

# A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

---

**PUBLISHER:** [International Organization for Migration](#)  
Migrant Protection and Assistance Division  
17 route des Morillons  
P.O. Box 17  
1211 Geneva 19  
Switzerland  
Tel.: +41 22 717 91 11  
Fax: +41 22 798 61 50  
Email: [hq@iom.int](mailto:hq@iom.int)  
Website: [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)

Cover image: © AF-Studio, 2016

Photos: © International Organization for Migration (IOM)

© 2018 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

---

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.

# A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION



# CONTENTS

- Introduction** ..... 1
- AVRR foundations** ..... 4
  - Legal basis ..... 4
  - From the IOM Constitution to the Migration Governance Framework ..... 5
  - AVRR principles ..... 6
- Putting principles into action** ..... 7
  - Section 1: Facilitating dignified voluntary return** ..... 8
    - Objective 1: Migrants can make an informed decision and take ownership of the voluntary return process ..... 8
    - Objective 2: Migrants reach their countries of origin in a safe and dignified manner ..... 10
  - Section 2: Supporting sustainable reintegration** ..... 11
    - Objective 3: Returnees are able to overcome individual challenges impacting their reintegration ..... 13
    - Objective 4: Communities have the capacity to provide an enabling environment for reintegration ..... 14
    - Objective 5: Adequate policies and public services are in place to address the specific needs of returnees and communities alike ..... 15
  - Section 3: Addressing migrant vulnerabilities** ..... 17
    - Objective 6: Migrant vulnerabilities are addressed throughout the voluntary return and reintegration process ..... 17
- Priorities for the future** ..... 20

# INDEX

## Boxes

Box 1: AVRR beneficiaries . . . . .	2
Box 2: Assisted voluntary return and reintegration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development . . . . .	5
Box 3: Preventing unnecessary or prolonged detention . . . . .	9
Box 4: Monitoring and measuring the sustainability of reintegration . . . . .	16
Box 5: Unaccompanied and separated children . . . . .	18

## Graphs

Graph 1: A framework for assisted voluntary return and reintegration . . . . .	3
Graph 2: IOM's integrated approach to reintegration – conceptual model . . . . .	12

# INTRODUCTION

The return and reintegration of migrants<sup>1</sup> unwilling or unable to remain in host or transit countries have gained renewed political importance in the agenda of national and international policymakers around the world. Increasingly mixed and complex movements of a growing number of migrants are taking place,<sup>2</sup> with many of them remaining stranded or finding themselves in irregular situations for prolonged periods of time.

To promote humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)<sup>3</sup> was established in 1951. IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with government, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. With 172 Member States, a further 8 States holding observer status and offices in over 100 countries, IOM is dedicated to providing services and advice to governments and migrants.

In particular, to support the reinsertion of returning migrants, IOM is carrying out assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes. Since 1979, IOM has been implementing AVRR programmes worldwide as a humane and dignified approach to return and reintegration.

**“Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes provide administrative, logistical and financial support, including reintegration assistance, to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host/transit country and who decide to return to their country of origin.”<sup>4</sup>**  
*(IOM Glossary on Migration, forthcoming)*

Initially conceived in Europe, which still represents the majority of assisted voluntary returns supported by IOM, AVRR programmes have progressively expanded both geographically and programmatically over the past four decades. The range of host countries where AVRR activities are implemented has steadily grown beyond Europe to include host countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania. Furthermore, in the context of transit migration, AVRR has also proven to be an effective tool to assist stranded migrants who are in distress and often destitute, or who lack the means to continue their journey, be them in a regular or in an irregular situation.

At the same time, reintegration assistance has been gradually introduced to complement voluntary return assistance, based on the recognition that addressing returnees' needs, particularly those in vulnerable situations, and supporting their reestablishment back home is fundamental for the sustainability of the reintegration process.

Through partnerships with government and non-governmental stakeholders as well as other international organizations, IOM has increased its expertise and reach of AVRR programmes, effectively assisting more than 1.6 million people throughout the years.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary trends have seen a growing number of actors involved in the provision of voluntary return-related support, along with increased geographical diversity in AVRR and strong interest from development actors with regard to sustainable reintegration.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “migrant” refers to “any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is” (International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Key migration terms”, available from [www.iom.int/key-migration-terms](http://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms)).

<sup>2</sup> Mixed movements are defined as movements “in which a number of people are travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have varying needs and profiles and may include asylum-seekers, refugees, trafficked persons, unaccompanied/separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *10-Point Action Plan on Mixed Migration*, 2012, p. 291).

<sup>3</sup> On 19 September 2016, IOM became part of the United Nations system as a Related Organization.

<sup>4</sup> In the migration context, the term “country of origin” is understood as “a country of nationality or of former habitual residence of a person or group of persons who have migrated abroad, irrespective of whether they migrate regularly or irregularly” (*IOM Glossary on Migration, forthcoming*).

<sup>5</sup> Figures refer to the period from 1979 until 2017.

### *Box 1: AVRR beneficiaries*

Beneficiaries of the IOM AVRR programmes may include stranded migrants in host or transit countries, irregular migrants, regular migrants, and asylum seekers who decide not to pursue their claims or who are found not to be in need of international protection. AVRR assistance can also be provided to migrants in vulnerable situations, such as victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children, or migrants with health-related needs.

This framework for assisted voluntary return and reintegration (hereinafter referred to as the Framework) builds on IOM's long-standing contribution in this area and marks an important milestone in the Organization's engagement in AVRR.

