



A Psychosocial Approach to Reintegration Counselling

Adapted for the East and the Horn of Africa Region | January 2020

■ **EU-IOM**
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Migrant Protection
and Reintegration
■

 
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organization for Migration
SOLER	Sit squarely, Open posture, Lean forward, Eye contact, Relax
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures

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Two young Ethiopian migrants receiving educational materials as part of their reintegration process.

INTRODUCTION

The present guide is intended to provide key information on the importance of post-arrival counselling, the basic counselling and communication skills, and how to conduct a reintegration counselling interview.

At the same time, it offers some tips to understand the emotional complexity and the psychosocial challenges that returnees might experience upon return, which can affect positively or negatively how they reintegrate into their communities, engage with the programme, and interact with IOM Assistant/Counsellor.

This guide is not meant to constitute Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), but it is rather a practical tool to support the IOM Assistant/Counsellor during the reintegration counselling process. It does not cover counselling of specific cases such as victims of trafficking or torture, children and others whose return counselling requires specific skills, attitudes, and precautions.

01

COUNSELLING: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IS IT FOR?

Counselling is used in a variety of situations: psychological counselling, career counselling, legal counselling, etc., and has to do with engaging and assisting people facing a specific problem, to solve the problem or identify the acceptable coping mechanism. Despite there is not a single definition of “counselling”, this term can be comprehended as “a process, organized in a series of steps, which aims to help people cope (deal with or adapt to) better with situations they are facing. This involves helping the individual to understand their emotions and feelings and to help them make positive choices and decisions. Counselling is an approach for assisting people to reduce initial distress resulting from a difficult situation, and to encourage short and long-term adaptive functioning (positive coping)”¹.

IOM defines reintegration counselling as:

- Provision of information to the returnee on the reintegration assistance process;
- Collection of information on the returnee, including assessment of potential situations of vulnerability and identification of needs, skills, motivations, and opportunities;
- Provide first-line emotional and psychological support to the returnee.

The reintegration counselling is a fundamental step for the establishment of a comprehensive reintegration plan for all returnees, which should not just be limited to a business plan but should be a “life plan”² which encompasses the economic, social and psychosocial needs of the individual.



Khadeejah, a Sudanese migrant assisted by the EU-Joint Initiative Programme. © IOM Sudan / 2019

1. IOM, *Introduction to Basic Counselling and Communication Skills: IOM Training Manual For Migrant Community Leaders and Community Workers*, 2009, available at http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/pandemic_manual_aug09.pdf

2. A comprehensive reintegration plan should be based on IOM’s *Integrated Approach to Reintegration* and therefore should consider the multidimensional process of reintegration in a holistic manner across the economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions. (See https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/Towards-an-Integrated-Approach-to-Reintegration.pdf)

02

ROLE OF THE IOM ASSISTANT OR COUNSELLOR

The role of the IOM Assistant/Counsellor should be focused on the following:

- **Engage** - Engaging with the returnee through reintegration counselling in order to better understand his/her background, professional qualifications, skills and resources that can facilitate a sustainable reintegration and the obstacles that may, on the contrary, hinder the reintegration process;
- **Assess Needs** - Assessing the returnees' specific needs and resources in a holistic manner, by taking into consideration the economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions of the reintegration process. The assessment should consider the interaction between different levels: the individual psychological level (emotional experience, personal strengths, and weaknesses), the professional level (skills, experiences and professional areas to be developed) and the social level (social capital and networks);
- **Support** - Supporting the returnee in the design of a comprehensive and realistic reintegration plan. Exploring options and mobilising resources to implement the plan through referral notably, selection process or direct assistance (when relevant);
- **Follow Up** - Monitoring and follow-up support.

The IOM Assistant/Counsellor should perceive him/herself as a coach (who supports persons) and not merely an administrator of bureaucratic procedures. S/he should avoid considering the returnee only as a passive beneficiary or 'victim' to be assisted but rather as an agent of his/her life.

The counselling process calls for the returnees to maintain a sense of self-worth and self-determination or to stop feeling helpless, in case s/he feels so. It aims at making one more aware of oneself, able to accept their weaknesses and identify their strengths. Through the process, the returnee is supported to form a clearer picture of his/her own weakness and identify one's own strengths.

Counselling aims at helping people believe more in themselves and in their ability to decide upon the future course of their lives and take on the responsibility of being able to bring change in their own lives and in those of their families and communities.



The person is supported to form a clearer picture of his/her situation and reintegration challenges, to look at the various options open to him/her and to decide upon the course of action to be taken.

The IOM Assistant/Counsellor will then support the returnee to maintain or strengthen his/her resilience³ which is what gives people the strength to deal with problems and maintain or regain a full sense of self-esteem, self-help and control over one's life.

This means:

- **Respect** – Respecting and not hindering their autonomy and self-determination, by listening attentively and unjudgmentally to their points of view, aspirations and fears.
- **Acknowledgement** – Help them maintain or re-establish a full self-confidence, acknowledging their predicaments, and the frustrations that a return can entail; reassuring them about the normality of certain feelings and fears that can be determined by such a situation (see Annex 1); validating their aspirations; and giving value to their points of view, in the making of the plan.
- **Valorization** – Help them in recognizing their own resources (individual qualities, professional skills, social capital and network, productive assets⁴), including those acquired during the migration process and the return, especially those they can use in their reintegration plan, within or in complementarity to the IOM reintegration support.



