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REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

3

Key Messages

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The definition of community is context-specific and depends on sociocultural, economic and political conditions as well as migration trends.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reintegration assistance at the community level uses participatory methods to create local ownership of the reintegration process for the benefit of both returnees and the community.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community-based reintegration projects can use varying approaches: collective returnee projects, new community-based projects or inclusion of returnees into existing community-based projects.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Empowering returnees to share their experiences with return communities and build social networks can increase their resilience and improve sustainability of reintegration.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working with communities to combat stigmatization and improve services is crucial to sustainability.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehensive profiles of high-return communities can help identify local needs and dynamics and build on existing initiatives.



Policymakers



Programme managers/
developers



Case managers/
other staff



Local
government

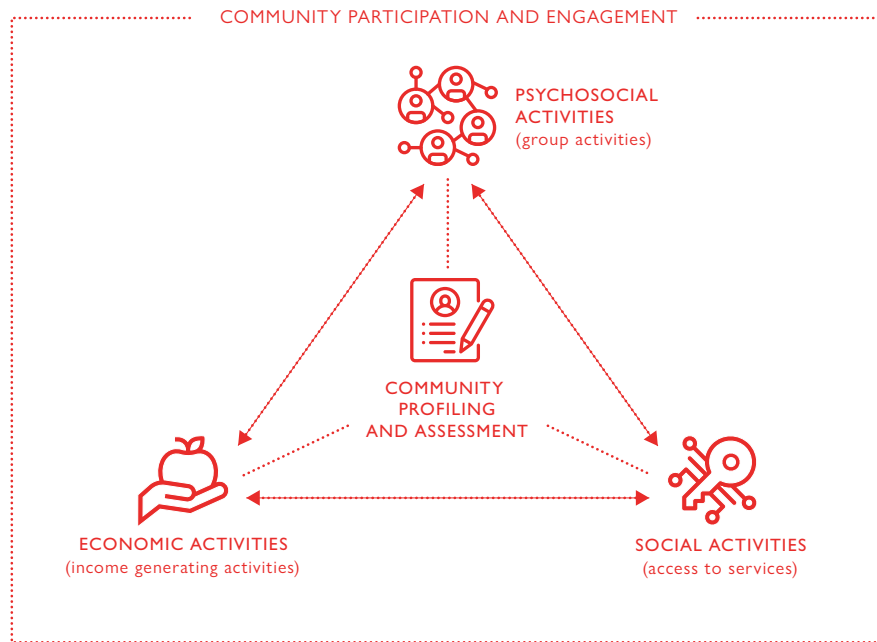


Implementing
partners



Service
providers

REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL



- Policymakers • Project programme managers/developers • Case managers/other staff
- Local government (origin) • Implementing partners • Service providers

INTRODUCTION

Community-based reintegration assistance supports strong community networks and conditions for sustainable reintegration. It is implemented using a participatory approach involving returnees and their communities of return to address wider needs and concerns. Community-based initiatives can increase support for reintegration among local actors. These kinds of initiatives are particularly useful when there is a large number of returnees to a specific community, because community-based integration can address tensions between returnees and local communities, or serve as extra capacity when a community has been stretched to accommodate returnees' needs.

The situation in communities of return greatly influences the reintegration process. Communities with strong social networks and access to resources can provide support and protection to returnees and themselves benefit from the reintegration process. But when communities are unable to provide these networks and resources, the experience of return can constitute a risk factor for the community and the returnees.

Furthermore, returnees may not always be readily accepted into a community, even if it was their community of origin. Perceived or actual economic competition for jobs, strains on services and infrastructure in high-return areas, and stigmatization of returnees are all potential barriers to successful reintegration. These barriers also prevent communities from taking advantage of new skills or experiences the returnees can share with them. These strains and stresses on a community are more likely when there are larger numbers of migrants returning to a community in a short period of time.

Because working in all return communities is not usually feasible within the scope of a reintegration programme, assistance is best targeted to communities with a high concentration of returnees and where specific problems have been identified that could be addressed by the programme. These problems could be stigmatization, lack of jobs or strains on services. In addition to this, community-level interventions should be undertaken in locations where local authorities are motivated to support reintegration and there is a basic level of infrastructure and security.

Working with communities facing these challenges to better accept, support and include returnees is important for sustainable reintegration. To be successful, it is strongly recommended that community-level interventions involve and benefit both returnees and non-migrants. Though these interventions look different in different contexts, working from needs' assessments and working with established networks can be a good way to identify initiatives and actions that have higher chances of relevance and impact.

Reintegration interventions at the community level should be participatory: they should be designed and decided upon in partnership with community members, both returnees and non-migrants. This way, interventions can be appropriately matched to people's strengths, resources, needs and concerns. This fosters sustainability of reintegration. Participatory methods can also help reduce actual or potential tensions between returnees and community members, because they bring an understanding of wider needs and concerns beyond the individual returnees, and help address these.

In addition, community-level initiatives should:

- Focus on the short- and medium-term to address community barriers to reintegration;
- Foster dialogue, social cohesion and empowerment;
- Support the resilience of returnees and the community;
- Support the longer-term sustainability of intervention outcomes.

This Module covers how to understand community-level risk and protective factors and assist communities so that reintegration can be as supportive and beneficial as possible. It examines how to conduct comprehensive community needs assessments, develop collective and community economic projects, make services accessible and tailored to returnee and community needs and empower returnees to share their experiences and form community support networks.

3.1 Defining and engaging the community

This section presents explores the definition of community and provides guidance on fostering a participatory approach for community based projects.

Definition of a community

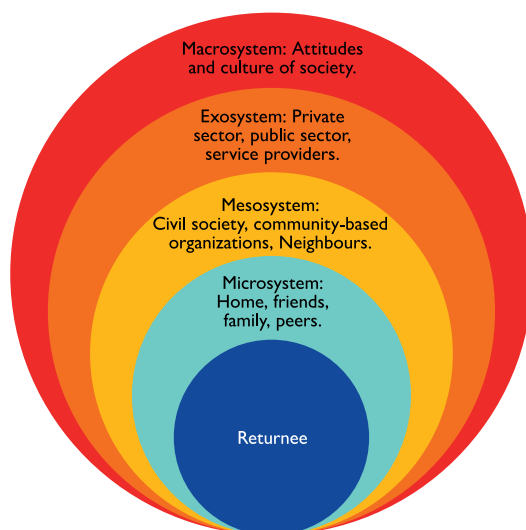
A participatory approach

To design a community project for a specific context, it is crucial to define who the “community” consists of – a task that is not always straightforward. For the purposes of this Handbook we will use the following definition of community, “a number of persons who regularly interact with one another, within a specific geographical territory, and who tend to share common values, beliefs and attitudes.”²⁸ The definition of community is context-specific and depends on cultural, social, political and economic conditions as well as local migration trends.

One way to define a community is by using **the ecosystem approach**.²⁹ This approach recognizes that each returnee exists within a system of actors that interact with each other and may be supporting or hindering the returnee’s reintegration.

To identify a returnee’s community, qualitative research, such as in-person interviews or focus groups, can be used to understand which institutions, organizations or individuals are considered to be influential members of a specific geographic area. Once those actors are identified, key informants (such as religious leaders, local authorities, heads of community-based organizations, prominent elders or others) can be brought in for focus group discussions about the impact of return and reintegration on the community and possible community-level assistance as they see it.

Figure 3.1: Understanding a returnee’s ecosystem



²⁸ IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse (forthcoming).

²⁹ More information on the ecosystem approach in reintegration settings can be found in [Setting Standards for an Integrated Approach to Reintegration](#), (Samuel Hall/IOM, 2017) commissioned by IOM and funded by DFID.

Community assessment and engagement should always occur using a participatory approach, which means that returnees, families or communities of return are consulted. Participation (personal involvement in assessment and decision-making around reintegration) can increase the sense of empowerment, self-reliance and ownership over projects. This approach acknowledges that those engaged in reintegration projects are knowledgeable about local developmental and environmental needs and have unique insight into how to make reintegration more sustainable.

Carrying out focus group discussions with an array of key informants when assessing communities, as well as when deciding on reintegration projects, makes the process a collaborative one. During these focus group discussions, the process and aims of reintegration projects need to be clearly explained and any questions addressed so that expectations are managed.



Inclusivity and conflict sensitivity in participatory engagement

When engaging the community, it is important to be aware of existing conflict issues and marginalization of specific groups. Otherwise, the process could exacerbate these problems by excluding those groups already marginalized or by reinforcing negative power dynamics. For this reason, it is important to strive for inclusivity of different perspectives in assessment and engagement processes.