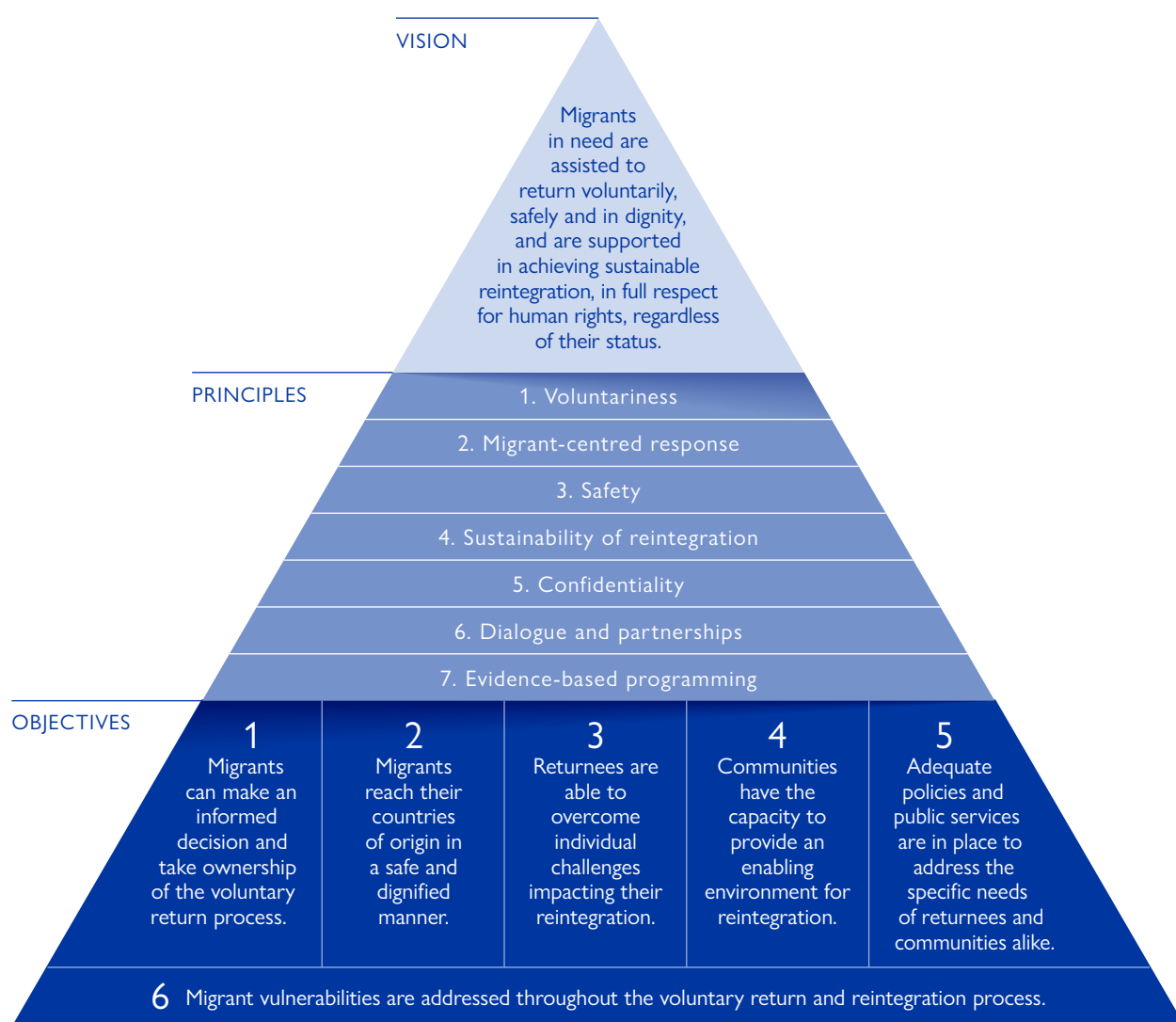
Designed to guide both policymakers and AVRR practitioners, the scope of the Framework goes beyond IOM's own engagement. Considering the diversity of AVRR projects' eligibility criteria, available resources, national policies, implementation partners and operational contexts, the Framework proposes a road map to address voluntary return and reintegration in a holistic way – one that responds to the needs of the individual returnees, the needs of the communities to which they return and the priorities of concerned governments, calling for the adoption of coordinated measures, policies, and practices between stakeholders responsible for migration management and development at the international, national and local levels.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> The scope of this paper does not extend to returns of internally displaced persons nor to the repatriation of refugees. More details on the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons can be found in IOM's "The progressive resolution of displacement situations framework", available from [www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/DOE/humanitarian\\_emergencies/PRDS/IOM-PRDS-Framework.pdf](http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DOE/humanitarian_emergencies/PRDS/IOM-PRDS-Framework.pdf)



Graph 1: A framework for assisted voluntary return and reintegration



The Framework lays out the key principles that in IOM’s view need to be adhered to in order to support dignified voluntary returns and sustainable reintegration. Building on 40 years of practice, the document also proposes six concrete objectives which are applied throughout the voluntary return and reintegration process. Illustrated through concrete activities, these principles and objectives underpin IOM’s commitment to facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and to contribute to migrants’ socioeconomic well-being, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Compact for Migration and the Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the IOM Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF), see: [www.iom.int/sites/default/files/about-iom/migof\\_brochure\\_a4\\_en.pdf](http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/about-iom/migof_brochure_a4_en.pdf)

# AVRR FOUNDATIONS

## LEGAL BASIS

The AVRR legal foundations are anchored in international law and rest on two main pillars:

### Protection of the rights of migrants during the return and reintegration process<sup>8</sup>

The human rights of migrants and responsibilities of States are outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), as well as in the nine core international human rights treaties, which apply to all persons, including migrants, and in all contexts, including migration.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the principle of safe and dignified return is embedded in the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (2000) and in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000), which also gives preference to the voluntary return of victims of trafficking (VoTs). Additional regional instruments may also apply, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), the American Convention on Human Rights (1969) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), which all grant human rights to all people under a State's jurisdiction, including migrants.