See Annex 1 for tips and key messages on how to support migrants during their return and reintegration process.



3. Resilience is a term used in psychology to describe the inner and collective capacity of individuals and groups to cope with distress and adversities, and to resistance to future negative events.

4. Productive assets (if any) like for instance a piece of land, poultry, computer, car, etc.

03

BASIC COMMUNICATION AND COUNSELLING SKILLS

Counselling differs from daily person-to-person informal communication. Instead, basic counselling skills, which include positive communication skills, constitute a fundamental tool during the reintegration counselling process with a view:

- To create a safe environment;
- To establish a trusting relationship between the reintegration assistant and the returnee;
- To understand the returnees' needs, resources and aspirations in relation to their reintegration, at the individual, family and community level;
- To provide basic first-line emotional support to the returnee;
- To establish a participatory and realistic reintegration plan;
- To understand when to offer the returnee the services of a mental health specialist (if necessary and feasible).



See Annex 2 for a list of values that usually characterize the most effective communication styles.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND COUNSELLING TECHNIQUES

There is evidence that good and effective communication leads to a better outcome of the counselling. It allows the returnee to accurately describe his/her situation and resources, ensure that s/he clearly understands the reintegration options and therefore can facilitate the establishment of an effective and sustainable reintegration plan.

Good communication

Good communication is a dynamic two-way dialogue between the reintegration assistant and the returnee, in which each person pays attention to what the other person says and how s/he reacts, making a sincere attempt to understand and acknowledge each other. This is beneficial for both: the reintegration assistant will know the returnee's concerns, obstacles, skills, resources that can hamper and/or facilitate the reintegration process. This will allow him/her to better tailor the reintegration counselling and assistance.

The returnee knows the different options and the functioning of the assistance process and is thus able to make informed decisions about his/her reintegration. Both returnee and reintegration assistant avoid misinformation and above all, they establish mutual trust and understanding that can increase the returnee's confidence that is a vital factor for the success and sustainability of his/her reintegration plan. It is not possible to avoid communication even if we do not wish to do so, we communicate just with our attitude and body language.

However, there is not always mutual comprehension. It is often mistakenly believed that good communicators are born, not made. But recent studies show that the ability to talk and listen more effectively can be easily learned.

Here are some of the communication techniques that are recommended for a positive reintegration counselling interview:

Effective listening

There are three components of effective listening:

- **Attending behaviour:** In order to establish a positive relationship with the returnee, the IOM Assistant/ Counsellor should demonstrate positive unconditional regard, empathy⁵ and genuineness. Everyone feels good when attention is given. On the contrary, it is very painful to be ignored by others. Getting attention is a basic psychological need of all human beings.

The IOM Assistant/Counsellor should show attending skills which include first and foremost giving the client undivided attention. The counsellor should not double task during the counselling session, look at his/her e-mails or your phone or attend to other tasks in parallel. In addition, they should signal physically that they are listening, as for instance by nodding the head or saying “Yes”, “Yes, go on”, “I’m with you”, “Uh-huh”, “Mmm-mm”, “I see”, “Of course”.

- **Non-verbal communication:** The non-verbal aspects of communication include body language, socioemotional presence, and silence (see Box 1).
- **Active listening:** Good listening requires the IOM Assistant/ Counsellor to play an active role in the listening process and encourage the beneficiary to actively participate in the interview.

The IOM Assistant/Counsellor’s posture should show that s/he is not in any hurry. It is advised not to try to fill forms at the same time but instead leave this for the end of the session as a recap with the returnee. Avoid as well frantically typing on laptop or phone when the person is talking.

When asking questions or giving verbal reactions, the counsellor must do it at a slow pace, staying with the subject under discussion. It is better to avoid switching quickly from one matter to another and to interrupt frequently.



The use of non-verbal attending sets a comfortable tone, encourages the returnee to keep talking and demonstrates the IOM Assistant/Counsellor’s concern and interest in following the conversation.

The IOM Assistant/Counsellor should facilitate the discussion and encourage the returnee to provide complete information by using specific interviewing techniques (see Box 2 and 3). When listening to the answers, the counsellor will often paraphrase (e.g. “So you are saying that... did I understand correctly?”) and clarify (e.g. “I am not sure what you mean. Can you explain a bit more?”).

In active listening, the IOM Assistant/Counsellor should try to understand from what the returnee is saying, what s/he is feeling, including about his/her return and reintegration.

5. Empathy simply means imagining what it must feel like to be in another person’s place. Understanding the returned migrant situation and reintegration challenges s/he might face will help you be more sensitive and will help the person feel more comfortable in talking to you.

BOX 1 - NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Non-verbal behaviour/body language - Often, we are able to notice the changes in expression on another person's face. Similarly, the returnee can see the expressions on the IOM Assistant/Counsellor and observe the tensions in his/her body language. This can be a sign of positive or negative attending. The IOM Assistant/Counsellor needs to be aware of his/her body as a source of non-verbal communication. During the counselling process, s/he can follow what is suggested through the acronym SOLER:

S – sit squarely

O – open posture

L – lean forward to show interest and empathy (if culturally appropriate)

E – eye contact (if culturally appropriate)

R – relax

It is therefore important to take always into account cultural differences, e.g. the acceptability of some forms of courtesy such as shaking hands with someone, looking the other person in the eyes, and the degree of distance/proximity in interpersonal relationships may vary greatly from one culture to another.

