
Child-sensitive reintegration assistance at the structural level

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Key Messages

- Strengthening reintegration for children and families at the structural level requires engaging key stakeholders in mainstreaming reintegration considerations into national and local policies and strategies that affect children and families. These stakeholders include national and local governments and their agencies, and foreign governments and donor agencies, as well as NGOs and other associations and organizations, including those led by returning migrants themselves.
- Structural level reintegration assistance should strengthen systems and services for all children in the area to which children are returning, for instance child protection, education, health care, housing, access to justice, social protection and so forth. Such structural interventions through a multisectoral approach – long-term capacity-building of these sectors, in alignment with national and local development priorities – promotes children’s sustainable reintegration.
- With regards to child protection services, structural level reintegration assistance should guide and inform the ongoing development of protection mechanisms for vulnerable children and families. In some cases, the vulnerabilities which trigger migration or hinder reintegration efforts are similar to the vulnerabilities which undermine children’s development and weaken families’ and communities’ resilience. Capacity-building efforts at the structural level develop case management frameworks, including referral mechanisms, and strengthen the social service workforce who carry out case management activities for vulnerable children.
- Stakeholder mapping and information gathering as part of the situational analysis contributes to providing context, including vulnerabilities, strengths, relevant laws, donor policies, national and local government policies and priorities, services and systems which impact children and families in countries of origin. IOM and UNICEF processes allow for the regular gathering, analysis and updating of country of origin information and can serve as a starting point to better understanding the national context and infrastructure to which a child might be returning.
- Practitioners should ensure that information obtained about factors affecting children’s reintegration, as a result of stakeholder mapping and information gathering, is used to work with relevant stakeholders (including governments in countries of origin, host countries, and donor countries) and to advocate with them to ensure that children’s rights and children’s needs are included when developing reintegration processes and policies.

Target audience

Programme managers/ developers

Case managers/other staff

National government

Local government (host and origin)

Service provider (national)

Implementing partners

Donors

Introduction

Political, institutional, economic and social conditions directly impact the chances of sustainable reintegration for children and families. Creating a conducive environment for the design and implementation of child and family-focused reintegration assistance requires:

- Engagement and capacity-building of key stakeholders in host countries and countries of origin, as well as advocacy with all relevant government counterparts to ensure that children's rights and needs are taken into account when designing and implementing reintegration policies and programmes.
- The strengthening or development of coordination mechanisms among all key stakeholders throughout the return and reintegration process.
- The development or strengthening of international (both multilateral and bilateral) cooperation systems and practices focused on reintegration of returnees.
- Mainstreaming reintegration considerations into national legislation, policies, strategies and

practices relating to child protection and social welfare, and to other services including education, health care, housing, access to justice, social protection, as well as policies and strategies affecting employment.

In contexts where there are fewer number of returnee children and families or where child protection and social welfare mechanisms systems and other services of particular relevance to children are well established, structural level interventions can focus on ensuring returnees are incorporated into existing systems. In general, structural level reintegration assistance should guide and inform the ongoing development and adaptation of protection mechanisms for vulnerable children and families. In some cases, the vulnerabilities which trigger migration or hinder reintegration efforts are similar to the vulnerabilities which undermine children's development and weaken families' and communities' resilience. In this sense, the sustainable reintegration of returnees can serve as an opportunity to:

- Expand resources for local and national services;
- Further engage and expand the range of key stakeholders acting to promote child rights and address the needs of all children in returnee communities of origin;
- Strengthen systems which not only support returnee children and families but ensure protection and assistance to all children and families alike, with particular attention to those in situations of vulnerability.

This chapter focuses principally on strengthening child protection and social welfare mechanisms through capacity-building, as an example of the kind of structural interventions that should be prioritized to support the sustainable reintegration of children. Other services that are of particular relevance to returnee children include education, health care, housing, social protection and access to justice.

6.4.1 Stakeholder engagement

Engaging with national and local authorities in the early stages of designing the reintegration assistance process is beneficial due to their proximity to the community and in-depth knowledge of available services. Stakeholder mapping can, for example, allow for the identification of child protection and welfare authorities during the pre-departure phase or immediately after a child or family arrive back in the country of origin. Stakeholder mapping and information gathering as part of the situational analysis contributes to providing context, including vulnerabilities, strengths, relevant laws, readmission agreements between States, donor policies, national and local government policies and priorities, services and systems which impact children and families in countries of origin.

