

# GENDERED REINTEGRATION EXPERIENCES AND GENDER-SENSITIVE/RESPONSIVE/ TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES TO REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| BMZ     | German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development                            |
| CSOs    | Civil society organizations   |
| EU      | European Union  |
| FGD     | Focus group discussion  |
| GBV     | Gender-based violence   |
| GIZ     | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH                                |
| IOs     | International organizations   |
| IOM     | International Organization for Migration  |
| KI      | Key informant   |
| LGBTIQ+ | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer persons <sup>1</sup>                |
| NGO     | Non-governmental organization   |
| PI      | Primary investigator  |
| SOGIESC | Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics <sup>2</sup> |
| TVET    | Technical and vocational education and training   |
| VHR     | Voluntary humanitarian return   |

1 The plus sign includes persons with other diverse SOGIESC who self-identify using other terms.

2 This document uses the phrasing “people with diverse SOGIESC” in preference to the acronym LGBTIQ+ which may be seen as too narrow in origin and application. All people have SOGIESC; diverse SOGIESC refers to SOGIESC that exist outside of heteronormative, cisnormativity, gender binary and endosexist assumptions.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research analysing the multidimensional aspects that define the process of return and reintegration through a gender perspective continues to be very limited. Moreover, there are multiple challenges, including protection concerns, linked to the collection of gender disaggregated data. This has repercussions for policies and programmes targeting return of migrants and their reintegration.

Considering that more data and evidence are needed to generate programmatic recommendations and improve existing reintegration assistance and services, this study had the overarching objective of providing new knowledge and information on gendered experiences of return and reintegration and ultimately to make recommendations for more gender-sensitive/gender-responsive programmes and policies for reintegration assistance. The study was carried out in five case study countries – the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Serbia and Tunisia – chosen by IOM and BMZ, considering reintegration programmes ongoing at the time of the research.

The study used qualitative methods to understand in greater depth how gender interacts with and informs structures and processes impacting returnees' reintegration. These included: a desk review of available academic and grey literature, review of available data on gender and reintegration (particularly in case study countries), key informant interviews, semi-directive interviews and focus group discussions with returnees. Throughout the research, specific ethical considerations were put in place following protection principles and ethical protocols.

The study builds on and complements previous research undertaken on this topic, particularly a quantitative study, conducted by IOM in collaboration with the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance of Maastricht University<sup>3</sup> that analysed reintegration outcomes through a gender perspective; as well as an IOM research and mapping of protection and assistance measures for migrants with diverse SOGIESC.<sup>4</sup> The recommendations outlined

in the study are structured by on the basis of IOM's Integrated Approach to Reintegration<sup>5</sup> that advocates for a holistic and a needs-based reintegration assistance at the individual, community and structural levels addressing economic, social and psychosocial dimensions.

The research findings showed the impacts of dangerous and often violent migration journeys on return and reintegration processes, with many returnees expressing severe psychological impacts upon returning to their countries of origin. Moreover, many expressed that their return was a result of constrained options, which subsequently led to feelings of failure. Despite the limitations of the research in gathering gender-disaggregated information, particularly from returnees with diverse SOGIESC, as highlighted above, the findings reflect the effects of gender inequality during the reintegration process. They show that independently of their gender, returnees are frequently stigmatized and discriminated by their families and local communities. Nonetheless, these forms of prejudicial treatments were experienced in gendered ways by returnees, and inflicted because of traditional gender-binary roles (i.e. men not bringing economic gains from their migration, women being victims of sexual violence, etc.). The findings of the research bring to light specific challenges for single parents, specifically single mothers, who faced stigma and discrimination along with their children.

Regarding economic reintegration, the research findings highlight the complexities faced by returnees in accessing, or re-entering, the labour market. They are exacerbated by a persistent gendered division of labour, influencing the reintegration process but also other stages of migration (e.g. men tend to acquire skills abroad – particularly in construction related jobs – which help them to earn a living upon their return). Additionally, the current allocation of tasks, based on traditional gender norms, impacts on returnees' choices and ways of accessing jobs. The latter follows

3 IOM and Maastricht University, [Comparative Reintegration Outcomes between Forced and Voluntary Returns and through a Gender Perspective](#) (2021).

4 IOM and Samuel Hall, [Global Report: Mapping and Research to Strengthen Protection and Assistance Measures for Migrants with Diverse SOGIESC](#). (2023).

5 IOM, [Towards an Integrated Approach to Reintegration in the Context of Return](#) (2017).



and contributes to a gendered-segregated labour market, which negatively impacts the sustainability of returnees' economic reintegration and reinforces the barriers in accessing training or employment. This is exacerbated for returnee women and single mother returnees.

Finally, on what concerns social reintegration, the research finds that there is a great need for expanded mental health and psychological support services for returnees. For many the violence and the challenges encountered during their migration may have worsened pre-existing mental health conditions or may have triggered new ones. On the other hand, many others may have endured disruptions and severe stressors and feelings of isolation, leading to a state of intense emotional distress and distrust. The research finds a gap in dedicated services for survivors of violence and torture, and particularly for survivors of gendered based violence, noting that women are mainly affected by this form of violence.

The recommendations of this study are divided into economic, social and psychosocial dimensions of reintegration through a gender perspective. Overall, they advocate for a greater comprehension and consideration of needs of returnees resulting from their experiences of migration; existent local gender dynamics and structural inequalities in the creation and development of reintegration programmes; the establishment and development of partnerships with diverse actors; as well as for a greater understanding of the influence reintegration services could have in challenging traditional gender roles and their effects. Although efforts have been made to include gender-sensitive approaches to reintegration assistance, the data gathered in this study underlines the need for increased efforts on the subject to be able to move towards gender responsive and/or transformative approaches.



## INTRODUCTION

This study was commissioned by BMZ and IOM, to provide new knowledge and data on gender issues on reintegration in countries of origin. As the literature review in this report indicates, there is so far little research on return and reintegration that includes a gender analysis. This has repercussions for policies and programmes targeting return migrants and programmes which aim to support reintegration. The aim of this study was therefore to fill a gap in current research in this area and to provide new data and analysis on gender in return and reintegration. It aimed to move beyond research focusing on a binary division between men and women, and to understand the reintegration challenges for all returnees (women, men, returnees with diverse SOGIESC) to make recommendations on policies and programmes which might address these challenges. As discussed in more detail in the limitations section, challenges related to empirical field research made it complex to obtain data on returnees with diverse SOGIESC; however, the report tries to include this analysis as far as possible.

In 2021, IOM, in collaboration with the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance of Maastricht University, conducted a study<sup>6</sup> that analysed reintegration outcomes through a gender perspective. The results and data collected in the framework of this study provided new insights into gendered reintegration experiences as well as how gender relates to reintegration sustainability.<sup>7</sup> The study found that overall, returnee women faced greater reintegration challenges across the different countries studied, with lower Reintegration Sustainability Survey scores particularly in the economic and psychosocial dimensions of reintegration. However, there are still evidence gaps relating more practically to how reintegration programmes can effectively support women and girls as well as returnees with diverse SOGIESC in their reintegration.

The present study aimed to build on previous research carried out on the subject, by using qualitative methods to examine gendered return and reintegration experiences. Its goal was to analyse this qualitative data to identify gender-sensitive/ responsive approaches that might contribute to reducing gender inequalities for returnees. Apart from further expanding the knowledge base on gender, return and reintegration, in practice, the results can be used to adapt reintegration programmes and policies according to the needs of different target groups and, thus, offer more inclusive and tailor-made approaches for migrant women, men, and returnees with diverse SOGIESC.

The study gathered empirical data from five case study countries: the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Serbia and Tunisia. These countries were selected by BMZ and IOM in function of the ongoing country-based reintegration programmes and activities. The information gathered in each of these countries was analysed following an intersectional approach as far as data allowed (e.g. in most of the interviewed cases, racial and ethnic categorizations did not have an impact on experiences of return and reintegration; however, socio-economic status did play a role).

6 IOM and Maastricht University, [Comparative Reintegration Outcomes between Forced and Voluntary Returns and through a Gender Perspective](#).

7 The Reintegration Sustainability Survey is a tool that standardizes the measurement of returnees' reintegration outcomes. See N. Majidi and N. Nozarian, "Measuring sustainable reintegration" in *Migration Policy Practice*, vol IX nr.1 (January–March 2019), p. 30–39.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The overarching objective of the research was to understand gendered return and reintegration experiences to make recommendations for implementing gender-sensitive/responsive approaches and programmes.

To this end the research aimed to:

- Provide more in-depth qualitative data and analysis to develop concrete recommendations for improving the gender-sensitive nature of reintegration programmes and moving towards more gender-responsive approaches within policies and assistance.
- Move beyond traditional gender approaches, considering mainly women and girls, by adopting an intersectional approach considering gender as it interacts with other structures of inequality and discrimination (age, class,<sup>8</sup> sexual orientation, disability, race/ethnicity, migration status and so on).
- Provide an understanding of how all returnees (women, men and returnees with diverse SOGIESC) are impacted by unequal gendered norms, representations and structures and how gender-responsive reintegration services can contribute to reducing gender inequalities for all returnees and particularly those in the most vulnerable situations, by taking a gender relational approach.

## UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER

This report utilises IOM's understandings of gender and related definitions,<sup>9</sup> as follows:

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

**Gender identity** is defined as “each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth or the gender attributed to them by society.”

**Gender expression** implies that “individuals use a range of cues, such as names, pronouns, behaviour, clothing, voice, mannerisms and/or bodily characteristics, to interpret other individuals' genders. Gender expression is not necessarily an accurate reflection of gender identity. People with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics, do not necessarily have a diverse gender expression. Likewise, people who do not have a diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics may have a diverse gender expression.”

**Sex** refers to “the classification of a person as having female, male and/or intersex sex characteristics. While infants are usually assigned the sex of male or female at birth based on the appearance of their external anatomy alone, a person's sex is a combination of a range of bodily sex characteristics.”

**Sex characteristics** refer to “each person's physical features relating to sex, including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, genitals and secondary physical features emerging from puberty.”

**Sexual orientation** can be defined as “each person's enduring capacity for profound romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings for, or attraction to, other people. Encompasses hetero-, homo-, bi-, pan- and asexuality, as well as a wide range of other expressions of sexual orientation.”

**People with diverse SOGIESC** is “an umbrella term for all people whose sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and/or sex characteristics place them outside culturally mainstream categories.”

8 Class here refers to socioeconomic status.

9 IOM, [SOGIESC Glossary of Terms](#) (2021).

## GENDER-SENSITIVE, RESPONSIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

The different levels of integration of gender into programmes and activities can be understood using the following scale:<sup>10</sup>

**Gender sensitive:** Recognizing gender inequalities, including different gender roles, stereotypes, responsibilities, perception and experience, and outcomes and impact on all individuals. This includes the various needs of different gender groups; and different social, cultural, political, and economic contexts.

**Gender responsive:** Responding to the aspects recognized from a gender sensitive approach. This includes undertaking specific actions to try and reduce gender inequalities and address the specific needs of women, men and persons with diverse SOGIESC.

**Gender transformative:** Taking necessary measures and addressing structural barriers or root causes of existing gender inequalities, with a focus on harmful gender norms, and with respect for different perception and experience and consideration of outcomes and impact. Taking action to achieve gender equality includes promoting shared power, control of resources and equal participation in decision-making tables, which leads to transformative change.

<sup>10</sup> This research uses a previous scale, as it was conducted before the finalization of the new 2023 IOM Gender Equality Policy, which sets 'gender responsive' at the top of the scale, defining it as "taking necessary measures and addressing structural barriers or root causes of existing gender inequalities, with a focus on harmful gender norms, and with respect for different perception and experience and consideration of outcomes and impact. Taking action to achieve gender equality includes promoting shared power, control of resources, equal participation in decision-making tables, and empowerment, which leads to transformative change." IOM, Gender Equality Policy, (forthcoming).



## METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative methods to understand in greater depth how gender interacts with existing structures of inequality and processes impacting returnees' reintegration, and which might create situations of vulnerability, barriers and challenges to reintegration. Qualitative methods were deemed suitable to gain in depth understandings of how returnees themselves felt about their situation, their experiences of migration, including return, and also to solicit their opinion on how they could be best supported in the complex process of reintegration in their countries of origin. Research methods included:

**Desk review of academic and grey literature,** concerning gender, return and reintegration. The literature review was carried out using relevant academic databases and search engines, combined with a search for grey literature and integration of reports provided by KI at the international level. This provided a basis for building on previous research and data on gender and reintegration globally and at country level.

**Review of available secondary data,** on gender and reintegration globally and in case study countries.

**KI interviews,** with informants selected based on their involvement in return and reintegration programmes. The KI interviews were used to seek the experiences and opinions of these individuals on issues relating to gender and reintegration, programmes in place, obstacles and challenges to implementing gender-sensitive, gender-responsive activities.

**Country case studies,** the research teams (the primary investigator and a national external consultant) carried out the following:

- **KI interviews** with relevant government officials, NGOs, CSOs, IOs and other individuals in each country, who were involved in return and reintegration programmes. These supplemented KI interviews carried out in the inception phase of the research and provided more detailed information, particularly concerning the context for reintegration in each country, relevant partners and programmes working on reintegration, gendered-related challenges

and opportunities for gender-sensitive or gender-responsive activities.

- **Semi-directive interviews with returnees.** Participants were identified and selected through national IOM country offices (returnees who have benefited from return and reintegration assistance), relevant CSOs and relevant government programmes for reintegration.<sup>11</sup> Following this, a snowball sampling was applied where possible to reach out to returnees who may not have benefited from any type of reintegration assistance. Despite limitations, efforts were made to guarantee the inclusion of participants of all genders and a balance of participants across different geographical and social locations. Interviews explored migration and return experiences of individuals, their interactions (if any) with reintegration assistance programmes, the challenges and difficulties they have faced, the positive factors that might have helped their reintegration, their relationships with families and communities of return, and with CSOs, NGOs, IOs and government institutions.
- **Focus group discussions with returnees.** FGDs were held with groups of returnees in three of the case study countries (the Gambia, Ghana and Guinea). In Serbia and Tunisia, it was not judged feasible to organize such discussions given the limited access to reach out to returnees. The FGD participants were selected by the local researchers in collaboration with national IOM offices, gender focal points at GIZs Programme Migration for Development, relevant CSOs and lead consultant. FGDs were organized in men only and women only groups,<sup>12</sup> to try and create spaces where participants were comfortable to talk about possibly sensitive topics relating to gender and/or to voluntarily disclose any information related to their SOGIESC. The FGDs explored participants' views and opinions about return and reintegration, their gender-specific needs in relation to reintegration services, gendered perceptions and representations, presence and effectiveness of reintegration

11 Sociodemographic details of interviewees are provided in Annex 2.

12 FGDs were not organized specifically in groups of people with diverse SOGIESC, as this could expose participants to risks.

assistance programmes, and ideas about how reintegration could be made more sustainable for all returnees.

**Thematic analysis** (country level and comparative international analysis), after transcription, the qualitative data from interviews and FGDs was coded and analysed. Analysis was carried out on national data, and then, as far as possible, a comparative international analysis was undertaken.

**Implementation of the research.** The semi-directive interviews and FGDs in each country were carried out by local researchers, under the supervision of the PI. The PI travelled to each country before the start of data collection to work with the local consultants, to go through the research tools together and to decide with them whether these needed any adaptation to the country context. Pilot interviews and FGDs were carried out by the PI and local researchers to test research tools, after which any necessary further adaptations were made. Most of the interviews and FGDs were recorded (after obtaining written consent from the participants) and all were transcribed into either English or French by the local consultant for analysis.

