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Evidence on Migrant Protection and Reintegration in the Horn of Africa

Key findings from studies conducted in the framework of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in the Horn of Africa and the Individual Measure for the EU-IOM Joint Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Background

The Horn of Africa region has a high volume of migration flows both into, out of, and within the region. The reasons for migration vary, but deteriorating socio-economic conditions are a significant factor. Many migrants leave their countries to pursue better livelihood opportunities abroad, often in an irregular manner with the help of smugglers. However, the journey and arrival in transit and host countries present many challenges and risks to migrants, including protection risks, human rights violations, movement restrictions, challenges in accessing essential services, and various forms of violence, exploitation, and abuse. Many migrants end up stranded in transit and host countries in vulnerable situations and exposed to protection risks.

Returning migrants often face significant challenges, including arriving back in their communities of origin in a vulnerable state and being unable to resume their normal lives prior to migration. They may face stigmatization from other community members, stressors linked to their migration journey and return, and to the debt or loss of assets caused by their previous migration attempt. In response to these challenges, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched the **Integrated Approach to Reintegration** framework in 2017¹ to inform the design of a new generation of reintegration initiatives. The framework, together with IOM’s definition of sustainable reintegration², emphasize the multi-dimensional nature of a reintegration process – economic,

¹ See IOM (2017), [Towards an Integrated Approach to Reintegration in the context of Return](#).

² The International Organization for Migration (IOM) views reintegration to be sustainable when “returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity”.

social and psychosocial – and the need to approach migrant reintegration in a comprehensive manner, considering the factors that can affect reintegration at the individual, community and structural levels.

The EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in the Horn of Africa, hereafter JI-HOA, launched in December 2016 with support from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), is the first comprehensive programme to save lives, protect and assist migrants along key migration routes in Africa. It operates in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan, enabling migrants who decide to return to their countries of origin to do so in a safe and dignified way and restart their lives. The EU-IOM Joint Initiative represents an important learning opportunity to inform future operationalization of the Integrated Approach to Reintegration framework, also thanks to the research and evaluation initiatives conducted under this programme. This flyer consolidates some of the key findings from these studies.

The Migrant Response Plan for Horn of Africa and Yemen is an inter-agency and inter-regional plan that brings together 48 partners to provide urgent life-saving humanitarian and protection support and enhance access to basic services and medium- to long-term actions aimed at addressing the drivers of migration for migrants and host communities.

IMPACT Study and Natural Experiment-Based Evaluation

The IMPACT Study is a flagship impact evaluation aimed at obtaining robust estimates of the impact of reintegration assistance provided under the JI-HOA, informing the definitions of a standard impact evaluation methodologies for reintegration programmes and improving the understanding of sustainable reintegration metrics. The evaluation was conducted by Itad³ between March 2020 and March 2023, and focused on Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia – the three countries with the largest returnee reintegration caseload in the programme.

The Natural Experiment Evaluation is a component of the IMPACT study that used a natural experiment (NE) approach to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic and other related shocks affected the wellbeing of returnees, what coping strategies were implemented and what role IOM's assistance under JI-HOA played in resilience and recovery. NEs are research approaches that make use of unplanned changes to test important hypotheses but have not often been used in evaluations so far. Whilst the main event informing this NE was the COVID-19 pandemic and associated control measures, important co-occurring shocks – conflict, floods, locusts – were impossible to separate from the effects of the pandemic. Collectively, these shocks, the pandemic and control measures are referred to in the NE as the COVID-linked shock (CLS).

The findings of the IMPACT Study showed an overall positive impact of the JI-HOA on sustainable reintegration of returnees assisted under the programme in Ethiopia and Somalia. The evidence was particularly strong in Ethiopia, where returnees' reintegration scores converged with a comparable group of non-migrants by the endline, highlighting that returnees had broadly equalized with those that did not migrate. In Somalia, returnees' scores were significantly better at endline than their corresponding non-migrants. However, in Sudan, the findings were different, with returnees consistently having higher reintegration scores than non-migrants, with neither group improving over time. The lack of improvement over time could be explained by the challenging socio-economic conditions (including conflict, severe political and macroeconomic instability), which affected the reintegration outcomes of returnees, especially in Sudan.