The rights of migrants within a State's territory or otherwise under a State's jurisdiction must be respected and protected, regardless of their nationality or migration status and without discrimination, in order to preserve their safety, physical integrity, well-being and dignity. Rights relevant for migrants include, but are not limited to: the right to return to one's own country; the right to leave any country; the right to seek asylum; the right not to be returned to a country where the life or freedom of the person would be threatened on account of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion or where there is a real risk for the person to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatments or to other irreparable harms; the right to respect for private and family life; the right to health and access to social and health-care services; and the rights of the child, including the full respect for the principle of the best interests of the child, applying to the return of all migrant children and in particular unaccompanied migrant children.

### State sovereignty

States have the sovereign right to determine who may enter and remain on their territory, subject to their respective obligations under international law. States are also required by international law to accept the return of their own nationals, particularly those making voluntary use of their right to return.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> In line with Principle 1 of the MiGOF and its general principles of protection, IOM is committed to uphold international standards and to promote migrants' rights in all its activities, including in its assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes.

<sup>9</sup> See: [www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx)

<sup>10</sup> For instance, the International Law Commission (ILC), in its Draft Articles on the Expulsion of Alien (available from [http://legal.un.org/docs/?path=../ilc/texts/instruments/english/commentaries/9\\_12\\_2014.pdf&lang=EF](http://legal.un.org/docs/?path=../ilc/texts/instruments/english/commentaries/9_12_2014.pdf&lang=EF)), recognizes that: "it is undisputed that that State [of nationality] has an obligation to receive the alien under international law" (Commentary of Article 22).

## FROM THE IOM CONSTITUTION TO THE MIGRATION GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

IOM's approach to return and reintegration finds its initial inspiration in the 1953 IOM Constitution, which: in its preamble, recognizes that migration assistance may be required to ensure the orderly flow of movements, and that such assistance may be needed for any type of migration, including return; and, in its Article 1, paragraph 1 (d), spells out the various types of migration assistance and services the Organization could provide for voluntary return.<sup>11</sup>

There has been a growing recognition among policymakers that return migration is an indispensable part of a comprehensive approach to migration management, and that this can only be achieved through complementarity of efforts and coordination among State and non-State actors at both national and international levels.

Against this background, the MiGOF provides a comprehensive overview of the essential elements for planned and well-managed migration. It underlines principles and objectives that are also embedded in IOM's approach to voluntary return assistance and reintegration. By offering migrants the possibility to return in a safe and dignified manner, AVRR contributes to achieving MiGOF Objective 3, which stipulates that *"Migration should take place in a safe, orderly and dignified manner"*. By providing assistance to reintegration, AVRR supports the achievement of MiGOF Objective 1, which states that *"Good migration governance and related policy should seek to advance the socioeconomic well-being of migrants and society"*.

It derives from this approach that voluntary return and reintegration should not be considered in isolation from other components of migration management.

A well-functioning and balanced return migration system also depends on the effectiveness of fundamental migration management components such as, fair and transparent asylum procedures in host or transit countries, availability of legal migration pathways, integration and resettlement measures, and access to rights and remedies.

### *Box 2: Assisted voluntary return and reintegration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

In 2015, States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the objective of eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions and promote sustainable development. States pledged under Target 10.7 to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through facilitating voluntary returns, thereby underlining the relevance of AVRR as an essential pillar of migration management systems and as a preferred option for migrants to return in a humane and dignified manner.

In addition, AVRR contributes to Target 10.2, which is to empower/promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status – by supporting returnees in their economic, social and psychosocial reintegration processes in their countries and communities of origin.

Through local partnerships and cooperation in the implementation of and referrals for reintegration support, AVRR is also relevant to achieving Target 17.17, which is to encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnership. Furthermore, by engaging and building the capacity of all relevant stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels, AVRR programmes foster a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the importance of well-managed return policies, thereby relating to Target 17.9, which is to enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation. Such an approach is particularly relevant to countries facing challenges and/or limited capacity in reintegrating returning migrants.

---

<sup>11</sup> See the IOM Constitution, available from [www.iom.int/constitution](http://www.iom.int/constitution)

## AVRR PRINCIPLES

The Framework sets out seven principles, which form a common basis for engagement in AVRR-related activities:

### Principle 1 **Voluntariness**

In the context of AVRR, voluntariness is assumed to exist if two conditions apply: (a) freedom of choice, which is defined as the absence of physical or psychological pressure to enrol in an AVRR programme; and (b) an informed decision, which requires the availability of timely, unbiased and reliable information upon which to base the decision. In some cases, an assessment may be needed by qualified professionals to determine the extent to which a person is capable to take such a free and informed decision, and who, should the person lack such a capacity, could legally take the decision on his/her behalf.

### Principle 2 **Migrant-centred response**

AVRR puts the rights and needs of the migrant at the forefront. Individual assessments should be undertaken to provide tailored support to each migrant throughout the return and reintegration process in a gender- and age-sensitive manner. This is particularly important for migrants in vulnerable situations, who may require a thorough assessment of their situations and targeted assistance that meets their specific needs.

### Principle 3 **Safety**

AVRR programmes need to take into account safety considerations, such as the general level of security, and operational challenges that may affect the provision of return and reintegration assistance. Returns to certain regions or countries may need to be limited or suspended if one or a combination of these factors amounts to a situation that poses a threat to the safety of returning migrants and/or staff involved in the provision of AVRR assistance.

### Principle 4 **Sustainability of reintegration**

The sustainability of migrant reintegration is at the core of the AVRR approach. Reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities and psychosocial well-being, which allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than a necessity.

### Principle 5 **Confidentiality**

Migrant privacy needs to be respected by putting in place strict safeguards for handling the personal data of AVRR beneficiaries, taking all reasonable and necessary precautions to preserve the confidentiality of personal data and the anonymity of individuals. All personal data must be collected, used, transferred and stored securely in accordance with international data protection standards.<sup>12</sup>

### Principle 6 **Dialogue and partnerships**

Institutional dialogue fosters constructive and balanced exchanges between stakeholders involved at different stages of the AVRR process. It promotes a common understanding of challenges related to return and reintegration while informing and influencing policy development. Cooperation between a variety of actors – government and non-governmental – at the international, regional, national and subnational levels is required to enhance the range and quality of return assistance available to migrants, avoid duplication of efforts and foster the sustainability of reintegration processes.