- IOM and UNICEF processes allow for the regular gathering, analysis and updating of country of origin information, national surveys and situational analyses and can serve as a starting point to better understanding the national context and infrastructure to which a child might be returning.
- The child and family's individual circumstances can inform the identification of key stakeholders.
- The reintegration plans for individual children and families as well as the implementation of larger reintegration programmes in communities welcoming many returnees should consider all relevant stakeholders. Relevant stakeholders include national and local level authorities, the private sector, civil society organizations (including those that are youth-led), migrant, returnee and diaspora associations, and foreign governments and donor agencies (typically

those of host countries who return migrants).

- Stakeholder mapping and the situational analysis are an extension of the BIA which should be completed for all children (see [Table 4.1, Module 4](#) for a description of the stakeholder categories, their relevance and possible functions).
- Engagement of the stakeholders who manage the systems which govern the delivery of economic, social and psychosocial reintegration assistance is essential to safeguarding the best interest of the child. This includes the private sector which is key to the economic and social reintegration assistance for the child and family.

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Stakeholder engagement at national and municipal level in El Salvador

Reintegration assistance in El Salvador involves the engagement of stakeholders across multiple ministries at the national and municipal level, beginning with an adequate reception process (with more than 11 national institutions providing services post arrival). On arrival adults, family units, children and adolescent returnees are received at the national reception centre, led by the Directorate of Migration (DGME) and supported by international organizations and civil society. Each institution implements a quick individual assessment, with special focus on children and family units, in coordination with the child protection system. Unaccompanied children are referred to the National Council for Childhood and Adolescence (CONNA). The national services provide referral and follow-up at local level in communities of arrival.

In several prioritized municipalities with high levels of homicides, the Government of El Salvador, with the support of international, institutional and social actors launched “Plan El Salvador Seguro” in 2015, which then evolved into “Plan Control Territorial” in 2019. The objective is to address community violence through the recovery of safe and rehabilitated public spaces for the enjoyment of families and community members. This included the creation of workshops to deliver life-skills training, the promotion of entrepreneurial projects, reintegration into the education system through flexible education modules and the opening of youth employment offices focusing on populations at risk.

The programme prioritized more than 60 municipalities. To complement this, IOM, based on official government data, tracks the number of returnees arriving to El Salvador from the United States of America and Mexico. This data allowed IOM with the support of USAID, to prioritize municipalities with both high homicide and high return rates, to work on reintegration and prevention of irregular migration. An example is the municipality of Zacatecoluca.

The Zacatecoluca municipality launched a municipal office for returnees and their families. This office receives returnee referrals and offers assistance with other national services for their reintegration process. The municipal office also raises awareness on the risks of irregular migration and helps returnees to maintain links with Salvadorans abroad.

Furthermore, the Municipal Committees for the Prevention of Violence (CMPV) opened a local victim support office and promoted artistic and cultural activities through the establishment of dance and painting schools. Efforts like this allow for a more comprehensive approach for each returnee, according to their profile.

In parallel, IOM with the leadership of the municipality, strengthened local efforts towards social cohesion based on the development of small-scale infrastructure projects, promoting local engagement and community leadership. IOM also strengthened communal capacities for reintegration ownership and the prevention of irregular migration.

The engagement of multiple layers of stakeholders has resulted in community public spaces which promote the social cohesion and social reintegration of returnee families and other marginalized members of the community, mitigate migration drivers and raise awareness on the risks of irregular migration

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- Engage a wide variety of stakeholders at various levels including the national, municipal and local level, and define a local leader.
- A thorough understanding of an adequate and dignified reception process, including a thorough mapping of actors and services available, is the first step for developing the needed approaches for reintegration.
- Ensure immediate psychosocial support and form support groups for returnees.
- Foster evidence-based strategies through analysis of available data from returnees and the community of origin.

6.4.2 Capacity-building and strengthening

Capacity-building can be targeted at any stakeholder playing a role in reintegration assistance and involves strengthening their skills, structures, processes or resources so they can facilitate the sustainable reintegration of returnee children and families.⁷⁸ IOM and UNICEF work jointly as key stakeholders in promoting the sustainable reintegration of returnee children and families in their countries of origin. UNICEF has adopted a systems' approach to child protection. The systems' approach seeks to ensure that children are being protected in a manner consistent with their rights. Systems-strengthening, in turn, involves enhancing the capacities of institutions and systems to achieve this aim.⁷⁹ UNICEF implements the systems'-strengthening approach to child protection by promoting a holistic and integrated structure of service provision and policies which identify and support all vulnerable children in a non-discriminatory manner. Along with capacity-building to strengthen systems, UNICEF's strategy emphasizes a unified system where every vulnerable child can access necessary support rather than establishing parallel mechanisms that are not integrated or coordinated.

