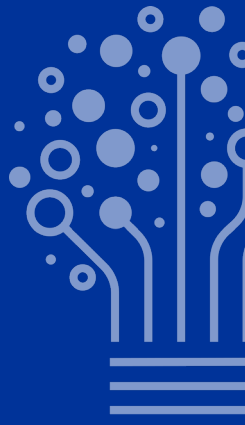


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COMPARATIVE REINTEGRATION OUTCOMES BETWEEN FORCED AND VOLUNTARY RETURN AND THROUGH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Final Report

Maastricht Graduate School of Governance
for the EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub





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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AVRR	Assisted voluntary return and reintegration
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 19
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RSS	Reintegration Sustainability Survey
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund



Credits: A Somali returnee in Burco, Somalia.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Although return migration is often seen as a ‘natural’ end to a migration journey, return and reintegration processes can be complex. Understanding the multidimensional nature of the reintegration process after return requires a thorough investigation of a combination of individual factors and structural conditions both in receiving and sending countries.¹ In addition, policy and programmatic interventions in the form of return and reintegration assistance (or the lack thereof), during and after return are likely to affect reintegration outcomes such as social and economic reintegration, psychosocial well-being and re-migration aspirations.

This report presents the outcomes of two combined research projects: 1) “Comparative reintegration outcomes in forced and voluntary returns”, and 2) “Understanding and implementing gender-sensitive sustainable reintegration”. The aims of these projects were to study differences in reintegration outcomes between forced and voluntary returnees, and male and female returnees in various return contexts and by identifying other factors that affect reintegration outcomes at the individual, community and structural level. The projects were commissioned by IOM under the EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, funded by the European Union, and designed and implemented by a research team based at the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG), Maastricht University.

Research for this report was conducted in six countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, El Salvador, the Gambia, Nigeria and Somalia), using a mix of methods. The methodology consisted of the analysis of quantitative data collected by IOM country missions and the research team using the RSS tool, and the analysis of qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with returnees, family members of returnees and key informant interviews. Because the research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project relied heavily on the work of local consultants to collect data. The data are complemented with a literature review that provides an overview of the empirical evidence on the reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees, and male and female returnees.

Although the research was intended to provide comparisons of the experiences of different groups of returnees (forced and voluntary returnees and male and female returnees) across the different case study countries, the demographic profiles of the returnees in the samples differ substantially across the country cases. In Bangladesh and Nigeria, for example, a large sample of forced returnees was interviewed, whereas it was not possible to generate a sufficient sample size for forced returnees in the Gambia. Similarly, in Nigeria and Afghanistan, a large sample of female respondents was available and complemented with additional quantitative data, whereas it wasn't possible to generate a sufficient sample size for female returnees in the Gambia and El Salvador. The report therefore explores overarching patterns and common trends in reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees and male and female returnees and the factors that impact this process among returnees across the six countries.

¹ See Koser, K. and K. Kuschminder, [Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants](#) (2015); and Black, R. and S. Gent, [Sustainable return in post-conflict contexts](#), *International Migration*, 44(3), 15–38 (2006).



1.1.1 Objectives and research questions

The overall objective of the study was to compare differences in reintegration sustainability outcomes between forced and voluntary returnees and between returnees of different genders who received reintegration support, including under the EU-IOM Actions.² It also aimed to determine individual, community and structural factors that affect these outcomes in their countries of origin. Based on the findings, the aim was to identify effective practices to support reintegration of different types of returnees from a programmatic and policy perspective. To meet these objectives, the research projects were organized around the following research questions:

RQ1	What is the demographic profile of returnees in selected target countries (e.g. in terms of age, sex, level of education)?
RQ2	What factors on the individual, community and structural level influence reintegration outcomes for different groups of returnees (e.g. age, sex, host country, community of return, education level)?
RQ3	How do the reintegration outcomes in the three dimensions measured through the RSS (economic, social and psychosocial reintegration) differ for forced and voluntary returnees?
RQ4a	How do the reintegration outcomes in the three dimensions measured through the RSS (economic, social and psychosocial reintegration) differ for male and female returnees?
RQ4b	How does gender play a role in the reintegration experiences of returnees? What are the gender-specific barriers to and/or opportunities for reintegration of returnees?
RQ5a	What forms of return and reintegration assistance do returnees identify as desirable given their own interests and needs?
RQ5b	What is the role of local and national stakeholders that work in the field of return and reintegration in creating conditions for sustainable reintegration?

1.1.2 Report structure

This report is structured as follows. The rest of the introduction describes the key concepts that were used in both studies, after which the methodology is discussed in detail and an overview is given of the respondents in our sample (RQ1). To address RQ2, [Chapter 2](#) presents the overall reintegration scores for the returnees in the six case study countries, based on RSS data and complemented with insights from the in-depth

² In line with the European Union external policy and migration priorities, IOM and the European Union have jointly developed the following programmes focusing on migrant protection, dignified voluntary return and sustainable reintegration: EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in Sahel and Lake Chad, North Africa and Horn of Africa; Pilot Action on Voluntary Return and Sustainable, Community-Based Reintegration; Reintegration and Development Assistance in Afghanistan project (RADA) and Bangladesh: Sustainable Reintegration and Improved Migration Governance (Protasha).



interviews to understand the individual, community and structural factors that impact the economic, social and psychosocial reintegration of returnees. **Chapters 3** and **4** begin with an overview of returnees' reasons for migration and their experiences before and during their return, looking at the varying experiences of forced and voluntary returnees (Chapter 3) and male and female returnees (Chapter 4). Then, these chapters zoom in on the reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees (RQ3) and male and female returnees (RQ4). Chapter 4 also focuses specifically on the role of gender in the reintegration experiences of returnees, to answer RQ4b that focuses on the gender-specific barriers to, and opportunities for, the reintegration of returnees. **Chapter 5** gives an overview of the good practices and key challenges, as described by returnees themselves and key informants across the research sites. As such, Chapter 5 provides an answer to RQ5a that addresses the return and reintegration assistance that returnees find desirable given their own interests and needs. It also addresses the role of local and national stakeholders in creating conditions for sustainable reintegration (RQ5b). Finally, **Chapter 6** provides the programmatic and broader policy recommendations that are derived from this research.

1.1.3 Key concepts

Return. This research focuses on international **return migration**, defined as “the movement of persons returning to their country of origin after having moved away from their place of habitual residence and crossed an international border.”³

Voluntary return can be defined as “the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit, or another country based on the voluntary decision of the returnee”.⁴ Returnees who are eligible to participate in IOM voluntary return programmes, including AVRR programmes, “may include stranded migrants in host or transit countries, irregular migrants, regular migrants, and asylum seekers who decide not to pursue their claims or who are found not to be in need of international protection.”⁵ In this research, we include voluntary returnees who returned through either AVRR programmes, voluntary humanitarian return programmes, voluntary return programmes operated by other national and local actors, or returnees who returned voluntarily without assistance. In terms of voluntary returns, it is important to keep in mind that the options available to migrants with regards to their return might be limited and not fully correspond with their individual wishes. This indicates a clear difference between migrants actively looking for opportunities to return voluntarily and those who enrol in return assistance programmes in situations where they are unable to remain in host countries, such as withdrawn or rejected asylum applicants.⁶ It is therefore important to note that those who are referred to in the report as voluntary returnees may have faced varying degrees of constraints in their options to return, which may have an impact on their reintegration outcomes.

Forced return is “the act of returning an individual, against [their] will, to the country of origin, transit or to a third country that agrees to receive the person, generally carried out on the basis of an administrative

³ IOM, [Glossary on Migration](#) (2019), page 186.

⁴ *Ibid.*, page 229.

⁵ IOM, [A Framework for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration](#) (2018), page 2.

⁶ See IOM, IOM's [Policy on the Full Spectrum of Return, Readmission and Reintegration](#) (2021).



or judicial act or decision.”⁷ In practice, forced returnees were identified during the research as those who returned to their country of origin unwillingly and who were deported from the host countries.

Sustainable reintegration. The study adopts IOM’s definition of sustainable reintegration, articulated as follows: “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.”⁸

Drawing on this definition, this study is centred around the three core components of sustainable reintegration: economic self-sufficiency, social stability, and psychosocial well-being.

Economic self-sufficiency. The definition of sustainable reintegration recognizes returnees’ need to participate fully in the economic life in the country of origin and achieve a certain level of economic self-sufficiency. In this regard, the economic dimension of reintegration “covers aspects of reintegration that contributes to re-entering the economic life and sustained livelihoods.”⁹

Social stability. To achieve sustainable reintegration, returnees need to participate fully in the social life and reach a certain level of social stability in their return communities. Therefore, the social dimension of reintegration “addresses returning migrants’ access to public services and infrastructure in their countries of origin, including access to health, education, housing, justice and social protection schemes.”¹⁰

Psychosocial well-being. The third dimension encompasses returnees’ need to develop a sense of psychosocial well-being after return. According to IOM (Reintegration Handbook, 2019a), this dimension entails “the reinsertion of returning migrants into personal support networks (friends, relatives, neighbours) and civil society structures (associations, self-help groups, other organizations and civic life generally). This also includes the re-engagement with the values, ways of living, language, moral principles and traditions of the country of origin’s society.”¹¹

Sex. One of the objectives of the study was to explore how reintegration outcomes vary for female and male returnees based on the outcomes of the RSS.¹² According to IOM sex refers to “the classification of a person as having female, male and/or intersex sex characteristics.”¹³

Gender. One of the objectives of this report was to explore what role gender plays in the return and reintegration processes of returnees based on qualitative interviews with returnees and key informants.¹⁴ IOM defines gender as “the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society

⁷ IOM, *Glossary*, page 77.

⁸ IOM, [Towards an Integrated Approach to Reintegration in the Context of Return](#) (2017), page 3.

⁹ IOM, [Reintegration Handbook - Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance](#) (2019), page 13.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The RSS currently only allows binary options of male and female, which are moreover completed by the interviewer based on presumed sex. This does not provide an opportunity to indicate if the respondent is transgender or intersex.

¹³ IOM, [IOM SOGIESC: Full Glossary of Terms](#) (2020), page 6.

¹⁴ Because the RSS only provides presumed sex of returnees (and not gender), the aspects that relate to gender in this study are explored through the qualitative interviews with returnees and key informants on the national and global levels. The interview questions for returnees and key informants on the national level were only designed to make a distinction between the experiences of men and women returnees while key informant interviews with global-level experts were conducted to gather insights on the specific needs and vulnerabilities of returnees with diverse SOGIESC.



considers appropriate for individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth.”¹⁵ Gender is considered a key individual factor that intersects with structural conditions in origin and host countries, and which can play an important role in reintegration outcomes. As such, the concept of gender does not relate to biological differences, but rather to the local norms and values associated with these biological differences and how these norms and values in turn impact economic opportunities, access to social services and the psychosocial reintegration process.

SOGIESC. SOGIESC is an acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. According to IOM, people with diverse SOGIESC refer to “people whose sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and/or sex characteristics place them outside culturally mainstream categories.”¹⁶ Although there is little research on return and reintegration focusing on the experiences of people with diverse SOGIESC, it is widely recognized that sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and whether one has diverse sex characteristics can have a decisive impact on the individual’s experiences at different stages of migration, including return migration and reintegration.¹⁷ The societal norms and expectations associated with one’s SOGIESC can drastically affect reintegration experiences by interfering with the returnee’s ability to access the necessary resources (tangible and intangible) and means to rebuild their lives.¹⁸

BOX 1. SOGIESC

Sexual orientation can be defined as “each person’s enduring capacity for profound romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings for, or attraction to, other people. Encompasses hetero-, homo-, bi-, pan- and asexuality, as well as a wide range of other expressions of sexual orientation.”

Gender identity is defined as “each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth or the gender attributed to them by society.”

Gender expression implies that “individuals use a range of cues, such as names, pronouns, behaviour, clothing, voice, mannerisms and/or bodily characteristics, to interpret other individuals’ genders. Gender expression is not necessarily an accurate reflection of gender identity. People with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics do not necessarily have a diverse gender expression. Likewise, people who do not have a diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics may have a diverse gender expression.”

Sex characteristics refer to “each person’s physical features relating to sex, including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, genitals and secondary physical features emerging from puberty.”

Source: IOM, IOM SOGIESC: Full Glossary of Terms (2020).

¹⁵ IOM, *IOM SOGIESC: Full Glossary*, page 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, page 1. Since the main focus of the study was on the reintegration experiences of males and females and not on gender diversity, returnees with diverse SOGIESC were not the primary research subjects of this study. Nevertheless, some insights on the experiences of returnees with diverse SOGIESC were gained through key informant interviews on the global level (and not from the returnees themselves or key informants at the national level).

¹⁷ See IOM, [Gender and Migration Data: A Guide for Evidence-based, Gender-responsive Migration Governance](#) (2021).

¹⁸ See IOM Gender and Migration [website](#).



1.2 METHODOLOGY

The research was based on a mixed-method approach, consisting of the following components: 1) a desk reviews detailing the available empirical evidence on the return and reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees, and male and female returnees (see [Annex 1](#) and [2](#)), 2) an analysis of quantitative data collected through IOM's RSS in the six countries, complemented with new RSS data collected by the research team of Maastricht University, and 3) an analysis of in-depth interview data collected among returnees, family members of returnees and key informants in each country and at the global level. The tools used for data collection (the RSS questionnaire and the interview guides) are presented in the annexes to this report.

1.2.1 Desk review

Information for the desk reviews was collected in a systematic way and followed three phases. First, the research team identified all the relevant studies on reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees through the combination of certain keywords, including for example: 'return migration', 'reintegration', 'forced return', 'voluntary return', 'deportees', 'reintegration of deportees.' Then, additional keywords were used to search for articles and other resources on the reintegration outcomes of males and females, including for example: 'female returnees', 'male returnees', 'LGBTIQ+ returnees', 'gender'.

The first phase resulted in a systematic review of resources on the topics on interest, including peer-reviewed journal articles, relevant policy reports, research reports, working papers and publications from international organizations and development cooperation agencies. In the second phase, the research team assessed the quality of the selected studies. The assessment was based on the research design (e.g. sample size, methodological robustness and transparency, validity of the findings, conceptual framing) and the quality of reporting. The last phase consisted of writing up the summaries of the available evidence on reintegration outcomes of forced versus voluntary returnees and male and female returnees¹⁹ as two separate reviews. The desk reviews can be found in Annex 1 and Annex 2.

1.2.2 Sampling and data collection methods

The research focused on the reintegration experiences and perceptions of different groups of returnees (forced and voluntary returnees, and male and female returnees) residing in six countries of origin: Afghanistan,²⁰ Bangladesh, El Salvador, the Gambia, Nigeria and Somalia. The country selection was made in collaboration with the Technical Review Panel, comprised of IOM and the European Union, and with a view to ensure regional diversity and a sufficient availability of data, informed by current IOM caseloads. Because the research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team worked with local consultants in each country to collect additional quantitative and qualitative data. The local consultants were primarily responsible for collecting survey (RSS) data, conducting in-depth interviews with returnees in Afghanistan,

¹⁹ Due to the lack of studies on reintegration outcomes of returnee with diverse genders, the desk review is limited to studies with binary (male-female) views of gender.

²⁰ It should be noted that the surveys and interviews with returnees in Afghanistan were carried out before the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the situation was relatively stable compared to the current circumstances, which should be kept in mind while interpreting the findings of this study. In addition, at the time of this paper's release, and considering the prevailing insecurity across Afghanistan, IOM's AVR program, as well as post-arrival reintegration assistance to returnees, have been put temporarily on hold. See IOM, Press release, "[Safety of Afghans and Humanitarian Access Must be Top Priorities](#)" (17 August 2021).



Bangladesh and Somalia, and family member interviews in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Somalia. The in-depth interviews with returnees in El Salvador, the Gambia and Nigeria were conducted remotely by the Maastricht University research team. The following sections detail the data collection tools and the sampling strategies that were used in the quantitative and qualitative components of the study.

a. Quantitative data collection: Reintegration Sustainability Survey

Building on an empirical research study conducted in 2017 by Samuel Hall in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Senegal and Somalia under the Mediterranean Sustainable Reintegration (MEASURE) Project implemented by IOM²¹ and funded by the UK Department for International Development,²² a new survey tool, the RSS, was developed to measure reintegration sustainability (see [Annex 3](#)).²³ Designed to be easily deployed in IOM's reintegration programming, the RSS and related scoring system generate a composite reintegration score and three dimensional scores measuring economic, social and psychosocial reintegration, as outlined in the definition of sustainable reintegration referenced above.

Existing RSS data collected in six countries prior to this research was shared with the Maastricht University research team. The existing data consisted of **4,524 cases**, distributed across six countries (see Figure 1). In addition, **1,290 new RSS interviews** were conducted across the six countries during fieldwork that took place from 15 March to 19 June 2021 (see Figure 1). The returnees included in the data collected by Maastricht University consisted of migrants who returned within the same timeframe as when the RSS surveys were carried out by IOM (0–24 months after return)²⁴ but also migrants who returned more than 24 months prior to the survey.²⁵

The **sampling methodology** to collect new RSS data was based on distributed lists from IOM country offices²⁶ as well as snowball sampling organized by the local consultants.²⁷ Interviews were conducted by the local consultants, who entered the responses of the participants into a platform for creating and distributing web-based surveys (Qualtrics). This way, the research team in Maastricht was able to closely monitor the data collection process and the quality of the data. The local consultants conducted the surveys either face-to-face or on the phone, depending on local COVID-19 restrictions.

²¹ See Samuel Hall and IOM, [Setting Standards for an Integrated Approach to Reintegration](#) (2018).

²² Now replaced by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

²³ See IOM, *Reintegration Handbook*, Module 1–5 and Annex 4B; and EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, Sustainable Reintegration Knowledge Bites Series, [Knowledge Bite #1: Introduction to the Series](#) (2020).

²⁴ Baseline surveys are normally carried out within two months of the return, and end-line surveys about 18–24 months after return.

²⁵ The share of the sample with a comparable time since return to the IOM sample (0–24 months, corresponding to either baseline, mid-term or end-line survey) vary across the samples. For example, in Somalia and Nigeria the majority of the sample had returned within the 24 months prior to the data collection while in El Salvador and Bangladesh a majority of returnees had returned more than 24 months prior to the survey.

²⁶ The distributed lists from IOM contained a total of 1,947 contacts, the majority from Nigeria (898) and Afghanistan (369), followed by El Salvador (227), Bangladesh (176), Somalia and the Gambia (153).

²⁷ In Bangladesh, Somalia and Afghanistan, local consultants recruited additional respondents using a snowballing approach in order to generate enough of a sample size to ensure comparability of reintegration outcomes for different types of returnees (forced and voluntary, and female and male returnees).



Figure 1. Overview of original RSS sample distribution by country of origin

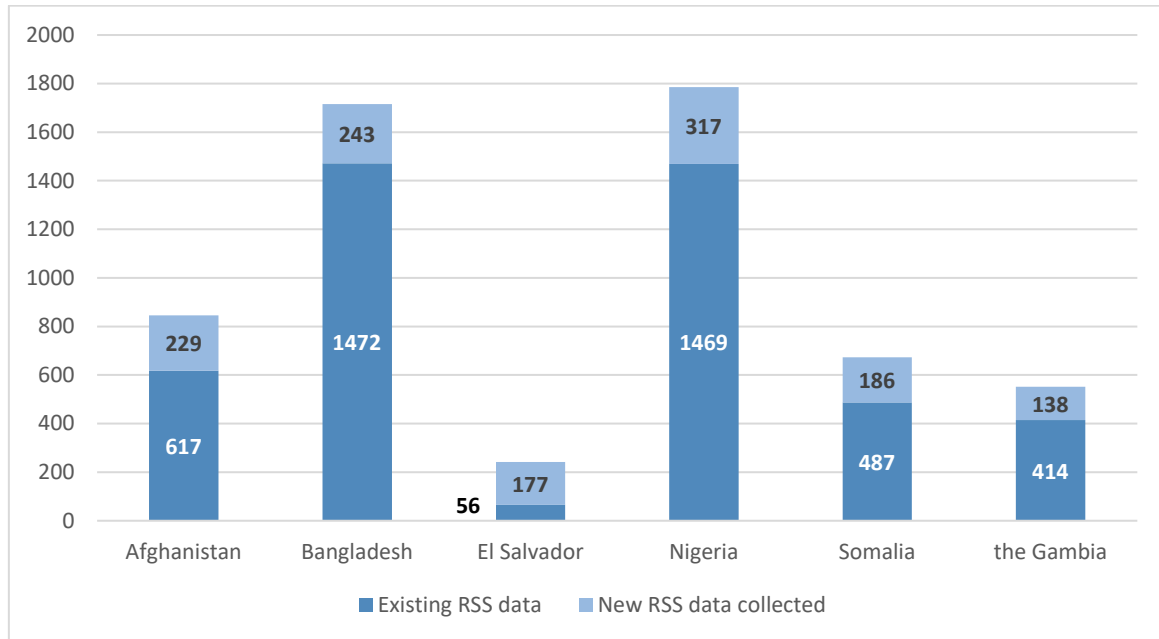
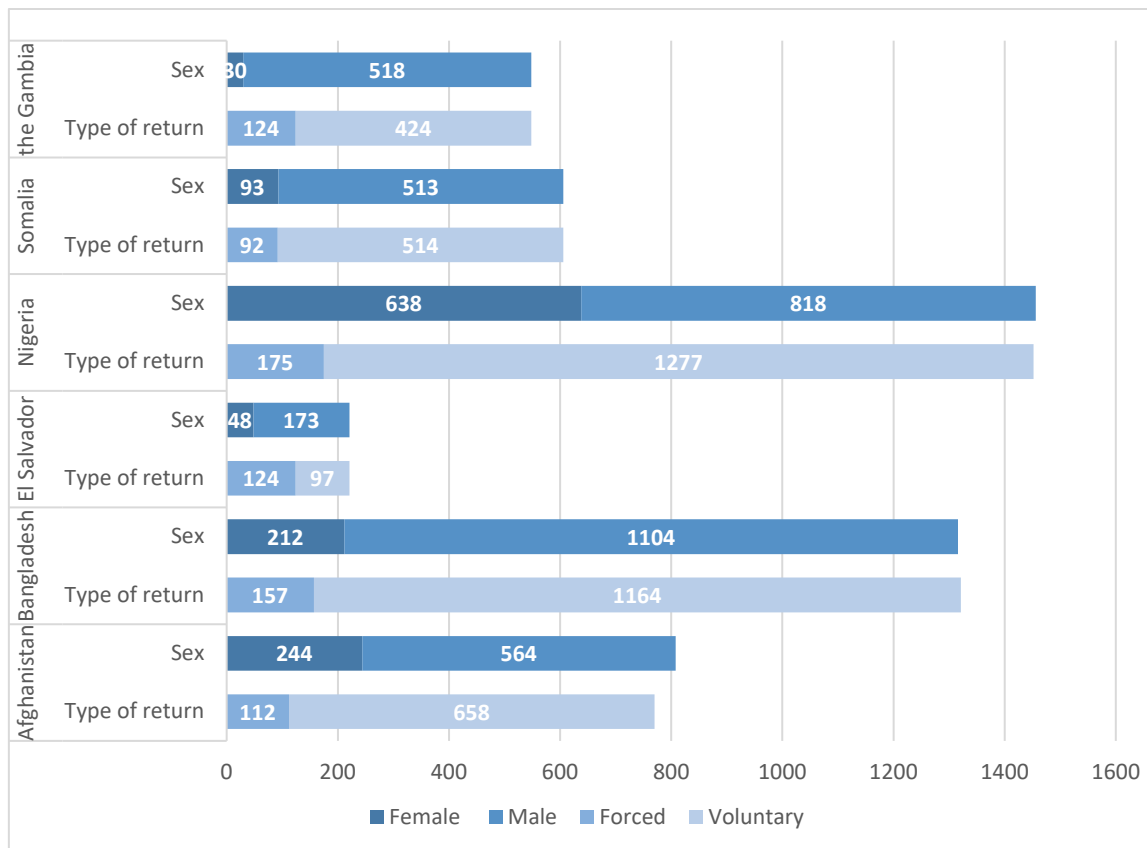


Figure 2. Overview of final RSS data sample for analysis, by country of origin, sex and type of return





In total, the research team obtained an **initial sample size of 5,814 RSS respondents**. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the existing RSS data obtained from IOM and the new RSS data collected by the research team. However, a closer examination of the data revealed that the existing RSS data included duplicate cases (same data for same individual entered twice in the database), cases where returnees had been interviewed multiple times (baseline, end-line and sometimes also a mid-term survey) and entries with missing values for some of the key variables for analysis. The RSS data was further matched with a dataset including additional variables related to the return and reintegration process (notably the IOM assistance received). Due to missing identification variables in the RSS data, not all cases in the RSS data could be matched with the reintegration data. Due to these challenges, the data cleaning process resulted in a reduction of the original sample that could be used in the final analysis. The final sample described and analysed in the quantitative sections is thus smaller than the data provided by country offices and contains a **total number of 5,030 RSS respondents**. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the survey sample by country of origin, sex and type of return after cleaning the data.

In general, the data contained fewer females than males, which complicated the comparability of reintegration outcomes of males and females in some countries. This partially stems from the fact that female returnees constituted a small percentage of the overall returnee population in the selected countries of origin. An exception is Nigeria, where migration is increasingly a female phenomenon.

Similarly, the existing data included fewer forced returnees than voluntary returnees, which reduced the comparability of reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees. In some country contexts (e.g. in Somalia), this relates to the fact that country offices have the contact details only of those forced returnees referred to IOM for post-arrival assistance, and funds for such assistance are not always ensured.

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic profiles of RSS respondents. The vast majority of RSS respondents were aged between 18 and 37. Whether returnees returned to their community of origin or not varies across countries. A vast majority of the returnees in Bangladesh, Somalia and the Gambia returned to their origin communities, while about half of the returnees in Afghanistan and Nigeria stated that they returned to a different location.²⁸ The host countries varied significantly, but Libya had been a top destination for returnees in four of the six countries (Bangladesh, Nigeria, Somalia and The Gambia). Most of the migration had been south-south, while only a smaller percentage south-north. In El Salvador, the vast majority of respondents indicated the United States of America as their host country.

²⁸ It should be noted that this variable contained significant numbers of missing values for many of the countries, and was therefore excluded from most of the regression analysis.


Table 1. Demographic profiles of RSS respondents across six countries

RSS Sample overview	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	El Salvador	Gambia	Nigeria	Somalia
Sample size	808	1,321	212	548	1,456	673
Age groups						
18–27	266	102	58	307	657	454
28–37	201	224	67	92	575	90
38–47	41	114	53	9	161	20
48–57	18	32	34	5	39	5
Over 57	9	6	9	2	14	6
Sex						
Female	244	212	48	30	638	93
Male	564	1,104	173	518	818	513
Type of return						
Forced	112	157	124	124	175	92
Voluntary	658	1,164	97	424	1,277	514
Return to same community						
Yes	58%	92%	-	98%	51%	89%
No	42%	8%	-	2%	49%	11%
Main host countries						
	<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>Libya</i>	<i>United States</i>	<i>Libya</i>	<i>Libya</i>	<i>Libya</i>
	<i>Iran (Islamic Republic of)</i>	<i>Greece</i>	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>Mauritania</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>
	<i>Austria</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Guatemala</i>	<i>Niger</i>	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>	<i>Yemen</i>
	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Germany</i>		<i>Germany</i>	<i>Mali</i>	<i>South Sudan</i>



b. Qualitative data

The qualitative data consisted of 1) key informant interviews at the national and global levels, 2) in-depth interviews with returnees, and 3) family member interviews in the six countries of origin.

The contact details of potential **key informants** were provided by IOM offices and included governmental and non-governmental stakeholders on the national level, as well as IOM actors on the global level. In total, 37 key informant interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted with key informants in Afghanistan (5), Bangladesh (5), El Salvador (8), the Gambia (3), Nigeria (8) and Somalia (4). In addition, four interviews were conducted with global-level experts on protection, migration and gender. The majority of the key informant interviews were conducted remotely by the Maastricht University research team. The key informant interview guide can be found in [Annex 6](#).

The respondents for the **in-depth interviews with returnees** were sampled from contact lists shared by IOM offices with a view to ensure diversity in terms of age, education level, sex and type of return. In total, 98 in-depth interviews were conducted with returnees. The in-depth interviews with returnees included respondents from Afghanistan (15), Bangladesh (23), El Salvador (15), the Gambia (15), Nigeria (15) and Somalia (15). The in-depth interview guide can be found in [Annex 4](#).

In addition, 12 interviews were conducted with **family members of returnees** in Afghanistan (1), Bangladesh (1), Nigeria (5) and Somalia (5). The family member interview guide can be found in [Annex 5](#). The family member interviews were conducted to provide additional insights into the reintegration experiences of returnees. However, as described in [Section 1.2.5](#), on “Data limitations”, it proved difficult to collect comprehensive and systematic data on the views of family members.

Due to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, all the interviews were conducted via internet or on the phone. The respondents were given the possibility to choose the date and time of the interview. All the interviews were individual one-to-one interviews. The returnee and family member interviews were conducted in English (the Gambia and Nigeria), Pashto and Dari (Afghanistan), Somali (Somalia), Bangla (Bangladesh) and Spanish (El Salvador). The local consultants in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Somalia were responsible for conducting the in-depth interviews in their respective countries, while the interviews in Spanish and English were mostly conducted by the Maastricht University research team. Two key informants in Bangladesh and one key informant in Afghanistan were interviewed in Bangla and Dari by the local consultants in the respective countries.

In the report, quotes from in-depth interviews with returnees are cited with a system that contains the first letter of the country of origin, followed by “R” for returnees, the number of the interview, identifier of returnees’ sex (“F” for female and “M” for male), and type of return (“VOL” for voluntary and “FOR” for forced). For example, “AR1, F, FOR” stands for female Afghan forced returnee. The quotes from interviews with key informants and family members are cited with a system that contains the initial letter of the country of origin followed by “KI” for key informants and “FM” for family members and the number of the interview (e.g. AKI1 stands for Afghan key informant, NFM1 stands for Nigerian family member). To ensure anonymity of key informants and family members, no additional identifiers beside the country initials were used.


Table 2. Overview of qualitative data by country of origin

Country of origin	Key informant interviews	In-depth interviews with returnees			Family member interviews
		Forced	Voluntary	Total	
Afghanistan	5	6	9	15	1
		<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>		
		6	9		
Bangladesh	5	9	14	23	1
		<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>		
		14	9		
El Salvador	8	12	3	15	-
		<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>		
		8	7		
Gambia	3	15	-	15	-
		<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>		
		2	13		
Nigeria	8	7	8	15	5
		<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>		
		11	4		
Somalia	4	11	4	15	5
		<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>		
		8	7		
Global	4			-	-
Total	37			98	12



1.2.3 Data analysis

a. Analysis of quantitative data: empirical evidence, methods and models used

Analysis of the RSS data was done using statistical techniques, which included descriptive statistics, t-tests and regression analysis (using ordinary least squares). In particular, the quantitative analysis explored the sustainable reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees across the three dimensions of sustainable reintegration (economic, social and psychosocial) as well as the composite sustainable reintegration score. The key variables of interest were sex (a binary variable for male or female) and return type (a binary variable for whether the return was forced or voluntary). The quantitative analysis allowed to explore the differences in reintegration outcomes based on sex and type of return, while controlling for other factors²⁹ that may impact the return process and reintegration outcomes.

Four regression specifications were carried out for each of the countries, one specification including the overall composite RSS score as the dependent variable and three additional specifications looking respectively at economic, social and psychosocial reintegration scores.

The empirical literature suggests that return processes are affected by multiple factors at the individual, household, community and national level. Ideally, the analysis would thus control for factors related to the migration experience itself, the return and post-return experience and context as well as individual characteristics of the returnee. The analysis was however limited by the available information in the data and included some but not all of the variables that are considered key in the return process.³⁰ It is also important to mention that the regression analysis gives insights into the factors that are associated with reintegration outcomes, but cross-sectional analysis may be subject to bias and causal impacts cannot be established.

b. Analysis of qualitative data: empirical evidence, methods and models used

Most in-depth interviews were recorded to ensure an in-depth analysis of the data. One interviewee in the Gambia did not give permission to record the interview. Thus, the interviewer took extensive notes during the interview to account for the loss of the recording. The qualitative data was transcribed, translated into English if needed (e.g. in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, El Salvador and Somalia) and coded in a qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) using an extensive coding sheet developed for the purpose of this study. The process of coding involved the tagging of similar text passages with a code to ensure identification of available patterns in the data. In addition to interview transcripts, local consultants were asked to provide the research team with field notes that summarized their observations during data collection. These notes were also reviewed and incorporated in the qualitative data analysis process.

²⁹ Controlling for other factors means removing the impact of factors other than sex and type of return from the analysis in order to see if there is a significant difference between the reintegration outcomes of female and male returnees and forced and voluntary returnees. In other words, factors other than sex and type of return are held constant to remove their influence on the reintegration outcomes.

³⁰ Detailed description of the regression model and control variables included in the analysis can be found in [Annex 9](#). Important control variables that are included at least once in the analysis are situation of vulnerability, years abroad, whether the migrant returned to the same family/community as prior to migration, host region, age, whether the returnee is a minor and type of IOM reintegration support received. In countries where these variables are consistently collected, they were included in the analysis. Other variables such as education level, reasons for migration and employment status in the host country were not consistently collected and thus including them in the analysis was not possible.



1.2.4 Ethical considerations

Before the research activities started, the research team sought to gain ethical approval through the relevant ethical review bodies in coordination with IOM country offices. A data protection plan was prepared in collaboration with the data privacy officers at Maastricht University before the start of the research, to ensure compliance with the European General Data Protection Regulation and IOM data protection policy.³¹ In addition, the research team and IOM followed a two-step approach to recruit participants for the study. First, IOM country offices sought consent of the returnee beneficiaries for their personal data to be shared with the research team for the purpose of the study. Second, the research team sought consent of the participants to participate in the study. The research team used an information sheet and a consent form to ensure that research participants were properly informed about the study's goals and freely agreed to participate in the research, while being aware of their rights to withdraw from the research at any time. These documents were shared with potential interview and survey participants in advance. Because most in-depth interviews and surveys were conducted remotely (via phone or online), oral consent was provided by most participants. The consent form and information sheet are provided in [Annex 7](#) and [Annex 8](#), respectively.

1.2.5 Data limitations

This study was subject to several methodological constraints. **First**, the sample size and composition of RSS data varied greatly across countries (see Figures 1 and 2). The RSS data analysis relied heavily on existing RSS data formerly collected by IOM country offices and shared with Maastricht University, while additional data collection relied on the availability of returnees' contact details (shared by IOM country offices) and their willingness to participate in the study. In some countries, such as El Salvador, it was not possible to generate a large sample due to limited existing data and the small number of contact details provided. In other cases, such as the Gambia, the sample size was large enough but did not contain enough female and forced returnees to fulfill the objectives of the study.

As mentioned before, the few observations for female returnees partially stemmed from the fact that most returnees in the countries of origin were male, except in Nigeria where migration is increasingly a female phenomenon, while the low number of forced returnees in the samples related to the limited number of referrals to IOM and a relatively slim budget allocated for the reintegration of forced returnees at the IOM level. This limited the research team's access to this group. The overall response rate was also low and many returnees were unreachable through the contact details provided, which can be due to frequent changes in their contact details, and in some cases due to security constraints according to insights from the country offices. Furthermore, the RSS data collected by IOM and the RSS data collected by Maastricht University were not fully comparable as the timeframes for data collection in relation to the date of return of the migrant did not always correspond, as explained in [Section 1.2.2 \(a\)](#). The new RSS data collected for this report included migrants who returned more than 24 months prior to the survey, which may affect the reintegration outcomes.

³¹ The [General Data Protection Regulation](#) is the European data privacy and security law that came into effect in 2016. For IOM data protection policy, see IOM, [IOM Data Protection Manual](#) (2015).



Second, and as described before, the RSS data does not include gender dimensions, but only contains sex-disaggregated data. When interpreting the RSS data findings, it is therefore important to keep in mind that the reported RSS comparisons do not indicate whether someone is transgender or has a diverse gender. The quantitative data recorded sex based on the interviewer's perception, with the assumption that respondents were cisgender and endosex. The interviews with returnees explored gender dimensions of return for male and female returnees but did not address the experiences of returnees with diverse genders. To address this limitation, key informant interviews with global-level experts on SOGIESC and migration emphasized the gender dimension of reintegration, which provided some insights on the importance of accounting for the specific needs and vulnerabilities of returnees with diverse SOGIESC. Nevertheless, the data on returnees with diverse SOGIESC was scarce. Therefore, a separate section ([Section 4.6.](#)) summarizes the limited findings in this regard.

A final limitation was related to the limited access to returnees' family members. Contact information of family members was not readily available, which meant that returnees were asked to provide details of their family members to be contacted. The interviews with family members were conducted where feasible given the time available and the willingness of family members to share their views. In the end, the research team had limited access to family members of returnees, which was likely due to a number of factors, including cultural norms that do not approve disclosure of family issues to strangers (e.g. in Afghanistan).