### Principle 7 **Evidence-based programming**

Systematic and continuous data collection, monitoring and evaluation have to be established throughout the entire AVRR process to understand the impact of AVRR interventions and inform ongoing and future programme design. Feedback mechanisms should also be in place to allow migrants to express their views on the assistance received in an open and confidential manner.

---

<sup>12</sup> This includes, among others, the principle of lawful and fair collection of data, for a specified and legitimate purpose, the principles of consent, confidentiality, access and transparency and data security. For the IOM Data Protection Principles, see: *IOM Data Protection Manual* (Geneva, 2010), available from [www.publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iomdataprotection\\_web.pdf](http://www.publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iomdataprotection_web.pdf)

## PUTTING PRINCIPLES INTO ACTION

AVRR principles provide an overall conceptual blueprint which, when translated into practice both in policy and operations, guarantees upholding humane and dignified return and sustainable reintegration in all AVRR programmes.

The following sections are structured around six strategic objectives, systematizing how AVRR principles are applied throughout the voluntary return and reintegration spectrum, with the aim to inform policy, programme design and operations. Each objective is further illustrated by a set of non-exhaustive-related activities that apply to all potential or actual AVRR beneficiaries. The last objective is cross-cutting and relates specifically to interventions in support of migrants in vulnerable situations.



## SECTION 1 FACILITATING DIGNIFIED VOLUNTARY RETURN

Pre-departure and travel-related activities lie at the core of AVRR. From outreach through counselling and information to travel arrangements, they are key in ensuring voluntariness and dignity before and during the return. Throughout this process, the implementation of interventions tailored to the needs of migrants in vulnerable situations is particularly important (see Section 3: Addressing migrant vulnerabilities).

### Objective 1

Migrants can make an informed decision and take ownership of the voluntary return process



Access to timely, unbiased and reliable information is essential. It allows migrants to make an informed decision and fosters preparedness for return and ownership of the return process, thereby enhancing prospects for sustainable reintegration.

### RELATED ACTIVITIES

#### Conducting outreach and awareness-raising activities

Outreach activities help to ensure that migrants who may be in need of return and reintegration assistance, as well as other information multipliers such as communities, diaspora, consular representations and other relevant stakeholders, are aware of AVRR. Information provided to migrants should be objective and based on up-to-date facts. Whenever possible, mapping and engaging with migrant communities and relevant diplomatic representations in the design and implementation of awareness-raising activities can foster broader outreach and assure that messages are adequately shaped to address identified information needs and are well understood by the target group.

#### Counselling migrants on return and reintegration assistance

Individualized counselling enables potential returnees to consider all their available rights and options in the host or transit country and in the country of origin, be informed on the assistance that they would receive and on the conditions of the voluntary return and reintegration assistance process, and consequently decide whether return is the best alternative for them.

Counselling should be provided in a language that can be understood by the migrant. It should take place in conditions that allow migrants to ask questions and express their views freely, including their concerns. It may, but does not have to, result in one's decision to return voluntarily, and migrants can change their mind at any stage prior to departure.

Migrants may also need support to contact their communities and families, whose members can play an important role in migrants' decision-making. In some cases, it may be necessary to undertake specific assessments of the migrant's ability to make a competent decision on the return and to express his/her willingness to return.

A number of different actors may have a role in the counselling process. Close collaboration and partnerships between all stakeholders involved contribute to avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring that migrants are provided with accurate information in a reliable, coherent and transparent manner. Alternatively, migrants who wish to pursue legal options to remain in the host country should be referred to available and relevant legal assistance. As part of this process, and in accordance with international law, migrants should be informed of the possibility to receive assistance and support by various actors, including government asylum authorities, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners, child protection authorities, authorities in charge of the protection of VoTs and others as required.

*Box 3: Preventing unnecessary or prolonged detention*

The fundamental rights to liberty and security of a person as well as the freedom of movement apply in principle to all human beings, regardless of their immigration status. Deprivation of liberty should be a measure of last resort, and States should always first explore the possibility of using less restrictive options and develop alternatives to detention such as open reception centres, centres for special support to vulnerable migrants and community-based alternatives whenever possible. IOM believes that at no point should children be detained for immigration-related purposes, irrespective of their migration status or that of their parents. Detention is never in their best interests. Where needed, appropriate care and accommodation arrangements that enable children and families to live together in communities should be implemented.

In some contexts, in the absence of other alternatives, assisted voluntary return can be an option to end unnecessary and sometimes prolonged detention. Strict safeguards are required when facilitating the voluntary return of migrants held in immigration detention to ensure that migrants have access to all relevant information and are counselled on all options available to them to enable an informed decision. In assessing the willingness of detained migrants to return, it must be ensured they are not subject to pressure, violence or ill treatment intended, or to an actual or implied threat of indefinite or arbitrary detention to force enrolment in the AVRR programmes.

Every effort should also be made to cooperate with relevant actors, such as UNHCR, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and other organizations that are well placed to provide targeted assistance over the longer term and can ensure migrants' access to legal assistance and the right to seek asylum.

## Objective 2

### Migrants reach their countries of origin in a safe and dignified manner



Ensuring migrants reach their countries of origin in a safe and dignified manner implies a number of administrative and logistic arrangements and the provision of movement assistance. Specific processes and safeguards related to migrants in vulnerable situations also apply (see Section 3: Addressing migrant vulnerabilities).

#### RELATED ACTIVITIES

##### Facilitating administrative and logistical arrangements

Travel preparations include a variety of administrative and logistical arrangements, from arranging all necessary documents and booking the tickets to organizing operational assistance needed upon departure, transit, and arrival.

The return journey should be organized in the most suitable and viable ways. As much as possible, returnees should travel on commercial lines like any other passengers, as this represents a cost- and time-effective option that preserves migrant dignity and anonymity.