The microbusiness support provided by the JI-HOA was found to have an attributable impact on reintegration, especially in Ethiopia. Those who received both microbusiness and *Start and Improve Your Business* training fared better in Ethiopia. In contrast, the combination of microbusiness assistance and business training did not yield a significant increase in reintegration outcomes in Somalia and Sudan. Cash-based modalities were generally more effective at short-term mitigation of shocks than in-kind assistance but did not change the recovery trajectory or have an impact on reintegration.

³ In partnership with Statistics for Sustainable Development (Stats4SD), JaRco Consulting (Ethiopia), Dansom (Somalia) and Sayara (Sudan).

One of the key findings was that **the COVID-19 pandemic and associated shocks⁴ had a significant impact on returnees' livelihoods** in the three countries where the evaluation was carried out. The extent of the impact varied depending on the returnees' sources of livelihood before the crisis, with around 60 percent of self-employed returnees having to close their businesses during lockdowns. The pandemic also affected returnees' access to food, health, housing, and education, as well as their acceptance by family members and communities.

Returnees employed various coping strategies to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on their wellbeing, including relying on family and social networks for support and increasing their involvement in agriculture. The study found that engagement in **agriculture was a particularly effective resilience strategy for mitigating the impact of the CLS on returnees' well-being and aiding in their recovery**. Microbusiness support provided by the JI-HOA also helped to mitigate the decline in returnees' wellbeing in six out of eight domains.⁵

Furthermore, variation in the time the JI-HOA took to deliver economic assistance to returnees was substantial. This time variation had a significant impact on returnees, as the **longer a returnee had the JI-HOA support, the less the CLS impacted on their well-being**.

While the JI-HOA's economic support contributed to mitigating the CLS's impact on well-being, it had no apparent effect on recovery from the shock. The evaluation found that microbusiness assistance or the assets it had helped build were monetized to provide subsistence, lessening the CLS's impact but compromising subsequent recovery. However, the emergency cash assistance, a modest sum deducted from the microbusiness assistance, in Ethiopia had a significant effect on mitigating the most severe dimension of food insecurity and recovery.

Additionally, the evaluation highlighted **the difficulties in understanding how returnees living with physical and mental disabilities were affected by and responded to the CLS**. Two-thirds of returnees declined to answer a series of questions on these issues, which severely diminished confidence in the quantitative findings.

Finally, the evaluation found that the methodological approaches applied through the NE were valuable and feasible and could be replicated elsewhere. **The NE provided credible insights into the experiences of individuals who lived through and responded to the CLS**, which could improve the effectiveness of JI-HOA programming. The study suggests that the NE could be adapted to future severe shocks, providing opportunities for programs to gain insights that would not otherwise be available.

Study on Retrospective Enumeration to Measure Reintegration

The study, conducted by a professor of the European University Institute, underpins the validity of using retrospective data for the IMPACT Study and also provides recommendations for the integration of retrospective questions in reintegration-related surveys. The study is based on the retrospective data gathered via the Reintegration Sustainability Survey questionnaire.

The study explores the use of retrospective survey measurement as a method to measure the baseline of migration policy programmes, specifically in the context of transitory populations, developing countries, and reactive policy interventions⁶. Retrospective survey measurement uses recall survey questions to measure past states, such as an individual's economic or psychological situation, to produce baseline estimates that can be used to calculate changes over time.

⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic was exacerbated by other extreme events that affected the East and Horn of Africa region unevenly at about the same time in 2020 (most notably: desert locust infestations, flooding in parts of Somalia and Sudan, and conflict, especially in southern Somalia). As separating the effects of these co-occurring shocks from the shock caused by the pandemic, including the measures taken by governments to limit the spread of infection, is difficult, the study refers to these shocks collectively as COVID-19 linked shock.

⁵ Meals per day, days with protein-rich foods, meal size, healthcare access, housing, and family/community acceptance

⁶ Reactive policy interventions are policies that are implemented in response to a crisis, issue, or event. Examples include emergency relief programs, such as disaster assistance or financial support in response to economic downturns.

