, smaller and medium enterprises can also play a useful role in this regard.⁶³



Suggested approaches for governments of EU member states

Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies

Aim to identify common ground and cooperation with private sector actors (both large and small scale). Especially in areas of high return, support to larger firms may be able to include reintegration efforts while focusing on local economic development.

Select implementing agencies based on track record in working with government and through existing structures, focusing on longer-term sustainability aspects, avoiding to set up parallel structures while building trusted partnerships with local and bottom-up actors. Be aware of existing competition and overlaps (including both development and migration actors working with the same local partners and carrying out similar activities through subcontracting).

Foreign/Development Ministry & Development agencies

Ministry of Interior & Return agencies

Link to existing structures and schemes (state-run programmes, local development initiatives, private sector activities, etc.) beyond what is offered by the programme or programme partners. This can help close gaps in support and also broaden the options available for reintegration support.

⁶² For instance, IOM programmes in Guinea, Senegal and Morocco were found to have few connections to private sector actors. Orion Webinar (7 October 2020), Slides of speakers (IOM 2020c), based on Study on Reintegration Outcomes Through a Comparative Lens (Samuel Hall and University of Sussex 2020).

⁶³ Ibid.



Initiatives and good practices

- An EU-financed programme, implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC), supports communities in West Afghanistan (Herat) and in Kabul, which are characterised by high displacement and return, through funding social enterprises that employ returnees. The fashion (garment production, silk) and food sectors (saffron, dried fruits and nuts) were chosen as entry points for local economic development and therefore reintegration (Samuel Hall 2020).

3. Important elements of sustainable reintegration programmes

Above dilemmas and challenges have pointed to the decisions that need to be taken when designing reintegration assistance with a view to approaching reintegration from a sustainable development perspective. Irrespective of these choices that will have to enter into the design of reintegration support, there are a number of elements that the process of designing and implementing reintegration programmes, which focus on longer-term development, should entail. These are summarised in the following.

3.1. Build reintegration support on analysis

Context matters greatly for designing good reintegration programmes from a sustainable development perspective.⁶⁴ Reintegration assistance should thus be planned based on a contextual analysis of the return environment, which should entail the following elements: fragility aspects, services available, individual capacities, needs and preferences of returnees (or varying groups of returnees) and host communities, structural conditions, elements that can do harm (sources of tension, power dynamics, conflict issues), needs of labour markets, existing stakeholders and coordination mechanisms as well as political economy factors influencing the governance of reintegration.⁶⁵ These are important aspects to assess and analyse when taking a longer-term development approach to reintegration. Not always is all relevant information available upfront, and it can sometimes only be studied during implementation. Development programmes can then be set up flexibly to allow for changes when parameters become known or change. Analysis should ideally also be continuous and studies can be carried out alongside programme implementation to provide necessary information for adaptation. While this is more costly, it can enhance the relevance, sustainability and link to longer-term development processes of reintegration support.

3.2. Be clear on the objectives of specific support

Moreover, reintegration support programmes often only address parts of the elements of sustainable reintegration processes and for some it would be ambitious to claim that they can contribute to sustainability or that they indeed link to more structural development outcomes. Being clear about these contributions (all of which are valid) can thus gauge the level of expectations on both sustainability and development contributions. Having a good understanding of what other types of support are available and how specific development programmes relate to other programmes and assistance can help to determine where a contribution can best be made. For instance, is the programme meant to provide a minimum level of start-up and humanitarian assistance? Is it meant to bridge the gap until a longer-term support programme starts and is available? Is it meant to contribute to sustainable livelihoods? Through individual or system-wide approaches? Development actors have in the past supported reintegration in all of these forms, yet ideally they should strive to transform structures so that there are long-term benefits. Lastly, adequate human and financial resources, which match the objectives and levels of ambition, are key. While this should go without saying, in practice it is often a reason why reintegration programmes have high expectations in terms of development contributions, yet cannot prioritise elements that can contribute to sustainability and strengthen positive longer-term outcomes.

⁶⁴ While this is the case for development programmes in general, an IOM ORION comparative study on reintegration support carried out by Samuel Hall and the University of Sussex points out how similar reintegration support has varying effects for sustainable reintegration depending on the context (Samuel Hall and University of Sussex 2020).

⁶⁵ See also the graph “Designing a Reintegration Programme” (IOM 2019a: 15).