Socioemotional presence - This refers to the quality of the IOM Assistant/Counsellor's total presence to the returnee during the counselling interview. Both the verbal and non-verbal behaviour should tell the returnee that you are very willing to work with him/her. There should be no distinction between the two, as this will indicate a lack of genuineness and interest in attending.

Some examples of negative attitudes when someone is talking to you that should be avoided: looking around the room and appear distracted, talk to or text someone else on the phone when the person is talking, tapping your pen on the table, looking constantly at your watch or your phone.

Silence - Silence gives the returnee a chance to think things through. Occasionally it may indicate embarrassment or resentment. Most of us feel uncomfortable with silences and tend to chip in with the first thing that comes to mind, which is usually irrelevant. This must be avoided. Leave pauses, even at the beginning of the counselling interview before the returnee has spoken. If s/he stops talking, but you feel s/he is not really finished, do not let the silence make you nervous. S/he may be thinking through something important. After a while, you can say something like "you seem to be thinking hard"; this will let him/her know that you are with him/her and can facilitate the dialogue. The counsellor should not evaluate, offer opinions, give advice, analyse or interrogate, and should be careful not to misinterpret the returnee. By consistently relying on "active listening", the IOM Assistant/Counsellor shows support, understanding and empathy for the returnee's feelings (See Box 4), and at the same time allows him/her to retain leadership and agency over the process.

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BOX 2 - INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

Open-ended questions - These are questions that can bring out different answers and that cannot be answered in few words or, sometimes, even in a single session. They encourage returnees to talk and provide maximum information. In open questioning, it is usual to begin with “What”, “How”, “Why”. The “What” questions serve to solicit facts and gathering information; the “How” questions are related to sequence and process of emotions (e.g. “How do you feel about ...?”; “How can you move forward with your strengths?”), and the “Why” questions tend to focus on reasons and intellectual history. These questions encourage sharing and give the respondent the possibility to express his/her view in their own language. It is important to encourage the returnee to speak freely about whatever s/he wants related to the posed question.

Closed-ended questions - These questions leave the returnee only a few possibilities to answer, like “yes” or “no”. Those questions should always be complementary to open-ended questions.

Paraphrasing - Paraphrasing is a brief rephrasing of information provided by the returnee. It provides a restatement of the information’ essence in your own words. The use of paraphrasing demonstrates you are listening, and it helps you make sure your understanding is correct. It is not uncommon for people to be somewhat vague or have trouble coming to the point when discussing. By restating the returnee’ main points in your own words, you not only assist your own understanding but also help him/her to clarify his/her main points and concerns. If your restatement is not quite on target, the person will usually clarify what s/he has just said. E.g. “It sounds like...”; “Let me see if I heard you right...”; “Are you saying that...”; “In other words, what you mean is...”.

Clarifying and summarizing - Clarifying means asking questions until you are both confident that you have understood. E.g. “I am not sure what you mean. Can you explain a bit more?”. Summarizing is pulling together, organizing and integrating the major aspects of your conversation, going over it together, agreeing on the next step of action.

Restating - Restating what you have just heard often helps the returnee to carry on talking without distracting the train of thoughts.

E.g. Migrant: “...and I do not know what to do now.”

Counsellor: “You do not know what to do?”

Migrant: “No, I just do not see any solution to my current situation...”

Invitations to talk - Sometimes it is useful to make an encouraging remark like:

“Would you like to talk more about that?”

“Could you tell me more about your situation?”

BOX 3 – TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING CHILDREN

- Create a friendly atmosphere that generates trust
- Ensure you and the returnee are on the same eye-level
- Establish eye contact in a respectful way (if culturally appropriate)
- Avoid physical contact
- Keep your tone of voice soft and calm, however, do not infantilise the tone of voice
- Consider communicating in a gender-sensitive manner
- Reaffirm the confidentiality of the information shared
- Do not force the child to talk
- In some cases, the IOM Assistant/Counsellor can use board games and/or drawings to make the child feel more comfortable to talk
- Listen attentively
- Present information in a language they understand (avoid using technical terms)
- Do not judge their feelings and stories
- Avoid multitasking during the interview, including taking notes

BOX 4 – EMPATHY VERSUS SYMPATHY

The IOM Assistant/Counsellor should try to show **empathy** rather than sympathy or... apathy.

Example	Empathy	Sympathy	Apathy
The migrant is talking about his grief for the loss of a friend during the travel.	I can understand what you are going through.	Poor you. It is really bad that this happens to you.	Mmm, I see.
The migrant expresses his/her anger in relation to mistreatment from authorities.	I can understand that you are feeling angry at what has happened to you.	It is horrible that this has happened to you.	Ah, OK.
The migrant expresses his/her fears of not being accepted back in the family.	I accept that you are very scared.	Do not be scared. I am here to help you however I can.	Can you excuse me? I need to go out for five minutes.
The migrant starts crying.	Simply sitting in silence while the person expresses his/her feelings or weeps.	I am sorry for you, do not worry everything will be all right.	Can we go on, now?

Khadeejah, a migrant supported by IOM in her return and reintegration to Sudan. © IOM Sudan / 2019



HOW TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Several recommendations on how to create a supportive environment during the reintegration counselling process are listed below.

