Child-sensitive reintegration assistance at the community level

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Key Messages

- Community-based reintegration assistance caters to the needs, vulnerabilities and concerns of both returnees and their host community, utilizes their strengths and skills building on resources and competencies already present in the community, and can mitigate or address any potential tensions that may arise between them, while enabling the community's capacity to actively support the sustainable reintegration of returnee children and families.
- Reintegration interventions that are community-led (by returnees, civil society, employers and so forth) and that are designed and implemented at the local level (by both returnees and host community members) are more likely to be successful, and to foster dialogue and social cohesion.
- The social worker, case manager or organization supporting reintegration should work closely with community members and community led interventions to improve assistance for children returning to specific areas.
- The stronger the emphasis on community members' mobilization to care, provide peer support or build community networks for vulnerable children, families, or caregivers, the stronger the community level referral network will be for the social service workforce.

Target audience

Policymakers-icon Created with Sketch.   Policymakers

Programme managers/ developers

Case managers/other staff

Local government (origin)

Implementing partners

Service providers

Introduction

Community-based reintegration assistance supports the ecology around the returning family and child. It promotes the participation of children and families with their communities of return to meet their needs and concerns. Community-based reintegration assistance caters to the needs, vulnerabilities and concerns of both returnees and their host community, utilizes their strengths and skills building on resources and competencies already present in the community, and can mitigate or address any potential tensions that may arise between them, while enabling the community's capacity to actively support the sustainable reintegration of returnee children and families. Chapter three of the module focuses on various methods to engage communities in protecting children, safeguarding their rights, and promoting their meaningful participation in various aspects of community life.

6.3.1 Defining and engaging the community in community-led child protection

Understanding the community and the specific context into which a child and family might be returning is crucial for planning and ensuring that children and families are able to access support upon their arrival in their community of origin. A community can also be understood from the ecological approach which recognizes that each returnee child exists within a system of actors that can either support or hinder the child's reintegration. This system should be considered in the design and implementation of the reintegration assistance. The system includes:

- Family and peers;
- Civil society, faith-based and community-based organizations;
- The public and private sector;
- Social norms.

In this regard, a child-sensitive approach to reintegration assistance at the community level focuses on activating and engaging community-based child protection structures encompassing formal child protection mechanisms, as well as actively supporting initiatives that strengthen and empower community-based structures that contribute to the provision of services for children such as education, health care and psychosocial support. It also includes financial support for activities that include and bring together both returnees and host communities (especially those with a specific

focus on children, young people and families), and initiatives that enhance social cohesion, facilitating the integration of child returnees and their families.

Formal child protection structures are often supported by government and civil society organizations. On the other hand, community-led approaches focus on community-derived empowerment, community dialogues, and decision-making that takes into consideration the views of children. They take various forms such as child protection committees, traditional leaders' and women's associations and youth organizations. The benefit of community-led approaches is that they generate higher levels of community ownership and contribute to defining the parameters of available service provision. They also generally enable stronger harm prevention and sustainability by building on resources and competencies already present in the community.

The Child Resilience Alliance has developed a [Guide for Supporting Community Led Child Protection Processes](#) and a [Toolkit for Reflective Practice](#) that offers guidance on sustainable community-led approaches to child protection. The toolkit identifies the following criteria for a community-led approach to child protection[75] and can be considered for the design, implementation, monitoring and follow-up of reintegration programming.

- Community identifies the child protection issue to be addressed (reintegration);
- Community decides how to address the issue (integrated approach);
- Community decides what local capacities and resources to use;
- Community designs the action;
- Community implements the action;
- Community conducts its own evaluation of the action;
- Relatively low reliance on outside facilitators or actors;
- Inclusive community participation;
- High level of community ownership;
- Minimal reliance on outsiders.

6.3.2 Child-sensitive community assessments

The IOM Reintegration Handbook proposes a focus on migration drivers, community perceptions, economic systems' analysis, stakeholder and service mapping, along with other sociodemographic factors outlined in Table 3.1 below to help inform an in-depth, child-sensitive, context specific community assessment or profile. A community assessment or profile helps define the criteria for reintegration programming and the appropriate reintegration approach. Community assessments:

- Present an opportunity to comprehensively assess the ecology of the child beyond the family;
- Highlight vulnerabilities and strengths which exist in the environment and how they can contribute or detract from sustainable reintegration;
- Maintain a focus on the developmental needs of children while gathering information about what exists in communities to support children's development;
- Identify potential risks and challenges of community led interventions which if addressed, should be reviewed regularly;
- Are a good way of gauging any source of potential conflict or tension between returnee children and families, and the host community;

- Should be reviewed and updated frequently in cooperation with local actors to reflect changes, new challenges and risks or new opportunities.