Making participatory approaches inclusive

- **Ask:** Who needs to be included in the process? Who has something positive to contribute? Who could create challenges?
- **Identify:** All relevant stakeholders, along with potential barriers or challenges to their participation.
- **Interview:** Key informants directly by seeking them out.
- **Recognize:** Power imbalances among stakeholders. Who may have less power? Women? Children and youth? People with disabilities? Those with less education? Create extra opportunity for participation for these groups.
- **Hold:** Focus groups and forums at times and in places especially convenient for the least vocal participants, or offer separate or private meetings if appropriate.
- **Create:** Opportunity for people to lend their voice and perspective anonymously, or in spaces that foster trust and openness.

3.2 Community assessments and projects

Before undertaking community-level reintegration assistance it is necessary to undertake a comprehensive community assessment, also called a community profile. A community profile identifies the needs and resources of a community and the impact of return migration on these. It pinpoints the drivers of migration, barriers to sustainable reintegration and sources of community resilience. The community profiled is based on the definition of the community in the particular context.

The community assessment can then be used as a guide to understand where that assistance would be most effective and the different project approaches that can be taken. These assessments and programme development processes should be participatory and include both returnees and non-migrants from the community.

A study carried out in 2016 by Altai Consulting for IOM Morocco suggested that the following criteria provide a favourable environment for implementing community-based reintegration projects:

- Sufficient number of migrants returning to the same community within a short period of time;
- Adequate migrant profiles (that is, returnees' skills were well-matched to the reintegration project);
- Local community interest and motivated migrants;
- Availability of basic infrastructure in the region;
- Availability of services such as health care, education, housing, and so forth;
- Stability, security and economic opportunities in the return area;
- Civil society activism.

It is therefore important to carefully assess the community's context to determine whether these criteria are met.

This chapter presents a detailed overview of the first steps for developing a community-based project.

3.2.1 Community profiles and analysis

3.2.2 Developing community-level assistance

3.2.1 Community profiles and analysis

Community-based reintegration assistance is typically based on comprehensive community profiles in the communities with a high concentration of returnees or strong outmigration pressure. These profiles help the lead reintegration organization understand how reintegration activities can support both returnees and return communities and how the reintegration process affects the community.

As part of the community profile, community-level indicators provide information for determining which interventions are appropriate in each target area. In addition, the profile gives insight into potential challenges or risks of community-level interventions. Analysing indicators along with information from the community

profile helps pinpoint specific issues, like lack of resources, that could cause tensions between returning and non-migrant community members. Assessment activities should always apply a conflict-sensitive lens by highlighting any feelings of resentment or hostility towards returnees that can arise if individual returnees are seen as receiving benefits or rewards disproportionate to the non-migrant population.

Indicators that can be useful for community profiles include but are not limited to:

Sociodemographics	Community-based resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Age distribution <input type="checkbox"/> Gender distribution <input type="checkbox"/> Social activities <input type="checkbox"/> Support networks <input type="checkbox"/> Social inclusion (discrimination, violence, harassment based on sex, gender, nationality, ethnicity, age, migrant status, religion, dis/ability, sexual orientation) <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic distributions <input type="checkbox"/> Educational achievements <input type="checkbox"/> Migration rates <input type="checkbox"/> Perception of migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Safety levels, including risks of environmental disaster and political (in)stability <input type="checkbox"/> Income and employment <input type="checkbox"/> Access to services (including housing, health care, and schools) <input type="checkbox"/> Essential needs coverage (including food security, health, education and training, WASH, shelter) <input type="checkbox"/> Diaspora links or projects <input type="checkbox"/> Land and tenure security <input type="checkbox"/> Language(s) spoken <input type="checkbox"/> Access to effective remedies and justice <input type="checkbox"/> Resilience to environmental risks, including those related to climate change <input type="checkbox"/> Existing reintegration or local development projects <input type="checkbox"/> Social participation and activities including existing formal and informal theatre, visual art, music, dance, sports and other interest collectives and groups

Assessments should consider how available community-based resources are to community members and whether access to resources varies based on age, gender, family size, ethnicity, religion, (dis)ability or other personal characteristics. This analysis can be done by comparing resources against the sociodemographic profiles to understand how resources are distributed across a community.

Once the basic community profile is completed, the lead reintegration organization should carry out more in-depth research and analysis. It is important to first check for existing assessments and analyses that the lead reintegration organization or others may have done and use those whenever possible. In this respect, those working on community-level support should communicate frequently with case managers providing individual support to returnees in the targeted communities, because their experiences can inform community interventions.

The table below highlights questions to use or adapt when assessing a community and proposes data collection methods.

Table 3.1: Research questions for in-depth community analysis

Phase	Research questions	Data collection methods
Community profile	Migration drivers <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the role of mobility in the community? (past/ present) 2. What are the key drivers that influence migration? (look at economic, governance, social, political, environmental, structural, security dimensions) 3. What are the personal motivations of migrants and returnees for considering/deciding to depart and to return? 4. What is the role of collective decision-making on migration? Who are the key actors shaping migration decision-making? 5. What are the enabling factors conducive to irregular migration? (financial, human, logistical and so forth). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Focus group • Discussions • Individual survey
	Reintegration programming <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. What are the factors that prevent or foster reintegration at economic, social and psychosocial levels? 7. What type of reintegration support (at economic, social and psychosocial levels) is needed to make reintegration sustainable? 8. Which actors are appropriate to implement these activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Focus group • Discussions • Individual survey
	Community perceptions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. What are sources of tension and sources of social capital in the ecosystem? What perceptions do community members have of each other? 10. What are key events that have shaped this community in the recent and distant past? 11. What are the existing levels of awareness and attitudes towards migrants and returnees? 12. What are the communities' perceptions of migrants and returnees as actors in the ecosystem? 13. How do community members engage with returnees and how do returnees engage with community members? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Focus group discussions • Individual survey • community consultations • Community historic mapping

	Economic system analysis <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Map a system of economic exchanges and production, including service delivery. 15. Establish a typology of the formal and informal sectors. 16. Analyse the socioeconomic potential of the sectors identified in terms of (a) business creation and development; (b) job creation in the areas defined by the project, (c) identify government priorities and plans in terms of market development. 17. Identify concrete and immediate opportunities for employment, income generation and self employment. 18. Identify concrete and immediate opportunities for strengthened access to services and protection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Key informant interviews with private actors • Individual survey • Labour market assessment (see section 1.4.2)
Stakeholder and services mapping	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Who are the stakeholders directly/indirectly involved in the provision of reintegration support at the national and local level? 20. How do they interact and coordinate? 21. What community-based projects exist that are related to reintegration? 22. What are the referral mechanisms in place at the various levels (individual, community, regional, national level) that can support reintegration activities? 23. What are the existing services available to returning migrants that could support reintegration activities? 24. What complementary approaches are available? Who implements these? 25. Are there opportunities to develop new or strengthen existing partnerships to support reintegration activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review (particularly of existing stakeholder mapping and service mapping, see section 1.4.2) • Key informant interviews
Capacity assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 26. What are the human and financial resources available for stakeholders to intervene at the three levels (economic, social, psychosocial) and three dimensions (individuals, community, structural) of reintegration? 27. What are the capacity-building activities required to effectively support partners in the provision of reintegration assistance? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews (analysis through Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool)

As with assessments at all levels, community profiles and assessments should be reviewed and updated frequently in cooperation with local actors to reflect changes, new challenges and risks or new opportunities for programming.

3.2.2 Developing community-level assistance

When first considering community-based reintegration projects, the following criteria can be used to assess the benefits and drawbacks in a particular context:

Table 3.2: Benefits and drawbacks of community-based reintegration projects

Positive criteria	Negative criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project gathers together several returnees and several members of the community; • Project proposed by community members and directly responding to identified community needs; • Project allowing support for the needs of returnees with high vulnerability; • Project responding to specific needs of the community, inter alia by contributing to improve access to services at community level; • Project contributing to social cohesion (that is, contributing to improve the attitude of the community towards return and returnees and vice-versa); • Project expected to contribute to improve the community's socioeconomic situation, including by creating employment and livelihood opportunities in the community; • Project closely linked to the local development plan; • Project that is environmentally friendly. This could relate to the “environmental footprint” of the project, or the green nature of the business activity (such as recycling), but could also relate to projects which address environmental threats affecting the community such as exposure to natural hazards, climate change or environmental degradation;³⁰ • Project that fully incorporates a gender perspective by ensuring that all gender groups benefit and participate meaningfully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project that could do harm to the community of return (for instance by competing with existing local initiatives or by negatively affecting the natural environment); • Project that is assessed as not viable; • Project that does not take into consideration the community's needs and priorities; • Project that does not integrate any gender considerations.