- A reintegration counselling interview must not harm the returnee further from an emotional point of view. In particular, the returnee should not be pushed to talk about what happened to him/her in the past or during the migration, and there must not be judgements about what they are saying.
- The emotional challenges the returnees may face upon return should always be acknowledged, this means not to diminish or minimise those challenges when they are expressed. It means also to reassure the returnee on the fact that those challenges are normal and not a sign of weakness in the return situation while recognizing that the fact they are normal does not diminish the burden on the migrant.
- Reintegration counselling should preferably be done individually, as group counselling may not provide the best environment, particularly in the case of people in vulnerable situation among the returnees.
- In contexts where gender issues are culturally sensitive and may have an impact on the counselling, the option should be given to the migrant to decide whether to talk with a female or male counsellor (whenever possible in terms of resources).
- Show respect by accepting the returnee in what constitutes his/her subjective reality. This means accepting his/her emotions, feelings, and thoughts without trying to push them away or downplaying them. Keep in mind that returnees may have suffered extreme experiences in the country of origin as well as during the journey. His/her ability to survive and to overcome adversities should be recognized and merits full respect.
- Consider the returnee a peer subject in the conversation, and not only the recipient of information. Do this by paying attention to any signals made by the returnee, for example, indicating his/her wish to stop talking for a bit, to take a little break or to change of environment.
- When collecting information (including profile assessment and vulnerability screening), establish first a relationship of trust.
- Provide factual information and be honest about what you know or not, what can be done or not within the IOM's reintegration assistance. For example, say, "I do not know but I will try to find out".
- Acknowledge the returnee's feelings and as well his/her strengths and how these have been supportive so far.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality, especially when returnee discloses very private information.
- Do not comment or give an opinion on the returnee's situation. Just listen.
- Be non-judgmental.

04

COUNSELLING STEPS AND KEY MESSAGES

Counselling is a key component of the integrated approach to reintegration. It is the starting point of the flexible approach embedded in it and in the EU-IOM Joint Initiative Programme SOPs on Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR). It should thus allow consideration of the various factors impacting reintegration (economic, social, and psychosocial) and designing a reintegration plan addressing the needs, motivations and opportunities of each returnee.

The counselling session should follow some steps described below, keeping in mind the important aspects highlighted above. It may not be possible or desirable to cover everything during one single counselling session; several interviews may be needed before developing a strong and comprehensive reintegration plan.

1. Preparation of the setting

Counselling should take place in a quiet and as much as possible “warm” and comfortable place (with good air and light, a positive picture on the wall, adequate furniture, water or tea/coffee to be offered, paper towels, etc.). To minimize distractions, build a supportive environment, guarantee privacy and confidentiality. Arrange the chairs in order to facilitate direct interaction between you and the returnee (it is preferable to avoid sitting behind a desk but rather to choose a more informal sitting arrangement). Keep in mind that the preparation of a welcoming setting includes putting into practice the active listening techniques mentioned above (e.g. switch off your personal phone, avoid looking at your mails, etc).

2. Preparation for the counselling session

It is helpful to be prepared adequately before the reintegration counselling session. This may include reviewing the returnee’s case file before the interview in order to avoid asking information that has already been collected. Keep in mind the main questions and information needed for the profile assessment, the vulnerability screening as well as the reintegration plan in order to avoid just reading the questionnaires but have an open discussion instead. Ensure you have enough time for the interview: you must not appear pressured by time.

3. Introducing the interview

You should start the interview by introducing yourself, your name, IOM’s role and mandate to the person. Some people may be confused or suspicious. You should clearly state your professional role and say that you wish to talk about IOM’s reintegration assistance. Explain that this is a confidential encounter. Negotiate the duration of the interview with the migrant, based on his/her availability. Give the migrant the possibility to ask you questions and to introduce him/herself as well.

4. Establishing a trusting relationship

The first minutes of the interview are key in setting the tone and establishing a relationship of trust with the returnee. Before the reintegration counselling session begins, engage in brief small talk and ask a personal question or two, keeping them generic. Reassure the beneficiary, if necessary: “You’re not alone, IOM and its partners will support you to the possible extent, and convey messages listed in Annex 1. This will help to build trust and a supportive environment, which is key in encouraging the dialogue and making the discussion about the reintegration assistance effective.



Remember to look at the person during the interview, unless this makes the person uncomfortable (which may be due to culture or other issues). Show empathy.

5. Explaining the reintegration assistance process

Explain the process of the reintegration counselling, what will happen next, how does the reintegration assistance work in general terms. Explain that the assistance will be given in goods and/or services. More details about the reintegration options will be given later but the returnee should have a broad idea about the process. Keep in mind to give the returnee a realistic idea of the available options and possibilities and do not create unrealistic expectations, which might be detrimental for the sustainable reintegration of the individual concerned and can create frustration and feelings of anger. You can use the project information sheet or flyer as a support document.

6. Profile and vulnerability assessment

Obtain relevant details about the returnee. Three main forms are typically used to support reintegration assistants collecting this information: the registration form, the profile assessment form and a set of vulnerability assessment forms. When administering them, focus on the person, not on the forms. Use the above-mentioned techniques. Identifying possible situations of vulnerability is important as it determines the assistance available as well as the timing of the assistance (migrants in such situation should receive immediate assistance specifically tailored to their needs, i.e. addressing the situation of the vulnerability identified).