## ETHICAL AND PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

Before the research activities started, approval from the national government was obtained for data collection in each country where appropriate. All research followed strict ethical protocols, including IOM's Data Protection Principles.<sup>13</sup> The researchers ensured that they found safe spaces for interviews/FGDs, as well as ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. The purpose of the study and the interview/FGD were explained clearly and all participants gave informed consent to participating, and additional consent to the interview/FGD being recorded. When the participant did not consent to being recorded, the local consultants took

detailed notes instead. No questions pertaining to an individual's SOGIESC or to any other potentially sensitive issues were asked, as this would imply high risks. Nor were there any questions concerning any violent or traumatizing experiences that the individuals may have lived. Open questions were used to allow the interviewees/FGD participants to disclose information voluntarily. All participants were made aware that they could refuse to reply to any question and could stop the interview at any time if they wished, and that this would not have any negative impacts on them. Additionally, participants were provided with contact information for the IOM's country's data focal point, they were informed about their right to contact the focal point and withdraw their consent at any time on the use of their data. They were also provided with information regarding various forms of assistance available to them if they wished to access this in the follow up to the interview/FGD (contacts provided depended on those services available in each country).

## LIMITATIONS

The study's overarching objective was to understand gendered reintegration experiences and challenges of reintegration for women, men and returnees with diverse SOGIESC. However, it is important to note that due to a limited time frame for fieldwork and a relatively small sample size for each country, in conjunction with difficulties in reaching some of the returnees, it was not always possible to gain as comprehensive a range of data as might be wished for.

Limitations to this research emerged from local contextual factors<sup>14</sup> and the measures this study undertook to ensure ethical considerations and compliance of the *do no harm* principle,<sup>15</sup> as well as the safety and protection of all people participating in it. This meant, for example, not asking any questions about participants' SOGIESC, as this could cause harm to interviewees, or result in a non-accurate collection of data (as participants might provide

13 IOM, [Data Protection. Manual](#) (2015).

14 In some of the research target countries it is culturally unacceptable and/or criminalized to express diverse SOGIESC. In some other target countries, there were issues linked to the political and legal contexts.

15 "The principle of "Do No Harm" means that specific attention should be paid to only collect data that does not increase or bring harm when collected, stored, shared, analysed and used, and to only solicit that data in a way that does not do harm and through the appropriate methods and sources." IOM, [Operational Guide: Safe and useful data for an inclusive response that is mindful of people's diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics \(SOGIESC\)](#) (2023).

non-reliable responses to protect themselves). In this sense, the study gathered data on the sex of returnees based on the interviewers' observations,<sup>16</sup> which therefore is considered as gender data. The collection of data on gender identity (as defined previously) was limited to the information voluntarily disclosed by interviewees in their responses.

While the factors mentioned above did lead to limitations in surpassing the binary approach (woman/man; female/male), this study underscores the significance of and strives to adopt more inclusive approaches. In this regard, even though the data collected regarding the observed sex of returnees adhered to a binary approach and its analysis predominately relied on the observed gender expression of participants (unless voluntarily self-disclosed otherwise); the study endeavoured to bridge this gap by seeking to incorporate background information review, analysis and recommendations in a more comprehensive fashion.

Although the research team utilized a variety of strategies to engage a diverse sample of returnees and to collaborate with a broad range of organizations and associations in each country, it is crucial to acknowledge the constraints inherent in a multi-country study approach such as the one undertaken by this research. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the research findings offer updated insights into the key gender-related concerns in return and reintegration, highlighting significant avenues for deeper investigation, including further in-depth research, and offering recommendations for policies and programmes aimed at supporting returnees in their reintegration.



<sup>16</sup> In some cases, asking the sex of a person could be considered inappropriate and create damage.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION REVIEW

### COUNTRY SELECTION AND CONTEXTS

The case study countries – the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Serbia and Tunisia – were selected by BMZ and IOM, in function of their own programmes and activities on return and reintegration.

Three of the countries included in the study – the Gambia, Ghana and Guinea, which are situated within the West African region and are all members of the Economic Community of West African States – showed a reasonable level of similarity in terms of the profile of migrants and returnees. Serbia and Tunisia provided relatively different national contexts in terms of migration and return profiles.

A general review of gender equality and gender relations in each country was beyond the scope of this analysis, however the below country profiles provide a brief overview of available research related to gender and return and reintegration pertaining to each country as well as some additional relevant information that emerged from KI interviews.

#### The Gambia

The Gambia is one of the African countries with the highest number of emigrants, and, as such, migration can be said to be part of the culture of the country.<sup>17</sup> Gambian migrants have shown to try to reach the EU more than migrants from other West African countries.<sup>18</sup> Many of the migrants are young men who, as research has shown, are encouraged to migrate in large part due to gender norms which expect them to provide for their families, and by high levels of unemployment in the Gambia, which

means they feel they must migrate to fulfil this role.<sup>19</sup> Migration can thus be seen as a “rite of passage” linked to fulfilling norms of masculinity.<sup>20</sup> This may pose problems for returnees in terms of feelings of “failed masculinity”, which is an aspect that was identified as a challenge by respondents in this study. The scarcity of regular routes for migration means that most migrants leave along irregular and dangerous routes which are known as the “backway”.<sup>21</sup> Since the fall of the Jammeh regime in 2016–2017, Gambian asylum seekers in the EU face a high chance of rejection, with over 5,000 rejected asylum applications in 2019.<sup>22</sup>

Considering the increasingly difficult situation in transit countries, many migrants are now returning without having reached the EU.<sup>23</sup> In 2022, IOM assisted 1,004 migrants to return to the Gambia, most of them coming from the Niger, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco (host countries).<sup>24</sup>

The very difficult conditions in transit countries, and particularly extremely high levels of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, may contribute to increasing the vulnerability faced by returnees. Further, research has pointed to widespread stigmatization of Gambian returnees who have “failed” in their migration and “wasted family resources”.<sup>25</sup> Because of this, many returnees do not return to their families or communities of origin but prefer to remain in larger cities.<sup>26</sup>

17 Gaibazzi, P., “Frontiers of externalisation: Borders and temporality in the Euro-African zone”, *Paideuma: Mitteilungen Zur Kulturkunde*, 66: 219–234 (2020).

18 Altrogge, J. and F. Zanker, *The Political Economy of Migration Governance in the Gambia*, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (2019).

19 Gaibazzi, “Frontiers of externalisation: Borders and temporality in the Euro-African zone”.

20 Conrad Suso, C. T., “Backway or bust: Causes and consequences of Gambian irregular migration”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 57(1): 111–35 (2019).

21 Ibid.

22 Marino, R., J. Schapendonk, and I. Lietaert, “Translating Europe’s Return Migration Regime to The Gambia: The Incorporation of Local CSOs”, *Geopolitics*, 28(3): 1033–1056 (2023).

23 Altrogge and Zanker, *The Political Economy of Migration Governance in the Gambia*.

24 IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2022 – Annexes* (2023).

25 Castellano, V., “Voluntary Returns or Forced Choices? Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programs in the Gambia”, article in ROR<sup>n</sup> (2 November 2022).

26 Ibid.



## Ghana

Ghana has a long history of migration. Estimates show that today about 1.5 million Ghanaians are living outside the country.<sup>27</sup> As Kleist argues: “Ghanaian migrants are very diverse, including highly skilled persons, students, marriage migrants, traders, and low-skilled migrant workers, with the implication that migration projects and modes of return differ significantly”.<sup>28</sup> This is important to consider in studying gendered return and reintegration experiences. Indeed, Ghana has been noted as one of the countries in the West African region which has become most active in promoting the return of highly skilled migrants who can contribute to the development of Ghanaian sectors such as health care.<sup>29</sup> The experiences of highly skilled returnees differ to those of less-skilled ones.

There is a section in the 2016 “National Migration Policy for Ghana” which concerns return and reintegration, but there is yet no comprehensive reintegration programme at government level, leaving reintegration activities to be developed on an ad hoc basis.

In 2022, IOM assisted 1,050 migrants to return to Ghana, with most of them (753) coming from Libya (host country).<sup>30</sup> This provides a specific context for returns given the known conditions of exploitation and violence towards migrants in Libya.<sup>31</sup> As such, recently, when assisted voluntary return is not possible in some humanitarian settings, voluntary

humanitarian return<sup>32</sup> may take place, as from Libya. Kleist<sup>33</sup> studied the experiences of Ghanaian migrants forced to return from Libya. She found that women who return “empty-handed” are faced with social stigma, gossip and ridicule. This is particularly the case for single mothers. Many lack family support and social networks to provide care or economic support. KIs stated that there are also increasing returns to Ghana from Middle Eastern countries which have become a destination for Ghanaian migrant workers with increasing reports of survivors of trafficking. Women who migrate for domestic employment are frequently exploited and may experience sexual violence from their employers. It is often difficult for them to leave because of the *kafala* systems operating in many of these Middle Eastern countries, in which the migrant’s legal status in the country is dependent on their employer. During COVID-19 pandemic, there were a lot of returns from the Middle East which were assisted by the Ghanaian Government.<sup>34</sup>

## Guinea

Emigration from Guinea has increased significantly in recent years,<sup>35</sup> and most migrants are young men and boys.<sup>36</sup> In Guinea, as in other countries of the region, studies have described a pressure on migrants to succeed economically and to provide financial security for their families. Returnees might be regarded as failures or as cursed.<sup>37</sup> More recently, the patterns of migration have been observed to

27 Kleist, N., “Trajectories of involuntary return migration to Ghana: Forced relocation processes and post-return life”, *Geoforum*, 116: 272–281 (2020).

28 Ibid.

29 Adam, I. et al., “West African interests in (EU) migration policy. Balancing domestic priorities with external incentives”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(15): 3101–3118 (2020).

30 IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2022 – Annexes*.

31 Achtnich, M., “Waiting to Move On: Migration, Borderwork and Mobility Economies in Libya”, *Geopolitics*, 27(5): 1–14 (2021); and Al-Dayel, N., A. Anfinson and G. Anfinson, “Captivity, Migration, and Power in Libya”, *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 9(3): 280–298 (2023).

32 According to IOM, VHR is a form of assisted return which is applied in humanitarian settings when assisted voluntary return and reintegration is not possible. “VHR often represents a life-saving measure for migrants who are stranded or in detention.” As with all return support, “the IOM approach to VHR is based on respect for migrants’ rights, including the right to return, and the provision of timely, unbiased and reliable information on the return and reintegration process, to ensure migrants can make an informed decision on whether or not to return. IOM-assisted VHR also includes vulnerability and medical screenings to ensure appropriate safeguards are put in place throughout the return and reintegration process.” IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2022* (2023), page 2.

33 Kleist, N., “Disrupted migration projects: the moral economy of involuntary return to Ghana from Libya”, *Africa*, 87(2): 322–342 (2017).

34 KI interview, 28 March 2023.

35 Botta, E., M. Engeler and A. Somparé, *MIGCHOICE country report: Guinea* (2021).

36 Laboratoire des Études et Recherches sur le Genre, l’Environnement, la Religion et les Migrations / Observatoire Sénégalais des Migrations, *Migration – my project. Candidates and migration networks – the case of the Republic of Guinea* (2019).

37 Ibid.

be changing, as Wotem Somparé<sup>38</sup> argues, more and more frequently, migration can be seen as an individualized rather than a family project, and an increasing number of migrants are women. This might also indicate that the profile of returnees could change, and that the proportion of women might increase. As many of these returnees will have transited through countries where sexual and gendered violence is frequent, many may have experienced GBV, which needs to be considered in reintegration support and assistance.

Guinea has the largest number of returnees among the case study countries in this research. In 2022, IOM assisted 6,468 migrants to return to Guinea. Most of them returning from host countries in North and West Africa (the Niger, Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Libya).<sup>39</sup> The large numbers of returnees create challenges for those organizations working to provide reintegration support. During KI interviews, problems of limited resources for reintegration assistance were highlighted, particularly in a context where, as mentioned by a KI, “everyone is exposed to situations of vulnerability”.<sup>40</sup>

## Serbia

Reintegration of returnees to Serbia is managed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, who is responsible for all reintegration processes under readmission agreements. However, not all returnees interact with the Commissariat as there is no legal obligation for returnees to register. KIs pointed out that this was a big challenge for planning reintegration programmes as there is a lack of comprehensive data, including data on gender of returnees.<sup>41</sup> Since 2007 and the start of negotiations with the EU over visa liberalization for Serbian citizens and possible accession of Serbia to the EU, the number of returns under the readmission agreements from the EU Member States to Serbia continually increased,<sup>42</sup> reaching a peak in 2017. KIs explained that sending

countries in coordination with the respective donors decide on the selection criteria for who gets reintegration assistance.

In 2022, IOM assisted 518 migrants to return to Serbia, most of them were coming from other European countries such as Germany, Austria, Belgium and the Kingdom of the Netherlands (host countries).<sup>43</sup> Most returnees to Serbia come from the Roma population, who were already discriminated in multiple ways prior to migration. These migrants leave Serbia because of this discrimination and their difficult economic situation and living conditions.

A recent study on reintegration in Serbia<sup>44</sup> found that whilst the educational levels of women and men returnees were similar, with both groups having low levels of education, men had more skills that facilitated employment or further training on return. In terms of the types of skills the returnees possessed, there is a clear gender divide, with men being trained in skills such as construction, while women have skills in cooking or domestic and care work services. This means that women are disadvantaged in their reintegration into the labour market as they generally have skills for less well-paid or unpaid types of work. Further, the experience of having migrated seems to have a deleterious effect on women’s employment opportunities, with percentages of unemployment similar for men and women before going abroad but showing a difference on return when the share of men unemployed fell to 70 per cent, whilst it was 82 per cent for women. The author of the report attributes this difference to women’s domestic responsibilities. In many families of returnees, children aged 3–14 did not attend school and thus required parental supervision, usually by their mothers. It was found that this was not women’s choice, but a result of men’s decision within a patriarchal culture that does not approve women working outside of the home, combined with lack of money and inability to qualify for kindergarten care for their

38 Wotem Somparé, A., "La dynamique du phénomène migratoire en Guinée : aspirations de mobilité sociale et inégalités d'accès à la migration", *Africa*, 1(2): 75–96 (2019).

39 IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2022* – Annexes.

40 KI interview, 28 March 2023.

41 KI interview, 13 April 2023.

42 Cvejić, S. and SeConS, *Socio-Economic Position and Reintegration of Returnees Under the Readmission Agreement in Serbia in 2021*, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Srbija (2022).

43 IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2022*, Annexes.

44 Cvejić SeConS, *Socio-Economic Position and Reintegration of Returnees Under the Readmission Agreement in Serbia in 2021*.

children. Women who did report being employed were usually working in the informal sector doing jobs such as cleaning. Having been abroad did not change patriarchal norms or patterns, placing a large burden of domestic work on women, especially in multi-generational families. As the study states: “In multi-generational Roma households, the greatest burden is on daughters-in-law, who are expected to take care of the entire household, including, for example, preparing food, cleaning or washing clothes by hand for a large number of household members.”<sup>45</sup>

Discrimination against Roma is a major issue affecting returnees in Serbia. In the study cited above, it was found that Roma returnee women felt that they had experienced institutional discrimination, for example through not receiving any social aid or child allowance even when they should have been eligible for these. This can be seen as an additional barrier to economic and social reintegration particularly impacting women.

The KIs in Serbia pointed to the issue of returnee survivors of trafficking who require support. They also mentioned partnerships with organizations working for and with people with diverse SOGIESC, from whom they had anecdotal evidence of the difficulties of returnees with diverse SOGIESC, and the lack of adequate support for them.<sup>46</sup>

## Tunisia

In general, most of the returnees to Tunisia are young men (average age 30–40) who have migrated by boat to Europe. Women who return do so generally as part of a couple or having left a marriage or a relationship with a partner in Europe.<sup>47</sup> In 2022, IOM assisted 232 migrants to return to Tunisia, most of them were coming from countries in Europe, among them: Romania, Germany, Türkiye, Belgium, Austria (host countries).<sup>48</sup>

KIs spoke about the fact that young men who return experience this as a failure, and that even if they are not rejected by their families, they still feel that they

have let their families down. Frequently, they do not wish to be seen in their home neighbourhood and spend a period hiding at home. For women who return, the most vulnerable cases are single mothers who experience stigma for being unmarried/divorced and having children. Some women have left situations of domestic violence from their partners in Europe, and do not have access to any specific psychological support or counselling to help them recover from this. KIs mentioned that there is currently a change in profile of those emigrating from Tunisia with more women leaving either alone or with their children. This might be expected to change the profile of returnees in coming years.<sup>49</sup>

## SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION

Although there is no universally agreed definition of sustainable reintegration, IOM’s definition asserts that:

*“Reintegration can be considered 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.”<sup>50</sup>*

Building on the definition above, IOM conceptualized its *Integrated Approach to Reintegration* in 2017, which states that that reintegration is a complex and multidimensional process that requires a holistic and needs-based approach. IOM’s integrated approach considers three levels of support: the **individual**, the **community** and the **structural**. Addressing the following three dimensions of reintegration:

45 Ibid.

46 KI interview, 21 November 2022..

47 KI Interview, 4 November 2022.

48 IOM, *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2022* – Annexes.

49 KI interview, 17 November 2022.

50 IOM, *Reintegration Handbook (2019)*, page 12.

**The economic**, covering “aspects of reintegration that contribute to re-entering the economic life and sustained livelihoods.”

