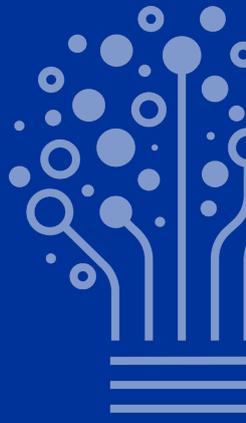




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Research Study #2 | December 2021

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

Executive Summary

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





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



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE RESEARCH¹

This summary paper presents the key findings of the 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 returnees of different genders,² 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.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall objective of the study was to compare differences in reintegration sustainability outcomes between voluntary and forced returnees and between returnees of different genders who received reintegration support, including under the EU-IOM actions³ and to determine individual, community and structural factors that affect these outcomes in their countries of origin. The findings presented in this summary paper are based on fieldwork conducted in Afghanistan⁴, Bangladesh, El Salvador, the Gambia Nigeria and Somalia between March and June 2021. Based on the findings, the aim was to identify effective practices to support reintegration of different types of returnees from a programmatic perspective. To meet these objectives, the research projects were organized around the following research questions:

¹ The research study is undertaken by a team of researchers at Maastricht Graduate School of Governance/UNU-MERIT, consisting of Dr. Sonja Fransen, Eleni Diker, Sarah Röder, Mohammad Khalaf, Dr. Ortrun Merkle, Dr. Lisa Andersson and supported by Pierina Maria Lesti Flores, Kevin O'Dell and Adriana Sofia Marín Peroza. The research team at Maastricht University was supported by a team of local researchers, Fattah Lemar Rabiei, Mahmudol Hasan Rocky, Keny Martinez, Tomiwa Erinosh, Mohamoud Mohamed Ismail and Aliou Loum, to conduct the fieldwork in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, El Salvador, the Gambia Nigeria and Somalia.

² 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. Moreover, 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.

³ 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 (Prottasha).

⁴ 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 AVRRO programme, 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).



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?

METHODOLOGY

The research was based on a mixed-method approach, consisting of the following components:

- 1) Desk reviews detailing the available empirical evidence on the return and reintegration outcomes of forced and voluntary returnees, and male and female returnees;
- 2) 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 (see Figure 1);
- 3) Analysis of in-depth interview data collected among returnees, their family members and key informants in each country and at the global level (see Table 1).

BOX 1. 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 IOM, and funded by the UK Department for International Development, a new survey tool, the RSS, was developed to measure reintegration sustainability. The RSS contains 32 questions that aim to measure reintegration outcomes of returnees in three dimensions: economic, social and psychosocial dimensions.



Figure 1. Overview of final RSS data sample for analysis, by country of origin, sex and type of return

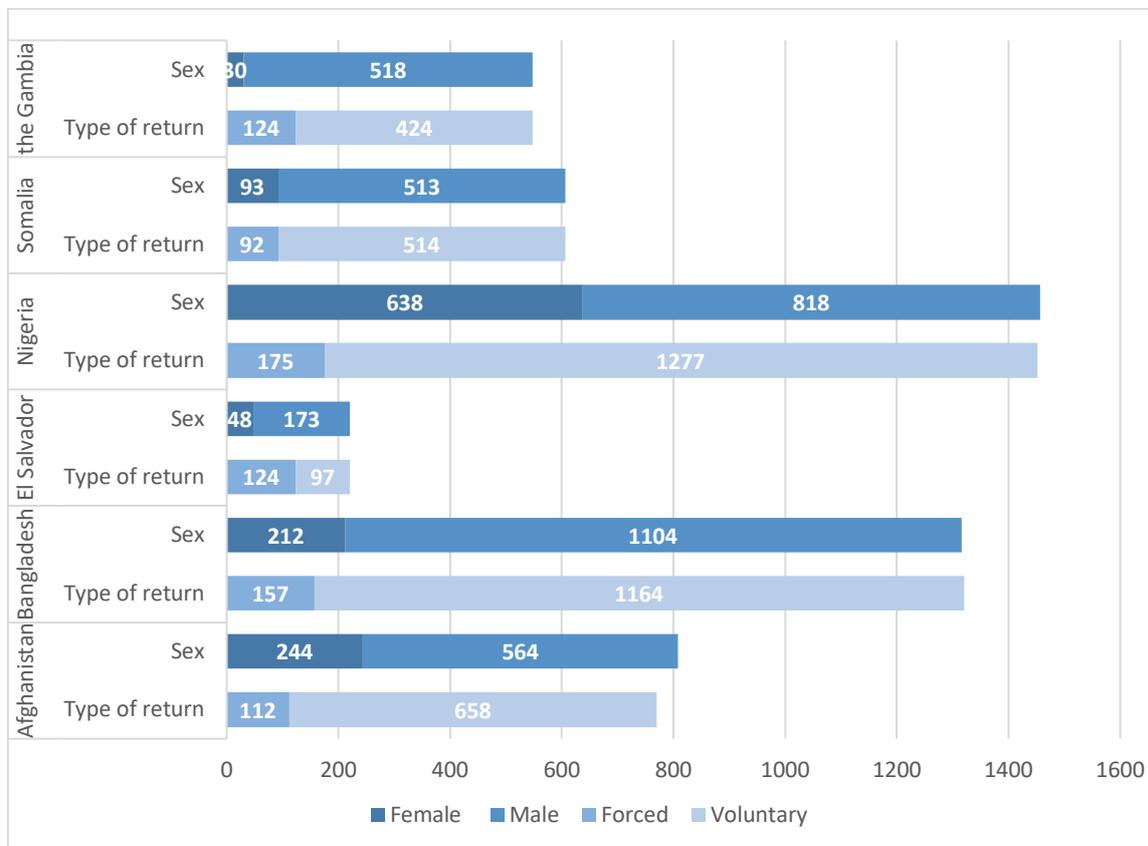


Table 2. Overview of qualitative data by country of origin

Country of origin	Key informant interviews	In-depth interviews with returnees			Family member interviews
		Forced	Voluntary	Total	
Afghanistan	5	6	9	15	1
		Female	Male		
		6	9		
Bangladesh	5	9	14	23	1
		Female	Male		
		14	9		



		<i>Forced</i>	<i>Voluntary</i>	<i>Total</i>	
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

The sampling methodology to collect new RSS data was based on participant lists from IOM⁵ as well as snowball sampling.⁶ The respondents for the in-depth interviews with returnees were sampled from the same contact lists shared by IOM offices with a view to ensure diversity in terms of age, education level, sex and type of return. 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 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. Due to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, the majority of interviews and surveys were conducted via internet and/or on the phone.