Remember that often survivors of disruptive events may show different distress reactions and they can be afraid that they might go crazy and that nobody is able to understand them. They need someone who does not think they are “wrong”. (See Box 6: How to recognize signs of distress).

Provide basic emotional support. Show empathy with verbal (active listening) and non-verbal gestures (if culturally appropriate, touch the shoulder, smile) that reflect and validate the feelings returnees may express while going through this part of the session (See Box : How to help people feel calm).

In case you think the person is too distressed to go on, take a break and leave time. Encourage the migrant to interrupt the session if s/he feels doing so.



Related documents:

Registration form
Profile assessment form
“Determinants of migrant vulnerability” model

If indications of vulnerability:

- Rapid screening form,
- Counter-trafficking screening form,
- Migrants in vulnerable situation screening form as relevant.

Reintegration sustainability survey and scoring system

7. Joint agreement on the reintegration assistance

Explore the potentialities, resources and motivations of the returnee, including his/her skills and the experience, social network and economic resources. The aim of this part of the counselling session is to bring the returnee to envisage his/her reintegration process.

The reintegration plan should not be limited to the assistance provided by IOM but should be broader, encompassing different aspects and factors of reintegration, in a sort of “life plan” containing the objectives of the returnee and the actions to be carried out both by him/her and by IOM. The reintegration plan should as much as possible build on these, and the IOM Assistant/Counsellor should highlight these strengths and resources as key elements that may facilitate the reintegration process. At the same time, it is important that the returnee be open about the challenges, issues and obstacles faced so that IOM and its partners can address them, when feasible.

As the discussions on the returnee’s reintegration plan progress, the IOM Assistant/Counsellor should give the returnee a realistic idea of the available options and possibilities and be careful not to create unrealistic and false expectations. The reintegration approach described in the SOPs does not envisage fixed packages of assistance but, rather, a flexible approach to it based on the needs of the returnee and on the potential sustainability and impact of the assistance provided. The definition of the types of assistance and value of it should thus constitute a progressive process where each step allows refining the reintegration plan.

In the end, a decision should be taken about what steps the returnee should take and what IOM shall contribute to, within the limits allowed by the project, including the budget, the project’s parameters and criteria, and the types of assistance available. The next steps should then be described, possibly linked to a timeline/ action plan or roadmap. (See Annex 3).

Collective and community-based assistance are promoted. While collective and community-based reintegration assistance is challenging to promote in the context of individual counselling, it is possible to highlight some of the advantages of this kind of assistance (bigger project; pooling of resources and support from peers, some of them having maybe a set of specific skills or experience that may be useful to the project; better acceptance from the community; etc. – see SOPs). Collective and community-based activities can also be encouraged by describing the selection criteria reintegration plans will have to pass through: if a project is presented by a group of returnees, if it involves the community or addresses its needs, it is far more likely to be selected and funded than individual projects. Finally, training sessions organized under the project may constitute very relevant occasions to foster engagement around collective projects. Returnees from the same region can indeed meet and discuss their reintegration ideas with their peers which may encourage some of them to join forces naturally.

REMEMBER

Referrals - In each country, government agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations implement programmes in a variety of fields. If the needs and perspectives of the returnee can be addressed through these programmes, IOM should not duplicate the services available and should refer the migrant to them.

Training and general support - To address common needs of returnees, IOM and its partners should organize training workshops, focus group discussions or other types of activities such as job fairs or meetings between returnees and microfinance institutions (each IOM Mission should consider types of support that are relevant to their context and to the profile of their beneficiaries). During the reintegration counselling session, the relevance of inviting the returnee to specific training or event should be assessed. For instance, many migrants will eventually set up a business. Following training in financial literacy and business management may thus be very relevant, regardless of the fact that IOM will then support the setting up of the business or not.

Additional/complementary reintegration support - It can be provided in three situations:

- In case the returnee is found to be in a situation of vulnerability,
- In case a returnee returns to a community where a community-based project is implemented, and
- In case a returnee's reintegration plan is chosen by a selection committee based on several criteria.

Assistance is provided in-kind - E.g. Through the direct provision of goods and/or services, and can include medical assistance, psychosocial support, training, education, job placement, the creation or strengthening of income-generating activities (including at community level), housing and basic needs such as food and clothes.

Assistance can be either individual or collective and can have a community based focus.

BOX 5 – EXTRA INFORMATION TO BE SHARED WITH THE CHILDREN

- Family-tracing information and procedures
- Information on education possibilities back in their country of origin
- Information on substance abuse prevention
- Contact details for IOM/Implementing partners focal points



IOM staff interviewing a child migrant in the Migrant Response Centre (MRC) in Obock, Djibouti.

8. Closure

Ensure that the reintegration assistance process is well understood by the returnee and that the returnee agrees with the reintegration plan or roadmap defined. Briefly, re-explain what the next steps are and agree on when the next contact should take place. Insist on the following points, if and when relevant:

Important for the returnee to keep contact and inform about any possible change in the contact details;

- Important for the returnee to discuss his/her reintegration plan with his/her family (and potentially important for the family to be involved in counselling sessions), and possibly more largely to members of his/her community;
- Important for the returnee to open his/her eyes and ears to identify potential opportunities and inform IOM or partners accordingly.

