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## Social reintegration assistance at the community level

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

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

Community-level social reintegration assistance not only helps returnees access the services they need but can also benefit other community members who have similar needs or vulnerabilities. Particularly when strains on services are caused by large numbers of returnees, supporting service provision for high-return communities can also help alleviate tensions and potential conflict drivers that arise when large groups of returnees return to a single community. Community profiles and specific assessments can identify problems of social service provision in target communities or tensions arising from constrained access. Community-based projects for social reintegration are most successful when projects are created in partnership with local stakeholders and when local leaders are willing to take ownership.

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

? **Housing and accommodation.** Large numbers of returnees returning to a community can strain housing availability for all community members. Landlords can take advantage of returnees and enter into exploitative agreements. In these cases the lead reintegration organization can take a proactive approach to educate landlords and other relevant stakeholders (such as local authorities)

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on the barriers returnees are encountering when looking for housing and how to make housing more accessible to them. As described in [section 2.5.1](#), the lead reintegration organization can help returnees find housing by providing guarantees. This can also be an option at the collective level, if a group of returnees finds collective housing.

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

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

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

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

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

? **Public infrastructure and safety.** Access to services is typically dependent on good infrastructure and one's ability to physically reach a place of service. So the routes and transportation methods needed to attend schools, see doctors, process documents and meet all other elements of social

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stability must be affordable and accessible. Roads must also be secure and safe and not exacerbate any risks of violence, exploitation and abuse.

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

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

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

## **Community advocacy for social service accessibility**

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

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

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## **Infrastructure rehabilitation in El Salvador**

El Salvador has been experiencing high numbers of returning migrants since 2015. The quest for better economic opportunities, overall violence and cracks in the social fabric were reported as main

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reasons for leaving. As a result, IOM El Salvador opted for a holistic infrastructure rehabilitation strategy that includes re-establishing migrant reception centres and restoring community infrastructure to promote holistic, accessible and user-friendly community infrastructure and services.

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

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

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

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