

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMMES AND FINANCE

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DEVELOPING POLICIES AND PRACTICES ON SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION

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Introduction

1. Return and reintegration are complex, multi-faceted phenomena that affect not only returning migrants, but also their families, their communities, and societies in general in countries of origin. For reintegration to be sustainable, the adoption of holistic, needs-based policies is required, taking into consideration the economic, social, and psychosocial factors impacting on reintegration across individual, community, and structural levels.

2. This paper focuses on reintegration assistance provided to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in host or transit countries and returning through assisted voluntary return or through returns organized by host governments and other actors. It is intended to update Member States on the Organization's most recent initiatives to address reintegration in the context of return in a sustainable manner. It outlines the approach employed to conceptualize comprehensive, development-oriented reintegration policies, describes the way in which IOM and its partners are putting this approach into practice and highlights the challenges and limitations that should be addressed.

Background

3. Recent years have seen a rise in complex and mixed migratory flows, motivated by the need to flee from conflict, natural disaster, violence, lack of economic opportunities, or deteriorated environmental conditions, to name but a few factors. These factors, combined with restrictive asylum policies and limited availability of regular migration channels, contribute to the increase in irregular migration. As a result, migrants often find themselves stranded in host or transit countries because of lack of legal status or because they are not found to be in need of international protection.

4. The return of migrants and asylum seekers has gained renewed political importance among national and international policymakers around the world. This has been accompanied by increased political interest, scope and funding to address their reintegration, under assisted voluntary return programmes and for returns organized by governments or their mandated agencies.

5. In line with its longstanding mandate and multisectoral expertise, IOM advocates the adoption of sustainability-oriented reintegration policies that respond to the economic, social and psychosocial needs of returning migrants, while also benefitting communities of origin and addressing structural challenges to reintegration. As outlined in the IOM Framework for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration, these policies need to be backed up by strong data collection, monitoring and evaluation to document lessons learned and inform new initiatives.

6. Implementation of such policies requires shared responsibility, partnership and cooperation among a variety of different stakeholders, as recognized in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (in objectives 21 and 7, among others). Holistic reintegration policies also contribute to the achievement of several targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, such as target 10.2.

Designing policies using an integrated approach to reintegration¹

7. Various elements influence a person's ability to reintegrate into their society and they may not be dissimilar from the personal and external drivers that resulted in the decision to migrate in the first

¹ For further information, please refer to International Organization for Migration, *Towards an Integrated Approach to Reintegration in the Context of Return* (Geneva, 2017).

place. Such drivers can be further exacerbated by the challenges related to the migration and/or return process. If not addressed by comprehensive reintegration policies, they may result in remigration as a coping mechanism against actual or perceived inadequate standards of living, insecurity and lack of opportunities.

8. According to IOM, “reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice rather than necessity.”² As such, reintegration policies can only be successful if there is a certain level of reinclusion across economic, social and psychosocial dimensions:

- (a) The economic dimension covers aspects of reintegration which contribute to economic self-sufficiency. This includes sources of income, the reliability and adequacy of employment or income-generating activity, debt-to-spending ratio, food security and satisfaction with the economic situation.
- (b) The social dimension reflects the extent to which returnees enjoy access to basic services and infrastructure in terms of housing, education, justice, health and other essential public services.
- (c) The psychosocial dimension encompasses the psychological, interpersonal and sociocultural elements of reintegration. This includes the re-establishment of personal support networks (friends, relatives, neighbours) and civil society structures (associations, self-help groups and other organizations). It also relates to the re-engagement with the values, way of living, language, moral principles, ideology, and traditions of society in the country of origin.

9. Reintegration does not only concern the individual returnee, but also the communities to which migrants return. It is also dependent upon the structural conditions of the return environment. Therefore, effective reintegration policies should be designed to encompass different levels of interventions:

- (a) **Individual level.** To address the specific needs of beneficiaries. This is particularly important for returnees who have experienced situations of violence or exploitation, such as victims of trafficking, or for those in other vulnerable situations, such as unaccompanied and separated children and migrants with medical needs.
- (b) **Community level.** To respond to the needs and concerns of the communities to which migrants return by helping to tackle the drivers of irregular migration, forging social links and increasing the capacity of communities in regions with high levels of return to successfully provide support during the reintegration process.
- (c) **Structural level.** To promote good governance of migration and to ensure continuity of support through adequate local public services.