##### Providing travel assistance

Migrants may need assistance upon departure and during transit, to go through check-in, passport and security controls.

For instance, accompanying measures or escorts may be relevant to ensure the well-being and security of migrants such as elderly people or unaccompanied migrant children. When health conditions and related needs have been identified at the preparatory stage, arrangements have to be made for a medical escort and medical care all along the travel duration, along with other medical equipment such as stretchers and wheelchairs, as needed. Specific travel measures have to be put in place when facilitating the return of unaccompanied and separated children, elderly migrants and VoTs.

##### Assisting returnees upon arrival

Whenever requested, immediate assistance upon arrival in the country of origin should be provided to returnees, for instance, in the form of onward transportation to the final destination and/or in arranging overnight accommodation. Specific arrangements should be in place for migrants in vulnerable situations who may require immediate support upon arrival (see Section 3: Addressing migrant vulnerabilities).



## SECTION 2 SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION

Various factors influence a person's ability to reintegrate into his/her country of origin. This process takes time, as returnees' individual capacities and vulnerabilities, community absorption capacities and perceptions, and the external environment may present opportunities for or barriers to sustainable reintegration.

The factors affecting the reintegration process and subsequently its sustainability can be similar to those that resulted in the decision to migrate in the first place. They can be of economic, social, and psychosocial nature and they relate at the same time to the individual returnees, communities to which they return, and the structural environment.

Considering the complexity of reintegration, achieving sustainability requires the adoption of an integrated approach: one that addresses the needs of individual returnees as well as the communities in a mutually beneficial way while responding to the structural factors at play (e.g. cooperation between various government departments at the local and national levels, returnee-oriented policies and legal instruments, or access to employment and basic services).

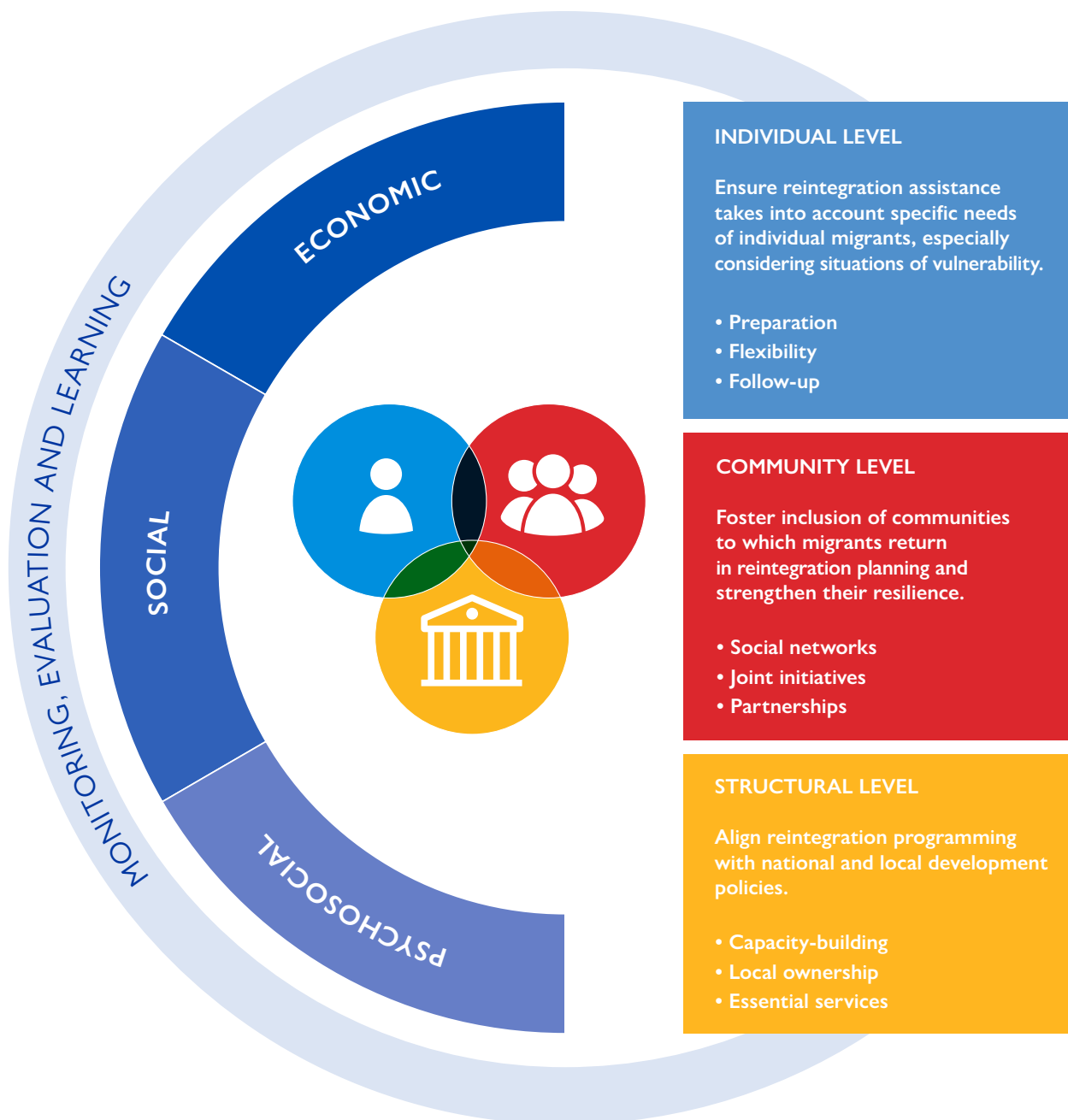
Accordingly, reintegration interventions should seek to enable returnees to reach levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers.<sup>13</sup>

Sustainable reintegration is beyond the scope of one actor's engagement. The success of an integrated approach to reintegration therefore largely relies on the combined efforts and engagement of a variety of actors – governmental and non-governmental, public and private, local and international – with different mandates and areas of expertise. In particular, synergies ought to be explored between different interventions in the areas of humanitarian assistance, community stabilization, migration management and development cooperation.