Although retrospective survey measurement has been used to assess the effects of public policy responses, it has been criticized for its potential measurement errors, including susceptibility to survival bias, high cognitive demands on respondents, and biased responses to avoid cognitive dissonance with contemporaneous self-assessments or narratives. However, empirical evidence remains mixed, with some studies showing that bias increases with the passage of time and others finding a weak and uncertain influence of recollection.

The study suggests that **accuracy can be improved by focusing on recent events, linking questions to salient life events**, such as marriage, having children, or return migration, and by asking multiple members of the same household the same retrospective questions and recording the quality of the interview.

Overall, the study concludes that **retrospective measurement has significant practical and logistical advantages over panel approaches**⁷, notably in terms of efficiency, as panel approaches are subject to attrition⁸ and other biases that are especially problematic in dealing with transient populations.

The study recommends that **researchers ideally 4 both forms of baseline measurement in impact evaluations and other monitoring and evaluation initiatives conducted in the context of returning migrant reintegration**. When using retrospective measurement, however, it is vital to i) collect data on self-reported ease-of-memory of the time being measured, ii) test for variation in the results according to self-reported memory; iii) prioritize face-to-face interviews because phone interviews are found to increase self-reported problems in memory.

Inner journeys: the MHPSS needs of returning migrants in the Horn of Africa

This mixed-method study was conducted by a mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) specialist and focused on the mental health and psychosocial support needs of returning migrants in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, providing a detailed analysis of the experiences and coping mechanisms of returnees. A related quantitative survey made use of standard psychometric scales to estimate the incidence of Common Mental Disorders among programme beneficiaries (also comparing the results with a control group of matched non-migrants in Ethiopia).

The study highlights the various reasons why migrants in the Horn of Africa region undertake migration journeys and the challenges and risks they face during their journeys. **The study finds that migrants migrate for socioeconomic reasons such as unemployment, underemployment, insufficient wages, and aspirations to improve their living standards**. Family and peer pressure also play an important role in migration decisions, particularly in Ethiopia and Somalia.

The study also identifies **the risks and threats faced by migrants during their migration journeys**, including **lack of access to basic needs, extreme physical exhaustion, illnesses, and various types of abuse and violence such as physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, economic and labour exploitation, and racism and discrimination**. These experiences have significant consequences for returning migrants at the individual and socio-relational levels, including health conditions or disabilities, sleeping problems, nightmares, feelings of shame, guilt, and anger, disorientation, anxiety, emotional instability, deterioration or break-ups in relationships, stigmatization, marginalization, and isolation from others. While racist and discriminatory attitudes along the journey and in destination countries created the risk of social exclusion and marginalisation for returnees, returnees often isolated themselves when faced with stigma upon return. Such stigma was observed significantly more towards female returning migrants, as they are often seen as having been sexually abused and exploited.

⁷ A panel model, also known as a longitudinal model or a mixed model, is a statistical analysis technique used to examine the relationship between variables over time, individuals, or both. It involves analyzing a dataset that includes multiple observations of the same individuals or entities over a period of time and is often used in social science research to study the effects of policies, programs, or interventions on outcomes of interest.

⁸ Attrition occurs when participants leave from a study.

Understanding the dynamic relationship between returning migrants and their surrounding environmental contexts, including families, communities, and laws, policies and frameworks that guide them, is critical in facilitating reintegration processes at individual, community, and structural levels. Many returning migrants in this study displayed great resilience in the face of various challenging experiences, by utilising their personal coping and/or inter-relational skills. **The study recommends a resilience-based approach that recognizes the many positive coping strategies and resources that returnees have in their repertoire. Family support, peer support, and social networks are identified as critical social and interpersonal factors that facilitate reintegration of returning migrants.**

Peer support and social networks, especially among returning migrants themselves, **contributed greatly to reintegration**. Returnees reported supporting each other in various ways, ranging from teaching each other how to do a certain job, to collecting money among each other to be used when needed. Community-based MHPSS activities also played a crucial role in facilitating the interaction between returnees and other community members and decreasing stigma towards returnees, which in turn greatly contributed to the psychosocial wellbeing and reintegration of returnees.