In addition to supporting sustainable reintegration, community-focused projects can have a positive influence on overall peaceful coexistence within host communities by reducing barriers between community members, improving mutual understanding and addressing community-wide issues such as scarcity of resources.

³⁰ For a simplified screening tool, refer to World Food Programme's *Environmental and Social Screening Tool* (2018).

Project approaches

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to community-based projects, because each project depends on the local context, community needs and the profiles of migrants. This Handbook therefore proposes various project approaches and outlines their advantages and disadvantages. These approaches are differentiated by their focus; some community-based projects focus on the needs of groups of returnees and also find ways to involve members of the community, while others focus on the needs of the local community and seek to involve one or more returnees.

Additionally, these approaches can vary depending on whether community-based projects are newly developed by the lead reintegration organization, or they take advantage of already-existing projects, which may or may not already include returnees and address their specific needs.

There are three main possible approaches to community-based reintegration projects:

1. Collective returnee projects;
2. New community-based projects;
3. Existing projects that integrate returnees.

A summary of these approaches and their advantages and disadvantages are included in the table below.

Table 3.3: Approaches to community-based reintegration projects

Type	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Supporting collective groups of returnees	Projects take as a starting point returnees' needs. Individual or collective project of (a) returnee(s) in which the returnee(s) may involve the community.	Strong impact on returnees. Addresses the needs of returnees in the specific context of a local community.	Addresses the community's needs less. Limited impact in terms of reducing the risks of tensions between returnees and their community due to limited community involvement.
Starting a new community-based project	Projects taking as a starting point the community's needs. Projects primarily designed with/for the community in which returnees are located, such as local economic development projects, community-based climate change adaptation projects.	Strong impact on the community. Provides enabling environment for reintegration. Addresses the needs of the local community.	Risk of limited impact on returnees who may have limited involvement in the project.
Integrating returnees into existing projects	Projects taking as a starting point existing projects. Including returnees in successful projects implemented by the lead reintegration organization or by other actors.	Higher chances that projects continue to be successful. Solution to limited available funding and lack of internal expertise in a given sector by the reintegration actors. Coaching opportunities for returnees who do not have specific skills.	Need to connect returnees to projects. Requires a good relationship between the returnee and the group already created. The referring actor may not have access to information on all available projects.

The difference between these categories, particularly the first two, is conceptual. In reality, community-focused reintegration projects can share many characteristics of returnee-focused collective initiatives, and vice versa. And multiple approaches can be used together as part of a larger programme. Nonetheless, distinguishing the different approaches, at least conceptually, helps underscore their potential benefits and drawbacks, and how they might be operationalized.

3.3 Economic reintegration assistance at the community level

Community-level economic reintegration assistance comes in many forms, in line with the different project approaches introduced in [section 3.2.2](#). The role of these interventions – as opposed to individual economic reintegration support – is to use economies of scale, foster a wider economic environment more conducive to sustainable reintegration and partner with and build upon existing local development programming. Community-level economic reintegration assistance is most appropriate when large numbers of returnees with similar skills and motivations return to the same community within a short timeframe, and when the wider economy is doing well and or there are local development initiatives already in place.

Community-based interventions can be very effective in facilitating the reintegration of individuals within existing community structures, harnessing economies of scale of individual projects and fostering the sustainability of projects. Yet, for successful implementation, a number of contextual, individual and operational considerations need to be taken into account.

- ➔ The wider national and local economic context greatly impacts project viability. This context includes the situation of the national economy prior to project implementation and economic development over time. The success of past community-based economic reintegration project experiences is strongly correlated with overall economic environment development: if the national economy is growing and prosperous, community-based economic projects tend to be more successful, and vice versa.

However, within these general trends, the impact of contextual economic factors also depends on the nature (employment or self-employment), economic sector (industry, services, agriculture and so forth) and value chains of a particular project. Identifying these economic dynamics is important so the project can be adapted to national and local economic and structural opportunities and barriers. Adaptation to current conditions increases the chances of a project's success.

- ➔ Community-based economic reintegration projects are most successful when migrants returning to a particular community have similar socioeconomic profiles, particularly in terms of skills, work experience, areas of interest and life plans. An important success factor is the relevance and level of returnees' skills in relation to a particular community project. When collaborating on a project, it is crucial that at least one returnee has advanced skills in the project-relevant field and can assume the role of an expert and mentor. Yet, it is nonetheless preferable if all returnees possess basic skills or preliminary experience in the field. They can then internalize new skills and knowledge more effectively during the collective work.

It is rare, however, that all migrants returning to a community have the same set of skills and similar levels of work experience. If no returnee within a community has relevant skills or work experience for an implemented community-based project, other ways of transferring skills need to be deployed. These include involving non-migrant community members with relevant expertise (if feasible in the project and if the expertise is available); creating partnerships with associations with expertise in the field (such as groups that were involved in relevant past projects); or including project-specific technical training in the project's budget for at least some members of the group, who can subsequently share their knowledge. Furthermore, since effective teamwork is needed for all community projects, returnees' interest in collective work is a crucial requirement for effective community-based projects. Similarity of returnees in terms of age, community of origin and time spent abroad are additional factors conducive to success.

The design, implementation and success of community-based interventions can be facilitated by developing an up-to date and **integrated database of returnee, project and contextual information**. To facilitate grouping returnees, this database should contain the complete profiles of returnees in terms of needs, capacities and interests. To take advantage of synergies and avoid duplication, it should also capture up-to-date data on existing reintegration projects and other projects with a reintegration component (*see section 3.2.2*) in each country of origin, implemented by the lead reintegration organization or by third parties. Information on livelihood opportunities, growth-generating sectors, regulations and socioeconomic conditions at local levels (*see section 1.4.2*) should be entered into the same database. This provides programme managers with a single go-to source of information to make evidence-based programme design decisions that take into account the profile, needs and interests of individual returnees, their geographic distribution upon return, the presence of existing reintegration projects and the overall economic, social and structural conditions in communities of return.

This chapter presents a detailed overview of the different approaches of community-based economic reintegration support.

- 3.3.1 Collective income-generating activities
- 3.3.2 Community-based local development and livelihood activities
- 3.3.3 Community financial support activities

3.3.1 Collective income-generating activities

Collective income-generating activities can take various forms depending on the local context and market system. They can range from small agricultural cooperative farms and artisan groups to agro-processing cooperatives, youth employability programmes and networks of small mobile shops. Compared to individual projects, collective projects are particularly effective for activities that require a significant initial investment and substantial working capital since returnees can pool their resources. For example, for fishing projects, individual assistance would not suffice to cover the purchase of boats for overnight fishing that have higher returns on investment than traditional boats. When collective income-generating activities are effectively designed and implemented, individual economic payoffs can substantially exceed those of individual reintegration projects, even if they both have the same level of per capita reintegration support.

Furthermore, collective income-generating activities can enable returnees who do not have the skills needed to succeed in an individual project to benefit from the skills and expertise of other returnees or other

members of the community. If developed in a skills-sensitive and market-oriented manner, these initiatives can expand the possible realm of income-generating activities for each returnee beyond his/her individual limitations. Finally, collective income-generating activities encourage the development of social and economic networks of returning migrants, supporting sustainable reintegration in the long-term (see *Case study 8, below, for an example of how IOM Bangladesh worked with returnees and local communities to help them create collective income-generating business in the form of social enterprises that could benefit the entire community*).



Case Study 8: Community-based social enterprises in Bangladesh

IOM Bangladesh found that many returning migrants did not have the experience and capacity required to sustainably operate a business by themselves. There was also a common request from female returnees to manage their businesses jointly with their family members.

In response to this, IOM Bangladesh developed a mechanism that gives returnees the option to invest in a social enterprise as part of a group of returnees and with the backing of a local NGO, effectively becoming shareholders in a community-based social enterprise.

A mapping exercise identified priority local business sectors and partner NGOs expert in this field and which had some understanding of returnees' circumstances. These NGOs were asked to assist in managing, administering and governing these social enterprises by appointing two of their representatives to the governing board and investing a small sum of money.

