

Linking Migrant Reintegration Assistance and Development Goals

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Executive Summary

For migrants returning to their countries of origin, whether because they do not have a right or a desire to stay in their destination country, assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programs offer a safe and dignified way to do so. In recent years, European AVRR programs have offered returnees counselling and short-term assistance. These activities have produced mixed results, largely because of community and structural conditions in origin countries that hamper effective reintegration, including prejudice against returnees, weak public services, and limited opportunities in local economies.

In recognition that reintegration does not happen in a vacuum, there has been a growing push among destination-country stakeholders (including home affairs actors, who usually fund AVRR programs) and origin-country governments to add a development angle into reintegration projects. By improving social and economic conditions for returnees and the communities in which they live, these efforts aim to foster sustainable reintegration, strengthen social cohesion, and ideally, have a multiplier effect on local development. However, the path to achieving these intersecting goals remains unclear.

Different approaches exist to linking reintegration projects and development goals. These include encouraging positive spillover effects from reintegration

assistance provided to individual returnees (e.g., start-up grants to launch a small business, some of which may grow and employ other community members) as well as community-based reintegration interventions (e.g., livelihoods projects that are open to returnees and other local residents). Still other efforts involve capacity-building assistance to improve the ability of origin-country governments and civil society to serve returnees (and others) well, and reintegration service providers referring returnees to development interventions for support that is often longer term in nature and can be more impactful.

By improving social and economic conditions for returnees and the communities in which they live, these efforts aim to foster sustainable reintegration.

But despite the potential benefits for both returnees and their communities, connecting reintegration projects and development goals is challenging. Reintegration and development actors have long operated in separate silos, and most reintegration projects remain focused solely on delivering assistance to individual returnees. For many AVRR program funders, improving community and structural conditions is a “nice to have” element, rather than essential, or too complicated and resource intensive.

And in migrants' countries of origin, connecting reintegration projects and development goals can be politically sensitive (as it touches on the contentious issue of returns), governments may not have a strategy for linking the two, and many returnees find themselves in vulnerable situations (e.g., as a result of medical issues, trauma, or debt) that mean they are not in a position to immediately contribute to local development. Finally, there is limited evidence on what modalities work best to achieve reintegration and development outcomes at once.

While efforts to link up reintegration projects and development goals are not new, they are gaining momentum as it becomes clear that doing so will be critical to maximizing the impact and sustainability of assistance provided to returning migrants. Making good on this aim will require significant resources and political will to develop a common language and a joint agenda among partners in countries of origin and destination.

1 Introduction

Migration and development are intricately linked.¹ The level of social and economic development in a country shapes why and where people move. Likewise, migration affects development in countries of origin, transit, and destination, through the circulation of people with different skills, remittances, and more. Since the European refugee and migration crisis in 2015–16, these linkages have increasingly drawn the attention of European donors and policymakers. These actors have launched a range of programs seeking to use development funding and instruments to reduce what are often termed the “root causes” of migration.² This thinking also extends to assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programs for asylum seekers whose cases are rejected and for certain other migrants (e.g., those who have overstayed a visa, and asylum seekers who abandon their asylum claims). Instead of simply returning people to their countries of origin, there is

now a broader recognition that offering assistance can ease returnees' reintegration and potentially help them make the most of their skills, knowledge, and resources. In turn, there is a growing acknowledgement that migrant reintegration is often most successful in communities that are welcoming, that have functional public services, and where livelihood opportunities are available.³

However, delivering assistance to returnees while building a conducive environment and, ideally, achieving broader development goals in countries of origin remains a challenge. Most development actors have avoided connecting their work with reintegration programs, mainly because these programs are often directly managed by home affairs ministries and seen as an element of migration enforcement. And indeed, many reintegration programs are primarily driven by destination countries' desire to anchor returning migrants in their countries of origin so that they do not migrate again.⁴ Until recently, donors also showed limited interest in documenting the outcomes of reintegration projects, though doing so could help identify which approaches are the most effective for returnees and their communities.⁵ Finally, while reintegration assistance usually targets individual returnees, development programs aim to generate wider societal benefits at the community and structural levels. The sum of these trends is that reintegration and development initiatives have rarely overlapped.

Still, recent shifts in EU return governance, including the involvement of new actors such as Frontex and the launch of new programming cycles, may change some of these dynamics. On the one hand, some parts of the European Commission as well as development actors in countries such as Germany and Belgium are advocating for more links between reintegration and development programs. In addition, these actors support increasing cooperation with origin countries and fostering their ownership over the design, implementation, and monitoring of reintegration programs.⁶ On the other hand, there has

recently been a redistribution of mandates for reintegration at the EU level, with Frontex’s Joint Reintegration Services offering reintegration assistance for migrants returning from Member States to 34 countries.⁷ This mechanism relies on Frontex-contracted service providers to deliver assistance to individual returnees,⁸ often without systematic mechanisms to refer returnees to services in origin countries that could provide longer-term support. In this shifting context, the question is not only how to connect reintegration and development programs, but also how to ensure the many different stakeholders and funding streams involved converge toward the same objectives: sustainable reintegration for returnees and broader development goals.

