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## Understanding reintegration

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Reintegration is generally understood as a multidimensional process enabling individuals to re-establish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity and achieve inclusion in civic life<sup>10</sup>.

The notions of return and reintegration are intimately interlinked with that of sustainability. While there is no universally agreed definition of sustainable reintegration, as part of its integrated approach to reintegration, IOM defines sustainable reintegration as follows:<sup>11</sup>

*"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."*

This definition is based on trends identified in existing literature, on IOM's practice, and on a review of complementary approaches outside the traditional scope of AVR. It recognizes that returnees need to participate fully in the economic and social life of their return communities, and that developing a sense of psychosocial well-being after return is crucial to their successful reintegration. Consequently, sustainability of reintegration is not only dependent on the returning individual, but also on the local community and the structural situation the environment of return.

Economically self-sufficient returnees are able to provide for themselves and their families, and develop a capacity to participate in and benefit from local economic activities in a dignified manner. It is equally crucial that the returnee feels a sense of belonging: that they enjoy strong social relationships and engaged in the immediate community of return. The migrant's return should have a positive influence on – or at least not worsen – conditions in the community of return (families and other actors). A migrant's psychosocial wellbeing rests on a minimum sense of safety and security and on availability of basic services (education, housing, water and sanitation, health care). The returnee's positive attitude towards recreating a sustainable lifestyle in the place of return also forms a crucial cornerstone to all other reintegration efforts.

IOM asserts that reintegration support can only be successful if there is a level of re-inclusion across all economic, social and psychosocial dimensions. This can require different levels of interventions.

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At the individual level, the specific needs of beneficiaries (and when relevant, family members or households) should be covered and support for these provided upon return. At the community level, concerns of families and the non-migrant population in the community of return should be addressed by strengthening social links and increasing the absorption capacity of communities in regions with high levels of return. At the structural level, ensuring access to adequate local public services fosters an environment for re-establishing a dignified existence.

This definition also implies the absence of a direct correlation between successful reintegration and further migration after return. Further migration can still be a choice regardless of whether reintegration is successful, partially successful or unsuccessful. On the other hand, returnees are unlikely to reintegrate if they find themselves, for example, in situations where moving again or relying on a family member abroad is considered necessary for their physical or socioeconomic survival and well-being.<sup>12</sup>

The IOM definition reflects the broader understanding of the reintegration process and the need for various levels of intervention. IOM recognizes the misconception of directly comparing a returnee to members of the local population: if the community of origin cannot sustain stable livelihoods and already defies migratory pressures, it is much more unlikely that a returnee to this environment will be reintegrated in a way that is sustainable. Attaining sustainable livelihood levels comparable to the local community will not be possible if push factors remain strong, or if returnees' aspirations are not fulfilled. Especially in more unstable or underdeveloped environments, access to basic services and safety might be limited for all, providing little opportunities for sustainable reintegration. If such structural factors are not addressed, they will continue to result in migration as a coping mechanism for actual or perceived inadequate standards of living, insecurity and lack of opportunities.

<sup>10</sup> [IOM. Glossary on Migration 2019a.](#)

<sup>11</sup> For more information see IOM's paper [Towards an Integrated Approach to Reintegration in the Context of Return](#) (2017).

<sup>12</sup> While the reintegration elements of the integrated approach are part of the development strategies in countries of origin, development aid should not aim to limit further migration. It is widely acknowledged that improvement in development indicators generally leads to increased mobility in the short term, as a result of broadening opportunities and the opening of regular migration channels. In the context of return, however, a positive change in structural factors affecting reintegration allows individual returnees to make a genuinely free choice, rather than opting for (largely irregular) re-migration out of necessity.

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