These social enterprises operate like normal businesses and are administered by a board of directors as the governing body, which includes two members of each group – returnees, local community members, and the local NGO. They are registered as joint stock companies, of which returnees and their families usually hold 80–85 per cent of shares invested with funds provided by IOM. The local partner NGO holds 15–20 per cent. The profits are distributed according to the investment amount and share of the enterprise.

Enterprises set up through this project cover areas such as crab and hydroponic farming, cow fattening and mobile food carts. They employ staff from local communities, including a professional manager, to handle the daily operations. If they wish, returnees can be hired to work in the enterprises in which they invest. Staff are accountable to the board, which defines the overall strategy and provides guidance. These enterprises help portray a positive image of returnees by generating local employment and supplying goods and services in sometimes remote and rural areas. Since both returnees and local community members directly benefit from them, they help reinforce social cohesion.



Tips for success:

- Clarify to potential investors that this should be considered a long-term investment, because tangible profits are not generated immediately.

To harness the potential of collective income-generating activities and avoid failure, it is essential that reintegration project managers and partners be closely involved in developing, selecting, implementing, monitoring and evaluating these activities. A best practice summary of the consecutive steps and actions to be performed by reintegration programme managers and/or partners is provided below:

Table 3.4: Development, selection, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of collective income-generating activities

Step	Actions
Assessing preconditions for collective income-generating activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess general feasibility of contextual and operational preconditions for implementation of collective income-generating activities (see section 3.2); Assess specific contextual environment for these activities, including market systems and labour market assessments, community profiles, environmental considerations (risks and opportunities), and a mapping of other projects (see sections 1.4.2, 3.2.1); Assess complementarity of returnee profiles, needs and interests of returnees in specific areas of return based on database of returnees.
Group formation and incentivization of collective action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring together groups of returnees, discuss and propose collective projects and provide a platform for exchange and brainstorming; Identify opportunities for collaboration, involvement and interactions with existing activities and other community-based reintegration projects (if present in the local context and conducive for collaboration); Incentivize feasible collective income-generating activities if mechanisms are provided for in the specific reintegration programme.
Short-term training and development of project plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train returnees on how to develop project plans that indicate the type and purpose of assistance requested as well as details about the expected costs and outcomes; Train returnees on opportunities and barriers in local market systems (including from an environmental perspective) and provide project-specific technical mentoring; A short-term training can be a useful tool to determine the genuine interest and motivation of the candidates for the project and their ability to work together.
Selection of viable collective income-generating activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-selection based on reintegration programme's eligibility criteria; Initial selection based on contextual criteria (feasibility of project plan as per findings of the labour market analysis and effects at community-level assessment); Final selection based on reintegration programme's selection criteria (such as high involvement of members of local community; addressing needs of local communities; environmental criteria and so forth).
Registration process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support registration of the project as a legal entity with the appropriate agency and formalize all aspects of the project (land registration, asset ownership, business registration and so on).

Training on various aspects of project implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on cooperative group formation, entrepreneurial skills. Where feasible, integrate this with the Business Development Support track to explore synergies and decrease costs. • Sensitization of group dynamics, including trust-building, raising awareness of potential lack of income in the short-term, strategies to deal with intra-group conflicts, complaints mechanisms and so forth. • Coaching and tutoring through former beneficiaries who have succeeded in the same region and in a similar sector. • Support the delineation of clear roles and responsibilities for each member. • Establish a decision-making and coordination mechanism that is agreed and formalized by all members.
Support during project implementation and long-term counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous support during project implementation and facilitate adjustments where required; • Support to expand operations and reach more customers.
Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build M&E processes into the operational logic of each collective income-generating activity, both for internal (group members) and for external M&E (lead reintegration organization and partners); • Discussion of evaluation reports with group members and provision of appropriate recommendations and with technical support; • Targeted phasing out of the external support once the project is operating sustainably, based on the evaluation findings.



The chart above and the text below contain steps unique to establishing collective income-generating projects. For more detailed information on general business development support, including for collective projects, see [Annex 2](#).

Assessing pre-conditions and group formation

The process of assessing pre-conditions and group formation should ideally start during the pre-return phase in the host country. However, this requires the presence of a sufficient number of beneficiaries who aim to return to the same community. It also requires adequate available information about opportunities and existing projects in the country of origin.

There are various ways to encourage returnees to engage in community-based activities rather than individual projects. These include funding incentives that provide a small additional allowance for each returnee involved in a group project. Depending on the local context and the project design, providing additional allocations per employed non-migrant resident is also a possibility.



Failure of collective income-generating projects

Programme managers need to be aware that there can be significant negative repercussions on groups of returnees and the wider community if a project fails. It is therefore essential that all collective income-generating projects have a comprehensive project schedule from the beginning. This should specify project activities, working capital requirements and the expected allocation of capital among those involved in different activities.

Short-term training

Similar to the short-term training in business planning in the integrated business development support track (see [Annex 2, Step 3](#)), returning migrants without prior experience in starting a project or who have been out of the country for a long time are unlikely to be able to create a feasible and market-ready business plan. These returnees require a short training session on developing market- and community-oriented project plans. They need to familiarize themselves with the technical prerequisites they need to meet during the subsequent selection process. This training can be carried out by a private sector partner, a civil society or government partner or by staff members of the lead reintegration organization. The short-term training should also familiarize candidates with opportunities and barriers in local market systems and provide project-specific technical mentoring. For this aspect of training, trainers should have and teach specific technical expertise relevant to the chosen sector for each project, rather than providing a general training programme common to all returnees. Ideally, these trainers should be a group of local experts with local economic and, where relevant, environmental expertise.

Selection

Following the finalization of project plans, the lead reintegration organization must select the most promising collective income-generating activities. While selection criteria for collective income-generating projects should be adapted at programme, national and local levels to best fit the programme's objectives and context, they should generally favour projects that require significant initial investment or working capital. Where feasible, local actors should be involved at the stage of project selection, in addition to their role in contributing to the development of community-based projects. Both functions can be integrated through the creation of steering committees, which can shape the design of community-based projects and conduct the selection process of beneficiaries.

Following approval

Once precise collective income-generating activities have been approved, group members might require training in various aspects of project implementation, such as cooperative group formation, entrepreneurial skills and collective business management (teamwork, task sharing, management and administration). Where feasible, these activities should be integrated with other individual business development support activities to explore synergies and reduce the costs of training.

Furthermore, participants need to be made aware in advance of typical group dynamics arising in collective income-generating activities, in case of returnee-only projects or mixed projects. Training can include trust-building exercises, strategies to deal with potential intra-group conflicts. It should provide information on

programme-specific conflict resolution and complaints mechanisms (*see section 3.5 for examples of some trust-building activities and approaches*). Also, beneficiaries should again be made aware that the specific project may not have immediate payoffs, because many projects generally yield a low income in the short-term.

The initial stage of project implementation is particularly critical. The lead reintegration organization, the community or its partners should provide close support during this time, to facilitate adjustments where required and mediate in case of in-group conflicts. To support the economic viability of collective income-generating activities, project managers can, for example, determine that projects initially only comprise returnees and integrate other members of the community at a later stage when the project becomes profitable.

As is true for individual businesses, collective income-generating activities need to receive support and mentoring over longer periods of time. The lead reintegration organization or its partners should support adjustments during the first years of operation, including potentially providing additional start-up capital or training. Profitable projects may need support to expand their business and reach more customers, and the lead reintegration organization or other partners could help by linking the business with incubators and investors; providing support for increasing the product range and marketing approach; and facilitating connections to mainstream businesses. Where feasible within budget and programming parameters, it could be an option to provide direct support to the most successful projects after a specified period.

3.3.2 Community-based local development and livelihood activities

This section provides an overview of community-based projects that support local economic development (LED) while supporting the livelihoods of both members of local communities and of returning migrants. Community-based reintegration approaches with LED objectives are not aimed primarily at supporting reintegration, but at improving the overall environment with regards to employment, social cohesion and individual protection. Local development reintegration projects can provide sustainable economic and livelihood opportunities for community members (both non-migrants and returnees) and improve governance, stability, local infrastructure, resilience to climate change and delivery of services. Whenever possible, such projects should be environmentally sustainable and directly contribute to sustainable management, conservation or rehabilitation of the environment and natural resources (land, water, forests, ecosystems). (*See Case study 9, below, for an example of a community stabilization project that benefits returnees and local community members while also addressing an important “push” factor in migration, degraded agricultural land.*) Compared to collective income-generation activities, local development projects place a greater emphasis on involving the local community in their design, implementation and monitoring.