⁵ 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).

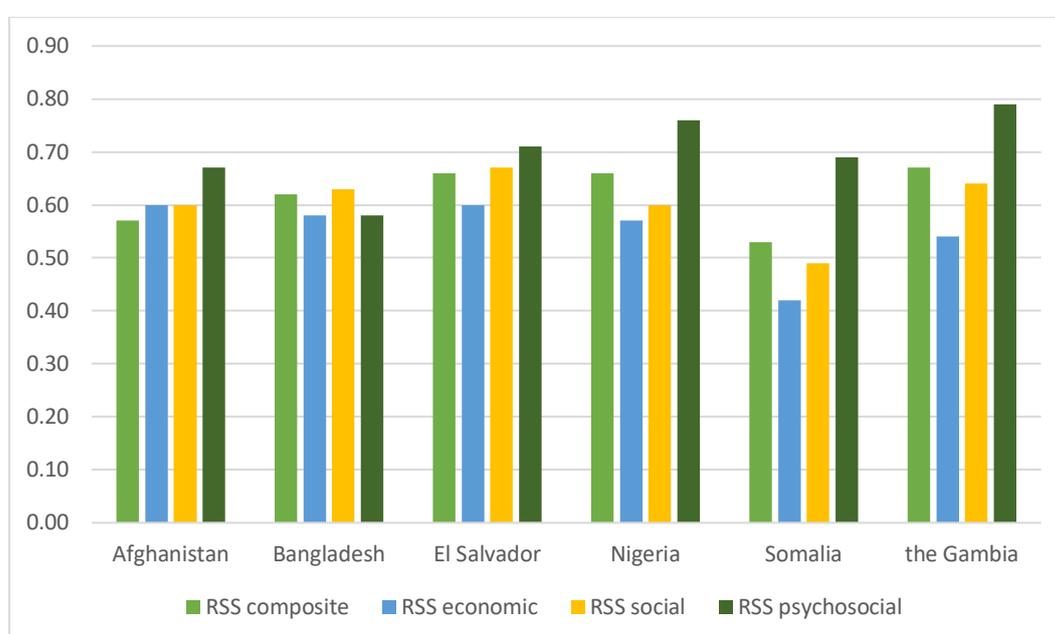
⁶ In Bangladesh, Somalia and Afghanistan, local consultants recruited additional respondents using a snowballing approach in order to generate enough of a sample size to ensure comparability of reintegration outcomes for different types of returnees (voluntary and forced returnees, and female and male returnees).



OVERALL RSS SCORES AND FACTORS IMPACTING REINTEGRATION

As Figure 2 shows, the RSS composite scores⁷ differ significantly across countries, with **Somalia** having the lowest average score (0.53), followed by **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) have the highest average RSS composite scores in the sample, followed by **Bangladesh** (0.62). Important to mention is that when the scores on the other – social and psychosocial – reintegration dimensions are included as control variables in the analysis, reintegration dimensions are highly related, meaning that high scores in one dimension go along with high scores in the other dimensions and vice versa. This finding is reiterated by the qualitative findings, which for example illustrate the importance of psychosocial well-being for economic reintegration.

Figure 2. Overall RSS scores, by country of origin



Economic dimension

In most countries the average economic reintegration scores are lower than the average scores on the other dimensions, which suggests that the economic reintegration process is a challenge for the returnees in our sample. Respondents in Somalia scored the lowest across all but the psychosocial dimension, and particularly low in the economic reintegration dimensions. A closer look at the specific RSS indicators illustrates the economically challenging context in Somalia, with 53 per cent of the respondents reporting being unemployed and 55 per cent having poor access to employment and training opportunities. Somalia is followed by the

⁷ 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.



Gambia, where 38 per cent of RSS respondents reported that they were unemployed and 30 per cent reported poor access to employment and training opportunities. 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 only 33 per cent reported that they were unemployed.

The regression analysis performed on the RSS data highlights some key factors that were significantly related to the economic reintegration process. These factors include the returnees' situation of vulnerability⁸ (significant impact in Somalia and Afghanistan), the type of return, namely whether someone returned voluntarily or not (significant impact in Afghanistan and Bangladesh), and the type of reintegration support received. Overall, those who were defined as vulnerable and those who returned involuntarily had lower economic reintegration scores. The support received in terms of micro-businesses seemed to be positively related to economic reintegration in Somalia and Nigeria. The qualitative data supported this finding, 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 the 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. During the in-depth interviews, respondents mentioned several economic challenges, including pressures of having to pay off debts, unemployment, bad 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.

Social dimension

As Figure 2 shows, the social reintegration scores are generally higher than the economic reintegration scores and lower than the average scores in the psychosocial dimension.⁹ Like in the economic dimensions, 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 documentation (particularly for forced returnees), housing and justice and law enforcement were particularly perceived limited by the respondents in Somalia. The highest score in the social dimension is observed in El Salvador. For example, 82 per cent of the respondents indicated good access to education and 63 per cent reported a good level of access to health

⁸ 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 in the Report). 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's Reintegration Handbook, which defines vulnerability as situational and personal and refers to a restriction on returnees' ability to effectively enjoy their human rights. According to the Handbook, 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 - Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance (2019), page 36. The interviews with gender experts indicated that having a diverse SOGIESC was another element of vulnerability, but the Handbook does not explicitly include diverse SOGIESC as a situation of vulnerability. Therefore, this aspect had not been included in guidance to local consultants.