Table 6.1 Proposed research questions for in-depth child-sensitive community analysis

Phase	Research questions	Data collection methods
Community profile	**Migration drivers**	• Desk review • Focus group • Discussions • Individual survey
	1. What is the role of mobility in the community? (past/ present)	
	2. What are the key drivers that influence migration? (look at economic, governance, social, poptical, environmental, structural, security dimensions)	
	3. What are the personal motivations of migrants and returnees for considering/deciding to depart and to return?	
	4. What is the role of collective decision-making on migration? Who are the key actors shaping migration decision-making?	
	5. What are the enabpng factors conducive to irregular migration? (financial, human, logistical and so forth).	
	Reintegration programming	• Desk review • Focus group • Discussions • Individual survey
	6. What are the factors that prevent or foster reintegration at economic, social and psychosocial levels?	
	7. What type of reintegration support (at economic, social and psychosocial levels) is needed to make reintegration sustainable?	
	8. Which actors are appropriate to implement these activities?	
	Community perceptions	• Desk review • Focus group discussions • Individual survey
	9. What are sources of tension	

Phase	Research questions	Data collection methods
	and sources of social capital in the ecosystem? What perceptions do community members have of each other? 10. What are key events that have shaped this community in the recent and distant past? 11. What are the existing levels of awareness and attitudes towards migrants and returnees? 12. What are the communities' perceptions of migrants and returnees as actors in the ecosystem? 13. How do community members engage with returnees and how do returnees engage with community members?	• Community consultations • Community historic mapping
	Economic system analysis 14. Map a system of economic exchanges and production, including service depvery 15. Estabpsh a typology of the formal and informal sectors. 16. Analyse the socioeconomic potential of the sectors identified. in terms of (a) business creation and development; (b) job creation in the areas defined by the project, (c) identify government priorities and plans in terms of market development. 17. Identify concrete and immediate opportunities for employment, income generation and self employment 18. Identify concrete and immediate opportunities for strengthened access to services and protection.	• Desk review • Key informant interviews with private actors • Individual survey • Labour market assessment (*see section 1.4.2*)

Phase	Research questions	Data collection methods
Stakeholder and services mapping	19. Who are the stakeholders directly/indirectly involved in the provision of reintegration support at the national and local level? 20. How do they interact and coordinate? 21. What community-based projects exist that are related to reintegration? 22. What are the referral mechanisms in place at the various levels (individual, community, regional, national level) that can support reintegration activities? 23. What are the existing services available to returning migrants that could support reintegration activities? 24. What complementary approaches are available? Who implements these? 25. Are there opportunities to develop new or strengthen existing partnerships to support reintegration activities?	• Desk review (particularly of existing stakeholder mapping and service mapping, *see section 1.4.2*) • Key informant interviews
Capacity assessment	26. What are the human and financial resources available for stakeholders to intervene at the three levels (economic, social, psychosocial) and three dimensions (individuals, community, structural) of reintegration? 27. What are the capacity-building activities required to effectively support partners in the provision of reintegration assistance?	• Key informant interviews (analysis through Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool)

6.3.3 Community-based reintegration projects for economic reintegration

In communities with limited formal resources there can be few opportunities to study or work, leaving children and youth at high risk of being out of school, unemployed, underemployed and in conflict with the authorities. This can lead to feelings of hopelessness and when combined with other risk factors, can act as a driver for migration, lead to negative coping strategies and even suicidal thoughts or behaviour. In such settings of limited economic resources, parents may struggle to find employment and face challenges in meeting their children's basic needs, such as adequate amounts of food, and access to health care and education. They may also be unable to provide emotional support to their family as they face discrimination and social exclusion while trying to adapt to their new environment.

Economic reintegration assistance at the community level should consider the economic needs and opportunities accessible at the community level and the impact returnee children and families will have on these. The aim should be to reduce the vulnerability of the community as a whole to economic shocks while promoting dialogue, social cohesion and empowerment, which requires short and long-term strategies. Relying on local knowledge to inform interventions, participation of returnees and non-migrant populations and connecting to local development plans is likely to foster sustainability. Programmatic approaches can include community profiling to assess the needs and priorities, mapping of existing initiatives and interventions with active participation of returnees and non-migrant communities, analysis of market labour trends, and identification of skilled and unskilled labour opportunities in the local context including vocational training, mentorship and apprentice opportunities. Partnerships with the private sector to create employment or collaboration with the public sector to implement development projects such as road construction are some practical examples that can be pursued for economic reintegration (see Module 3 of the Handbook which examines collective income-generating activities, community-based local development and livelihood activities and community financial support activities as options for organizing community level economic reintegration support).