9. Follow up

Counselling is not a one-time activity. It is rather a continuous process. The reintegration assistant should ideally have regular contacts with the returnee to ensure that the reintegration process is proceeding well (according to the plan), readjust the reintegration plan if needed and when possible and relevant add additional support.

05

PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES RELATED TO RETURN

1. PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF REINTEGRATION

The complex, multidimensional process of reintegration requires to consider the various factors impacting an individual's reintegration, including economic, social and psychosocial factors across the individual, community and structural dimensions.

It is therefore important to have a holistic perspective on how well-being is affected during the reintegration process and to understand the repercussions of return and the psychosocial challenges of reintegration.

Reintegration is defined as the re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a migrant into the society of his/her country of origin. It is a process that requires adjusting to a new life, reconnecting with family and friends, and making plans for the future. Reintegration back "home" can be mistakenly conceptualized as an easy and unproblematic process as migrants reintegrate and resettle in their "homeland" and within their community and family. This assumption does not consider the "emotional, social and cultural complexity" and the readjustment challenges the returnees may face.

The decision to return may trigger different emotions, feelings, negative thoughts and behaviours in migrants. Particularly, a migration plan that did not lead to the desired outcome, a return, especially but not only if "empty-handed", can result in different psychological reactions:



The psychosocial well-being is also influenced by the sociorelational and socioeconomic context of return, especially the relations with the family and community. Family members may have different feelings about the return, some positive, such as joy, relief and excitement and some more difficult. They may perceive the return as a failure. The family may have supported the travel, but the returnee was not able to repay the debt. They may have had expectations of their time in another country but did not meet these expectations.



Such psychological reactions should be considered as normal consequences of the challenges faced in the reintegration process and are not necessarily symptoms of mental disorders.

Consequently, the returnee may be perceived as a problem, a burden, as someone who did something wrong and responsible for what happened. The reintegration in family and group of peers might, therefore, be a complex process and the uncertainty about economic prospects play an important role.

Community members as well may take time to understand where the returnees have been and the different experiences they had. The more time they spent away from their country of origin, the more changes may have occurred, both for the people who stayed and did not migrate and for the returnees themselves.

Migrants are changed by living in a different society and culture and by, for some of them, being exposed to adversities and disruptive experiences during the journey or in the destination country. When migrants have lived abroad for some time, "home" (community members, services, structures, etc.) has changed during the migrant's absence and sometimes in quite fundamental ways, which challenge the migrant's memory of how it was when they left. The community may expect migrant to return with success and wealth and this is not always the case.

Therefore, the returnees may be worried about not being accepted easily back into their community and they will need time to settle back and to feel part of the community again. Resentment among communities may also be generated if the reintegration assistance received by individual returnees is perceived as an undue reward to returnees as opposed to local populations that did not migrate.

The psychosocial difficulties hampering the reintegration process, as briefly mentioned above, can be additionally challenged by the mental health consequences of the exposure to extreme adversities.

For instance, migrants from East and Horn of Africa en route to the Middle East through the Eastern Route (over Yemen, Saudi Arabia and beyond) face difficult circumstances and are confronted with extreme stressors. They might have been subjected to human rights violations including torture, modern slavery, physical and sexual violence, forced labour, detention, and/or exploitation by their captors and traffickers.

People who experienced one or repeated distressing events are at greater risk of developing psychological and social problems. A small minority of people may even develop different mental health conditions like depression, anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychoses and risk of suicide, and need special attention and care.

However, it is important not to generalize, and to acknowledge that distress may be common for migrants who return, but it is a normal consequence of their predicaments, and mental disorders are rare.

It is worth noting here that the same events may cause very different levels of psychological distress to different people. Also, the same individual can react differently to the same event at different moments. Factors such as personality, characteristics, vulnerability factors, age, sex, educational background, social support, memories of similar events, previous physical and psychological condition, may contribute to different mental health reactions after the same precipitating/significant event.

When conducting the counselling session, the IOM Assistant/Counsellor should be aware of the above-mentioned mental health and psychosocial challenges of the returnees as in some cases this may hinder the reintegration process. It is therefore important to keep in mind that a sustainable reintegration can be facilitated only when the psychosocial factors are addressed in parallel with the economic and social aspects of the reintegration.

2. RETURNEES REQUIRING “EXTRA ATTENTION”

When delivering the counselling session, the IOM Assistant/Counsellor should pay special attention to identify those returnees who may need psychosocial support and extra attention.

Some returnees should be immediately referred to a medical or specialized psychological care. Those are returnees who:

- Attempt, announce or have attempted suicide, or are self-harming;
- Are particularly violent against the others;
- Have reached the point that they cannot remember very simple facts of their life (e.g. their name), or cannot attend to basic routines (waking up, eating);
- Report having been recent victims of rape, torture, personal violence, trafficking and/or witnessed tragic situations;
- Report to be drug users;
- Report pre-existing psychiatric conditions. Especially if they did not have access to drugs for a prolonged period.

In addition, psychological counselling, if available, can be offered, but NOT imposed to returnees who:

- Are seen to remain isolated/withdrawn most of the time and show no overt interest in the activities happening around them;
- On being approached, break into an irritated outburst or start weeping;
- Show extreme reluctance to communicate when approached;
- Appear extremely distressed (see Box 6);
- Are grieving, or communicate during the interview they are having intrusive thoughts of past events;
- Report having experienced protracted detention, personal violence and/or witnessed tragic deaths.