3.3. Consult with governments and link reintegration efforts with support to local development plans

In the same vein, reintegration support should link with and support national or local development plans and initiatives. This ideally goes beyond loosely linking reintegration programmes to the logic and content of national development strategies but involves consultations with relevant government actors to identify priorities and concrete activities if possible. This is in line with aid effectiveness principles. Yet, how such links can be established will vary depending on the context. In Nigeria, for instance, Standard Operating Procedures on Return and Reintegration have been developed at the federal level, which provide an entry point to provide longer-term structural support. In Ethiopia, a reintegration policy exists as well. But it can also be policies or plans targeting development more widely and into which the issue of return and reintegration is integrated. For instance, in Somalia, the existing social protection policy could be used as an entry point to integrate returnees.⁶⁶ Working with governments in this way takes the countries' development plans and their needs for managing reintegration as a starting point in line with a sustainable development approach.

3.4. Aim for a minimum of harmonisation with existing programmes and development plans

In areas of high return, there may be several donor programmes for returnees and the amounts of grants or the scope of the assistance awarded can vary greatly. Return migrants can thus access different levels of support depending on where they have returned from – spanning across programmes from both return/migration as well as development actors. This can lead to tensions, as pointed out by the IOM Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration handbook for the North African Region (2013). Avoiding overlap and working towards harmonisation and alignment across donor programmes on reintegration is a key element of aid effectiveness. So far, there has been little interest in funding more standardised reintegration programmes. Yet, efforts should be made to understand what other assistance programmes exist, how a new programme would fit in and how it may be perceived. IOM has also called “*for the adoption of coordinated measures and practices as concerns reintegration support*” (IOM 2018b).

3.5. Determine complementarities, set up functioning coordination structures and establish MoUs

As noted above, complementarities between programmes, which support different elements of reintegration support for individuals or communities, do not always work optimally. Especially when aiming to support structures as part of longer-term development approaches to reintegration, it is important to seek complementarity with local actors and reinforce their capacity and contributions. The following elements should thus be thought through and be part of support programmes aiming at sustainable reintegration prior to implementation:

- Mapping the network of partners, assess their capacities (e.g. how many referrals they can take) and build trust with them. Often local civil society can offer advice returnees are comfortable with and build relationships of trust. This is important for services to be taken up and for their potential to have a lasting and sustainable effect. The capacity of partners will need to be assessed and real partnerships be built. Local civil society actors may not have strong resources or capacities but space can be made for them to build

⁶⁶ Interview, Researcher, October 2020.

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- expertise and increase their caseload capacity over time. Keeping an overview and up-to-date mapping may be complex but it is an important part of the process.⁶⁷
- Memoranda of Understandings with government actors and other implementing partners, which include arrangements for practical cooperation. For partners working together on integrated reintegration programmes, MoUs should be established beforehand and can help think through the practicalities of joint work. This will need to include agreements on data sharing (including data security provisions); on the referral procedures to be followed; clarity about mutual expectations and roles and responsibilities, matching criteria for programme eligibility with data collected about individuals (especially when referrals are to take place). Such arrangements should be in place before the start of a programme.
 - Coordination structures, which link to national actors and their development plans as well as existing coordination networks for referrals.

3.6. Consider gender and diversity aspects

Gender and diversity are key cross-cutting norms for sustainable development. A longer-term sustainable approach to reintegration will not be possible if aspects of diversity are not taken into account and properly addressed. Not all returnees from one country have the same needs depending on gender, age, qualifications, and reason and preparedness for return. In the interest of sustainable reintegration policy, policymakers need to take this variety into account, and if possible use a target group approach. Policymakers could offer appropriate and needs-based reintegration programmes for different categories. To be able to do so, adequate data needs to be available that disaggregates along characteristics that are of interest.