10. The adoption of an integrated approach to reintegration requires the alignment of reintegration programming with national and local development strategies, taking into consideration the needs of the communities to which migrants return and promoting ownership of the reintegration process by governments of origin. It can be achieved through the promotion of a whole-of-government approach to reintegration: enhancing cooperation across different sectors and between relevant ministries and identifying complementarities between different funding instruments, namely those used to address return management and those supporting community stabilization and cooperation for development.

² Ibid.

11. Comprehensive reintegration policies should include systematic monitoring (both at the programme implementation and beneficiary level) and long-term evaluation to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, impact and sustainability of measures implemented.

From theory to practice: Operationalizing an integrated approach to reintegration

12. IOM has been undertaking concrete actions to foster the design and implementation of reintegration policies inspired by its integrated approach. The following sections highlight some of the initiatives currently being carried out by IOM and its partners at the local and global levels.

Fostering the development of comprehensive reintegration support systems in countries of origin

13. In 2017 and 2018, the European Union and IOM launched several joint programmes (also referred to as European Union–IOM Actions) addressing migrant protection and sustainable reintegration in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa and the Development Cooperation Instrument. These include the Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions, North Africa and the Horn of Africa, which supports reintegration efforts in and with 26 partner countries; the Pilot Action on Voluntary and Sustainable, Community-based Reintegration, which covers Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa; and country-level projects to improve the reintegration of returnees in Afghanistan (RADA project) and Bangladesh (Prottasha project). Within the scope of the Pilot Action, a knowledge management hub has been established, which provides support to all the EU-IOM Actions detailed above.

14. These EU-IOM Actions use an integrated approach to reintegration, which not only assists individual returnees, but also supports the communities to which migrants return and the structures/systems relevant to returnee reintegration in the country of origin. The type of assistance provided is determined in the country of origin, based on the needs of the migrants and their communities and in partnership with the authorities of the respective countries.

15. The knowledge management hub plays a crucial role in the implementation of these actions by providing thematic expertise, supporting the development and cross-regional harmonization of standard operating procedures and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and contributing to the improvement of existing data collection, data management and reporting tools. More specifically, comprehensive guidance has been developed on measuring the sustainability of reintegration, based on the revised IOM definition and fieldwork undertaken within the scope of the Mediterranean Sustainable Reintegration (MEASURE) project, which was funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). The indicators and tools included in the guidance are integrated into the EU-IOM Actions and are being progressively rolled out globally across all reintegration initiatives, thereby fostering harmonization across regions and allowing for comparative analysis.

16. The knowledge management hub will also disseminate lessons learned and good practices on return and reintegration through a dedicated online portal for practitioners, which will include a virtual community of practice. This is further supported by workshops and a limited research fund allowing the commissioning of studies on knowledge gaps in the field of return and reintegration. A recent initiative, co-sponsored by the knowledge management hub, was the Technical Workshop on Sustainable Reintegration of Migrants held in November 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as part of the work of the African Union–European Union–United Nations Taskforce on the Situation of Migrants in Libya. Participants exchanged good practices and identified challenges, lessons learned, and opportunities to strengthen sustainable reintegration of migrants returning to their home countries from various regions.

Providing integral support from reception and working with local governments

17. In Central America, thousands of migrants are returned to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras each year from Mexico and the United States of America.³ With the support of the United States Agency for International Development, the governments of countries in the northern triangle of Central America have worked closely with IOM to improve their capacities for the reception, processing and care of returning migrants. Reception is the first step in the reintegration process and integrated services are offered at reception centres by multi-agency processes, in collaboration with civil society partners. Local governments are a key partner in reintegration activities, owing to their direct contact with individual returning migrants, their families and their communities. IOM supports local government efforts to provide sustainable reintegration in line with local development initiatives, through psychosocial assistance, vocational and educational training, and community-led infrastructure projects. In addition, the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund has decided to invest in reintegration efforts in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras as a way to promote social cohesion and prevent violence in communities of return.

Providing practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance

18. Through the Operationalizing an Integrated Approach to Reintegration (ORION) project, also funded by DFID, IOM is finalizing a reintegration handbook and a related training curriculum. These tools provide practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance for IOM staff, policymakers and other reintegration practitioners globally.