⁹ Except in Bangladesh where social reintegration scores are higher than scores in other dimensions and in Afghanistan where social and psychosocial reintegration scores are equal.



care there. Access to safe drinking water is limited in El Salvador, with 20 per cent of the respondents indicated having poor access to it.

Key factors that were highlighted in the regression analysis to be significantly related to social reintegration included the type of return (significant impact in Somalia and Afghanistan), the situation of vulnerability (significant impact in Somalia and Afghanistan) and the reintegration support that was received. Forced returnees and returnees that were in a situation of vulnerability were more likely to score lower in this dimension. In particular, the micro-business support that was received was related to higher 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 was perceived as particularly challenging for forced returnees, for those who had been subject to abuse and exploitation during their migration journey, and for those who spent significant periods of time abroad. Major challenges cited by returnees and key informants were access to housing, health care and documentation. Moreover, the duration of stay abroad appeared 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 reintegrate within their communities. None of the respondents of the in-depth interviews received social reintegration support.

Psychosocial dimension

The lowest average score in the psychosocial dimension is found in Bangladesh and the highest scores are recorded in the Gambia and Nigeria. Scores in the psychosocial dimension are generally higher than scores in social and economic dimensions, except in Bangladesh (Figure 2). A closer look at the data reveals that the critical indicators in the context of Bangladesh are signs of distress and feeling of discrimination: most RSS respondents (74%) reported experiencing negative feelings since returning to Bangladesh, and 32% reported experiencing discrimination. In addition, 38 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 negative feelings since returning to Afghanistan, and another 43 per cent expressed desire to receive psychological support. These results are in line with the qualitative findings; the psychological challenges, particularly among those who had negative experiences during their migration journey or during detention or deportation, was a recurring theme in the in-depth interviews with returnees and key informants.

The results from the regression analysis reveal that the situation of vulnerability of the returnee (significant impact in Afghanistan and Somalia), the type of return (significant impact in Nigeria), and the region from which the returnee 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 had been forced to return had lower reintegration scores in the psychosocial dimension than voluntary returnees. In Afghanistan and Somalia, those with a situation of vulnerability scored lower in this dimension. In terms of host country region, those who had



returned from Europe to Afghanistan had much lower scores than those who had returned from host countries in the region. This finding is supported by the qualitative data. Those who had returned from Europe explained how they had exhausted their financial resources during the relatively more expensive irregular journey to Europe, how their migration expectations had been unmet, and how their feeling of ‘failure’ was amplified by community pressure to provide for family who falsely assumed that returnees would come back with savings.

Having a weak social network, low levels of community and family acceptance and conflict within the family were some of the common negative experiences that came up during the in-depth interviews. A lack of social networks was mentioned in all country case studies and particularly among those who had 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. In Nigeria, family rejection often occurred based on a narrative of ‘failed migration’, where the return represented a loss of the initial investment in covering the costs of the (often) irregular migration journey and the loss of remittances. 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 returnees 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. None of the respondents of the in-depth interviews received psychosocial reintegration support.

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 voluntary and forced returnees. To fill this knowledge gap, this research explored how the economic, social and psychosocial reintegration experiences differ for forced and voluntary returnees. The RSS results are complemented with detailed insights from the in-depth interviews with returnees, their family members and key informants to provide context and a deeper understanding of the findings.

BOX 2.

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.”¹⁰ Returnees who are eligible to participate in IOM’s 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.”¹¹

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

¹⁰ IOM, [Glossary on Migration](#) (2019), page 229.

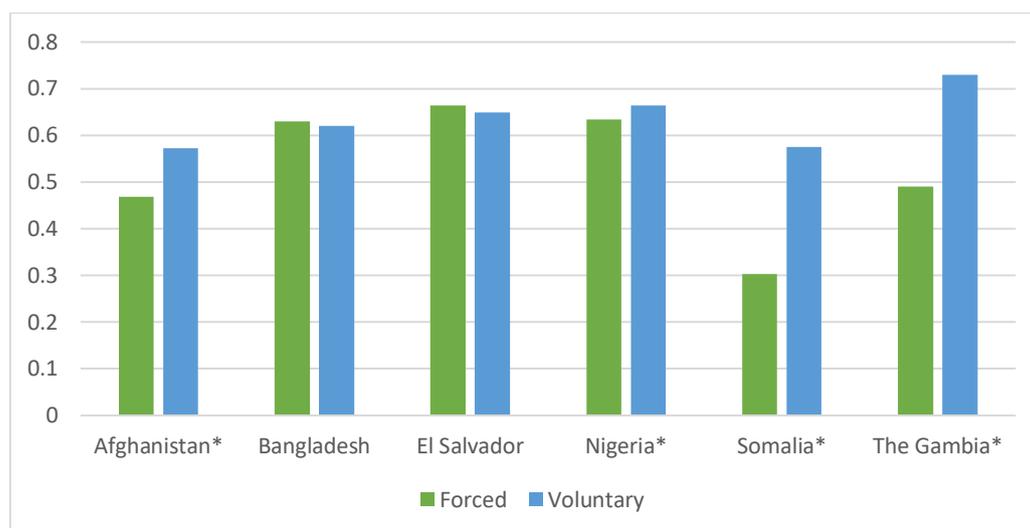
¹¹ IOM, [A Framework for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration](#) (2018), page 2.



or judicial act or decision.”¹² 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.

Overall RSS scores for forced and voluntary returnees

Figure 3. Overall RSS composite scores, by country of origin and type of return



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

As shown in Figure 3, forced returnees generally have lower RSS scores across the countries, except in El Salvador. 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 score better than voluntary returnees in the sample group for El Salvador.

The data revealed particularly low values reported for forced returnees in Somalia, the Gambia and Afghanistan. The regression results corroborate that the type of return had a significant impact on reintegration scores, with forced returnees having lower scores, on average, than voluntary returnees when other individual factors (e.g. sex, age, situation of vulnerability, years since return) and IOM reintegration support variables are controlled for (although the correlation is not statistically significant for Bangladesh). The statistical differences between the RSS scores of forced and voluntary returnees are mostly driven by differences in the economic and social dimensions of RSS.

How do economic reintegration outcomes vary for forced and voluntary returnees?