Credits: Rosamond returned from Libya in 2017 and opened a grocery shop in the Gambia. Little by little, she has been expanding it to meet the needs of her family . © IOM 2020

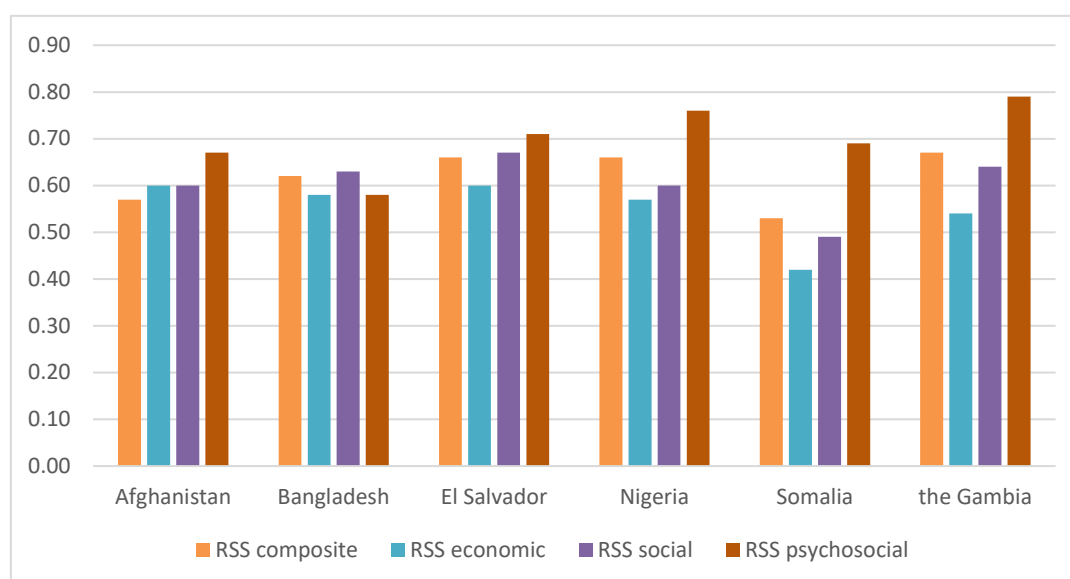


CHAPTER 2 – OVERALL REINTEGRATION OUTCOMES AND FACTORS IMPACTING REINTEGRATION

This chapter focuses on the reintegration outcomes and the factors impacting reintegration for the sample as a whole. The chapter is based on RSS data to describe the reintegration outcomes, complemented with detailed insights from the in-depth interviews with returnees, family members and key informants to provide context and a deeper understanding of the findings. The factors impacting the reintegration of returnees were grouped and analysed in three different levels (individual-, community- and structural-level factors) across the three dimensions of reintegration (economic, social and psychosocial reintegration). While the findings on individual-level factors were informed by both quantitative and qualitative data, community- and structural-level factors were solely based on qualitative data.

The chapter starts with an overview of the composite RSS scores for the returnees in the six countries, followed by a discussion of the findings for each sub-dimension of the RSS: economic, social and psychosocial reintegration. The chapters that follow will zoom into the reintegration outcomes for forced and voluntary returnees and those of male and female returnees.

Figure 3. Overall RSS scores, by country of origin



2.1 OVERALL RSS SCORES

The RSS scores for the six countries are provided in Figure 3. As the figure shows, the RSS composite scores³² differ significantly across countries, with **Somalia** having the lowest average score (0.53), followed by

³² The RSS composite score represents a numerical measure of overall reintegration sustainability. The RSS composite scores are calculated through the application of a weight to each indicator in the RSS. The indicators take values between 0 and 1. Some are binary (responses are coded either as a score of 0 or 1), others are scored on a 5-point scale (taking on values of 0, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75, or 1). Higher numerical values indicate more sustainable results. For example, a score of 0 indicates unsustainable reintegration outcomes whereas a score of 1 would demonstrate that returnees on average are sustainably reintegrated. The RSS dimensional scores refer to the RSS scores in the three dimensions of the RSS: economic, social and psychosocial. The RSS dimensional scores are also generated from respondents' answers using a weighting system.



Afghanistan (0.57). Respondents in Somalia scored the lowest across all dimensions of the RSS except for the psychosocial dimension. **The Gambia** (0.67), **Nigeria** (0.66) and **El Salvador** (0.66) had the highest average RSS composite scores in the sample, followed by **Bangladesh** (0.62). In most countries, among the three dimensions, respondents scored the lowest on average on the economic reintegration dimension. A detailed analysis of these results based on specific RSS indicators in relevant dimensions is presented in the following sections.

2.2 ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION



The specific **RSS indicators in the economic dimension** are outlined below:

- Satisfaction with current economic situation
- Frequency of food insecurity
- Ability to borrow money
- Frequency of borrowing money
- Debt to spending ratio
- Access to employment and training
- Ownership of productive assets
- Employment status
- Currently searching for a job

This section analyses the economic reintegration of returnees and the factors that influence their economic reintegration at the individual, community and structural level.

As Figure 3 shows, in most countries the average economic reintegration scores are lower than the average scores on the other dimensions, which suggests that the economic reintegration proved to be a challenge for the returnees in the sample. Respondents in **Somalia** scored the lowest across all but the psychosocial dimension, and particularly low in the economic reintegration dimension. A closer look at the specific RSS indicators illustrates the economically challenging context in Somalia, with only 40 per cent of the respondents currently working, 23 per cent possessing productive assets and 46 per cent being satisfied with their economic situation. Somalia is followed by **the Gambia**, with 38 per cent of RSS respondents reporting being unemployed and 30 per cent indicating poor access to employment. **Afghanistan** has the highest scores in the economic dimension: 79 per cent of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their current economic situation, while 67 per cent reported that they were currently working. Afghanistan is followed by **El Salvador**, with 75 per cent of the respondents indicating currently being employed and 57 per cent reporting being satisfied with current economic situation. Table 3 summarizes the overall RSS results in the economic dimension across six countries.

**Table 3.** RSS results in economic reintegration dimension across countries

RSS Economic Indicators (% in total)	Afghanista n	Banglades h	El Salvador	Gambia	Nigeria	Somalia
Economic satisfaction						
<i>Satisfied</i>	79%	70%	59%	62%	76%	46%
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	21%	30%	41%	38%	24%	54%
Debt situation						
<i>Can borrow if needed</i>	81%	64%	55%	49%	43%	22%
<i>Had to borrow often</i>	31%	19%	24%	5%	7%	19%
<i>Debt larger than spending</i>	25%	21%	18%	17%	14%	19%
Productive assets						
<i>Yes</i>	29%	70%	32%	8%	33%	23%
<i>No</i>	71%	30%	68%	92%	67%	77%
Access to employment and training						
<i>Good</i>	30%	29%	29%	44%	34%	20%
<i>Fair</i>	27%	32%	33%	26%	36%	16%
<i>Poor</i>	43%	39%	38%	30%	30%	64%
Employment situation						
<i>Employed</i>	67%	65%	75%	62%	33%	40%

2.2.1 Individual-level factors

The regression analysis performed on the RSS data highlighted some key factors that were significantly related to the economic reintegration process. These factors include the **returnees' situation of vulnerability**³³ (significant impact in Somalia and Afghanistan), **the type of return**, namely whether someone returned voluntary or not (significant impact in Afghanistan and Bangladesh), and **the type of reintegration support received** (see [Annex 9](#)). Overall, returnees in a situation of vulnerability and those who returned forcibly had lower economic reintegration scores.

The support received in terms of micro-businesses was positively related to economic reintegration in **Somalia and Nigeria**, when other factors were held constant. The qualitative data supported this finding,

³³ The "situation of vulnerability" is an RSS indicator derived from a question in the profile section that is completed by the interviewer/researcher (see [Annex 3](#)). For this question, the local consultants were asked to note specific difficult circumstances of respondents such as trafficking experiences, living with disability or chronic medical conditions, experience of violence, exploitation and abuse, or unaccompanied and separated children. The guidance to local consultants was informed by the definition of vulnerability elaborated in the IOM Reintegration Handbook, which defines vulnerability as situational and personal and refers to a restriction on returnees' ability to effectively enjoy their human rights. Individual vulnerabilities can include "whether returnees have health needs, whether they are victims of trafficking, violence, exploitation or abuse, or whether they are unaccompanied or separated children." IOM, *Reintegration Handbook*, page 36.



while also showing that economic reintegration support in the form of business capital was often most useful when returnees possessed additional resources to sustain their business. Interestingly, returnees residing in **Nigeria and Afghanistan** and who had returned from Europe, had lower economic reintegration scores than returnees who had returned from elsewhere. This might be due to additional economic pressure to provide for extended family members, based on the false assumption that those who returned from Europe would come back with savings. This issue was revealed during some of the in-depth interviews with Afghan male returnees.

Important to mention here is that when the scores on the other – social and psychosocial – reintegration dimensions were included as control variables in the analysis, all reintegration dimensions appeared to be highly related, meaning that **high scores in one dimension go along with high scores in the other dimensions and vice versa**. This means that those who score lower in the economic dimension are more likely to score lower in the psychosocial and social dimensions, and vice versa. Overall, it was possible to discern a pattern of correlation between the three dimensions of reintegration across the six different sites.³⁴ This finding is reiterated by the qualitative findings below, which for example illustrate the importance of psychosocial well-being for economic reintegration.

During the in-depth interviews, respondents mentioned several economic challenges, including pressures of having to pay off debts, unemployment, deteriorated health conditions that did not allow them to work and left them incapable of covering health expenses, stigmatization and discrimination in the labour market, lack of qualifications or diploma validation, and gaps in their educational and professional lives due to migration.

In **Bangladesh**, for example, some respondents believed that being away from Bangladesh for many years was a disadvantage in the labour market as this is perceived by employers as a gap in one's education or professional life. In addition, those who spent long periods abroad perceived that the resources they possessed did not match with the labour market demands anymore. As explained by one respondent:

“The main thing is, I have fallen far behind from my life in four and a half years. The current environmental situation [context] here is such that I have moved far away from being able to match it with there. Here it is becoming very tough to bring it back to its previous situation and I don't think it's possible. Which is why, I have been living unemployed for so long after returning back. Because I'm...nothing is matching actually. I don't have any resources with which I can do anything.”

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Returnees with low education levels often cited aging both as a reason to return and as a barrier to access job opportunities. High-skilled returnees were financially better off and able to rely on their savings even if their expectations of migration had not been met.

2.2.2 Community-level factors

The sustainability of a returnee's reintegration is not only dependent on the individual-level factors, but also on the conditions in the community of return.³⁵ Community-level challenges in terms of economic reintegration that were mentioned by returnees included stigma and discrimination in the labour market (in

³⁴ This finding is consistent with results from an analysis of RSS data contained in EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, *Knowledge Bite #1*.

³⁵ IOM, *Reintegration Handbook*.



Afghanistan, El Salvador, Bangladesh, Nigeria) and competition in the labour market. For example, in **Afghanistan**, a Hazara³⁶ returnee expressed having felt discriminated in the labour market on the basis of his ethnic origin and cited this as a main reason for his dire economic circumstances.

In areas of return, the arrival of returnees sometimes created additional pressure on job markets, resulting in tensions if returnees had similar skill sets as resident workers or set up similar businesses. In Afghanistan, community-level tensions arose because returnees received assistance to start a business while similar businesses were already operational in the community. One respondent explained:

“Whenever a business is [launched], the neighborhood is somehow unhappy because another [similar] business has been created, a profit sharing [business]. A person would say, in the market when there are two grocery shops and there is a [need] for a third grocery shop but if the third person is a returnee doing the same business, they would think that the margin of the profit has been grasped by the returnee. So, that’s why the community acceptance is very low sometimes.”

AKI2

2.2.3 Structural-level factors

Structural conditions in the home countries played a significant role in the economic reintegration processes of returnees. The majority of returnees reported that they were unable to make ends meet, even with IOM or other organizations’ assistance. In **Somalia** and **Bangladesh**, most of the returnees explained how they had returned to the same financial problems as they had experienced before migration. This was mostly a result of the structural problems in the country, which had often acted as the main factor for migration in the first place. This was particularly the case when returnees were not provided with seed capital to start their business but had to rely solely on labour market opportunities.

The global **COVID-19** pandemic amplified the economic reintegration challenges of the respondents. Some recent returnees had been forced to make the decision to return because the COVID-19 situation in their host countries made it impossible to sustain their lives there. Upon return, restrictions to curb the spread of the virus made it difficult to reintegrate, for instance to start a business or to find employment. In some cases, the reintegration assistance ended up being not effective because of the COVID-19 situation. In Bangladesh, for example, a respondent had invested in a car so that her husband could work as a driver, but in the end he failed to do so after the country was hit by COVID-19. Even though COVID-19 and the general level of insecurity affect both returnees and non-returnees, these factors provided an additional complication for returnees and particularly for those who had been abroad for long periods and therefore could not rely on informal networks.

In **Afghanistan**, the in-depth interviews showed that the various structural constraints faced by returnees were far too great to overcome with just the provision of financial assistance. The key informants frequently cited high unemployment rates, clientelism in the job market, a climate of corruption, persistent insecurity and unstable political conditions as major challenges for returnees and non-returnees alike. Key informants

³⁶ Hazaras are an ethnic minority group representing approximately 9 per cent of the population in Afghanistan. They have historically been subject to systematic discrimination, as well as targeted violence and resulting displacement. The information is retrieved from the [Minority Rights Group website](#), directory of minorities and indigenous peoples in Afghanistan.



emphasized the vitality of building peace between the conflicting parties on the national level to ensure a dignified return and sustainable reintegration. For some returnees in Afghanistan, the sense of physical insecurity sometimes limited returnees' freedom of movement, and therefore limited their ability to work or search for livelihood opportunities. Moreover, government stakeholders indicated that they had limited capacity to receive returnees in mass numbers. They emphasized that mass forced deportations by host countries require more bilateral coordination so that a minimum level of preparation can be made by Afghan authorities before their arrival.

In **Bangladesh**, respondents frequently cited corruption in the form of extortion or bribery in the labour market as a reason for their inability to find a job or start a business. Some of the respondents mentioned how their feelings of financial and physical insecurity prevented them from making an investment (e.g. not buying a cow due to fear that it will be stolen, not starting a business due to fear of extortion).

In **El Salvador**, respondents talked about the saturated and fractured labour market that made it difficult to find a job, even with a university diploma. Moreover, qualifications obtained abroad were often not recognized or validated in El Salvador. Even though there have been various programmes to certify skills of returnees upon return, the interviewees reported that skill certification usually focuses on a relatively narrow range of professions (e.g. construction, mechanics, service sector) that are aligned with the demands of the local market, which, in turn, causes a lot of the human capital available amongst returnees to remain unused.

2.3 SOCIAL REINTEGRATION



The specific **RSS indicators in the social dimension** are outlined below:

- Access to housing
- Perceived standard of housing
- Possession of identification documents
- Access to documentation
- Access to justice and law enforcement
- Access to health care
- Perceived quality of health care
- Access to education
- Children enrolled in school
- Access to safe drinking water

This section analyses the social reintegration of returnees and the factors that influence it at the individual, community and structural level. As Figure 3 shows, the average social reintegration scores are generally higher than economic reintegration scores and lower than the average scores in the psychosocial dimension, except in **Afghanistan** where social and psychosocial reintegration scores are equal and in **Bangladesh** where social reintegration scores are higher than economic and psychosocial scores. Respondents in **Somalia**, scored the lowest in the social dimension, followed by **Nigeria and Afghanistan**. A closer examination of the specific RSS indicators shows that access to particularly housing and education were perceived as limited



by the respondents in **Somalia**. The highest score in the social dimension is observed in **El Salvador**. For example, 78 per cent of the respondents indicated good access to education and 58 per cent reported good level of access to health care among returnees. Table 4 summarizes the overall RSS results in the social dimension across the six countries.

Table 4. RSS results in social reintegration dimension across countries

RSS Social Reintegration Indicators (% in total)	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	El Salvador	Gambia	Nigeria	Somalia
Access to housing						
<i>Good</i>	47%	59%	52%	44%	46%	40%
<i>Fair</i>	30%	33%	32%	33%	39%	24%
<i>Poor</i>	22%	8%	16%	24%	15%	36%
Quality of housing						
<i>Good</i>	36%	48%	60%	42%	36%	39%
<i>Fair</i>	38%	42%	33%	37%	46%	23%
<i>Poor</i>	26%	10%	7%	21%	18%	38%
Access to education						
<i>Good</i>	52%	74%	78%	65%	46%	54%
<i>Fair</i>	17%	23%	16%	30%	38%	14%
<i>Poor</i>	31%	3%	6%	5%	16%	54%
Access to documentation						
<i>Good</i>	65%	57%	85%	59%	55%	40%
<i>Fair</i>	19%	34%	12%	20%	38%	27%
<i>Poor</i>	16%	9%	3%	21%	16%	33%
Access to safe drinking water						
<i>Good</i>	51%	75%	56%	70%	52%	58%
<i>Fair</i>	24%	20%	23%	22%	34%	21%
<i>Poor</i>	25%	5%	21%	8%	15%	21%
Access to health care						
<i>Good</i>	35%	52%	58%	58%	42%	33%
<i>Fair</i>	30%	38%	23%	31%	41%	27%
<i>Poor</i>	34%	10%	19%	11%	17%	40%
Reasons for limited access to health care						
<i>No facility</i>	10%	-	-	50%	18%	0%
<i>Too expensive</i>	33%	-	-	14%	69%	75%
<i>Too far</i>	50%	-	-	27%	12%	25%
Quality of health care						
<i>Good</i>	36%	48%	39%	44%	37%	39%
<i>Fair</i>	29%	40%	45%	26%	48%	27%
<i>Poor</i>	36%	12%	16%	30%	15%	34%





2.3.1 Individual-level factors

Key factors highlighted in the regression analysis as being significantly related to social reintegration include **the type of return** (significant impact in Somalia and Afghanistan), the **returnees' situation of vulnerability** (significant impact in Somalia and Afghanistan) and **the type of reintegration support received** (see [Annex 9](#)). In particular, the micro-business support received was related to more sustainable social reintegration outcomes. It is however unclear whether returnees who were already doing better were also more likely to receive this type of support, or whether the business support really had a large positive effect on access to services.

In the in-depth interviews, the social dimension of reintegration came forward as particularly challenging for those with difficult or distressing migration experiences. In **El Salvador**, returnees whose rights were violated during migration and returnees who had been deported reported limited access to housing, food and health care. Key informants in **Nigeria** repeatedly pronounced the immediate need of (temporary) housing, cash assistance and health-care support for victims of trafficking who face social and familial rejection due to stigma associated with trafficking in human beings. Legal aspects, such as acquiring documentation, was also a key challenge reported by returnees, particularly forced returnees in **Nigeria, Afghanistan, and El Salvador**.

The **duration of stay abroad** also appears to have an impact on social reintegration processes. According to key informants, it takes longer for returnees who spent significant periods abroad (e.g. **Afghan** returnees born in Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, and the returnees in **El Salvador** who had spent significant periods in the United States) to achieve a level of sustainable social stability within their communities.

2.3.2 Community-level factors

The qualitative data revealed that social reintegration challenges can be amplified when returnees were unable or unwilling to return to their communities of origin. Based on the RSS results, this share is substantially high in Afghanistan and Nigeria with more than 40 per cent of respondents reported having returned to a different location than their habitual residence (see Table 1). According to key informants in **Afghanistan**, returnees may not want to return 'home' due to fear of stigma or security concerns, as it will be further explained in [Section 2.4](#). on psychosocial dimension. As a result of a lack of familiarity with the social surroundings, public institutions and bureaucratic procedures in their new locations, the adaptation process may take longer.

2.3.3 Structural-level factors

Overall, social reintegration challenges were often mentioned in relation to structural poverty and households' inability to afford services such as health care and education. In many cases, limited access to social services were not exclusively a problem for returnees, but rather stemmed from broader structural constraints that non-returnees similarly face. Other challenges cited were infrastructural challenges (e.g. access to electricity), poor quality of services and different forms of corruption (e.g. in **Afghanistan and Bangladesh**). As one of the key informants from Afghanistan commented:



"Afghanistan is based on social network, in Afghanistan if you don't know someone in the government, a member of parliament or a minister, you can hardly get your work done, you know, social network is very important here, even if that's your cousin, if that's your acquaintance, that's your family, in case of most of these returnees, they do not have anyone in Afghanistan."

AKI1

2.4 PSYCHOSOCIAL REINTEGRATION



The specific **RSS indicators in the psychosocial dimension** are outlined below:

- Participation in social activities
- Strength of support network
- Sense of belonging to community
- Sense of physical security
- Conflict with family/Domestic tension
- Feeling of discrimination in country of origin
- Frequency of experiencing signs of distress
- Desire to receive psychological support
- Remigration (ability to remain)
- Need versus wish to remigrate

This section follows the same structure as the previous ones and provides a three-level analysis of the factors that impact psychosocial reintegration: individual- (informed by both quantitative and qualitative data), community- and structural-level factors (based on qualitative data).

As illustrated in Figure 3, the lowest score in this dimension is found in Bangladesh and the highest score is recorded in the Gambia and Nigeria. The scores in the psychosocial dimension are generally higher than scores in the social and economic dimensions, except in **Bangladesh**. A closer scrutiny of results reveals that the more critical indicators in Bangladesh are frequency of signs of distress and conflict with family: a significant number of the RSS respondents experienced stress (41%) and conflict with family members (52%) on a regular basis since returning to the country. In addition, 64 per cent of the respondents indicated a desire to receive psychological support. Bangladesh is followed by **Afghanistan**, where 43 per cent of returnees stated having experienced feelings of stress after returning to Afghanistan, and 53 per cent expressed desire to receive psychological support. These results are in line with qualitative findings; the psychological well-being of returnees, particularly of those who had negative experiences during their irregular migration journey, in detention or throughout the deportation processes, was a recurring theme in the in-depth interviews with returnees and key informants. Table 5 summarizes the overall RSS results in the psychosocial dimension across six countries.



Table 5. RSS results in psychosocial reintegration dimension across countries

RSS	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	El Salvador	Gambia	Nigeria	Somalia
Psychosocial Reintegration Indicators (% in total)						
Participation in social activities						
Never	2%	4%	16%	1%	8%	16%
Rarely	9%	20%	21%	6%	25%	17%
Sometimes	27%	54%	29%	52%	45%	48%
Often	62%	22%	33%	41%	22%	19%
Perception of network support						
Good	65%	49%	57%	60%	50%	47%
Fair	24%	40%	32%	29%	33%	22%
Poor	12%	11%	11%	11%	15%	31%
Perception of sense of belonging to community						
Agree	90%	73%	88%	92%	95%	87%
Neutral	2%	23%	8%	7%	1%	1%
Disagree	8%	4%	4%	1%	4%	12%
Perception of physical safety						
Safe	53%	75%	71%	75%	83%	68%
Neutral	17%	19%	10%	23%	14%	18%
Unsafe	30%	6%	19%	2%	3%	14%
Conflict with family since return						
Never	44%	17%	49%	37%	35%	51%
Rarely	22%	31%	34%	28%	37%	9%
Sometimes	14%	38%	14%	29%	22%	22%
Often	20%	14%	3%	5%	6%	18%
Experience of discrimination						
Never	70%	40%	43%	52%	51%	71%
Rarely	21%	43%	33%	37%	37%	22%
Sometimes	6%	13%	19%	10%	10%	6%
Often	2%	4%	4%	1%	2%	1%
Frequency of experiencing signs of stress						
Never	32%	21%	32%	20%	22%	18%
Rarely	25%	37%	36%	46%	49%	42%
Sometimes	21%	29%	25%	30%	23%	34%
Often	22%	12%	7%	4%	6%	6%
Desire to receive psychological support						
Yes	53%	64%	55%	15%	18%	59%



No	47%	36%	45%	85%	82%	41%
Remigration						
Able to remain	60%	81%	88%	91%	94%	83%
Need versus wish to remigrate (among those who reported that they are unable to remain)						
Wish to leave	3%	-	10%	4%	8%	83%
Need to leave	97%	-	90%	96%	92%	17%

2.4.1 Individual-level factors

The results from the regression analysis (see [Annex 9](#)) reveal that the **returnees' situation of vulnerability** (significant impact in Afghanistan and Somalia), **the type of return** (significant impact in Nigeria), and **the region from which they returned**, namely from Europe, the Middle East, Southern Asia, Western Asia or Africa (significant impact in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Somalia) play a significant role in the psychosocial reintegration of RSS respondents. In **Nigeria**, those who were forced to return had lower reintegration scores in the psychosocial dimension than voluntary returnees. In **Afghanistan and Somalia**, those in a situation of vulnerability scored lower in this dimension. The region from which returnees returned had an impact on their psychosocial reintegration scores, particularly in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Somalia. For example, Afghans who returned from Europe scored lower than Afghans who returned from host countries in the neighboring region of Afghanistan (e.g. Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan). This finding is supported by qualitative data and can be explained by several factors including exhausting financial resources during the relatively more expensive irregular journey to Europe. Other factors include the unmet expectations from migration or the feeling of failure which is amplified further by community pressure to provide for the family that falsely assumes that they come back with savings.

An important psychosocial reintegration challenge that returnees mentioned during the interviews related to a lack of social networks. This was mentioned in all country case studies and particularly among those who spent long periods abroad. In **Afghanistan and El Salvador**, some respondents reported how they had no ties with their country anymore and were unfamiliar with the culture and language. The interviews with returnees revealed that economic and psychosocial reintegration challenges are strongly interlinked as the hardships of making a living put pressure and stress on individuals and their relationships.³⁷ The economic challenges seemingly damage family relations and increase tensions in the household. One respondent explained:

"We both face the economic crisis and psychological disturbance. We're feeling a lot of pressure mentally. That mostly affects our relationship. In a crisis, the relationship of husband and wife doesn't go well."

BR4, F, FOR

In **Nigeria**, family rejection often occurred based on the narratives of 'failed migration' mentioned above, but also centred around the financial loss of the family as in some cases *"their parents have sold one property or one asset or other just to ensure they go over there"* (**NKI4**). The return thus represented the loss of the

³⁷ The majority of the interview respondents reported having received financial and material support upon return. None of them indicated having received psychosocial reintegration support.



initial investment in covering the costs of the irregular migration journey (which sometimes resulted in trafficking, as cited by key informants) and the loss of remittances. Migrants were often expected “*to have stayed, accept the exploitation and pay the debt*”, as cited by key informants. Where families were supportive of the reintegration process, however, they were reported to be an important source of resilience, both financially and emotionally.

As time passed, some succeeded in improving their conditions and began to feel a sense of belonging while others struggled even more, particularly in the context of the global pandemic.

2.4.2 Community-level factors

Community acceptance, or the lack thereof, played a significant role in the psychosocial reintegration process of returnees across the six countries. Social stigma attached to returnees took different forms in different communities, with some communities perceiving returnees as linked to criminality (e.g. in **El Salvador**) and others seeing them as a failure based on their inability to meet the migration expectations of their families and communities (e.g. in **Afghanistan**), or seeing female returnees as “loose” women, particularly those who became victims of trafficking (e.g. in **Nigeria**). Such perceptions reinforced feelings of fear, anxiety and shame that negatively influenced the psychosocial well-being of returnees and, in some cases, prevented them from returning to their communities of origin. According to RSS results, this is particularly the case in **Nigeria** and **Afghanistan**, where more than 40 per cent of respondents reported returning to a different location than their habitual residence. In **Afghanistan**, in addition to social stigma attached to returnees, it was also the conflict situation and perceived security threats that sometimes compelled migrants to return to a different location, based on key informants’ insights.

Feelings of discrimination were also cited by some returnees, particularly Afghan returnees from Islamic Republic of Iran who expressed being discriminated against and bullied within their communities because of their accent. For a respondent who had been subject to such bullying in the past, a desirable programmatic approach to support psychosocial reintegration is to inform and sensitize people about the conditions of migrants to prevent such bullying and humiliation:

“I think if they can give information for people who are [in Afghanistan], people who haven’t migrated to any other country, about the difficulties and the challenges that the migrants are experiencing, like they are lonely, about their life in [Islamic Republic of] Iran, for people to behave nice to them. They should not disrespect them because of their accent and also because of the way they’re dressing. They shouldn’t disrespect anyone.”

AR6, F, VOL

A key informant, too, stressed the issue of discrimination towards returnees from Islamic Republic of Iran as a hindrance to community acceptance:

“The first thing is that those who are coming from [Islamic Republic of] Iran they have a different accent, language, a cultural behaviour, everything is different there, even the way of behaviour is different, so normally they cannot integrate with the host community and they make fun with this people, they make problem with this people, they not even sometimes give them the right that they are part of this country, well they have been away from the country, so they do not accept this people easily.”

AK13



In **Nigeria**, several returnees and key informants highlighted that stigmatization of returnees by the community, but importantly also from their families, hampered their psychosocial reintegration. Stigma was related to the notion that returnees came “*back empty handed, with nothing and you got in trouble*”, when they were

“supposed to be like the hero or heroine. And they [are] expecting she’s going out there to be successful, become wealthy and all of this. And by the time you come back and you’re not all of what they expected, there is that look like, so really, why did you go out?”

NKI2

Similar challenges existed for returnees in Somalia, particularly if the family, relatives or other community members provided financial support for the migration journey. An anecdote by one key informant illustrated sharply the extent of possible consequences of community rejection for forced returnees:

“Those who are forced returnees are more likely to go back again [...], or thinking about what their community would think, what their family would think of them, because the family invest so much. The majority of the family invest on them, whether the family are selling their goods or house, or whatever they own, or take a loan on behalf of them, so they feel bad, some of them actually kill themselves, some of them died, there was a case, a refugee, a forced immigrant from Denmark was killed in Mogadishu and there were a couple of few people who were saying we need to contact Denmark and let them know what they are doing to people, this is not a safe place.”

SKI2

2.4.3 Structural-level factors

Very often, structural conditions related to insecurity and safety had a big impact on the psychosocial reintegration of returnees. This was particularly the case in **Afghanistan**, where many respondents mentioned how the lack of security made it hard for them to reintegrate. This is in line with RSS results in Afghanistan with 30 per cent of returnees reporting feeling unsafe in their current location, followed by El Salvador (19%). In **El Salvador**, many respondents, and particularly females, feared violence, such as gang-related violence or domestic violence, or extortion upon their arrival in their community of origin.

Corruption was also frequently mentioned as a barrier for psychosocial reintegration. As mentioned before, some returnees’ perceptions of corruption and clientelism in the Afghan system also diminished their sense of belonging, as they personally felt discriminated in access to social services or economic opportunities. One returnee, who previously worked for the Afghan government and spent three years in Germany, explained:

“Everything works with connections and political power, you need to have some connections in politics to be able to find a job, receive treatment from hospital, or if you are threatened and you need protection from the police. All of these treatments are personalized, that is why I don’t really feel connected to this country, [to this] regime. When I compare my life here with the country that I have lived for 3 years, despite all the challenges that I had there, there was a better system, no discrimination, and treatment was same with everyone.”

AR1, M, VOL



While only 8 per cent of the RSS respondents indicated feeling discriminated upon return to **Afghanistan**, this share is substantially high in **Bangladesh** with 17 per cent reporting experiencing discrimination, the second highest share in the sample after **El Salvador**.

Overall, the findings presented in this chapter illustrate the complex and multi-dimensional process of reintegration, which is shaped by a multiplicity of factors operating at different levels. The sustainability of reintegration outcomes is highly dependent on the individual returnee, their experiences during migration and return processes as well as the context of return, including community-level factors and structural conditions in the countries of origin. While the RSS results provided a broader perspective on the reintegration outcomes across countries, the anecdotal cases highlighted the need for tailored and individualized reintegration planning addressing the economic, social, psychosocial needs to help returnees achieve economic self-sufficiency, social stability in their communities and psychosocial well-being.



Credits: Migrant returnees arrive to El Salvador from Belize, with the support of the IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return Program.

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CHAPTER 3 – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REINTEGRATION OUTCOMES BETWEEN FORCED AND VOLUNTARY RETURNS

It is commonly known that the voluntariness of return influences the reintegration process and its sustainability. So far, little comparative evidence has been gathered on the reintegration experiences of forced and voluntary returnees.

To fill this knowledge gap, this chapter zooms in on the reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees across the six country case studies. The chapter starts with a brief overview of the migration and return experiences of returnees in our sample, with a specific focus on how these experiences differ for forced and voluntary returnees based on insights from the in-depth interviews with returnees. Then the chapter presents the composite RSS scores for forced and voluntary returnees in the case study countries, followed by a discussion of the findings for each sub-dimension of the RSS: economic, social and psychosocial reintegration. The RSS results are combined with insights from the in-depth interviews with returnees, their family members and key informants to provide context and a deeper understanding of the findings. The chapter ends with an overview of the future migration plans of forced and voluntary returnees, based on the quantitative and qualitative data.

3.1 BACKGROUND: REASONS FOR MIGRATION AND EXPERIENCES OF RETURN

Migration and return experiences are important factors that can have an impact on the reintegration outcomes of returnees. The in-depth interviews with returnees provided rich information on why individuals migrated from their countries of origin and on their return experiences that were not captured in the RSS data. The findings presented here are by no means representative for all returnees in the different contexts, but some common patterns can be identified.

3.1.1 Migration reasons of forced and voluntary returnees

The reasons why respondents left their countries of origin varied by country context. Whereas the migration of Afghan returnees had been primarily motivated by security issues, in some cases combined with economic concerns, economic reasons and family-related factors played a large role in the other country contexts. These key themes are explored in detail below.

Economic reasons: employment, education and health care

The majority of returnees in Bangladesh, Nigeria, the Gambia, and Somalia mentioned primarily economic reasons for their migration. In El Salvador and Afghanistan, respondents also cited the general situation of violence and insecurity in addition to the economic reasons that led to their migration.

In **Bangladesh**, respondents frequently mentioned dire economic circumstances as a reason for migration. Many of the returnees had migrated with the aim to accumulate enough savings to build a house



or launch a business back in Bangladesh. Other reasons respondents mentioned included completing studies, starting a small business abroad (e.g. tailoring, selling furniture), and providing affordable and good quality education for their children. Establishing a permanent life abroad was cited by only a few respondents in Bangladesh, the majority of whom were relatively better off before migration and had a proper job with a decent salary.

Respondents in **EI Salvador** explained how they dreamed of finding a job in the United States, building a life for themselves and supporting their families back home through remittances. This idea of the ‘American dream’ was fueled by social media and success stories from others who had gone before them. Young individuals often migrated due to limited employment and educational opportunities within municipalities.

In **Nigeria**, all respondents explained that they had migrated out of economic necessity, as they were unable to meet basic needs. In the absence of local economic opportunities, migration was seen as the only feasible livelihood strategy. Returnees had often heard from a friend or relative about opportunities abroad and were subject to family pressure to provide for the family with a job abroad. In most cases they were fully aware of the dangers associated with irregular migration and trafficking. In Nigeria economic problems were often mentioned alongside concerns about corruption and unequal opportunities. As explained by some respondents, without having access to the right contacts, it was difficult to find a good job. A few migrants cited plans of continuing education abroad as their migration motivation and two migrants cited lacking or unaffordable health care as their main reason for migration.

The majority of the interview respondents in **the Gambia** were male returnees who often stressed financial difficulties as the main driver of their migration decision. The most frequent description respondents provided on their living situations before migration was “*very difficult*” or “*life here is not easy.*” As one male respondent put it “*life was hard here, there was no money*” (**GR12, M, FOR**). Difficulties to finance education in the Gambia was also reported as an additional burden to families who could hardly make ends meet, as in the example of one respondent who explained:

“After I completed my secondary school, I wanted to continue my education to a higher level, but my family could not finance my education. Life was not easy with me, although I was working as a marketing agent, but the salary was very small to support my family. Therefore, I decided to use the back way to Europe.”

GR13, M, VOL

The quote above illustrates that having a job did not guarantee financial stability in **the Gambia**, which was something other respondents mentioned as well. The lack of work opportunities and the low wages constituted challenges to make ends meet and to afford higher education for many of the respondents. One respondent talked about lack of job opportunities in the Gambia, and how it affects the ability of people to pursue education:

“Life was not easy with me, things were just hard, I lost both parents at an early age. I stopped schooling at a point because of school fees. This is when my brother took up my responsibility. Even with him sometimes he sits for a very long time without a contract.”

GR15, F, FOR





Climate-related reasons

In **Somalia**, respondents mostly related economic problems to climatic reasons, particularly droughts, that forced them to leave their farms in rural areas and find employment elsewhere. One respondent explained:

"[...] I used to be a nomadic person or livestock herder or pastoralist person, during the last drought I lost my livestock. [...] Since we lost our livelihoods, I decided to look for better life. [...] we lost everything we had in the last drought happened in Somalia, [...] we became desperate with all zero income. We were also extended family some of them very young, when I failed to sustain this family, I decided to immigrate searching better life for them."

SR8, M, FOR

Family pressure

In most country contexts, pressures from family members to migrate and to provide for those who stayed behind played a large role in the decisions to migrate. The in-depth interviews revealed that economic reasons for migration were often intertwined with pressure from family members. For example, in **the Gambia**, respondents often mentioned how the financial hardships in the country meant that family members had to rely on each other. The conversations with respondents for example revealed high expectations from older siblings to support their families:

"As I said, I'm the first son of my family so my responsibility was very big, and I had no permanent job. I join friends to do labour job whenever there is any. Therefore, I was not able to take care of my family. This is why I decided to travel."

GR2, M, FOR

"I decided to leave in order to get a job and a source of income. I need to help my family and build a future for myself. That is why I decided to travel to Mauritania. I heard that I can work in services there, such as cleaning and house services. That is why I decided to leave."

GR6, F, FOR

Similar stories emerged in **Nigeria**, where returnees talked about family pressure and families making collective decisions to 'send' one of the family members abroad. In some instances, extensive investments were made by the family to finance the migration of one family member. One respondent explained: *"their parents have sold one property or one asset or other just to ensure they go over there"* (NKI4). After the migrant returned, family members often faced the loss of the initial investment and the loss of remittances, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In **Somalia**, desperate families collectively took the migration decision, hoping that those who migrated could support the rest of the family to meet their daily needs. In other cases, returnees had taken the decision to migrate against the wishes of family members.