19. The reintegration handbook provides guidance on an integrated approach to reintegration, with modules on individual, community and structural level actions, focusing on the economic, social and psychosocial dimensions of reintegration. A module on monitoring and evaluation is also included. Furthermore, a separate chapter on the reintegration of children and their families will be developed in collaboration with UNICEF. The handbook details the key aspects to consider when designing, implementing and monitoring reintegration programmes, taking into account the specific country context. Initial pilot workshops to prepare the handbook training curriculum took place in Guinea, Morocco and Senegal in November 2018. These highlighted the relevance of the integrated approach for returnees and the importance of working closely with all relevant actors to provide reintegration assistance.

20. Simultaneously, a mentoring approach is being piloted in Guinea, Morocco and Senegal. Mentors – who are community members (including former returnees) – serve as a link between returnees and the community and help returnees to implement their reintegration plans. The mentors also play a key role in developing networks and raising awareness about reintegration among relevant local authorities, institutions and non-governmental and civil society organizations in their communities. Furthermore, the ORION project aims to use the indicators developed by IOM to measure reintegration sustainability at the individual level. It will do this by comparing data from returnees who have received different kinds of reintegration support. This will provide evidence on the effectiveness and reintegration outcomes of related approaches, which will be crucial in informing future programming.

Assisting migrants vulnerable to human trafficking, violence, exploitation and abuse

21. Alongside the reintegration handbook, IOM has also developed the *IOM Handbook: Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse*. The Handbook describes

³ See the latest official statistics here: <https://mic.iom.int/webntmi/>

the IOM determinants of migrant vulnerability model, which provides a method for assessing the risk and protective factors at individual, household, community and structural levels that influence vulnerability or resilience to violence, exploitation and abuse within a migration context. Based on such assessments, appropriate responses to mitigate and address migrant vulnerability can be designed and implemented at all levels, either before, during or after migration, including in reintegration contexts.

Linking pre-departure counselling and post-arrival job placement through partnerships

22. IOM promotes job placements through the provision of up-to-date information on the conditions in countries of origin to prepare returnees before they return. For instance, in the framework of the national assisted voluntary return and reintegration programme of Belgium – funded by the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (FEDASIL) – up-to-date information is provided to potential returnees to Armenia, Georgia and the Russian Federation. This includes information on job vacancies and training opportunities in the countries of origin. Partnerships are also established with job employment agencies and relevant actors in the private sector to enhance employment opportunities for returnees.

Current gaps and limitations

23. Although important strides have been made by IOM, its donors and partners towards more holistic reintegration initiatives, considerable limitations remain. Wide discrepancies continue to exist in the level of support provided to returnees and areas remain where no reintegration support is available upon return. Funding provided to support reintegration globally remains uneven and insufficient to address the needs of returning migrants and their communities. The important link between pre-departure assistance and reintegration needs to be further strengthened, while the psychosocial dimension of reintegration remains largely unexplored.

24. Further developing and expanding monitoring and evaluation through comprehensive and harmonized data collection and analysis is necessary to determine which interventions have the maximum impact in different contexts and would provide a baseline from which to learn, adapt, and refine migrant- and community-centered reintegration initiatives.

25. Government ownership and capacity-building should be promoted so that reintegration initiatives are part of local and national policies and align with development plans. Institutional dialogue and partnerships should be strengthened to effectively draw on the mandates and mobilize the expertise of governmental and non-governmental actors alike.

Conclusion

26. Recent years have seen an important progression towards the adoption of comprehensive policies and practices on reintegration. This is mainly the result of an improved understanding of this phenomenon among policymakers, donors and practitioners and the increased complementarities between different funding instruments, namely those used to address return management and those supporting cooperation for development at the international, national and local levels. This progression is reflected in the programmatic examples outlined in this paper.

27. At the same time, further efforts are needed to promote a truly integrated approach to reintegration. The current migration landscape presents an opportunity to reshape reintegration policies and practices into something more than a mere response to irregular migration. Reintegration should be seen as a tool that can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. IOM stands ready to continue supporting its Member States and to work with its partners to ensure that a holistic approach to reintegration is embedded in government policies and practices.