The study recommends that family engagement should be a mandatory part of reintegration assistance, that families are prepared for the return of their family member and that they are supported to be welcoming and accepting. Returnees should be actively encouraged to foster their own social networks as part of their reintegration process, through engaging in community life and other social activities that they enjoy and that connect them with others. This should form part of the reintegration planning process.

The study found that the shortage of services to meet basic needs of returning migrants including food, housing, clothing and medical care resulted in the disruption of psychosocial well-being. Returning migrants whose basic needs were met reported having better psychosocial wellbeing and better coping with challenges of everyday life. **Reintegration assistance provided by IOM was revealed as a strong facilitating factor for returnee's reintegration in their countries of origin.** Simultaneously, delays in the provision of this assistance had negative effects on returnees' mental health and wellbeing. Individual psychosocial counselling sessions provided by IOM or its implementing partners as part of integrated reintegration assistance was noted to help returnees regain hope and motivation and equip them with basic tools to use when feeling distressed, although the activity was not always well-structured.

The study highlights the need to provide multi-layered psychosocial support to returning migrants, including mental health and psychosocial support activities, that focus on the individual, community, and structural levels, and the importance of involving communities and community committees in the reintegration process. Communities can play a key role in supporting the reintegration of returning migrants, by providing them with the necessary social and economic support to rebuild their lives.

Expert Review of the MHPSS Component of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative

This expert reviewS), draws lessons from the experience of providing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services in the context of the JI-HOA programme. The study's findings and recommendations were instrumental in shaping the MHPSS strategy of the IOM Regional Office for the East and Horn of Africa and the related M&E framework for MHPSS activities in the context of return and reintegration.

The review analyzed the findings along four analytical axes: architecture of the JI-HOA programme and MHPSS staffing, integration of MHPSS services, community-based MHPSS activities and referral, partnership and capacity building.

In terms of the **architecture**, the review found that MHPSS should be consistently included, properly designed and well-integrated in the main documents of return and reintegration programmes. Recommendations were made to **develop and standardize programmatic MHPSS tools for each country, ensure that all MHPSS**

activities have clear objectives and outcomes], develop common monitoring and reporting frameworks, provide regular capacity building activities and technical supervision to MHPSS staff, and employ a permanent MHPSS specialist at the regional level.

In terms of **integration of MHPSS services**, the review highlighted the importance of **identifying returning migrants' strengths and skills to build resilience, self-confidence, agency, and inclusion**. A glossary for MHPSS activities, along with guidelines on how to conduct these activities with returnees, their families, and other community members, was also suggested to improve consistency and quality of activities offered.

Concerning community-based MHPSS activities, the review **recommended building on the existing capacities of community committees rather than creating separate structures**. The study suggested mobilizing existing community-based support structures to reinforce sustainable community-based initiatives, systematizing capacity building MHPSS activities with clear objectives, and enhancing communities' capacities to implement psychosocial interventions. There were main positive examples of this already across the JI-HOA countries which were found to be important to build upon.

Finally, the review emphasized the need to **strengthen partnerships with governmental and non-governmental MHPSS service providers** for integrated and coordinated reintegration assistance. Recommendations were made to ensure that trained and supervised case managers/reintegration counselors address psychosocial needs alongside strengthening partnerships with grassroots organizations that are trusted by communities and build on their capacities. The review also suggested assessing capacity development gaps and training needs of key partners and ensure their familiarity with key principles of MHPSS and global guidelines. Generally, the review suggested that capacity building requires more than just ad-hoc training, and is better delivered through mentoring, on-the-job coaching and regular knowledge sharing for a.

Study on Partnerships for Reintegration

The study, conducted by an independent researcher, develops a conceptual framework for the assessment of partnership performance in the context of reintegration initiatives and applies it to the case of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, under which a large number of partnerships were established to deliver reintegration assistance.

To develop an analytical framework for assessing partnership performance, the study draws on existing models and studies and incorporates various concepts and attributes that are relevant to partnership dynamics. The key concepts identified are power, complementarities, clearly articulated vision and goals, trust, communication and coordination, partner empowerment, partnership quality, satisfaction and accountability.