Reintegration has also grown as a political priority for migrants’ countries of origin, which are facing increased pressure both to deliver better services to returnees and to strengthen the resilience of the communities in which they settle. Several events have contributed to this. First, starting in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led migrant workers to return *en masse* to their countries of origin and put pressure on origin-country governments to assist their nationals.⁹ Second, some African countries have experienced a large number of returns from Niger and Libya, and faced public pressure to better address the needs of returning migrants and their communities.¹⁰ Third, European countries have lobbied for and provided funding to move reintegration higher up on origin countries’ domestic agendas, and this has led some to become more receptive to the idea of developing national reintegration policies, at least in the short term.¹¹ Lastly, some countries of origin have sought to better leverage external funding for reintegration to achieve national development priorities (for instance, to build up small-scale infrastructure).¹² Yet, despite origin-country governments’ growing attention to reintegration matters, many also face tension stemming from the public perception that returnees are being granted special treatment compared to other groups who are also in vulnerable situations. The notion of taking own-

ership over reintegration is also sensitive and not accepted by all origin-country governments because it is connected to the contentious subject of migrant returns and readmission.

This issue brief analyzes the potential benefits of connecting reintegration projects with development goals in order to create the best environment possible for returnees and contribute to local development. It maps out existing approaches to creating such links as well as these approaches’ limitations. Finally, the brief outlines measures that could help future policies and programs overcome these hurdles.

2 Unpacking the Links between Reintegration Projects and Development

While most European reintegration projects are managed by home affairs ministries, not development authorities, this does not mean they cannot have development impacts. This usually occurs in one of four ways, shown in Figure 1. For instance, projects that deliver assistance to individual returnees (e.g., via vocational training or start-up grants) can have positive knock-on effects for the local economy in origin countries, though these impacts tend to be limited. In some cases, reintegration projects target the broader communities in which returnees live, which can generate wider development effects. Beyond these two approaches, a few recent development programs have specifically sought to build the capacity of origin-country government and civil-society actors to deliver better services for returnees and their communities. Finally, the work of reintegration and development efforts may intersect, such as when a reintegration service provider refers returnees to development interventions or when returnees are included as a target group in such interventions.

FIGURE 1

Four Ways Reintegration Projects and Development Objectives Can Intersect

Source: created by the authors.

A. *Individual-Focused Reintegration Projects*

The most straightforward way to connect reintegration projects and development goals is to view returnees as potential actors in local development. Most reintegration initiatives provide returnees with a support package, and in some cases this assistance

can have a positive effect on the local economy.¹³ For example, under the reintegration program of the French Office for Immigration and Integration (Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration, or OFII), returnees can receive a start-up grant to launch a business, and some of these businesses manage to grow and employ other community members or offer new products or services to local customers.¹⁴

However, these individual-focused reintegration projects' development impacts tend to be small in scale. For one thing, they do not aim to have structural effects in the country of origin or address community dynamics. In addition, the projects tend to directly target relatively small numbers of people in countries of origin (e.g., 1,326 people benefited from OFII's reintegration support worldwide in 2021).¹⁵ The outcomes of returnees who receive assistance, though not sufficiently documented by monitoring data, also appear to be mixed.¹⁶ For example, not all returnees are able to become successful entrepreneurs, whether because they lack the skills, have other aspirations, or because they are grappling with health issues, trauma, stigma, or debt from their migration journey and cannot fully focus on managing a business.¹⁷ In some cases, external factors such as economic crises and instability can undermine these efforts. For instance, the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN) has supported returnees in Afghanistan with creating small businesses,¹⁸ but growing instability, the pandemic, and the fall of the Afghan government in August 2021 have led to major difficulties for these entrepreneurs.¹⁹

A final limitation of this individual-focused approach is that it can negatively affect social cohesion and trigger tensions. This generally occurs when program beneficiaries are perceived as unfairly receiving support that is not available to other community members who did not migrate or who migrated and returned but were ineligible for the same assistance (e.g., because they returned by their own means or via an AVRR program that offered less comprehensive reintegration support).²⁰

B. Community-Based Reintegration Projects

To address several of the challenges faced by individual-focused projects, some reintegration pro-

grams have adopted a community-based service model. These interventions do not have direct development goals either, as their priority remains supporting the reintegration of returning migrants. The community lens is primarily a tool to reach that objective, by fostering an environment in which reintegration is more likely to occur.²¹ Still, activities are not solely designed around returnees' needs and instead seek to also address issues facing broader communities. Such programs have involved cash-for-work projects in which returnees build public infrastructure²² and livelihoods initiatives that are open to both returnees and other community members.²³ For example, in a small project run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in two Ethiopian villages, returnees and nonreturnees helped to rehabilitate the local environment via soil and water conservation measures.²⁴

Such programs have involved cash-for-work projects in which returnees build public infrastructure and livelihoods initiatives that are open to both returnees and other community members.