**The social**, addressing “returning migrants’ access to public services and infrastructure in their countries of origin, including access to health, education, housing, justice and social protection schemes.”

**The psychosocial**, encompassing “the reinsertion of returning migrants into personal support networks (friends, relatives, neighbours) and civil society structures (associations, self-help groups, other organizations and civic life generally). This also includes the re-engagement with the values, ways of living, language, moral principles and traditions of the country of origin’s society.”<sup>51</sup>

All of these dimensions are influenced by gendered norms and structures of inequality, which will have ongoing impacts on returnees.<sup>52</sup>

## GENDER AND FORCED RETURN

Previous research has shown that forced<sup>53</sup> return<sup>54</sup> creates extra layers of complexity and can be seen to deepen gendered vulnerabilities. As King and Lulle argue, in forced return “expected performances of masculinity in migration are compromised, female exploitation deepened, and ongoing quests for a new identity ruptured and reshaped”.<sup>55</sup> Forced return tends to concern men in greater proportion than

women, as it is generally more likely to be young men who are deported from Europe or the United States of America, for example.<sup>56</sup> Migrants who are forced to return are likely to experience stigma and shame and feel themselves to be “failures”, occupying what Khosravi<sup>57</sup> terms an “abject social status”. For example, Schuster and Majidi<sup>58</sup> describe the high levels of stigmatization experienced by Afghan returnees who have been deported from Europe, the United States or Australia. Drotbohm<sup>59</sup> explains that deportation is often experienced as a deeply unjust measure by those who are forcibly returned, and this sense of injustice may continue to impact on their psychosocial well-being and impede on their ability to reintegrate into their home society. Drotbohm shows the gendered impacts of forced return on Cabo Verdean migrants, with the few women who are forced returnees being even more stigmatized than men. Men, she argues, tend to engage in “macho” retellings of the physical hardships that they have endured in host countries to overcome feelings of inadequacy and reinforce their masculinity and therefore their position in the community. Generally, research seems to point to the fact that whilst (young) men are most likely to experience deportation and forced return, it is women who suffer the most difficult challenges in reintegrating and “re-embedding” themselves in the home society, following deportation.<sup>60</sup> In a study of returnees to Ethiopia, Bilgili *et al.*<sup>61</sup> also found that returnee women had far worse perceptions

51 Ibid., page 13.

52 Bilgili, Ö., K. Kuschminder and M. Siegel, “Return migrants’ perceptions of living conditions in Ethiopia: A gendered analysis”, *Migration studies*, 6(3): 345–366 (2018).

53 The difference between “forced” and “voluntary” returns has been questioned in recent research, with studies showing that many so-called “voluntary” returnees were in fact constrained by a number of factors in their choices and decisions. The role of international organizations in facilitating “voluntary” returns and “managing” migration has also been questioned. See Bhat, S., “Fooled by a mirage: Nigerian migrant women’s ‘voluntary’ return from Libya and the IOM” in Freedman, J. et al. (eds), *The Gender of Borders: Embodied Narratives of Migration, Violence and Agency*, London and New York: Routledge (2023); Trauner, F. et al., *The International Organization for Migration in West Africa. Why Its Role is Getting More Contested*, Policy Brief n.3, UNU Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (2019).

54 IOM and Maastricht University, [Comparative Reintegration Outcomes between Forced and Voluntary Returns and through a Gender Perspective](#).

55 King, R. and A. Lulle, “Gendering return migration” in Russel K. and K. Kuschminder, *Handbook of Return Migration*, Edward Elgar Publishing (2022), page 53–69.

56 Ibid.

57 Khosravi, S., *After deportation: Ethnographic Perspectives*, Springer (2018).

58 Schuster, L. and N. Majidi, N., “Deportation stigma and re-migration”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration studies*, 41(4): 635–652 (2015).

59 Drotbohm, H., “On the durability and the decomposition of citizenship: the social logics of forced return migration in Cape Verde”, *Citizenship Studies*, 15(3-4): 381–396 (2011).

60 De Regt, M. and M. Tafesse, “Deported before experiencing the good sides of migration: Ethiopians returning from Saudi Arabia” in Demissie, F., *Ethiopians in an Age of Migration*, Routledge (2017), page 104–118.

61 Bilgili, Kuschminder and Siegel, “Return migrants’ perceptions of living conditions in Ethiopia: A gendered analysis”.

of return conditions than their male counterparts believing that they had suffered economically and socially through forced return.

On the other hand, where cultures and representations surrounding migration privilege the model of a man who migrates internationally to be able to provide economic security for his family at home, return might be highly stigmatizing for men who have not been able to achieve this and meet these expectations. Castellano<sup>62</sup> thus reports that men returning to the Gambia are frequently highly stigmatized for being “failed” migrants, and that forced return is associated with criminality, leading to these young men being represented as security risks for the country. She describes how many returnees hide away from their families and hope to re-migrate as soon as possible to escape this stigma.

## VIOLENCE DURING MIGRATION AND IMPACTS ON REINTEGRATION

The conditions of return and reintegration are significantly influenced by the experiences of migration which are also gendered. One issue which has been highlighted as key is that of experiencing violence during migration, and the long-term consequences thereof. Whilst people of all genders may face various forms of violence, many studies have shown that women are more likely than men to experience GBV, including sexual violence, both during transit and in destination countries.<sup>63</sup> This can be argued to have an important impact on women’s reintegration through long-lasting psychological impacts of GBV, and often neither their countries of origin, nor reintegration support services are equipped to provide adequate essential services to returning migrants who have experienced GBV.

Several KI for this study also pointed to lack of services and support for survivors of GBV as a key factor in creating gendered vulnerabilities and barriers to reintegration.<sup>64</sup> As well as the long-term physical and mental health impacts of having experienced GBV, women can be faced with stigma from their families and communities because they have experienced this type of violence. They thus face a “double” burden which impacts heavily on their ability to achieve sustainable reintegration. Recent research on returnees to Somalia, found that many returnees found themselves being displaced into camps and being left to fend for themselves. This heightened the vulnerability of women and girls to GBV.<sup>65</sup> And in another recent study, Bhat<sup>66</sup> points to the lack of support for women who returned to Nigeria. The women she interviewed had been returned to Nigeria with IOM support, after having been intercepted in the Mediterranean trying to cross from Libya to Italy. After return to Nigeria, they felt that they did not receive suitable assistance for reintegration.

These literature review findings on the potential gaps in reintegration support for women were echoed by KI interviewed for this study, who also pointed to the fact that reintegration assistance might not be adapted to women’s needs. For example, where women feel that they are in situations of insecurity, they may feel scared to have to make the journey to the place where reintegration assistance is provided.<sup>67</sup>

62 Castellano, “Voluntary Returns or Forced Choices? Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programs in the Gambia”.

63 Freedman, J., N. Sahraoui and E. Tastsoglou, “Thinking about Gender and Violence in Migration: An Introduction” in *Gender-Based Violence in Migration*, Palgrave Macmillan (2022), page 3–28.

64 KI interviews, 22 and 23 November 2022..

65 Owigo, J., “Returnees and the Dilemmas of (Un) sustainable Return and Reintegration in Somalia”, *African Human Mobility Review*, 8(2): 122–138 (2022).

66 Bhat, S., “Fooled by a mirage: Nigerian migrant women’s ‘voluntary’ return from Libya and the IOM”.

67 KI interview, 2 November 2022.

## GENDER SHAPING THE DECISION TO RETURN

Research has shown how gender relations shape and impact all stages of migration in countries of departure, transit and destination,<sup>68</sup> and how these have a major impact on return. There is evidence of gender differences in decision-making regarding return, pointing in general to women's greater reluctance to return to their countries of origin.<sup>69</sup>

Although the decision to return can be analysed at the individual level, it is a decision which is mediated through gendered relations within the family, community and other social structures,<sup>70</sup> and constrained through gendered structural factors in countries of departure and return.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the choice to return can be observed in terms of a "constrained choice" where the individual is placed within a web of family and community relations, and larger economic, political, legal and social structures (including migration policies and lack of legal options to remain in host countries). Women may face more pressure to return to look after elderly family members, for example.<sup>72</sup> Further, dominant gender roles and norms play a role in return migration. One study showed how the idea of regaining "masculine

roles" lost through migration was shown to be a factor in influencing Somali men's decision to return.<sup>73</sup>

Several studies have pointed out that migrant men are more likely to plan for and initiate return to their countries of origin,<sup>74</sup> whilst women migrants would be more invested (financially, socially and emotionally) in their host country and less likely to plan for return.<sup>75</sup> Women may also be more reluctant to return to their countries of origin because of fears of returning to places with more restrictive gender norms.<sup>76</sup> These types of differences in the way that men and women plan for, initiate and imagine return migration will have consequences for the experiences of return itself and for their subsequent reintegration. For example, if women invest more of their earnings in their host country and are less invested in economically preparing a return,<sup>77</sup> then this may well make return and reintegration far more economically difficult for them. Women who are deciding on returning to poorer countries, or to countries with strongly gender-segregated labour markets, realize that finding a job and assuring an income on return will be very difficult.<sup>78</sup> Return decisions are also influenced by gendered labour market conditions in host countries. King and Lulle<sup>79</sup> explain that following the economic crises in Southern European countries after 2008,

- 68 Amelina, A. and H. Lutz, *Gender and Migration. Transnational and Intersectional Perspectives*, Routledge (2019); Freedman, J., *Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate*, Springer (2015); Nawyn, S. J., "Gender and Migration: Integrating Feminist Theory into Migration Studies", *Sociology Compass*, 4(9): 749–765 (2010); Timmerman, C. et al., *Gender and Migration: A Gender-Sensitive Approach to Migration Dynamics*, Leuven University Press (2018).
- 69 Pérez, G. M., "A gendered tale of Puerto Rican return: place, nation and identity" in Potter R. B., D. Conway and J. Phillips, *The Experience of Return Migration: Caribbean Perspectives*, Ashgate Aldershot (2005), page 183–205; Potter, R.B. and D. Conway, "Experiencing return: societal contributions, adaptations and frustrations" in *ibid.*, page 283–287; Le Mare, A., B. Promphaking and J. Rigg, "Returning Home: The Middle-Income Trap and Gendered Norms in Thailand", *Journal of International Development*, 27(2): 285–306 (2015); Sondhi, G. and R. King, "Gendering international student migration: an Indian case-study", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(8): 1308–1324 (2017).
- 70 Curran, S. R. and A. C. Saguy, "Migration and Cultural Change: A Role for Gender and Social Networks?", *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2(3): 54–77 (2001).
- 71 Wong, M., "Navigating return: the gendered geographies of skilled return migration to Ghana", *Global Networks*, 14(4): 438–457 (2013); Girma, H., "The salience of gender in return migration", *Sociology Compass*, 11(5): e12481 (2017).
- 72 Baldassar, L., C. V. Baldock and R. Wilding, *Families Caring Across Borders: Migration, Ageing and Transnational Caregiving*, Palgrave Macmillan (2007); Lulle, A. and R. King, *Ageing, Gender, and Labour Migration*, Palgrave Macmillan (2016).
- 73 Hansen, P., "Circumcising Migration: Gendering Return Migration among Somalilanders", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34(7): 1109–1125 (2008).
- 74 *Ibid.*; and Vlase, I., "My husband is a patriot!": Gender and Romanian Family Return Migration from Italy", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 39(5): 741–758 (2013).
- 75 Pessar, P. and S. J. Mahler, "Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender In", *International Migration Review*, 37(3): 812–846 (2003); Piper, N., "International Migration and Gendered Axes of Stratification—Introduction" in Piper N., *New Perspectives on Gender and Migration – Livelihood, Rights and Entitlements*, Routledge (2008), page 1–34.
- 76 King and Lulle, "Gendering return migration".
- 77 Pedraza, S., "Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17(1): 303–325 (1991).
- 78 De Haas, H and T. Fokkema, "Intra-Household Conflicts in Migration Decisionmaking: Return and Pendulum Migration in Morocco", *Population and Development Review*, 36(3): 541–561 (2010).
- 79 *Ibid.*

jobs in typically “masculine sectors” of the economy were lost more quickly than typically “feminine” jobs, which in many cases led to men migrants returning to their countries of origin, whilst women staying in the host country and sending remittances.

Girma<sup>80</sup> highlights the need to avoid a dichotomy between women’s empowerment in richer countries of destination in the Global North, and a return to a home country in the Global South which will entail disempowerment and loss of autonomy or independence. This framing reinforces colonialist and racialized representations of the Global North and whiteness as superior.<sup>81</sup> These types of colonialist and racialised representations are present in many accounts of return, produced by both scholars and policy makers in the Global North. Gender relations as well as relations between countries of origin and destination are more complex than this and, hence, need more nuanced and multi-dimensional analyses. This points to the need to anchor any research and analysis within contexts and to resist globalizing assumptions both about gender relations and about North-South relations.

Decisions and conditions of return will also be influenced by whether people have migrated and returned alone, or with partners or families. Women who migrate with husbands or partners frequently return without these partners due to violence *en route*, in countries of destination, or separations in couples which can also be linked to difficulties of the journey. A study in Côte d’Ivoire found that many women who had migrated as part of a couple, returned without their partner and that this was a significant source of psychosocial distress for them and their children.<sup>82</sup> KIs mentioned the potential added vulnerability of single returnee women, who may have a lower socioeconomic status and suffer from social isolation.<sup>83</sup>

## CHALLENGES FOR REINTEGRATION FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

After return, gender norms and expectations continue to impact the experiences of reintegration. The expectation that men should provide for their families, and that women will fulfil domestic roles may weigh on returnees. Owigo<sup>84</sup> found that men returning to Somalia who could not find jobs and whose wives had to find work in order to feed the family, felt that their masculine role was diminished. On the other hand, women who had been economically active in a host country may find that gender norms restrict their access to paid employment on return. A study for UN Women in Nepal<sup>85</sup> found that women who returned found it difficult to use the skills acquired abroad for reintegration into the Nepalese labour market because of a gendered division of roles and responsibilities in the household and communities; gendered access to productive inputs, particularly land and credits; and gender discrimination in the labour markets.

Although there are various examples which point to women being empowered by return such as Wong’s<sup>86</sup> study on women migrants returning to Ghana, other studies find that women are disempowered on return. Xhaho and Caro<sup>87</sup> found that in return migration to Albania, men regained a sense of “control”, whilst women found that they had lost it. In some cases, women had been constrained to return to follow their husbands and not split up the family which only reinforced this sense of disempowerment. As a result, women in the study were found to experience more emotional and psychological problems than men on return. And in another study in Peru, Alcalde<sup>88</sup> found that returnee women experienced high levels of street harassment which had an impact on their daily lives and autonomy.

80 Girma, “The salience of gender in return migration”.

81 Lee, H. K., ““I’m my mother’s daughter, I’m my husband’s wife, I’m my child’s mother, I’m nothing else”: Resisting traditional Korean roles as Korean American working women in Seoul, South Korea”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 36: 37–43 (2013).

82 IOM, *Migration féminine en Côte d’Ivoire : Le parcours des migrantes de retour* (2019).

83 KI interview, 2 November 2022.

84 Owigo, “Returnees and the Dilemmas of (Un) sustainable Return and Reintegration in Somalia”.

85 UN Women, *Returning Home: Challenges and Opportunities for Women Migrant Workers in the Nepali Labour Market* (2019).