Key stakeholders in the child protection system strengthening approach are national ministries and civil society organizations mandated to safeguard and promote the rights of children and families. Capacity-building for the government and civil society partners coordinating or providing support to

children and families is core among the systems strengthening interventions. In [Chapter 6.2](#), child-sensitive case management was highlighted as an effective means for delivering individualized support for children and families. Capacity-building efforts at the structural level develop national and cross-border case management frameworks, including referral mechanisms, and strengthen the social service workforce who carry out case management activities for vulnerable children.

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Strengthening reintegration assistance through the national case management system: Ethiopia

IOM and UNICEF work jointly as key stakeholders in promoting the sustainable reintegration of returnee children and families in their countries of origin within the context of the National Case Management Framework in Ethiopia. Systems'-strengthening involves enhancing the capacities of institutions, procedures and processes to ensure that children are being protected in a manner consistent with their rights.

UNICEF and IOM support the strengthening of mechanisms and structures that allow all children including returnee children and their families to connect to support at the national level in predeparture and postarrival planning for the child followed by the continued support and follow-up with the child and family in their local communities. For returnee children in Ethiopia, this has included a partnership with IOM and the Ministry of Women Children and Youth (MoWCY) to provide social workers at the IOM transit centre who support the identification, registration and assessment of returning unaccompanied and separated children. The social worker initiates family tracing in accordance with the child's best interests, accompanies the child to their village and hands over to a local social worker to oversee family reunification and implementation of the child protection case care plan in coordination with relevant stakeholders.

This approach has been informed by a national case management framework incorporating the needs of all children including returnees. The case management approach brings together and coordinates

all actors with a child protection concern. The multisectoral approach requires the involvement and support of all levels within the system, from national to community, with structures in place for coordinating the views, priorities, approaches and interventions of all stakeholders. The result is a web of interlinked agencies, coordination mechanisms as well as a standardized case management practice. UNICEF is supporting the testing of the national case management framework in various locations by, among other activities, increasing the number and enhancing the capacity of the social service workforce including community social workers through specialized training. Relevant standard

operating procedures and tools have been developed to transition the paper-based case management system to a digital platform to facilitate more efficient case follow-up, monitoring and referral to appropriate services.

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- Invest in increasing the social service workforce including community social workers and enhancing their competency by conducting specialized courses on return and reintegration.
- Identify certified qualified social service workers under the relevant national authority to oversee and supervise reintegration assistance at the local and community level.
- Strengthen national child protection, social welfare and education systems to cater for the needs of returnee children and families.

6.4.2.1 Social service workforce strengthening

An appropriate staff profile, staffing structure and recruitment approach for a reintegration project for children and families begins with a functioning social service workforce. The Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection 2018, developed by UNICEF in consultation with the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA), are informed by evidence of ‘what works’ and lessons learned in the field. They are designed to accelerate UNICEF regional and country offices’ programming on social service workforce strengthening, and support work to better plan, develop and support the social services workforce with national and regional partners.

The guidelines outline recommended strategies and interventions to strengthen the social service workforce – an important component of the child protection system – by:

- Increasing the understanding of the role and function of the social service workforce within the child protection system.
- Increasing the understanding of the composition of the workforce and the key actors that constitute the workforce.
- Recommending evidence-based strategies and interventions for strengthening the social service workforce in the short, medium and long term.
- Highlighting the specific role that UNICEF can play in strengthening the social service workforce at the regional and national levels.
- Strengthening country-level, regional and global monitoring for measuring progress on strengthening the social service workforce, and its impact on child protection prevention and response services.