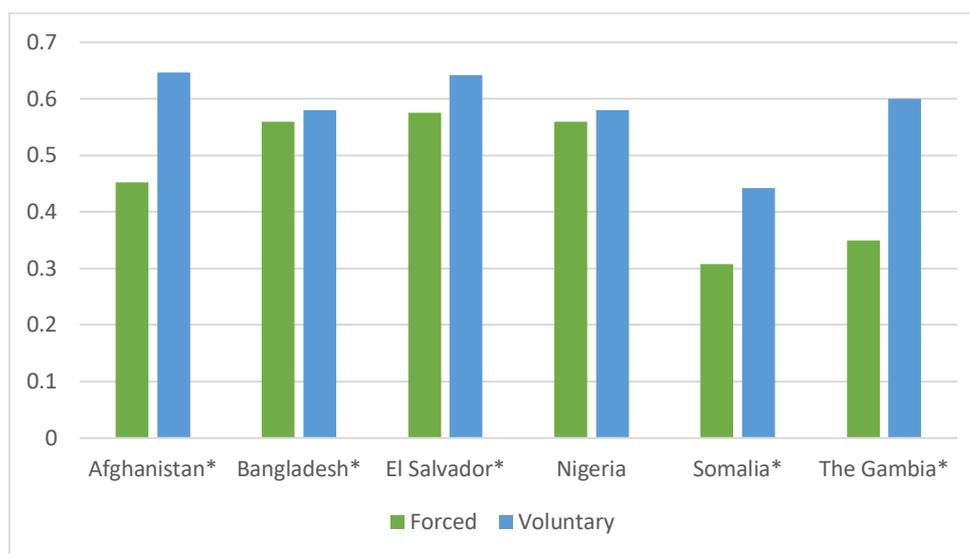
Across the different countries, voluntary returnees consistently have higher average economic reintegration scores. In some countries, notably Afghanistan, Somalia and the Gambia, the differences between forced and

¹² IOM, *Glossary*, page 77.



voluntary returnees are large, whereas in Bangladesh and Nigeria the differences are small and in the case of Nigeria the difference does not hold when the research team controlled for other factors in the regression analysis. 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.

Figure 4. RSS economic dimension score, by country of origin and type of return



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

A closer examination of specific RSS questions in the economic dimension show that, in proportion to the overall returnee population in Afghanistan, forced returnees particularly scored low on the question about their level of satisfaction with the current economic situation. While in the overall sample 79 per cent of respondents were satisfied with their current economic situation, this percentage was around 46 per cent for forced returnees. Moreover, while 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 50 per cent of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current economic circumstances, this was 93 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 interviews revealed more insights into the additional difficulties that forced returnees face in their reintegration process. In particular, forced returnees reported more psychological problems due to their distressing migration and return experiences, which in turn affected their motivation and ability to work upon return. Due to the sudden nature of return, they had been less able (if at all) to prepare for return and came back with little or no savings. Another recurring theme was the social stigma attached to returnees, which can be particularly intense for forced returnees in some contexts and hinders their abilities to access job opportunities, thereby diminishing prospects of economic self-sufficiency.



Credits: A Somali returnee in Burco, Somalia.

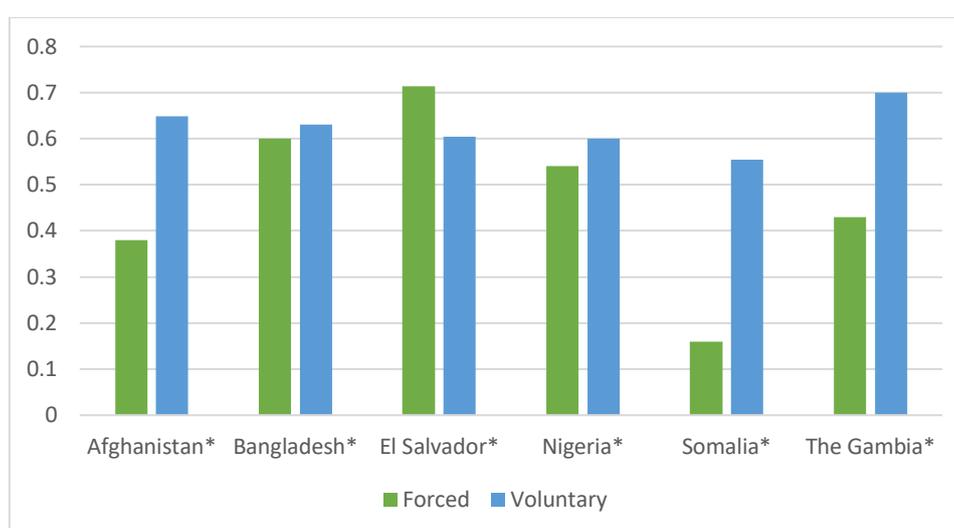
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How do social reintegration outcomes vary for forced and voluntary returnees?

The RSS data highlights how forced returnees have lower social reintegration scores on average, except in El Salvador where forced returnees scored better than voluntary returnees (Figure 5). 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 forced returnees reported poor access to education, whereas only 20 per cent of voluntary returnees did so. 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.

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



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

The regression results show that the differences in social reintegration between forced and voluntary returnees are statistically significant in each country. When controlling for all other variables¹³ in the regression analysis, these results are robust, except for in Nigeria, where forced and voluntary returnees seem to have equal access to social services upon return. Other key factors that were highlighted in the regression analysis as being significantly related to social reintegration included the **situation of vulnerability** (significant impact in Somalia and Afghanistan) and **the reintegration support** received by returnees (significant impact in Nigeria and Somalia). In particular, the micro-business support that was received contributed to more sustainable social reintegration outcomes in Nigeria and Somalia. 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.

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

¹³ Important control variables that cannot be consistently included in the analysis are for example education level, years spent in the host country, time since return, whether the migrant returned to the same family/community as prior to migration, the employment status in the host country, reasons for migrating etc. Some of these variables are collected through the RSS, however not consistently in some countries and thus including them in the analyses was not possible. In countries where these variables are consistently collected, they were included in the analysis.