The IOM Assistant/Counsellor should provide a basic first-line emotional support to the returnee who may need it (see Box 7), but also be aware of their limit and not try to do everything on their own.

A referral network should be established in advance and returnees in need of extra attention and specialized support should be referred to mental health and psychosocial support professionals. The IOM Assistant/Counsellor should explain with simple words the reasons for the referral and the kind of support they can receive and ask the opinion of the returnees (the stigma around mental health issues should always be kept in mind). A referral is, in fact, lifesaving and therefore immediate and compulsory for the returnees in the first list and should be offered as a choice to the others.



For people in need of extra attention and support a referral to a mental health and psychosocial specialist may be necessary.

BOX 6 - HOW TO RECOGNIZE SIGNS OF DISTRESS

What to look for during the interview

- Facial expressions of sadness or fear
- Restlessness, e.g. unable to sit relaxed
- Strange movements
- Irrelevant answers to questions
- A very fast rate of talking or conversely, a very slow rate of talking
- The person's general hygiene and self-care'

Common signs of distress reactions

Physical - Shaking, headaches, extreme fatigue, change of appetite, aches and pains, nausea, dizziness, breathing difficulties, complaints of sleeping problems, pale look.

Emotional and psychological - Tearfulness, sighing frequently, appearing vague and confused, feeling hopeless, experiencing high levels of anxiety, irritability, unpredictable outburst of anger, sustained low mood, frequent expressions of negativity, feelings of guilt, shame, feeling confused, and emotionally numb.

Behavioural - Poor self-care and neglected personal hygiene, withdrawing socially, being on guard or jumpy, violent act towards self and/or others, eating and sleeping too much or too little, taking drugs or alcohol to reduce tension, pulling away from others or usual activities.

Cognitive - Feeling unusually confused and forgetful, inability to concentrate, constant worrying, seeing only the negative, reduced activity and low energy.

BOX 7 - HELPING PEOPLE FEEL CALM

- Stay close to the person (if culturally appropriate)
- Do not pressure them to talk
- Listen carefully in case they want to talk
- If they are very distressed, make sure they are not left alone
- Keep your tone of voice soft and calm
- If someone feels "unreal", help them to enter in contact with:
 - i. Themselves (feel feet on the floor, tap hands-on lap)
 - ii. Their surroundings (notice things around them)
 - iii. Their breath (focus on breath and breathe slowly)

06

CONCLUSION

This guide highlights how mental health and psychosocial support is a cross-cutting issue which should be mainstreamed in all reintegration assistance interventions, including the economic support measures. The IOM Assistant/Counsellor has a fundamental role to play in integrating a psychosocial approach in all their activities and counselling is one of the key interventions that can contribute to the success of the assistance provided and to sustainable reintegration.

It may look like this guide contains information and complex techniques that are not feasible in your context, with numerous returnees every week and a significant backlog. However, we believe that after reading this and putting some effort to implement this approach with a few cases, most of the guidance provided will become quite automatic and will allow you to significantly improve your counselling skills and, hence, the quality of the assistance.



Female returnees receiving reintegration post-arrival assistance in the IOM Transit Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

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RECOMMENDED READINGS AND RESOURCES

IOM (2010). Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Handbook. Available on the intranet. [Internal]

IOM (2014). Returning with a health condition, A toolkit for counselling migrants with health concerns. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/returning-health-condition-toolkit-counselling-migrants-health-concerns> IOM (2019). Manual on Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies and Displacement. Available at <http://www.iom.int/mhpsed>

IOM (2019). Reintegration Handbook – Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/reintegration-handbook-practical-guidance-design-implementation-and-monitoring-reintegration>

Samuel Hall/IOM (2017). Setting the standard for an integrated approach to reintegration. Commissioned by IOM and funded by DFID. Available at https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/IOM_SAMUEL_HALL_MEASURE_REPORT%202017.pdf

WHO, War Trauma Foundation and World Vision International (2011). Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers. Available at https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/

World Bank Group. Restoring Livelihoods with Psychosocial Support. Available at <https://olc.worldbank.org/content/restoring-livelihoods-psychosocial-support-4> 5-part video series, which lays out the reasons it is important to consider psycho-social and mental health needs when designing livelihood programs.



Migrant returnees receiving onward transportation as part of their reintegration in the Transit Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
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08

ANNEXES

KEY MESSAGES TO SUPPORT MIGRANTS DURING THEIR REINTEGRATION PROCESS

Here are 10 key messages to support returnees to deal with the psychosocial challenges of return and reintegration and move on with their lives.