In **El Salvador**, family pressure was not explicitly mentioned by respondents or key informants in the in-depth interviews.

Many returnees in **Afghanistan** had migrated together with family due to security reasons, which is explained in more detail in the next section.





Violence and insecurity

In some countries, violence and insecurity also played a role in migration motivations. The decades-long conflict and political instability in **Afghanistan** had been central push factors for the initial migration of respondents. Other respondents cited a lack of opportunities and dire economic circumstances, often expressed in relation to the conflict situation.

Respondents in **El Salvador** mentioned gang violence, domestic and sexual abuse, alongside the extreme poverty in rural areas as factors impacting their decision to migrate.

In the case of **Nigeria and Somalia**, the risks associated with irregular migration and/or trafficking were often assumed to be part of this undertaking. In the case of **El Salvador and Somalia**, some female returnees reported that their migration was a strategy to escape from sexual and domestic violence. Some females stated how low access to education and economic opportunities, combined with conservative gender roles, incentivized them to migrate.

3.1.2 Migration and return experiences of forced and voluntary returnees

Respondents in **Afghanistan** were either second-generation returnees (i.e. the self-reported children of refugees) who returned from Pakistan and Islamic Republic of Iran, or returnees from European countries, including Germany, Finland, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, all of which were males. Most of them returned because their asylum applications had failed and they had no other option but to return, or because they were deported. One respondent explained:

“When I applied for asylum I was not accepted. The situation that I was in, like I didn't have a work permit, didn't have the right for language course, didn't have the right for sport, instead of slow death there, it was better for me to die beside my family. The miserable situation was a slow death for me. That is why I returned.”

AR1, M, VOL

Feelings of discrimination and the constant fear of deportation in the host country were mentioned as well, particularly among Afghan returnees from Islamic Republic of Iran. In the case of these returnees, the negative experiences in the host country played a leading role in their decision to return voluntarily in the face of constrained options. While recognizing the relative safety in Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, many returned with the hope of improving their economic circumstances in their countries of origin, as well as the education of their children. Some respondents returned to a different place, often a big city like Herat, Kabul or Mazar-i Sharif, instead of their habitual residence, due to security issues. According to key informants, the social stigma attached to forced returnees is another reason why some returnees return to other cities.

Returnees that were interviewed in-depth in **Bangladesh** had returned from Saudi Arabia or European countries and moved back because their migration journeys had ‘failed’ or because of family pressure. For voluntary returnees, the decision to return was mainly a result of economic difficulties; either because of unemployment, failed business or the inability to improve economic conditions. Recent returnees' decisions were affected by COVID-19, due to family members losing jobs and being unable to arrange visa in lockdown conditions. For those who returned from Saudi Arabia, stories of (sexual) abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence were omnipresent in the narratives, and many described their migration journeys as distressing.



Returnees in **El Salvador** had mostly been deported, some after spending long periods abroad (mostly the United States). In **Nigeria**, respondents had mostly been deported from Mali or Libya. While Europe had been their main destination, many were or became stranded along the way. Just like for Bangladeshi returnees, their migration experiences had often been distressing, with stories of sexual violence, trafficking, prostitution, detention and exploitation, both while *en route* and while in Mali or Libya. This also holds for many **Somali** returnees, some of which were caught up in the war in Yemen, while on route to Saudi Arabia. Most Somali returnees were also deported. They had migrated by boat to Yemen and crossed the borders to Saudi Arabia on foot or by cars. The journey was risky, and many respondents reported human rights violations including torture and rape by gangs or by Saudi police forces. Most irregular migrants were caught in Yemen or Saudi Arabia, imprisoned, abused and sent back to Somalia.

Returnees in **the Gambia** had mostly returned forcibly from Europe, from countries like Italy, Germany or Spain, and some because their asylum applications were rejected in countries like Germany or Austria. Their migration journeys had also been turbulent, as many moved irregularly, traveling through countries like Libya, and reaching Europe crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Many of them indicated Spain as their main destination, but they were caught either in Mauritania or Morocco. Despite these difficult journeys, the respondents mentioned fewer traumatic experiences than those who returned from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Mali or Libya.

Across all countries, the return experiences of those who were deported were often described as distressful, especially when it concerned families. In **Nigeria** and **Bangladesh** respondents mentioned that the deportation added another layer to an already distressing experience. One Bangladeshi female respondent who was deported from Norway explained:

"If you see the police at your door [as you] wake up in the morning, when you have no paper, no help from the embassy and you have 3 years old children who only know their language, how will you feel then? We've been living there for 7 years."

BR4, F, FOR

In **El Salvador**, respondents also mentioned that their deportation happened quickly and without notice. According to respondents, this resulted in unnecessary distress, especially for children. In some cases, returnees had to leave behind family members – sometimes children – in the United States. Overall, the experiences described by forcibly returned families or single parents concerning their children often involve intense worries and stress over the future well-being of their children, which reiterates the fact that forced returns can hardly be assessed in the best interest of children.³⁸

3.2 OVERALL RSS SCORES FOR FORCED AND VOLUNTARY RETURNEES

As shown in Figure 4, forced returnees generally have lower RSS reintegration scores across the countries, except in **El Salvador**. The data revealed **particularly low values for forced returnees in Somalia, the Gambia and Afghanistan**. The finding **that forced returnees have lower reintegration**

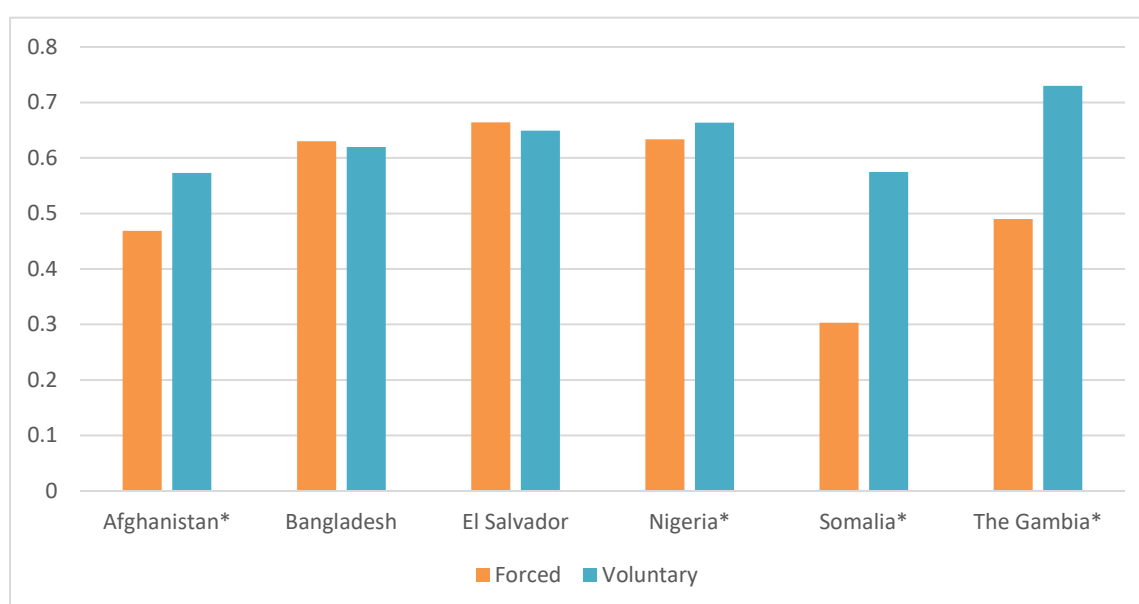
³⁸ UNHCR defines the best interests determination of a child as a "formal process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child's best interests for particularly important decisions affecting the child." Under this context, forced returns and deportations are not in the child's best interest and may further hinder reintegration. UNHCR, [UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child](#) (2008), page 8. See also IOM and UNICEF, "A Child Right's Approach to the Sustainable Reintegration of Migrant Children and Families," in IOM, *Reintegration Handbook*.



scores holds for all the countries in the regression analysis (see [Annex 9](#)) when control for other individual factors (e.g. sex, age, situation of vulnerability, years since return) and for IOM reintegration support variables (although the finding is not statistically significant for Bangladesh) is in place. It wasn't possible to run a regression analysis for **El Salvador** due to the small number of observations. However, insights from the fieldwork show that there are various social support programmes that equally target forced and voluntary returnees implemented by local government authorities with the support of international development organizations such as USAID and embassies of foreign countries (e.g. Japan). This may explain why forced returnees scored better than voluntary returnees in the sample group for El Salvador.

As the following sections will show, the statistical differences between the RSS scores of forced and voluntary returnees are mostly driven by differences in the economic and social dimensions. The qualitative interviews revealed that these differences result from the additional difficulties that forced returnees face in their reintegration process. In particular, forced returnees reported more psychological problems due to distressing migration experiences, which in turn affected their motivation and ability to work upon return, they made less preparation for return and accumulated little or no funds abroad. In addition, they were more likely to be stigmatized upon return and had more problems accessing documentation. The following sections will focus more in-depth on the different reintegration dimensions, using the quantitative RSS data and the qualitative data to explain differences and put findings into context.

Figure 4. Overall RSS composite scores, by country of origin and type of return



*Refers to a statistically significant difference (t-test, $p < 0.05$).

3.3 ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

Across the different countries, voluntary returnees consistently have higher average economic reintegration scores. In some countries, notably **Afghanistan, Somalia and the Gambia, the differences between forced and voluntary returnees are large**, whereas in **Bangladesh and Nigeria** the differences are small and in the case of Nigeria do not hold when the research team controlled for other factors in the

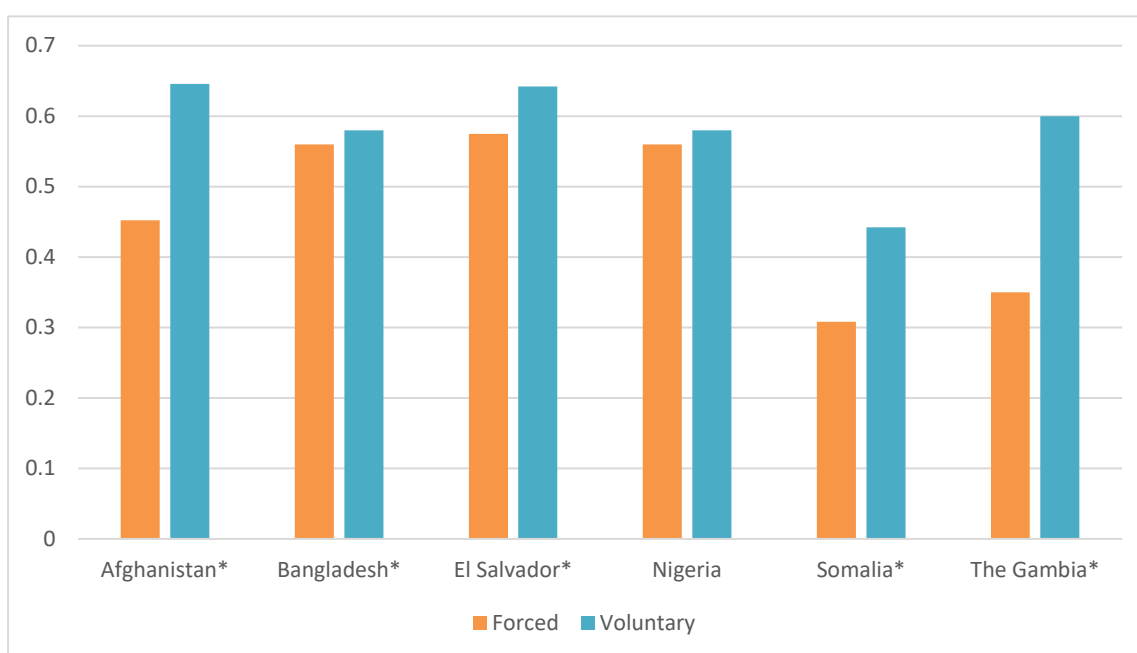


regression analysis (see [Annex 9](#)). Due to small sample size, it was not possible to run a regression analysis for El Salvador, but the descriptive results reveal that voluntary returnees in the sample group scored slightly better than forced returnees in the economic dimension.

A closer examination of specific RSS questions in the economic dimension show that, in comparison with the overall sampled returnee population in **Afghanistan**, forced returnees scored particularly low on the question about their **level of satisfaction with current economic situation**. While in the overall sample, 79 per cent of respondents were satisfied with their current economic situation, this was only the case for 46 per cent of forced returnees in Afghanistan. Moreover, while overall 43 per cent of the respondents reported that they had **poor access to employment and training**, 73 per cent of forced returnees reported this in **Afghanistan**. Similarly, in **Somalia**, while 46 per cent of the overall respondents expressed satisfaction with their **current economic circumstances**, this was 17 per cent among forced returnees and 60 per cent among voluntary returnees. In **the Gambia**, the difference was even more pronounced, with 80 per cent of voluntary returnees being satisfied with their economic situation compared to 4 per cent among forced returnees. These findings reveal critical differences between forced and voluntary returnees in their abilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency in the economically challenging contexts of **Afghanistan, Somalia** and **the Gambia**.

The qualitative data revealed that both forced and voluntary returnees appeared to suffer from similar financial problems and faced the same structural conditions upon return. At the same time, certain aspects related to the experiences abroad and particularly during the return process, made the reintegration process more challenging for forced returnees in some contexts, as described below.

Figure 5. RSS economic dimension score, by country of origin and type of return



*Refers to a statistically significant difference (t-test, $p < 0.05$).



Little or no time to prepare for return

First, across the research sites, forced returnee respondents mentioned that their deportation experiences left them with little or no time to prepare, which negatively impacted their economic reintegration. Respondents mentioned that the **lack of preparation** meant that they had little to fall back upon after return, in terms of financial resources, employment and social networks. Some had exhausted their financial resources during the journey and were in urgent need of economic assistance upon return. In **Afghanistan**, for example, respondents mentioned how one or two months of waiting for reintegration assistance was unbearable. They had no resources left because of their high-cost journey and their inability to build resources in the country of origin. Similar stories emerged in **Nigeria**, where a key informant stated that the process of forced return often meant that returnees were unable to collect their belongings or access savings, resulting in an urgent need for provision of shelter and food upon return. In **Somalia**, the majority of respondents stated that they had no chance to develop any skills or new experiences in the host country, which made them more vulnerable upon return. Social networks were often lacking for forced returnees, because forced returnees who had to return unexpectedly had not had the time to set up or mobilize their contacts before return. Especially those who were deported after spending a significant period abroad often lacked the social networks that could help them find employment.

Mental health problems linked to deportation experience

Second, forced returnees reported more mental health problems, including anxiety and recollections of distressing experiences, which in turn affected their ability to reintegrate economically. These self-reported mental health problems, which will be discussed more in detail in [Section 3.5](#) on psychosocial reintegration, were often a result of the sudden and unexpected return experience of forced returnees. In Nigeria, one key informant explained:

“They [forced returnees] cannot make an informed decision to return, and for forced returns there is, of course, alone the procedure of being woken up in the middle of the night, having to pick the things, not even being able to plan anything, just being put on a plane, that’s very traumatizing, especially if the families have children.”

NKI6

The key informant further explained that voluntary returnees generally displayed more willingness to make their reintegration work:

“They are willing to make the best use of these circumstances on the grounds, and quickly adjust, whereas forced returnees were often focused on re-migration, feeling that they had not completed their mission that they had set out to do from the onset” and thus “jump on the opportunity to return.”

NKI6

In the in-depth interviews, forced returnees sometimes reported that they had travelled irregularly during their migration journey, which made them more susceptible to abuse, violence and exploitation. Some forced returnees reported experiences of trafficking.³⁹ Although the interviews did not focus specifically on this topic, trafficking experiences were specifically mentioned by forced returnees in Bangladesh and Nigeria. Here, respondents explained how the emotional exhaustion due to the difficulties faced abroad

³⁹ IOM holds the formal position that forced returns and deportations are not in the best interest of a victim of trafficking and may further hinder reintegration.



and during return lessened their hopes of building a future for themselves and their families, which resulted in a lack of motivation to improve their economic circumstances. ‘Losing hope’ and ‘giving up on one’s own future’ was commonly expressed by returnees. As such, the migration experiences of forced returnees had a large impact on the economic reintegration process.

Social stigma attached to forced returnees

Finally, forced returnees and key informants sometimes mentioned how they faced additional stigma in the labour market. This was mentioned by respondents in **El Salvador, Nigeria and Afghanistan**. The reasons for stigmatization differed across countries. In El Salvador, returnees, particularly those that had been deported, were linked to criminality gangs and were generally seen as a ‘failure’ as they had been unable to provide for their families by migrating and sending remittances. The idea of a ‘failed return’ among forced returnees was also brought up by key informants in Nigeria, where stigmatization was related to the fact that returnees came back without savings. This stigmatization had a large effect on the economic reintegration of forced returnees. In Afghanistan, forced returnees who felt unsafe or ashamed to go back to their communities of origin were also often in more critical economic positions as they had less access to the social networks that would facilitate access to jobs.

3.4 SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

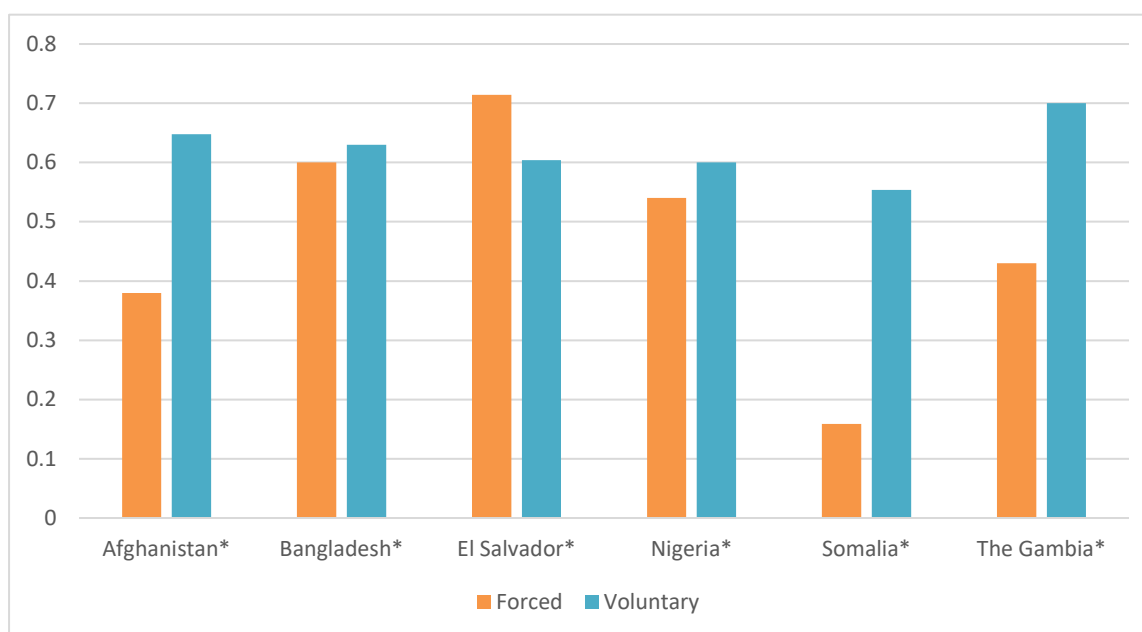
The RSS data highlights how forced returnees have lower social reintegration scores overall, except in **El Salvador** where forced returnees scored better than voluntary returnees. Figure 6 shows the average RSS social dimension score per country, comparing forced and voluntary returnees. The difference between forced and voluntary returnees is the largest in **Somalia, the Gambia and Afghanistan**, where forced returnees persistently indicated poorer access to social services than voluntary returnees. For example, in **Afghanistan**, 91 per cent of the forced returnees reported poor access to education, whereas this share was 20 per cent for voluntary returnees. Similarly, poor access to justice and law enforcement was reported by 80 per cent of forced returnees, while this was indicated by 22 per cent of voluntary returnees.

The regression results show that the differences in social reintegration between forced and voluntary returnees are statistically significant in each country. However, when controlling for other variables (such as age, sex, duration of stay abroad, etc.), the difference in access to social services between forced and voluntary returnees is only statistically significant in Nigeria, El Salvador, the Gambia and Bangladesh while there are no statistically significant differences in social service access between the groups in Afghanistan and Somalia. This means that, when the impact of other factors (e.g. the fact of being male or female, and older or younger returnee) is removed, there is no significant difference between forced and voluntary returnees’ access to social services in Afghanistan and Somalia.

During the in-depth interviews, both forced and voluntary returnees reported troubles accessing and paying for services due to structural levels of poverty. However, the in-depth interviews also revealed how forced returnees faced some additional social reintegration challenges as compared to voluntary returnees.



Figure 6. RSS social dimension score, by country of origin and type of return



*Refers to a statistically significant difference (t-test, $p < 0.05$).

Access to services: housing, health care and financial support

In **El Salvador**, for example, returnees reported that they had limited access to services, including access to housing, food and health care after their return. Although this was reported for both forced and voluntary returnees, this was particularly the case for returnees whose rights had been violated during migration and those who had been deported. Some forced returnees explained how health care for chronic diseases was discontinued after return due to costs of medication relative to income. Access to health care was particularly relevant for females, as diseases such as diabetes and hypertension were reportedly more prevalent among them. As described in [Chapter 4](#) on gender, some females suffered from torture or physical violence during migration, which increased their need for health services upon return. These experiences were most often reported by forced female returnees who had travelled irregularly.

In **Nigeria**, forced returnees, and particularly self-reported cases of victims of trafficking, were often in immediate need of housing, cash assistance and other types of social support such as health care. Often facing family rejection, returnees and key informants reported in the in-depth interviews that there was an urgent need to provide shelter to these people. For voluntary returnees, the situation seemed less urgent as they had had more time to prepare for their return and faced less stigmatization by family members and the wider community. As described, stigmatization was often related to the perception of returnees as a 'failure', which led to less social support. One forced returnee in Nigeria reported that stigmatization had a negative impact on her ability to find housing, even leading to eviction from previous housing. Also in Nigeria, key informants explained forced returnees expressed a high degree of mistrust towards institutions, which made it difficult for them to reintegrate socially.



Acquiring documentation

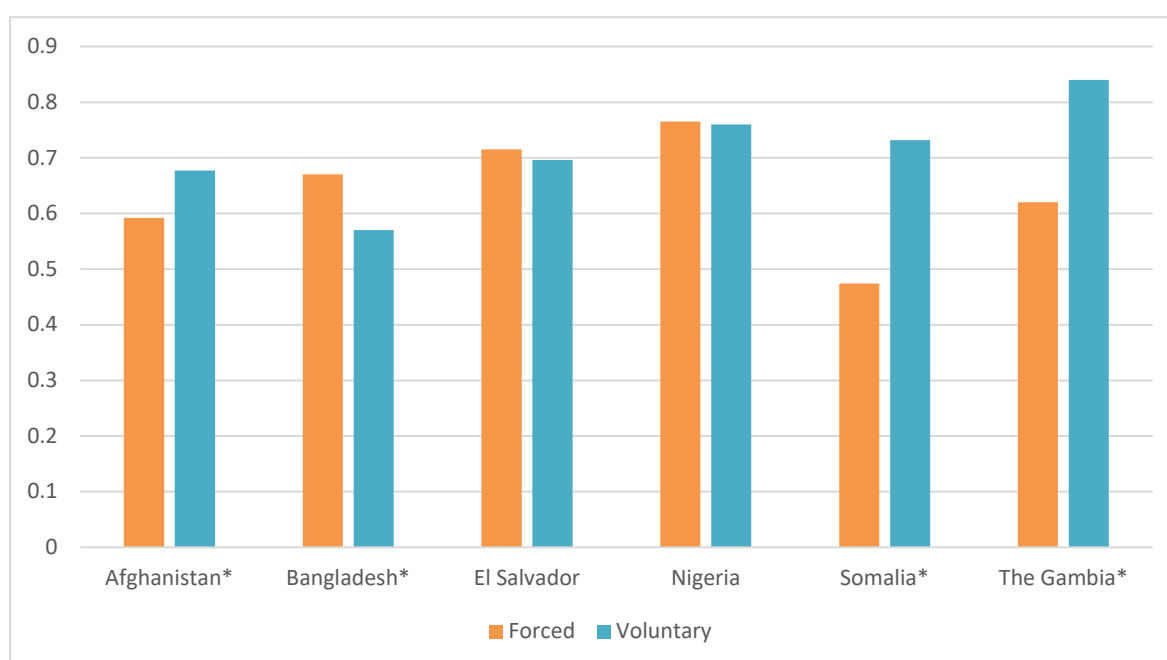
Across the countries, those who had been deported often had troubles accessing services such as education and health care because of problems acquiring official documentation.

In **Afghanistan**, returnees who spent their entire lives in Pakistan or Islamic Republic of Iran and who were deported after a failed migration attempt to Europe, faced problems acquiring identity documents. These challenges were amplified by the lack of (cultural) knowledge on how to navigate in Afghan society.

3.5 PSYCHOSOCIAL REINTEGRATION

The psychosocial RSS dimension scores show mixed results for forced and voluntary returnees across countries (Figure 7). Whereas in **Bangladesh, Nigeria and El Salvador**, forced returnees have better psychosocial reintegration scores, opposite result are registered in **Afghanistan, Somalia and the Gambia**. The difference between forced and voluntary returnees is most visible in **Somalia** in terms of psychosocial indicators, particularly those related to the strength of the support network and sense of physical safety. For example, 94 per cent of forced returnees indicated having a weak support network while this was 18 per cent for voluntary returnees. When returnees were asked whether they felt physically safe in their current location, 47 per cent of forced returnees expressed feeling unsafe, while this was 5 per cent among voluntary returnees. In **Nigeria**, on the other hand, many psychosocial indicators yielded similar results for forced and voluntary returnees. For example, in terms of sense of belonging, the large majority of respondents indicated that they felt part of the community, and only around 30 per cent stated that they were rarely or never invited to social activities in the community, with similar prevalence for forced returnees.

Figure 7. RSS psychosocial dimension score, by country of origin and type of return



*Refers to a statistically significant difference (t-test, $p < 0.05$).



While descriptive results from the sample group show mixed results across countries, the regression analysis (see [Annex 9](#)) reveal that voluntary return is positively correlated with psychosocial reintegration scores when other variables are held constant (and statistically significant for Nigeria and Afghanistan), meaning that voluntary returnees are more likely to have better outcomes than forced returnees in general.

The qualitative interviews revealed more nuanced and highlighted key aspects that may challenge the psychosocial well-being of returnees, such as the difficult experiences during migration, separation from families, and family/community rejection.

Difficult migration journey

The in-depth interviews with returnees and key informants revealed that many respondents had distressing experiences related to their migration, but that this was particularly prevalent among forced returnees and to a lesser extent among rejected asylum seekers who returned voluntarily. First, and as described before, forced returnees had often migrated irregularly and had therefore been more exposed to risks of trafficking, detention, extortion and abuse. The journeys of **Nigerian** respondents, for example, were often characterized by exploitation, restricted freedom of movement, sexual violence, prostitution, police brutality and detention, all of which affected their psychosocial well-being after return.

Family separation

Second, the deportation process, which, according to respondents, often happened quickly and without notice, left some respondents distressed. In **El Salvador**, several returnees who had been deported had to leave their family members, in some cases children, behind in the host country. This negatively affected their mental health as *“their body is here but everything else is with their family abroad”* (EK12).

Negative feelings, signs of distress and emotional exhaustion

In Bangladesh, for forced returnees, the lack of preparation for their return and not being able to make an informed choice led to feelings of stress, panic, loss of hope and lack of a vision for the future. Respondents frequently expressed their inability to make future plans as days passed by full of anxiety. As a female returnee cited when explaining her challenges:

“It’s not like I have to face it once a month, I have to face it every day after waking up.”

BR3, F, FOR

In **Afghanistan**, forced returnees and voluntary returnees who had no other option than to return reported similar experiences. Negative feelings such as stress, anxiety, and loss of hope existed in both groups. Especially those who had returned from Europe, either voluntarily or forced, had severe mental health problems that were often triggered by asylum rejection decisions. Voluntary returnees also expressed feelings of regret regarding their return, thinking about what their future had looked like if they hadn’t decided to return. As one key informant working at an NGO noted:

“I have had many voluntary returnees sitting here, talking with me and regretting their decision. But on the other hand, they were also sure that if they hadn’t returned voluntarily, they would have been deported.”

AKI1



Lower levels of trust in institutions

The distressing experiences of particularly forced returnees did not only affect their mental health, but also other aspects of their reintegration. As described in the previous sections, those who had experienced distress often experienced more challenges to reintegrate economically. Some respondents mentioned how the difficult experiences during migration and during the return process led to lower levels of trust in institutions, which affected the extent to which they received support upon return.

Family and community rejection or acceptance

Community and family acceptance were a struggle for forced returnees in some case study countries. In the previous sections, stigmatization of forced returnees was discussed already, particularly in the contexts of **Nigeria** and **El Salvador**.

In **Bangladesh**, respondents reported mixed stories of family and community acceptance for forced returnees. In general, some were happier abroad, some were better off before migration, but only a few felt content about their current circumstances. A main coping mechanism commonly referred to is faith, helping them to come to terms with their unlucky “fate”. A key informant noted a similar pattern with regard to community acceptance, arguing that the belief in fate in the community of origin sometimes make it easier for the community to reaccept and even sympathize with the forced returnees based on the belief that what happened to them was God’s will. Yet a respondent stressed that the opposite may also occur, and that community rejection can be intense:

“Both cases are very strong. In some cases the family and society neglect him strongly and in some other cases, they accept him with open arms believing it was all God’s will. These types of things are in the family. If not, you see the one who was cheated and couldn’t migrate or migrated but had to come back, he is saying that it happened for others but it wasn’t in his luck or all that Allah does is for good.” This is believed in our family or society. So as we still live with these beliefs, on that note... for the forced returnees... the struggle is sometimes very serious and at the same time family or society might be very sympathetic to him.”

BK11

The RSS results in Bangladesh corroborated these mixed findings with half of the respondents indicating that they felt like they did have a supportive social network (49%), while the share was lower among forced returnees (43%).

In **Somalia**, disappointment related to ‘failed’ migration was more often mentioned by forced returnees. Some respondents shared their families’ happiness for their return, happiness mixed with feelings of uncertainty about alternative sources of income after their return. Others explicitly stated that their families were disappointed by their return as they could not achieve the goal of sustaining the financial resources for the family. This sense of ‘failure’, which was more common among forced returnees, had an influence on their psychosocial reintegration. The RSS results validate the additional psychosocial challenges for forced returnees: while 61 per cent of Somali returnees indicated that they feel like they have a supportive social network, this percentage is substantially lower among forced returnees (14%).



3.6 FUTURE MIGRATION PLANS OF FORCED AND VOLUNTARY RETURNEES

The results presented in this section are based on a mix of the quantitative and qualitative data collected in each site. In the psychosocial dimension of the RSS, the respondents were asked if they were *able to stay and live in the country of origin*, and whether the desire to migrate stemmed from an essential need or more of a wish due to less essential needs (*need versus wish to remigrate*). To produce a more nuanced analysis in this aspect, the research team addressed a similar question to returnees about their future plans during the in-depth interviews. The results described below illustrate the diversity of future expectations and plans across the country studies with a specific focus on the varying experiences of forced and voluntary returnees.

Table 6. Percentage of returnees indicating ability to stay in country of origin, by country and type of return

Country of origin	Forced returnees	Voluntary returnees	Total population of returnees
Afghanistan	59%	68%	60%
Bangladesh	71%	82%	81%
El Salvador	90%	80%	88%
Nigeria	93%	94%	94%
Somalia	46%	89%	83%
Gambia	78%	91%	91%

Source: RSS Question #30

In the case of **Afghanistan**, 59 per cent of the RSS respondents indicated that they felt able to stay and live in Afghanistan. Voluntary returnees were more likely (68%) to feel able to stay than forced returnees (59%). Of those indicating a desire to migrate again, 97 per cent cited it as a need due to inability to establish sustainable living, while for 3 per cent of respondents it was more of a wish due to less essential needs. The in-depth interviews revealed more nuance, where in some cases voluntary returnees appeared more likely to express plans to migrate again, as they were not banned from re-entry into the host country. This was different for forced returnees who had been deported, and who often felt that a new migration attempt would be fruitless. Most of the respondents conditioned their future plans on the security situation and the availability of jobs. Only a few seemed confident about their decision to stay in Afghanistan, while many others expressed uncertainty because of the protracted conflict situation.

In **Bangladesh**, 81 per cent of RSS respondents felt that they were able to stay and live in Bangladesh, with voluntary returnees being more likely (82%) to feel that they could stay than forced returnees (71%). In the interviewees' accounts, a sense of 'failure' was present, as many felt that they had failed to meet the expectations of themselves and their families. The future plans of many returnees did not involve migration, but rather centred around building a decent life in Bangladesh. While voluntary returnees often envisioned a life in Bangladesh, forced returnees seemed more willing to move abroad if they had the means to do so.



However, none of them found this a realistic option given their current circumstances. This was also noted by a government actor as a general pattern observed among forced returnees:

“He [voluntary returnee] returned deciding that he will start a new life here. He will find a job here. He decided on this. But who returned forcefully keeps thinking about abroad, when can he go again and start again. Here lies the problem. Who came willingly do not have this problem because he has a plan on what he will do after returning. He worked hard there, earned something and will try to do something here. But who returned forcefully thinks about migrating again.”

BKI2

In **El Salvador**, returnees who succeeded in setting up a relatively stable business had no desire to remigrate. Only a few respondents explained that they would remigrate if legal options and work opportunities would arise, as they did not want to relive the difficulties experienced through irregular migration. The RSS results show that 88 per cent of respondents felt that they were able to stay and live in El Salvador. Forced returnees (90%) were more likely to express ability to stay than voluntary returnees (80%). In the in-depth interviews, only a few respondents expressed that they would consider migration if legal options and work opportunities arise. Many others had no intention to re-migrate unless circumstances coerced them to do so.

In **Nigeria**, only 6 per cent of RSS respondents felt that they were not able to stay and live in Nigeria, with voluntary returnees only marginally less likely (5%) to want to migrate again than forced returnees (7%). Of those indicating a desire to migrate again, 92 per cent cited it as a need due to the inability to establish sustainable living, while for 8 per cent of respondents it was more of a wish due to less essential needs. The in-depth interviews corroborated these figures. The majority of participants stated that the distress sustained as part of their migration experience prevented them from undertaking the same journey again. However, many indicated that they would migrate again if there was a legal migration opportunity. For a few migrants, the costs associated with migration acted as a barrier to migrate again. Key stakeholders in Nigeria explained that the lack of immediate assistance and/or delay of assistance severely hampered some returnees' ability to cover basic needs such as food, shelter/housing and clothing, which acted as a push factor for re-migration. One respondent said:

“If the reintegration process is slow, they will begin to regret why they come back.”

NKI3

In **Somalia**, 83 per cent of the RSS respondents felt that they were able to stay and live in Somalia, with voluntary returnees being significantly more likely (86%) to feel comfortable staying than forced returnees (46%). Many interview respondents expressed a desire to migrate again if they had the means to do so. These migration desires were mostly a result of the difficult financial situation that returnees and their families were in. All respondents who received reintegration assistance talked about their need for more sustainable solutions such as employment opportunities and help in starting small businesses. Many stressed no source of support. As such, migration is seen by many as the only way to financially support their families:



"If I get the opportunity to travel, I wouldn't like to stay one hour even, I would have been back again abruptly to Saudi Arabia. [...] I don't think I will be able to earn better if I stay here, because I lacked the basic necessity to support my children and family. As I am speaking, it is the month of Ramadan; I cannot buy clothes and shoes for my children in order to celebrate the Eid days."

SR13, M, FOR

In **the Gambia**, a large majority of the sample felt that they could stay and live in the country (91%), and forced returnees (although the sample was very limited) were less likely (78%) to feel that they are able to stay and live in the Gambia than voluntary returnees (91%). The interview sample did not include voluntary returnees, but an overall pattern among forced returnees was a desire to remigrate unless their financial circumstances improve.

3.7 REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE

Across the three dimensions, the information received before arrival was found to play a big role in the reintegration process of voluntary returnees, as was highlighted by returnees and key informants. Pre-departure counselling (such as in the case of Germany, where some respondents indicated having received detailed guidance on what to expect upon return) had a positive effect on the likelihood of voluntary returnees adapting quickly upon return, as they knew what to expect and could prepare accordingly. However, such counselling is often unavailable for forced returnees.

After return, the reintegration assistance received by respondents in the sampled group included a mix of cash and in-kind assistance, with the latter representing the bulk of assistance. The interviews revealed that additional support is desired with respect to immediate assistance upon arrival and psychosocial support. Reintegration activities in the form of labour market insertion are often prioritized by reintegration service providers, and service providers pay less attention to the social and psychosocial components of reintegration. The psychosocial reintegration component is crucial for returnees to overcome internal barriers to reintegration.

Vocational trainings led to positive outcomes particularly when the skills provided matched with the interests of the returnees and responded to the needs in the labour market. In cases where returnees lacked additional resources, capital to start business proved less useful and sustainable than providing vocational trainings. Monitoring and follow-up that go beyond the project timelines appeared to be essential with business start-ups. Rent expenses or support in building a house (particularly for those who already had land) are other desirable types of assistance.