---

<sup>13</sup> IOM, "Towards an integrated approach to reintegration in the context of return" (Geneva, 2017). Available from [www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/DMM/AVRR/Towards-an-Integrated-Approach-to-Reintegration.pdf](http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/Towards-an-Integrated-Approach-to-Reintegration.pdf)

Graph 2: IOM's integrated approach to reintegration – conceptual model



## Objective 3

Returnees are able to overcome individual challenges impacting their reintegration



Individual assistance seeks to empower the returnees first and foremost, and create an environment in which they can take ownership of the reintegration process. Accordingly, a flexible approach is required to provide reintegration assistance that is adapted to the returnees' needs, profiles and preferences, as well as to the different return contexts.

### RELATED ACTIVITIES

#### Collecting information on available reintegration support

Mapping stakeholders providing reintegration-related services to returnees, available opportunities and constraints within the socioeconomic context enables the provision of comprehensive and up-to-date information to returnees during both pre-departure and post-arrival counselling sessions. Importantly, it allows to put in place effective referral mechanisms.

#### Counselling and referring returnees to reintegration-related services

Individual counselling sessions allow the identification of various economic, social and psychosocial challenges that returnees may face during their reintegration process.

Returnees are supported in designing their reintegration plans, which aim to respond to individual needs, address vulnerability factors, and build on skills while taking into account the specific opportunities and constraints in the returnees' communities of return. An effective referral system allows for the identified needs to be matched with services, such as psychosocial support and health care, as well as existing training, education and employment opportunities.

#### Providing reintegration grants

Reintegration grants can be provided in cash, in kind, or in a combination of both to help returnees meet their most pressing needs and/or support educational or livelihood activities. This may entail support for micro-business set-up, housing, medical assistance, education, vocational training and job placement, among others, depending on individual needs and local opportunities. They should be as flexible as possible to respond to identified needs.

## Objective 4

### Communities have the capacity to provide an enabling environment for reintegration



The role that communities play in migrant reintegration can be manifold. Communities can provide an environment conducive for reintegration in terms of safety nets, strong social networks, psychosocial support and financial resources. When communities perceive return positively, this allows migrants to return without the risk of being stigmatized, enabling them to reestablish social ties and facilitating reinsertion into society. Similarly, the reintegration process should also benefit (or, at least, not harm) communities through migrants' contributions, skills and experiences. At the same time, receiving communities may not have the capacities, structures or resources to facilitate reintegration. Especially in contexts where the number of returnees is considerable, this may lead to competition over available resources and significantly hamper the returnees' reintegration. A returnee's ability to reintegrate within the community may further be impacted when return is seen as a failure or when the decision to migrate in the first place is seen as abandonment. Return(s) may also result in further economic pressure on migrant communities or families, due, for example, to unrecovered migration-related debts. Therefore, community-based initiatives are critical to strengthen a community's capacity to absorb returnees and mitigate any feelings of resentment or hostility that a returning migrant may face, for instance, for receiving assistance, or, on the contrary, for returning empty-handed.

#### RELATED ACTIVITIES

##### [Identifying and addressing the needs and existing opportunities within the community](#)

A socioeconomic assessment undertaken in communities with a high number of returns and/or strong outward migratory pressure helps identify the impact of return migration on the community as a whole. It is important to include communities themselves to the extent possible in the process of such assessments to align reintegration activities with their needs and priorities and ensure that they are not negatively affected or discriminated against by the actions taken. Engaging communities inclusively in reintegration interventions from the outset also fosters local ownership of initiatives and therefore enhances sustainability after the assistance has ended.

##### [Promoting reintegration activities linking returnees and communities](#)

Joint initiatives that encourage the inclusive participation of returnees and non-migrant populations alike, while addressing the targeted communities' needs, can foster social cohesion between returnees and their communities. Activities can range from the set-up of training programmes and job creation initiatives in partnership with the private sector to the implementation of small-scale infrastructure projects such as water irrigation and road construction, to name a few. Such interventions do not only reinforce a community's capacity to absorb their returning members but may also contribute to strengthening the links between return migration and local development. They allow the community to harness the skills of returnees while also addressing issues that impact the larger community.

## Objective 5

Adequate policies and public services are in place to address the specific needs of returnees and communities alike



A returnee's ability to successfully reintegrate is influenced by the political, institutional, environmental, economic and social conditions in his/her country of origin. The existence or absence of return and reintegration-related policies and legal instruments, cooperation between various government departments at the local and national levels, and the degree of engagement of the private sector, diaspora, and civil society impact on returnees' access to employment and basic services, such as housing, education, health and psychosocial assistance.

In some countries of origin, capacities and infrastructure are not adequate to provide returnees and local population alike with an appropriate level of services, protection and assistance. Policy and technical and material support to public institutions, the private sector, and civil society may be necessary to address these gaps. Furthermore, countries with significant returns may also require support to develop adequate policies and structures to address the needs of returning nationals.

Interventions reinforcing the provision of essential services and fulfilment of rights in key areas, such as education, health, psychosocial assistance, access to natural resources, employment and housing for returnees and non-migrant populations alike, are required to address these necessities at the structural level.

### RELATED ACTIVITIES

#### **Involving governments in the design of reintegration-related programmes**

Reintegration-related activities must be shaped in line with the needs and priorities identified by governments and civil societies in countries of origin. The effectiveness and ownership of processes and activities can be fostered by engaging local and national authorities and stakeholders in the design of reintegration-related programmes.

#### **Strengthening national and local capacities to provide reintegration services to returning migrants**

Structural interventions may be directed at strengthening national capacities to provide reintegration services to returning migrants. This may include providing technical support and tools, facilitating cross-sectoral coordination, establishing national networks and referral mechanisms, and providing training and conferences to exchange good practices and discuss lessons learned.