Whereas the larger target group of LED-centred approaches increases the complexity of reintegration programming, it also provides more opportunity to cooperate with other locally engaged third parties. The reintegration programme needs to maintain relationships with development and environmental actors active in return communities and identify successful development projects before considering returnees’ involvement. Ideally, this can lead to a Memorandum of Understanding or a Framework Agreement that stipulates both a cost-sharing component and the inclusion of strategic reintegration objectives in the initial programme design. Engaging with external local development projects is likely to be more effective when large projects integrate a high number of returnees, thus minimizing the number of different partnerships that need to be established.

In contexts where LED projects do not exist or do not align with reintegration programming objectives, the lead reintegration organization can implement a new LED project. In such cases, it is very important that the organization identifies relevant local actors and establishes the LED project using a participatory approach from project design through implementation. (See *Case study 9, below, for one example of this.*)



Case Study 9: Community stabilization initiatives in the Niger

Climate change and desertification is a push factor for migration and can increase tension among local populations as resources become scarcer. Restoring degraded lands generates a ripple effect by addressing environmental, social and economic challenges.

This has been the case in the Agadez region of the Niger, where community stabilization initiatives create employment opportunities for locals and returnees and mitigate potential conflicts by providing communities with arable land and shared water points.

Upon recommendations from a feasibility study on land restoration and water access, local authorities identified degraded plots of land. Two hundred hectares of land were restored through cash-for-work activities carried out by more than 150 people during the rainy season and 60,000 trees were planted. More than 100,000 water catchments were created to harvest and conserve rainwater and to create a favourable environment for crops.

In coordination with local authorities and community leaders, young beneficiaries (returnees, at-risk youth and ex-smugglers) residing in Agadez were selected and each granted one hectare of land.

These beneficiaries went through a skills'-development training facilitated by the Regional Directorate for Agriculture and received seed kits and materials to start their activities. Throughout the project, a monthly allowance of 60,000 FCFA was allocated to cope with revenue fluctuation due to unstable weather conditions.

To enlarge the intervention's scope, the agricultural site is also used as a training facility for 500 West African migrants transiting through the Agadez IOM centre. They gain some transferable skills before returning to their own countries.

IOM the Niger set up a local technical monitoring committee composed of communal and regional technical services to monitor and sustain field activities by proposing recommendations during site visits and interviews with the target groups.

Existing community-based projects usually take the form of a local development project for the community. Such projects principally aim at reducing irregular migration and improving local living conditions, livelihoods and service provision. While returnees are sometimes beneficiaries of local development projects, they are rarely involved in the design stage and projects usually do not take into consideration returnees' specific needs.

This type of initiative offers fewer guarantees of meeting the individual needs of returnees when compared to returnee-led initiatives. So it is particularly important for relevant reintegration staff to have strong knowledge of the specific projects and the sectors they target to match returnees to suitable projects that meet their individual assistance needs and interests. On the one hand, it is particularly complicated to prepare such

projects with returnees at the pre-return phase, because effective matching requires in-depth knowledge of a returnee's skills, needs and interests, along with a precise overview of the project, its objectives and target groups. On the other hand, local development projects are particularly suited for the socioeconomic reintegration of returning migrants who returned without reintegration assistance. It is particularly important for reintegration staff to have comprehensive knowledge of a local development project in order to assess which, if any, beneficiaries should be matched to the project. Relevant assessment criteria are provided in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5. Assessment process for the involvement of returnees in existing local development projects

Assessment	Project criterion	Required assessment
Assessing the suitability of the project for supporting returnees' reintegration	Capacity	A local development project may be successfully operating and suited to returnees' profiles but may have insufficient capacity to integrate sufficiently large numbers of returnees. In case a project can only integrate a small number of returnees, assess the proportionality of integrating individual beneficiaries against the potentially capital-intensive monitoring and evaluation of beneficiaries' reintegration.
	Location	If not directly implemented in the community of return, the reintegration team needs to consider accessibility of the returnee to the project, in terms of cost, time and distance.
	Duration	A local development project may be successfully operating and suited to returnees' profiles but may not be operational for the long timeframes required for sustainable reintegration. This is generally not the case for self-sufficient or profitable projects, but instead for capital-intensive projects that rely on funding through external donors. However, some projects have finite goals (such as local infrastructure development), which downscale activities once the primary objective has been reached. It is therefore essential that reintegration staff assesses both the foreseen duration of the project (including objectives), and the underlying funding model and cycles in order to assess the adequacy of involving returnees in the project.
	Adequacy of income	The lead reintegration organization needs to assess the adequacy of the foreseen income of beneficiaries derived from their involvement in the project. In some cases, "newcomers" may be remunerated differently from initial participants, and the foreseen income may thus be inadequate. Some projects are solely aimed at providing locals with supplementary income and are therefore not suitable as an exclusive source of income.

	Sector(s) and activities	The lead reintegration organization needs to gain a comprehensive understanding of the sector(s) targeted by the project and the range of activities pursued in order to be able to match returnees to particular fields of activities that correspond to their skills, needs and interests. This in turn relates to the capacity assessment of the project, as the project may have a high overall absorption capacity but lack the capacity to integrate returnees in those specific roles or activities that would correspond to their profiles.
	Skills requirements of foreseen activities	The lead reintegration organization needs to conduct an in-depth assessment of the range of skills required for relevant project activities. On-the-ground visits by the project team should be performed to better understand the activities foreseen, their complementarity to returnees' individual skills, needs and interests and any training that may be required.
	Gender equality	The lead reintegration organization should require that women and men are paid and treated equally for work of equal value in projects that subcontract companies employing returnees. When integrating a reintegration component in such a project, the reintegration mission could require that women and men receive equal wages and take the opportunity to promote companies' awareness of the benefits of mixed employment and equal pay as well as addressing issues of sexual harassment and abuse.
	Project-specific eligibility criteria	The lead reintegration organization needs to assess any existing project-specific eligibility criteria that affect returnees' eligibility of inclusion in the project.
Assessing the impact of returnees' involvement on the project/local community	Social impact	The lead reintegration organization needs to assess whether the preformed project groups are interested or willing to integrate returning migrants in the project, or if they prefer to integrate other members of the community rather than returnees. In any case, the lead reintegration organization needs to sensitize members of existing projects to integrate one or more returnees.
	Economic impact	The lead reintegration organization can consider allocating a portion of the individual reintegration assistance to the collective project in return for his or her integration into the group as a full member. The foreseen economic impact of involvement of returnees in a project needs to be assessed, taking into account also the project's specific disbursement scheme.

After assessment

Because the lead reintegration organization does not manage the external projects and therefore has no direct control over the design and implementation of projects (such as methodology and objectives) the main risk in using these as part of a reintegration strategy is the potentially limited impact of such projects on returnees and their socioeconomic reintegration. However, this risk can be mitigated with comprehensive information on the project and its surrounding environment as well as returnees' individual skills, needs and interests.

3.3.3 Community financial support activities

Where possible, community economic reintegration assistance, like individual economic assistance ([see sections 2.4.4, 2.4.5](#)), should be paired with complementary financial support such as financial literacy training and counselling, microsavings programmes, collective investment schemes and group-based loan schemes.

The creation of **financial support groups** can facilitate the reintegration of returnees, provide an additional safety net for non-migrants and returnees and foster the creation of social ties. Financial support groups should be created with the objective of enhancing the productive use of the local communities' and returning migrants' capacity of savings, access to credit and use of remittances. A local financial support group can provide financial support to its members in different ways:

- **Collective investment schemes.** For returnees and community members with disposable capital, financial support groups can provide an effective means of pooling together capital for collective investments. Members of financial support groups should be trained in providing advice and information to other members on investment opportunities, including productive projects implemented regionally by returnees and non-migrants. Under certain programmes, investments can also be complemented by local governments, international donors and other third parties. The lead reintegration organization or partners should provide supervision, develop and strengthen partnerships with financial and social entities, and monitor the sustainability of the investments to adjust investment models to lessons learned and best practices.
- **Group-based microcredit schemes.** Access to banking and financial services is dependent on eligibility and lending criteria ([see section 3.2 for details](#)) and the migration-specific challenges of returnees. Financial support groups can facilitate the creation of groups of borrowers, in which groups of returnees or non-migrants collectively provide collateral. Group lending is based on joint liability and therefore incentivizes group members to use their social ties to screen, monitor and enforce loan repayment on their peers. In return contexts, such group-based schemes should, however, be implemented very diligently and only if the lead reintegration organization or its partner has sufficient capacity to monitor loan usage and repayment. They also need to be able to address risks of intra-group trust erosion and support the group in case of repayment issues or loan defaulting.
- **Collective saving schemes and microsavings programmes.** Financial support groups can provide microsavings programmes for mixed groups of individuals (returnees and community members) who join together for a defined period to save and borrow as a group. The lead reintegration organization should provide support in identifying locally adapted saving schemes and optimizing the use of capital for savings.