3.8 CONCLUSIONS

The RSS data shows that forced returnees in the sample have worse reintegration outcomes overall, as compared to voluntary returnees. These differences are particularly visible in the economic and social reintegration dimensions. The regression results corroborate that the type of return – voluntary or forced – has a significant impact on economic reintegration scores, with forced returnees having lower scores, on average, than voluntary returnees. The situation of vulnerability and the reintegration support provided by IOM are other factors that had a significant impact on economic reintegration outcomes. In the social



dimension, the type of return has a significant impact only in some contexts, with voluntary returnees being more likely to score better than forced returnees. Other important factors impacting social reintegration are the situation of vulnerability (negative impact on reintegration) and the reintegration support that was received by returnees (positive impact on reintegration). In the psychosocial dimension, descriptive results from the sample group show mixed results across countries, but the regression analysis reveals that voluntary return is positively related with psychosocial reintegration scores when other variables are held constant, meaning that voluntary returnees are more likely to have better outcomes than forced returnees in general. The in-depth interviews allowed the research team to get more insights on the various challenges encountered by forced and voluntary returnees in the six case study countries. Especially in Somalia and Nigeria, economic conditions were difficult and returnees were in dire need of more sustainable solutions. Returnees in El Salvador mentioned fears of violence and a general sense of insecurity. In Afghanistan, the political and security situation, combined with mass returns from Islamic Republic of Iran for instance, added another layer of insecurity for returnees and impacted their abilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency. The global pandemic has amplified the reintegration challenges in many countries, both because it had 'forced' individuals to return 'empty-handed' and because it made more difficult for them to reintegrate economically after return.

Even though forced and voluntary returnees faced similar economic, social and psychosocial challenges, several aspects related to the migration journey and the return process created additional challenges for forced returnees. Forced returnees had often travelled irregularly, which left them unprotected and exposed to trafficking, exploitation, detention, abuse, and violence. These difficult experiences negatively impacted all aspects of their reintegration process. As such, those who had experienced feelings of distress due to difficult migration journeys and return processes belonged to a particularly vulnerable group that was in urgent need of additional medical assistance, including psychological support. Moreover, those who had travelled irregularly had been less likely to acquire skills or additional education abroad that would help them in their reintegration process upon return. The idea of a 'failed' migration often came forward in our interviews with respondents. In many cases, the inability to provide for family members added another layer of frustration and disappointment for respondents.

In many cases, the return process itself had been difficult for forced returnees. Returnees who had been deported often mentioned how they had been unprepared for their return, had to leave unexpectedly, sometimes leaving behind family members. Their inability to prepare for their return meant that they often lacked access to financial means or social support upon return. For many, the return experience added an additional distressful element that impacted on their reintegration process. Particularly returnees who had to leave family members behind, such as in El Salvador, struggled to reintegrate. The stigma attached to forced returnees and returnees from Europe who failed to meet the expectations of their communities and families upon return led to feelings of shame and failure, which required additional psychosocial support. Finally, forced returnees often faced more difficulties to acquire proper documentation, such as identity documents, upon return. This was especially the case for returnees who had spent long periods abroad and/or returnees who had been unprepared for their return. Lack of documentation, in turn, affected their ability to access basic services, such as education, health care and legal assistance, upon return. These findings suggest that achieving



sustainable results in reintegration outcomes in the economic, social and psychosocial dimensions are highly interrelated, for both forced and voluntary returnees.

In terms of reintegration assistance, the findings show how all stages of the migration cycle should be taken into account while designing tailored reintegration assistance plans to support returnees in achieving economic self-sufficiency, social stability and psychosocial well-being. These findings will be synthesized into programmatic and policy recommendations presented in [Chapter 6](#).



Credits: Reintegration assistance in Nigeria.

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CHAPTER 4 – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REINTEGRATION OUTCOMES THROUGH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

It is widely recognized that sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions and whether someone is intersex have an important impact on individual experiences at different stages of migration, including return migration. The societal norms and expectations associated with being a man, a woman or a person with diverse genders, and whether one identifies with diverse sexual orientations, can drastically affect return and reintegration experiences by interfering with a returnee's ability to access the necessary resources (tangible and intangible) and means to rebuild their lives.⁴⁰ Yet, while gendered and intersectional perspectives are becoming essential in migration studies, gendered analysis of return migration and reintegration processes are still relatively uncommon.⁴¹

To address this knowledge gap, this chapter focuses on the reintegration experiences of male and female returnees, as well as the gendered experiences of the reintegration process. The aim of this research was to examine the differences in reintegration outcomes of female and male returnees, and to identify challenges, good practices and recommendations for gender-sensitive reintegration programming. The outcome of the research is intended to inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of reintegration support programmes for male and female returnees as well as to feed into recommendations for gender-sensitive return and reintegration policy and advocacy.

This chapter is based on RSS data, in-depth interviews with returnees, family members, key informants in the six research sites, and global IOM experts on migration and gender. The RSS data only refers to male and female returnees and is recorded based on the interviewer's perception of the interviewee's sex. When interpreting the RSS data findings, it is therefore important to keep in mind that the reported RSS comparisons relate to presumed sex, not gender. The in-depth interviews with returnees and key informants allowed for reflection on gendered experiences of reintegration, however, the focus of the study is largely on the reintegration differences between female and male returnees based on presumed sex.

The chapter starts by giving an overview of how migration and return experiences differ for female and male returnees based on insights from the in-depth interviews with returnees. Then, it presents the overall RSS scores of male and female returnees in the six countries, after which the results for the different reintegration dimensions (economic, social and psychosocial reintegration) are presented, using information from the RSS combined with insights from the in-depth interviews. Then, a section zooms in on the experiences of returnees with diverse SOGIESC. Although returnees with diverse SOGIESC were not the focus of this study, several key informants at the global level shared insights on the specific needs and vulnerabilities of this group, therefore a separate section is dedicated to present the limited findings in this regard. The chapter ends by focusing on the future migration plans of male and female returnees, followed by a conclusion that summarizes the main findings.

⁴⁰ See IOM, Gender and Migration [website](#).

⁴¹ See Girma, H., [The salience of gender in return migration](#), *Sociology Compass* 11(5): 2 (2017).



4.1 BACKGROUND: REASONS FOR MIGRATION AND EXPERIENCES OF RETURN

This section provides an overview of qualitative findings on why individuals migrated from their countries of origin and their circumstances of return that was not captured in the RSS data. The findings presented here are by no means representative for all returnees in the different contexts, but some common patterns can be identified among female and male returnees, which may highlight gender-related aspects of migration and return that are important to consider while designing gender-sensitive reintegration programming.

4.1.1 Migration reasons of female and male returnees

The in-depth interviews with returnees explored the key factors that motivated the migration decision of returnees, with a view to understand the specific circumstances that may have an impact on the reintegration outcomes. An analysis of patterns in the narratives of female and male returnees through a gender lens reveal various recurring themes that can be summarized as below.

Family pressure

While societal pressure to provide for the family was often pronounced by male returnees, the findings suggest that female respondents, often single females, sometimes faced similar pressures too, as illustrated by a quote of a **Somalian** female returnee:

“My family was very poor who can’t afford the basic things to survive, the children who go to madrasa [Koranic school] can’t get food when they are back at home, no food nothing, [...] My mother encouraged me to go to Yemen to work and support the family, after when she realized the situation is getting bad.”

SR1, F, VOL

In **Afghanistan**, female respondents frequently migrated with their families, as part of a collective household decision. Only one female respondent indicated no desire to leave Afghanistan but had to do so due to marriage arrangements with her partner living in Austria. She eventually returned voluntarily to Kabul to live with her parents and left her husband and children behind due to mental health problems and difficulties in adjusting to life abroad:

“Before I migrated to Europe I had something else in my mind about Europe. The problem that I had, maybe not just me so many other Afghans have this idea, I was thinking that when I go there, I can wear nice and new brand clothes, put lots of makeup. But when I went there, I was not enjoying, maybe it was not my country, I was trying hard to be happy but I was not happy at all.”

AR10, F, VOL

In **El Salvador**, some female respondents stated how the conservative gender roles meant that they had low access to education and economic opportunities, which incentivized them to migrate.

Economic reasons

In a few cases, females made the migration decision individually to provide for their family, as explained by a family member (younger sister) of a **Somalian** female returnee:



"It was her decision to go and look for employment opportunity, after when she saw the family condition, we never discussed or collectively decide this immigration, she couldn't tolerate the family condition, the only reason she migrated was to help us and secure our daily food through remittance she sent, also she felt like a responsibility since she is the eldest in the family. [...] Yes, I do respect her decision, as well as we believe she will support the family, no one was against her will, we needed very badly someone to help the family, personally I supported her migration."

SFM1

In **the Gambia**, a female respondent who could not find a source of income in her country decided to migrate to Mauritania where females can work in domestic services, as she learned from other females.

Security concerns

One male respondent in **the Gambia** stated that he had left the country mainly for personal safety concerns based on assumptions about his sexual orientation, as he explained:

"I travelled out of the Gambia in 2008 and the main reason for travelling was that I was accused of being a homosexual. As a result, I was afraid and ran for my security because the former government did not take homosexuality light."

GR8, M, FOR

This case was very particular in the Gambia, but illustrates the negative view of the (former) government on homosexuality, which might be a reason for other cases to consider migration.

4.1.2 Migration and return experiences of female and male returnees

Gender-related factors also play a role in return decision making. Several **Nigerian** female returnees who had migrated or had been stranded in Libya reported that their stay abroad was marked by exploitation, restricted freedom of movement, sexual violence, forced prostitution and/or labour, police brutality, detention and extortion. Similar experiences were described by **Somali** returnees from Saudi Arabia and Yemen and **Bangladeshi** female returnees from Lebanon and Greece. One Somalian returnee described her experience as follows:

"I was only two months in Saudi [Arabia], and those two months I was in jail with some other Somali people, it was very bad memory, they use to treat us badly and rape the ladies, every night they use to come and use one of us, they beat and arrest badly if she refuses, while abusing they deliberately rape in front of us every night. We were in that situation for those 2 months in jail until being repatriated."

SR4, F, FOR

In **Afghanistan**, returnees from Europe were often single males who returned from countries including Germany, Finland, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many of them returned because their asylum applications had failed and they had no other option but to return, or because they were deported. Several Afghan female returnees cited family pressure as an additional reason to return, in all cases coming from male members of the family including husbands, fathers and brothers. For example, a female respondent who was leading a good life with a decent income in Oman had to return due to pressure from her brothers to come back and get married.



"If I was still abroad, everyone [would] call me bad."

AR12, F, VOL

Indeed, the interview with her brother showed his disapproval of migration of females in general:

"I believe, apart from her, a girl going abroad from anywhere in our country is rarely seen in a positive way. Most of the people don't. Even I myself don't see it positively. It is true. Not for her only, every woman like her. After she had returned to the country, she was married to someone."

AFM1

On the other hand, the perspectives of male returnees illustrate that the gender roles assigned to male returnees create high levels of pressure to provide for the whole family and limit their ability to take risks (e.g. moving to another European country to look for other opportunities after exhausting options in one country), because of having the responsibility of the family, as expressed by a male returnee:

"Why did I have to back off? Because I have a weakness. Because I have a family. I have children. Today if I lived in Austria for 4 and half years and then I went to Italy, would my paperwork be done there? I couldn't take this risk. It might be fine if I was alone but I couldn't take it with my family, due to which I had to return back to the country by following their laws."

AR15, M, VOL

According to key informants, the social stigma attached to returnees in their communities of origin can be intense for both female and male returnees and may even lead to life-threatening situations for female returnees particularly if their migration was not approved by their families/communities in the first place. This may force them to return to places other than their origin communities. For male returnees, on the other hand, it is often the negative psychological reactions like shame and perceptions of failure that prevent them from going back to their communities of origin.

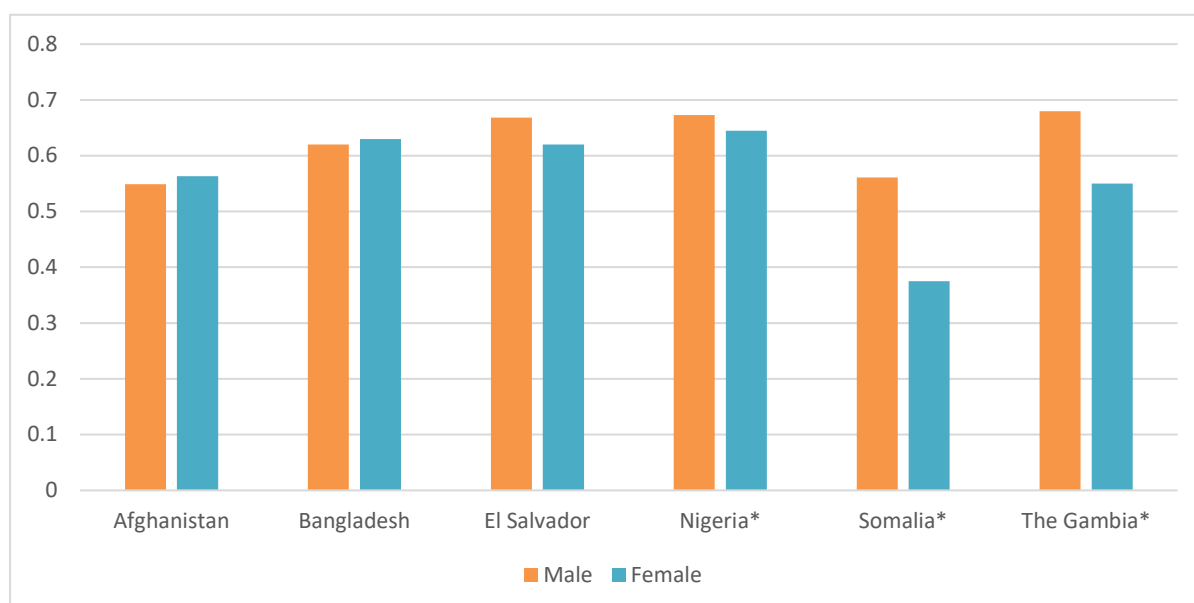
As will be described in the following sections, these distressing return migration experiences, as well as the difficulties experienced in the host country, significantly impacted the reintegration processes of returnees. The narratives on the decision-making processes of the respondents also illustrate the problematic distinction between forced and voluntary migrants, as well as the gender-related factors that inform migration and return decisions. Even though some respondents returned to their country of origin through AVRRO programmes or on their own initiative, their return was often incentivized by their inability to build a life abroad, by situations of exploitation, violence or abuse, or by psychosocial reasons such as discrimination and psychological problems. The narratives on the decision-making processes also illustrate the particular difficulties that different returnees face upon return.



4.2 OVERALL RSS SCORES FOR MALE AND FEMALE RETURNEES

An analysis of overall RSS scores for male and female returnees shows that female returnees in the sample had lower reintegration outcomes in all countries except for Afghanistan and Bangladesh (Figure 8). In **El Salvador and Nigeria** female returnees had slightly lower reintegration scores than male returnees. In **Somalia and the Gambia**,⁴² on the other hand, females had significantly lower reintegration outcomes than males.

Figure 8. Overall RSS composite scores, by country of origin and sex



*Refers to a statistically significant difference (t-test, $p < 0.05$).

The regression analysis, presented in [Annex 9](#), shows that the results for male and female returnees in the composite scores hold in most country cases, except in Somalia. In **Afghanistan, Nigeria and Bangladesh**, female returnees scored lower on their composite reintegration score than males, when controlling for all individual factors (e.g. age, situation of vulnerability, years since return) and the region of return (whether the returnee returned from Europe, Asia, Middle East), as well as variables related to reintegration support provided by IOM. In **Somalia**, the results related to sex are no longer significant when controlling for other variables, meaning that when the impact of these variables is removed, there is no significant difference between the reintegration outcomes of females and males. In Somalia, the **type of return** (forced versus voluntary), the **returnees' situation of vulnerability**⁴³ and the **type of reintegration support received** related more strongly with the reintegration process. In the following

⁴² Note that the RSS sample size for females in the Gambia is very low, at only 30 females.

⁴³ See footnote 33. The interviews with SOGIESC experts indicated that having diverse SOGIESC was another element of vulnerability, but this had not been included in guidance to local consultants.



sections, the reintegration outcomes of male and female returnees for each reintegration subdimension is described and complemented with insights from the qualitative data and regression analysis.

4.3 ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

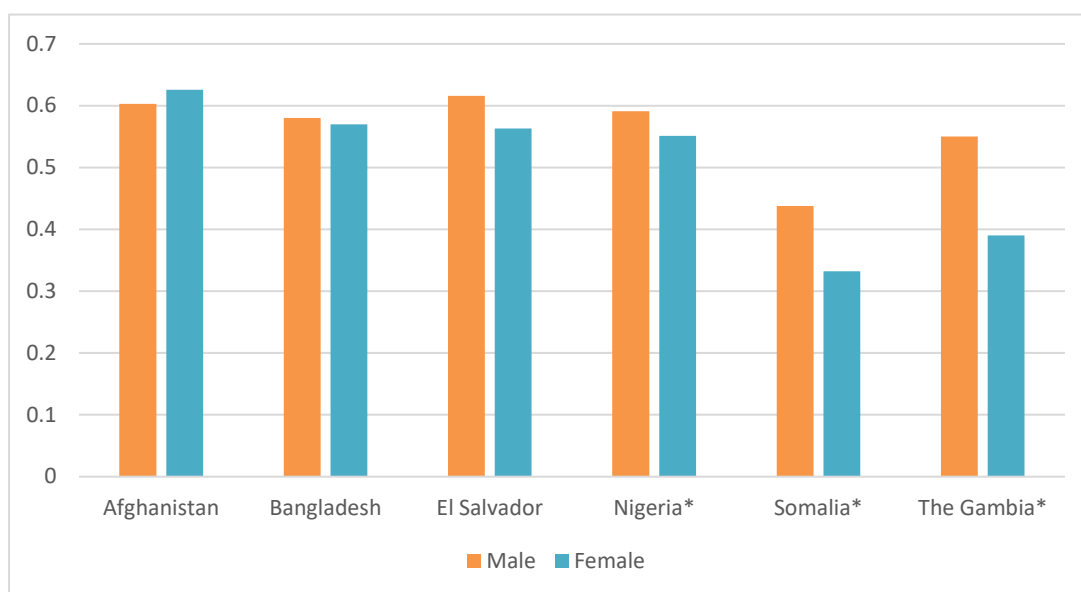
Across the research sites, the quantitative data reveals that female returnees in the sample group often faced more difficulties to reintegrate economically than male returnees (Figure 9). This was the case in all countries, except for **Afghanistan**.

The negative correlation between being female and reintegration is statistically significant only in the case of **Nigeria**.

In **Somalia**, on the other hand, the results regarding sex become *insignificant* after inclusion of other control variables (type of return, situation of vulnerability, host country and the number of years spent abroad), meaning that there is no evidence of a correlation between sex and economic reintegration particularly when we control for situation of vulnerability. Therefore, the overall low scores for females in the economic dimension can be explained by the fact that female returnees were more likely to report situations of vulnerability compared to males.

In Afghanistan, where there is no statistically significant difference between RSS outcomes of female and male returnees, the specific RSS indicators show that females are more likely to report higher levels of economic satisfaction (89%) compared to the overall average (79%). This was different in El Salvador, where females scored lower compared to males in terms of economic satisfaction. Similarly, 43 per cent of the overall Afghan respondents perceived they have poor access to employment and training, whereas this is the case for 30 per cent of female returnees. These results were different in Nigeria and Bangladesh where access to employment and training opportunities were reported to be lower for females than the overall average.

Figure 9. RSS economic dimension score, by country of origin and sex



*Refers to a statistically significant difference (t-test, p<0.05).



The in-depth interviews provided more nuance on how male and female returnees experience different challenges in achieving economic self-sufficiency. Some of the recurring themes that may relate to gender dynamics are elaborated below.

Gender stereotypes in access to employment opportunities

In some cases, qualitative data illustrated how societal stereotypes and patriarchal norms limited the opportunities available to female returnees. In **Somalia and El Salvador**, female returnees expressed having restricted access to certain types of jobs that are typically occupied by males such as industrial jobs and construction work. Those who were able to work in these sectors were reportedly suffering a double burden as they were also expected to manage the household and to take care of children. In **El Salvador and Bangladesh**, on the other hand, females were oftentimes expected to do domestic chores and child-rearing, and faced stigmatization when they engaged in employment. In the case of **Afghanistan**, it was reported that females were restricted in their movement and often not allowed to work at all.

Family pressure and debts

For male returnees, societal pressures to provide for their families was a common challenge hindering their economic reintegration, but this was also experienced by some female returnees (e.g. in Somalia), who migrated to provide for their families in the first place. These pressures often resulted in receiving less emotional support from the family and a heightened feeling of shame, particularly if returnees were unable to pay off debts accrued before migration. In **El Salvador**, returnees reported that this created an incentive for males to re-migrate.

Financial dependence on family members

Economic reintegration challenges were more strongly experienced by separated or widowed females. In some female respondents' accounts, high financial dependence on relatives or in-laws hampered their abilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Involvement in decision-making processes

Finally, male members of the households (if any) in the six countries were more likely to deal with the entire process regarding the provision of the reintegration support and this was the case in all countries. Female members were somewhat involved in the decision-making process, but they frequently mentioned that it was mainly their husbands' business to decide on the type of assistance to be received and how to make use of the assistance. There is no clear indicator on whether this creates an additional barrier to economic reintegration, however, it results in female members of the household having less control over the circumstances that may have an impact on their level of economic self-sufficiency.

4.4 SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

The RSS dataset shows that the social reintegration scores of male and female returnees vary across countries (Figure 10). In **Afghanistan**, female returnees have higher social reintegration scores than males, whereas in **Bangladesh, Somalia and the Gambia** female returnees have lower social reintegration scores than



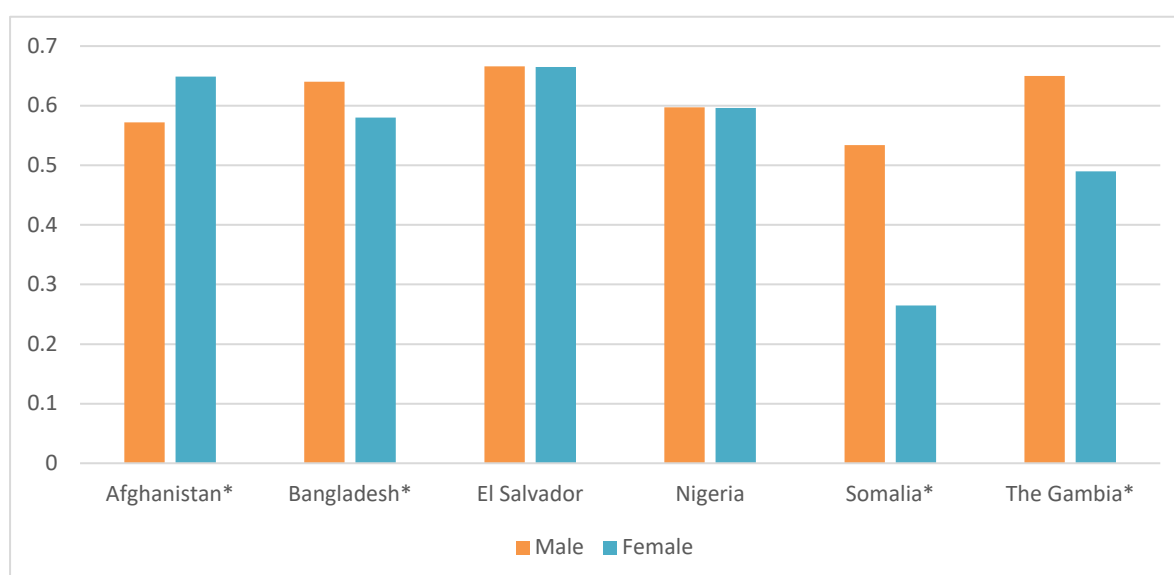
males. No differences between males and females were found in **El Salvador** and **Nigeria**. When controlling for other variables in the regression analysis ([Annex 9](#)), sex is not significantly related to social reintegration, except for Bangladesh, where females scored significantly lower on social reintegration. Overall, therefore, it seems that sex plays a rather modest role in social reintegration outcomes.

When looking at the descriptive results, the indicators that led to lower scores for **Somali and Bangladeshi females** in the sample group, included the RSS indicators on access to housing, documentation, justice and law enforcement, which were particularly lower for females in Bangladesh. Almost all indicators in the social dimension revealed lower results for females in Somalia.

On the other hand, the factors that contributed to lower scores for **Afghan males** were **access to documentation** and **access to justice and law enforcement** where more males perceived poorer access to these services compared to females. However, it is possible to interpret this finding differently because RSS data does not capture whether the respondents live in a household with multiple members and who in the household deals with access to different social services. Given that different members of the household may be more or less likely to deal with access to certain social services (e.g. male members of the household may be more likely to deal with issues related to documentation than female members, or vice versa), there is a possibility that the perception of level of access to social services may differ depending on how much they interact with the system.

In the in-depth interviews, economic hardships were central in the narratives of returnees when asked about the challenges they encountered upon return, but social components such as poor access to health care, poor housing, low quality of education or limited access to public services in places of origin also adversely affected returnees' social reintegration. Some of the key themes that came across during the interviews are elaborated on below.

Figure 10. RSS social dimension score, by country of origin and sex



*Refers to a statistically significant difference (t-test, $p < 0.05$).



Health conditions and access to health care

Female migrants who had travelled irregularly or who reported experiences of violence, abuse or exploitation often lacked access to health services in host countries, which resulted in various health problems. Female returnees in **Nigeria and El Salvador** mentioned severe health problems such as sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies due to sexual exploitation. The exposure of female returnees to the risks associated with irregular migration journey increased their vulnerability to health risks. In the case of **El Salvador**, some female returnees experienced retinal detachment problems due to physical violence and/or torture. Other health conditions cited by female respondents were diabetes and hypertension. Due to either lack of access to or unaffordable health care, these health problems often remained largely untreated. Male returnees rarely mentioned health related concerns, however, they often mentioned aging and reduced physical capacities as a reason for their inability to find labour-intensive jobs. In **Bangladesh**, a female returnee received reintegration assistance to cover health expenses, which allowed her to pay for her treatments. Another female respondent unable to receive adequate treatment for her health condition expressed it in relation to her emotional and psychological state since having to return:

"I expected to stay longer there, stay happily with my husband. But it couldn't be possible. The situation was not at hand, my husband lost his job. So finally, we had to move back. I was completely healthy when I was there. But my life has been destroyed since I returned."

BR1, F, VOL

Important to mention is that the RSS questionnaire only contains questions related to *access* to health care, and not health per se, which might explain why females did not necessarily score worse on the RSS social reintegration dimension in the quantitative data, despite the fact that the in-depth interviews did reveal additional health challenges for females upon return.

In some female respondents' accounts, change of climate and low food quality were perceived to cause additional health problems.

Access to education and school adaptation of child returnees

Another young female Afghan returnee who wished to continue education was unable to do so due to disapproval of family members on the basis of an assigned responsibility to provide for her family. An anecdotal finding highlighted by a Bangladeshi female forced returnee was the difficult reintegration and adaptation process of her Norway-born children in the schooling system due to cultural and language differences.

Other public services

Access to safe drinking water and electricity were mentioned by some female respondents in **Afghanistan**. In one case, a returnee was unable to make use of the sewing machine obtained through the tailoring course because of a lack of electricity. However, these experiences, albeit more often mentioned by females, seemed to refer to more general patterns of limited access to social services rather than gender differences in access.

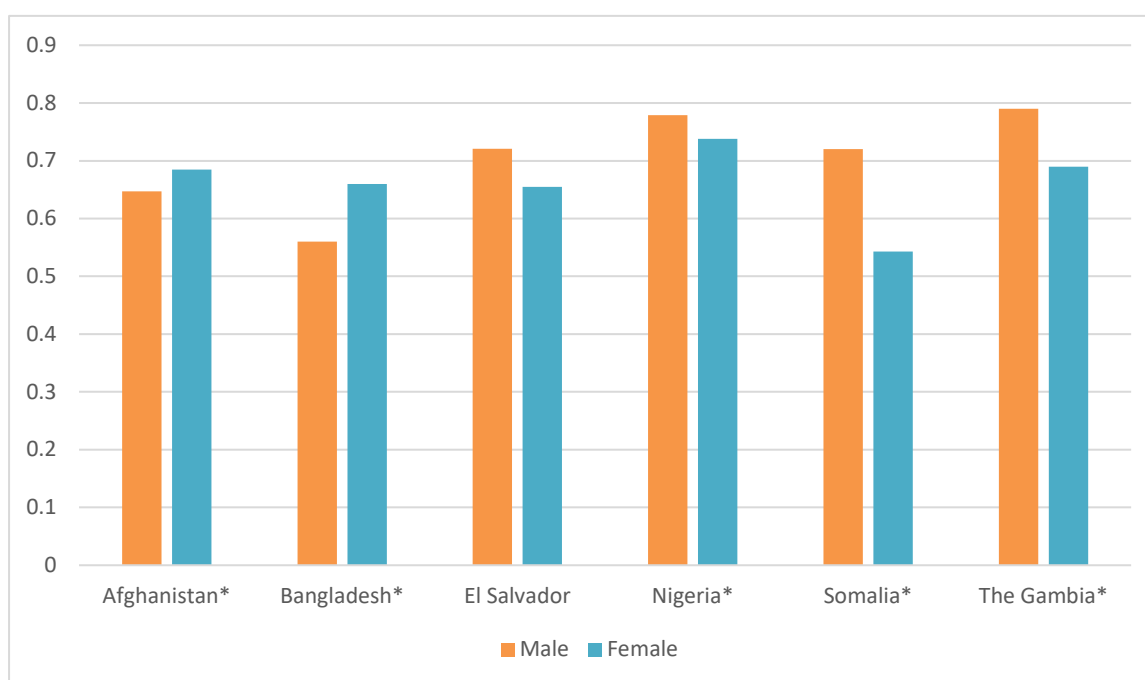


4.5 PSYCHOSOCIAL REINTEGRATION

The psychosocial reintegration scores for males and females also vary across countries (see Figure 11). In **El Salvador, Nigeria, Somalia and the Gambia** female returnees have lower psychosocial reintegration scores, while the opposite pattern are registered in **Afghanistan and Bangladesh**. When other variables in the regression analysis are controlled for, significant effects are only registered for sex in **Nigeria**, with females scoring lower on psychosocial reintegration.

The specific RSS indicators in which females score slightly lower than males in **Nigeria** are participation in social activities, sense of physical security, and feelings of discrimination. Moreover, Nigerian females were marginally more likely to want to migrate again than male returnees, which negatively impacted reintegration scores in the psychosocial dimension (see [Section 4.7](#) for further analysis of future migration plans). The interviews provided more in-depth information on the various factors impacting psychosocial well-being of female and male returnees. Some common themes that emerged are explored below.

Figure 11. RSS psychosocial dimension score, by country of origin and sex



*Refers to a statistically significant difference (t-test, $p < 0.05$).

Negative experiences before and during migration

Having gone through difficult experiences before migration and while abroad can have a negative effect on the psychosocial well-being of returnees. Past studies on female domestic workers returning from the



Middle East to Ethiopia revealed as a barrier to psychosocial reintegration the sustained impact of the mental health problems encountered abroad.⁴⁴

Similarly, female returnees and key informants in **Nigeria and El Salvador** reported that emotional challenges related to negative experiences during the irregular migration journey or trafficking acted as a barrier towards reintegration. Linked to gender-based violence or forced prostitution during their journey, such distressful experiences often represented a serious mental health challenge for females, as they found it challenging to reintegrate into productive life. The male respondents in the sample group rarely described experiences of violence, abuse or exploitation. However, it is worth to note that identification of male survivors of gender-based violence is a common challenge, and it requires specific attention and expertise. Men and boys are often less likely than women and girls to report such incidents and to seek assistance. As the country studies show, in most cases psychosocial support was not offered to returnees interviewed for this study, let alone mental health care, highlighting a gap in implementation. While economic reintegration assistance is often the most desirable form of assistance among returnees, the provision of psychosocial assistance can be offered as a complementary component of the assistance so that the returnees do not have to choose one over the other.

Family/community acceptance, stigma and discrimination

Stigmatization of females had direct implications for returnees. In **Afghanistan**, females who had migrated alone faced rejection by their family due to patriarchal norms in some communities. In the case of **Nigeria**, females often faced exclusion from the community and from their families, linking them to prostitution and being considered as “loose” females. These struggles appear as key barriers to their mental health and psychosocial well-being. A quote by one of the female respondents illustrates an example of gendered racism within the household:

"I don't care about myself at all. Even if I live or die. I only want to make my girls be educated so that their husbands cannot taunt them by judging their skin color and humiliating them. I want them to be financially independent."

BR1, F, VOL

Victims of trafficking were in this context particularly affected, as the interviews in both **Nigeria and Bangladesh** showed. These returnees faced the highest likelihood of social exclusion and family rejection and/or poor treatment from family members, with reports of verbal and physical abuse. In **El Salvador**, there were some reports of societal stigmatization, but to a lesser extent. As cited by a female Bangladeshi respondent, family conflicts and pressure to pay off debts accrued by the migration attempt add an additional layer of psychological burden on female survivors of trafficking:

⁴⁴ See Anbesse, B., C. Hanlon, A. Alem, S. Packer and R. Whitley, [Migration and Mental Health: A study of Low-income Ethiopian Women Working in Middle Eastern Countries](#), *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 55(6): 557–568 (2009); and Ketema, N. B., [Female Ethiopian Migrant Domestic Workers: An Analysis of Migration, Return-migration and Reintegration Experiences](#) (2014).



"I don't know how the men get insulted, but the women get insulted by the men. I had to hear a lot even after my return because of being a girl. I had to face disputes about how I became sick. The situation is also running now. I was different previously, but now I'm another kind. I'm facing many bad things. The family dispute is continuing everyday. My life has become a hell. I'm tensed [about] how I'll be capable again and be free from debt."

BR5, F, FOR

Experts on gender and migration also highlighted that in particular for **victims of trafficking** the assistance might sometimes not be enough to support them to recover and to address the vulnerability factors which contributed to the risks of trafficking in the first place, in order to prevent re-trafficking.⁴⁵

In this regard, **single mothers** were particularly vulnerable groups in **El Salvador, Nigeria and Bangladesh**. In Nigeria, returning with a child often resulted in family rejection, whereas in El Salvador, family separation and thus left-behind children often played a role in stigmatizing females as "bad mothers". In Bangladesh, single or widowed females were a particularly vulnerable group requiring psychosocial assistance as they often struggled to reintegrate economically without the support of family members.

4.6 REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES WITH DIVERSE SOGIESC

Key informant interviews with global-level experts on SOGIESC allowed us to gain insights into the circumstances of returnees with diverse SOGIESC, which are often overlooked in gender-sensitive programming due to lack of systematic data collection about the specific needs of this group.

Identification of returnees with diverse SOGIESC

A major challenge with regard to this group is identification, as returnees with diverse SOGIESC may not feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics to caseworkers or other staff in host or origin countries. Lack of disclosure and knowledge about returnees' SOGIESC may present a barrier to their specific reintegration needs to be identified and met.

The decision of the returnee on whether to disclose their SOGIESC can be influenced by multiple factors ranging from exclusively personal reasons to structural factors in the host or origin country contexts. In countries where protection for persons with diverse SOGIESC is limited, returnees may be reluctant to disclose their identities owing to fears of stigmatization, exclusion, discrimination, violence and abuse. As highlighted by one of the experts, *"especially [in] Somalia, Nigeria and Afghanistan, it can be very difficult, if not dangerous, for migrants to share with IOM that they have a diverse SOGIESC."* Particularly if the decision to migrate in the first place was linked to one's diverse SOGIESC, returnees may be more reluctant to disclose this information upon return.

Experts therefore emphasized that it is crucial to create a safe environment for self-disclosure, which requires efforts that go beyond displaying safe space posters, flyers and stickers:

⁴⁵ IOM is currently developing a toolkit to monitor the reintegration of victims of trafficking.



“What it means building safe spaces? It's not just a physical space where you have posters on the back of your background saying we're committed and they can have a rainbow flag. That's part of it, but it's not entirely it. Capacity development is required and there's a long way to go from the fundamentals to the more specific AVRR day-to-day.”

Experts cited other important steps to create safe spaces in a holistic manner: ensuring the availability of gender-neutral bathrooms, offering confidential visitation hours, training and monitoring of all office staff that interact with returnees, developing protocols and clear organizational guidelines and providing capacity development training to AVRR staff. However, important to keep in mind is that self-disclosure is eventually a personal choice which cannot be pushed for but can only be encouraged by making sure that there are safe and accommodating spaces for them.

Reintegration challenges of returnees with diverse SOGIESC

In terms of **economic reintegration**, stigma and discrimination in the labour market against people with diverse SOGIESC may hinder their access to job opportunities. In this regard, transgender individuals are mentioned as a specific group that experience particularly high levels of stigma, exclusion and discrimination and they often have the lowest rates of employment in most countries.⁴⁶ It is in this context that the experts reiterated that the challenges faced by returnees with diverse SOGIESC can vary greatly depending on their specific identities and characteristics. Although they may have some experiences in common, there are distinct challenges faced by each specific group that requires a case-by-case analysis in provision of reintegration assistance.

In terms of **social reintegration**, key informants described how returnees with diverse SOGIESC may experience challenges in accessing social services, such as health and education. In order to ensure that returnees reach a certain level of **social stability in their communities**, experts emphasize the importance of providing them with access to support networks upon return, especially to inform them about the current context in the country of origin and their rights. The community-level factors such as the availability (or lack) of support networks for LGBTIQ+ people largely influence the returnees' ability to adjust and reintegrate in the social, economic and psychosocial dimensions. A specific challenge for transgender individuals is **access to identification documents** in cases where one's gender identity is different than before migration. In some cases, they may not be able to re-enter their country of origin because their appearance does not match their documentation. In this regard, experts underline that it is essential to prepare for safe migration considering these potential risk points, and as part of reintegration to provide **legal assistance** to obtain new identification document cards in order to facilitate their access to services when possible. In addition, transgender individuals may also have different health needs such as transition-related medical support and mental health support, which necessitates special consideration when designing individualized reintegration assistance.