Overall, these initiatives tend to be small in scope (e.g., 115 people, including 50 returnees, worked for three months as part of the IOM Ethiopia initiative). They have also had a mixed record in terms of the extent to which communities are consulted to inform project design as well as their impacts and durability.²⁵ For instance, it can be difficult to reach consensus on what criteria a project should use to select community members for participation, especially in regions where many households have a pressing need for livelihoods support.

C. *Capacity-Building Assistance*

In comparison to the two previous approaches, which aim to have a near-term impact on individual returnees and their communities, projects that aim to build the capacity of origin-country actors to support migrant reintegration and public service delivery more broadly seek to achieve more structural and sustainable impacts. The rationale is that by strengthening public institutions and civil-society organizations, these local actors can then deliver better services to returnees and their communities.²⁶ Some capacity-building efforts involve supporting local actors as they develop their own reintegration mechanisms. In Tunisia, for example, the EU-funded program ProGreS (Programme Gouvernance Stratégie Migration Tunisienne) I and II has sought to support the country's national reintegration mechanism Tounesna.²⁷ In partnership with OFII, the French development actor Expertise France has provided technical assistance, training, and tools to the Tunisian government, with the goal of improving support for returnees and ensuring it is grounded in local realities. Capacity-building approaches can also involve the provision of equipment, setting up coordination mechanisms, and direct budget support for the offices in charge of service delivery.²⁸

A notable subset of capacity-building efforts focus on training origin-country authorities and civil-society organizations to be aware of and respond to the specific challenges returnees face. As part of the Migration for Development program, which is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH has supported the establishment of job centers in 12 partner countries and trained representatives of employment services and ministries of labor (among others) on the types of assistance returnees often need.²⁹ The goal is for these institutions to deliver existing services in a way that is more sensitive

to returnees' needs and to build additional support systems, such as psychosocial assistance.

All of these measures align with a development agenda, but some have limited long-term effects. This is generally due to lack of buy-in from origin-country partners, whether for political reasons or due to competition between ministries/civil-society organizations over which actors should have responsibility for supporting migrants' reintegration. These stakeholders may also lack the resources to step up their activities and governance mechanisms.³⁰ In addition, capacity-building interventions are unlikely to have immediate effects, which may generate frustrations among returnees who urgently need assistance. A final set of difficulties includes issues such as staff turnover and trainings not sufficiently tailored to the local context, which can blunt the impact of capacity-building efforts.³¹

D. *Connections between Reintegration and Development Programming*

A final approach is to directly connect the work of reintegration and development actors. This can involve an AVRR program referring returnees to a development initiative for support, reintegration and development actors designing joint programs, or development projects identifying returnees as one of their target groups. Doing so can help broaden the services available to returnees and ensure they receive longer-term support than is usually available through individual reintegration assistance, especially when such efforts occur alongside capacity-building support for local institutions.³²

These connections hinge on making sure development programs recognize returnees' needs and work to reach them. This involves, for instance, ensuring that health programs address issues common among returnees, or that livelihoods initiatives are

open and accessible to returnees. For example, the Youth Employment Project (YEP) in The Gambia was launched under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to provide training and employment opportunities to both returnees and other residents in communities with high emigration rates. To benefit from this development intervention, returnees were referred by their IOM reintegration program to the International Trade Centre, YEP's implementing partner in The Gambia.³³ Such referrals to development interventions are at the heart of making linkages between reintegration and development programs work in practice.

A key obstacle is the many discrepancies between reintegration and development programs, often including their geographic scope and target groups.

However, support via development programs is not always available to returnees, depending on when and where they return. A key obstacle is the many discrepancies between reintegration and development programs, often including their geographic scope and target groups. Coordination is another challenge, given referrals from an AVRR program to a development initiative typically entail a shift of responsibility, partially or completely, over an individual's case. This can lead to gaps in ownership and accountability if the referral process is not carefully planned and, ideally, supported by a formal agreement that lays out each partner's responsibilities.³⁴ For instance, in Guinea, IOM and the Belgian development agency Enabel sought to work together to integrate returnees into a livelihood initiative managed by Enabel.³⁵ But referring returning migrants to the project proved more challenging than anticipated due to mismatches between returnees' profiles, arrival dates, and location and the development project's eligibility criteria, timeline, and geographical scope.³⁶ In the end, some returnees fell

through the cracks and did not receive livelihoods support from either IOM or Enabel. Finally, returning migrants' ability to access support via development programs can be constrained by the skills and knowledge of the development actors involved, many of whom have received little to no training on the specific challenges returnees face.

3 Obstacles to Further Linking Reintegration and Development Programs

Overall, policymakers and practitioners in both origin and destination countries have an appetite for better connecting reintegration and development programs. But what exactly such linkages should look like remains open for debate. This is largely because a shift away from providing support to individual returnees and toward more development-oriented interventions requires balancing the immediate needs of returnees with broader support to achieve change at the community and/or structural level. Other challenges relate to the dynamics of return governance in countries of destination and origin, and to the dearth of evidence on what types of interventions are best able to achieve both reintegration and development goals.