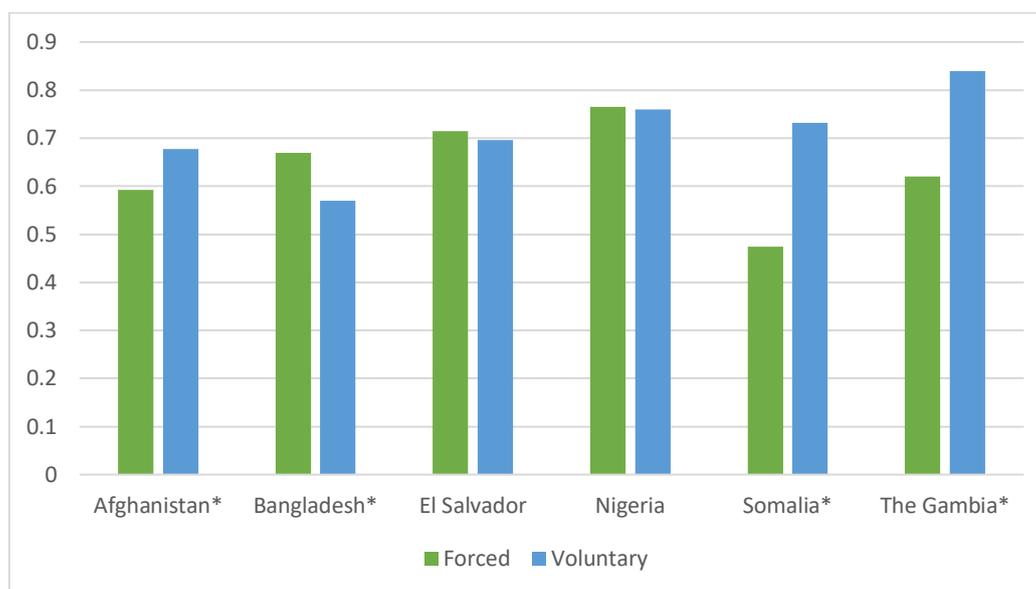


returnees faced some additional challenges as compared to voluntary returnees in terms of access to social services such as housing, health care, and documentation. In Nigeria, for example, forced returnees, and particularly those who had been victims of trafficking, were often in immediate need of housing, cash assistance and other types of social support such as health care. Often facing family rejection, there was an urgent need to provide shelter to this population. 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. 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, for example, 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.

How do psychosocial reintegration outcomes vary for forced and voluntary returnees?

The psychosocial RSS dimension scores show mixed results for forced and voluntary returnees across countries, as shown in Figure 5. Whereas in Bangladesh, Nigeria and El Salvador, forced returnees have better psychosocial reintegration scores, the 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, and particularly those related to the strength of 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 5 per cent of voluntary returnees reported to feel unsafe. In Nigeria, on the other hand, many psychosocial indicators yielded similar results for forced and voluntary returnees. For example, in terms of participation in social activities, 67 per cent of all respondents indicated that they participated in social activities in the community, showing similar prevalences for forced returnees.

Figure 6. 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 reveals that voluntary return is positively related to psychosocial reintegration scores when we hold other variables constant, meaning that voluntary returnees have better outcomes than forced returnees in general. The qualitative interviews highlighted key aspects that may create additional layers of challenges for forced returnees, such as the difficult experiences during migration and deportation, separation of families, experiencing signs of distress and emotional exhaustion, diminished levels of trust in institutions, and family/community rejection. Forced returnees had often migrated irregularly and had therefore been more exposed to risks of trafficking, detention, extortion and abuse, which affected their psychosocial well-being after return.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REINTEGRATION OUTCOMES THROUGH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and whether someone is intersex can have an important impact on individual experiences at different stages of migration, including return migration and the reintegration process. Societal norms and expectations associated with being a man, woman or a person with diverse SOGIESC can drastically affect reintegration experiences by interfering with a returnee's ability to access resources (tangible and intangible) to rebuild their lives.¹⁴ Yet, while gendered and intersectional perspectives are becoming essential in migration studies, gendered analyses of return migration and reintegration processes are still relatively uncommon.¹⁵

To address this knowledge gap, this research studied the reintegration experiences of male and female returnees, as well as gendered experiences of the reintegration process. These findings are 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 RSS results are complemented with detailed insights from the in-depth interviews with returnees, their family members and key informants on the national and global level to provide context and a deeper understanding of the findings. The in-depth interviews with returnees and key informants allowed for reflection on experiences of reintegration for different genders, including returnees with diverse SOGIESC, however, the focus of the study is largely on the reintegration differences between female and male returnees based on presumed sex.

¹⁴ See IOM Gender and Migration [website](#).

¹⁵ See Girma, H., [The salience of gender in return migration](#), *Sociology Compass* 11(5): 2 (2017).



BOX 3.

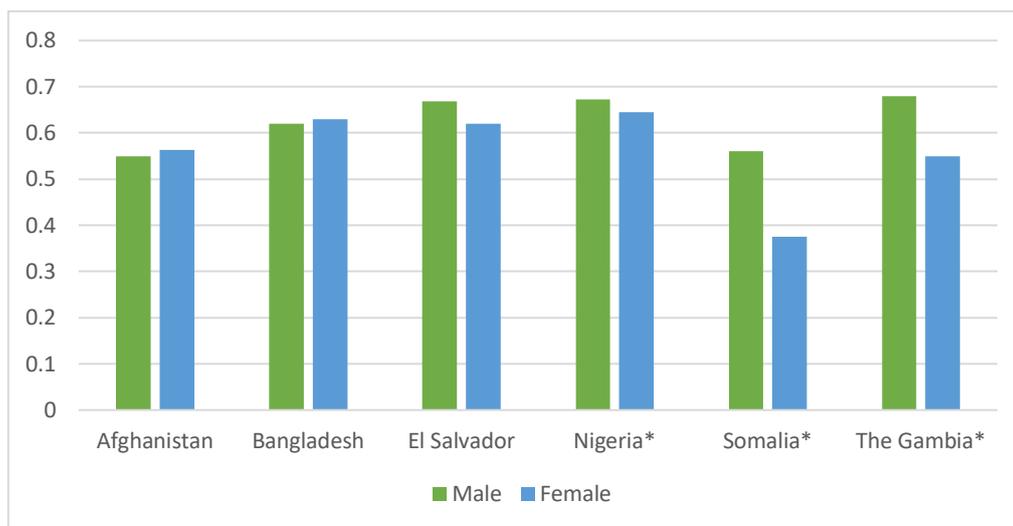
IOM defines **gender** as “the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth”.¹⁶