86 Wong, “Navigating return: the gendered geographies of skilled return migration to Ghana”.

87 Xhaho, A. and E. Caro, “Returning and Re-Emigrating Gendered Trajectories of (Re) Integration from Greece”, *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(6): 171–180 (2016).

88 Alcalde, M. C., “Gender, autonomy and return migration: negotiating street harassment in Lima, Peru”, *Global Networks*, 20(5): 25–41 (2018).

Majidi found that Somali women suffered psychosocial impacts when their expectations of economic activity on return were not fulfilled. In some cases, women may play down their role as economic providers in order not to “damage” men’s standing in the community or the relationships between men and women. In a study on returnees to the Plurinational State of Bolivia, for example, Bujan<sup>89</sup> found that men’s narratives highlighted the economic hardships that they had encountered in host countries, whilst women spoke about their role as mothers. And women undertook secret economic transfers to their male partners, to ensure that these men would still be regarded as the primary “breadwinners” for the family, and that their masculine roles would thus not be undermined.

Wanki *et al.*<sup>90</sup> argue that these gendered community expectations of returnees need to be much more closely analysed to understand why some returnees face greater difficulties than others in the reintegration process. In their study of returnees to Cameroon, they found that returnee women who were not married were judged more harshly than those who were, and that particular criticism was reserved for returnee women who tried to be “independent” and were thus seen to be trying to subvert traditional gender norms and take on “masculine” roles. They argue that “gender equality” is seen as a Western or foreign import and that women’s empowerment is not welcomed. As flagged by one of the KI, this points to the need to look at gendered norms and representations in home countries and communities to facilitate sustainable reintegration, a point that was underlined by several other KI for this study.<sup>91</sup>

Women who have left their children in their countries of origin during their migration may also face stigma and rejection on return. Avila<sup>92</sup> found that returnee

women who had left their children behind were stigmatized by wider family and community as “bad mothers”, whilst fathers who had left their children behind were ascribed a more “heroic” role.

Returnee women may thus face hostility and discrimination from their communities of return. A study on forced returnee Bangladeshi female migrant domestic workers<sup>93</sup> found that they faced gendered forms of discrimination and negative perceptions both from their communities and families. Some of the returnee women were assumed to have engaged in sex work whilst abroad, or to have experienced rape and sexual violence, which dishonoured them in the eyes of their families and communities. These negative perceptions were also dependent on whether the women had sent back high levels of remittances or satisfied their families’ financial expectations on return, in which case they were perceived less negatively. According to the same study, women who had returned prematurely because of violence or exploitation from their employers in countries of destination suffered further stigmatization on return because they had not brought the hoped-for financial benefits to their families and were assumed to have been responsible for the “failure” of their migration. Additionally, Chy *et al.*<sup>94</sup> mention that these negative attitudes can lead to depression and sometimes suicide among returnee women.

Another study of returnee women in Côte d'Ivoire<sup>95</sup> found that there was a clear deterioration in relations between these women and their families and communities of return. Out of the women surveyed, 44 per cent said that their relations with their family were very bad, and 38 per cent said that their relations with their community were very bad. Some women said that their families and friends refused to talk to them after their return. This was

89 Buján-Martínez, R., “Gendered Motivations for Return Migrations to Bolivia from Spain”, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 13(4): 401–418 (2015); Buján-Martínez, R., “Here or there? Gendered return migration to Bolivia from Spain during economic crisis and fluctuating migration policies”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(16): 3105–3122 (2019).

90 Wanki, P., I. Derluyn and I. Lietaert, ““Let Them Make It Rain and Bling”: Unveiling Community Expectations towards Returned Migrants in Cameroon”, *Societies*, 12(1): 8 (2022).

91 KI interviews, 21 and 22 November 2022.

92 Avila E. M., *Transnational Motherhood and Fatherhood: Gendered Challenges and Coping*, University of Southern California ProQuest Dissertations (2008).

93 Chy, M. T. *et al.*, “Forced returnee Bangladeshi female migrant domestic workers and their social reintegration experiences”, *Current Sociology*, 71(1): 133–151 (2023).

94 *Ibid.*

95 IOM, *Migration féminine en Côte d'Ivoire : Le parcours des migrantes de retour*.



in part because migration had largely fragilized the economic situation of these women. In some cases, their families had been forced to contribute to help pay a ransom in Libya, but even when this was not the case, a deterioration in the women's economic situation on return was found to put a strain on family relations. Women also found themselves in a fragile social position on return. The study found that over a half of women surveyed had not informed their families about their planned return. They explained this by citing bad relations with their family, shame at returning having "failed" in their migratory projects, or fear of rejection<sup>96</sup>. This points to an awareness on the part of returnee women of the likelihood that their return will be socially very difficult and that they may find themselves in positions of vulnerability on return. Additionally, it points to also women – and not just men – being pressured to have successful migration projects from an economic standpoint.

Migration may also be seen to damage a woman's marriage prospects on return and thus lead to stigmatization in communities where women are expected to marry. Ullah<sup>97</sup> found that returnee women to South Asian countries considered that they had damaged their marriage prospects and thus lost their opportunities for motherhood. This was severely stigmatizing in communities where motherhood is part of an expected role for women. This echoes the findings reported above of stigmatization of women who leave their children behind when they migrate and are thus perceived as "bad mothers".

Economic reintegration is also influenced by gender, and women may face more difficulties than men in finding employment and achieving economic self-sufficiency on their return. Owigo<sup>98</sup> and Majidi<sup>99</sup> both point to the difficulties that Somali women

returning from Kenya have in finding work and becoming economically self-sufficient. The ability of returnee women to enter the labour market can be hampered by their gendered domestic and assigned familial responsibilities (looking after children or older relatives), lack of relevant training and skills, or gendered inequalities within labour markets (gender-segregation in employment sectors or dominant norms against women's employment outside of the home). These gendered difficulties in economic reintegration were also underlined by KIs. For example, in Serbia, a KI pointed out that often Roma returnee women have very little chance of finding paid employment because of the expectation that they care for children and elderly relatives.<sup>100</sup>

Specific challenges to reintegration may exist for women survivors of trafficking or sexual exploitation, which shows the complex familial and community relationships. Brunovskis and Surtees<sup>101</sup> report that the return of survivors of trafficking is often complicated by difficult financial situations, especially when they have borrowed money to migrate or have unpaid debts, as well as by the stigma shown to survivors of trafficking. Following a study of returned Nigerian women victims of trafficking, Plambech<sup>102</sup> argues that the extreme violence of trafficking in persons can often mask the continuing everyday violence that women face after return. The assumption is often that they are being "saved" from the violence of trafficking in persons and returned to a "home" which is assumed to be safe. But this is not always the case, and they might continue to experience various forms of GBV after their return; hence the importance of having risk assessments conducted for victims of trafficking.<sup>103</sup>

96 Ibid.

97 Ahsan Ullah, A. K. M., "Mother's Land and Others' Land: "Stolen" Youth of Returned Female Migrants", *Gender, Technology and Development*, 17(2): 159–178 (2013).

98 Owigo, "Returnees and the Dilemmas of (Un) sustainable Return and Reintegration in Somalia".

99 Majidi, N., "The return of refugees from Kenya to Somalia. Gender and psychosocial wellbeing", in Vathi, Z. and R. King, *Return Migration and Psychosocial Wellbeing. Discourses, Policy-Making and Outcomes for Migrants and their Families*, Routledge (2017).

100 KI interview, 21 November 2022..

101 Brunovskis, A. and R. Surtees, "Coming home: Challenges in family reintegration for trafficked women", *Qualitative Social Work*, 12(4): 454–472 (2013).

102 Plambech, S., "Between "Victims" and "Criminals": Rescue, Deportation, and Everyday Violence Among Nigerian Migrants", *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 21(3): 382–402 (2014).

103 IOM, *Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse* (2019), particularly, pages 16 and 36.

## EXISTENT GAP ON EXPERIENCES OF RETURNEES WITH DIVERSE SOGIESC

There is yet little research on returnees with diverse SOGIESC. Studies have found that wanting to escape discrimination and violence based on their diverse SOGIESC is a factor in people deciding to migrate and leave their country of origin.<sup>104</sup> However, there are a very few studies which examine what happens if, and when, migrants with diverse SOGIESC return (or are returned) to their home country. Research has shown that restrictive asylum systems in many cases deny refugee status and thus legal residence to those who claim international protection based on the persecution they experience as a result of their diverse SOGIESC.<sup>105</sup> Lewis<sup>106</sup> thus discusses the way in which deportation has become part of the “cycle of lesbian migration and asylum” and finds that for lesbian women who have been deported from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and returned to countries of origin such as Uganda, where homosexuality is criminalized, there is little possibility of any form of sustainable reintegration, and they live in conditions of extreme vulnerability, sometimes in hiding.

In another article on LGBTIQ+ migrants returning to Peru, Alcalde<sup>107</sup> describes a form of “exclusionary incorporation” whereby these migrants must accept violence and discrimination in order to reintegrate into their families in the context of a society with high levels of homophobia. Homophobia is a constant presence in their lives and they experience fear and marginalization.

KIs mentioned the difficulties of access to documentation for transgender returnees and the problems of identity documents which do not recognize their trans identity.<sup>108</sup> However, in several interviews, informants admitted that they were not aware of any specific activities aimed at supporting returnees with diverse SOGIESC, and that in some countries the subject was not even discussed when planning reintegration assistance and support because of national sensitivities. Another KI pointed to the possible lack of comprehensive training of key workers in countries on diverse SOGIESC issues (also because of local/national sensitivities).

104 Winton, A., “I’ve got to go somewhere’: Queer Displacement in Northern Central America and Southern Mexico”, in Güler A., M. Shevtsova and D. Venturi, *LGBTI Asylum Seekers and Refugees from a Legal and Political Perspective*, Springer (2019), page 95–113.

105 Danisi, C. et al., *Queering Asylum in Europe: Legal and Social Experiences of Seeking International Protection on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, Springer (2012); Lewis, R., “Queering deportability: The racial and gendered politics of lesbian anti-deportation activism”, *Sexualities*, 0(0) (2022); Murray, D. A. B., “Real queer: “Authentic” LGBT Refugee Claimants and Homonationalism in the Canadian Refugee System”, *Anthropologica*, 56(1): 21–32 (2014)..

106 Lewis, “Queering deportability: The racial and gendered politics of lesbian anti-deportation activism”.

107 Alcalde, M. C., “Home and the limits of belonging: Homophobia and return migration to Peru”, *Sexualities*, 22(5-6): 916–931 (2019).

108 KI interview 2 November 2022.



## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings stem from analysis of data acquired through a combination of interviews and FGDs with returnees, and interviews with KIs. It is important to note, as outlined in the limitations section, that there were constraints in acquiring comprehensive information about returnees with diverse SOGIESC. Consequently, the current findings are primarily an outcome of the interviewers' observations<sup>109</sup> regarding the gender of the returnees.

Further, it should be noted, that although the research tools focused largely on reintegration experiences, many of those interviewed were keen to talk about their experiences of migration and often the difficult and violent situations they had experienced, and which had led to their return. The experiences mentioned above have an important impact on the conditions and possibilities for reintegration and, therefore, are discussed in some detail before turning to the challenges of returnees' reintegration.<sup>110</sup>

### VIOLENCE DURING MIGRATION

It is impossible to understand the experiences of return and reintegration without placing these within the context of the whole migration journey, and one element which stood out in returnees' experiences of migration was the violence they had encountered, particularly in irregular migration journeys. Those who had migrated irregularly from West Africa to, or through, some countries in North Africa, described the violence of the journey through the desert, in overcrowded and unsafe vehicles, or sometimes by foot:

*"Forty-seven of us were jam-packed at the rear of the vehicle that I boarded. The journey in the desert lasted for almost a week and access to drinking water each day was just once, as the driver made it clear that frequent stops would delay the journey. In the same vein, we ate only once, and it was in the middle of the night when we would be forced to stop to relax and sleep. [...]"*

*I witnessed the death of twenty people because of the hard and dangerous nature of life in the desert. The treatment meted on dead migrants of the black race is the same as the one meted on a dead dog. Black dead bodies are usually dragged out with their feet and buried in such a way that wind cannot exhume their bodies."*

Returnee man, the Gambia

Violence during migration had come from various sources. The returnees told of the violence exercised by smugglers and by police and border authorities. Many had been imprisoned and tortured or sold as slaves during their migration journeys:

*"We were sent into a house owned by someone known as [name].<sup>111</sup> He arrested Guineans and tortured them to make them pay a ransom. One of our friends died. It was [name] who ordered his death. They tortured him for a long time before killing him, because it was him who was helping us and was going to pay for our sea crossing."*

Returnee man, Guinea

*"I was arrested and imprisoned while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. While in prison, I was tortured mercilessly. I spent seven months in prison because my people could not raise the funds to facilitate my release. The torture meted on us, left some prisoners with broken arms, fractured bones, and other injuries. I escaped prison after an attempted breakout. Though I was among the escaped ones, some were caught and dragged back to the cells."*

Returnee man, the Gambia

Many of those interviewed had made several attempts to cross the Mediterranean, and had experienced shipwrecks and watched other migrants drown, sometimes including their own friends or family members:

109 In some cases, asking the sex of a person could be considered inappropriate and create damage.

110 To ensure all protection safeguards, countries not included in the scope of this research, as well as any sensitive personal information, have been excluded from the quotes in this report.

111 Name not cited for data protection reasons.

*“I paid for a boat trip to go through the Mediterranean Sea. The boat later capsized drowning more than half of the 120 people on board as only 47 of us were rescued alive. I was then arrested and taken to prison for 3 months and went through a lot of tortures ranging from beatings, starvation and other horrible experiences. During my stay in the prison, I sustained an injury because I was shot in my leg by a prison guard while trying to escape.”*

Returnee man, the Gambia

Interviewees also shared stories of violence experienced in Europe whilst attempting to cross borders:

*“We arrived in the forest and we walked all night, you can fall over and break something, it’s so dark. You aren’t allowed to use a torch. We spent the night in the forest in the rain. In the morning we were so tired, we hadn’t slept at all, we had been walking for two days. [...] There was a pregnant woman with us who was five or six months pregnant and she was bleeding, so we could not wait. Our guide told us to go on, so that the woman could get medical help. As we crossed, they launched tear gas at us, and set their dogs on us, they fired at us shouting “sit down, sit down.””*

Returnee woman, Tunisia

Moreover, migrants talked about violence and exploitation from employers in their destination countries. One interviewee who had gone to work as a domestic worker in a country in the Middle East explained:

*“For two weeks, they locked me up in a room and beat me up. They gave me nothing to eat during that period. When I finally came out, I was swollen all over. When I was finally a bit well, I took to my heels.”*

Returnee woman, Ghana

The analysis showed gender differences in the forms of violence experienced. Women frequently took on the role of nurses to care for the men who were injured during the journey or in countries of destination, as migrants have no access to health care

in some of those countries.<sup>112</sup> Having experienced or witnessed extreme violence, and having seen fellow migrants dying on the journeys, it can be expected that for many returnees these disruptions resulting in traumatizing experiences could be a barrier to reintegration in their countries of origin. As discussed below, there is a paucity of psychological and mental health support available to them when they return, and this provides a real challenge for reintegration.