A. *Balancing Pressing, Individual Needs and Long-Term Development Goals*

While there are some success stories of returnees contributing to local development, many migrants find themselves in vulnerable situations immediately upon return. They may have gotten sick, injured, or experienced trauma during their migration journey. For example, a considerable share of migrants who return to Armenia have acute or chronic health

problems, which limits their employment prospects.³⁷ Some returnees may also not have the skills to contribute to the local economy, at least in the short term, for lack of education and training. In Serbia, for instance, the majority of returnees are members of the Roma minority, which has faced a long history of systematic discrimination and has low average levels of education.³⁸

In addition, the relationships between returnees and their families and communities of origin are not always conducive to returnees becoming agents of local development. For example, in Central America, returnees often face stigma and are perceived as associated with criminal groups in the United States.³⁹ In other places, returnees are perceived as having failed their family or community, especially if they have taken on debt to fund their migration and returned before it could be paid off.⁴⁰ These prejudices, and the associated lack of community support, can make it harder for returning migrants to find livelihoods and housing.

All these factors point to the reality that not all returnees are able to leverage their skills and experience to make an immediate difference at home. To be successful, reintegration projects should be designed with these difficulties and individual support needs in mind, even as they increasingly aim to also have a development impact.

B. Coordinating across Policy Portfolios

Policymakers and practitioners in countries of destination will need to work across policy areas if they are to make the most of the potential synergies between reintegration and development programming. For a long time, reintegration and development actors have operated in silos, and these silos remain strong in some places. In France, for example, OFII manages its reintegration projects independently from the work of the French

Development Agency.⁴¹ At the EU level, the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs and Frontex operate their own reintegration projects for migrants returning from the European Union.⁴² Meanwhile, the Directorates-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations and for International Partnerships manage capacity-building projects in the areas of return and reintegration, as well as reintegration initiatives for migrants returning from countries outside the European Union to their home countries.⁴³ Some efforts are underway to better connect these portfolios,⁴⁴ but gaps persist, reflecting the difficulties of reconciling the different mandates and approaches of development and home affairs stakeholders.⁴⁵

Working together more closely will require these actors to find a common language, as well as to sort out a whole range of operational matters (e.g., how to make returnees a target group in development programs, given the uncertainty about how many will return, on what timeline, and what their profiles will be). Bridging these gaps will take time and may not always be compatible with the political pressure on European policymakers and practitioners to boost return figures. Development programs could strive to include reintegration considerations starting in their design phase, much in the same way that some factor in considerations related to internally displaced persons or returning refugees.⁴⁶ Doing so will, however, be resource intensive and depend on effective cooperation between actors that do not always share the same priorities.⁴⁷

C. Engaging Origin-Country Actors Effectively

Sustainable reintegration and broader development impacts can only be achieved if key stakeholders in countries of origin are involved in supporting returnees from the start. This entails, for example, ensuring that origin-country governments are aware of the profiles and needs of returning migrants, the rein-

tegration projects available, and potentially, have dedicated services for those with particular vulnerabilities. This is not always straightforward, however, since origin countries face many competing priorities. Providing assistance to returnees has become more important for some,⁴⁸ but it is often still largely perceived as the responsibility of destination countries (at least for returns from Europe).⁴⁹

Tensions may also exist within origin-country governments over which entity is responsible for reintegration. For instance, in Guinea, the Enabel livelihoods project open to returnees and locals (described in Section 2.D.) was connected to a different Guinean ministry from the one responsible for reintegration affairs more broadly, and the two entities were not used to close coordination.⁵⁰ Insufficient buy-in from countries of origin and disagreements over the governance of reintegration issues can hamper the effectiveness of reintegration projects and attempts to connect them up with development efforts.

D. Gathering Evidence on the Intersection of Reintegration and Development

There is limited evidence on what approaches work best to achieve both reintegration and development outcomes. Policymakers have begun advocating for more robust monitoring of reintegration projects,⁵¹ and an increasing number of studies, monitoring reports, and evaluations have been conducted in recent years.⁵² New programs such as Frontex's Joint Reintegration Services have also stated their commitment to monitoring and better documenting the outcomes of their reintegration assistance. But these monitoring mechanisms, at best, only capture the effects of assistance on returnees; they rarely track the potential broader impacts on returnees' communities. In addition, in the case of capacity-building efforts, impact can be challenging to measure be-

cause it is not always easily quantifiable and baseline data are not always available. The outcomes of these capacity-building activities also tend to depend on many factors outside of the intervention itself, which can make it difficult to map its exact contributions to change. For instance, ProGreS previously faced delays due to institutional instability in Tunisia, and this situation limited the impact of some of its activities.⁵³