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.”¹⁷

Overall RSS scores for male and female returnees

An analysis of overall RSS scores for male and female returnees shows that female returnees in our sample group have lower reintegration outcomes in all countries, except in Afghanistan and Bangladesh (Figure 7). In El Salvador and Nigeria female returnees have slightly lower reintegration scores than male returnees. In Somalia and the Gambia, on the other hand, females have significantly lower reintegration outcomes than males.

Figure 7. Overall RSS composite scores, by country of origin and sex



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

The regression analysis shows that the results for male and female returnees in the composite scores hold in most country cases, except in Somalia. 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. Here, the type of return (forced versus voluntary), the situation of vulnerability and the type of reintegration support that is received correlate more strongly with the reintegration process. 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

¹⁶ IOM, [IOM SOGIESC: Full Glossary of Terms](#) (2020), page 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, page 1.



returned from Europe, Asia and the Middle East), as well as variables related to reintegration support provided by IOM. These findings are consistent with the insights derived from the qualitative data, which revealed the additional challenges that female returnees face in their reintegration processes, as elaborated in the following.

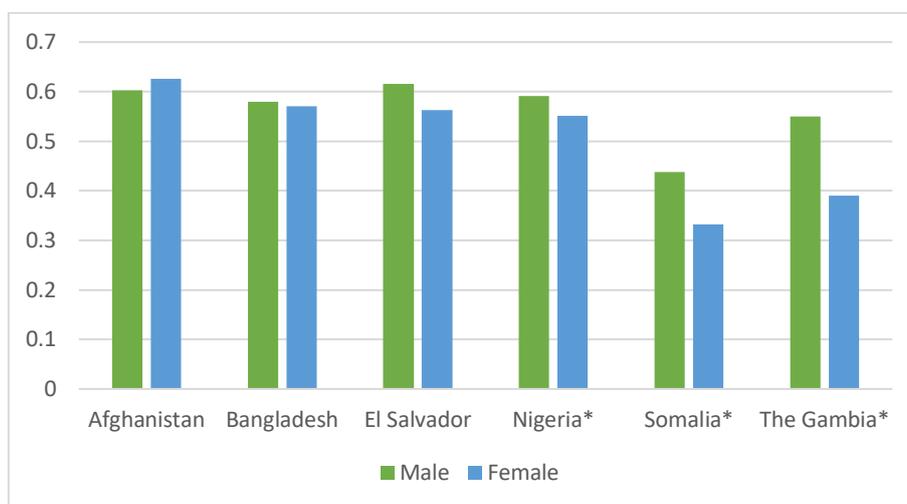
How do economic reintegration outcomes vary for male and female returnees?

Across the research sites, the quantitative data reveals that female returnees in our sample group often faced more difficulties to reintegrate economically than male returnees (Figure 8). This was the case in all countries, except for in Afghanistan. The regression results, however, show that the negative relation between being female and reintegration is statistically significant only in the case of Nigeria.

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, for example, where females scored lower compared to males in terms of economic satisfaction. Moreover, 43 per cent of the overall Afghan respondents perceive 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.

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Figure 8. RSS economic dimension score, by country of origin and sex



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

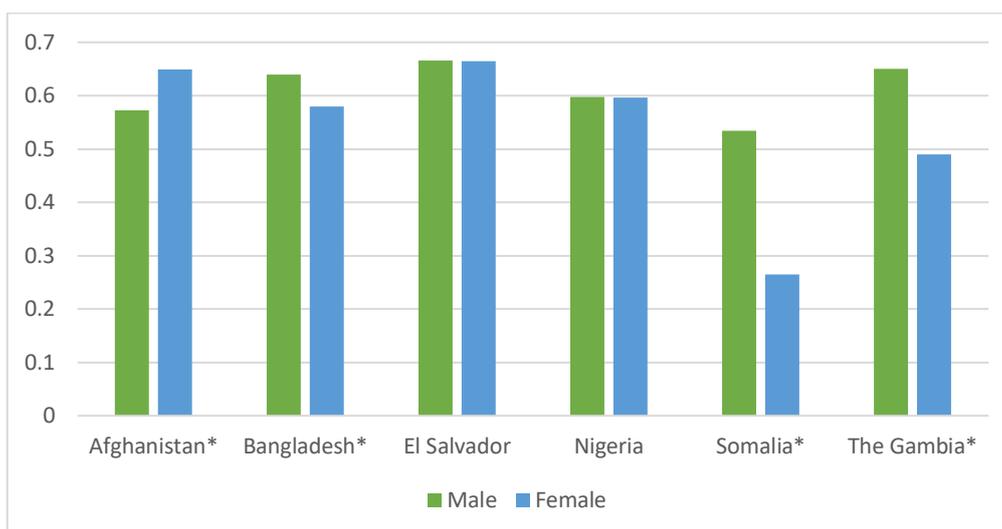


Based on the qualitative interviews, the lower economic reintegration scores for female returnees can be explained by their limited access to employment opportunities due to societal stereotypes and norms, distressful experiences during the migration journey, as well as due to the circumstances of separated or widowed females who faced 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.

How do social reintegration outcomes vary for male and female returnees?

The RSS dataset shows that the social reintegration scores of male and female returnees vary across countries (Figure 9). 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.

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



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

When controlling for other variables in the regression analysis, sex is not significantly related to social reintegration, except for in 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 RSS indicators that led to lower scores for **Somali and Bangladeshi females** in our sample group included access to housing, documentation and justice and law enforcement, which were particularly lower for females in Bangladesh. Almost all indicators revealed lower results for females in Somalia. On the other hand, the factors that contributed to lower scores for Afghan males related to access to documentation and access to justice and law enforcement; males perceived poorer access to these services compared to females.