### Sexual violence

Whilst returnee women spoke less frequently about imprisonment or beatings, they mentioned the sexual harassment and sexual violence to which they were exposed on their journeys and in countries of destination. The prevalence of sexual violence against women on migratory journeys is widely acknowledged; one KI mentioned that women frequently have a contraceptive implant before travelling,<sup>113</sup> knowing the risks that they face. As it is difficult to talk about sexual violence, women frequently used euphemisms to refer to these situations. Some did, however, speak explicitly about sexual violence on the journey:

*“I did not have security, a man picked me from the garage, gave me food and water. He drugged me and raped. He seized the documents of my colleagues but didn’t have access to mine. When I woke up from my sleep, I realized that I was raped.”*

Returnee woman, the Gambia

Some of them told us that when they saw and heard what other women were experiencing, it was enough to dissuade them from continuing their journeys any further:

*“Curious to know what awaited me, I asked for information from some women I was travelling with. That’s how I found out that women had all experienced sexual violence. They told me that if I decided to travel, I would have to suffer sexual exploitation and to engage in “horrible work”<sup>114</sup> to be able to survive the journey.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

112 KI Interview, 28 March 2023.

113 KI interview, 29 March 2023.

114 Implying sex work/transactional sex.

Forced sexual relations with smugglers to negotiate their passage was also noted as frequent. They told us:

*“I saw women negotiate the crossing with the smugglers on condition that they stay with them for a bit. There are some that get pregnant, others who are raped, betrayed and abandoned to their fate.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

There were no men returnees who spoke about having experienced sexual violence, or about having seen other men experiencing sexual violence. They, however, spoke quite frequently about the sexual violence that they had seen women experience:

*“When women take the illegal routes, they are often victims of rape and other sexual violence. They live with the consequences of this violence, which really harms their mental health, for the rest of their lives.”*

FGD with men returnees, Guinea

As will be discussed further below, the belief that women who travel have experienced sexual violence frequently leads to their stigmatization on return. There is also a real lack of specialized services for survivors of GBV. As one KI informed us, there is a lot of improvisation in this area and social workers are not specially trained to work with survivors of GBV.<sup>115</sup> This is a real area of concern and a gap in services for returnees.

### Trafficking in persons

Another form of violence encountered in migration journeys is that of trafficking in persons. It was generally returnee women who talked to us about trafficking in persons, although several men talked about how they had been “sold” whilst travelling through the Sahel and North Africa.

Several interviewees spoke about the fact they had been tricked and forcibly taken to a different country than the one they were expecting. In some cases, they experienced sexual violence, or were forced into prostitution in these countries:

*“The person who I gave the money to, said I was going to work as an artist in France, travelling through [transit country]. But he just took the money I gave him and left me in [transit country] with another man. The man who he gave me to, came into my room every night and started to touch me, and assault me, he threatened me and did things to me .... I eventually managed to escape and found a woman by the side of the road who helped me run away.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea.

This woman found out she was pregnant by her aggressor when she returned to Guinea. She also discovered that her uncle had been aware of what was happening when he arranged her migration and on return to her country of origin she would not go out of her house without her parents.<sup>116</sup>

One woman who had been trafficked and forced to work in prostitution, and who found herself pregnant, talked about being forced to sell her baby in return for a passage to Europe:

*“I was received by a woman. I was pregnant at that time and the woman told me that when the baby will be born, she was going to sell it and then she would use some of the money to help me cross the Mediterranean.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

In this case the baby was stillborn, and the woman eventually escaped and was able to return to Guinea.

In multiple cases, when migrants reached their destination following migration journeys, they found that their passports would be confiscated, and that they could not leave their employer even when they became abusive:

*“For us the women, the agents were the ones who linked us to our employers. So, once you get to the airport, your employer will take your passport and take all your belongings. The problem is that once a policeman meets you and you don't have your ID, you will be arrested and taken to the deportation centre. Moreover, before you are finally deported, you would have gone through a lot of challenges.”*

Returnee woman, Ghana

<sup>115</sup> KI Interview, 8 March 2023.

<sup>116</sup> As part of her reintegration, this person received the full assistance required for her welfare and benefited from an educational re-training through a master's programme financed by an IOM-led project.

## DECISION TO RETURN

*“Sincerely, I didn’t want to come back to Guinea. I have friends who told me that they’d rather commit suicide than come back to Guinea.”*

Returnee man, Guinea

The above quote is typical of the attitude of the returnees that were interviewed, the majority of whom reported that they did not really want to return. This clearly had an impact on their reintegration once they had returned as they did not want to be in their country of origin. It is important here to understand the difference between migrants who seek out return options and choose to return voluntarily, and those who opt to do so in the face of constrained options, as the latter tend to experience a negative impact on their mental well-being once they return, and thus on the sustainability of their reintegration. In this sense, migrants’ informed decisions must be promoted, even in the face of constrained options, as this is preferable to no choice at all, and is a necessary precondition to a safe and dignified return.

For those respondents who had arrived in a European country, many had been arrested or put into migrant detention centres because of lack of legal status (for example after their asylum claim had been rejected). In this case, they would choose to ask to return rather than risk deportation with all the attendant legal consequences for them.

*“The truth is, there was no other choice. That’s it, I was stuck. I had no money, no more anything. But about return, I really didn’t think about coming back to Tunisia. I knew it was no use to come back to Tunisia.”*

Returnee man, Tunisia

In some cases, the decision to return came after a failed attempt to reach Europe (often a shipwreck). Others who had returned from countries in North Africa talked about experiences of arrest, imprisonment and torture, racist violence and discrimination, insecure living conditions, thefts and attacks, and the exploitative working conditions they were under. For many, these conditions finally became too difficult and violent, and they thus decided to return.

*“In the Maghreb, even in the middle of day, they attack you. You can’t even walk around with your phone in your hands. I had to fight with robbers over there. I kept moving house because of all the attacks. They insult you; they spit at you. Some of them when they see you, they hold their nose as if to say that you smell bad.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

Many individuals found themselves subjected to arrest and imprisonment. They shared accounts of enduring torture, which subsequently led them to make the decision to return to their country of origin:

*“I opted to return to the Gambia and not to stay in prison. I preferred to return to the Gambia rather than face difficulties in prison that may lead to my death.”*

Returnee man, the Gambia

Finally, many of those who had been working in the Middle East explained that they had returned because of exploitative working conditions and violence from employers. In some cases, their employers did not want them to leave and so they had to seek help from embassies or NGOs supporting migrant workers to help them to escape.

These constrained decisions to return exacerbate the challenges of reintegration, amplifying a prevailing sense of failure, and of not wishing to be in their country of origin.

## CHALLENGES FOR REINTEGRATION FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

### Relations with family

Generally, when returnees arrive in their country of origin, there seems to be an expectation amongst organizations supporting them that they will return to their families. However, this assumption that family is the best or most supportive environment for returnees was put into question by this research as some people had migrated to escape from difficult or violent familial situations. Members of an association working with people of diverse SOGIESC in one of the research target countries, for example, reported that all their members had been rejected

(often violently) by their families. So, for these people a return to family would be extremely difficult and potentially dangerous. In these cases, despite screening for protection risks as part of return and reintegration planning, returnees may find it very hard or impossible to explain to the organization supporting their return why they do not wish to return to their family.

Even in cases where family rejection has not taken place before migration, the fact of having migrated can be a source of tension, or exclusion from families. Although some returnees explained that they had no problem returning to their family, who were just glad to see them alive after their migration experience, for many others, relations with their families were very difficult after return. They felt that they had been a disappointment to their family as their migration journey had not “succeeded”, and as they had not been able to contribute financially to their family as expected. Some families believed that the returnees are tricking them by not handing over money which they believe they have. As these returnees explained:

*“My family is not pleased by my return at all. I feel they are angry and disappointed in me because of their gestures, facial expression and sometimes without consulting me on family matters. Some look down at you and see you as a failure.”*

Returnee man, the Gambia

*“Generally, families place a lot of hope in men and if their adventure leads to being sent back its total despair. We’re treated as cursed. Especially when we come back without money. In poor families it’s worse, we’re seen as one burden too many.”*

Returnee man, Guinea

KIs mentioned that in many cases returnees want to get some cash immediately upon return so that they can go back to their families without being empty-handed (this is linked to the perceived stigma of a “failed” migration). This means that many choose a reintegration project that will yield cash quickly, for example getting goods to sell, without having a real sustainable long-term project. These issues are relevant in terms of gender-responsive reintegration support, as they tend to reduce the possibilities of

longer-term planning which might challenge the gendered divisions of labour which currently exist in this national context.

In some other cases, the family had previously advised against migration and when this advice was not taken, it was a cause of disputes, especially if the migration ended in the perceived “failure” of return:

*“For me, when I travelled, my mother and siblings were at loggerheads with me because I travelled outside the country. So, for the entire two years that I was away, they were not talking to me. When I got back to Ghana, none of them even said welcome or spoke to me up until now. So, I had to move into my own apartment together with my children and I’m trying to survive. The biggest challenge for me was that travelling brought separation between myself and my family, especially my mother. I was thinking that when I return, I would have been received with open arms, but my whole family is still not in talking terms with me.”*

Returnee woman, Ghana

Relationships with family also tended to be worse when the returnee had borrowed (or in some cases stolen) money from their relatives to pay for their journey. Many returnees explained that they were seen as a “burden” for their family after their return.

*“I was rejected by everyone, especially my dad. He ignores me, he doesn’t want to know anything about me. It’s because I failed in my adventure. He was the first person to say that I was cursed and that he knew I wouldn’t succeed. I had a challenge to meet to prove to him that I could succeed. But alas. His behaviour has really hurt me. He should have supported me during my reintegration, but he hasn’t done that. My sisters want me to move out of my mother’s house where I’m living. I’m being stigmatised by my own family.”*

Returnee man, Guinea

This can lead to returnees being pushed out of their family homes and, on some occasions, the family causing them to be rejected or evicted by others:

*“My family hate me now and they came and told the owners of my house to increase the rent because they think I have enough money and that it’s an International Organization which is looking after me. And at the same*

*time all the money I had received from IOM was nearly gone. Because I couldn't pay the new rent, I had to move out and find a new cheaper house which doesn't even have electricity."*

Returnee woman, Guinea

Returnees frequently had not informed their families of their return. Some of them were using messaging apps to communicate with their families from a foreign phone number, so that they would not realize that they had in fact returned to the country. As one Ghanaian explained:

*"With me, till now my family members don't know I've returned to Ghana. Even when my wife returned to the family house, they still don't know I returned together with my wife. The reason we chose not to tell them anything was that they might feel let down."*

Returnee man, Ghana

In the case quoted above, it is relevant to note that the couple judged that the family would be more receptive to the wife's return than to that of the husband. This points to a wider gender difference that was noted, with men feeling more often that they had let down their families by failing to play the "breadwinner" role and provide for them financially. Other respondents also pointed to their perception that it would be easier for women to reintegrate into their families who were likely to be more supportive towards them:

*"The expectation on the men is usually high so when the women return empty-handed, it's not as big an issue as when a man returns empty-handed after going abroad. In my case for instance, when my wife went back to the family house, she returned there empty-handed, but they didn't make a big deal out of that. If I had returned empty-handed to the family house like she did, it would have been a bit of an issue, because there are many things, they expect me to do or to have done since going abroad."*

Returnee man, Ghana

The family's welcome to returnee women may, however, be undermined in other ways, as the woman's morals and sexuality are put into question. As sexual violence is known to be so prevalent on most irregular migration routes, it is assumed that

returnee women may well have experienced sexual violence, including rape. And paradoxically, rather than gaining them sympathy and support, this may be a cause of rejection from families:

*"My family they don't consider me because they just take me like somebody who is a fool, they even term me as a prostitute, they think that I go outside for prostitution, so they don't have respect for me, so people if you come out here, people say that you were used by rebels, you were used by men."*

Returnee woman, the Gambia

*"My uncles told me that I couldn't live in the family house with my daughter. I told them that I couldn't abandon her. I don't know her father, or her father's family. So my future husband will have to take her as his child. My uncles say that I should know where to go with her. But where can I go? I don't know the father of the child. I asked them; "Do you think I prostituted myself to have her?" No! My daughter is the result of a rape!"*

Returnee woman, Guinea

Additionally, a KI working for a shelter for victims of trafficking highlighted that the main problems for women who are survivors of trafficking is that of shame. Frequently they use family resources and money to travel with the hope of earning and being able to send back money, but they return with nothing. This same KI noted that when these women return empty-handed, they frequently grapple with anxiety, depression, and profound feelings of guilt and regret. The KI explained that most of the women seeking refuge in the shelter are young individuals, who have returned from the Gulf States where they intended to engage in domestic labour, but ended up being exploited and experiencing violence, including sexual abuse, from their employers.

This KI mentioned that women stay at the shelter for between one week and three months and that many have problems returning to their families and would rather go and stay with friends. Finally, the KI flagged that women feel they cannot go back to their families empty handed and if they are eligible for reintegration assistance, they will wait for this so that they at least return with something. This person concluded by saying that many of these women may not understand the



importance of psychological care and that they may not come back for psychological support sessions.<sup>117</sup>

Some women who had children with foreign men reported that they were disapproved by their families, who did not support them with looking after the children.

*“For me it was hard to go back to my family with my child. It was more than a year before I dared to go back to see my father. Our relationship is getting better little by little. But I still feel he is not happy. He told me that he sent me to work in Morocco and I dishonoured him by coming back with a child.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

These types of attitudes towards women returning alone with children born during migration may lead to pressure to marry quickly to get rid of the stigma attached to being an unmarried mother. Another woman explained that her father had forced her to marry very soon after returning with her child:

*“A few weeks after I got back, one of my cousins asked to marry me. Although I didn’t want to marry him, my father forced me to. He said I had a child outside of marriage and I couldn’t say anything or give my opinion. When I got married to this cousin it was hell. My husband is an alcoholic who beats me regularly and sometimes stops me from eating.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

Several of the participants had been widowed whilst they were living in another country or on their migration journeys (one of them recounted that her husband had drowned whilst they were both trying to cross the Mediterranean). Those who return as widows also face disapproval from their families:

*“As soon as your husband dies, you’re alone with your problems. Since my husband died, I have had no contact with his family. And when I came home with the children, my father asked me why I didn’t leave the children in Morocco. I told him that I am going to look after them because they are my children. But I’m still in conflict with him. If I call him, he doesn’t even ask me how the children are.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

Women thus seem to be judged by their families less on the financial support they provide (or do not provide) and more on their perceived morals and sexual behaviour, and on their marital situation. Some pointed to the need for the State or another organization to provide housing for returnees so that they were not forced to return to a family who rejected them or treated them badly:

*“If the State or the NGO built reception centres or accommodation for returnee women, then we would have somewhere to live other than the family house.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

### Social relationships

Another challenge of return and reintegration was the way in which migration and return affected the relationship within a couple. Returnees talked about the fact that if one partner had migrated, this could lead to marital problems and divorce after return. For some, there was thus a clear difference between married and single returnees, with single people having less pressure to have “succeeded” in their migration:

*“The relationship between those who leave their wives behind is more complicated because they will not want to come back without succeeding. For those who are single the pressure to succeed is not as great as the married ones and that is the difference.”*

Returnee man, the Gambia

*“When I migrated, he was proud that his girlfriend had travelled and coming back with something tangible, but it didn’t happen that way. So, the relationship ended when I came back empty handed. He was thinking I could help him also to migrate out of Ghana, but I did not get the opportunity. I heard that when I travelled, he went in for another woman but when I asked him, he denied it so when I got back, I observed things for myself and realized it was true. The lady is even pregnant from him now. If I had brought a lot of money, he would have dumped that lady for me but as he realized that I came empty handed, he continued with the relationship with her and now they are expecting a baby.”*

Returnee woman, Ghana

Generally, the research seemed to show that the impacts of return on women's marriages/partnerships was more complicated than for men. One KI talked about the fact that women who find that they have had more freedom and independence during migration may also find it difficult to return to more traditional gender norms within their couple, and this can also be a reason for divorce after return.<sup>118</sup> But the rejection and divorce or separation frequently seemed to be because of disapproval of the woman's migration. For some married women with children, migration could lead to them being rejected on return and losing access to their children:

*"When I met him, we were both students and then I got pregnant. After giving birth, things became difficult. The man and his family were not minding me, so I single-handedly did menial jobs to take care of the child so when the opportunity came for me to travel, I took it. Since I didn't have anybody, I decided to go and leave my child in the care of the father's family. Since I came back, I have not seen my child. Someone gave me the father's number and whenever I call to talk to my child, he hangs up immediately as he hears my voice."*

Returnee woman, Ghana

Migration was also seen as harming single women's marriage prospects when they returned, because of the perceptions about them having engaged in sex work or having experienced sexual violence:

*"Sometimes these women suffer when they come back without anything meaningful. A lot of the time they find it difficult to marry again because every man wants a supportive wife. There is the perception that they went to live an aimless life and face challenges with marriage."*

Returnee man, Ghana

And even when there is not a divorce or separation after return, a few women talked about how their husbands held their migration against them, and used it as an excuse to behave violently and abuse them:

*"I am now married, but my husband molests me, he abused me, telling me nasty things because of what happened. I face a lot of challenges with my husband*

*who abuses me every time and calling me a prostitute and sometimes I feel like killing myself. Even when I asked for divorce because of his attitude he refused. He has been saying for the last five months that as long as he is alive, I will not divorce him, but he tells me nasty words that I don't like."*

Returnee woman, the Gambia

Thus, although all returnees talked about the difficulties that migration and return could provoke in their marriages, it seemed that for women, the consequences of this could be more difficult and lead to more negative consequences which had a significant impact on their reintegration.