There is also hesitance among some donors and implementing partners to extend their monitoring to cover the work of external partners, such as public services and civil-society organizations that support returnees through referrals. This is due in part to the view that these referrals can blur the lines of institutional responsibility (i.e., who should be accountable for the quality of services delivered by a public institution after a referral). There are also practical challenges, such as policies limiting what personal data can be shared (and with whom) and the absence of a dedicated budget line for monitoring activities.⁵⁴ Similarly, the entities that receive returnees via referrals may not be inclined to engage in thorough monitoring efforts, especially if these are not funded. Ultimately, even when evaluations are conducted, their findings are not always shared with key partners, including origin-country governments. This is often a product of the high level of competition that exists between service providers (who may compete for contracts) and the sensitivity of return and reintegration issues in origin countries. However, overcoming these hurdles to building a stronger evidence base will be necessary if reintegration projects and development goals are to be more closely—and effectively—linked.⁵⁵

4 Conclusion

Stronger connections are being forged between reintegration projects and development efforts. And while there is limited evidence on what approaches

produce the best outcomes for returning migrants, their communities, and countries of origin and destination, one thing is clear: reintegration and development actors will need to carefully navigate trade-offs between responding to the specific needs of returnees and thinking about the broader, long-term development of the communities in which they settle.

Reintegration assistance for individual returnees is not set up to have community-level or structural impacts. Even if returnees are able to find their own economic footing after return, the knock-on effects are likely to remain small and localized. In addition, many returnees struggle with health challenges, trauma, debt, or stigma, making it difficult for them to take full advantage of the livelihoods support being offered, let alone do so in a way that would have broad community benefits. Still, individual support is a necessary component of reintegration projects because it can respond to returnees' immediate needs. Community-based approaches, while more ambitious, have similarly had limited spillover effects on local development as they remain driven by reintegration objectives.

In contrast, initiatives focused on building the capacity of origin-country stakeholders to support reintegration and efforts to include returnees in development programs aim to achieve more structural and sustainable gains. However, they operate on a longer timeline and do not address the immediate needs of returnees in vulnerable situations. The latter approach also frequently suffers from major operational challenges related to the difficulties of aligning reintegration and development work, in terms of timelines, funding streams, geographic coverage, and target group criteria.

What is more, moving reintegration assistance fully into the realm of development programs risks diluting the attention paid to returnees—something that has been fostered over the last decade, in recognition of the fact that this group faces unique

challenges. Development actors already work with a wide range of groups in vulnerable situations, and adding returnees to this portfolio may mean the assistance they receive loses some of its specificity. The same can also be true for origin countries facing many competing priorities; mainstreaming reintegration considerations into public services and domestic development efforts may result in less attention being paid to returnees' unique needs.

Despite these tensions, reintegration assistance will need to build closer links to development goals and programs if it hopes to foster economic and social conditions in receiving communities that allow returning migrants to thrive. Four broad recommendations can guide this work:

- ▶ **Improve coordination between actors across policy portfolios and in countries of origin and destination.** With significant changes in EU governance of returns underway, and several European destination countries and origin countries restructuring their return and reintegration strategies, development and home affairs actors will need to step up coordination efforts and address uncomfortable questions around program objectives and responsibilities. For projects to truly achieve their reintegration objectives and, ideally, have a broader impact on development, all relevant actors in countries of origin and destination should be involved from the design phase on.
- ▶ **Strengthen local ownership over reintegration processes.** Projects cannot hope to achieve development impacts if key stakeholders in migrants' countries of origin are not involved. This is no easy task, given how sensitive returns-related issues can be for policymakers and civil society in these countries and the fact that many of these actors have competing priorities and capacity

constraints. Ensuring local ownership over the design, implementation, and monitoring of reintegration projects will require long-term engagement and support tailored to the local context. This should involve building better communication channels between countries of origin and destination, centering origin-country development priorities, and strengthening local organizations' ability to deliver high-quality assistance whose effects can endure beyond those of short-term reintegration programs.

- ▶ **Safeguard meeting returnees' needs as a top priority.** While it is welcome when reintegration programs yield local development impacts, pursuing development goals should not come at the expense of responding to returnees' vulnerabilities. To ensure their needs are met, any development partners involved in supporting returning migrants' reintegration should receive training to help them understand the specific challenges this group faces and how they can adapt their programs accordingly.
- ▶ **Build a better understanding of how different approaches to reintegration intersect with development goals.** A stronger evidence base is needed to answer questions such as what level of local development is required to ensure the success of reintegration projects and what impacts can reintegration interventions have on development at the community and

structural levels. Monitoring and evaluation is an important tool in this regard. Future efforts should aim to capture impacts of individual-focused reintegration projects that stretch beyond returnees themselves, and the extent to which referring returnees to development interventions and developing joint programs can produce better reintegration outcomes. Ideally, comparative studies would be conducted to shed light on which approaches work best in which contexts. Program budgets should be planned accordingly, including funding to not only carry out monitoring activities but also to involve origin-country partners in the process and to disseminate lessons learned.