- **Self-help groups:** Financial support groups can take the form of self-help groups, in which small groups of returnees or non-migrant community members save and internally lend their savings to individual members during times of need. The lead reintegration organization should support such groups through financial management training and tailored skills' training.

Apart from providing financial support, such groups are useful for fostering social connections and helping returnees reestablish a social circle. These social ties in turn facilitate the collective actions of group members, allowing them to coordinate their investment, savings and repayment decisions and cooperate for mutual benefit. However, collective schemes should be implemented very diligently and only if the lead reintegration organization has sufficient capacity to address risks of intra-group trust erosion, defaulting and avoidable collective indebtedness.

In locations where financial support groups are established, the lead reintegration organization should explore options for financial counselling, budget planning and saving mobilization training to be directly provided by these local groups ([see section 2.4.5](#)).

3.4 Social reintegration assistance at the community level

Social reintegration assistance at the community level is focused on improving the accessibility and availability of social services in communities of return. This can benefit both returnees and community members. It is most appropriate when there are physical, language or other barriers hindering returnee access services in specific high-return communities, or the services in these communities cannot meet the specific needs and vulnerabilities of returnees and community members.

Module 2 provides an overview of services that are most important for sustainable reintegration at the individual level, including housing, education and training, justice, health and well-being and other public infrastructure services such as water and roads. Aside from supporting individual returnee access to these services, the lead reintegration organization can work towards making these services more available and accessible in specific communities of high returns. Note that supporting service provision, referral networks and accessibility beyond one community is covered in [Module 4](#).

Community-level social reintegration assistance not only helps returnees access the services they need but can also benefit other community members who have similar needs or vulnerabilities. Particularly when strains on services are caused by large numbers of returnees, supporting service provision for high-return communities can also help alleviate tensions and potential conflict drivers that arise when large groups of returnees return to a single community.

Community profiles and specific assessments can identify problems of social service provision in target communities or tensions arising from constrained access. Community-based projects for social reintegration are most successful when projects are created in partnership with local stakeholders and when local leaders are willing to take ownership.

What follows are some considerations for strengthening social service accessibility and provision at the community level in the sectors most relevant for sustainable reintegration:

➔ **Housing and accommodation.** Large numbers of returnees returning to a community can strain housing availability for all community members. Landlords can take advantage of returnees and enter into exploitative agreements. In these cases the lead reintegration organization can take a proactive approach to educate landlords and other relevant stakeholders (such as local authorities) on the barriers returnees are encountering when looking for housing and how to make housing more accessible to them. As described in [section 2.5.1](#), the lead reintegration organization can help returnees find housing by providing guarantees. This can also be an option at the collective level, if a group of returnees finds collective housing.

When there is an overall lack of suitable housing in the community, the lead reintegration organization can look into expanding housing availability for all community members, including returnees. The lead reintegration organization should work with local authorities to devise locally appropriate solutions, particularly on issues such as the allocation of land, to address the needs of all those requiring housing.

➔ **Education and training.** Because educational and training environments should be secure and safe and provide protection from threats or harm for all, schools and other education facilities play an important role in promoting community well-being. Training teachers and educators to use positive disciplinary and conflict resolution techniques that promote tolerance and understanding of others could improve both social cohesion and community functioning, in addition to attitudes towards and acceptance of returnees.

Teachers and educators need to be aware of issues in learning environments that might be challenging to returnees (for instance, challenges to learning due to distressing past experiences and their effect on the capacity for concentration, the ability to take in new information and to engage socially in a learning environment). This might also mean helping educators learn to account for these issues for all, including non-migrants. In particular, schools and other educational or training facilities should be aware of barriers to education that can include:

- Learners not speaking or having low literacy in the language of instruction;
- Prohibitive school fees or other associated costs;
- School placements mismatched to a student's learning level;
- Arriving in the middle of the academic year or after a training programme has commenced;
- Adjustment to a different style of learning and education (for instance, because of cultural or pedagogical differences).

➔ **Health and well-being.** Access to and provision of quality health services is often a primary concern for not only returnees but also communities. Projects can provide direct support for specific health needs by training of health-care providers, provision of equipment and materials for health services or rehabilitating infrastructure for health care in specific communities. By investing in quality health-care services, health outcomes can improve for all community members not, just for the returnees themselves. Furthermore, community-based assistance can improve the quality of information on health issues as well as services and equipment for provision of health care. Materials on available health services should contain information and messaging that reflects the common concerns and health-related needs of the general local population, in addition to the specific needs of returnees. This is particularly important when there are confirmed or suspected cases of infectious disease present within a community or population subgroup. These health promotion materials should be widely available in formats and languages returnees

and community members can understand, keeping in mind potential low levels of literacy that affect certain demographic groups more than others.

- **Public infrastructure and safety.** Access to services is typically dependent on good infrastructure and one's ability to physically reach a place of service. So the routes and transportation methods needed to attend schools, see doctors, process documents and meet all other elements of social stability must be affordable and accessible. Roads must also be secure and safe and not exacerbate any risks of violence, exploitation and abuse.

Community-level interventions to help reduce risks on daily journeys can include road construction or lighting and dedicated walkways along roads, promoting the use of reflective tape on clothing or bags, provision of torches or other equipment and use of or avoidance of identifiable uniforms. Community efforts can cover organized transportation, such as buses, walking as a group or a “mentoring approach”, or using adults to escort children to schools. All of these can be facilitated by effective community organization.

Environmental factors are very important for community stability. Through exposure to environmental challenges such as natural hazards, climate change or environmental degradation, communities can face diverse threats ranging from threats to physical safety and health and lack of access to vital natural resources, such as drinking water. Community-level interventions can address these threats by ensuring that communities are safe, prepared and resilient to disasters. In addressing environmental challenges, there is also potential to provide “green jobs”.

- **Justice and rights.** It can be difficult for returnees and community members to access justice systems or fulfill their rights, particularly if they lack the proper documentation for things like voting or filing claims or if they fear repercussions due to stigma or marginalization in the community. The lead reintegration organization can address these problems by sensitizing local government, courts, lawyers' associations, law enforcement and others to the barriers that returnees and other community members face. The lead reintegration organization can work to find solutions. In addition, bringing together community members, including returnees, with these stakeholders to discuss directly their obstacles can be beneficial to building trust and confidence.

Community advocacy for social service accessibility

Support for local-level advocacy can help address discriminatory policies and practices that increase reintegration barriers for returnees at the community level. In general, advocacy strategies at the community level should target changes in policy, practice and any decision-making that reinforces barriers to reintegration. These activities should be developed with community partners such as CSOs or local government and ideally carried out by them with the support of the lead reintegration organization. Local advocacy efforts can be most effective when paired with the wider community mobilization and outreach strategies described in [section 3.4](#).

Community advocacy strategies can target local government authorities, local administrators, or key community members who have the power to change service provision policies or practice. These stakeholders should be identified in the community assessment process ([see section 3.2.1](#)). Advocacy messaging should always call for the provision of important services without discrimination on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation or for any other reason.



Case Study 10: Infrastructure rehabilitation in El Salvador

El Salvador has been experiencing high numbers of returning migrants since 2015. The quest for better economic opportunities, overall violence and cracks in the social fabric were reported as main reasons for leaving. As a result, IOM El Salvador opted for a holistic infrastructure rehabilitation strategy that includes re-establishing migrant reception centres and restoring community infrastructure to promote holistic, accessible and user-friendly community infrastructure and services.

In coordination with local government, IOM refurbished already existing migrant reception centres to better refer and assist returnees. After assessing needs, IOM developed a six-month training plan targeting both municipalities and local communities to help them develop reintegration strategies and workplans. To better connect public services with returnees' needs, IOM held interactive discussion sessions for staff working at the centre, covering key topics such as return and reintegration, migration and local development and health, among others. This led to an increase in the capacities of reception centres to provide direct assistance (including counselling and shelter) and use individual screenings to refer for beneficiaries to relevant services.