The key to child-sensitive economic reintegration assistance is to consider which of these types of economic reintegration assistance will support the best outcomes for the child. This requires a multi-dimensional assessment which not only considers which type of economic assistance is the most viable for the adult income earners in the household, but also how income from livelihood activities can be used to best benefit children. In addition, an economic strengthening assessment can integrate health, education and training opportunities, build the participation of children and families in the assessment process, and consider the economic condition of the family and child to determine appropriate financial reintegration assistance.

These types of assessments are best done with a multidisciplinary team working with all members of the family. The multidisciplinary team can be embedded in a community-based or community-led structure which links with or is part of a formal or informal child protection structure. The stakeholder and service mapping which should be part of the child-sensitive community assessment process can help to identify existing structures. In practice, the multi-disciplinary team can be part of a joint field mission consisting of child protection and economic strengthening capacity. The focus of the assessment can be to identify appropriate skills tailored for the community through a market analysis, exploring the most appropriate use of available resources at individual, household or community level, and to build in evaluation of identified strategies.

The community-based reintegration programme: IOM Nigeria

IOM Nigeria is supporting a Community-Based Reintegration (CBR) programme in communities where there are high numbers of returnee migrants and families. CBR is an example of economic and social reintegration assistance at the community level which is focused on improving the accessibility and availability of social, psychosocial and economic opportunities in communities of return benefitting both returnees and other members of the community. In this regard, CBR-target beneficiaries are both returnees and potential migrants (unemployed youth) in order to respond to the local community needs.

To inform the design of the CBR intervention, IOM conducted an assessment in 18 local government areas in Nigeria. The assessment identified the type of needs and risks that existed in communities where there were high numbers of residents migrating and returning, along with feasible projects. Returnees and potential migrants were grouped together based on their skills, interest and location in the community. They were provided an initial business skills' training followed by a specialized practical and vocational skill training course depending on the type of CBR project established. These groups allow returnees who were living in isolation from other returnees or were identified as particularly marginalized to be grouped together to mitigate isolation and the social stigma some of them were encountering in their communities.

The CBR set up pineapple and cassava processing factories at the identified locations to create employment opportunities for returnees and unemployed youth in the community. The project also indirectly benefit farmers, beneficiary family members and other community members to mitigate unsafe and irregular migration practices and enhance their livelihood opportunities. CBR promotes a public-private partnership model. It engages qualified and experienced private sector actors to partner and oversee the management and operationalization of projects for a pre-defined period while cooperatives (made up of returnees and potential migrants) own the established projects. The partnership promotes the smooth running of the agroprocessing facilities by providing managerial experience of the private sector while tapping into their existing market position to avoid challenges related to market penetration and investment requirements.

Vulnerable community members who had not migrated benefitted both directly from the group employment but also indirectly through awareness-raising and livelihood support, since for farming households the processing factories would bring stable demand by off-taking their produce, prevent loss on returns by avoiding price drops during harvest season, and preventing loss associated with the perishable nature of the produce. This included farmers and others who benefit from CBR to mitigate unsafe and irregular migration practices. Advocacy with government for the allocation of land for the CBR, strengthened partnerships with the private sector to promote group employment schemes and returnees' access to shared capital, and creating a returnee cooperative society to advocate for and represent their collective interests, are some of the programmes notable achievements.

Created with Sketch.   Tips for success:

- Conduct assessments to help determine and prioritize where community-based reintegration projects should be established.
- Strengthen private sector partnerships to promote employment opportunities.
- Include both returnees and members of the community in interventions.