As with families, many returnees spoke about their reluctance to contact their friends from before migration upon return. And for those who did contact friends, responses were mixed, with many finding that their relationships had gotten worse. Many returnees were no longer in touch with the friends they had before migrating because of their attitudes towards them.

*"It was my friends who mocked me that I had opportunity to stay and I returned. They said if it were to be them, even if it means staying there illegally, they will do whatever they can to stay. So, I was perceived as stupid, and someone who is not able to take advantage of situations."*

Returnee man, Ghana

This loss of friends led many returnees to say that they felt isolated and lonely, which prompt negative psychological reactions, as discussed further below. The situation seemed the same for all returnees in this case, with no perceivable difference in the experiences of loss of friendship.

## Community perceptions

Community perceptions of returnees, mirror those of family and friends, in other words frequent criticism and mockery. Returnees told us that they were treated as "cursed" and insulted because of their "failure".

<sup>118</sup> KI interview, 27 March 2023.

*“The people in my community see me as a failure in life because I have gone through the back way with a lot of financial support to enter Europe and could not proceed.”*

Returnee man, the Gambia

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This stigmatization and the insults from their local communities meant that many returnees changed their lifestyle and avoided going out as much as possible. Some decided to change their neighbourhoods they lived in because of this:

*“When I got back to Guinea, in my neighbourhood I never went out, because each time I went out, people mocked me. It was the same neighbourhood that I lived in before I left. I couldn't stay there.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

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*“So, like I was saying because of our peculiar situation, we are usually neglected by people. We are not able to join any social gathering or party plus we are never really able to ask for help from people in the community mainly because in their mind, how is it we are not better off after having travelled outside the country to seek a better life. So, that is one of the major challenges we face.”*

Returnee woman, Ghana

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As with families and partners, the perceptions of women returnees often concerned their supposed sexual behaviour, with stigmatization of women who were imagined having experienced sexual violence and/or to have engaged in prostitution:

*“I can say that between men and women, women face more shame than men. Previously, what we know is that men travel more than women. Everybody believes that men are going to do hard work but being a woman, they believe the kind of work men do, cannot be done by women. They believe the women only travel to prostitute.”*

Returnee woman, Ghana

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In general, all returnees found that it was considered more legitimate in their society for men to migrate. Women who migrate were seen to be breaking dominant gender norms and acting illegitimately.

This had a real impact on their reception in local communities and thus on their reintegration when they returned to the country.

*“Men are much better received than women on their return. Because for members of the community, men have the right to go on adventure and look for work abroad to fulfil their needs and those of their families. But women don't have that right. They have to be submissive and stay at home. If they are married, they have to obey their husband in everything.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

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*“It's not easy to live in my community. A woman migrant is treated like a vagabond. You're considered like a girl who didn't listen to her family's advice. You are discriminated against, segregated, with strange looks wherever you go. As to men, it's assumed natural that they have the right to go on adventures, as they are meant to find their own families. So, they have to succeed. That's why men are better received when they return than women.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

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## Returnees with children

Migrants who returned with children found that they encountered difficulties linked both to the material challenges of looking after children and to the children's own problems in reintegrating which affected the parents. Although children should receive their own reintegration package (depending on where they are returning from),<sup>119</sup> it was found that frequently this was not enough to cover all their needs. The adults thus find themselves using some or all their own reintegration money to cover the needs of their children:

*“Those married with kids struggle most because it is difficult to move to a friend's place with your family when your rent is due. Again, those of us married still used the money IOM offered for business and also catered for the family but those not married had the chance to invest everything in their business. If have some spare money, you can use it to help alleviate some of your problems if not you have to channel everything there. As a married man, you can't watch your kids starve, sick*

*and go homeless even if you are broke. If you are not careful, you will use all the money such that when they call you, you won't be able to answer because eventually it will get to a time, the money will get finished."*

Returnee man, Ghana

These problems were particularly acute for single parents, who were far more often women, who recounted to us that they were struggling to house and feed their children:

*"A returnee woman who comes back with her children and one who comes back with no children are not in the same position. Those without children find it much easier to find somewhere to live, because one room is fine. But it's not the same for those with children. And concerning food, it's more expensive for us when we have children."*

Returnee woman, Guinea

Women talked about the fact that their children were stigmatized and teased if they did not know who their father was, which placed an emotional burden on the mothers. They also pointed to problems in children's schooling. Those who had been out of the country for a long-time, or who had been born in another country, might have difficulties with the language of their country of origin, which impacts on their ability to integrate into school. For some this meant trying to send their children to a private school where they could get extra help, but this put a huge financial burden on the parents.

In Serbia, where Roma children often do not speak Serbian and have educational difficulties even before migrating, this was flagged as a very common problem and one which needs to be addressed through all levels of education to ensure that returnee children are able to complete education and gain skills necessary for their adult lives.

Women also spoke about the fact that their children were no longer used to the food in their country of origin – one mother told us that her children would not eat rice since they had returned – and this could even lead to sickness.

KIs also talked about problems of women returning with children. In Ghana for example, there is a

problem for returnees coming back from an EU country with children because a big proportion of their assistance is used to support their children; for example, they may have to choose between starting a business and paying for schooling. Single mothers returning from Germany, for example, get more money, but still not nearly enough to cover the expenses related to the children. Those that return with children often lack social support and help for reintegrating the children. Children find it hard to re-acclimatize, especially if they have spent many years abroad.<sup>120</sup>

Several women were also responsible for the care of elderly parents, which added to the responsibilities of care for their children. As one explained:

*"I have numerous difficulties. I don't have enough money, but I have to keep paying my rent every two months, feed myself and pay for milk for the baby. My baby is often ill and I can't care for him properly. He should have a medical checkup, but I can't afford to take him. I'm also looking after my sick mother who lives with me."*

Returnee woman, Guinea

Whilst men also had responsibility for looking after children, in most cases they delegated a lot of the childcare responsibilities to their wives, or if they were single parents, to their own mothers. They were far less likely to find themselves completely alone to care for their children. And because of gendered divisions of caring work, men were also far less likely to have to take care of elderly parents, even if they might be expected to provide financially for them.

## Mental health

The process of migrating and returning can affect mental health at different levels. It can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions or cause the onset of new ones. Furthermore, for a broader group of returnees, the challenges experienced – which include violence – in their migration journeys may result in psychological distress. Although many respondents did not refer to mental health conditions, some referred to negative psychological consequences and some explicitly mentioned feelings of depression and suicidal thoughts:

*“Faced with such a situation, if you’re not strong in the head, you risk freaking out and losing it. That’s why you see lots of returnees who fall into depression.”*

Returnee man, Guinea

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*“When I first came, I had such thoughts of committing suicide because I came back without enough money. The only thing I had was the dress I was wearing. One day, I took out my old clothes and washed them. Some women came by and were talking about me but didn’t know I was in the room listening. They questioned whether I really did travel outside the country or not. I was really sad that day.”*

Returnee woman, Ghana

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Interviewees talked about returnees turning to drugs or alcohol to cope with their negative feelings:

*“I started to drink certain drinks to forget my worries. I thought I might start to take drugs, but I started to take refuge in the drink which we call “Trésor”. I can no longer cope without it. I have no hope because I have no one to rely on.”*

Returnee man, Guinea

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Other returnees, did not talk explicitly about depression or suicide, but about loneliness and isolation which had a huge impact on their psychological state:

*“In my language we say: Nit Nit Tai Garabam (human beings are medicine for one another) I had withdrawn from social life completely as a result of the shame I felt as an unsuccessful returnee.”*

Returnee woman, the Gambia

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*“I went on adventure to seek my fortune. But I came back with nothing. I was ashamed ... I’ve got all that going round in my head. I’m alone all the time because I’ve got no one I can talk about this. I talk to myself at night in bed, and I have nightmares. It’s really hard to talk about it. I feel better talking to you about it, but I can’t talk about it to others, they’ll never understand.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

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KIs talked about gender differences in access to psychosocial support. One KI mentioned that psychological counselling is a real need, especially for women, although many do not want to talk about their experiences immediately on return. It takes time to build up trust for them to be able to talk. Women face barriers, for instance, sometimes they cannot travel to appointments for counselling, so it is necessary to go and find them.<sup>121</sup>

There is generally a lack of mental health services for returnees. And even where mental health services exist, these frequently do not offer specific support for survivors of sexual violence, or victims of torture. In some countries of the study, mental health is still little discussed and both KIs and respondents spoke about the fact that it was not in their culture to talk about it. In other countries, returnees could seek mental health support from national health services. The mother of a returnee in Tunisia, for example, described how she had to take her son to see a psychiatrist because of his depression after return:

*“When he came back, he was tired, and he was unhappy with our conditions here. After a while I had to take him to see a psychiatrist. He prescribed medicine to treat depression, and now he’s getting better, thank God.”*

Mother talking about her son, Tunisia

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A lack of mental health and psychosocial support was noted by returnees, especially in countries where these services were not available as part of national health services. Some expressed their disappointment in the lack of support for returnees:

*“Among the services offered, what is missing is psychosocial support. When a person gets back from adventure, they are morally exhausted. You need to help them to raise their morale.”*

Returnee man, Guinea

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*“Nobody has helped me to get over the trauma of the journey. I had to manage that all alone.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

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On the other hand, some had found that the group therapy sessions offered by IOM in certain countries had helped them to overcome psychological/mental health problems:

*“But the group therapy has helped. It has built a certain psychological capacity for us to be resilient in the face of mockery and shame.”*

Returnee man, Ghana

Several of the returnees suggested that creating more sustained peer group support would also help. They argued that creating women’s or men’s returnee groups to share experiences and support each other would be helpful. They emphasized the need to talk to people in a group face to face, and not just through social media platforms. Indeed, some even expressed the view that the FGD had been good for them in that it had allowed them to discuss their situation with their peers in what they felt was a safe space.

*“What’s really missing is psychosocial support. We need psychologists but also spaces for exchange between women. Women want to talk about their situation in safe spaces. Because the feeling of not being listened to has a real impact on our mental and physical health.”*

Returnee woman, Guinea

These types of guided groups should be part of the psychosocial support (which should include: community and family support activities, individual and group counselling, counselling, guided groups, and clinical psychological, psychotherapeutic, and psychiatric care) provided to returnees, especially in contexts of limited mental health services, as is the case in many countries.

### Economic opportunities

Finding employment and making enough money to support themselves (and their families) was a key concern for both returnee men and women. For many of those interviewed, the lack of jobs and resulting economic difficulties were one of the major challenges of return. Some felt that they had additional difficulties as returnees, as potential employers did not trust them:

*“It’s not easy for a returnee to get work, because employers think that you are just looking for the means to get money to go off on an adventure again.”*

Returnee man, Guinea

This intersects with other aspects such as education and socioeconomic status. In this research study some highly skilled returnees (who had been given scholarships to study abroad, or who had worked abroad in sectors such as engineering, medicine, or information technology) were interviewed. Their responses showed that their experiences of return were different from those with lower socioeconomic status and educational levels.

Traditional gender norms do seem to play a role, with several men interviewees feeling that the pressure to get a job and earn money was not so great on women, and especially married women, because they could rely on their husband to earn money.

*“Men are more challenged than women in the Gambia. Men are always regarded as the security providers in the house, food and shelter in the Gambia whilst women are considered as receiver.”*

Returnee man, the Gambia

*“For instance, I’m a woman and if push ever comes to shove, I could go to a man who would give me some money to buy food. In other words, I can be taken care of by a man. But in the case of a man, if he doesn’t go out to toil and work, who is he going to ask for money from to go and eat?”*

Returnee woman, Ghana

It should be noted here, however, that these kind of gender norms also reinforce women’s dependency on men and may create conditions for exploitation and violence within a couple. This could add to the difficulties within relationships after return, as mentioned above.

On the other hand, both returnees and KIs pointed to the fact that men returnees would have more often learnt a skill whilst they were in another country – such as building, electrical work, plumbing etc. – which would be useful to them on they return and could help them to find work more easily. Women

had not learnt such skills being more frequently unemployed, or employed in domestic work whilst they were migrating (or in some cases engaging in transactional sexual relations to be able to survive):

*“I would say the females have the most difficulty. In my case when I arrived, I had a small occupation from which I was earning some money that I could use to take care of myself or cater for my hospital bills. In the case of the women who usually do not have any job when they return, it becomes difficult to raise money for basic needs.”*

Returnee man, Ghana

And gender norms also mean that it might be more difficult for women to find work because the expectation is that they should stay at home and look after the family:

*“It is easier to get a job for men than women. Women are expected to stay at home to support the family. Jobs are meant for men who take care of the compound and the family.”*

Returnee man, the Gambia

In terms of reintegration support for starting businesses and finding employment, it was noted that returnees often chose to try and work in sectors which were typically viewed as “masculine” or “feminine”. KIs working on these programmes stressed that the choice of sector to work in was left up to the individual returnee, and that the criteria for acceptance were based on the feasibility of the project. This means that generally women carry on choosing to engage in gender “traditional” businesses or professions, such as hairdressing, seamstress, selling food or material. As frequently the markets for more traditionally “feminine” businesses are already quite crowded, it is harder to start a sustainable business for women.<sup>122</sup> A few of the women returnees complained about this.

The focus on individual choices may be seen to preclude more general questions or strategies to challenge gendered divisions in economic activity

and labour markets. This tension between individual focused support and programmes which might attempt gender-responsive approaches to returnees’ economic reintegration on a more general level was found across all country case studies and is a point which could be considered in attempting to create more gender responsive reintegration programmes.

Similarly, migrants tend to choose trainings that have been typically associated with the gender they identify with; for example, women primarily choose trainings for nursing, or personal care, while men opt for trainings in mechanics or engineering.

There have been attempts in some countries to encourage women to enter gender non-traditional employment sectors, and one organization in the Gambia recounted that they had had some success in encouraging women to engage in horticulture or beekeeping. But they explained that sometimes women have problems accessing land for this kind of project as traditional divisions of labour, inheritance laws and traditions mean that women find it more difficult to acquire or own land.<sup>123</sup> Another success story which was recounted was that of women who had started up their own car-repair business in Ghana. There are thus some encouraging examples of women successfully starting “non-traditional” businesses, which challenge the prevailing gendered divisions in the labour market. But currently these seem relatively rare.

It should also be added, that in some cases, working in a more traditionally feminine sector can be an advantage for women as it might provide a source of networking and solidarity. A KI in Ghana,<sup>124</sup> for example, pointed out that women could join local hairdressing or dressmaking associations in their area, which would be a source of support for them and help to combat the isolation which many might feel on return. These types of pre-existing associations would seem to be a promising source of support for returnees to help them with reintegration.

Single parents, and particularly single mothers, face specific challenges in accessing training and employment. Despite some good practices, such as the one reported by a KI in Guinea, where single mother cases are generally considered as vulnerable

122 KI interview, 29 March 2023.

123 KI interview, 8 March 2023.

124 KI interview, 29 March 2023.

and will get extra assistance on this basis, it is often hard to reconcile childcare responsibilities with participating in training or starting a business. KI in Ghana spoke about how there is a challenge for getting women into TVET because most courses last three years and women don't have the time to do this because of the other demands placed on them, for example childcare or elderly care. They can't afford to spend a long time in training if they have children to support. IOM in Ghana has worked with TVET providers to design special shorter courses aimed at these women.<sup>125</sup> Identifying or designing training opportunities which would fit in with the schedules of parents with responsibility for childcare (or people with responsibilities for care of elderly parents in some cases) would thus seem to be necessary for helping them to gain qualifications and access employment.