In parallel, IOM helped to restore community infrastructures to reclaim public spaces and encourage social activities and cohesion. The remodelling of public spaces such as schools, community houses, sports field and parks allows community members to reclaim previously abandoned areas. Installation of lighting systems and bright pathways were installed to improve safe access to essential services such as schools.

These initiatives were developed and implemented through a participatory approach to foster community engagement with communities and municipalities. They were handed over to local authorities once refurbishment was completed. To consolidate ownership, IOM established a committee composed of local community members and local authorities' representatives. This working group is a coordination platform for programming and implementing activities in the recovered spaces that all groups can enjoy.

3.5 Psychosocial reintegration assistance at the community level

Psychosocial reintegration assistance at the community level includes activities that strengthen social networks within communities to empower returnees within those networks and foster wider acceptance of returning migrants within the community. These activities are most useful when returnees lack strong social links to communities of return or when community dynamics are not conducive to returnees' reintegration.

Beyond individual psychosocial assistance, community social networks and structures are important for the psychosocial reintegration process. Even if returnees have social networks in their country of origin, community dynamics are sometimes not conducive to returnee reintegration or can even stigmatize returnees. In addition, in an individual's mind, migration may have created a gap that has to be filled by interacting and creating new contacts with and within the community. Community-level psychosocial assistance aims to include returnees into social support systems within the community by fostering mutual understanding and acceptance and limiting stigmatization of returning migrants. These initiatives benefit returnees by giving them the social links and support for their empowerment. They help communities by allowing them to benefit and learn from returnees' reintegration processes.

Migrants who return with a mental health condition carry a double stigma: on the one hand they struggle with the symptoms and the disabilities that result from their condition; on the other, they are challenged by the prejudices of the general population and, commonly, those of their family and community. The psychosocial support that the lead reintegration organization is asked to give can be more effectively provided if it involves families and the communities, even before a returnee's actual return. All the activities for engaging communities described in this section can also help fight the stigma connected with mental illness. They include providing information about mental health and promoting contact with the affected returnees. For a detailed description of the steps in which psychosocial support can be offered at individual, family and community level, see [Annex 1](#).

This chapter presents a detailed overview of the different approaches of community-based psychosocial reintegration support.

- 3.5.1 Community mobilization activities
- 3.5.2 Peer support mechanisms
- 3.5.3 Community networks

3.5.1 Community mobilization activities

All activities falling under the community-based psychosocial approach to reintegration support the wider objective of community mobilization.

Community mobilization aims to develop inclusiveness and a positive attitude towards returnees' reintegration by counteracting potential stigma. In sensitization activities, community members, groups or organizations plan and carry out participatory activities, either on their own initiative or stimulated by others. Such work involves processes like raising awareness and building commitment; giving community members the opportunity to explore their current beliefs, attitudes and practices; setting priorities; planning how best to meet their challenges, implement their plans and monitor their progress; and evaluating results. Through their participation in the process, communities establish necessary organizational structures and relationships. Returnees develop their social support networks, which helps them to reduce stress factors and improves other aspects of their lives.

With relation to community mobilization in the context of psychosocial reintegration assistance, three types of community-level interventions are presented in this section:

- Facilitation of peer-support mechanisms and systems;
- Introduction of returnees to identified cultural, recreational and artistic systems and support to those systems; and
- Promotion and support for events and processes that positively affect the social perception of returnees.



One successful technique for building trust within groups and reducing intra-group conflict is the **“my story” approach**. In a “my story” activity, group members write short stories about themselves in response to a set of personal questions (such as, are you organized or rather messy? What physical activities do you enjoy? What are your hobbies?) and present their stories with partners or the group. Such exercises foster trust and familiarity in an environment that cultivates openness and information-sharing.

Turner, J. and Y. Kim.

2005 [Learning about building literacy communities in multicultural and multilingual classrooms](#). *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 10(1):21–41

See also:

Huddy, S.

2015 Vulnerability in the classroom: Instructor's ability to build trust impacts the student's learning experience. *International Journal of Education Research*, 10(2).

3.5.2 Peer support mechanisms

Peer support mechanisms use resources and capacities within the local community (including returnees) to build support networks to deal with reintegration or other challenges. Because they rely on existing resources, the support provided is not only locally appropriate but likely to last beyond the timeline of the programme.

Mentoring approach

This approach is based on a supportive relationship between two peers with similar experiences, for example a newly arrived returnee and a former returnee from the same location. It is an empowering form of psychosocial support that is learned through organized training activities.

Returnees who have been particularly successful in their reintegration, those with experience in community engagement, or those with specific backgrounds (such as social workers or teachers, for example) can act as mentors. These returnee mentors act as an informal support network for the newly arrived returnees. They can help them navigate the difficulties of return or just function as a point of reference.

A network of mentors can be established, formalized and supported with annual reunions and training sessions, such as training in the mentoring approach described below. During individual counselling, returnees should be referred to the mentor network where available and appropriate.

→ Who IS a mentor

A mentor is usually a volunteer who is available to support a returnee in acclimatizing to the return context, thus reducing their isolation. They are someone who can understand the experience of the returnee because they have also experienced something similar. They have received some training to fulfil this role. A mentor can also be a community member who might not have migrated, but understands the returnees' needs and opportunities.

→ Who a mentor is NOT

A mentor is not a case manager, because mentors act in a more informal fashion. Mentors are not supervisors, because they do not direct or monitor the reintegration of the returnees.

→ What a mentor DOES

The mentor supports the newly arrived returnee with solving practical problems, like giving information about services, procedures or formalities, connected with the fact that the country may have changed and the returnee needs help navigating. The mentor, relying on their personal reintegration story, fosters the returnee's proactivity and also helps reduce the social barriers to reintegration.

→ Training for a mentor

Apart from some attitudes such as being sensitive, empathic and available, the mentor should receive training covering such aspects as:

- The types of activities that mentors and returnees can do together;
- How to listen effectively (see [Annex 1.A](#));
- How to manage and adapt expectations;

- How to encourage equal and respectful relationships;
- How to refer the returnee to a help service or agency;
- How to provide Psychological First Aid ([see Annex 1.C](#));
- How to end the mentor relationship.

→ How to set up an effective mentoring approach

The lead reintegration organization, with the help of local organizations, communities and authorities, can set up an effective mentoring approach by:

- Meeting the community leaders or, if possible, local communities during collective events to explain the role of the mentor and its value;
- Asking for volunteers, preferably among former returnees who have already benefited from the support of helping organizations or entities. When possible, both male and female volunteers should be selected;
- Organizing formal training on the mentoring approach, covering the topics described above. This should usually entail at least a two-day initial training period and yearly refreshers;
- Organizing regular supervision with the mentors so that they can share their views and tackle the most common issues and ask for solutions;
- Supporting returnees in their emotional needs; and
- Evaluating the mentoring approach on a regular basis by meeting the returnees at the end of a mentoring cycle.

→ Peer support groups

Peer support groups are a consolidated form of group support in which individuals having similar life experiences interact and form helping connections. In the context of reintegration, the similarity stems from participants in the peer-support groups having gone through similar migration experiences. In this sense, peer support groups form a social, emotional, physical and tangible support network and can help returnees feel part of a group, overcome feelings of social isolation and build a bridge towards the community. Depending on the context, due consideration should be given to whether it is appropriate or preferable to have mixed- or single-gender groups.

Peer groups can form themselves spontaneously, but they can also be programmatically envisaged and structured. A structured peer-support group consists of:

- One to six one-hour initial meetings that the group can decide to extend up to one year;
- Ideally 8 to 20 participants. Although newcomers should not be included in existing groups and instead form new ones, this can be kept flexible due to geographical distances and consideration of existing bonds;
- An experienced facilitator: they can be identified among professionals or can be a returnee that has been trained to facilitate peer support groups;
- Information about the peer support group should be communicated to the returnee during counselling sessions;
- Community leaders and peers should be informed about the group and as much as possible involved in the activities of the group. This would require the approval from community leaders; and
- Follow-up sessions should be organized based on the interest and availability of the group.

The objectives of peer support meetings are sharing experiences, discussing return and reintegration related topics and giving and receiving support.³¹



Case Study 11: Returnee clusters in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, many returnees have been away for long periods of time and have limited connections with suppliers, other entrepreneurs and the business sector in their communities. This can hinder the sustainability of their businesses.