1. **Be positive about your abilities** - Self-esteem helps us cope with stress. Remember your own strengths and achievements. Be confident in your own ability to deal with problems.
2. **Prepare** - But also be open to unplanned opportunities. While you may have ideas about what your future will look like and what you want to do next, having an open and flexible approach to your expectations will let you recognize and benefit from opportunities when they arise. For instance, you may want to be a self-employed entrepreneur. However, your skills may be a perfect fit for a new company that is opening in your city. Balance your wishes with your needs and be ready to consider all your options.
3. **Change takes time** - Give it time. Dealing with change is part of life. At some point, everyone experiences challenges and setbacks. The road to change has ups and downs, twists and turns. Set small goals of change so you can go forward step by step.
4. **Find a sense of purpose in your life** - This might mean becoming involved in your community or participating in activities that are meaningful to you.
5. **Develop a strong social network** - Having caring, supportive people around you will help protect you in times of crisis. It is important to have people you can talk to honestly. Talking about your situation will help you get support and come up with possible solutions to problems you encounter. Find support groups and peer groups where you can connect with people who have similar experiences and interests. If you have difficulties with your own community after your return, these groups may provide support.
6. **Share your experience** - Your own attitude may influence the way people around you respond to your return, especially those in your family and in your community. Try to help people around you to understand why you decided to return, using positive and reassuring language. Share things from your journey with your community, bring information and talk to them about your experiences.
7. **Be accepting of changes** - Be flexible. By learning to adapt you will be better able to face life's challenges.
8. **Be optimistic and realistic** - It is normal to feel guilt, sadness, regret, uncertainty, disappointment, anxiety and fear. Your attitude will determine how you move through these feelings. Being optimistic can be difficult when times are hard, but positive thinking does not mean ignoring problems – it means focusing on positive outcomes. It means understanding that problems are not forever and that you have the skills to deal with challenges. It is important to be hopeful and positive about the future. Try to focus on the options you have now and how you can move forward with your strengths.
9. **Do not feel guilty** - Many people perceive the return as a failure and are ashamed about it. Your family may have supported you to travel but you will not be able to repay the debt. People may have expectations for your time spent in another country, but you did not meet those expectations. You may have described the situation elsewhere as good as it was and now the true story has emerged. You do not have to be ashamed since what happened is not your fault. You did what you had to do. Now it is time to focus on the future.
10. **Develop your problem-solving skills** - When you have a new challenge, make a quick list of ways to solve it. By practising problem-solving skills regularly, you will be better prepared to cope when a serious problem arises.

SET OF VALUES FOR THE MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STYLE

Empathy	The IOM Assistant/Counsellor must communicate an ability to see and feel from the returnee's point of view. This usually includes quality of personal warmth, as opposed to someone who is aloof, mechanical, or all business.
Respect	IOM Assistant/Counsellor must communicate sincere respect for the dignity and worth of the returnee.
Genuineness	This is about more than factual honesty or sincerity. In working with people who may find it difficult to trust others, IOM Assistant/Counsellor must be a very genuine person who can earn trust under difficult conditions. This means saying what you mean and meaning what you say. Anything less can lead to a sense of betrayal.
Positive regard	IOM Assistant/Counsellor must demonstrate sincere regard for the welfare and worthiness of the returnee. Such people may struggle with a sense of being unworthy and flawed. IOM Assistant/Counsellor's positive regard for them is often the seed of a renewed sense of self-esteem.
Non-judgemental stance	People are often concerned that they will be judged by others to be at fault for the crisis that befell them. The IOM Assistant/Counsellor can and should relieve this tension by carefully avoiding judging the returnee. Otherwise, empathy, respect, and positive regard may be undermined.
Empowering	IOM Assistant/Counsellor is temporarily in the returnee's life. Therefore, it is crucial that you leave the person feeling more resilient and resourceful than when you met him/her.
Practical	Being practical about what can and cannot be accomplished for a person is necessary if we are to succeed in leaving behind a strengthened and a functionally whole person even after support is withdrawn.
Confidentiality	This refers to the IOM Assistant/Counsellor duty to keep private those things that are shared by the returnee.
Ethical conduct	Ethical codes of conduct vary from one context to another. They also, however, have certain principles in common: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Do not harm; b) Be trustworthy and follow through on your words with appropriate deeds; c) Never exploit your relationship; d) Respect a person's right to make his/her decisions; e) Never exaggerate your skills or competence; f) Be aware of your own biases and prejudices.

KEY QUESTIONS ON HOW TO SUPPORT PEOPLE PREPARING THEIR REINTEGRATION

Your skills

- What skills do you have?
- What new skills have you gained while living abroad?
- Which skills do you think will be most useful for you (and to your family and community) now, upon your return?
- What can you build on to contribute to your family and community?

Your priorities

- What is most important for you? Think first about what you “need”, then about what you “want”.
- You should consider having a back-up plan. Which alternatives could be an option for you in the future?

Your resources

- What are your resources? Can you make a list? Keep in mind that resources are not just money or goods, but also skills, ideas, and people you know who can give you psychosocial support as well as another kind of support you may need;
- How can you use your knowledge, skills and contacts to find or create new opportunities for yourself?
- Can you look for new opportunities and then see where they match your skills and resources?

Share experiences with family and friends

- What do you think about the possibility to share the experiences you lived abroad with your family members? What do you wish they knew about your experiences?
- Can you share your difficulties (if any) in readapting with family members or friends?
- Do you have the possibility to talk with others who have returned?

Questions you can ask your family and friends

- How have things changed since I have been away?
- Have there been family changes, or changes in our social community?
- Are there new support organizations (for housing, medical treatment, education, etc.) that I can get in touch with?
- Has the local economy changed?
- What are the local sources of employment now? Have they changed?

Farhan and his mother back to Ethiopia after being assisted by EU-IOM Joint Initiative programme. © IOM Ethiopia / 2019