In Serbia, KIs talked about the difficulties for Roma returnee women in finding employment. Most women drop out of trainings or employment because they have small children and/or elderly family members whom they are expected to care for. According to this informant, women's position in the Roma community and in informal settlements has become worse over the past years.<sup>126</sup>

### Accommodation and shelter

Another important challenge mentioned by returnees was that of finding suitable accommodation after return, as many have given up their previous accommodation, and do not want to go back to living with their families for various reasons. This can lead to homelessness. Whilst both women and men talked about this problem, it seems that this is more difficult for women, and especially single women, and women with children.

*"Access to housing is not easy. Sometimes landlords won't agree to rent houses to single women and/or women with children."*

Returnee woman, Guinea

Respondents also expressed the opinion that women had more difficulties finding accommodation, as the following extract from one of the FGDs shows:

*Participant: "The women are more vulnerable"*

*Interviewer: "What do you mean by the women are more vulnerable?"*

*Participant: "For example, like I mentioned, I sleep at the cornmill where I work. A woman would need some more space under such circumstances and may not be able to cope. I can even go and perch with a friend, but that will be an option for many women."*

*Participant: "Also, if a woman finds herself in a position where she has to perch and the host happens to be a man, she might end up having to give sex in return for the shelter being provided."*

FGD with MEN returnees, Ghana

Other returnees also talked about the fact that men can go and stay with friends or acquaintances more easily, and it is more difficult for women who find themselves without accommodation. Lack of accommodation may force a woman to return to live with her family, even when the relations between them are not good. Thinking about more long-term and independent accommodation, especially for single women and women with children, could thus be a measure that would reduce the insecurities of these returnees.

<sup>125</sup> KI interview, 29 March 2023.

<sup>126</sup> KI interview, 13 April 2023.



## CONCLUSIONS

The challenges of return and reintegration identified in this study cannot be understood without placing them in the context of difficult and dangerous migration journeys and experiences in countries of transit and destination. As well as the fact that most of the returnees who participated in this research faced constrained options before their return. All of this makes reintegration a complex process for returnees in similar circumstances. The experiences that returnees have lived have long term impacts on them, including psychological consequences, which might include disruptions or chronic distress. This is exacerbated by the feelings of rejection and stigmatization by family, friends and communities on return.

Gendered differences can be seen both in the experiences of migration and in expectations and perceptions concerning returnees, as well as in conditions of reintegration. Women are more likely to experience sexual and gender-based forms of violence during migration and, upon return, they are more prone to be stigmatized for their perceived deviance from assigned traditional gender roles and through their supposed engagement in sex-work or experiences of sexual violence. Whilst men are more often cast in the role of “breadwinners” and are stigmatized for their failure to provide economic support for families and communities. Women who return alone with children suffer specific insecurities linked both to perceptions of their supposed sexual promiscuity, and to the needs of their children who also have difficulties in adapting and reintegrating, particularly when they have spent a considerable time outside of their country of origin (or have been born abroad). There thus seems to be a need to address more comprehensively the difficulties faced by women returning with children. These are linked both to the stigmatization of being single mothers and of having children with unknown fathers, added to the difficulties of caring for children and supporting their reintegration. The economic costs of supporting children seem, in many cases, to be not fully covered by reintegration assistance, and women face difficulties in completing training or going back to work with children as they often do not have adequate childcare support.

Support services for returnees tend to be insufficient, with gaps particularly in psychological and mental health services. The psychological effects of violent and dangerous journeys have a huge and long-lasting impact on many returnees, but where organizations do offer psychosocial support services these are frequently short term. It may be difficult for the returnees to talk about their mental health issues, particularly straight after return. Moreover, it was also noted that in some cultures, mental health is not something which can easily be talked about. It is thus necessary to develop long-term and culturally appropriate mental health support services for returnees. There is also a lack of dedicated and specialized services for those who have experienced gender-based forms of violence, including sexual violence. This type of violence does not only have psychological impacts at the time but also long term mental and physical health consequences. Further those who have experienced such violence may be stigmatized because they have been victims. So, the development of dedicated services for survivors of GBV and more specifically, sexual violence would be an important step to improve reintegration assistance.

In terms of the gender dimension within programmes, there is a difficulty in providing an integrated gender sensitive approach given the differential entitlements of returnees (depending on what country they return from, and under what project). This is exacerbated by the project-based nature of much reintegration assistance, which means that even promising initiatives which are gender sensitive and responsive, addressing gender inequalities might not be sustained in the long term. There are also tensions within reintegration programmes between focusing on individual needs and vulnerabilities of returnees and addressing structural gender inequalities. Although it is important to consider the individual requirements of each returnee this seems to foreclose in some cases consideration of wider structural issues. For example, training and employment activities tend to focus on the immediate need of getting income and employment for an individual returnee, and there are rarely longer-term considerations about gendered labour markets and attempts to address structural

gender inequalities in employment. Solutions which are offered for lack of childcare may well be to try and involve grandmothers in the care of returnees' children, which again may be a good individual solution but does not address the ongoing gendered divisions of labour within the family.

Returnees with diverse SOGIESC are generally not identified and not visible within return and reintegration programmes. This is because of the dangerous legal context and hostile environment in many countries, as well as the reluctance of returnees to talk about such personal and sensitive matters. Given the legal and social situation in many countries, it would seem highly inadvisable for any return and reintegration programme to try and identify returnees with diverse SOGIESC as this could imply severe risks for them. However, it is worth considering ways of making information on any available support (CSOs, etc.), for people with diverse SOGIESC more readily available to all returnees in a discrete manner, so that any person

who did want to get into contact with these support organizations could do so. It is also important that those working with returnees are open to the possibility that they may be of diverse SOGIESC even if they do not disclose these aspects, and that this might be a reason for some of their choices concerning their return and reintegration. It can thus be seen as generally important, for those working with returnees to respect and guarantee their choices, such as a decision not to return to family. This is true for returnees with diverse SOGIESC, but also for many others as women and those not wanting to return home because of gender-based forms of violence. It is vital to be sensitive to and aware of these issues, avoiding asking for disclosure of sensitive personal information. In general, this points to the need for systematic training of all those working with returnees to ensure that they are sensitive to and aware of the possible needs and challenges of returnees of all genders.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations have been formulated in function of the research results on the previous page.



### ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

1. Conduct a gender analysis of the local labour market and employment opportunities in countries of origin,<sup>127</sup> to comprehend the functioning of gender-based labour divisions and identify avenues to address gender inequalities within this sector. The aim would be to formulate reintegration programmes that encompass a profound understanding of gender dynamics and have transformative potential to counteract occupational segregation. This entails a comprehensive approach that not only acknowledges prevailing inequalities but delves into the intricacies of societal expectations that shape gender roles.
2. When advising returnees on economic reintegration opportunities, consider existing inequalities and the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, alongside socioeconomic constraints. These factors heavily influence returnees' decisions to undertake specific jobs. Incorporating these structural considerations would foster sustainable reintegration programming that also contribute to narrowing the gender gap.<sup>128</sup>
3. Collaborate with training providers to develop inclusive programmes tailored to parents, with a special focus on single mothers. This might involve designing part-time programmes that align with school hours or integrating childcare services into the training programme.
4. Foster partnerships with public employment services, private sector entities and trade unions to link returnees with existent job opportunities. This collaborative effort ensures equitable and

comprehensive access to the labour market, inclusive of returnees with diverse SOGIESC and women. The aim here is to revolutionize access by dismantling barriers regardless of gender identity or diverse SOGIESC. This concerted effort would create an environment where access to the labour market is respected as a right.

5. Building on the self-support groups (see recommendation no. 7 below), engage community-based organizations and development agencies to create collectives of returnees to ease resource pooling and access to finance.



### PSYCHOSOCIAL REINTEGRATION

1. When creating group-based psychological support services, put into place separate groups for men and women. In cases where it is viable, and without exposing returnees to protection risks, consider establishing specialized groups for individuals with diverse SOGIESC. In situations where such separation is not appropriate, establish safe spaces within gender-binary divided groups that provide a platform for returnees with diverse SOGIESC to freely express their perspectives and experiences.
2. Support the creation and maintenance of self-support peer groups for returnees, that cultivate an environment of empowerment and collective growth as well as contribute to overcoming loneliness and isolation. While fostering these groups, it is imperative to support the different needs of returnee women, men and returnees with diverse SOGIESC.<sup>129</sup>
3. Train all those working with returnees by expanding the concept of psychological first aid, as well as on GBV, so that they are sensitive to returnees' needs, including those specific of potential returnees' survivors of GBV. Ensure

<sup>127</sup> IOM, *Reintegration Handbook*, page 25–27.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, page 135–136.

<sup>129</sup> During this study returnee women expressed a desire to talk to and exchange to other women, while men expressed to be more comfortable with other men.

that staff are aware of the procedures to make confidential referrals.

4. Increase advocacy to promote narratives around migration based on facts and data, to challenge existing ones depicting stereotypes or negative conceptions of returnees. Those returnees who have faced stigmatization must be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of interventions addressing this issue. Care must be taken particularly in designing these interventions, to ensure that harmful outcomes, such as increased stigma do not arise.



## SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

1. Raise awareness about the fact that migrants may not want to return to their own communities of origin, but to other locations within their country of origin.<sup>130</sup> Continue working towards the provision of diverse solutions for accommodation and return to spaces outside of the communities of origin.
2. Enhance and/or develop services for returnees with children and especially single parents, and actively facilitate access to them. These include childcare services, targeted psychological and mental health support specifically for children, and support networks for single parents.
3. Collaborate with and support the government in strengthening the existing social security schemes to render them accessible and accommodating for returnees.
4. Develop or provide access to existing specialized mental health and psychological services for survivors of sexual and GBV, ensuring that these are meticulously designed to preserve their anonymity.
5. Ensure the provision of multitiered and connected psychosocial services, providing support and training to local health professionals on delivering culture and gender-appropriate evidence-based treatment to people who survived trauma, violence and SOGIESC-based discrimination. Facilitating access and granting

the continuity of care particularly to those who suffer from severe mental disorders.

6. Provide safe housing for immediate shelter pre-return and upon arrival for those who are most vulnerable, especially returnees with diverse SOGIESC, victims of GBV and trafficking survivors.
7. Advocate for and mainstream non-discriminatory reintegration policies that integrate a gender approach.
8. Carry out local gender sensitive mapping of actors and existent services on the subject to avoid duplication and to ensure coordinated actions between institutions, organizations and services.
9. Collaborate with legal experts to offer gender-responsive legal assistance, focusing on issues such as property rights, marital status, and child custody for returnee women.



## GENDER AND DIVERSE SOGIESC

1. Recognize and address the intersections of gender with other identities such as age, disability, religion and ethnicity to ensure that reintegration assistance is inclusive and tailored to individual needs.
2. Undertake gender country analysis to ensure that reintegration programmes are designed based on the needs of returnees with diverse SOGIESC, including them when planning any programmatic response and even if SOGIESC are not disclosed.
3. Ensure that information on organizations and services dedicated to supporting women and people with diverse SOGIESC is readily available and accessible to all returnees, without necessitating the disclosure of personal or potentially sensitive information.
4. Elevate the standards of institutional and organizational practices through a comprehensive staff training on gender and SOGIESC to guarantee inclusive and non-discriminatory

<sup>130</sup> Return migration can also include 'return' to a third-country, one not of a migrant's country of origin.

treatment of all migrants. Offer training programs that challenge traditional gender norms, fostering critical reflection among staff and service providers to pave the way for transformative change. Such training should also aim to equip staff with the expertise to respond sensitively to disclosures from individuals with diverse SOGIESC backgrounds, ensuring their voices are heard with respect and empathy.

5. Sensitize and capacitate community workers and service providers to identify the nuanced challenges encountered by returnees with diverse SOGIESC and returnee women and empower them to become beacons of support, understanding, and advocacy within their communities.
6. Promote interorganizational cooperation, including with the academia to bridge the existing gaps in understanding SOGIESC challenges and issues within the context of migration, particularly during reintegration. Simultaneously, infuse gender and intersectional approaches into the very fabric of reintegration assistance, ensuring that services for returning migrants are not only gender and vulnerability sensitive but also responsive, therefore, moving from gender sensitive to gender responsive and transformative approaches.
7. Strengthen partnerships with health institutions to ensure that medical and psychosocial support provided, specifically as part of reintegration assistance, is sensitive to the challenges and needs of people with diverse SOGIESC.



## ANNEX 1: RESEARCH TOOLS

### In-depth interview with returnees

**Date:**

**PID:**

**Age:**

**Gender:**

**Location:**

#### Guide for in-depth interviews with returnees

I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am representing the International Organization for Migration (IOM). You are taking part in this interview because you are one of thousands of individuals who have migrated out of (insert country) and now returned to this country. I would like to hear about your experiences including challenges faced during your return and your current living conditions and the various strategies you have employed or employ to manage the challenges and obstacles you have faced/face. We will also talk about how you might have received various forms of support from different people or organisations and how these might have helped you, and what kinds of help and support you might need in the future.

#### Theme 1: Migration Journey

##### 1.1 Can you tell me your migration story?

Probes:

- Why did you decide to travel to another country? How did you travel? How long did it take you?
- Who else did you travel with? Any dependents?
- Who helped you on the journey? Did you have to pay to make the journey? Where did you get the money for the journey? How did you manage to cross the borders you came to?
- Tell me about the places/countries that you stayed in? How long did you stay? What did you do there?

- What were your aspirations when you left your home country? Have your aspirations changed over time?

#### Theme 2: Decision to Return

##### 2.1 Can you tell me about your return?

Probes:

- Why did you decide to return to (insert country)?
- Was it your own decision or did someone else decide for you? Or was it a joint decision (with another family member/friend)?
- Did you feel that you were forced to return? By whom?
- How did you feel about returning before you made the journey?
- How long did it take between the decision to return and arriving back in (insert country)?
- Did you get help to prepare your return? From whom?
- If you did get help, was it useful? Why? Or why not?
- Was your origin / habitual residence government helpful in facilitating your return?
- Was your family pleased that you returned? Or have you felt any anger or disappointment?

#### Theme 3: Current Living Situation

*I would like to ask you questions about your living condition since you returned to (insert country).*

##### 3.1 Can you tell me about your current living conditions?

Probes:

- Are you living in the same place (city, town, village) that you lived in before you left (insert country)?
- If not, where are you living? Why did you return to a different location?

- If you have moved, how many times have you moved? Why?
- Who are you currently living with (alone, family, friends)?
- Did you have any challenges finding somewhere to live when you returned?
- How do you feel about living in your current location? How safe do you feel in your living environment (probe for relationship with local communities) and moving around? How safe is it for women/men? (Or adapt to people with diverse SOGIESC if this information is voluntarily disclosed)
- Are you happy living here? Or would you like to move somewhere else? If so, why?
- What are the major problems/challenges you find in your daily living here?
- What strategies have you put in place to overcome these?

### **3.2 Tell me about the resources you have and source of income for daily living?**

Probes:

- What do you do for a living?
- Is this the same job you were doing before you migrated and returned?
- If not, is it a better or worse job?
- Have you had problems finding work since you returned?
- Do you think it's particularly difficult for men/women to find work when they return? Why is this?
- Do you rely on someone else (e.g., family member) for financial support?
- Or do you support others (e.g., family members)?
- Tell me about any other financial support or other resources you receive or have received since your arrival?
- Where do you get this support from? (Government, IOs, NGOs, others)?
- How did you get this support? Was it difficult to find?

### **3.3 Access to services?**

Probes:

- Have you had any challenges in interacting with the authorities/institutions in your country since your return?
- Have you been able to obtain any legal documents that you need?
- Have you been able to access health care services that you need? If not, why? What are the challenges?
- If you have children, have you been able to access childcare services? Have you been able to register them in schools?
- What other challenges have you faced in accessing services since your return? Do you think that there are specific challenges that are linked to being a man/woman?

### **Theme 4. Attitudes to returnees**

*I'd like to ask you about how people in your local area have reacted to you after your return.*

#### **4.1 How do you think people in your family or community feel about your return?**

Probes:

- Does everyone in your family know that you have returned to (insert country)? If not, why did you not tell them?
- Was your family pleased that you returned? Or have you felt any anger or disappointment from them? If you have how did this manifest itself?
- How about your friends from before your migration? Have you contacted them again since your return? Have they made any positive or negative comments about your return?
- Have you felt isolated from family and friends since your return? If so, why is this?
- How about the community where you live? How have people reacted to your return? Have you experienced any negative attitudes? Or stigma?