#### **Setting up coordination mechanisms to foster complementarity and coherence across reintegration-related activities**

Return and reintegration policies are more effective when linked with the protection of migrant rights and with development opportunities in the country of origin, particularly those that address the root causes of migration. Effective coordination is required to build on synergies between development and reintegration efforts while ensuring that specific needs of returnees and communities alike are targeted in all efforts. All stakeholders involved – government and non-governmental, public and private, local and international – must be engaged in fostering coordination, complementarity and coherence across reintegration-related activities. To this aim, complementarities between different funding instruments need to be identified, namely, those used to address return management and those supporting community stabilization and cooperation for development. Development plans and any migration strategies at the national and local levels should equally be taken into consideration during the programme design and synergies should be explored wherever possible.

### Strengthening policy frameworks to promote well-managed migration

Activities at the structural level may include analysis, design, and implementation of migration-related awareness-raising campaigns, revision or upgrade of policy frameworks at the national level, or support to national and local authorities in the development of return and reintegration-friendly policies, as well as of standard operating procedures and protocols.

Efforts at the regional and global levels should promote the adoption of international and regional policies and the formulation of minimum standards, principles, and approaches for dignified return and sustainable reintegration, for example, by strengthening regional policy dialogues, such as the Regional Conference on Migration (also known as the Puebla Process) and the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA).

#### *Box 4: Monitoring and measuring the sustainability of reintegration*

Given the range of factors at play during the reintegration process, the impact of voluntary return and reintegration assistance on drivers of migration may be slow and difficult to measure. Nevertheless, monitoring and evaluation is key in determining the impact of voluntary return programmes on the sustainability of reintegration. Concerted efforts have recently been directed at developing standardized indicators, with the aim to strengthen measurement of reintegration sustainability in AVRR programmes. Such initiatives will help determine which interventions have the maximum impact in the diverse contexts of return and reintegration and provide a baseline from which to learn, adapt, and refine reintegration initiatives that are migrant- and community-centred.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> See for more details: Samuel Hall/IOM, "Setting standards for an integrated approach to reintegration: Summary report" (2017), commissioned by IOM and funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). Available from [www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/DMM/AVRR/IOM\\_SAMUEL\\_HALL\\_MEASURE\\_REPORT%202017.pdf](http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/IOM_SAMUEL_HALL_MEASURE_REPORT%202017.pdf)

## SECTION 3 ADDRESSING MIGRANT VULNERABILITIES

Particular attention to the needs and the rights of migrants in vulnerable situations should be given in programme design and policy development, and mainstreamed at all stages (before departure, during travel and upon return, and during reintegration), at all levels (individual, community and structural), and across all dimensions (economic, social and psychosocial) of the voluntary return and reintegration process.

“Migrants in vulnerable situations are migrants who are unable effectively to enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse, and who, accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer’s heightened duty of care. Vulnerable situations that migrants face can arise from a range of factors that may intersect or coexist simultaneously, influencing and exacerbating each other and also evolving or changing over time as circumstances change. Factors that generate vulnerability may cause a migrant to leave [his/her] country of origin in the first place, may occur during transit or at destination, regardless of whether the original movement was freely chosen, or may be related to a migrant’s identity or circumstances. Vulnerability in this context should therefore be understood as both situational and personal.”

(Adapted from *IOM Glossary on Migration*, forthcoming)

### Objective 6

Migrant vulnerabilities are addressed throughout the voluntary return and reintegration process



Migrants in vulnerable situations require tailored protection and assistance that directly responds to their immediate needs and addresses the risk factors that contribute to their vulnerability.

### RELATED ACTIVITIES

#### Identifying migrants in vulnerable situations

Vulnerability assessments form part of the individual counselling. These assessments should not focus solely on specific categories of migrants. Instead, they should be based on a complete understanding of the factors that contributed to the individual migrant’s or group of migrants’ vulnerabilities, and the resources and capacities they themselves can mobilize to resist or recover from their vulnerabilities.<sup>15</sup>

Vulnerability assessments allow determining whether the return is a viable solution or not for the migrant. If the vulnerability does not bar the return, the assessment should aim to identify potential assistance needs, ensuring that the availability of specific services in the country of origin is being taken under consideration and that the assistance is tailored to individual needs, before and during the return as well as throughout the reintegration process.

Additional safeguards apply for assisting migrants with specific needs, such as the following procedure.

<sup>15</sup> See the IOM Global Compact thematic paper: “Protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants and the specific needs of migrants in vulnerable situations”, available from [http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Protection-of-Human-Rights-and-Vulnerable-Migrants.pdf](http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Protection-of-Human-Rights-and-Vulnerable-Migrants.pdf)

### Assisting migrants with health-related needs

For migrants with health-related needs, return may be associated with increased risks due to long journeys, stressful situations or difficult travel conditions. Specific and individualized assistance to migrants with health-related needs is critical, not only to ensure access to health services and tailored assistance during their travel but also to guarantee the uninterrupted continuation of treatment in their countries of origin. Steps to be taken when providing voluntary return and reintegration assistance to migrants with health needs include the following:

- Gathering information on the availability and accessibility of health services in countries of origin prior to departure;
- Arranging adequate pre-departure and travel assistance according to the nature of pre-existing health conditions, the need to ensure continuity of treatment and requirements for specific arrangements during the return journey;
- Assisting returnees in accessing existing health and social support during reintegration, including through referrals to public services and non-governmental organizations.

### Protecting victims of trafficking

The well-being and protection of VoTs are the main concern during the whole AVRR process.<sup>16</sup> Depending on the specific situation of each individual, VoTs may face ongoing security concerns in the host country or be at heightened risk in their countries of origin. Accordingly, individual risk and needs assessments are required to adequately determine whether the VoT is in imminent danger in the host country and/or if return to the home community could present a potential risk of being re-trafficked, could lead to any reprisals against the returned VoTs, or give rise to any other negative consequences upon return.