Experts on SOGIESC and migration repeatedly stressed the extreme **psychosocial risks** returnees with diverse SOGIESC face, particularly if they return to countries that penalize same-gender relations. As one key informant stated:

⁴⁶ See Drydakis, N., IZA World of Labor, [Trans people, well-being, and labor market outcomes](#) (2017).



“We often say we cannot tell a person to go back to the closet [...] but we know the challenges that sometimes on a day-to-day basis, people themselves, the LGBTQI[+] [people], they have to do it”.

In situations where returnees have to conceal their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sexual characteristics, it can be difficult to achieve the minimum sense of physical safety and a sense of belonging to their return communities. The level of community support received by returnees often depend on the societal norms regarding SOGIESC-related issues on the community level. In communities where support and acceptance for persons with diverse SOGIESC is limited, returnees may be subject to stigmatization, exclusion, discrimination, violence and abuse.

Structural and cultural factors impacting reintegration of returnees with diverse SOGIESC

The interviews show that the success of reintegration outcomes for returnees with diverse SOGIESC fundamentally depends on **structural and cultural factors** in the countries of origin. The rules, legislations and societal norms regarding SOGIESC-related issues in the countries of origin can influence reintegration outcomes in economic, social and psychosocial dimensions. Limited access to social services, lack of employment opportunities due to stigmatization and discrimination and psychological problems related to having to conceal one's identity are some of the common challenges highlighted by key informants. In origin countries where same-gender relationships are criminalized or heteronormative social norms persist, returnees can face life-threatening situations upon return.

The structural factors in the country of origin may, in turn, determine the level of specialized support returnees can be provided with. In countries where same-gender relations are criminalized, the country offices may not have the necessary resources such as social support systems or reliable health-care partners to address the specific needs and concerns of returnees with diverse SOGIESC. In this regard, experts underlined the necessity of **bilateral coordination** between receiving and sending missions in case of identification of returnees with diverse SOGIESC in AVRR programmes, so that the receiving staff is well-prepared to address the specific situation of these returnees based on a clearer analysis of what options the returnees have when they return.

However, in some cases, even if the sending country offices are informed about the diverse SOGIESC of returnees, they may choose not to share this information with receiving countries based on concerns that the information may not be handled well due to lack of proper training and guidance in receiving contexts, as highlighted by a key informant:

“It's not a given that they [sending countries] will inform the receiving office. And it just depends on what the status of the receiving offices is and if they feel like the receiving office would handle that information confidentially and well and so on. And part of that is down to the fact that there's a lot of training to do with the receiving offices and we're just not there yet.”

Key challenges and good practices

The level and usefulness of the reintegration support received by returnees with diverse SOGIESC often depend on the staff in the country of origin and how equipped they are to support these returnees. It was mentioned that the way SOGIESC considerations are taken into account on the country level often



depends on the effort and knowledge of the individual staff member rather than comprehensive IOM-wide programming. The interviews with gender experts illustrate some progress in terms of awareness of IOM staff on SOGIESC-related issues in general but they agree that less progress has been reported in the field of return and reintegration. A training program⁴⁷ developed by IOM addressing protection and assistance of people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics is available to staff in the organization through annual webinar series and occasional in-person learning opportunities. However, IOM's gender policy⁴⁸ still takes a binary (male-female) approach to gender and is perceived outdated.

A key challenge in this regard is the lack of systematic data collection about the specific needs of returnees with diverse SOGIESC in the implementation of an inclusive gender-sensitive programming. One major element highlighted by experts on SOGIESC is the understanding that offering binary options of “male” and “female” excludes people of diverse genders and does not give information about diverse identities and characteristics, which is essential for programming that addresses the needs of migrants and returnees with diverse SOGIESC. They stressed the necessity to put in place clear organizational guidance on how to collect gender-segregated data. Similarly, some key informants on the national level suggested that monitoring and evaluation could help with needs assessment, to track returnees and ensure they are linked to services with long-term follow-up, all of which were felt to be currently absent. The absence of systematic data collection often means that knowledge about gender dimensions of return is limited, which complicates the design of policies that respond to the needs of different genders.

4.7 FUTURE MIGRATION PLANS OF FEMALE AND MALE RETURNEES

Following a similar structure to [Section 3.5.](#), this section explores the future migration plans of female and male returnees based on the psychosocial RSS indicator on “ability to remain” and whether re-migration intentions are based on an essential need or more of a wish based on less essential needs (RSS indicator labelled as “need vs. wish to remigrate”). These findings are combined with an analysis of qualitative data which contains information on future migration plans of returnees.

Table 7. Percentage of returnees indicating ability to stay, by country of origin and sex

Country of origin	Female returnees	Male returnees	Total population of returnees
Afghanistan	68%	59%	60%
Bangladesh	75%	82%	81%
El Salvador	88%	87%	88%
Nigeria	93%	95%	94%

⁴⁷ See IOM, [SOGIESC and Migration Training Package](#) (2021).

⁴⁸ See IOM, [Gender Equality Policy 2015–2019](#) (2015).



Somalia	60%	86%	83%
Gambia	100%	91%	91%

Source: RSS Question #30

In **Afghanistan**, 60 per cent of the respondents felt that it was possible to stay and live in Afghanistan. Of those indicating a desire to migrate again, 97 per cent cited it as a need due to their inability to establish a sustainable living, while for 3 per cent of respondents it was more of a wish. Female returnees were more likely to feel that they could stay in the country (68%) compared to male returnees (59%). The interviews did not reveal significant differences between males and females, but marital status appeared to be more strongly related to re-migration aspirations, with single respondents being more likely to express plans to migrate again.

In **Bangladesh**, 81 per cent of RSS respondents felt that they could stay in Bangladesh, with female returnees being less likely (75%) to feel that they could stay in Bangladesh than male returnees (82%). Female returnees saw their migration as a means to give their children a chance of a better life, but having failed to do so, they often expressed a desire to provide them with educational opportunities to build a good life for themselves. While some of them still had the wish to go abroad, they found it unrealistic without the means to finance migration. One female respondents commented sarcastically to express the extreme difficulty she was going through:

*“What plans to make? If you have to write down something, please write, “Nothing left to sell but 2 children.”
Now we’ll sell them... [...] please write, “She has no future and no plan.”*

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In **El Salvador**, the RSS results show that 88 per cent of respondents felt able to stay in El Salvador, which was in most cases expressed as a need (90%) rather than a wish. There were no visible differences between male and female returnees (87% versus 88%) in their subjective ability to stay and live in El Salvador. Feelings of physical insecurity stemming from widespread violence were common in the narratives of returnees in El Salvador. The RSS indicator on physical safety corroborated this finding, with more than one fifth of respondents (34% of female returnees) indicating that they felt unsafe in their current location. Nevertheless, the interview respondents expressed no desire to migrate again unless direct safety concerns would arise. Micro-business support appeared to be a contributing factor in returnees’ ability to remain in El Salvador by providing an incentive to build a proper future for themselves and their children.

In **Nigeria**, only 6 per cent of RSS respondents indicated a need or desire to re-migrate, with male returnees marginally more likely to feel that they could stay and live in Nigeria (95%) compared to female returnees (97%). Among the minority that indicated a desire to migrate, 92 per cent cited it as a need due to inability to establish sustainable living, while for 8 per cent of respondents it was more of a wish due to less essential needs. As discussed in [Section 3.5.](#), the in-depth interviews show that the difficult experiences during migration may repel people from undertaking the same journey. This was particularly the case for females, who often indicated that they would consider to re-migrate only if there was a legal opportunity to do so.



In **Somalia**, 83 per cent of the RSS respondents expressed an ability to stay in Somalia, with male returnees being significantly more likely to feel that they can stay (86%) compared to female returnees (60%). The qualitative data did not yield significant differences in the experiences of female and male returnees; the desire to migrate as an essential need was omnipresent in the narratives of Somali returnees and these intentions were often informed by the challenging economic circumstances (see [Section 3.5](#) for further analysis). Only in one case, a female respondent noted that she would not migrate for the sake of maintaining family unity and to avoid additional negative experiences.

In **the Gambia**, a large majority of the sample felt that they could stay and live in the country (91%), and none of female respondents in the RSS survey (although the sample was very limited including only 30 (5%) females among 548 respondents) expressed a need to leave the country. The in-depth interviews showed mixed results, with half of the respondents expressing a desire to stay only if their circumstances improve. The interviews draw a different picture with many returnees wanting to remigrate unless their circumstances improve. The interview sample did not allow identification of common patterns among females and males, but an overall finding in the Gambian context was a lack of financial resources and job opportunities that contribute to a desire to migrate.

4.8 REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE

The qualitative data revealed that, across the different research sites and different types of returnees, the reintegration assistance provided by IOM targeted towards *economic* reintegration was generally perceived as positive and welcome. The reintegration assistance received by respondents in the sample group included **a mix of cash and in-kind assistance**, with the latter representing the bulk of assistance.⁴⁹ Vocational trainings, micro-business assistance, furniture and home appliances, and rent subsidies were the main types of reintegration support provided to the respondents. The interviews revealed temporary housing, cash assistance and access to identification were the most desirable forms of assistance for females in situations of vulnerability, particularly for those who had travelled irregularly or who had suffered abuse, violence or exploitation during their migration, and those who were unable to return to their origin communities due to fear of stigma and marginalization. Reintegration activities in the form of vocational trainings and providing business capital are most common.

The findings reveal the **strong relation between material, social and emotional processes**, as negative experiences of returnees adversely affect their abilities to reintegrate economically and socially. However, the findings show that returnees rarely opt for psychosocial assistance over economic assistance when they are given the options to choose. Because for most of the returnees that depend on this assistance to re-build their lives, it is likely that finding the means to survive is more of a priority than emotional well-being. It is therefore essential to systematically incorporate mental health and psychosocial programming as a core component of reintegration programming rather than an optional package.

⁴⁹ IOM report "Migrant Protection and Assistance during COVID-19: Promising Practices" explains how the global pandemic conditions led to prioritization of cash-based interventions over in-kind assistance as it provides immediate relief and a more easily accessible option under the confinement measures. This may be one of the factors that contributed to overrepresentation of recipients of cash-based assistance in the sample group. See IOM, [Migrant Protection and Assistance during COVID-19: Promising Practices](#) (2021).



The **gender-specific barriers in outreach to potential beneficiaries** were also mentioned by key informants. In some cases, it appeared challenging for female beneficiaries, particularly single or divorced females, to seek reintegration assistance in physical centres that are populated by males and where women's presence may not be welcome based on societal norms.

4.9 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the research team identified patterns and trends in the reintegration outcomes of male and female returnees and the factors that contribute to or hinder achieving sustainable outcomes in the three dimensions of reintegration. In addition, the key informant interviews allowed us to gain insights into the circumstances of returnees with diverse SOGIESC, which are often overlooked in gender-sensitive programming.

Most respondents in this study reported that their migration had been incentivized by **structural poverty and limited economic opportunities** in the country of origin. While **societal pressures to provide for the family** is often associated with male migration, female respondents, often single females, sometimes faced similar pressure and migrated to provide for their families (e.g. in Somalia). In the case of Nigeria and Somalia, the risks associated with irregular migration and abuse, violence or exploitation were often assumed to be part of this undertaking. For some others, migration was a strategy to escape from **sexual and domestic violence** combined with **conservative gender roles**. In the case of Afghanistan, lack of opportunities combined with the **conflict situation and physical insecurity** were the main drivers of migration, for both males and females. But it was often single males who went to European countries to apply for asylum but had to return after failed asylum applications.

Overall, the quantitative data revealed that female returnees faced more reintegration challenges, although the results differed across the countries. Particularly in the economic and the psychosocial dimensions, female returnees had lower scores than male returnees. Economic RSS indicators that were particularly lower for females were **access to employment opportunities** and **satisfaction with the current economic situation**. The regression analysis showed that sex had a significant impact only in Bangladesh, with females scoring lower in the social dimension. The factors that led to significantly lower scores for females compared to males were **access to housing, documentation and justice and law enforcement** in Bangladesh. In the psychosocial dimension, significant effects were only registered for sex in Nigeria, with females scoring slightly lower than males on indicators including **participation in social activities, sense of physical security, and feelings of discrimination**.

As revealed by the qualitative data, the lower economic reintegration scores for female returnees can be explained by their limited access to employment opportunities due to societal stereotypes and norms, distressful experiences during the migration journey, as well as particular circumstances of separated or widowed females such as the double workloads of childcare responsibilities and providing for the family or high financial dependence on in-laws and relatives. These factors are perceived as major stumbling blocks to female returnees' **economic self-sufficiency**.

Social reintegration challenges were often brought up by females, who cited poor housing conditions, low quality of education for their children, and unaffordable health care as major concerns. Female migrants



who had travelled irregularly or who had suffered abuse, violence or exploitation, often lacked access to health care while abroad. Single mothers were also seen as a particularly vulnerable group, often not being able to reintegrate without substantial assistance for shelter and psychosocial support when their families rejected them upon return. For returnees with diverse SOGIESC, experts on gender and migration highlighted the importance of providing them with access to support networks to get information in the country upon return, especially about the current context and their rights.

Although many respondents had negative or difficult experiences related to their migration, challenges to **psychosocial well-being** were particularly prevalent among female returnees. Linked to gender-based violence, including forced prostitution, distressful experiences often had important impacts on females, as they found it challenging to recover and to reintegrate into productive life. They faced the highest likelihood of social exclusion and family rejection and/or poor treatment from family members, with reports of verbal and physical abuse. The majority of key informants in the case study countries indicated that there was a pronounced need for psychosocial assistance for people of all genders. Having to conceal one's SOGIESC can also lead to intense psychological problems for returnees with diverse gender identities, as cited by experts on the topic. The essentiality of psychosocial assistance was highlighted in a previous study by Samuel Hall, the University of Sussex and IOM, reiterating its importance as a main component, rather than an 'optional extra', to a sustainable reintegration process.⁵⁰

Returnees can face extreme psychosocial and economic challenges when they have to return to places other than their community of origin, such as other parts of the same country. Whilst for male returnees it is often the negative psychological reactions like **shame and perceptions of failure** that prevent them from going back to their communities of origin, the social stigma attached to single female returnees, including returnees with diverse SOGIESC, can lead to **life threatening situations**, forcing them to return to big cities instead of their places of origin owing to feelings of **fear**. Single mothers face specific challenges, such as high dependence on family, and community or family rejection due to disapproval of their decision to migrate. Experts on SOGIESC and migration repeatedly stressed the extreme psychosocial risks returnees with diverse SOGIESC can face particularly if they return to countries that penalize same-gender relations.

Overall, the country studies reveal that the opportunities and challenges for reintegration differ across identities and characteristics, which leads to men, women and people with diverse genders having different vulnerabilities and needs that should be addressed by designing tailored return and reintegration support programmes. While IOM has taken small but important steps in achieving a gender inclusive approach to return and reintegration, gender dimensions are largely absent in current national policies (if any) on return and reintegration, which will be discussed further in the following chapter.

⁵⁰ See Samuel Hall, University of Sussex and IOM, [Mentoring Returnees: Study on Reintegration Outcomes through a Comparative Lens](#) (2020).



Credits: A Somali returnee in his shop in Hargeisa, Somalia.

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CHAPTER 5 – GOOD PRACTICES AND KEY CHALLENGES

This chapter zooms into the landscape of reintegration assistance in the selected countries of origin to provide context and a deeper understanding of the findings before presenting the recommendations and concluding the report. The chapter starts with an overview of the various stakeholders involved in reintegration assistance in the six countries, followed by a discussion of good practices and key challenges in the field of reintegration assistance. The information provided in this chapter is based on interviews with key informants and returnees and complemented with a desk review. The aim here is not to provide the full picture of implemented activities in the reintegration field, but to provide a perspective and context to findings and present some of the good practices and common challenges that were identified during the interviews. Important to note is that the study did not specifically aim at identifying good practices, but rather focused on exploring the desirable forms of reintegration assistance based on insights gathered from key informants and returnees. Nevertheless, the research revealed some good practices as exemplary forms of assistance, even though these are limited in number since this information was not collected in a systematic manner.

5.1. ROLE OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

IOM and UNHCR are the main providers of reintegration assistance for returnees in the six countries included in this study, usually in partnership or coordination with government authorities, international NGOs and local NGOs addressing the needs of returnees with different capacities and mandates. Other organizations involved at different levels in reintegration assistance are faith-based institutions, private for-profit organizations and local governments and local community initiatives. The role of the national governments included bilateral coordination of return movements and monitoring of efforts by international organizations and NGOs through dedicated ministerial units or interdepartmental committees.

In **El Salvador**, the majority of key informants agreed that a well-articulated return and reintegration policy is in place, although some interviewees suggested that returnees still lacked recognition and that particularly vulnerable groups, such as female and forced returnees, need more attention. The main government body dealing with return migration and reintegration is the General Directorate of Migration and Immigration⁵¹, under the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. The leading organization mandated to develop and shape national policy on Salvadoran returnees is the National Council for the Protection and Development of Migrants and their Families, also known as ConMigrantes⁵² under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵³ ConMigrantes is an interdepartmental body representing multiple government departments (e.g. ministries) whose work touches on returnees and reintegration, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Economy, among others.

⁵¹ [Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería.](#)

⁵² [Consejo Nacional Para La Protección Y El Desarrollo De La Persona Migrante Salvadoreña Y Su Familia.](#)

⁵³ [Migration Governance Snapshot: Republic of El Salvador \(2018\).](#)



In **Afghanistan**, the lack of a coordinated and systematic national policy and legislation on reintegration is emphasized repeatedly as a main hindrance to achieve sustainable results. The main government body dealing with migration-related issues is the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation. The ministry has divided its actions into three complementary pillars, one of which concern returnees and reintegration. The ministry is involved in planning, coordinating and facilitating the provision of reintegration assistance in coordination with key stakeholders, including IOM and UNHCR. Some important large-scale programmes highlighted by key informants were the Reintegration and Development Assistance in Afghanistan (RADA)⁵⁴ programme of IOM and the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration programme (PARRs)⁵⁵ supported by UNHCR. Next to international and government actors, returnee reintegration is one of the main areas of NGO engagement in Afghanistan. Key informants highlighted that several civil society organizations were established as a result of increasing funding streams from European counterparts to support returnees. However, some NGOs' competence and commitment were questioned by some key respondents who argued that their entry into the sector may have been triggered by rising funding opportunities rather than a genuine desire to support returnees.

The Gambia did not establish an institutional or legislative framework that is specifically designed to address the reintegration needs of returnees. However, various institutions under the mandate of different departments, including the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, provide project-based assistance to returnees in coordination with IOM. The National Migration Policy of the Gambia launched in June 2018 had a specific focus on reintegrating returnees and reducing youth unemployment through the establishment of a Youth Empowerment Project (YEP).⁵⁶ This initiative illustrated the political will of the Gambia to support returnees, which, in turn, encouraged the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to allocate more funding to AVRR programming through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration.⁵⁷ Despite the positive developments and increasing government interest to address reintegration challenges of returnees, the government actors interviewed in the Gambia highlighted a lack of resources as the main obstacle to developing policies and programmes that specifically target returnees. As one of the key informants highlighted: *"the intention is there but the resources are not there to support"* (GK11). NGOs and private actors are also key actors supporting reintegration of returnees. One of the key informants interviewed in the Gambia was from a private organization that received funding from IOM to offer skills trainings and entrepreneurial support to returnees in specific areas of work.

In **Nigeria**, key informants expressed that many policies are developed and implemented at the federal level, while operational capacity at the state level and coordination between the different stakeholders is largely lacking. The recent Plan of Action for National Migration Policy (2019 – 2023)⁵⁸ entails a thematic focus on return and sustainable reintegration of Nigerian migrants, which was commended by the key informants. To realize the specific reintegration related objectives defined in the action plan, the government initiated a

⁵⁴ More information can be found on IOM Afghanistan [website](#).

⁵⁵ More information can be found in UNHCR, [UNHCR Afghanistan | PARRs Impact Evaluation – Key Findings](#) (2021).

⁵⁶ More information can be found on the Youth Empowerment Project [website](#), and IOM, [Returned Migrants' Debts and Their Impacts on Reintegration in the Gambia](#) (2020).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ See Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Plan of Action for National Migration Policy \(2019-2023\)](#) (2019).



federal level working group on return and reintegration, bringing together different state actors, including representatives of ministries, whose work touches return and reintegration of returnees.⁵⁹ Yet, according to key informants, a main challenge is the absence of a specific government agency with a designated budget allocated to protection and reintegration of returnees, unless they have been victims of trafficking. One of the key agencies dealing with returnees who have been victims of trafficking is the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). The work of NAPTIP mainly involves coordination with IOM and embassies of host countries to ensure safe return of Nigerian victims of trafficking and providing protection and reintegration support. Reintegration assistance is one of the key engagement areas also of civil society organizations. In addition to them, Nigerian returnees, particularly those who had difficult migration experiences, highlighted the role of faith institutions as an important source of resilience during the reintegration process.

In **Bangladesh**, key informants emphasized the lack of a coordinated and systematic national policy and legislation on reintegration. The main government body responsible for developing reintegration policies is the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee on Migration and Development and the leading agency responsible for provision of assistance to returnees is the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment. The reintegration of returnees is included in the "Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016"⁶⁰ of Bangladesh. The policy is linked with the "National Skills Development Policy"⁶¹ of 2011 and the "Seventh Five Year Plan"⁶² of Bangladesh. Despite these positive developments, key informants note that a holistic reintegration policy that takes into account the needs and vulnerabilities of different types of returnees is lacking. There is a network of civil society organizations named Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants and there is a commitment to coordinate and collaborate on issues related to migrants and returnees, but prospects for collaboration are not sufficiently utilized because there is no incentive or funding for such coordination, resulting in a lack of complementary approaches and duplication of services. As cited by one of the key informants, the engagement of civil society is mainly targeted towards welfare support for returnees and there are a limited number of human rights-based NGOs. Another key stakeholder is ILO, which works closely with government bodies. A major challenge reported by a key informant is the tendency to undermine the efforts of civil society organizations. As explained by a non-state actor:

"Government functionaries and others, all together we have drafted the law [in 2013], then what happened? The government gave it to ILO for legal language, and then that draft actually became the law. So civil society did so much, but then it is the ILO [that drafted the law]. [...] this type of labelling is there, which does not allow civil society to get what is rightfully theirs"

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In **Somalia**, there is a national policy committed to reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons returnees, but this policy does not target non-refugee returnees. However, there are several programmes

⁵⁹ See Knoll, A., P. Veron and N. Mayer, ECDPM Discussion Paper No. 291, [A sustainable development approach to return and reintegration: dilemmas, choices and possibilities](#) (2021).

⁶⁰ See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, [Action Plan for the Implementation for the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016](#) (2019).

⁶¹ See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Education, [National Skills Development Policy – 2011](#) (2011).

⁶² See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, General Economics Division – Planning Commission, [Seventh Five Year Plan, FY2016 – FY2020, Accelerating Growth, Empowering Citizens](#) (2015).



funded by the European Union, development agencies and international organizations to support the reintegration of returnees of all types. For example, the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa runs the large-scale project “RE-INTEG: Enhancing Somalia’s responsiveness to the management and reintegration of mixed migration flows” in coordination with IOM, UNHCR and the World Health Organization.⁶³ One of the aims of the project is to support sustainable reintegration of returnees through providing economic opportunities. A good practice in Somalia is the Participatory Programme Monitoring Meetings, which is a monitoring and evaluation tool that intends to strengthen feedback and accountability mechanisms among the various actors involved in the provision of return and reintegration assistance.⁶⁴ Key informants cite limited engagement of NGOs in the field of return and reintegration, which is further restrained by limited coordination mechanisms to ensure effective reintegration assistance.

Across the six countries, key informants commonly reported a lack of coordination between the different actors in the return and reintegration landscape. In Afghanistan, for example, it was felt that the resources allocated to return and reintegration are not fully utilized in the absence of an overall system of accountability. Similarly, in Nigeria, a key informant noted that,

“the chain is not properly looked after or established in such a way that you can actually account for what happens at every level.”

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Overall, experts suggested that improved inter-sectorial coordination and an overall mechanism to monitor implementation and use of funding could help to maximize utility from available resources.

Policies and practices related to voluntary versus forced returns

In Somalia, despite the lack of an integrated policy on return and reintegration, government engagement is viewed positively but efforts are highly concentrated on voluntary returnees and limited funding is allocated to forced returnees. In Nigeria, it was argued that classifying returnees as voluntary versus forced led to policy mechanisms mainly being designed for voluntary returns, whilst “criminalizing” forced returnees. This was cited by key informants as worrying given the increasing number of forced returnees in the last few years, who mainly return from European countries including Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy.

Overall, key informants suggested that revising the national return and reintegration policy to this end to ensure that forced returnees are also accommodated for could help guarantee that human rights provisions are met for all returnees.

Policies and practices related to gender dimensions of return

The interviews revealed that gender dimensions are largely absent in current national policies on return and reintegration. Therefore, it is often civil society organizations responding to gender-specific needs of returnees.

⁶³ More information can be found on the RE-INTEG project [website](#).

⁶⁴ See EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, [Introducing Participatory Programme Monitoring Meetings: Lessons Learnt from the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection And Reintegration in the Horn of Africa](#), 29 September 2020.



In **Afghanistan**, for example, several dedicated NGOs provide services to returnees, but the key informants reported limited participation of females in their programmes which they linked to the male-dominated migration demographics of the country. In **Bangladesh**, key informants indicated a recent interest on the government's side to develop a welfare support system for female returnees through international funding, but the high expectations of the government from the civil society organizations to materialize the planning and implementation of such programming was criticized by a key informant. In **Nigeria**, whilst experts felt that NGOs specialized on anti-trafficking and women-led organizations and networks contributed importantly to service provision particularly to female returnees, they often lacked capacity and funding.

5.2. GOOD PRACTICES

The interviews with key informants focused on gathering information about the type of activities undertaken by the organizations on a regular basis, and the type of policies and programmes they perceive as desirable to increase the effectiveness of reintegration assistance provided to returnees. Moreover, the interviews with returnees provided important information on how returnees evaluate the different types of reintegration assistance that they received and what types of assistance they perceive as more helpful and effective. While the study did not have a specific focus on finding best practices, the insights gathered during the interviews as well as a desk review of existing reintegration programming in the six case study country reveal several initiatives and practices that are worth mentioning. These practices are discussed in the three dimensions of reintegration below.

Good practices in the economic dimension

The interviews with returnees revealed that economic reintegration support in the form of vocational courses had a positive impact on female returnees in Afghanistan and Nigeria. Afghan female returnees, particularly the low-skilled ones, valued more the benefit of learning a life-long skill even if this skill did not generate any income. Some females expressed a desire to provide skills training to other females in similar circumstances in their community. The case of El Salvador highlighted the importance of providing females with small stipends that also cover childcare so they can attend vocational training programmes.

In **Nigeria, El Salvador and Bangladesh** being provided with seed capital was a very impactful reintegration measure for most returnees.⁶⁵ In Nigeria, returnees reported that they would not be able to generate any income without it, as gaining access to employment was particularly challenging. For Nigerian females vocational skills training was often accompanied by seed capital and the business generated by these types of reintegration assistance represented their only form of income (and an important alternative to re-migration). Some returnees in El Salvador and Bangladesh who managed to set up and maintain a stable business through the reintegration support cited the desire to grow their business as a primary expectation from the future, which seemingly improved their economic self-sufficiency and

⁶⁵ A recent IOM study on microcredit in reintegration context provides a detailed picture on the use of microcredit schemes as a form of or as a complement to reintegration assistance. See EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, Sustainable Reintegration Knowledge paper Series, [Knowledge Paper #1: The Use of Microcredit Schemes in Migrant Reintegration Context](#) (2021).



psychosocial well-being. In general, single, separated or widowed females mainly established their own businesses, whereas in families it was often male members receiving the assistance and females seemed less likely to be involved. The provision of business skills training provided returnees with essential skills to derive the maximum benefit from the businesses they had started and helped with financial literacy.

In **El Salvador**, one informant highlighted that the success of skills training programmes in municipalities and whether female returnees take part in them also depends on gender sensitivity and awareness of the instructors implementing the activities. In terms of return types, the availability of social support programmes that equally target different types of returnees can also be considered as a good practice as it narrows down the gap between reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees. As previously mentioned, the programmes mentioned during the fieldwork were those implemented by local government authorities with the support of international development organizations such as USAID and embassies of foreign countries (e.g. Japan).

BOX 2. Beekeeping and honey production cooperative

A Somalia-based organization that offers courses and series of training to equip returnees and non-migrant community members with livelihood skills launched a cooperative for beekeeping and honey production. The next step for the programme is to establish a partnership with another company to process honey and facilitate sales globally. The programme is designed within the framework of a community-based reintegration project that facilitates participation of both returnees and non-returnees in honey production on the local level. Past practices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Afghanistan show that beekeeping remains a viable livelihood option in resource-poor locations where bees are available.

BOX 3. Community-based approach to reintegration in

In Southern Somalia, IOM initiated a community-based planning approach to explore and identify potential initiatives and programmes to achieve sustainable reintegration of returnees in their local communities and to support social cohesion. As a result of a consultation process that brought together local community members and local authorities, 90 different projects were identified. The consultation process aimed at identifying target groups, selecting representatives of the target groups and the designing of interventions addressing the different groups' development and reintegration needs. One of the projects that came out of the process was the construction of a bridge, which notably increased human mobility in the town of Baidoa and allowed easier access to main business areas and social services.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Source: See EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, Reintegration assistance: Good, Promising and Innovative Practices Series, Practice #8: [Revitalizing Economy and Enhancing Social Cohesion through Community-based Planning and Community Prioritized Infrastructure Works: the Construction of a Bridge in Somalia](#) (2020).



BOX 4. INSAFORP in EI

The Salvadoran Institute of Professional Training⁶⁷ was mentioned by the key informants as one of the key stakeholders that offer vocational trainings to returnees through a project funded by IOM. The main objective of INSAFORP is to contribute to economic and social development in El Salvador and to promote the improvement of the living conditions of Salvadoran workers. Within the scope of the IOM project, INSAFORP offers trainings to returning Salvadorans in different fields, including gastronomy, ceramics, electricity. A key informant highlighted that one of the things they consider important is to motivate females to take part in vocational trainings that are typically considered as typically male-dominated occupations, such as electronics.

Good practices in the social dimension

Important aspects of social reintegration such as access to housing, health care and identification were frequently mentioned by key informants as key priority areas. However, good practices in these dimensions were limited.

Some of the initiatives that respond to critical gaps in overall reintegration assistance programming are the provision of temporary accommodation to returnees, such as in the case of a Nigerian NGO that provides shelters to returnees who have been victims of exploitation, violence and abuse. Similarly, in Afghanistan, temporary accommodation assistance is secured mainly for forced returnees in difficult circumstances or those who belong to minority groups and face risks of persecution.

In the case of El Salvador, the government facilitates the re-insertion of returnees in the **education system** after a screening process upon return. In addition, a specialized public agency, the Salvadoran Institute for the Integral Development of Children and Adolescents is responsible for developing social programmes for children whose rights have been violated, including returnee children.

BOX 5. Post-deportation

In Afghanistan, a Kabul-based NGO offers post-deportation counselling to forced returnees. The organization arranges one-to-one meetings with forced returnees and provides them with information on how to access accommodation, education and mental health support.

Another NGO in El Salvador provides free **medical check-ups** to returnees, with a particular aim to reach out to women who have been victims of trafficking during their migration. In Nigeria, providing legal assistance to ensure prosecution of their perpetrators was also reported by one of the key informants as a fundamental type of social support for victims of trafficking, which contributes significantly to psychosocial well-being, as explained in the following section.

An interesting finding is that some NGOs do not target returnees explicitly, but the scope of their activities naturally involves returnees based on how they define their target communities. For example, a Somalian NGO representative explained how their aim is to serve the most vulnerable populations in the country

⁶⁷ Instituto Salvadoreño de Formación Profesional, INSAFORP.



and added that they perceive returnees as one of the most vulnerable groups. Thus, returnees are direct beneficiaries of all the services provided by this organization, even though there are limited tailor-made programmes for returnees. This could be considered a good example in terms of having an inclusive approach when it comes to addressing challenges that are common for both returnees and non-returnees.

Good practices in psychosocial dimension

Across the countries, the psychosocial reintegration outcomes were more positive in cases where emotional support was provided by returnees' families as well as communities. In Nigeria, key informants had achieved good results with sensitizing legislators, traditional leaders in the communities, law enforcement officers and civil society organizations on the special circumstances of returnees, such as forced returnees and victims of trafficking. This support helped with protection, identification and investigation of cases of trafficking. According to a member of a Nigerian NGO, providing shelter to female returnees, particularly when they return pregnant or with children, can lift some of the initial burden generated by societal stigmatization and exclusion. Additionally, a service provider in Nigeria reported that providing legal assistance to victims of trafficking to support their participation in the prosecution of their perpetrators was a key facilitator of psychological health and thus psychosocial and overall reintegration. Training in the communities with traditional leaders has increased awareness of trafficking among local chiefs, who are often involved in payment of debts accrued by the migration attempt in the community. Similarly, in El Salvador, efforts to sensitize mayors and governmental staff on the municipal/local level on issues related to return migration have resulted in reduced stigmatization, sensitization of staff towards the gender dimensions of return and consequently in improved service provision to returnees.

BOX 6. Psychosocial support group sessions with forced

One NGO in Kabul is offering group sessions to provide forced returnees with a safe space where they can openly share their ideas, discuss their challenges and reflect on solutions to each others' problems. The founder of the NGO explains that the unsafe conditions in Kabul with frequent attacks and explosions are even more difficult to handle for deportees who spent several years in safe countries and suddenly returned to a conflict context without the minimum level of mental preparation. The sessions are facilitated by psychologists who are outsourced by other organizations, but the future aim is to hire a psychologist internally to be able to continue the sessions in a regular manner.

BOX 7. Trauma-informed care

Traumatic experiences can severely impact an individual's ability or motivation to access support mechanisms and services. A key informant in El Salvador shared that they adopted a trauma-informed care approach when working with survivors of gender-based violence, including boys, girls and women who had been exposed to sexual violence during their migration. The approach helps them to take into account the impacts of violence a returnee may have experienced and to determine if and what type of mental health or psychosocial assistance they need. The aim of the approach is not to diagnose nor treat symptoms related to sexual, physical or emotional abuse but rather to apply good practice on how to interact and provide care for those who have survived violence and to provide support services in a way that is accessible and appropriate for them.



5.3. KEY CHALLENGES

While support to returnees was often evaluated positively, several challenges in terms of programming and implementation were mentioned during the qualitative fieldwork. While many of the challenges commonly impact reintegration processes of different types of returnees (voluntary and forced, male and female), some of the challenges are more relevant for specific groups, as highlighted in the following sections.

Misleading or limited information on reintegration assistance

A key challenge expressed by key informants is the misleading or limited information that returnees sometimes receive in host countries about what to expect upon return. This was stressed particularly by key informants in **Afghanistan** and **the Gambia**. One NGO worker in Afghanistan explained that many returnees come to their desk with a completely different picture in mind, which results in feelings of disappointment and regret, particularly for **voluntary returnees** who feel that they are deceived into returning. He said:

“Sometimes we see the challenges starts from the beginning part, because whenever an individual decides to return to Afghanistan with the package of the reintegration, he or she should be completely briefed on how this package is going on, if it’s a cash assistance, that should be explained completely, if it’s an in-kind assistance that should be completely explained to them, but because whenever the returnees are back to Afghanistan, they immediately say, okay where is my reintegration package, among of this much money, so they just forget everything about the reintegration, about the package, about the business, they just remember the value of the money, and it has not been explained at the first stage.”

AK13

Another key informant from the Gambia commented similarly:

“I don’t know whether at the Europe level or at the IOM country level, but there is a lot of misconceptions about their entitlement once they return. And quite often they always feel very disappointed about what is given to them [...] So, I think that is another big, big, big challenge.”

GK13

Delays in provision of assistance

Several returnees and key informants mentioned delays in the start of reintegration programmes (e.g. in Nigeria, Afghanistan and the Gambia). This created financial difficulties for returnees in their initial return phases, and particularly for those whose return had been **unexpected and forced**. Those who had to return to a different place of origin due to security reasons (e.g. in Afghanistan and Somalia) or who faced stigmatization in their communities were in most need of expedited assistance because of the absence of family or community support. Given the specific vulnerability of victims of trafficking, providing immediate assistance and shelter to this group was of pivotal importance.

Limited follow-up in the long run

Long-term follow-up to support and respond to the individual needs of returnees over time was also largely absent, but was seen by key informants as an important mechanism to prevent remigration out of necessity and re-trafficking (e.g. in Nigeria and the Gambia). In some cases, NGO workers took the



initiative to follow up with respondents beyond the timeline of projects although there was no funding allocated for such assistance.

Limited capacity and lack of coordination between different stakeholders

In some cases, key informants expressed that policies are being carried out and developed at the national level, while capacity at the local level is lacking. In some countries, civil society organization networks exist and there is commitment to coordinate and collaborate, but prospects for collaboration are not sufficiently utilized because there is no incentive or funding for such coordination, resulting in a lack of complementary approaches and duplication of services. Overall, experts suggested that improved inter-sectorial coordination and an overall mechanism to monitor implementation and use of funding could help to maximize utility from available resources.

5.3.1. Economic sustainable reintegration

Insufficient economic reintegration support

First, economic reintegration assistance was often reported to be insufficient. In Somalia, **both male and female** respondents explained how reintegration support only provided momentary relief and did not create a long-term solution to their economic challenges. The assistance was most useful when the goods or services provided matched with the specific interests and skills of the returnees as well as the needs of the labour market. For those who had little resources to begin with, the capital assistance to start a business was insufficient, as it required recipients to have additional resources to top up the provided amount:

“My husband ran a business before migration, so he started that again. But they didn’t give us much money. We needed 10-12 lakhs⁶⁸, but we’d been given only 3 lakhs.”