Discussions about linking up reintegration projects and development goals are not new, but a growing number of policymakers and practitioners in Europe and migrants' countries of origin have become aware of the intrinsic limitations of individual-focused reintegration assistance. Some are now convinced that AVRR interventions could achieve better outcomes by tackling obstacles at the community and structural levels. In turn, development actors have increasingly acknowledged returnees as a group with serious vulnerabilities and long-term assistance needs. Thus, if key trade-offs and long-standing obstacles to collaboration can be successfully navigated, new synergies between reintegration and development programs could result in more impactful and sustainable assistance for returnees as well as broader development gains.

If key trade-offs and long-standing obstacles to collaboration can be successfully navigated, new synergies between reintegration and development programs could result in more impactful and sustainable assistance for returnees as well as broader development gains.

Endnotes

- 1 Frédéric Docquier, “The Emigration-Development Nexus: Recent Advances from the Growth Theory Perspective,” *Revue d’économie du développement* 25, no. 3–4 (2017): 45–68.
- 2 The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, *2021 Annual Report* (Brussels: The European Commission, 2022).
- 3 Discussion during the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) roundtable “Building Bridges: Making Reintegration Work for Development,” September 26, 2022. The roundtable was part of a joint initiative launched by MPI and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to create opportunities for dialogue on voluntary return and sustainable reintegration between partners from countries of origin, transit, and destination. See also International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), *ERRIN Technical Working Group on Reintegration & Development: Operational Framework* (Vienna: ICMPD, 2022).
- 4 For instance, one of the objectives of Frontex’s Joint Reintegration Services (JRS) is to “address root causes of illegal migration and support the stabilization of returnees in their country of origin.” See Frontex, “Returns and Reintegration,” accessed May 23, 2023.
- 5 Lucía Salgado, Radu-Mihai Triculescu, Camille Le Coz, and Hanne Beirens, *Putting Migrant Reintegration Programmes to the Test: A Road Map to a Monitoring System* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2022).
- 6 Discussions during the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF), New York, May 17–20, 2022, and the MPI roundtable, “Building Bridges.” See also European Commission, “Migration Management: New EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration” (press release, April 27, 2021); EU-International Organization for Migration (IOM) Knowledge Management Hub, *Fostering and Strengthening Interlinkages between Sustainable Development and Reintegration Programmes* (Geneva: IOM, 2021); ICMPD, *ERRIN Technical Working Group*. Both global and regional agreements have recognized and further emphasized this objective, including the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, which advocates for the inclusion of returnees and their communities in national and local development strategies. See Objective 21(f) of United Nations General Assembly, “Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration,” January 11, 2019. The EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration also calls for “coherent action” and “closer links with development initiatives.” See European Commission, “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration” (COM [2021] 120 final, April 27, 2021).
- 7 The JRS has replaced previous reintegration activities managed by the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN). See Frontex, “Returns and Reintegration.”
- 8 Frontex calls this a “post-return package.” It is delivered in the 12 months after return.
- 9 Camille Le Coz and Kathleen Newland, *Rewiring Migrant Returns and Reintegration after the COVID-19 Shock* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2021).
- 10 There has also been heightened pressure on the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration because more returns from Libya have occurred than what was initially planned for the program. See EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, *Evaluation of Reintegration Activities in the Sahel and Lake Chad Region* (Brussels: European Union and IOM, 2020), 33.
- 11 For example, several countries now have the foundations for creating national referral mechanisms. See, for instance, IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa, “IOM, EU and Government of Mali Launch Dissemination Campaign on National Referral Mechanism for Migrants in Most Vulnerable Situations” (press release, May 17, 2022); Christof Roos, Florian Trauner, and Ilke Adam, “Bureaucratic Migration Politics in West Africa: Opportunities and Dependencies Created by EU Funding,” *International Migration Review* (2023): 1–23.
- 12 Kate Hooper and Kathleen Newland, *Mind the Gap: Bringing Migration into Development Partnerships and Vice Versa* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018); Migration for Development, “Senegal – Making Migration Work for Sustainable Development,” accessed January 13, 2023.
- 13 This is still the majority of reintegration assistance programs, from the JRS to IOM. For instance, 88 percent of IOM reintegration support in 2021 was provided at the individual level, compared to 1 percent at the community level and 11 percent at the collective level (provided to a group of returnees). See IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2021* (Geneva: IOM, 2022).
- 14 Office Français de l’Immigration et de l’Intégration (OFII), “Parcours de réinsertions durables et réussies des migrants Géorgiens de retour de France avec l’aide au retour volontaire de l’OFII” (press release, April 21, 2022).
- 15 Rémy Schwartz and Didier Leschi, *Rapport d’activités 2021* (Paris: OFII, 2022), 19. Out of 4,678 people who received assistance from OFII to return voluntarily to their countries of origin, 1,326 received reintegration assistance.
- 16 Salgado, Triculescu, Le Coz, and Beirens, *Putting Migrant Reintegration Programmes to the Test*.
- 17 See, for instance, Constanza Vera Larrucea, Henrik Malm Lindberg, and André Asplund, *Those Who Were Sent Back: Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers to Afghanistan and Iraq* (Stockholm: Delmi, 2021); IOM, *Snapshot Report: Afghan Returnees from Turkey and the EU: Returnee Longitudinal Survey* (Bangkok: IOM, 2021); IOM, *Debt, Reintegration and Socioeconomic Sustainability of Migrants’ Households* (Dhaka: IOM, 2022); IOM, *Migration de Retour: Trafic et Traite des Migrants Ivoiriens le Long de la Route Méditerranéenne Centrale et Occidentale* (Abidjan: IOM, 2021).
- 18 ERRIN, “Afghanistan,” accessed January 13, 2023.