3.7. Incorporate M&E, learning and accountability systems

Committing to strong monitoring and learning frameworks is not always easy or possible given that it takes significant resources to manage. For IOM, it has not always been easy to commit donors to invest in this area. Experience with the projects under the EUTF for Africa have shown that many programmes are not designed with monitoring in mind.⁶⁸ Large-scale longitudinal analysis on reintegration support does not exist to date. The impact of reintegration support on longer-term individual or community development is thus not always clear. Yet, it is necessary for programmes to be built on evidence of what works for sustainable reintegration efforts and their link to development. Indicators for measuring sustainable reintegration have been developed during the past years, tools (such as the ERRIN RIAT tool)⁶⁹ can be made use of and there are developments to carry out more comparative research in this field.⁷⁰ IOM also developed the Reintegration Sustainability Survey scoring tool to perform a comprehensive assessment of a returnee's reintegration situation and evaluate the returnee's ability to achieve sustainable reintegration along the economic, social and psychosocial dimensions. This survey, along with the scoring system, can be used as a case management tool, for beneficiary monitoring and for programme evaluation, and is meant to allow IOM and other practitioners to compare trends in beneficiary reintegration across country contexts and over time (see IOM 2019a for more details on the survey).

⁶⁷ Experience with mapping actors in Afghanistan has shown that it is important to establish personal contact to understand capacities. One interviewee pointed out that *"one challenge is mapping – when you go and search, you may find more than 100 actors, but when you actually establish contact, the number is quite small, and each has its own targets and cannot take everybody"*.

⁶⁸ Interview Researcher, September 2020.

⁶⁹ [New Reintegration Assistance Tool](#) According to interviewees this tool has potential as it includes provisions for data protection and interviews/questionnaires can be added.

⁷⁰ See for example the resources shared and studies carried out under the [IOM Return and Reintegration Knowledge Management platform](#) as well as forthcoming research between IOM and the World Bank as part of the [KNOMAD platform Working group on reintegration](#).

An M&E system, which is integrated into programmes from the outset and which includes the different phases from pre-return counselling to reintegration assistance to sustainability of outcomes, is helpful.⁷¹ Ideally, this should go beyond measuring the impact of one specific programme and contribute to better understanding the conditions that made specific reintegration approaches successful or not (this helps to know if programmes can be replicated elsewhere) or comparing a variety of approaches with each other. Such approaches can provide insights as part of a knowledge community around return, reintegration and development that has been forming during recent years. Tracing returnees over time (with the timeframe depending on the understanding of sustainability) should be part of the M&E and learning approach.⁷² The challenge of keeping contact with returnees may be partly mitigated through an approach to reintegration that focuses more on building trust and relationships.⁷³ Beyond indicators for individual outcomes (which ideally include assessment of longer-term capacity to adapt beyond the timeframe of support), it is useful to include indicators that can measure longer-term and more structural development effects. Such research can inform what programmes work best from a longer-term sustainable development perspective.

⁷¹ This also requires all partners part of the support to agree on common monitoring criteria and research approach and that monitoring and research consider the sequencing of support.

⁷² Such tracing will already need to be integrated from the very beginning of programmes and starts with keeping contacts up to date.

⁷³ Interview Researcher, October 2020.

4. Concluding Analysis

This note discussed and analysed reintegration support from a development and aid effectiveness point of view, specifically in the context of return and reintegration of failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants from Europe. It aimed to provide an overview of the challenges and dilemmas that development actors face in aiming to ensure that return takes place in a dignified way, that reintegration is sustainable and that it has the best possible development outcome for returnees and their communities.

Section two has outlined in more granular detail suggestions for development actors to deal with dilemmas they may face in practice when being tasked to engage on sustainable reintegration – irrespective of whether the aim is to maximise development prospects in the context of reintegration, mitigate risks for a development and aid effectiveness agenda, accompany and incentivise return processes or the grey zones in between.

Section three has outlined seven key elements that the process of designing and implementing reintegration programmes should entail from a longer-term development perspective. This concluding analysis highlights the main findings and suggestions for development actors in supporting reintegration while giving primacy to the objectives of aid effectiveness and a longer-term development agenda.

4.1. The role of development actors

1. **A clear link between the return of migrants, reintegration into their societies and longer-term sustainable development outcomes is contested.**

Yet, adopting a development approach to sustainable reintegration expects to bring wider benefits to communities and the origin country overall beyond benefits to individual returnees. Reconciling development objectives with EU governments' motivations for return and reintegration is thus not always possible, as the dilemmas discussed in this note have shown. Taking this understanding as a starting point can help development actors determine – based on an assessment of country situations – whether and how their support can be linked to longer-term development.