BR2, F, FOR

A similar experience was reported by another female returnee in Bangladesh, illustrating how lack of additional resources may prevent returnees from achieving a sustainable solution to their economic challenges:

“I told them if they had given me a cow, I might sell her milk and manage my own expenditure. Then they told me to look for cows. I looked for and a man told me about selling a cow which cost 1 lakh 20 thousands. I let them know. Then they said, “Apa, if we give you 60 thousand, can you manage an extra 40 thousand to buy that cow?” Then I told them there would be no problem if I [had] 40 thousand, but as I had no money, I was seeking their help.”

BR6, F, VOL

Mismatching support with local labour market conditions

Respondents sometimes mentioned a mismatch between the support offered and conditions in the local labour market. This was for example the case in Afghanistan, where returnees were supported to set up businesses comparable to those that were already run by non-returnees, which led to tensions in the

⁶⁸ 1 lakh is equivalent to 100,000 Bangladeshi taka, which is in turn equivalent to about 1,156 United States dollars. Retrieved [here](#) on 20 August 2021.



community and (additional) stigmatization of returnees. Moreover, infrastructural conditions in the places of origin sometimes presented a barrier in realization of skills obtained through vocational trainings, as in the case of an Afghan woman who could not use the provided sewing machine due to limited access to electricity. The returnees who spent long periods abroad were often in need of advice in terms of what business opportunities exist and where to make the best use of financial capital they obtained or brought with them.

Post-project follow-up

Long-term follow-up to adapt to the changing needs and circumstances of returnees over time was perceived to be largely absent but was seen as an important mechanism to prevent re-migration and re-trafficking (e.g. in Nigeria and the Gambia). In some cases, NGO workers took the initiative to undertake post-project follow-up with respondents who established micro-businesses through IOM support, although there was no funding allocated for such assistance.

5.3.2. Social sustainable reintegration

With reintegration services mostly focused on economic reintegration, other needs of returnees, such as shelter, education, health care that fall under the social dimension were perceived as largely absent.

Re-familiarization with the social system

Returnees that spent a long time abroad were often in need of counselling and re-familiarization with the culture (e.g. in El Salvador, and Afghan returnees from Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan), with the institutions and how they work.

Access to (temporary) identification documents

The barriers to access services were amplified when returnees did not have access to identification documents upon return (e.g. Afghanistan, El Salvador, Nigeria). In this regard, NGO actors stressed the necessity to establish a mechanism to support returnees' access to (temporary) documentation immediately upon return.

Access to housing

Particularly for groups whose rights had been violated during migration, or who did not have access to housing due to their inability to return to their communities of origin, immediate housing assistance was perceived essential. This was particularly the case for individuals who left their families behind in host countries (e.g. in the case of El Salvador) and for **forced returnees** who cannot return to their communities of origin due to fear of social stigma.

5.3.3. Psychosocial sustainable reintegration

Psychosocial reintegration components also seemed to be lacking across all countries and the offer for mental health support services was perceived as limited. Although many NGO actors stated that they offered psychosocial support services, none of the returnee respondents (forced and voluntary) for the in-depth



interviews in the sample group (98) indicated receiving such support. The findings reveal that at least a minimum level of psychosocial assistance for vulnerable groups (forced returnees, single or widowed females, victims of trafficking, separated families) is essential. This aligns with the findings of Samuel Hall⁶⁹ study that highlights the importance of psychosocial assistance as a core component to ensure sustainability of reintegration.

The qualitative interviews revealed that psychosocial reintegration assistance is rarely provided to returnees. Given the nature of migration from the target countries of this study, females are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence during their journey or their stay abroad. In the majority of countries, participants asserted that leaving the psychological impact of this type of trauma untreated represents a major barrier towards sustainable reintegration.

5.3.4. Gender-sensitive programming

As briefly discussed in previous sections, IOM has taken some steps in adopting a gender-inclusive approach in some of its programming, but our interviews revealed that that capacity is largely lacking in AVRR programmes and gender dimensions are absent in current national policies (if any) on return and reintegration. Yet, the important role of NGOs in addressing the specific needs of female returnees and people with diverse genders were highlighted by several key informants. NGOs are, however, often underfunded or funds are not utilized properly due to lack of coordination between the different actors in the return and reintegration landscape.

The gender-specific barriers in outreach to potential beneficiaries were also mentioned by some key informants, explaining how single and/or divorced females are sometimes unable to seek assistance in designated centres as these places are often populated by males and women's presence may not be welcome based on societal norms (e.g. in Afghanistan). In the sample group, there were several female returnees (mainly recruited through snowballing in Bangladesh) who had not received any assistance, nor had knowledge on how to obtain it. In addition, a key informant from Somalia indicated that even if they receive the assistance, participation in reintegration activities outside homes (e.g. skills trainings) can prove more difficult for female returnees than male returnees due to patriarchal norms.

⁶⁹ Samuel Hall, University of Sussex and IOM, *Mentoring Returnees*.



Credits: Training processes in entrepreneurship
taught by IOM in El Salvador.
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CHAPTER 6 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESEARCH NEEDS

This chapter synthesizes the findings into recommendations that can inform and support the design of reintegration programming to achieve sustainable results in reintegration outcomes of different types of returnees.

The recommendations that arise from this research can be divided in four groups:

- 1) General programmatic recommendations;
- 2) Programmatic recommendations to inform the design of reintegration programming to address specific needs of forced and voluntary returnees;
- 3) Programmatic recommendations to inform gender-sensitive reintegration programming;
- 4) Broader policy recommendations.

The recommendations are intended for four primary stakeholder groups, including donor organizations, international organizations involved in return and reintegration assistance, their implementing partners, and national authorities.

6.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1.1. General programmatic recommendations

- ❖ **Tailored reintegration assistance that takes into account circumstances of return:** Past studies underline that the needs of returnees differ considerably depending on their individual characteristics and migration experiences (reasons for migration, experiences during migration, preparedness to return etc.), which rules out a one-size-fits-all approach to reintegration assistance. It is therefore essential to adopt a target group-centred approach that takes into account the different characteristics of returnees and design needs-based reintegration programmes for each category.⁷⁰ The fundamentality of designing individualized reintegration support and follow-up is reiterated in IOM's Reintegration Handbook, which highlights the need to pay special attention to the returnee's migration journey and the circumstances of return⁷¹.
- ❖ **Expedited and/or immediate assistance:** The first phase after return is often the most challenging period for returnees, particularly for forced returnees who had little or no time to prepare, as well as voluntary returnees who were unable to build up capital while abroad. Key stakeholders frequently cited that the lack of immediate assistance and/or delay of assistance severely hamper some returnees' ability to cover basic needs such as food, shelter/housing, and clothing, which diminished their ability to reintegrate. Delays in administrative procedures of reintegration support can lead to additional distress among returnees with no savings or social support to rely on.

⁷⁰ See Haase, M. and P. Honerath, Integration Strategy Group, [Return Migration and Reintegration Policies: A Primer](#) (2016).

⁷¹ According to IOM's Reintegration Handbook, these circumstances can include: "the length of the migrant's absence; conditions in the host country; exposure to diseases or other public or mental health concerns; delayed transitions such as being held in detention before return; conditions of return or the level of return preparedness; and resources available or access to information. Individual vulnerabilities to consider include whether returnees have health needs, whether they are victims of trafficking, violence, exploitation or abuse, or whether they are unaccompanied or separated children." IOM, *Reintegration Handbook*, page 36.



The immediate assistance serves as the first stepping-stone in what is often perceived to be a lengthy process. It is important to make sure that returnees are sufficiently supported as they await economic reintegration measures. The relief it may provide goes beyond financial assistance and may facilitate the psychological adaptation process by securing a sense of being supported during the early reintegration phases. This will also reduce the negative drivers of irregular migration.

- ❖ **More extensive pre-departure counselling to manage expectations:** More time and resources can be allocated to pre-departure counselling in host countries to create more realistic expectation of the return and reintegration process. The perceived mismatch between the scope and timeline of assistance promised and received amplifies feelings of regret among some voluntary returnees who feel like they were deceived into return by false promises. Voluntary returnees should be briefed in their own languages about the support they will receive upon return. It must be ensured in all cases that the timeline of the assistance and the details of the process are explained in detail to avoid disappointment and regret for making the decision to return. This process is essential for returnees to make an informed decision.
- ❖ **One-stop shops for initial reintegration assistance:** Future programming can focus on developing an integrated returnee reception system in cooperation with local, national and international partners to ensure that returnees can access the relevant support and services upon arrival or in the communities of return. The one-stop shop model is a public service delivery model that works well in addressing integration challenges of migrants, can be applied to return migration contexts in high-return areas. Local government-led or NGO-led community centres can be established to facilitate returnees' access to a range of services and reliable information in one location through established referral pathways.
- ❖ **Community-level reintegration approach:** To address community-level barriers to reintegration, a more systematic and coordinated approach to community-level reintegration is required in settings in which returnees are perceived in a negative way. IOM's integrated approach to reintegration⁷² also underlines the importance of community-level interventions where possible. The findings show that community-level approaches to reintegration are particularly important in situations of mass forced return. In addition to forced returnees, other key groups of concern are survivors of gender-based violence including human trafficking, single women, including and/or particularly those with diverse SOGIESC who are more likely to encounter family or community rejection or face social stigma. Future programming may want to emphasize sensitization activities for local authorities, community-based associations, religious leaders, law enforcement and other key community members to raise awareness for the circumstances of different types of returnees. Such efforts can create local ownership of the reintegration process that can eventually increase resilience of both returnees and their communities. This may also help to overcome barriers for stigmatized groups in the labour market.
- ❖ **Monitoring of micro-businesses beyond project timelines:** The importance of follow-up is key to ensure sustainability of reintegration, as highlighted in IOM's Reintegration Handbook. Our findings show that returnees that receive capital to start a business often need assistance that goes beyond project timelines. Key informants frequently cited the necessity to conduct regular follow-

⁷² IOM, *Towards an integrated approach to reintegration*.



up and monitoring of entrepreneurs and their businesses in the long run. Implementing partners can be provided with additional institutional funding that can cover expenses of post-project counselling for past projects' beneficiaries. Such counselling programming can be arranged ad-hoc or on a more regular basis depending on the availability of caseworkers.

- ❖ **Providing business capital in consideration of economic circumstances to ensure sustainable outcomes:** In some contexts, the provision of business capital allowed returnees to achieve economic self-sufficiency, whereas in other contexts it did not create a sustainable solution and only provided temporary relief. It is important to explore further the determinants of success (or failure), but the findings of this study suggest that it is often those who had little resources to begin with who failed to sustain their business. Some key informants also shared examples of returnees who sold the equipment provided to them to cover expenses for basic needs. It is therefore essential to be aware of the financial capacities of the recipients and provide them with stipends for a limited period to ensure that they are able to commit to the business support. The stipends should be provided based on an individualized assessment of economic reintegration needs in order to prevent dependency on such assistance. The process of disbursing seed capital to returnees is most effective when accompanied by skills training and mentorship.
- ❖ **Mainstreaming minimum level of psychosocial assistance in all reintegration assistance:** The findings reveal the strong entanglement of material, social and emotional processes, as negative experiences of returnees adversely affect their abilities to reintegrate economically and socially. However, returnees rarely choose psychosocial assistance over economic assistance when they are given the options to choose from. Findings show that, for most of the returnees that depend on this assistance to re-build their lives, it is unlikely that they prioritize emotional well-being over finding the means to survive. Therefore, one of the recommendations derived from this study is to systematically incorporate a minimum level of psychosocial assistance into reintegration assistance. Depending on the availability of resources and capacity, this can be established as a psychosocial screening process which is conducted by protection and psychosocial support professionals. The screening process can be designed with specific focus on identification of severe cases in need of psychosocial support, which are then referred to enhanced psychosocial support schemes as complementary to the other types of assistance that they chose to receive.

6.1.2. Programmatic recommendations: forced and voluntary returnees

- ❖ **Increase outreach to forced returnees:** While voluntary returnees are often informed about the availability of reintegration support prior to return, forced returnees sometimes lack this information. In the sample group, there were several returnees (mainly contacted through a snowballing approach) who had not received any assistance, nor had knowledge on how to obtain it. Moreover, the results show that forced returnees consistently scored lower in the different dimensions of reintegration, yet they were often less prioritized in reintegration assistance since many reintegration programmes exclusively target voluntary returnees. In contexts where reintegration assistance is available for forced returnees, it is essential to increase outreach and



information campaigns to potential beneficiaries in the host and origin countries. This can also help reduce the perception of differential and more favorable reception and treatment towards voluntary returnees in comparison to forced returnees.

- ❖ **Referral mechanisms for forced returnees:** In contexts where assistance to forced returnees is limited, it is important to establish a referral mechanism to respond to the needs of forced returnees in need of assistance. First contact points and caseworkers of reintegration assistance programmes that only provide assistance to voluntary returnees should be well-equipped to provide guidance to forced returnees and refer them to other organizations that may provide the necessary assistance.
- ❖ **Post-arrival counselling for forced returnees:** Pre-departure counselling had a positive effect on the likelihood of voluntary returnees adapting quickly upon return, as they knew what to expect and could prepare accordingly. However, such counselling is often unavailable for forced returnees.⁷³ Ensuring that forced returnees are informed and prepared as much as possible for their return can play an important role in their reintegration process. In the absence of pre-departure counselling given the sudden nature of forced returns, an alternative approach is to offer post-arrival counselling in a systematic manner through in the countries of origin. The counselling could be led by IOM in partnership with NGOs that are already well known and trusted by forced returnees. Such counselling may involve provision of information about access to social services, job opportunities or organizations providing psychosocial assistance, depending on the needs and experiences of returnees.

Economic dimension

- **Match skills trainings and business ideas with labour market needs:** Findings suggest that it is essential to have an assessment of local market conditions in origin countries before offering skills training and providing capital for business start-ups. This would avoid creating competition in the labour market between returnees and non-returnees, which can also negatively affect acceptance of returnees in communities. This is particularly important in areas of high return, for example, in receiving communities of mass deportations. It is essential to design programmes based on labour market needs assessments and in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Partnerships with local organizations who know the context and immediate needs of the communities can play a critical role in the success of new businesses. This recommendation aligns with the integrated approach put forward by IOM, which establishes the need to undertake an assessment of the return context to develop appropriate supports for sustainable reintegration.

Social dimension

- **Public-civil society partnerships to provide temporary shelter for returnees unable to return to their communities of origin:** Returnees can face extreme

⁷³ In some countries, NGOs or national authorities provide counselling for forced returnees as well as voluntary returnees. See European Migration Network, [Policies and Practices on Return Counselling for Migrants in EU Member States and Norway](#) (2019).



psychosocial and economic challenges when they are unable to return to their communities of origin. The findings suggest that forced returnees, victims of trafficking or female returnees in patriarchal societies are more likely to return to a different location than their communities of origin. The stigma associated with forced returnees based on the perception that they “failed” may deter returnees from returning to their communities of origin. The interviews with key informants revealed the significance of temporary housing assistance for people who have no place to return to. It can thus be recommended to set up shelters for vulnerable returnees run by experienced NGOs with government monitoring and funding.

- ❖ **Provide information and ensure access to identification:** In some contexts, barriers to access documentation hinder returnees’ access to social services. The interviews revealed the necessity to establish a mechanism to support returnees’ expedited access to at least temporary documentation to ensure a smooth transition to in the social protection system in countries of origin. This is particularly critical for forced returnees who have limited access to counselling and information compared to voluntary returnees.

Psychosocial dimension

- **Psychosocial support as complementary to economic assistance:** The interviews with key stakeholders across the research sites revealed that reintegration activities in the form of labour market insertion are often prioritized, neglecting the psychosocial dimension of reintegration. The findings suggest that distressful experiences of returnees, both forced and voluntary, affect their abilities to reintegrate economically, highlighting the strong interlinkages of material and emotional processes after return. The psychological challenges can be more intense for forced returnees due to lack of preparedness and willingness to return. Future programming may want to combine economic reintegration support with psychosocial help and mental health care particularly for those who had distressful experiences while abroad and during return.
- **Better data collection on mental health:** Additional data collection mechanisms can be put in place to gather data about the specific needs of forced and voluntary returnees, and particularly the mental health problems that both groups might face. The discrepancy between reporting on psychosocial issues in the qualitative and quantitative data suggests that the RSS does not fully capture the psychosocial reintegration dimension. To support forced and voluntary returnees and particularly those with distressful experiences during migration and upon return, it is essential to collect more and reliable information that captures their experiences.

6.1.3. Programmatic recommendations for gender-sensitive programming

- ❖ **Participatory design:** Future programming may consider participatory ways to design programmes to make sure that programmes address the needs of the population they are targeting. These participatory processes need to include returnees of all genders and age groups and different types of returnees (forced and voluntary) in the decision-making process on the overall programming strategies, the type activities and training programmes, as well as the issues that require awareness raising in the return communities. A first step is to conduct a gender-sensitive needs assessment to



better understand the specific reintegration needs of people of diverse genders. Past studies looking at reintegration outcomes of women corroborate the importance to include target groups in the design of programmes and policies and to involve female returnees in reintegration policy formulation.⁷⁴ As elaborated further in IOM's Reintegration Handbook, participatory approaches can be particularly useful for increasing support for reintegration among local actors in the implementation of community-based reintegration programmes.

- ❖ **Involve all household members in decision making when appropriate:** When families return, male members of the household are often involved in the process of reintegration assistance. Female members of the household commonly expressed that the decision to choose a specific reintegration package was made by male members in the household. As people of diverse genders may have different needs and specific views on the best type of assistance, it is important to involve all household members in the decision-making process when appropriate.
- ❖ **Safe spaces for women:** To ensure and sustain outreach to, and participation of, female returnees in reintegration programmes and activities, it is crucial to make sure that there are safe and accommodating spaces that are specifically designed for women and children. This is crucial especially for female survivors of gender-based violence. These spaces must also be accessible and welcoming to women with diverse SOGIESC, including transgender women. It is essential to ensure that not only returnees but also their families trust that all activities associated with the reintegration programmes occur in a secure environment. The aspects that require particular attention are the physical privacy and confidentiality assured to participants, availability of child-friendly spaces and accessibility using public transportation. Similarly, the places where skills trainings are conducted should be monitored closely and staff should be trained to make sure returnees are actively participating in the programmes. To establish sufficient levels of safety and trust, a practical starting point is to organize "open days" where community members can visit and learn about the activities in these women and children-friendly centres. Without feeling sufficient levels of safety and trust, female returnees may not experience the full benefits of the reintegration package.
- ❖ **Safe spaces for returnees with diverse SOGIESC:** Returnees with diverse SOGIESC may not feel comfortable disclosing their identities and characteristics to caseworkers or other staff in host or origin countries. Lack of disclosure and knowledge about returnees' SOGIESC may present a barrier to their specific reintegration needs to be identified and met. Experts on gender and migration underline that the practical applications of setting up and maintaining a safe space for returnees with diverse SOGIESC requires additional efforts, due to lack of clear organizational guidance regarding the reintegration of these groups. It is therefore essential to inform reintegration support staff about the specific circumstances faced by returnees with diverse SOGIESC in a context-sensitive manner. It was commonly stressed that whether or not these groups get appropriate reintegration support depends largely on the awareness and sensitivity of the individual caseworkers. The existing training modules designed to build capacities of staff on SOGIESC-related issues may

⁷⁴ See Yacob-Haliso, O. [Gender and Governance of the Reintegration of Returnee Refugee Women in Liberia](#) (2011).



need further adaptations to be applied to caseworkers in the return and reintegration field, and participation and commitment of senior management is essential. Having a full-time focal point in each mission combined with commitment on the senior level may help streamline a truly gender-sensitive approach that goes beyond the binary (female-male) view of gender.

- ❖ **Diverse staffing:** The caseworkers and service providers that are in direct contact with returnees should reflect the ethnic and gender diversity of beneficiaries. Use of inclusive and non-discriminatory language in all circumstances should be promoted not only organization-wide but also with implementing partners. In some cases, returnees perceived being discriminated on the basis of their ethnic origin. To avoid such incidents, it is essential to set up a diverse team that reflect the composition of the target population, as well as robust accountability systems.
- ❖ **Gender-sensitive data collection:** Additional data collection mechanisms can be put in place to gather data about the specific needs of returnees of all genders, and sub-populations such as survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence. One major element highlighted by experts on SOGIESC is the understanding that offering binary options of “male” and “female” excludes people of diverse genders and does not give information about whether someone is intersex, transgender, or has a diverse gender identity, which is essential for programming that addresses the needs of migrants and returnees with diverse SOGIESC. Global experts highlighted the need to have organizational guidance on how to collect gender-segregated data. As such, data collection tools such as the RSS will need to be revised to make sure that these specific groups are included. Moreover, the RSS questionnaire only contains questions related to access to services, and not the actual well-being of returnees, which might be a reason why females did not necessarily score worse on the RSS psychosocial reintegration dimension in the quantitative data, despite the fact that the in-depth interviews did reveal additional mental health challenges for females upon return. To collect more and reliable information on these aspects will be essential in the process of providing gender-sensitive support to returnees.
- ❖ **Inclusive gender-sensitive programming:** Experts on gender and migration recognized the progress made by IOM in shifting towards non-binary gender views in some of its programming. However, the integration of SOGIESC-related concerns has not yet been accomplished in return and reintegration programming. Clear organizational guidance can be provided by releasing guidance notes specifically addressing reintegration staff. Developing the capacities of reintegration caseworkers and other service providers through context-sensitive trainings can help mainstream the understanding of diverse SOGIESC.

Economic dimension

- **Female business partners and cooperatives:** Skills trainings are a source of empowerment for female returnees with low education levels, as they provide them with a life-long skill. Some women expressed a desire to share this skill and knowledge with other women in their communities. With the dual objective of economic and psychosocial empowerment, women can be provided with incentives to initiate business partnerships with other women in their communities, for example, to establish a tailoring workshop. Another alternative is to set up



cooperatives, ideally set up or run by women-led NGOs, where women can work together in a supportive environment. According to ILO,⁷⁵ employment figures in most countries show that female participation in cooperatives is much higher than their overall labour market participation. Creating solidarity networks among women while providing them with work opportunities can enhance empowerment and therefore lead to sustainable reintegration outcomes. Long-term strategies can focus on **linking such initiatives to local development objectives** and incentivize local actors to engage in such efforts. Other studies also highlight the importance of promoting governance synergies between organizations supporting short-term reintegration of women and those who deal with long-term development goals of origin countries.⁷⁶

Social dimension

- **Reception of child returnees:** The stigma attached to returnees can also have implications for their children. The interviews with returnees who returned with their children revealed that it is essential to ensure quality of reception, care and integration arrangements for child returnees. Families who had no intention to return but who were forced to do so with their children are primarily concerned about the (re-)adaptation of their children in the local schooling system. Providing language courses for children born abroad, and sensitizing school management on the conditions of returnees, can help to minimize bullying at schools and facilitate the adaptation process, in addition to relieving parental stress. IOM's Reintegration Handbook provides clear guidance on how to address the specific needs of children returnees within the framework of child rights approach to return and reintegration assistance at the individual child and family level.⁷⁷
- **Collaborate with and develop capacities of women and LGBTIQ+ organizations:** As mentioned before, establishing referral pathways with NGOs working with women, people with diverse SOGIESC, and victims of gender-based violence and human trafficking can facilitate reintegration in different dimensions. Other studies on reintegration of women also found that supporting female-led organizations in areas of return can help women reintegrate in social economic and political arenas.⁷⁸ For returnees with diverse SOGIESC, this is particularly important as they often lack a support mechanism that can facilitate their social adaptation process and inform them about their rights.
- **Public-civil society partnerships to provide temporary shelter for vulnerable returnees unable to return to their community of origin:** Returnees can face extreme psychosocial and economic challenges when they are unable to return to their communities of origin. The findings suggest that forced returnees, victims of gender-based violence including trafficking or female returnees in patriarchal societies are more likely to fear to go back 'home'. The interviews with key informants revealed the significance of temporary housing assistance for people who have no place to return to. It can thus be recommended to provide specialized shelter

⁷⁵ For more resources on cooperatives and women's empowerment, see ILO, [Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality website](#).

⁷⁶ Yacob-Haliso, *Gender and Governance*.

⁷⁷ IOM and UNICEF, *A Child Right's Approach to the Sustainable Reintegration of Migrant Children and Families*.

⁷⁸ See Cohen, R., Brookings Institute, ["Reintegrating refugees and internally displaced women"](#) (12 December 2000).



and/or reception centres for women only to facilitate reintegration. Depending on the country context, single mothers, widows and women that have survived gender-based violence linked to their migration journey are in need of this intervention as they are more likely to be at risk of family and community rejection and are thus exposed to manifold risks.

- **Safe spaces in health-care provision:** Women who were exposed to sexual violence often require specialized health care. It is important to set up referral mechanisms with health-care providers who are well informed and sensitive about the needs of survivors. Several women in the sample group had serious health conditions specifically regarding reproductive health due to experiences of abuse, violence or exploitation. In addition, key SOGIESC and migration experts highlighted that transgender individuals often have difficulty in accessing sensitive and appropriate care for their unique health needs such as transition-related treatment or mental health needs. Appropriate physical and mental health must form part of reintegration assistances.
- **Identification of male survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse:** None of the male respondents in the sample group described experiences of violence, abuse or exploitation. However, it is worth to note that identification of male survivors is a common challenge, and it requires specific attention and expertise because men and boys are often less likely than women and girls to report such incidents and seek assistance. Reintegration caseworkers should be trained to gain awareness on indicators of identification based on an inclusive understanding of sexual and gender-based violence.
- **Access to documentation of transgender persons:** A specific challenge for transgender individuals is access to identification documents in cases where one's gender is different than before migration. In some cases, they may not be able to re-enter their country of origin because their appearance does not match their documentation. It is therefore essential to prepare for safe migration taking into account these potential risk points, and as part of reintegration to provide legal assistance to obtain new identification documents in order to facilitate their access to services when possible.
- **Legal assistance to survivors of gender-based violence, such as trafficking:** Providing legal assistance to survivors of violence to support their participation in the efforts to prosecute their perpetrators was a key facilitator of psychological health and thus psychosocial and overall reintegration. Other studies support this finding, showing that addressing justice issues and bringing to trial those who committed sexual and gender-based violence may help survivors release some of the mental burdens of the past.⁷⁹

Psychosocial dimension

- **Psychosocial support as complementary to other assistance, rather than substitutes to each other:** Future programming may want to combine different types of reintegration support with psychosocial help and mental health care particularly for those who had difficult negative experiences while abroad and during return. To this end, female returnees

⁷⁹ Ibid.



often constitute a particularly vulnerable group. Trauma-informed care (see Box 7) is an important good practice-based approach when working with violence survivors. Given the strong entanglement of material and emotional processes after return, returnees working to recover from negative experiences often fall behind in all dimensions of reintegration. Other studies also highlight that context-specific mental health programming should be systematically incorporated into humanitarian programmes that promote reintegration particularly in post-conflict settings.⁸⁰ Community or family rejection can be intense for female returnees and have severe implications for their psychological health.

- **Future programming may provide an option to offer family counselling to help with family reintegration outcomes in cases where individuals face family rejection.** Having a diverse SOGIESC adds another stigma on top of the stigma attached to returnees. Return can also have serious psychosocial implications for returnees with diverse SOGIESC in countries such as Nigeria, Somalia and Afghanistan, and finding appropriate psychologists that understand the effects of stigma and its contextual manifestations in the lives of returnees may become a difficult task in these contexts. Future programming may consider to establish referral mechanisms with trusted practitioners who have experience working with people of diverse genders and who are cognizant of the stigmas.

6.1.4. Broader policy recommendations

- ❖ **Accountability and transparency of international community:** In some country contexts, key informants expressed criticisms about international actors who implement projects in relatively secure areas or who implement projects remotely. Despite increasing reintegration funding channeled towards some countries, the high administrative costs of international staff (e.g. office costs, travel expenses, per diems) in reintegration programming was met with criticism by key informants. Without proper monitoring and evaluation mechanism in place, it was felt that reintegration funds were not utilized properly by international actors. Such criticisms show that the relationship between local stakeholders and the international community can be tense due to confusion over roles and responsibilities as well as activities and programming. It is recommended to increase accountability and transparency and to make additional efforts to build trust with local actors as equal partners.

Forced and voluntary returnees

- **Bilateral coordination of mass deportations:** Key informant interviews revealed as a major challenge the lack of information sharing between host and origin counties on mass deportation plans. This has consequences not only for returnees and communities of return but also government actors who are unable to absorb large numbers of returnees in the social system due to limited capacity and lack of resources. It is therefore a high priority for host government

⁸⁰ Ibid.



actors to increase bilateral coordination efforts with countries of origin prior to mass deportation arrangements.

- **Inclusive support mechanisms:** In some contexts, governments concert efforts on the reintegration of voluntary returnees, with no or little interest in the plight of forced returnees. This contributes to the stigma and reinforces self-perceptions of forced returnees as ‘undeserving’ and neglected, which can in turn create incentives for re-migration. Establishing a more systematic and coordinated approach that is inclusive and more easily accessible for forced returnees is essential in the long run.

Gender-sensitive policies

- **Advocacy to include gender dimensions in return and reintegration policies:** The country studies revealed that gender dimensions are largely absent in current national policies on return and reintegration. A long-term recommendation in this regard is to advocate for integrating gender dimensions into existing policies and/or government interventions by providing policymakers with accurate information collected through gender-sensitive needs assessment studies. International organizations can provide such data through systematic data collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data and incentivize governments to design reintegration policies that match with local conditions and capacities.
- **Respect right to family unity:** Returnees that left their family members behind in the host countries require special assistance and legal support. On a broader level, the right to family requires attention and provisions in bilateral agreements.

6.2. FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS

Future studies can explore the factors that influence community perception of returnees in high-return areas and how it varies for forced and voluntary returnees. Moreover, longitudinal research exploring the sustainability of the reintegration processes of different groups of returnees (forced and voluntary, returnees of diverse genders) in relation to the assistance they received may be a welcome avenue for future research. To inform gender-sensitive reintegration programming, more research needs to be conducted on 1) the specific vulnerabilities of female returnees in return settings, particularly related to their social, psychosocial and health needs, and 2) the specific needs of returnees with diverse genders, and survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence.

In this process, the RSS will need to be revised and tested to properly capture the experiences and well-being of these groups, with additional questions on experiences during migration and return circumstances. In addition, the situation of vulnerability appeared to be a strong determinant of reintegration outcomes based on this study. In the RSS, this is a “yes/no” question that is completed by the interviewer in the initial section, which leaves it up to the discretion of the person conducting the interview. Converting it into a multiple option question and providing interviewers with more guidance on how to deal with this question can increase reliability of the data collected. As a result of this process, future research can explore further the link between



different situations of vulnerability (e.g. single parent, chronic medical conditions, diverse SOGIESC, experiences of gender-based violence) and reintegration outcomes in a systematic manner.

The RSS data on forced returnees were largely lacking in many of the countries explored in this study. Similar studies can be conducted in different country contexts with better comparability prospects between forced and voluntary returnees. In some country cases, we found that returnees from Europe fare worse than returnees from other regions. Other studies can focus of returnees from a specific host region, for example Europe, to have a more in-depth understanding of the specific circumstances of different groups.

Finally, it would be interesting to compare the reintegration experiences of forced and voluntary returnees to those who returned on their own, without any external support. A comparison like this will provide helpful insights into the effects of reintegration support programmes, a topic that was largely beyond the scope of this study.



ANNEX 1. DESK REVIEW ON TYPE OF RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Although return migration is often seen as a natural part of the migration cycle, return migration and reintegration processes can be complex. Building on earlier definitions, Koser and Kuschminder define sustainable return as when “the individual has reintegrated into the economic, social and cultural processes of the country of origin and feels that they are in an environment of safety and security upon return.”⁸¹ Scholars widely agree that return does not mean coming home, since both the country of origin and the immigrant themselves may change during the period of migration.⁸² Therefore, understanding the multi-dimensional nature of the reintegration process after return migration requires a thorough investigation of a combination of individual factors and structural conditions both in receiving and sending countries.⁸³ In addition, policy interventions in the form of return and reintegration assistance (or lack thereof) that returnees receive before, during and after their return are likely to affect reintegration outcomes such as precariousness, social and economic reintegration, mental well-being and re-migration aspirations.

Voluntary versus forced return in literature

On the individual level, the motivations and preparedness of the migrants to return can have diverse impacts on the reintegration outcomes. Returnees are not a homogeneous group and differ considerably in their motivations and preparedness for return.⁸⁴ Some may return unwillingly, either because of a ‘failed’ migration attempt, because they are deported by a host country or because the conditions in host countries force them to return, leaving no alternative option to stay.⁸⁵ Although the general tendency has been towards ascribing binary categories of forced and voluntary, each return falls somewhere on a spectrum of (in)voluntariness.⁸⁶ Newland identifies six different points in this spectrum, ranging from solicited, voluntary, reluctant returns to pressured, obliged, and forced returns, and each point corresponds to different levels of preparedness to return.⁸⁷

According to Cassarino, the constituting elements of overall preparedness are willingness and readiness to return, which are likely to have a decisive effect on the possibilities and constraints for successful reintegration upon return. Readiness refers to the gathering of the necessary information and tangible and intangible resources that can facilitate return and reintegration processes, while the willingness to return refers to the voluntariness of the decision.⁸⁸ For example, gathering of information about the post-return conditions at the

⁸¹ Koser and Kuschminder, *Comparative Research*, page 8.

⁸² See Preston, R. A. and S. Brown, [The Integration of Returned Exiles, Former Combatants and Other War-affected Namibians: Final Report](#) (1993); Dolan, C. “Repatriation from South Africa to Mozambique – Undermining durable solutions?” in [The End of the Refugee Cycle?: Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction](#) (1999); Arowolo, O., [Return Migration and the Problem of Reintegration](#), *International Migration* 38(5): 59–82 (2000); and David, A.M., [Back to square one: Socioeconomic integration of deported migrants](#), *International Migration Review* (5)1: 127–154 (2017).

⁸³ Koser and Kuschminder, *Comparative Research*; and Black and Gent, *Sustainable return in post-conflict contexts*.

⁸⁴ See Cassarino, J.P., [Theorising return migration: the conceptual approach to return migrants revisited](#), *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 6(2): 253–279 (2004).

⁸⁵ See Müller-Funk, L. and S. Fransen, IMI Working Papers No. 162, [Return aspirations and coerced return: A case study on Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon](#) (2020).

⁸⁶ See Erdal, M. B. and C. Oeppen, [Forced to leave? The discursive and analytical significance of describing migration as forced and voluntary](#), *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44(6): 981–998 (2018).

⁸⁷ See Newland, K. “Migrant return and reintegration policy: A key component of migration governance” in [Migration Research Leaders' Syndicate](#) (2017).

⁸⁸ Cassarino, *Theorising return migration*.



place of origin, such as safety and security, local community attitudes, employment opportunities as well as origin country policies towards returnees, such as property and citizenship rights can contribute to the migrants' readiness to return.⁸⁹ In addition, mobilizing financial resources (e.g. remittances, investments) and social networks (e.g. maintaining or initiating contacts, relationships, acquaintances) while abroad can provide returnees better chances to reintegrate economically and socially.⁹⁰ What this implies in terms of the impact of the modality of return on reintegration is linked to the fact that voluntary returnees often have more time to plan and prepare for return in comparison to forced returnees. In most cases, a forced return is sudden – it doesn't allow migrants enough time to prepare for return – and as a result, involuntary returnees, who had little or no time to prepare for their return, often lack the necessary information, resources and social networks that could facilitate reintegration in the country of origin.⁹¹

The modality of return and the reintegration process

Several studies thus far have investigated the link between the modality of return, meaning whether the return is forced or voluntary, and the reintegration outcomes of the returnees. For example, based on a study of forcefully returned Ethiopian domestic workers from Saudi Arabia, De Regt and Tafesse concluded that the sudden forceful expulsions affected returnees' economic, social network and psychosocial embeddedness back in Ethiopia in a negative way as they were unprepared for return.⁹² Erdal and Oeppen focused on the aspect of willingness and argued that the extent of agency exercised during the return decision-making processes is a likely determinant of psycho-social well-being after return.⁹³ Furthermore, David found that voluntary returnees fare better in terms of labour market outcomes than deported migrants, arguing that sudden forced return – be it due to administrative reasons such as rejected asylum claims, or personal reasons such as health or family – has a lasting negative impact on economic and socio-cultural reintegration outcomes of forced returnees.⁹⁴ Mezger Kveder and Flahaux draw similar conclusions in a study investigating the labour market conditions of Senegalese returnees, which demonstrated that forced returnees had lower labour market integration outcomes than voluntary returnees due to lack of preparedness to return.⁹⁵ Similarly, in a longitudinal study from Mexico, Hagan, Wassing and Castro investigated resource mobilization among forced and voluntary returnees in Mexico.⁹⁶ Comparing labour market outcomes between the two groups at three points in time (upon return, in 2010 and in 2015), the authors found that the majority of deportees and non-deportees entered wage work upon return in Mexico, but those who had *not* been deported were more likely to remain employed by 2015. On a positive note, they found that the initially large gap between forced

⁸⁹ See Kibreab, G., [Citizenship rights and repatriation of refugees](#), *International Migration Review* 37(1): 24–73 (2003); Rogge, J.R., "Repatriation of refugees: A not so simple 'optimum' solution" in Allen, T. and H. Morsink, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, [When Refugees Go Home: African experiences](#) (1994); and Koser and Kuschminder, *Comparative Research*.