- 19 Larrucea, Lindberg, and Asplund, *Those Who Were Sent Back*. See also IOM, *Snapshot Report: Afghan Returnees*. For evaluation of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative and challenges in the Sahel, see EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, *Regional Final Evaluation Report: the Sahel and Lake Chad Region* (Brussels: European Union and IOM, 2021).
- 20 Recommendations for more community-based projects to promote social cohesion are discussed in EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, *Evaluation of Reintegration Activities*.
- 21 IOM, “Module 3: Reintegration Assistance at the Community Level,” in *Reintegration Handbook* (Geneva: IOM, 2019).
- 22 One example is a project in Guinea Bissau focused on the reforestation of the eastern Gabu region. See EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, *Towards Sustainable Reintegration: EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration - Five Years on. Key Achievements* (Brussels: IOM, 2022), 22.
- 23 IOM, *Voluntary Return and Reintegration: Community-Based Approaches* (Rabat: IOM, 2017).
- 24 EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, “Practice #11: Creating Livelihoods through Environmental Rehabilitation in Ethiopia” (Reintegration Assistance Good, Promising, and Innovative Practices fact sheet, March 2022). Other initiatives under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative are documented in IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2021*. Previously, the Migrant Response and Resource Mechanism implemented by the IOM supported livelihoods projects involving around 3,000 returnees and 3,000 “potential migrants” in Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, Guinea, and Guinea Bissau. See IOM, “IOM Launches Reintegration Projects for West African Migrants with EU Trust Fund Support” (press release, March 28, 2017).
- 25 See, for instance, the challenges documented regarding the design of community assistance projects, for example in Côte d’Ivoire where the IOM-EU Joint Initiative faced challenges in identifying community-based initiatives. See EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, *Evaluation of Reintegration Activities*; IOM, *Voluntary Return and Reintegration*.
- 26 Another approach tested in a few contexts (including Afghanistan) is to support small and medium-sized enterprises so that they expand their activities and recruit returnees. In the Reintegration and Development Assistance in Afghanistan (RADA) project, the IOM grant aimed to help small businesses expand their capacity and market reach, while creating incentives to hire more people. See EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, “Practice #10: Supporting SMEs and Former Returnees to Create Jobs for Migrants Returning to Afghanistan” (Reintegration Assistance Good, Promising, and Innovative Practices fact sheet, February 2021). A similar approach was tested in Iraq. See EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, “Practice #9: Boosting Returnees’ Employment through Support to SMEs in Iraq” (Reintegration Assistance Good, Promising, and Innovative Practices fact sheet, June 2020).
- 27 Expertise France and OFII, “Dispositif de Réinsertion des Migrants” (brochure, March 2021).
- 28 Another example is the IOM Integrated Responses on Migration from Central America project in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The initiative seeks to build the capacity of local actors to facilitate the reintegration of returnees. See IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2021*, 53. These capacity-building efforts can also involve setting up better coordination structures, such as in Iraq where the ICMPD has helped create a multistakeholder platform for exchange between authorities in charge of reintegration, employment, and technical vocational and educational institutions. See ICMPD, “Capacity Building for Long-Term Reintegration of Returnees to Afghanistan And Iraq” (fact sheet, May 2021).
- 29 Similarly, as part of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, IOM has organized a series of capacity-building sessions in the target countries. For an example in Ghana, see IOM, “Training Workshop on Standard Operating Procedures for Reintegration of Returnees in Ghana to Make Multifaceted Assistance Sustainable” (press release, April 20, 2021). In 2021, 82 IOM country and regional offices reported being involved in capacity-building efforts. See IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2021*. The mid-term evaluation of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative found that capacity-building was helpful, especially for psychosocial counselling. See EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, *Evaluation of Reintegration Activities*.
- 30 Discussion during the MPI roundtable “Building Bridges.” This challenge has been documented in a variety of settings, including for civil-society organizations once the EU-IOM Joint Initiative ends. See EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, *Evaluation of Reintegration Activities*.
- 31 See, for example, EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, *Evaluation of Reintegration Activities*, 38.
- 32 Ravenna Sohst and Camille Le Coz, *Embedding Reintegration Assistance for Returning Migrants in the Local Context: The Role of Referrals* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2022).
- 33 EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, *Fostering and Strengthening Interlinkages*; Youth Empowerment Protect (YEP), “Our Blog,” accessed January 13, 2023.
- 34 Sohst and Le Coz, *Embedding Reintegration Assistance*.
- 35 Open.Enabel, “Programme d’appui à l’intégration socio-économique des jeunes en République de Guinée,” updated March 7, 2022.
- 36 EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, *Fostering and Strengthening Interlinkages*; Sohst and Le Coz, *Embedding Reintegration Assistance*.
- 37 IOM, *Assessment of Health Related Factors Affecting Reintegration of Migrants In Armenia* (Yerevan: IOM, 2014).
- 38 See Slobodan Cvejić, *Društveno-ekonomski položaj i reintegracija povratnika po sporazumu o readmisiji u Srbiji 2021. godine: Izveštaj o istraživanju povratnika i pružalaca usluga na lokalnom nivou* (Belgrade: GIZ, 2022).
- 39 Christian Ambrosius, “Deportations and the Roots of Gang Violence in Central America” (discussion paper no. 2018/12, Freie Universität Berlin, School of Business and Economics, Berlin, June 2018). In Afghanistan, there are similar misperceptions of returnees having committed a crime in Europe. See Larrucea, Lindberg, and Asplund, *Those Who Were Sent Back*.
- 40 On the debts incurred by migrants and the challenges they face upon their return, see for instance: Samuel Hall, University of Sussex, and IOM, *Returning to Debt – Examining the Effects of Indebtedness on Reintegration Outcomes* (Geneva: IOM, 2023).