6.3.4 Community-based reintegration projects for social reintegration

Social reintegration at the community level is focused on improving the accessibility and availability of social services and social cohesion in communities of return. Community-level reintegration helps returnees access services they need and also connects them with other returnees who have similar needs and vulnerabilities. Family strengthening interventions prioritize family engagement, empowerment and develop and strengthen family-centred policies, including access to community-based support services and parenting and parent-led support,[76] empowering families to help children socialize and learn about their culture, religion and identity. Community engagement can also shift norms which put children and families at risk, targeting schools, community leaders, and community-based structures to reinforce sustainable community-based support.[77]

The social service workforce, case manager, civil society organizations or other actors responsible for reintegration can connect with community-level interventions to support access to housing or appropriate care arrangements for children, particularly where the community is experiencing a high number of returns. Community-level interventions can also support education, skills' development and training by putting in place assessments to gauge the academic level, and inform the placement, of returnee children to complement school record and training certificates from host countries, when available – or by setting up flexible learning pathways where going back to formal education is not possible. Access to health (including mental health and psychosocial support) is usually a primary concern for children and families returning to their communities, as well as public safety and infrastructure, and access to justice mechanisms. Projects can provide direct support for returnee children's health needs by addressing legal and practical barriers they face in accessing health care, training needs for health workers, providing equipment, improving infrastructure and developing health-related information specific to the community particularly where it relates to infectious diseases. Access to justice can be collectively promoted by addressing barriers to birth registration and other documentation for children that may be a necessity for service provision.

6.3.4.1 Community Care Coalitions

Community Care Coalitions (CCCs) are groups of individuals and organizations at the local level which connect for the common purpose of expanding and enhancing care for the most vulnerable members of the community. The CCC model exists in a number of countries to complement the formal social service workforce in meeting the needs of vulnerable children and families. The CCC can be a resource in providing families with economic and social assistance and access to services. In Ethiopia, CCCs are highlighted as a primary source of support for returnee children and families in remote rural communities.

Community Care Coalitions in Ethiopia

CCCs in Ethiopia are established at the Kebele level (the lowest government administrative unit) and bring together a variety of stakeholders including traditional leaders, youth, teachers, social workers, health extensions workers, church leaders, women's groups and law enforcement authorities. They are community-based support systems which mobilize resources by collecting monthly contributions from community members who can afford the contribution. Community members are also encouraged to contribute in kind (including crops or practical support, such as labour) to the coalitions. These assets are distributed to vulnerable households in need, protecting children's health, education and well-being. The governance structure, which is adapted to the local context, consists of a taskforce chaired by the local administration, and various committees, including an executive group with permanent staff members, an auditor group that is voluntary or assigned to perform financial functions, and specialized thematic committees focused on particular interventions such as resource mobilization, access to justice (para-legals), social protection and so on.

The Government of Ethiopia and UNICEF are supporting and investing in CCCs as a valuable system of social support that protects children at the local level, and links and refers them to other child protection services. For example, a family of five including a husband, wife and their three school-going children were identified as vulnerable and needing support. The Kebele and CCCs stepped in to provide practical support, and links to services. The family received cash from the CCC to ensure the children could continue to attend school. An economic assessment revealed that the family although living in a rented house had a piece of land listed among their resources. They could not afford to build on the land so the CCC mobilized community members to build them a modest two-roomed house, now surrounded by beautiful plants. This intervention not only provided shelter but made it possible for the family to stay together.

Further, the CCC connected the family to social services support from the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth and health support from the local medical centre. The family received medical care from a medical centre that works closely with the CCC through referral by a Community Service Worker (CSW) assigned to the Kebele to identify vulnerable families in need of child protection services. The medical centre is identified as one of the community assets that facilitates free medical care to community members from Kebele.

The social worker at the Regional Bureau of Women, Children and Youth, supported the husband in accessing part-time work having achieved a greater skill level. The income the husband earns is enough to sustain the family. Due to these interventions one of the children successfully graduated from high school and obtained a part-time teaching position.

Created with Sketch.   Tips for success:

- National authorities should support CCCs to strengthen their capacity at local level.
- Assets at the local level should be identified and used to promote reintegration assistance through a community led approach.
- Individuals at the local level should be included in the CCCs because they are best placed to

identify vulnerabilities, needs and strengths.
- Appropriate referral mechanisms to available services within the community should be developed and kept updated.

6.3.5 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) at the community level

As outlined in [Chapter 6.2](#), children and families will have a level of resilience that allows them to reintegrate successfully. Reintegration MHPSS services focused on basic service provision and family and community support can benefit such returnee children and families. Community based MHPSS activities should aim to reinforce the bond between children and their caregivers, connect children with peers and facilitate children and family's social integration into their community. They can also include sensitization activities to counteract potential stigma and foster a welcoming and inclusive environment. Meeting the MHPSS needs of young children and caregivers, and supporting parenting programmes and teachers, promotes the developmental needs of returnee children.