Since 2007, IOM Sri Lanka has partnered with non-profit CEFE NET Sri Lanka to provide business skills'-development training (BDT) to returning migrants from different countries and assisted through various projects.

The BDT training curriculum is highly interactive and is tailored to respond to returnees' needs, backgrounds and skills. It accompanies them over time through the various phases of business set-up and expansion, using a combination of skills'-development courses and practical support. The courses are made of groups of 20 to 30 returnees.

The curriculum was recently strengthened to help returnees engaged in similar businesses form clusters. These clusters help returnees develop their social capital and network of peers through regular meetings and collaboration mechanisms. For example, clusters for agriculture and transport in Jaffna work closely together, transporting and selling agricultural products. Being part of a cluster produces direct economic benefits, such as scale economies when purchasing goods or services jointly, better leverage for negotiating with producer organizations or lending institutions, and exchange of tips related to overall business management and market dynamics. The clusters also work as a follow-up mechanism to mitigate risks of isolation once assistance ends. In this way, they promote the sustainability of businesses.

Cluster leaders and deputies, elected for 12 months by cluster members, are specifically trained to enhance their leadership skills and knowledge on how to establish relationships with business partners and suppliers, maintain a good team spirit among cluster members, and assist members with specific challenges. IOM regularly follows up with cluster members through social media and messaging apps.



Tips for success:

- Target areas where large numbers of migrants return and have common business interests.

³¹ To learn more about how to organize these groups, the following guide should be referred to www.mind.org.uk/media/17944275/peer-support-toolkit-final.pdf.

3.5.3 Community networks

Cultural, artistic and physical expression can play important roles in supporting returnees and communities to establish or improve social links and combat social stigma during the reintegration process. These interventions recognize that the returnees' culture, experiences, knowledge and skills have changed as a result of the migration experience and sharing this can assist in building more supportive community networks. Storytelling, theatre, visual art, music, dance and sport can all be powerful vehicles for sharing. They can have a strong potential impact on reintegration, social cohesion and on the well-being of individuals.

At the individual level, these activities help release stress and anxiety and promote self-awareness and confidence. Within a group of people, they can create strong bonds and break down barriers by discussing difficult issues through metaphors and in a safe place. At the community level, the expressive arts can produce positive images and increase understanding of returnees. Therefore, it is important for a case manager to:

- Identify and map existing formal and informal theatre, visual art, music, dance, sports and other interest-related collectives and groups in return communities;
- Sensitize these groups and stakeholders using information on the needs and creative resources that returnees may bring;
- Identify any returnees with possible creative interests during counselling;
- Refer the returnees to these groups, based on their interests; and
- Identify support for creative initiatives that are inclusive of returnees, through grants, publicity and so forth.

Building on the partnerships established through referrals, or independently, the lead reintegration assistance can support events (such as exhibitions, readings, storytelling, performances, sport events) that display the creativity and skills of returnees together with those of community members. For example, sports games involving both returnees and non-migrants can bring together not only the players but also the community to watch. Understanding local preferences in cultural, artistic and physical activities can guide decisions on what is appropriate to support.

→ Storytelling events

Storytelling is an effective tool for mobilizing communities and promoting social cohesion towards the reintegration of returning migrants. It is the oldest and easiest known form of sharing stories and exerts an emotional impact on both the tellers and the listeners. Stories that relate experiences can create understanding and have the power to unite people while they are being told. They work on a deep emotional level and benefit all participants: it is not only the listener who learns, but also the teller who becomes aware of the value of his or her own unique experiences and background.

Storytelling can be structured as a group activity or an event, involving returnees, their families and the communities. Returnees who feel so inclined can tell not only about hurdles but also about courage, skills and learned lessons that can be transferred to the community.

Storytelling can be verbal, in the form of a video or a reading. A facilitator can help the returnees combine their stories in different narratives to share in public. Digital media has been playing an increasingly influential role in shaping the perceptions and outcomes of migration processes and can be shared widely and easily between audiences. A digital story, with the editing of images, sound, music and voice does not require extensive technical knowledge or skills and can offer both the returnees and their communities opportunities

for learning new skills. A digital storytelling laboratory can bring together members of the community and returnees and enhance social cohesion. Combining the art of storytelling and the practice of exploring meaning through image making, each returnee can engage in remembering, reconstituting and performing their story.



TIP

To add value, a storytelling workshop could include not only the returnees but also members of the community, giving voice and images not only to the stories of the those who have left and have then come back, but also to those who did not migrate.

→ Staging the experiences of returning migrants

Staging the experiences of returnees in dramas written and played by the returnees themselves is a form of psychosocial support and a tool for community mobilization. It empowers returnees to become protagonists of their own stories. It enhances their sense of control and reduces feelings of helplessness; it can have an effect on the audience as well, changing their perceptions about return migration. Under the guidance of a play writer and of a director, these writing and acting workshops have the power to foster social cohesion and facilitate reintegration.

→ Theatre forums

Another example of staging returnees' experiences can be inspired by the forum theatre. Through this technique, a problem that oppresses an individual is presented unsolved in a theatre scene and spectators are actively engaged in the performance. The scene is repeated twice and during the replay, which is facilitated by a presenter or joker (who is also expert in moderating interactions), each audience member can stop the scene at any given moment, step forward and take the place of the oppressed character, showing how they could change the situation to allow a different outcome. Breaking the barriers between performer and audience, the dynamic engagement on stage is powerful and has transformative effects on all the people in the theatre. In addition, practical and shared solutions to general problems can emerge.

Usually, the scene is the result of a workshop of a few days with a group of people sharing similar situations, such as returning migrants. Forum theatres on problems faced by returnees can sensitize communities on these problems and help returnees and communities create bonds and find solutions in a creative and participatory way.



Case Study 12: Family and community dialogue in Ghana

Since 2016, IOM Ghana has organized focus group discussions to sensitize community members and relatives of returnees on the difficulties encountered by returnees upon their return, so that they can play a positive role in their reintegration and avoid contributing to their stigmatization, marginalization and isolation.

These focus groups usually gather small groups of about 20 people, including opinion leaders, returnees, family and community members. Sessions generally begin with IOM staff providing a brief background on the reason for the gathering and what the expectations are. Where appropriate, background information on generic challenges faced by returnees is shared, such as difficult migratory experiences, returning empty-handed or feeling like they have disappointed their family and community. Questions to prompt and direct conversation to topics of interest are posed to the group. Where returnees are willing, they share their experiences.

These exchanges can generate a better understanding of the reintegration challenges returnees face. The focus groups provide family and community members with a deeper insight into the support they could give to their relatives and peers. The discussions are also an opportunity to reflect on any unconscious bias that could undermine their reintegration. Because returnees are invited to freely voice their feelings and share their experience with family and community members, these focus groups also have a cathartic function and can help returnees reconnect with their social circles.

Radio programmes help publicize focus group discussions. Involving opinion leaders and local authorities also reinforces the local ownership of these activities.



Tips for success:

- Locate focus group discussion venues in high movement areas or easily visible and accessible places.

USEFUL RESOURCES

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

- 2017 *Voluntary Return and Reintegration: Community-Based Approaches*. Altai Consulting, IOM, Geneva. Provides practitioners with a large number of compact case studies and best practices on designing, implementing and monitoring community-based reintegration projects in different contexts and environments.
- 2019 *Community Based Psychosocial Support in Emergencies Manual*. IOM, Geneva. This manual is aimed at providing guidance on psychosocial support for communities in, and following, emergencies.
- IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse*. IOM, Geneva. Introduces IOM's programmatic approach to protecting and assisting migrants vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse. It discusses the model's operationalization and its application at different stages of migration and in countries of origin, transit and destination.

Samuel Hall/IOM

- 2017 *Setting Standards for an Integrated Approach to Reintegration*. IOM, Geneva, funded by DFID.

Schininà, G., J. Voltaire, A. Ataya and M-A. Salem

- 2011 'Dye mon, gen mon' ('Beyond the mountains, more mountains'). *Social theatre, community mobilization and participation after disasters: The International Organization for Migration experience in Haiti, after January 2010's earthquake*. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 16(1):47–54. This provides an in depth case study of the use of social theatre forums in Haiti.

Side by Side Research Consortium

- 2017 *Developing Peer Support in the Community: A Toolkit*. Mind, London.

World Food Programme (WFP)

- 2018 *Environmental and Social Screening Tool (consultation version)*. WFP, Rome.