- How have these attitudes affected you? Have you changed your lifestyle or routines because of them?
- Do you think men and women returnees are treated differently? In what ways?
- Do you think you have experienced criticism/negative attitudes because of your gender?
- What do you think might be done to change the attitudes of people here to returnees?

### **Theme 5: Support Programmes and Activities?**

*I'd like to ask you about any support programmes or activities that are organized for returnees that you have taken part in.*

#### **5.1 Can you tell me about any support programmes or activities for returnees that you have participated in?**

Probes:

- What programmes or activities have you participated in? Or if you have not participated in any programmes/activities then why not?
- Who were these support programmes organized by (government, IOM, another IO, an NGO, local civil society)?
- Were these programmes useful for you?
- If so, how were they useful?
- If not, why not?
- Did you find it hard to find out about and access these support programmes?
- What were the challenges in accessing them?
- Do you think that it is more difficult for women or men to access these support programmes/activities? Why is this?
- What other support programmes/activities would have been most useful to you?

### **Theme 6: Aspirations**

#### **6.1 I would now like to ask you about your future goals and aspirations? What would you like for you?**

Probes:

- What are your hopes and plans for the future?
- What would you like to do for a living? Where would you like to live?
- What are the barriers and challenges you need to overcome?
- What do you need to achieve your goals?
- How are you planning to pursue your goals?

#### **6.2 Is there anything else you want to add?**

What message would you like to pass on to improve conditions for returnees?

Thank you for your time and contribution!



## Interview FGD guide for returnees

FGD ID NO |\_|\_|\_|\_|\_|

Participant sub-group: (circle): / Women/Men/other

Date |\_|\_|/|\_|\_|/|\_|\_|

Introduction

I am \_\_\_\_\_ working for the International Organization for Migration.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. You are taking part in this focus group discussion because you are individuals who have migrated and then returned to (insert country). I would like to hear about your experiences and views including any challenges faced during return, current living conditions and the various strategies to manage the challenges and obstacles you might have faced. We hope the information we get from you will help us understand what needs to be changed to improve the situation for returnees.

I would like to remind you anything being mentioned here should be kept confidential and whatever is said in this room stays in this room. The session will take between 60 and 90 minutes. I will be asking questions and there are no right or wrong answers to questions – just ideas, experiences and opinions, which are all valuable to us. We hope to hear everyone's ideas and opinions and to hear all sides of an issue – the positive and the negative. It is important for us to be respectful and non-judgmental and to speak one at a time.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Is everyone in this room consenting to participate? If you have changed your mind, you can leave the room. Is everyone in this room consenting to recording the group discussion?

Let us start with a round of introductions. We suggest that you use a pseudonym that we can use during this discussion.

Now I am going to introduce some topics one at a time and I hope you can discuss them together.

| Domain               | Topic and probes  |
|----------------------|---|
| Challenges on return | <p><i>I would like to talk about the types of challenges that returnees face when they arrive in the country</i></p> <p>1.1 What are the most important challenges that you think returnees face when they arrive back in the country?</p> <p>1.2 Can you rank these challenges (discuss in group – once challenges have been identified then see if the group can come up with a ranking of importance ...)</p> <p>1.3 What are the different ways returnees cope or manage the challenges?</p> <p>1.4 Are you aware of other challenges that other returnees went through? What strategies did they use that were not mentioned before? Are the stories different for men and women?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Women vs men</li> <li>– Single vs families</li> <li>– Various return status</li> </ul> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Current living conditions and services</p>   | <p>2.1 What are the most important challenges that you think returnees face in their living situations in [site]:</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Safety and security the current living environment (probe for relationship with local communities) men and women?</li> <li>– What are the common ways returnees make a living? Women vs men?</li> <li>– What are working conditions like for returnees?</li> <li>– Can returnees access health and social services?</li> <li>– Can they access services for their children (childcare, education ...)</li> </ul> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Single vs families</li> <li>– Men vs women?</li> </ul> |
| <p>Family attitude to returnees</p>             | <p>3.1 In general, how do you think the families of returnees react to their return?</p> <p>3.2 What are some of the things that families might say about returnees?</p> <p>3.3 Is this different do you think for men and women?</p> <p>3.4 Is there anything you can think of that would improve relationships between returnees and their families?</p>  |
| <p>Local community perceptions of returnees</p> | <p>4.1 What do local people in the community (neighbours, friends, peers) think about returnees?</p> <p>4.2 Do you think that there are different attitudes to men and returnee women? Why is this? What is the difference?</p> <p>4.3 Do you think that these attitudes and perceptions have a big impact on the returnees? Might it make it harder for them to reintegrate into the community</p> <p>4.4 Have you got any ideas about how these perceptions and attitudes about returnees might be changed?</p>   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Reintegration support</p>  | <p>5.1 What do you know about reintegration support programmes? Do you think that they are useful? Have they helped you?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Who is providing reintegration support?</li> <li>– Is it easy to access? (Differences men v women)</li> <li>– Are support services useful?</li> <li>– What is the most useful kind of support service?</li> <li>– What is missing in support services?</li> <li>– Are there separate services for men and women? Should there be?</li> <li>– What else is needed in terms of support for returnees?</li> </ul> |
| <p>Aspirations</p>  | <p>5.1 Before we end, I would like to ask about your future aspirations, what are your hopes and plans for the future?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Where would you like to live?</li> <li>– What are the barriers you need to overcome?</li> <li>– What help and support do you need to do this?</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Closing</p> <p>We are now approaching the end of our discussion. Is there anything else anyone would like to add about challenges, strategies to address them, kind of services you need that we have not talked about? What would be some of the suggestions about intervention to improve your situation related to the topics we have discussed today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√ Summarize</li> <li>√ Thank participants</li> <li>√ Provide extra information and contacts to participants</li> </ul> <p>Collect participant demographic details</p> |   |

## FGD guide for communities

FGD ID NO |\_|\_|\_|\_|

Participant sub-group: Location

Date |\_|\_|/|\_|\_|/|\_|\_|

Introduction

I am \_\_\_\_\_ working for the International Organization for Migration.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. You are taking part in this focus group discussion because you live in a community/site where there are many individuals who have migrated and then returned. I would like to hear about your opinions and views on migration and return, including any challenges faced during return, current living conditions of returnees and the ways that they reintegrate into your community. We hope the information we get from you will help us understand what needs to be changed to improve the situation for returnees and for your local community.

I would like to remind you anything being mentioned here should be kept confidential and whatever is said in this room stays in this room. The session will take between 60 and 90 minutes. I will be asking questions and there are no right or wrong answers to questions – just ideas, experiences and opinions, which are all valuable to us. We hope to hear everyone's ideas and opinions and to hear all sides of an issue – the positive and the negative. It is important for us to be respectful and non-judgmental and to speak one at a time.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Is everyone in this room consenting to participate? If you have changed your mind, you can leave the room. Is everyone in this room consenting to recording the group discussion?

Let us start with a round of introductions. We suggest that you use a pseudonym that we can use during this discussion.

Now I am going to introduce some topics one at a time and I hope you can discuss them together.

| Domain             | Topic and probes   |
|--------------------|--|
| Views of migration | <p><i>I would like to talk about how you feel about people migrating from (insert country)</i></p> <p>1.5 Why do you think that people migrate from here?</p> <p>1.6 What impact does it have on the rest of the community when these people leave?</p> <p>1.7 Do you think migration is a positive thing?</p> <p>1.8 Is this different for men and for women?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Women vs men</li> <li>– Single vs families</li> </ul> |

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Views of return       | <p>2.1 How do you feel about migrants who return here?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Does it create problems for the community when migrants return?</li> <li>– What types of problem?</li> <li>– Differences in opinions about men/returnee women</li> <li>– Are there negative sentiments about returnees? Why is this?</li> <li>– What do you imagine they experienced during their migration?</li> <li>– Does this change their relationships to their families and friends when they come back?</li> </ul> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Single vs families</li> <li>– Men vs women?</li> </ul> |
| Family opinions       | <p>3.1 In general, how do you think the families of returnees react to their return?</p> <p>3.2 What are some of the things that families might say about returnees?</p> <p>3.3 Is this different do you think for men and women?</p> <p>3.4 Is there anything you can think of that would improve relationships between returnees and their families?</p>   |
| Reintegration support | <p>5.1 What do you know about reintegration support programmes for returnees?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Have you heard about reintegration support for returnees?</li> <li>– Do you think such programmes help them to reintegrate into this community?</li> <li>– If not, why?</li> <li>– What kinds of programmes would be useful in helping returnees to reintegrate?</li> <li>– Why?</li> <li>– What else is needed in terms of support for returnees?</li> </ul> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Men vs women</li> <li>– Single vs families</li> </ul>  |
| Future                | <p>5.1 Before we end, is there anything else you would like to add about returnees and your local community?</p>   |

Closing

We are now approaching the end of our discussion. Is there anything else anyone would like to add?

√ Summarize

√ Thank participants

√ Provide extra information and contacts to participants

Collect participant demographic details

## ANNEX 2: INTERVIEWS BY COUNTRY

### Guinea

| N° | Observed gender | Age | Civil status | Number of children |
|----|-----------------|-----|--------------|--------------------|
| 1  | Woman           | 24  | Single       | 1                  |
| 2  | Woman           | 37  | Married      | 2                  |
| 3  | Woman           | 50  | Single       | 2                  |
| 4  | Woman           | 39  | Single       | 4                  |
| 5  | Woman           | 33  | Single       | 1                  |
| 6  | Man             | 21  | Single       | 0                  |
| 7  | Woman           | 25  | Single       | 1                  |
| 8  | Woman           | 23  | Single       | 1                  |
| 9  | Man             | 25  | Single       | 0                  |
| 10 | Man             | 32  | Married      | 3                  |
| 11 | Man             | 21  | Single       | 0                  |
| 12 | Man             | 34  | Married      | 0                  |
| 13 | Man             | 32  | Single       | 0                  |
| 14 | Woman           | 26  | Single       | 0                  |
| 15 | Woman           | 33  | Single       | 3                  |
| 16 | Man             | 24  | Single       | 0                  |
| 17 | Man             | 28  | Single       | 0                  |
| 18 | Woman           | 25  | Single       | 0                  |
| 19 | Woman           | 20  | Single       | 2                  |
| 20 | Woman           | 27  | Married      | 2                  |
| 21 | Man             | 31  | Married      | 1                  |
| 22 | Man             | 26  | Married      | 0                  |
| 23 | Man             | 25  | Single       | 0                  |
| 24 | Woman           | 23  | Married      | 1                  |
| 25 | Woman           | 37  | Widowed      | 5                  |
| 26 | Woman           | 40  | Widowed      | 4                  |
| 27 | Woman           | 20  | Married      | 2                  |
| 28 | Woman           | 28  | Married      | 3                  |
| 29 | Man             | 32  | Married      | 1                  |
| 30 | Man             | 29  | Single       | 0                  |
| 31 | Man             | 28  | Single       | 0                  |
| 32 | Man             | 23  | Single       | 2                  |

## Ghana

| N° | Observed gender | Age | Civil status | Number of children |
|----|-----------------|-----|--------------|--------------------|
| 1  | Man             |     | Married      | 2                  |
| 2  | Woman           | 24  | Single       | 0                  |
| 3  | Woman           |     | Single       | 0                  |
| 4  | Woman           | 25  | Married      | 2                  |
| 5  | Man             |     | Married      | 3                  |
| 6  | Woman           |     | Single       | 0                  |
| 7  | Man             |     | Married      | 2                  |
| 8  | Woman           |     | Single       | 0                  |
| 9  | Woman           | 30  | Single       | 0                  |
| 10 | Man             | 31  | Married      | 0                  |
| 11 | Woman           | 41  | Married      | 2                  |
| 12 | Man             | 45  | Married      | 1                  |
| 13 | Man             | 31  | Married      | 2                  |
| 14 | Woman           | 26  | Single       | 0                  |
| 15 | Man             | 37  | Married      | 1                  |
| 16 | Woman           |     | Single       | 0                  |
| 17 | Woman           | 32  | Single       | 2                  |
| 18 | Man             | 25  | Married      | 4                  |
| 19 | Man             |     | Single       | 1                  |
| 20 | Woman           |     | Single       | 0                  |
| 21 | Man             |     | Single       | 1                  |
| 22 | Woman           | 27  | Single       | 0                  |
| 23 | Man             |     | Married      | 3                  |
| 24 | Man             |     | Married      | 6                  |
| 25 | Man             |     | Single       | 0                  |



## The Gambia

| No. | Observed gender | Age | Civil status | Number of children |
|-----|-----------------|-----|--------------|--------------------|
| 1   | Man             | 30  | Married      | 0                  |
| 2   | Man             | 30  | Single       | 0                  |
| 3   | Man             | 25  | Single       | 0                  |
| 4   | Man             | 27  | Married      | 0                  |
| 5   | Man             | 21  | Single       | 0                  |
| 6   | Man             | 39  | Married      | 5                  |
| 7   | Man             | 37  | Married      | 6                  |
| 8   | Man             | 33  | Married      | 0                  |
| 9   | Man             | 23  | Single       | 0                  |
| 10  | Man             | 25  | Single       | 0                  |
| 11  | Man             | 22  | Single       | 0                  |
| 12  | Man             | 24  | Single       | 0                  |
| 13  | Man             | 36  | Single       | 2                  |
| 14  | Man             | 25  | Single       | 0                  |
| 15  | Man             | 25  | Single       | 0                  |
| 16  | Man             | 34  | Divorced     | 4                  |
| 17  | Man             | 27  | Single       | 1                  |
| 18  | Man             | 26  | Single       | 0                  |
| 19  | Man             | 22  | Single       | 0                  |
| 20  | Male            | 25  | Single       | 0                  |
| 21  | Man             | 26  | Single       | 0                  |
| 22  | Man             | 29  | Single       | 0                  |
| 23  | Man             | 26  | Single       | 0                  |
| 24  | Man             | 41  | Married      | 3                  |
| 25  | Woman           | 32  | Single       | 1                  |
| 26  | Male            | 26  | Married      | 2                  |
| 27  | Man             | 46  | Married      | 4                  |
| 28  | Male            | 28  | Single       | 0                  |
| 29  | Man             | 20  | Single       | 0                  |

## Serbia

| No | Observed gender                           |
|----|---|
| 1  | Woman                                     |
| 2  | Woman                                     |
| 3  | Woman                                     |
| 4  | Man                                       |
| 5  | Woman                                     |
| 6  | Man                                       |
| 7  | Man                                       |
| 8  | Woman                                     |
| 9  | Woman                                     |
| 10 | Man                                       |
| 11 | Woman                                     |
| 12 | Man                                       |
| 13 | Man                                       |
| 14 | Man                                       |
| 15 | Woman                                     |
| 16 | Gender non-binary (voluntarily disclosed) |
| 17 | Man                                       |
| 18 | Woman                                     |
| 19 | Man                                       |
| 20 | Woman                                     |

## Tunisia

| Number | Observed gender | Age | Civil status | Number of children |
|--------|-----------------|-----|--------------|--------------------|
| 1      | Man             | 28  | Divorced     |                    |
| 2      | Man             | 36  | Single       | 0                  |
| 3      | Man             | 18  | Single       | 0                  |
| 4      | Man             | 21  | Single       | 0                  |
| 5      | Man             | 63  | Married      | 3                  |
| 6      | Woman           | 21  | Single       | 0                  |
| 7      | Man             | 21  | Single       | 0                  |
| 8      | Man             | 49  | Single       | 0                  |
| 9      | Man             | 43  | Married      | 2                  |
| 10     | Man             | 23  | Single       | 0                  |
| 11     | Man             | 28  | Single       | 0                  |
| 12     | Woman           | 30  | Married      | 0                  |
| 13     | Man             | 27  | Single       |                    |
| 14     | Man             | 38  | Married      |                    |
| 15     | Man             | 24  | Single       |                    |

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