2. **Still, development actors can play certain roles in supporting reintegration in line with development objectives.** This requires keeping some level of independence from a migration agenda. Ideally, the role of development actors takes the following form:

- The most favorable role for development actors is to **help strengthen local systems and capacities in partner countries** so that general conditions for citizens, including those of returnees, can be improved, host communities can better receive returnees and migration and return journeys are safer. This is in line with supporting governments in better managing all aspects of a migration cycle – one of the objectives included in Sustainable Development Goal 10.7.
- Another appropriate role is to **mitigate negative impacts** emerging from larger-scale returns with a focus on resilience, security and development. This can take the form of accompanying large-scale return processes from the EU or elsewhere with different interventions to support reintegration. Here, the aim is to cushion negative impacts but not necessarily a more positive longer-term sustainable development agenda.

3. Development actors may also play two other **roles, which follow a stronger migration logic** in line with “whole-of-government approaches” of their countries. These take place in practice, but are more contentious from an aid effectiveness perspective. They can still have value for development objectives, but there needs to be more caution in the way they are being set up:

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- **Accompanying return programmes with development reintegration assistance** can be used to incentivise stronger cooperation of countries of origin on return as part of a partnership approach. While development objectives can still be pursued, this role bears a higher risk of instrumentalisation of development aid for migration-related objectives.
 - **Incentivising individuals to consider voluntary return** and start planning for the reintegration process, e.g. through including them in on-going development programmes. This role is very close to classical AVRR projects, though it may be tagged to broader community or government capacity support aspects. While individual support is important for sustainable reintegration, the link to longer-term development impact is less clear.

4.2. Taking a wider perspective

4. Development actors should strive to **promote reintegration as part of broader partnerships** based on joint dialogue at national or regional levels with a view to include reintegration aspects into sectoral development strategies and planning of partner countries. Focusing on broader development questions can include support to sectors that matter for all citizens, including returnees, and that can help strengthen reintegration capacities systemically. While economic development stands out as an important element for returnees, this also includes service provision and legal reforms. Support to these will need to work towards making access inclusive and responsive also to returnees which have specific needs and circumstances. While European governments have strong interests regarding return and sustainable reintegration, a sustainable development approach would leave room to balance those interests with the concerns of partner countries and to enable the development of reliable partnerships.
5. Taking a broader perspective can also include **support to migration governance in origin and transit countries with the objective to make migration journeys and return safer**. Strengthening migration governance and enabling legal migration opportunities as well as adequate reception policies help to minimise harm during or improve the success of migration journeys. This in turn increases prospects for successful sustainable reintegration upon return.

4.3. Reintegration programmes with a strong emphasis on long-term development

6. Development actors ideally **approach reintegration from a structural and community level** perspective with a view to strengthen state, business and civil society institutional capacities and infrastructure rather than focusing on individuals only, which could be left to AVRR support programmes that complement broader efforts. This means supporting local actors and existing community-based initiatives in areas of high return to include returnees rather than putting a prime focus on returnees to have an impact on the community (though this can still be an outcome of development-led reintegration programmes). It also avoids the setting up of parallel structures and includes planning reintegration efforts together with local actors as part of their development plans or area-based approaches in returnee-prone areas. Local actors and partner governments should ideally be involved in the design and implementation of reintegration support programmes and – if not possible – at least be involved in co-monitoring.

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7. Development-oriented reintegration programmes ideally are **open to all groups of returnees (voluntary, involuntary, from various locations) without discrimination** or to both non-migrant citizens and returnees. This corresponds more strongly to a development-based angle to reintegration, though this needs to be balanced with the need to design programmes to fit the needs of specific groups. Programmes that are targeted only at EU returnees with the specific aim to incentivise return choices are more difficult to reconcile with an aid effectiveness logic. Development actors will also need to ensure that their approach to targeting and inclusion does not create tensions between different groups.
 8. Development actors engaging on specific reintegration programmes that do target individual beneficiaries should assess the extent to which targeting programmes to returnees for their reintegration can be reconciled with aid effectiveness and development principles, which follow poverty-, needs-, or vulnerability-based criteria. There may be instances where the group of returnees do not take priority from a development point of view and where a development logic is harder to retain.
 9. **Adapting funding procedures to include flexibility and openness for grassroots initiatives** can play an important role in strengthening local actors and structures to support reintegration. Development programmes in the area of migration (including on reintegration) often follow funding procedures that can make it hard for grassroots initiatives to be supported. Currently, donors often tender larger reintegration programmes, which in effect are open to only specific and larger actors. When selecting partners, keeping an eye on their track record in working with government and through existing local structures is important.
 10. **Harmonisation and alignment** are principles that are valid for all development programmes. It seems to be especially important in areas of high return, where there has been an increase in donor programmes, which largely vary in terms of the benefits they provide. This can lead to tensions and is not in line with general aid effectiveness principles. So far, there has been little interest in funding more standardised reintegration programmes. Development actors will need to play a stronger role in pushing for harmonisation, alignment and coordinated measures.
 11. Ensuring that cross-cutting issues that matter for development agendas, such as **gender equality and diversity aspects**, are reflected in reintegration support programmes is another standard value that should be considered. This means that diverse reintegration needs and perspectives of key groups are reflected in the community and systemic support that is provided.
 12. **Strengthen M&E, learning and accountability systems for sustainable reintegration from a development perspective.** This would include a focus on longer-term and larger scale longitudinal analysis, which includes impacts not only at individual level but also on community development. There is room to carry out more comparative research in the field on how different approaches impact on these dimensions and to better understand conditions that make specific reintegration approaches successful in terms of longer-term development and structural effects.