In the in-depth interviews, bad health conditions were often cited by female returnees who had travelled irregularly or who had experienced violence, abuse or exploitation. Due to either lack of access to or unaffordable health care, these health problems often remained largely untreated. Male returnees rarely

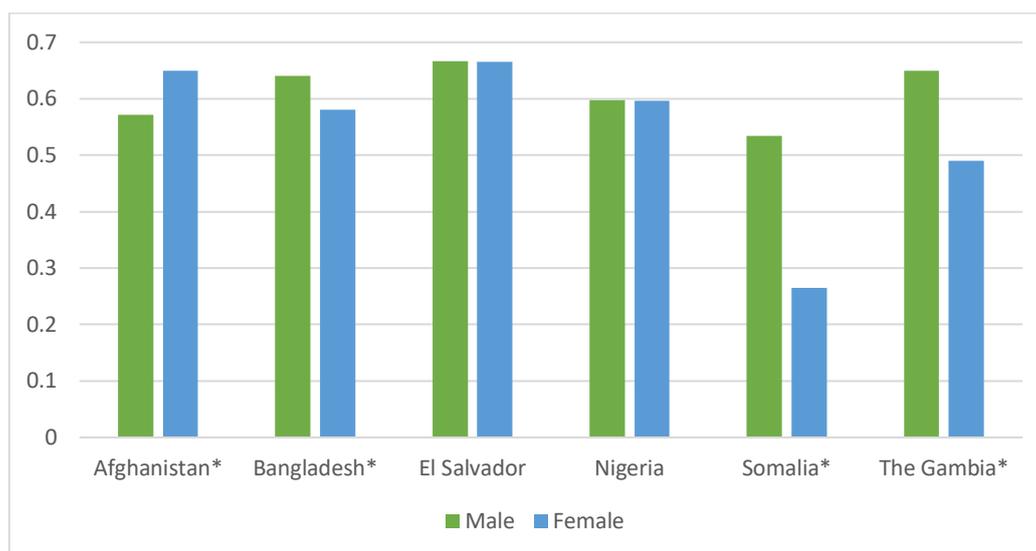


mentioned health related concerns. However, older men often mentioned aging and reduced physical capacities as a reason for their inability to find labour-intensive jobs. Access to safe drinking water and electricity were mentioned by some female respondents in Afghanistan. An anecdote shared by a Bangladeshi female forced returnee illustrated the difficult reintegration process of her Norway-born children in the schooling system due to cultural and language differences. 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.

How do psychosocial reintegration outcomes vary for male and female returnees?

The psychosocial reintegration scores for males and females also vary across countries (Figure 10). In El Salvador, Nigeria, Somalia and the Gambia females have lower psychosocial reintegration scores, while the opposite pattern is registered in Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

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



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

When other variables in the regression analysis are controlled for, significant effects for sex are only registered in Nigeria, with females scoring lower on psychosocial reintegration. The specific RSS indicators where females scored slightly lower than males in Nigeria were 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 impacts their reintegration scores in the psychosocial dimension. The interviews provided more in-depth information on the various factors impacting psychosocial well-being of female and male returnees. 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. Single mothers face specific challenges, such as high dependence on family, and community or family rejection due to disapproval of their decision to migrate. In cases where returnees were unable or unwilling to return to their communities of origin, psychosocial challenges can be amplified. Whilst for men 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 or 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.

BOX 4.

Returnees with diverse SOGIESC

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

Identification of returnees with diverse SOGIESC

A major challenge with regards to this group is identification, as returnees with diverse SOGIESC may not feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or intersex status 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.

Economic reintegration

Stigma and discrimination in the labour market against people of diverse SOGIESC may hinder their access to job opportunities. In this regard, transgender individuals are mentioned as a group that experiences particularly high levels of stigma, exclusion and discrimination. They often have low rates of employment. 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.

Social reintegration

Key informants described how returnees with diverse SOGIESC may experience challenges in accessing social services, such as health and education. The experts emphasized the importance of providing them with access to support networks upon return, especially to inform them about the context in the country of origin and their rights. A specific challenge for transgender individuals is access to documentation in cases where one's gender identity is different than before migration. It is essential to provide legal assistance to obtain new identification document cards in order to facilitate their access to services. In addition, transgender individuals may also have specific health needs such as transition-related medical support and mental health support.



Psychosocial well-being

Particularly if they return to countries that penalize same-gender relations, returnees with diverse SOGIESC can face life-threatening situations which may force them to conceal their identities. Having to conceal one's SOGIESC can lead to intense psychological problems for returnees, as cited by experts on the topic. Community and family support received by returnees on the individual level is highly dependent on the societal norms regarding SOGIESC-related issues in the local context. In communities where support and acceptance for persons with diverse SOGIESC is limited, returnees may be subject to stigmatization, exclusion, discrimination, violence and abuse.

THE IMPACT OF REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE AND DESIRABLE FORMS OF ASSISTANCE

The majority of returnee respondents for the in-depth interviews received economic reintegration assistance, which included a mix of cash and in-kind assistance, with the latter representing the bulk of assistance. Vocational training, micro-business assistance, furniture and home appliances, and rent subsidies were forms of reintegration support provided to the respondents. Economic reintegration support was generally perceived as positive and useful, albeit seen as insufficient and unsustainable in some cases.

Vocational training programmes 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 particular, vocational courses had a positive impact on female returnees in Afghanistan and Nigeria. Afghan females, particularly the low-skilled ones, valued the benefit of learning a life-long skill, even if this skill did not generate any income. Some female returnees expressed a desire to provide skills training to other female returnees 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 cases where returnees lacked additional resources, capital to start business proved less useful and sustainable. Monitoring and follow-up that go beyond the project timelines appeared to be essential with business start-ups.