In line with the existing literature, the study finds that **power dynamics** play a crucial role in determining the success of partnerships. In the JI-HOA's partnerships, power imbalances were identified as a major issue. Specifically, IOM held a dominant position in partnerships with local organizations receiving financial contributions from IOM to deliver different forms of reintegration assistance, both at the individual and at the community level. As a result, some partners felt unequal or powerless when confronted with challenges in the implementation of the partnership's activities. On the other hand, power dynamics in partnerships between IOM and government counterparts were more in favor of the latter party. In this context, IOM felt that it lacked leverage and political influence to facilitate the implement structural-level interventions.

How to address power imbalances to achieve successful partnerships in the delivery of reintegration assistance remains an open question which likely does not have a single answer. Case studies are included in this research to illustrate how partnerships were key in the implementation of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative and the practical issues faced in the process of managing the relationship. The comparative analysis highlights how different conditions in programme countries led to the formation of different partnership portfolios (e.g. some focused on geographical outreach, others on the provision of specialistic services) and structures for their management.

Case Management study

Case management is a fundamental aspect in the operationalisation of the Integrated Approach to Reintegration. This study, conducted by Independent Social Performance, entailed a review of case management practice in nine countries where the EU-IOM Joint Initiative programme was implemented, with comparative analysis performed to better illustrate the specific challenges to case management in the context of migrant protection, return and reintegration and identify best practices. The study also sought to develop practical resources for setting up case management structures and processes in future programmes.

Based on the experiences of beneficiaries, providing continuity of assistance to beneficiaries during case transfer between pre-return and post-return missions, as well as providing detailed information on the reintegration process before the return takes place were identified as key areas of intervention for the improvement of case management practice. Post return, beneficiaries were generally satisfied with modes and frequency of communication with caseworkers', even when satisfaction with the reintegration assistance itself may have been low.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of improving communication pathways and information transfer during the case transfer process, managing beneficiaries' expectations, and preventing misinformation. It also suggests that there is a need for additional training and capacity building for caseworkers in counselling skills, psychological first aid, MHPSS, assistance to victims of trafficking, gender-based violence, specific approaches for male victims of gender-based violence, workload management, and stress management.

At an institutional level, the study recommends the establishment of a case management working group within IOM that includes the task of monitoring caseworkers' wellbeing, improving communication and feedback processes between caseworkers and monitoring and evaluation teams, including case management within logical frameworks by developing specific case management indicators, recognizing different models of case management and their application in different contexts. Recommendations related to how case management process should consider families as a central actor in reintegration processes and involve them more systematically are also put forward.

Remigration Analysis

The study was conducted in collaboration with academics from the University of Warwick and the University of Potsdam. It employs an innovative methodology (Discrete Choice Experiment) to produce a robust analysis of remigration intentions among programme beneficiaries (in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan) and a control group (in Ethiopia only).

The study sheds light on what factors drive the intentions to remigrate. The study participants were presented with scenario where they could decide to either remigrate (via irregular pathways) or stay in the country, based on attributes such as their income at home or abroad, the risk entailed by the remigration, and the cost of remigrating. An important finding is that returnees most returnees have a strong preference for not remigrating, regardless of the attributes that are presented to them. When returnees make trade-offs, it is found that income at home is the most important factor shaping remigration intentions: increases in the amount of income at home translate in more than proportional reduction in the intention to remigrate. Experiencing challenging economic conditions and stigmatisation are instead associated with a strong preference to remigrate regardless of the attributes. The study also finds that whether economic reintegration assistance is provided in cash or in-kind does not translate in either a significantly stronger or weaker preference for remigration.

The study looks also at internal migration after return and finds that most returnees (85-95%) return to the same communities where they used to live before migrating. Those who express interest in internal migration are motivated by better access to jobs and avoiding stigmatisation in the community of origin.

Overall, **the evidence clearly points at the importance of increasing economic opportunities and reducing stigmatisation** in reducing the re-engagement in irregular and endangering forms of migration. .