⁹⁰ Cassarino, *Theorising return migration*.

⁹¹ David, *Back to square one*.

⁹² See De Regt, M. and M. Tafesse, Deported before experiencing the good sides of migration: Ethiopians returning from Saudi Arabia, *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 9(2): 228–242 (2015).

⁹³ See Erdal, M. B. and C. Oeppen "Forced to return? Agency and the role of post-return mobility for wellbeing among returnees to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Poland" in Vathi, Z. and R. King, *Return Migration and Wellbeing: Discourses, Policy-Making and Outcomes for Migrants and Their Families* (2017).

⁹⁴ David, *Back to square one*.

⁹⁵ See Mezger Kveder, C. L. and M.-L. Flahaux, Returning to Dakar: [A mixed methods analysis of the role of migration experience for occupational status](#), *World Development* 45(C): 223–238 (2013).

⁹⁶ See Hagan, J., J. Wassink, and B. Castro, [A longitudinal analysis of resource mobilisation among forced and voluntary return migrants in Mexico](#), *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45(1): 170–189 (2019).



and voluntary Mexican returnees was eventually reduced in terms of labour market trajectories and social mobility outcomes.

One of the ways in which forced returnees may respond to the challenges of reintegration is through making the decision to re-migrate. Research shows that forced returnees are more likely to repeat migration than voluntary returnees.⁹⁷ For instance, if the conditions that led to the decision to migrate (e.g. poverty, unemployment, conflict, ethnic tensions) are still pervasive in the country of origin upon return, it may lead to intentions to re-migrate.⁹⁸ This goes in line with the findings of Schuster & Majidi who concluded that the experience of deportation only added new reasons to migrate on top of the initial individual or structural factors that led to the migration of Afghan deportees in the first place, including the difficulties in paying back the debts incurred by migration, the feeling of shame due to failed migration attempt, and the negative attitude of locals due to perceptions of changed attitude or appearance of the returnee, all of which created barriers to reintegration and contributed to intentions to repeat migration.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Mezger Kveder and Flahaux found that the intentions to re-migrate were higher among forced Senegalese returnees in comparison to voluntary returnees who were more satisfied with their occupational status. At the same time, re-migration is not necessarily a result of a failed reintegration process because the desire to re-migrate may occur for multiple reasons such as education purposes, career prospects or family-related reasons, and it can take place even if the returnees' circumstances are much better than when they first left.¹⁰⁰ For example, a study on Salvadoran deportees identified separation from family in the United States as the primary factor that motivates the intent to remigrate.¹⁰¹ Hagan, Eschbach and Rodriguez draw similar conclusions, arguing that the inclination to repeat migration was considerably high among Salvadoran deportees with long-established work and family ties in the United States.¹⁰² In addition, the authors found that the sudden disruption of established patterns of remittances deprived family members in El Salvador from a major source of income, giving Salvadoran deportees yet another reason to remigrate. Along similar lines, Mensah found that high levels of family dependence on remittances fostered re-migration of Ghanaian labour migrant returnees, besides policy-related factors such as lack of reintegration support and weak governance.¹⁰³ It is unclear if the propensities to remigrate increase or decrease when debts to smugglers are involved in the migration cycle. On the one hand, it may encourage returnees to find employment or alternative sources of income to pay back the debts, contributing to self-reliance of the returnee. On the other hand, returnees may become subject to threats by the smugglers, heightening the wish to migrate again.¹⁰⁴

Experiences of stigmatization and marginalization could also affect negatively the post-return economic and psychosocial well-being of returnees and trigger re-migration aspirations. The stigmatization of deportees by

⁹⁷ Haas and Honerath, *Return Migration and Reintegration Policies*.

⁹⁸ Newland, *Migrant return and reintegration policy*.

⁹⁹ See Schuster, L. and N. Majidi, [What happens post-deportation? The experience of deported Afghans](#), *Migration Studies* 1(2): 221–240 (2013).

¹⁰⁰ See Kuschminder, K. [Interrogating the relationship between remigration and sustainable return](#), *International Migration* 55(6): 107–121 (2017).

¹⁰¹ See Cardoso, J. B., E. R. Hamilton, N. Rodriguez, K. Eschbach and J. Hagan, [Deporting fathers: involuntary transnational families and intent to remigrate among Salvadoran deportees](#), *International Migration Review* 50(1): 197–230 (2016).

¹⁰² See Hagan, J., K. Eschbach and N. Rodriguez, [U.S. deportation policy, family separation, and circular migration](#), *International Migration Review* 42(1): 64–88 (2008).

¹⁰³ See Mensah, E. A., [Involuntary return migration and reintegration. The case of Ghanaian migrant workers from Libya](#), *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 17(1): 303–323 (2016).

¹⁰⁴ Koser and Kuschminder, *Comparative Research*.



employers or governments can present obstacles to labour market participation and lead to deteriorating social and economic positions.¹⁰⁵ Besides, returnees may be deemed with suspicion on the community level based on locals' perceptions of changed attitudes, accent or appearance, referred to as 'contamination' by Schuster and Majidi. They argue that the stigma of failure and of contamination attached to Afghan deportees contributed to their aspirations to remigrate. Marginalization could also stem from locals' feeling of resentment towards those returning refugees who they perceive to have abandoned their countries during the war in post-conflict countries such as in the case of Burundi and Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁰⁶

As briefly mentioned above, the dichotomy of forced and voluntary returns often undermines the complexity of the return decision-making processes. Scholars of empowerment assert that, for an individual to make a meaningful choice (in this context, to return or to remain), there must exist alternative options to choose.¹⁰⁷ For example, the return decision of a rejected asylum applicant is hardly a meaningful and empowering choice because of the inability of the asylum seeker to choose otherwise. If the rejected asylum applicant benefits from the voluntary return assistance programmes, they are likely to be categorized by policymakers as voluntary returns whereas, in reality, the nature of the movement is hardly voluntary. There are several studies questioning the voluntariness of returns under different voluntary return programmes.¹⁰⁸ It is therefore essential to clearly define the distinction between voluntary and involuntary movements in order to make meaningful conclusions about the impact of type and modality of return on reintegration outcomes. For example, in a study on 178 returnees from Afghanistan, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Viet Nam, Ruben, Van Houte and Davids classified as "involuntary" all of those who return outside of their personal desire to do so (e.g. rejected asylum claim, pressure from family in origin country).¹⁰⁹ The distinction of whether or not the choice to return was a well-informed and free choice is a highly individual matter that cannot be readily drawn out from voluntary return program statistics and records.

As discussed above, a considerable amount of literature has been published on the linkages between different migration experiences, the preparedness to return and reintegration processes, but a critical aspect that received little attention in the existing literature is to what extent policy interventions in the form of return and reintegration assistance programmes can facilitate sustainable return and reintegration. It is likely that the assistance that returnees receive before, during and after their return affect reintegration outcomes and remigration aspirations. A widely criticized aspect with regard to institutional return and reintegration programmes is their limited ability to address the sustainability conditions of return mainly due to the misinterpretation of return as a process of going home.¹¹⁰ However, the empirical evidence on the impact of return and reintegration assistance on reintegration outcomes under different return conditions (e.g. forced

¹⁰⁵ Hagan, Wassink and Castro, *A longitudinal analysis of resource mobilisation*.

¹⁰⁶ See Lukunka, B. N., "[They call us witches](#)": Exclusion and invisibility in the Burundian returnee reintegration process, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 24(3): 315–319 (2018); and Stefansson, A., "Sarajevo suffering: Homecoming and the hierarchy of homeland hardship" in [Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return](#) (2004).

¹⁰⁷ See Kabeer, N., [Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal](#), *Gender & Development* 13(1): 13–24 (2005); and Kabeer, N., [Women's empowerment and the question of choice](#), *Journal of International Affairs* 72(2): 209–214 (2019).

¹⁰⁸ See Webber, F. [How voluntary are voluntary returns?](#), *Race & Class* 52(4): 98–107 (2011); and European Council on Refugees and Exiles, [Increasing Refugee Participation in the Field of Voluntary Return](#) (2005).

¹⁰⁹ See Ruben, R., M. Van Houte and T. Davids, [What determines the embeddedness of forced-return migrants? Rethinking the role of pre-and post-return assistance](#), *International Migration Review* 43(4): 908–937 (2009).

¹¹⁰ Ibid. See also Dolan, *Repatriation from South Africa*; and Hammond, L., "Examining the discourse of repatriation: towards a more proactive theory of return migration" in *The End of the Refugee Cycle?*.



and voluntary) is very limited. To fill this key research gap, Koser & Kuschminder conducted a comprehensive study to incorporate ‘assistance’ into the analytical framework on return and reintegration and investigated whether and how it influences sustainable return, based on fieldwork across 15 countries of origin, transit and host. The authors found that reintegration, and the sustainability of return mainly depend on individual characteristics and experiences, and therefore fall largely beyond the influence policy interventions, including return assistance. A limitation of the study is its inability to systematically compare the relevance or differential outcomes of different types of assistance packages. However, the limited discussions on this aspect show that programmes that offer cash-based or in-kind support upon return can be most effective if the decision to migrate was primarily due to economic reasons.

In the study of Ruben, Van Houte and Davids, the authors found that the majority of post-return assistance packages consists of material and practical support, whereas limited attention is given to psychosocial needs of the returnees. They argue that reintegration support programmes can be more effective if financial support is combined with human guidance and practical information. In general, these findings point out the necessity of targeted programming for sustainable return and reintegration.¹¹¹ In a study on Ecuadorian migrants returning from Spain, Mercier and others highlight the need to design targeted programmes for specific groups, such as returnees who plan to launch their own business, the most vulnerable workers (women, older returnees, unemployed), and foreign-educated returnees.¹¹² The needs of returnees differ considerably depending on their individual characteristics (age, gender, education level, qualifications etc.) and migration experiences (reasons of migration, experiences during migration, preparedness to return etc.), which rules out a one-size-fits-all approach to reintegration assistance. It is therefore essential to adopt a target group-centred approach that takes into account the different characteristics of returnees and design needs-based reintegration programmes for each category.¹¹³

¹¹¹ See Whyte, Z. and D. Hirslund, DIIS Policy Brief, [Assisted return of rejected asylum seekers – How can we create sustainability?](#) (2013).

¹¹² See Mercier, M., A. David, R. Mahia and R. De Arce, [Reintegration upon return: Insights from Ecuadorian returnees from Spain](#), *International Migration* 54(6): 56–73 (2016).

¹¹³ See Haas and Honerath, *Return Migration and Reintegration Policies*.



ANNEX 2. DESK REVIEW ON GENDER, RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Gender and return perceptions

Evidence across various studies shows that gender plays an important role in the decision-making processes on return migration. A recent study conducted in Lebanon and Turkey showed that women had higher return aspirations, which the authors attributed to fears and experiences of gender-based violence among women in the host countries.¹¹⁴ Bilgili, Kuschminder, and Siegel found that negative perceptions of women on their living conditions upon return in Ethiopia were largely influenced by their migration experiences.¹¹⁵ The perceptions of return can also be linked to the views and attitudes on gender roles in the places of origin. For example, Ruiz, Siegel, and Vargas-Silva found that in Burundi, women had more negative views than men about the impact of their migration on their social status upon return, their ability to contribute to the community, and their decision-making power.¹¹⁶ Studies examining women migrants' post-retirement return aspirations confirm that women are more reluctant to permanently return to their origin countries than men owing to a fear of having their freedoms restricted (King et al., 2014; Mahler and Pessar, 2006).¹¹⁷ A comparable conclusion is drawn by Böcker and Gehrig who found that Turkish female migrants were more likely (than men) to favor a transnational way of living with dual residence over permanent post-retirement return, so that they could maintain access to a wider network of support in terms of informal care arrangements within the family.¹¹⁸ The gendered views and attitudes in origin societies can have implications also on male migrants' perceptions of return. For example, male returns could be motivated by a desire to regain a lost patriarchal status as demonstrated in a study of Somali men migrating back to the country of origin due to the inability to come to terms with their changing role within the household and a resultant feeling of loss of masculinity at the host countries.¹¹⁹

The impact of the migration cycle on reintegration processes

The migration cycle – including the phase of transition to the new country and the duration of stay at the host country – can be experienced differently by men and women as migrants move between gendered and stratified societies.¹²⁰ Having gone through difficult experiences before the initial migration and abroad can have a disempowering effect in the post-return period, culminating in unsustainable return or unsuccessful reintegration outcomes. For example, the studies on female domestic workers returning from the Middle East to Ethiopia revealed as a barrier to psychosocial reintegration the mental health problems encountered

¹¹⁴ Müller-Funk and Fransen, *Return aspirations and coerced return*.

¹¹⁵ See Bilgili, Ö., K. Kuschminder, and M. Siegel, [Return migrants' perceptions of living conditions in Ethiopia: A gendered analysis](#), *Migration Studies* 6 (3): 345–366 (2018).

¹¹⁶ See Ruiz, I., M. Siegel and C. Vargas-Silva, [Forced up or down? The impact of forced migration on social status](#), *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28(2): 183–201 (2015).

¹¹⁷ See Mahler, S.J., and P.R. Pessar, [Gender matters: Ethnographers bring gender from the periphery toward the core of migration studies](#), *International Migration Review* 40(1): 27–63 (2006).

¹¹⁸ See Böcker, A.G.M. and A.J. Gehring, [Returning 'home' after retirement? The role of gender in return migration decisions of Spanish and Turkish migrants](#), *Review of Social Studies*, 2(1): 77–97 (2015).

¹¹⁹ See Hansen, P., [Circumcising migration: Gendering return migration among Somalilanders](#), *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34(7): 1109–1125 (2008).

¹²⁰ See Piper, N., "International migration and gendered axes of stratification—Introduction" in N. Piper, [New perspectives on gender and migration—Rights, entitlements and livelihoods](#) (2009).



abroad because of the extreme hardships that women went through.¹²¹ The implications of experiences of human trafficking can be devastating in the psychosocial dimension but also put a strain on the economic reintegration of contract domestic workers upon return due to the failed hope of economic betterment.¹²² Besides, families may not welcome with open arms returning female survivors of trafficking, which may complicate further the chances of successful reintegration.¹²³ The post-return experiences can also take a negative turn owing to women's perception of weakened family and community ties during their long stay abroad.¹²⁴ Stigma and shame that community members and families may harbor towards the returnees can become a key obstacle to the social reintegration of women. For example, a study on Bangladeshi returnees reveals women's experiences of exclusion and negative social attitude on the community-level due to the stigma attached to female migration within the patriarchal gender order.¹²⁵ In the case of Ethiopian domestic worker returnees, the stigma attached to women returnees stemmed partially from the locals' perception that they have led a loose sexual life while abroad, which the women returnees believe diminished their marital prospects upon return.¹²⁶ Lee showed that the highly skilled second-generation South Korean – American women returnees refused to conform to traditional gender norms when they went back to the Republic of Korea, which led to feelings of cultural exclusion and a distancing from their South Korean identities.¹²⁷ However, Lee's study challenges the discourse of north to south return migration as a disempowering experience for women, rather emphasizes the agency of women on negotiating on a daily basis the gender and racial ideologies in the South Korean labour market. In the context of the Philippines, there have been instances where migrant women were publicly stigmatized in the media, with news reports accusing them of abandoning their children and leaving them susceptible to abuse.¹²⁸

While migration of women is often portrayed as a threat to the traditional gendered family structures, migration can also reinforce gendered responsibilities, as elaborated in studies on Filipino migrant mothers.¹²⁹ Parreñas emphasized¹³⁰ that the long-distance nurturing of migrant mothers to compensate for the physical distance between them and their children can result in what Hays calls "intensive mothering", which may lead to the perpetuation of conventional gender roles promoted by the migration of women. The stigmatization of women as 'bad' mothers in the communities of return (despite counter-evidence) may contribute to low post-return psychosocial well-being.¹³¹ On the contrary, the chances of successful social integration are higher if the returnee receives sufficient support from the families and communities, as found by Wong in a study investigating Ghanaian highly skilled women's experience of return migration.¹³²

¹²¹ Anbeesse and Ketema, *Female Ethiopian Migrant Domestic Workers*.

¹²² See Minaye, A., [Trafficked to the Gulf States: The experiences of Ethiopian returnee women](#), *Journal of Community Practice* 20(1-2): 112–133 (2012).

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ See Ullah, A., [Mother's land and others' land: "Stolen" youth of returned female migrants](#), *Gender, Technology and Development* 17(2): 159–178 (2013).

¹²⁵ See Bélanger, D. and M. Rahman, [Migrating against all the odds: International labour migration of Bangladeshi women](#), *Current Sociology* 61(3): 356–373 (2013).

¹²⁶ See Nisrane, B. L., "Home, but not home: Reintegration of Ethiopian women returning from the Arabian Gulf" in Van Reisen, M., M. Mawere, M. Stokmans and K. Gebre-Egziabher, [Roaming Africa: Migration, Resilience and Social Protection](#) (2019).

¹²⁷ See Lee, H. K., ["I'm my mother's daughter, I'm my husband's wife, I'm my child's mother, I'm nothing else": Resisting traditional Korean roles as Korean American working women in Seoul, South Korea](#), *Women's Studies International Forum* 36(1): 37–43 (2013).

¹²⁸ See Parreñas, R. S., [Transnational mothering: A source of gender conflicts in the family](#), *North Carolina Law Review* 88(5): 1825–1855 (2010).

¹²⁹ See Parreñas, R. S., [The gender paradox in the transnational families of Filipino migrant women](#), *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 14(3): 243–268 (2005).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ See Hays, S., [The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood](#) (1996).

¹³² See Wong, M., [Navigating return: The gendered geographies of skilled return migration to Ghana](#), *Global Networks* 14(4): 438–457 (2014).



The pre-migration experiences of conflict and the perpetuation of societal tensions after return can also result in reintegration challenges upon return. In her dissertation study among Liberian refugee returnee women, Yacob-Haliso argued that past experience of violence in conflict-settings may hinder the psychosocial reintegration processes of women by interfering with their mental strength and their ability to genuinely “start over”.¹³³ In post-conflict contexts, even if the conflict seems to have ceased, the societal tensions may persist, and prevent women more than men from participating in social and economic arenas in their respective communities.¹³⁴

The economic reintegration outcomes, which can be defined as the ability of returnees to secure a livelihood in the origin country, depend on preparedness to return, experiences during migration, and reintegration assistance upon return.¹³⁵ Cassarino defines preparedness as a combination of willingness and readiness to return, which refers to the extent to which the potential returnee freely chose to return and whether this choice was supported by the gathering of the necessary resources that can facilitate return and reintegration processes, such as mobilization of resources and activation of social networks prior to the actual return.¹³⁶ For example, Fentaw found that the savings of Ethiopian female domestic workers, which they remitted to their households, were of no use upon return mainly because the money remitted was spent by families on basic needs without a long-term benefit;¹³⁷ many returnees, therefore, found themselves in the same or worse position in economic terms upon return due to limited financial preparedness. Also, the professional skills possessed before migration may become useless upon return as migrants may not be able to practice those skills while abroad, adding up to the lack of preparedness.¹³⁸ Another study with Ethiopian female returnees demonstrated that married women with children were more determined to achieve their migration goal and accumulated better resources than women without children, which expedited their process of reintegration.¹³⁹ In an exploratory study investigating how gender and governance factors affect the reintegration of formerly refugee women to post-war Liberia, Yacob-Haliso argued that the many reasons that were sources of fear for women before their departure was still present or even proliferated in the post-war environment, hence, hindering women's ability to participate fully in economic, social or political life.¹⁴⁰ The economic reintegration outcomes can also be shaped by the type and content of the reintegration endeavors provided by different governmental and non-governmental organizations. For example, Nisrane and others found that the reintegration assistance provided for forced returnees was beneficial only when returnees were able to make savings in the host country, showing that assistance in the form of vocational training alone would not be sufficient to sustain livelihoods if unaccompanied with financial assistance.¹⁴¹

¹³³ Yacob-Haliso, *Gender and Governance*.

¹³⁴ Cohen, *Reintegrating Refugees and Internally Displaced Women*.

¹³⁵ See Nisrane, B.L., A. Morissens, A. Need, and R. Torenlvied, R., [Economic reintegration of Ethiopian women returned from the Middle East](#), *International Migration* 55(6): 122–136 (2017).

¹³⁶ Cassarino, *Theorising return migration*.

¹³⁷ See Fentaw, A. E., [Ethiopian returnee women from Arab countries: Challenges of successful reintegration](#), *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 11(1): 33–50 (2017).

¹³⁸ Ullah, *Mother's land and others' land*.

¹³⁹ Nisrane et al, *Economic reintegration of Ethiopian women*.

¹⁴⁰ Yacob-Haliso, *Gender and Governance*.

¹⁴¹ Nisrane et al, *Economic reintegration of Ethiopian women*.



These studies show that it is important to take into account gendered experiences of return and reintegration processes. The opportunities and challenges for reintegration differ across men and women, which leads to men and women have different vulnerabilities and needs that should be addressed by designing tailored return and reintegration support programs.



ANNEX 3. THE REINTEGRATION SUSTAINABILITY SURVEY

<p>Name: Case ID: Date of return: Date of birth: Age at time of return: Sex: <input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female Country from which return took place: Length of absence from country of origin _____ (years) Situation of vulnerability: yes no If yes, please specify _____</p>	<p>Country to which return took place: Address in country: Province/governorate: Community (if mapped): Community of return same as community of origin? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Date of interview: __/__/20__ Interview location: <input type="checkbox"/> at IOM office <input type="checkbox"/> phone call <input type="checkbox"/> on site (place of work, migrant's home, etc.)</p>
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REINTEGRATION SUSTAINABILITY		
ECONOMIC DIMENSION		
Questions 1–10 contain indicators of economic reintegration, which contribute to economic self-sufficiency		
1	How satisfied are you with your current economic situation?	Very satisfied Satisfied OK Dissatisfied please explain Very Dissatisfied please explain I don't wish to answer
2	Since you returned, how often have you had to reduce the quantity or quality of food you eat because of its cost?	Very often Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't wish to answer
3	Are you able to borrow money if you need to?	Yes No I don't know I don't wish to answer
4	Do you borrow money? How frequently?	Very often Often Sometimes



		Rarely Never (I don't borrow money) I don't wish to answer
5	On average, which amount is bigger: your spending every month, or your debt?	I don't have debt Debt is larger Spending is larger I don't wish to answer N/A
6	How would you rate your access to opportunities (employment and training)?	Very good Good Fair Poor Very poor I don't know
7	Do you currently work?	Yes No I don't wish to answer N/A
8	Do you own any of the following productive assets?	Land Animals Trees (fruits, nuts) Buildings and Structures Vehicles Equipment and Tools Other - please explain No I don't wish to answer
9	Are you currently looking for a job?	Yes (please continue to Q10) No (please continue to Q11) I don't wish to answer (Q11)
10	Why are you looking for a new job?	Unemployed Unhappy with work at current job Unhappy with work conditions (location, working hours and so on) Unhappy with salary at current job Other - please explain
	SOCIAL DIMENSION Questions 11–21 contain indicators of social reintegration, reflecting the extent to which returnees have reached social stability within their community, including access to services relating to housing, education, justice, health and other public infrastructure services.	



11	How would you rate your access to housing in your community?	Very good Good Fair Poor Very poor I don't know I don't wish to answer
12	How would you rate the standard of housing you live in today?	Very good Good Average Poor Very poor I don't wish to answer
13	How would you rate the access to education in your community?	Very good Good Fair Poor Very poor I don't know I don't wish to answer
14	Are all school-aged children in your household currently attending school?	Yes (also select if no children in home) No - some but not all please explain None please explain I don't wish to answer
15	How would you rate the access to justice and law enforcement in your community?	Very good Good Fair Poor Very poor I don't know I don't wish to answer
16	Do you have at least one identification document?	Yes No I don't know I don't wish to answer
17	How would you rate the access to documentation (personal ID, birth certificates and so on) in your community?	Very good Good Fair Poor Very poor I don't know I don't wish to answer



18	How would you rate the access to safe drinking water in your community?	Very good Good Fair Poor Very poor I don't know I don't wish to answer
19	How would you rate the access to health care in your community?	Very good Good Fair Poor please explain Very poor please explain I don't wish to answer
19 (1)	Please explain why health care is not easily accessible to you:	No health-care facility exists nearby It is too expensive It is too far Other:
20	What is the quality of health care available to you?	Very good Good Fair Bad Very bad I don't know I don't wish to answer
21	Access to public services overall is generated from average answers to above questions (Q13, 15, 17, 18, 19).	
PSYCHOSOCIAL DIMENSION Questions 22–32 contain indicators of psychosocial reintegration, encompassing the emotional and psychological elements of reintegration		
22	How often are you invited or do you participate in social activities (celebrations, weddings, other events) within your community?	Very often Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't wish to answer
23	How do you feel about your support network? Can you rely on the network's support?	Very good - a very strong network Good Fair Bad Very bad - a very weak network I don't know I don't wish to answer



24	Do you feel you are part of the community where you currently live?	I agree - I feel strongly that I am part of the community I somewhat agree I don't agree or disagree I somewhat disagree I strongly disagree - I don't feel part of the community at all I don't know I don't wish to answer
25	How physically safe do you feel for yourself and your family during everyday activities outside?	I feel very safe all the time I feel safe most of the time Neutral I feel unsafe most of the time I feel very unsafe all the time I don't wish to answer
26	How frequently have you experienced important tensions or conflicts between you and your family since you returned?	Very often Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't wish to answer
27	Have you felt discriminated against since your return?	Never Only rarely Sometimes please explain Very often please explain I don't wish to answer
28	Do you often suffer from any of the following? - Feeling angry Feeling sad Feeling afraid Feeling stressed Feeling lonely Feeling low self-worth Difficulty concentrating	Never Only rarely Sometimes please explain Very often please explain I don't wish to answer
29	Would you wish to receive specialized psychological support?	Yes No I don't know I don't wish to answer
30	Do you feel that you are able to stay and live in this country?	Yes No (please continue to Q32) I don't know I don't wish to answer
31	What is it that makes you feel that way	I miss my friends/family members elsewhere; cultural factors; wish to continue studies abroad (WISH TO LEAVE)



		Lack of jobs; lack of security; low earnings; lack of essential services; family pressure (FEEL THE NEED TO LEAVE)
32	Who are the people and organizations that support you in this community?	Family Friends Religious organizations and leaders Community leaders Work colleagues IOM NGOs Other returnees Other please explain No one



ANNEX 4. RETURNEE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introductory question

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself? (where and when born, where do you live at the moment, what is your educational and professional background, family situation)

Migration cycle

2. Can you tell us a little bit about your life in (country of origin) prior to your migration? Where did you live? How was your life? What did you like and dislike about your life? (probe with: housing, employment, family and social life, education, sense of belonging)
3. Can you tell me a little bit about how you decided to migrate (what were your reasons for migration) and what were your expectations of migration?
4. Can you tell us about your migration journey? When did you leave [country of origin] and where did you go?
5. Were your expectations of migration met? How far your migration experience differed from what you were expecting before migrating?
6. Did you take any classes/learn any new skills while you were in the country of migration? (can include formal training, vocational training or language)?
7. I'm also interested in hearing about your return experience. Did you make the decision to return by yourself or were there others involved?
 - 7.1. Did you return to the same place you were residing before migration? [If not] Why did you return to this place?
 - 7.2. If personal choice: can you tell us about the factors that affected your decision making/considerations?
 - 7.3. If return against own will: would you like to tell us the reasons that forced/compelled you to return?
 - 7.4. What were your expectations of return?

Return assistance

8. Did you receive any kind of assistance to return to your country of origin? E.g. from an international organization, NGO, government agency or some other institution?
If yes:
 - 8.1. How did you get to participate in this program?
 - 8.2. Can you explain to us what this program offered you? What were the main components? (e.g. return ticket, pocket money, pre-departure information/counselling, arranging travel documents, fit-for-travel exam, shelter and accommodation; water, sanitation and hygiene services, food and nutrition, health assessment and health assistance, family tracing, family assessment, legal support, risk and needs assessment (for victims of trafficking), transportation to departure point, pocket money, non-food items (hygiene kits, etc.))
 - 8.3. What did you find particularly useful in the assistance package that you received?
 - 8.4. What was lacking in this assistance package? (In other words, what would make a difference in helping you mitigate the challenges that you face during return and reintegration?)



8.5. To what extent do you think your conditions today would be different if you hadn't received this assistance?

If no:

8.6. Did you know that such assistance exists? If yes, why did you not participate in it?

Reintegration assistance

9. Did you receive any kind of assistance after your return to your origin country? E.g. from an international organization, NGO, government agency or some other institution before or after your return?

If yes:

9.1. How did you get to participate in this programme?

9.2. Can you explain to us what this programme offered you? What were the main components? (e.g. reintegration grants cash for work, education course and examination fees, education equipment, accommodation rental, temporary housing, apprenticeship, skills training, legal counselling support, food, clothes, psychosocial support, language courses, general financial assistance/cash grant, shelter support, rent subsidy, help with finding a job, business training, capital for starting a business, health support, education/language support for children, etc.)?

9.3. What did you find particularly useful in the assistance package that you received?

9.4. What was lacking in this assistance package? (In other words, what would make a difference in helping you mitigate the challenges that you face during return and reintegration?)

9.5. To what extent do you think your conditions today would be different if you hadn't received this assistance?

If no:

9.6. Did you know that such assistance exists? If yes, why did you not participate in it?

Reintegration outcomes

10. Since you have returned, what were the main challenges you faced? How did they change over time since your return?

Probe: Have you had any challenges in accessing employment and training opportunities or public services? How is it now? (economic dimensions)

Probe: Have you had any emotional challenges? How do you feel now? (psychological dimensions)

Probe: Since your return, how do you feel you have been received by your family, friends and the wider community? (social dimensions) How do you deal with these challenges? Has anyone helped you face these challenges? If so, who and how?

Probe: Do you feel that you have a strong network of family and friends that would provide you support should you need it?

11. In your opinion, did your migration and return conditions and experience (as a forced or voluntary returnee, or as someone who received assistance from IOM) have any influence on your current life circumstances?



12. Do you think as a man/woman your return or reintegration experience was different than that of a man/woman? (for example, in terms of access to opportunities or the way you are treated by your family or community)
13. What kind of support would make a difference in helping you improve your situation in general after your return?

Future prospects (aspiration to remain or re-migrate)

14. What are your plans for the future?
Probe: Do you have short-term plans that you would like to achieve in the next 12 months or less?
Probe: What are your longer-term plans? Where would you like to be in 5 to 10 years?
15. Do you feel that you are able to stay and live in this country?
16. Do you wish to stay in this country? Why or why not?
 - 16.1. Where do you want to go? Why?



ANNEX 5. FAMILY MEMBER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introductory questions

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself? (where and when born, where do you live at the moment, what is your educational and professional background, family situation)
2. Can you tell us a little bit about your relationship with your [family member]? How close are you and your [family member]? How often do you see each other? How was it before she/he migrated?

Perceptions about family member's decision to migrate and decision to return

3. How did you feel about your [family member's] decision to migrate? Did you support him/her?
4. How did you feel about your [family member's] return? Did you feel that it was the right thing to do? [Alternatively: Were you supportive of his/her decision to return? Why (not)?]
 - 4.1. Did your opinion change over time? Why?

Perceptions about reintegration challenges

5. Overall, how do you think s/he is doing after return?
6. In your opinion, what has been her/his biggest challenges since s/he returned?(if needed, probe with legal status, freedom of movement, housing conditions, employment, social life)
7. Do you feel you were able to support her/him in facing these challenges? How?
8. Can you think of any other kind of support that you wish you could offer her/him to help her/him adapt to the circumstances?

Perceptions about family/community acceptance

9. Do you feel that your close family was welcoming to [family member] upon his/her return?
 - 9.1. Did s/he receive any help from the immediate family members? [If yes] If I may ask, what kind of help did s/he receive?
10. Do you think being a returnee (or a forced returnee) distinguishes your [family member] from other people in your family? Is she/he seen differently than s/he was before s/he migrated? In what ways?
11. Do you feel your community [e.g., town, neighborhood, extended family members, friends and other social circle] was welcoming to [family member]?
 - 11.1. Did s/he receive any help from the community? [If yes] What kind of help did s/he receive?



ANNEX 6. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself? Where are you from, what is your professional background, and what is the name of the organization/institution you work for? *For community leaders: what community are you part of?*
2. How long have you worked for this organization (in this community) and what is your position in the organization? *For community leaders: what is your role in this community?*
3. Can you please describe your activities with regard to returnees?
4. How would you describe the demographic profile of returnees from abroad in this country/community? (in terms of gender composition, educational background, geographic distribution, ethnic and social background, time spent abroad, etc.)
5. What are the major challenges returnees face upon return? [Probe: access to employment and training opportunities, local community acceptance, access to social support mechanisms, psychosocial support]
 - 5.1. How does time play a role in the adaptation process? Do you think the returnees' circumstances change as some time passes after their return? And how do you think time spent abroad plays a role in the adaptation process?
6. How are returnees generally perceived by other family and society members?
7. Can you think of specific challenges faced by female versus male returnees?
8. Can you think of specific challenges faced by forced versus voluntary returnees?
9. How can these challenges be addressed effectively by policy makers and programs? Do you have any suggestions?
10. In your opinion, which type of policies and programs should be prioritized to improve reintegration outcomes of returnees?
11. Which organizations provide the most important support programs for returnees in this country? And what is the role of the national government in return and reintegration? (Probe: national policies, local policies, how are returnees perceived, etc.)
12. What are the capacities of the different organizations?
13. And how is reintegration support coordinated among the different organizations?
14. What is your personal view on the effectiveness of government policies in this field?
15. Is there any other important information you would like to share regarding this topic?



ANNEX 7. CONSENT FORM

Declaration of Consent for participation in the research studies:

*Comparative Reintegration Outcomes in Forced and Voluntary Returns,
Understanding and implementing gender-sensitive sustainable reintegration*

I have been informed about the study's goals and research methods. I have read the written information provided to me about the study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I have been able to think about my participation in the study, which is completely voluntary. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time without needing to give a reason.

I agree to participate in the study:

Name:

Birth date:

Signature: Date:

By checking this box, I agree that my interview may be recorded, as confirmed by the signature below:

Signature:

Date:

The undersigned, responsible researcher, declares that the said person has been informed orally and in writing about the study mentioned above.

Name:

Function:

Signature:

Date:



ANNEX 8. INFORMATION SHEET

Information sheet for respondents for research Studies on Comparative Reintegration Outcomes in Forced and Voluntary Returns Understanding and implementing gender-sensitive sustainable reintegration

Introduction

This form gives you information on the research study you have been asked to participate in. It outlines the purpose and structure of the study so you can make a more informed decision about whether or not you would like to participate in this research study. The person conducting the interview will describe the study to you and answer any questions you may have about it. If the interviewer cannot fully address your questions, please feel free to contact the focal point identified below.

Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, please sign the consent form to record your consent.

Basic information

Title of Study: Comparative Reintegration Outcomes in Forced and Voluntary Returns,
Understanding and implementing gender-sensitive sustainable reintegration

Investigator(s): Sonja Fransen, Eleni Diker, Sarah Roder, Mohammad Khalaf, Ortrun Merkel, Katie Kuschminder

Project contact: Sonja.fransen@maastrichtuniversity.nl or eleni.diker@maastrichtuniversity.nl

Organization: Maastricht University, UNU-MERIT/Maastricht Graduate School of Governance

Commissioned by: International Organization for Migration (IOM) under the EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub funded by the EU

What is this study about?

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has commissioned Maastricht University to conduct studies titled “Comparative Reintegration Outcomes in Forced and Voluntary Returns” and “Understanding and implementing gender-sensitive sustainable reintegration” under the EU funded Knowledge Management Hub. The research studies will be carried out in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, the Gambia, Somalia and El Salvador. The research team will conduct interviews with adult male and female participants who forcibly or voluntarily returned to their mentioned countries of origin in order to achieve the following objectives of the studies:

1. to compare the differences in reintegration sustainability outcomes between forced and voluntary returnees and determine factors that affect these outcomes at the individual, community and structural level,
2. to examine the gender dimension of reintegration (experiences, outcomes, opportunities and challenges), including specific vulnerabilities and needs faced by men and women, and to identify good practices and recommendations for gender-sensitive reintegration programming.

What does participation in this study entail?



In this study, you will talk to an interviewer, who will ask you questions about your opinions, your personal or professional experiences, and your experiences as a migrant who returned to his/her country of origin. The interview will take up to one hour, during which you can always refuse to answer a specific question or opt out of the interview altogether. With your permission, the interview will be recorded. This is done to ensure that the interviewer does not misunderstand the information you provide and can return to the conversation to correct or complete their notes. If you do not want to be recorded, please inform the interviewer, who will instead take more extensive written notes as you talk.

Do I have to be part of this study?

No, you can choose whether or not to participate. Even if you initially agree to take part in the study but decide later that you would like to withdraw, you always have the right to do so. You may decide to stop participating at any time. To do so, you can write an email to the researchers using the email address provided above.

Are there any risks involved in the study?

We do not foresee any risks related to your participation in the study. The interviewer will discuss any potential safety or security concerns you may have about the interview before you agree to participate. The interviewer will ensure that any information you share remains confidential and will never be given to employers, colleagues, family members, or other persons who are not involved in the design and analysis of the research. Whenever you feel uncomfortable with a question or do not wish to answer, feel free to indicate that.

What are the benefits of the study?

We hope that the information we collect can help in designing better return and reintegration support programs and policies, and in identifying good practices for gender-sensitivity in reintegration programming and policies. You will not receive anything to take part in the study, but the results of the study will be made publicly available in the form of a report, which can also be provided to you on request.

How will the information given in the study be used?