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, and less attention is paid on the social and psychosocial components of reintegration. The majority of key informants indicated that there was a pronounced need for psychosocial assistance for returnees, particularly for those who were vulnerable. The essentiality of psychosocial assistance was highlighted in a study by Samuel Hall, the University of Sussex and IOM,¹⁸ reiterating its importance as a main component, rather than an 'optional extra', to a sustainable reintegration process.

Rent expenses or support in building a house (particularly for those who already had land) were other desirable types of assistance cited by returnees. In addition, temporary housing, cash assistance and access to

¹⁸ See Samuel Hall, University of Sussex and IOM, [Mentoring Returnees: Study on Reintegration Outcomes through a Comparative Lens](#) (2020).



Credits: Reintegration assistance in Nigeria.

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identification are desirable forms of assistance for marginalized females, particularly for those who are unable to return to their communities of origin.

These findings illustrate the importance of developing individualized reintegration assistance plans to support returnees in achieving levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability and psychosocial well-being. Past studies underline that the needs of returnees differ considerably depending on their individual characteristics and migration experiences, 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.¹⁹ The fundamentality of designing individualized reintegration support and follow-up is reiterated in IOM's Reintegration Handbook,²⁰ which highlights the need to pay special attention to the returnee's migration journey and the circumstances of return²¹.

PROGRAMMATIC AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the report, 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.

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

¹⁹ See Haase, M. and P. Honerath, Integration Strategy Group, [Return Migration and Reintegration Policies: A Primer](#) (2016).

²⁰ See IOM, [Reintegration Handbook - Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance](#) (2019).

²¹ 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." Ibid., page 36. Having diverse SOGIESC is another example of individual vulnerabilities.



characteristics of returnees and design needs-based reintegration programmes for each category.²² 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 return.

- ❖ **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. Immediate assistance to cover basic needs such as food, shelter/housing, and clothing 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 may also facilitate the psychological adaptation process by securing a sense of support during the early reintegration phases.
- ❖ **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. 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 and 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 approach is required in settings in which returnees are perceived in a negative way. IOM's integrated approach to reintegration 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 on the circumstances of different types of returnees. Such efforts can create local ownership of the reintegration process that can eventually increase resilience

²² See Haase, M. and P. Honerath, Integration Strategy Group, [Return Migration and Reintegration Policies: A Primer](#) (2016).



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 by IOM.²³ Findings show that returnees that receive capital to start a business often need assistance that goes beyond project timelines. 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 provided economic support 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 can 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.
- ❖ **Mainstreaming minimum level of psychosocial assistance in all reintegration assistance:** The findings reveal the strong correlation between 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.

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 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.

²³ IOM, *Reintegration Handbook*.



- ❖ **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. 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.²⁴ Ensuring that forced returnees are informed and prepared as much as possible for their return can play an important role in their reintegration process. Due to the sudden nature of forced returns, pre-departure counselling may not be a viable option. An alternative approach is to offer post-arrival counselling in a systematic manner 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 startups. 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. Programmes should be based on labour market needs assessments and in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Partnerships with local organizations who know the context can play a critical role in the success of new businesses. This recommendation aligns with the integrated approach put forward by IOM,²⁵ which establishes the need to undertake an assessment of the return context to develop appropriate support for sustainable reintegration.

Social dimension

- **Public-civil society partnerships to provide temporary shelter for returnees unable to return to their communities of origin:** R The findings suggest that forced returnees, victims of trafficking, single women, including and/or particularly those with diverse SOGIESC 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. Interviews with key informants revealed the significance of temporary housing assistance for people who have no place to return to. It is recommended

²⁴ 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).

²⁵ IOM, *Reintegration Handbook*.



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 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 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.

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 SOGIESC. 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 different 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, and especially for female survivors of gender-based violence. These spaces must be welcoming and accessible to women with diverse SOGIESC, particularly transgender women. 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.
- ❖ **Safe spaces for returnees with diverse SOGIESC:** Lack of disclosure and knowledge about returnees’ SOGIESC may present a barrier to their 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 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 diverse identities and characteristics, 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. An 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,²⁶ 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.

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. 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."²⁷

²⁶ For more resources on cooperatives and women's empowerment, see ILO, [Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality website](#).

²⁷ See IOM and UNICEF, "A Child Right's Approach to the Sustainable Reintegration of Migrant Children and Families," in IOM, *Reintegration Handbook*.



- **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, gender-based violence and human trafficking issues can facilitate reintegration in different dimensions. 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:** The findings suggest that forced returnees, victims of gender-based violence including trafficking, returnees with diverse SOGIESC and female returnees in patriarchal societies are more likely to fear to go back 'home'. It is recommended to provide specialized shelter and/or reception centres for women to facilitate reintegration. Depending on the country context, single mothers, widows and women that survived gender-based violence linked to their migration journey are in need of this intervention.
- **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 had serious health conditions 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 described experiences of violence, abuse or exploitation. However, identification of male survivors is a common challenge. 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 the gender expression is different than before migration. It is therefore essential take into account these potential risks, and to provide legal assistance to obtain new identification document cards 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 victims of violence to support their efforts to prosecute their perpetrators was a key facilitator of psychological health and thus psychosocial and overall reintegration.

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 and returnees with



diverse SOGIESC often constitute particularly vulnerable groups. Trauma informed care is an important good practice-based approach when working with violence survivors.

- **Future programming may provide an option to offer family counselling to help with family reintegration outcomes in cases where individuals face family rejection.** Having 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 establishing referral mechanisms with trusted practitioners who have experience working with diverse genders and who are cognizant of the stigmas.

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, and 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. It is therefore a high priority for host government 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.

The Final Report is [available here](#).

The Country Profiles' results are [available here](#).

Credits:

Front page: In Burkina Faso, IOM in collaboration with the Government of Burkina Faso, and with funding from the European Union, is supporting the establishment of livestock farmer groups. © IOM 2019 / Alexander BEE

Back page: In September 2020, IOM supported the first voluntary return of Gambians from Niger since the start of the pandemic, after a six-month hiatus due to border closures. Since 2019, Niger has been the top-sending country of voluntary returnees to The Gambia. © IOM 2020 / Alessandro LIRA



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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.

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