- 41 OFII, “[Les dispositifs d’aides au retour et à la réinsertion](#),” accessed January 13, 2023; Agence Française de Développement (AFD), “[L’ADF et Les Migrations](#)” (fact sheet, September 2019). The same is true for the United Kingdom, where the Home Office manages reintegration programs and the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office is not involved. Author interview with a representative of the UK Home Office, November 17, 2022.
- 42 The Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs funds assisted voluntary return and reintegration projects via the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund. These projects are usually co-funded with EU Member States. In turn, Frontex operates the JRS, open to all EU Member States.
- 43 These two directorates fund reintegration projects through the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument.
- 44 For instance, the Directorate-General for International Partnerships was represented at the Frontex Annual Reintegration Conference in May 2023.
- 45 Author interview with a representative of an EU Member State agency, November 25, 2022; discussion during the MPI roundtable “Building Bridges.”
- 46 Mainstreaming migration into development efforts is a goal that has been advanced by actors gathered at international forums such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development as well as in international organizations such as the IOM. This discussion has focused on various groups of migrants, including returning refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). For instance, governments and their development partners have recently included these groups in several national poverty reduction strategy papers. International organizations such as IOM have also emphasised more recently that failure to properly consult with IDP communities on development decisions can lead to adverse effects and even development-induced displacement. See IOM, *Mainstreaming Migration into Development Planning: A Handbook for Policy-Makers and Practitioners* (Geneva: IOM, 2015); International Monetary Fund (IMF), “[Sudan: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – Joint Staff Advisory Note](#)” (IMF Country Report No. 21/145, IMF, Washington DC, 2021); UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “[Internally Displaced Must Have a Say in Development Decisions to Help Avoid Rights Abuse: UN Expert](#)” (press release, October 18, 2022).
- 47 Discussion during Return and Reintegration Facility’s Technical Working Group on Reintegration and Development meeting, November 23, 2022, and the MPI roundtable “Building Bridges.”
- 48 Camille Le Coz, *EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration: Craftng a Roap Map to Better Cooperatiton with Migrants’ Countries of Origin* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2021).
- 49 Author interview with a representative of a national development agency in Europe, December 23, 2022. Sustainability has also been raised as an issue for returns that occur within Africa. For example, see EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, *Evaluation of Reintegration Activities*.
- 50 Integra was implemented in partnership with the Guinean Ministry for Youth and Youth Employment (Ministère de la jeunesse et de l’emploi jeune), whereas the Ministry of Foreign Affairs manages reintegration projects with international partners.
- 51 For instance, see European Commission, “[EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration](#).” Such policies are in part a response to long-standing demands from researchers and practitioners for increased monitoring and evaluation.
- 52 Advances have also been made toward building systematic frameworks for the evaluation and monitoring of reintegration programs. For instance, see ERRIN, “[Quality Monitoring Framework for Reintegration Assistance](#),” accessed January 13, 2023; Salgado, Triculescu, Le Coz, and Beirens, *Putting Migrant Reintegration Programmes to the Test*; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Sustainable Reintegration of Returning Migrants: A Better Homecoming* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020), Chapter 7; IOM, *Reintegration Handbook: Practical Guidance on the Design, Implementation and Monitoring of Reintegration Assistance* (Geneva: IOM, 2019).
- 53 Author interview with a representative of a development agency based in Tunis, Tunisia, January 13, 2023.
- 54 Discussion during the MPI-ERRIN workshop “Enhancing Local Embeddedness of Reintegration Assistance through Referral Mechanisms,” May 2, 2022.
- 55 Discussion during the MPI roundtable “Building Bridges.”

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