Annex I: Methodology

This note is based on a **desk literature review** of academic and grey literature, policy documents, programme evaluations as well as other reports pointing to lessons learned from return, reintegration and development programmes. This has been complemented by **nineteen semi-structured interviews** conducted with development practitioners, experts and researchers on return and reintegration as well as government officials to gather perspectives on longer-term development approaches to reintegration. The research has been conducted between August and October 2020.⁷⁴

A particular focus of part of the literature review and the interviews has been on reintegration and development efforts in Somalia, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The choice to focus on these countries has been motivated by a mix between the following factors:

- **Relevance from a return perspective in Sweden and the EU.** Top nationalities among return cases in Sweden have been: Iraq, Serbia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia with Afghanistan and Iraq becoming more prominent during the past years. This matches with the top countries of origin of asylum requests in Sweden in 2019, which were Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia. If we look at the broader EU picture, the top 10 nationalities staying irregularly in the EU highlighted in the Frontex 2020 Risk Analysis features Iraq, Afghanistan, and from Africa include Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria and Eritrea.
- **Relevance with regards to (EU-financed) reintegration interventions.** Countries where reintegration support (from the EU) has been prominent during the past years, or where it has been part of the picture, e.g. as part of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative. Total numbers of returnees receiving reintegration assistance as part of the Joint Initiative mainly come from Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, Egypt, Morocco, Ethiopia and Somalia.
- **Geographical balance.** Africa / Asia.
- **Socio-economic and fragility situation of the country of origin.**

⁷⁴ Some interviews on which this research draws have been conducted in the first quarter of 2020 in the context of other ECDPM work.

Annex 2: Conducted Interviews

Interview #	Function	Date
1	Researcher, University	11 Sept. 2020
2	Development Agency, Belgium	17 Sept. 2020
3	Consulting Agency, France	21 Sept. 2020
4	International Organisation	21 Sept. 2020
5	International Organisation	24 Sept. 2020
6	International Organisation	25. Sept. 2020
7	Consulting/Research Agency, France	01 Oct. 2020
8	Government Official, Sweden	01 Oct. 2020
9	Government Official, Afghanistan	08 Oct. 2020
10	Development Agency, Germany	09 Oct. 2020
11	International Organisation - Country Office	12 Oct. 2020
12	Researcher, NGO	12 Oct. 2020

In addition, the team drew on interviews conducted for other projects at the beginning of 2020 (February, March 2020) as well as in September 2020; including

- Separate interviews with two implementing agencies of a reintegration programme in Bangladesh;
- Separate interviews with two government officials, Bangladesh;
- Implementing Agency, Bangladesh;
- Implementing agency, Somalia;
- Government official, Somalia.

Annex 3: Additional useful resources

IOM guidance and approaches

- International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). 2018. A Framework for Services for Reintegration of International Labour Migrants from Bangladesh.
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2015. Reintegration – Effective approaches.
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Evaluations, studies and reports

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- Newland, K. and B. Salant. 2018. Balancing Acts. Towards a Global Compact for Migration: A Development Perspective – A Series to Inform the Debate. Issue no. 6. Migration Policy Institute (MPI). October 2018.
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Policies and frameworks

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