All the information we collect in the study will be used to inform a report, which is being prepared for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the EU. This report may be published and shared with different people and organizations. It is possible that other publications, including policy briefs, blogs, and journal articles, may be produced based on the information collected. The report will not list the name of any participant, and the report will not allow for any participants to be identified. After the interview, respondent's personal information will be separated from the information they gave. This will help make sure that any information is anonymized, which means that personal information cannot be linked to the information shared.

Data collected will be anonymized after completing the data collection phase. The interview will be recorded based on your consent. The audio files will be then transcribed and translated into English. The transcripts will be fully blinded prior to analysis, with all your personal identifiers removed from the transcripts. Limited personal information such as age, gender will be collected. This information will remain in the transcripts, but data that would allow the identification of individuals will not be collected. Findings from the interviews may be reported on individual level, as individuals quotes may be used in the report.



Quotes will not be attributed to an individual. All participants retain all rights to their personal data as proscribed under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and as such, they may request that such information is erased. The data will be used by the research group for the length of the research process, and some or all of the data will be destroyed once the project has ended, because of a contract or law. Ownership of the data lies with IOM. Hence, we will destroy the data after the project has ended and the data has been shared with IOM.

You can invoke your right to access the stored data or to erase the information provided by contacting this email: eleni.diker@maastrichtuniversity.nl.

If you have any questions or complaints about the privacy legislation of the research, please contact: privacy@maastrichtuniversity.nl

What is the role of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in this project?

The studies are commissioned by IOM under the EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub (KMH). The EU-IOM KMH was established in September 2017 under the European Union-funded Pilot Action on Voluntary Return and Sustainable Community-Based Reintegration. It aims at supporting the implementation of the EU–IOM Actions in support of migrant protection and reintegration by strengthening information-sharing and harmonization of approaches, processes and tools relating to return and reintegration, and by centralizing and disseminating the knowledge gained from these programs and beyond. In this framework, a limited Research Fund has been established as part of the Knowledge Management Hub, to contract studies in order to address knowledge gaps in the field of migrant return and reintegration. Three comprehensive topics looking at the reintegration outcomes through the prism of forced return, child- sensitivity and gender were identified by reintegration practitioners during the AU-EU-UN Workshop on Sustainable Reintegration in 2018 organised with the support of the KMH, and have been commissioned by IOM.

Who should I contact with questions about the study?

If you have any further questions, feel free to ask the interviewer or contact the main researcher (Sonja Fransen) using the email address provided above. You can also contact our focal point in your country:

Country	Local consultant
Afghanistan	Fattah Rabeie
Bangladesh	Mahmudol Hasan Rocky
El Salvador	Keny Martinez
the Gambia	Alieu Loum
Nigeria	Tomiwa Erinosh
Somalia	Mohamoud Ismail



ANNEX 9. REGRESSION SPECIFICATIONS AND RESULTS

Model specification

Regression analysis was used to explore reintegration outcomes across the three dimensions of sustainable reintegration (economic, social and psychosocial), as well as the composite sustainable reintegration score. The standard ordinary least squares -model takes the following form:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where, Y is one of the four reintegration scores: composite (Regression results 1); economic (Regression results 2); social (Regression results 3) or psychosocial (Regression results 4) respectively. X_1 and X_2 represents the two key variables of interest: sex (a binary variable for male/female) and return type (a binary variable for whether the return was forced or voluntary). X_3 is a set of control variables (explained below) that are likely to affect reintegration outcomes, and ε is the error term.

Control variables

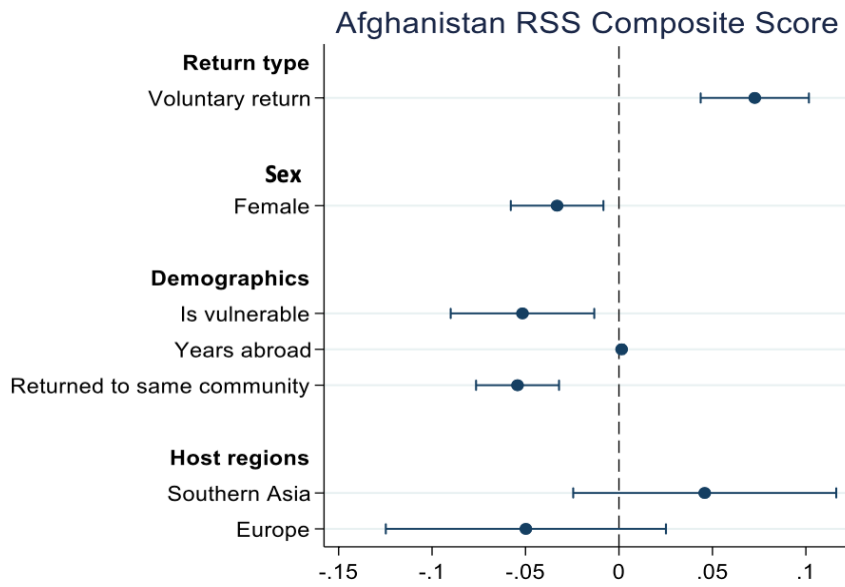
Due to data limitations, the control variables used in the regression analysis vary across different countries. A summary of the control variables included in at least one specification is presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Description of variables

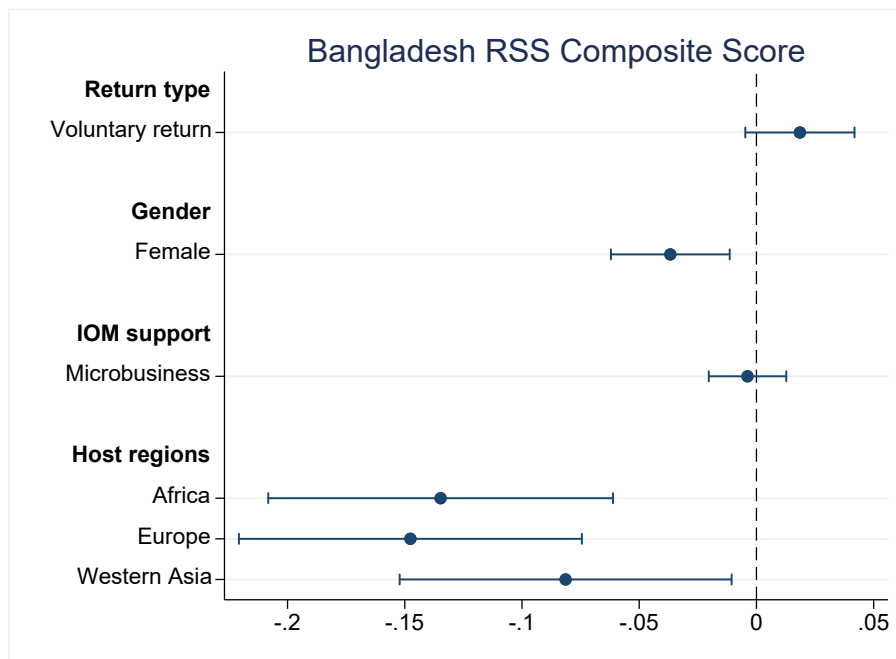
Variable/set of variables	Type and definition
Is vulnerable	Binary variables (1=yes, 0=no) capturing if the return migrant is classified as vulnerable (according to IOM criteria)
Years abroad	Continues variable for number of years the return migrant spent outside country of origin
Returned to same community	Binary variable (1=yes, 0=no) stating if return migrant returned to the same community as he/she was living in prior to migration
Host region	Categorical variable specifying the region in which the host country that the return migrant returned from is located (regions are specified using United Nations definitions)
Age	Continuous variable specifying the age of the return migrant at time of return
Minor	Binary variable (1=yes, 0=no) specifying if return migrant is a minor (14–17 years old)
IOM support	Set of binary variables (1=yes, 0=no) capturing the type of IOM support the return migrant has received.



Figure 12. Regression results (1): Controlling for variables' impact on overall reintegration in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Somalia



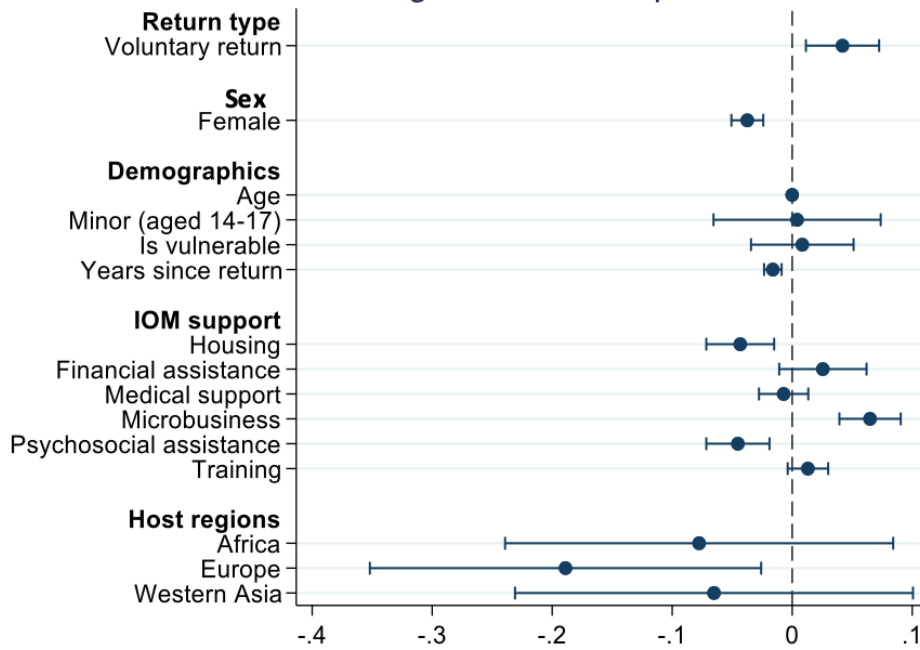
Note: Excluded host region = Western Asia



Note: Excluded host region = Southeast Asia

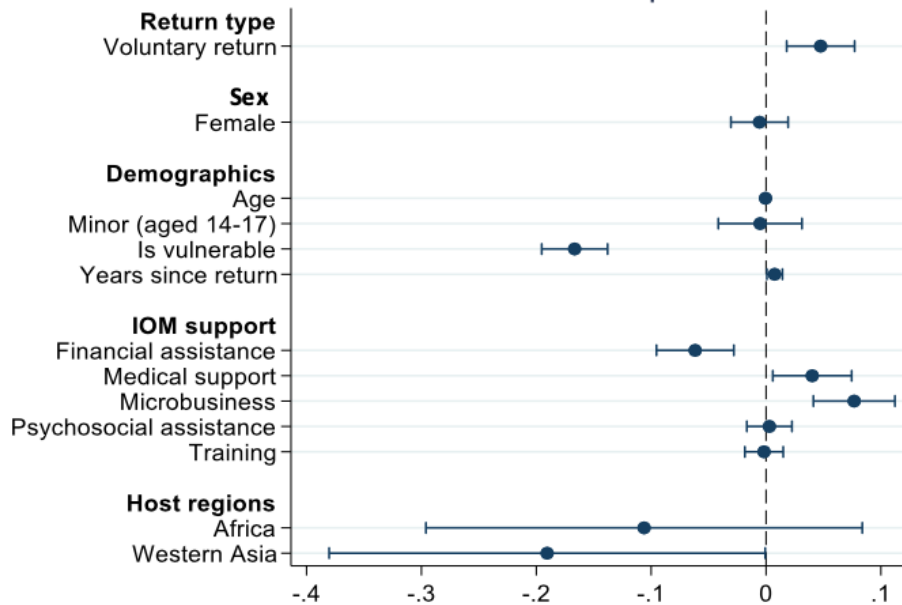


Nigeria RSS Composite Score



Note: Excluded host regions = East and Southern Asia

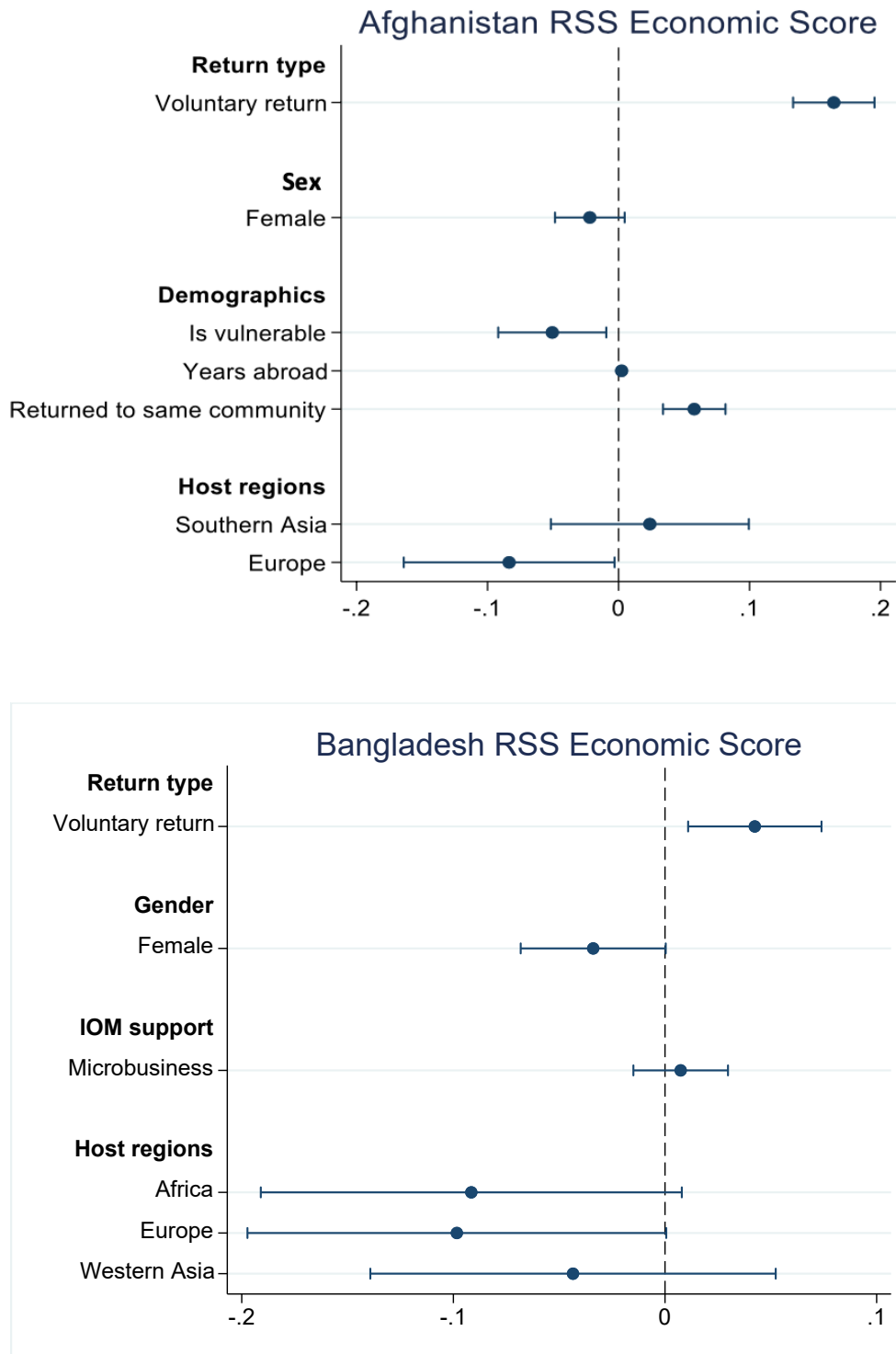
Somalia RSS Composite Score



Note: Excluded host region = Europe

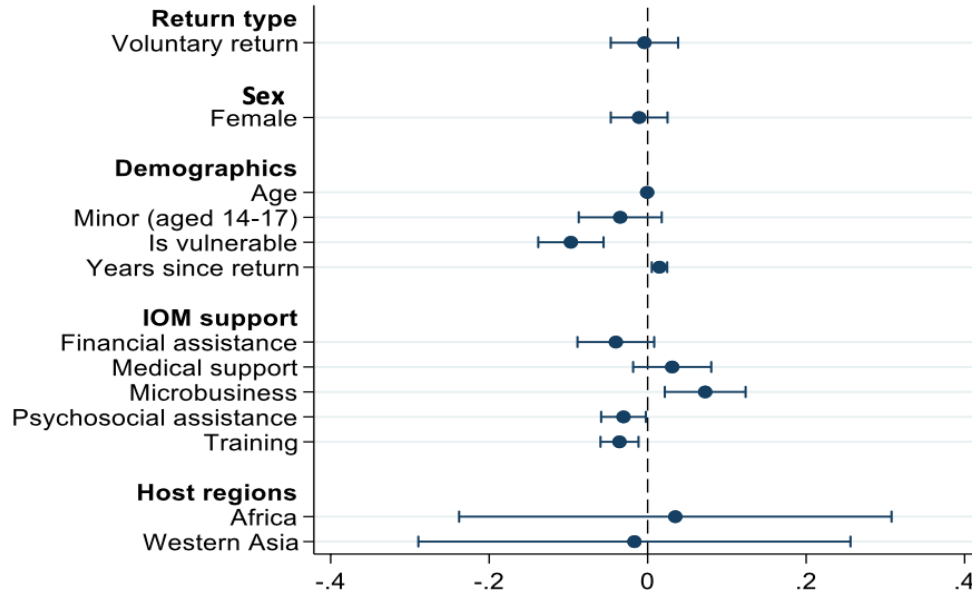


Figure 13. Regression results (2): Other factors impacting economic reintegration outcomes in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Somalia





Somalia RSS Economic Score



Nigeria RSS Economic Score

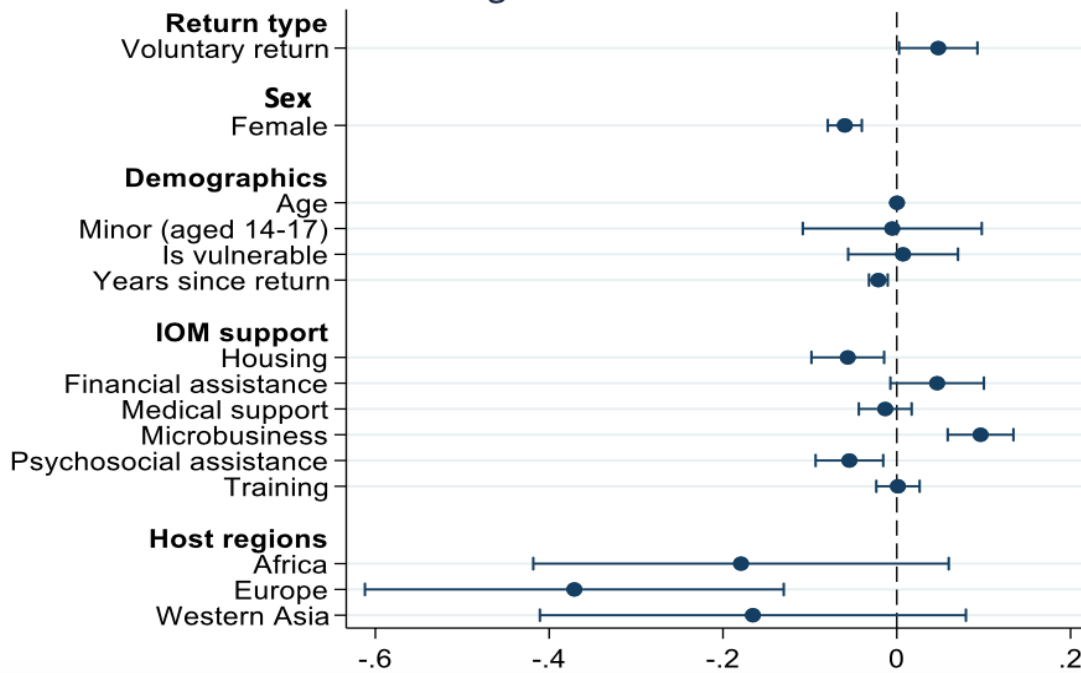
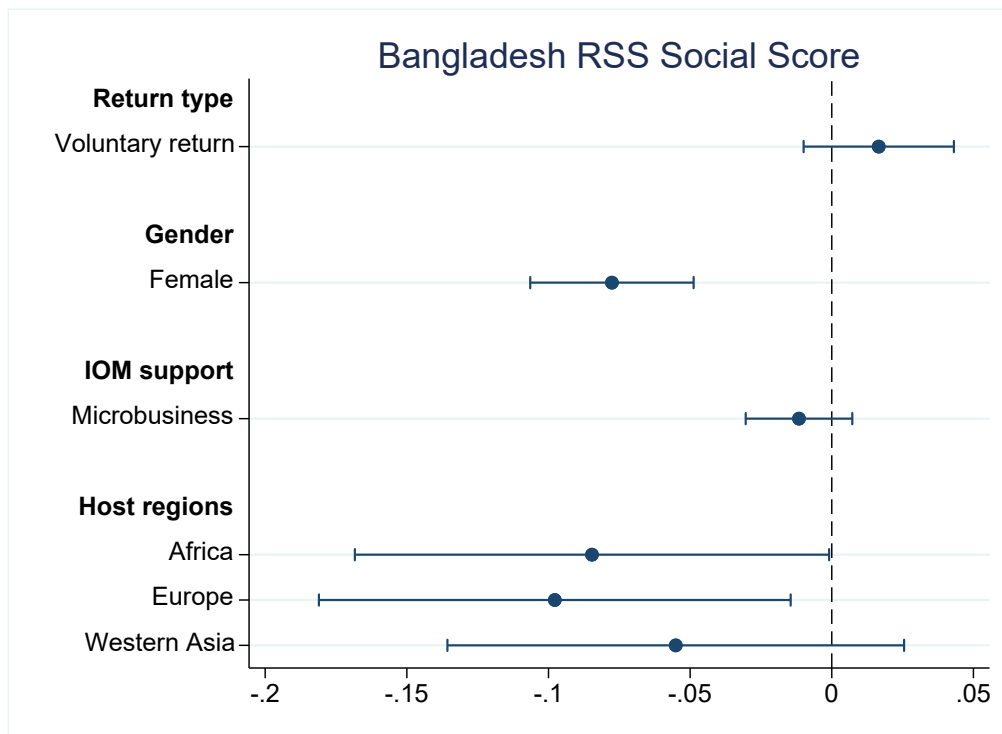
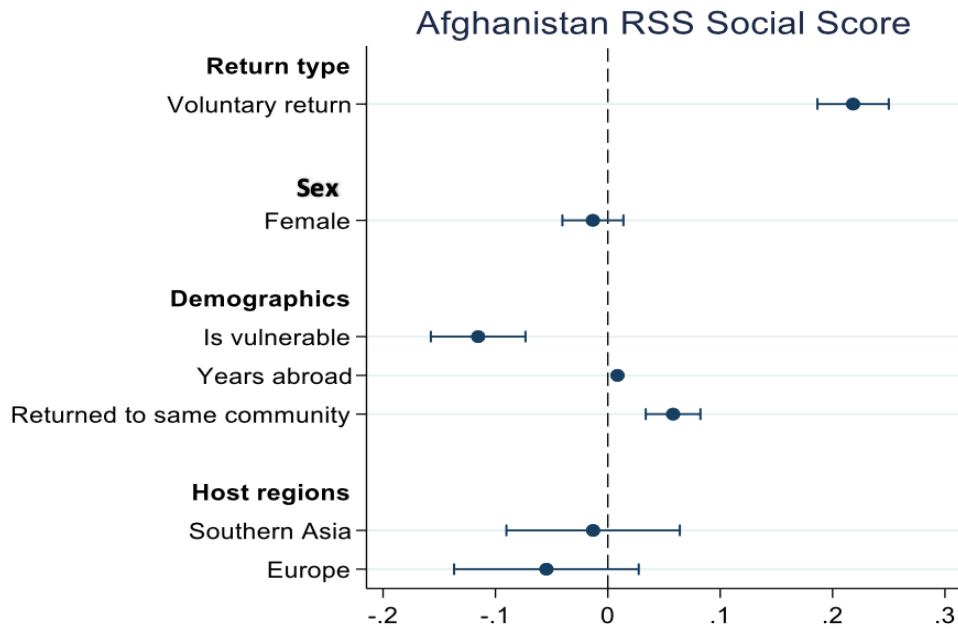


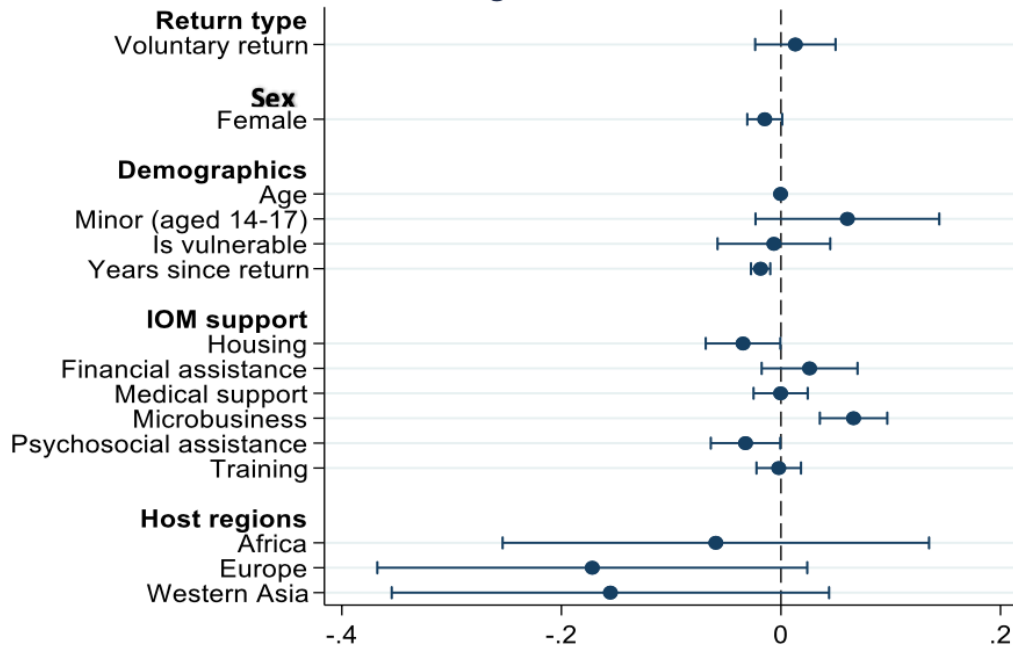


Figure 14. Regression results (3): Other factors impacting social reintegration outcomes in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Somalia





Nigeria RSS Social Score



Somalia RSS Social Score

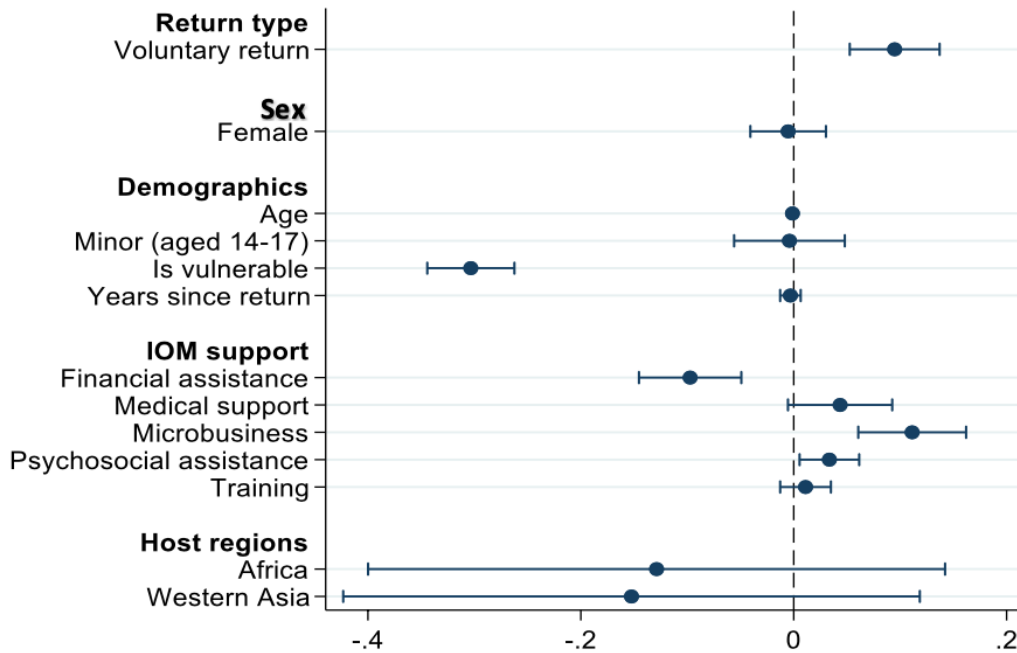
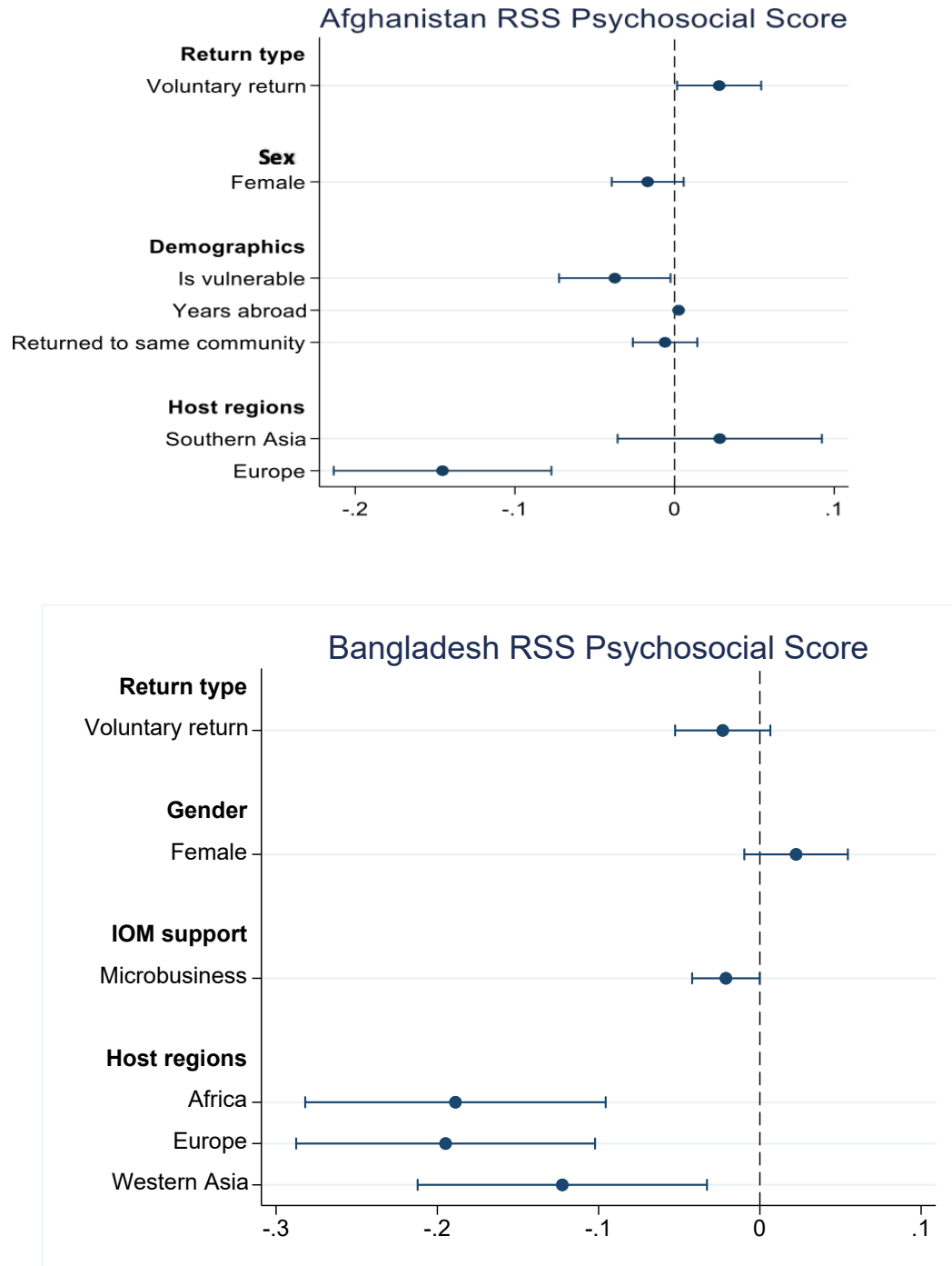


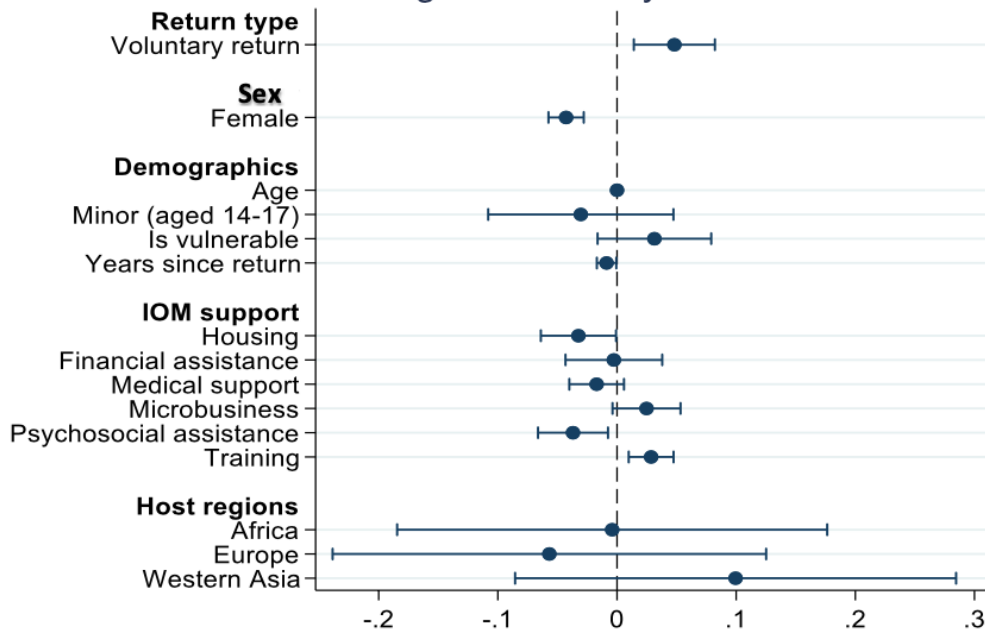


Figure 15. Regression results 4: Other factors impacting psychosocial reintegration outcomes in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Somalia

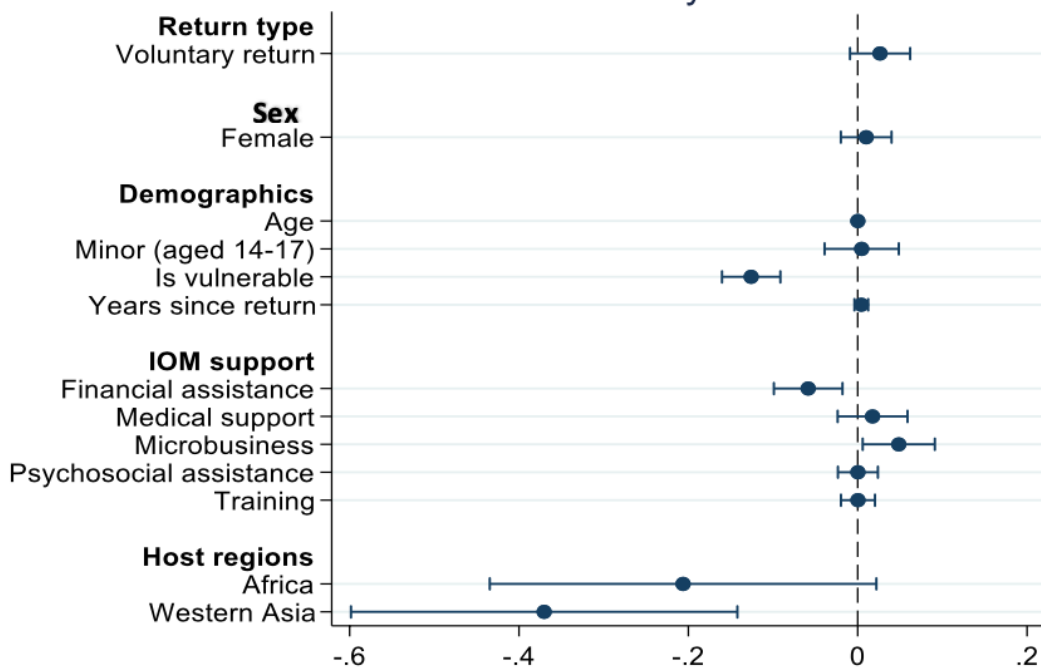




Nigeria RSS Psychosocial Score



Somalia RSS Psychosocial Score





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Maastricht Graduate School of Governance United Nations University, Maastricht University

Maastricht University's Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG)/United Nations University-MERIT (UNU-MERIT) is a higher-education institute that leads the way in operational, policy-relevant studies and evaluations. Its focus is on preparing robust evidence to support more informed and responsive policy across different thematic domains, including migration. In January 2011, the School became part of the United Nations University (UNU) system, which further strengthened its role in preparing researchers, policy analysts, and designers for work in increasingly complex and cross-cutting policy areas. The Migration Research Group currently chairs the UNU Migration Network and is part of the Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development.

EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub

The development and production of this research study is supported by the EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub (KMH), which was established in September 2017 under the Pilot Action on Voluntary Return and Sustainable, Community-based Reintegration, funded by the European Union. The KMH aims to strengthen learning across return and reintegration programmes, and support the harmonization of approaches, processes and tools under the EU-IOM Actions addressing migrant protection and sustainable reintegration in Africa and Asia and beyond.