Engaging and building the capacity of the social service workforce facilitates MHPSS at the community level. As such, building the capacity of MHPSS providers should complement the development of the social service workforce at the community level. This means strengthening social, counselling, educational and health services, including mental health to respond to the needs of returnee children. It also means focusing efforts to building dedicated MHPSS capacity (counselling, clinical psychology) where it is lacking.

This can be done through the development of MHPSS interventions for caregivers and children, then engaging community facilitators (who are parents themselves) to develop and implement the intervention. These groups can:

- Extend the social support network and help build a sense of community (many parents express that they feel isolated and that they are the only ones experiencing this; groups counteract that).
- Capitalize on existing specialized MHPSS resources, expanding access to care to underserved communities.
- Provide a safe space, creating opportunities to practice new ways of being seen, relating to others and understanding patterns in interpersonal dynamics (many parents had lost the ability to trust other parents, anticipated feeling judged and judged themselves about their parenting).

Group interventions can include art, music and dance, and should use the innate ways that communities have to connect. The case study below shows how this methodology was used in Colombia. The community context in the case study is similar to many contexts where children and families may return to a country of origin with low resources for reintegration support, ongoing high levels of displacement or migration and high levels of violence or economic factors which destabilize social cohesion. This methodology can be helpful when assisting parents who return to their children

that they had left with other family members and may be having difficulties reconnecting with them. Training for group facilitators focused on family strengthening helps to develop an additional referral network resource to support sustainable reintegration, while promoting social cohesion by creating spaces where the community can come together to learn these skills.

Created with Sketch.   Case Study 5:

Child-parent psychotherapy group intervention in Tumaco, Colombia

In Tumaco, Colombia, communities are regularly displaced by and exposed to armed conflict. This can have serious repercussions on children's mental health and psychosocial well-being as they grow up, that remain with them once they become parents. In order to protect child development in these violence-affected communities, Dr. Andres Moya from the Universidad de los Andes led on the research, in partnership with the University of California which created "Semillas de Apego" ("Seeds of Bonding" in English) a group-based psychosocial intervention for primary caregivers and children under five.

Semillas de Apego is built upon the work of Alicia Lieberman and Vilma Reyes, who adapted child-parent psychotherapy (CPP) to a group model informed by the socioeconomic, geopolitical and cultural context of two communities in Colombia. It aims to foster the child-parent attachments that promote healthy emotional development in the midst of adverse circumstances, explore ways in which experiences impact parenting, increase caregiver's mindfulness and restore trust in the community. The group intervention is based on the precept that the best predictor of how children cope after experiencing distressing experiences is how their parent or caregiver copes with the event. It consists of 15 sessions with topics and exercises that aim to build trust within the group, promote reflection, insights and strategies into repairing the child-parent bond and enabling the parent's ability to meet their child's developmental needs.

Groups in Tumaco were facilitated by locally recruited facilitators who were trained by the clinical team who led the pilot in Bogota. A supervisor was identified among the Tumaco group facilitators who then cascaded training-of-trainer sessions to a group of future facilitators. All of the facilitators were parents themselves and reported learning about and improving their relationship with their own children as well. They were trained in CPP principles, trauma theory and group facilitation. They also received reflective supervision which allowed them to reflect on their own parenting, apply the various theories and activities they learned and to experience what it was like to participate in a reflective space so that they could recreate this for group participants.

As part of the clinical trial and piloting of the intervention in Colombia, pre and post intervention outcome measures were completed. Outcomes for parents and children included:

- Reduced severe anxiety and depression symptoms of caregivers;
- Reduced parenting stress;
- Improved parenting self-efficacy (satisfaction with one's parenting);
- Improvement in the child-parent relationship;
- Reduction in symptoms of trauma, emotional dysregulation and cognitive, social and language skill impairment in children.

Created with Sketch.   Tips for success:

- Recruit and train group facilitators who know and are part of the community.
- "On-the-job" training and coaching is essential in implementing the model.
- Adapt the model to the cultural frame and context.

For more information please go to https://uniandes.edu.co/en/news/regional-development/sowing-the-future-in-a-land-of-violence

[75] Wessells, M.G., *A Guide for Supporting Community-led child Protection Processes,* Child Resilience Alliance (New York, 2018).

[76] UNGA Working Group, *Key Recommendations for 2019 UNGA Resolution on the Rights of the Child with a Focus on Children without Parental Care* (New York, June 2019).

[77] Ibid.