### Reuniting unaccompanied and separated children with their families

When assisting the voluntary return and reintegration of unaccompanied and separated children, all actions have to be guided by the protection of the rights of the child, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).<sup>17</sup>

#### *Box 5: Unaccompanied and separated children*

**Unaccompanied children** are children, as defined in Article 1 of the CRC, who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so (Committee on the Rights of the Child, “General comment no. 6: Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin”, CRC/GC/2005/6, 1 September 2005, paragraph 7).

**Separated children** are children, as defined in Article 1 of the CRC, who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members (Committee on the Rights of the Child, “General comment no. 6: Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin”, CRC/GC/2005/6, 1 September 2005, paragraph 8).

<sup>16</sup> AVRR for victims of trafficking should be carried out in accordance with the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000) as well as with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Guiding Principles on Human Rights in the Return of Trafficked Persons* (Warsaw, 2014), available from [www.osce.org/odihr/124268?download=true](http://www.osce.org/odihr/124268?download=true)

<sup>17</sup> The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an international treaty which is binding on 196 States Parties. The CRC is a comprehensive instrument that sets out the rights of all children. Its core principles include the principle of non-discrimination, the right to participation, the right to life, survival and development of the child, as well as the principle of the best interests of the child.



*Best interest determination.* The principle of the best interests of the child is a primary consideration throughout the AVRR process. A determination of what is in the best interests of the child requires a clear and comprehensive assessment of the child's identity; upbringing; ethnic, cultural and linguistic background; particular vulnerabilities; care and protection needs; and the right to health and education. This assessment should be carried out in a child-friendly and gender-sensitive manner by qualified professionals and include consideration of the safety, security, and availability of adequate care arrangements back in the origin country, as well as the views of the child. Family tracing, family assessment and security assessment are part of the determination process, which should ensure that the return will not result in the violation of fundamental human rights of the child<sup>18</sup> and that the family is willing and capable of taking the child back and providing adequate care.

*Counselling.* During the counselling phase, it is important to present information to children in a language that they understand and in a gender- and age-sensitive manner, to provide them with the opportunity to express their views and make well-informed decisions on return. Such information should cover options for the child's future, possibilities for assistance and support both in the origin and host countries, and details on how and when the return will occur, among other things. Children should be ensured access to free, quality legal representation at all stages.

Arrangements should be made to receive the child at the airport or at the final destination, including by the parent(s)/family where possible, and ensure that there are procedures in place to transfer care and custodial responsibilities. The child's guardian should be fully involved in assisting the child during the return process and measures should be taken to ensure safety and assistance if needed during the return.

---

<sup>18</sup> General Comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee against Torture on the implementation of Article 3 of the Convention in the context of Article 22, para. 29(o); Joint General Comment No. 22 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, para. 45; General Comment No. 6 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, para. 27; General Comment No. 31 (2004) of the Human Rights Committee on the nature of the general legal obligation imposed on States Parties to the Covenant, para. 12.

# PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Aligning with the objectives the Global Compact for Migration, the Framework aims to contribute to this historic milestone and inform its subsequent implementation.

The Framework outlines the value of AVRR as an essential pillar of migration management and as a preferred option for migrants to return in a voluntary, humane and dignified manner. Going forward, this Framework recommends prioritizing the following areas, stressing the importance of an integrated, inclusive and cooperative approach to foster dignified voluntary return and sustainable reintegration:

## Promote shared ownership and responsibility

Return and reintegration management needs to be a shared responsibility – no single entity has the capacity, reach or mandate to address on its own the profound implications that return and reintegration have on a wide range of stakeholders. Government ownership should be promoted in a way that return and reintegration are part of local and national policies and align with development plans. Institutional dialogue and partnerships should be reinforced, including through capacity-building initiatives, to effectively mobilize mandates and expertise of government and non-governmental actors alike.

## Anticipate funding needs and enable adequate resource mobilization

Demand for voluntary return and reintegration assistance worldwide continues to outnumber the capacity to offer it in many countries, particularly to those in transit. The establishment of a global funding mechanism would bridge this gap and enable a flexible response in contexts where a substantive need for AVRR arises. This could also facilitate the response to individual situations of stranded migrants.

## Standardize programme design in AVRR

Pre-return counselling should be reinforced and reintegration support should be systematically included in AVRR programmes, in order to foster preparation for return and sustainability of reintegration. Standardization of the nature and amount of AVRR support could help minimize existing or perceived inequalities in the assistance received between beneficiaries before, during and upon return. To the extent possible, joint programming should be pursued through the involvement of host countries, transit countries and countries of origin.

## Enhance the availability and quality of assistance to migrants in vulnerable situations

Addressing and reducing vulnerabilities has emerged as one of the main challenges in contemporary migration management. When targeting migrants in vulnerable situations, return and reintegration-related policies and programmes should systematically establish adequate mechanisms and resources to directly respond to their immediate needs and address the risk factors that contribute to their vulnerability.

## Reinforce monitoring and evaluation and learning

Further developing and expanding monitoring and evaluation efforts through comprehensive and harmonized data collection and analysis will help determine which interventions have the maximum impact in the diverse contexts of return and reintegration and provide a baseline from which to learn, adapt, and refine reintegration initiatives that are migrant- and community-centered.

## Strengthen accountability mechanisms

Mechanisms to collect and process complaints about the return and reintegration process and to report instances of errors or abuse should be strengthened. Migrants should be informed about the possibility to file complaints as well as of any follow-up measures being adopted or about any other available legal remedy they can have access to.

## Foster migrant participation and inclusion

More systematic avenues are needed to allow migrants and their communities, including diasporas, to share their feedback on return and reintegration experiences. Whenever possible, migrant involvement in the design of AVRR interventions, in institutional forums and in government-led processes should be sought.





INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION

Migrant Protection and Assistance Division

17 route des Morillons, P.O. Box 17

1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland

Tel.: +41 22 717 91 11 Fax: +41 22 798 61 50

Email: [hq@iom.int](mailto:hq@iom.int) Website: [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)