In addition, the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA) has developed guiding principles and competencies for para professionals in the social service workforce. Good para professional social workers are trained in providing care that is child focused and family centred through an “ongoing process of assessment, care management, service coordination, quality improvement,

capacity-building, and direct support”.⁸⁰ The second edition (2017) [Para Professionals in the Social Service Workforce: Guiding Principles, Functions and Competencies](#) includes:

- Guiding Principles for the Development of Para Professional Social Service Workers.
- Generic/Core Functions and Competencies for Para Professional Social Service Workers.
- Functions and Competencies for Para Professional Child and Youth Care Workers.
- Functions and Competencies for Para Professional Social Workers.
- Functions and Competencies for Para Professional Community Development Workers.

These set of competency frameworks are child focused and are intended to assist managers in developing programmes, designing job descriptions as well as assessing training and supervision needs and complement the reintegration staffing profile provided in [Module 1, Chapter 1.4.3](#).

6.4.3 Establishing coordination mechanisms

The previous chapters have emphasized the importance of considering the ecology and best interests of the child. The complexity of these key considerations is reflected by the web of stakeholders, support mechanisms and service providers necessary to ensure the child’s ecology and best interests are supported and promoted. Most countries of origin will have some level of coordination mechanisms for accessing protection, services and assistance, but these mechanisms may not be organized around the needs of individuals and families returning to countries of origin. In fact, it is likely that the lack of access and coordination of support mechanisms to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals or families may have contributed to the motivation to migrate.

In countries of origin with under-resourced or underdeveloped coordination mechanisms, [Module 4](#) provides guidance for setting up a context-sensitive coordination mechanism. Mapping available services, establishing standard operating procedures, referral mechanisms and promoting government ownership including national coordination of the referral mechanism and connecting key actors are some of the steps highlighted in [Module 4](#). Establishing a coordination mechanism specifically to address the needs of individuals and families returning to their countries of origin can be an immediate or emergency response to provide support for returnees in countries of origin where there are no existing mechanisms to reintegrate and support returnees. Sustainable reintegration for returning children and families will be reliant on enhancing the capacity of systems at the national level to respond. The Ethiopia National Case Management Framework demonstrates a methodology for strengthening the social service workforce and establishing the necessary coordination mechanisms to ensure all children and families who need it have access to individualized support and follow-up, including returning migrants.

6.4.4 International coordination

As the reintegration process begins before departure from the host or transit country, the information gathered for the BIP, the motivation or drivers for migration and the circumstances regarding the

migration journey are important considerations to take into account for reintegration planning. The timing and arrangements for the physical return of children and families also requires planning and coordination made possible by available and effective cross-border communication and coordination mechanisms. Stakeholders integral to this process are governments of the host and origin countries, at their national and local levels, particularly child protection and social welfare actors, international organizations, NGOs, CSOs, schools, faith-based organizations, private actors and migrant, returnee and diaspora associations in host, origin and transit countries.

Effective cross-border communication and coordination is facilitated by developing agreements and cooperation frameworks that are child and family focused and bring together local and international partnerships to facilitate cooperation and effective case management across borders. It helps to coordinate individual support for returnee children and identify, track and mitigate risks and vulnerabilities that children may face before, during and after the migration journey. It can bring together host countries and countries of origin, facilitate provision of reintegration support at the predeparture stage, inform the adaptation of reintegration mechanisms to the country of origin context, tailor measures to the needs of children and families and promote monitoring and evaluation to measure sustainable reintegration. Particular risks to be taken into consideration during this process are child trafficking, various forms of child exploitation and the identification and protection of unaccompanied and separated children. With these risks and vulnerabilities identified, child-sensitive protocols should be developed and incorporated into bilateral and cross-border child protection agreements as well as local partnerships and readmission agreements.

Effective cross-border communication and coordination supports the reintegration process by facilitating:

- Cooperation between actors in host, transit and origin countries;
- Provision and coordination of reintegration assistance starting at the pre-return stage;
- Adaptation of reintegration measures to the needs and capacities of the countries of origin;
- Tailoring reintegration assistance to the individual needs of returnees through shared information;
- Monitoring and evaluation to track the progress and success of return and reintegration measures.

Cross-border case management can be built on existing national systems that are inclusive of children on the move, sensitive to their specific protection needs, and promote domestic and transnational coordination. Cross-border case management establishes a continuum of care where services between places of origin, transit and destination are coordinated based on interlinked systems for data and case management (taking into account data protection standards). In such a system, children on the move who require protection are identified, referred to child protection authorities, and supported to find and implement a sustainable solution based on a best interests procedure and a comprehensive assessment in the host country, country of origin or a third country. This requires different national case management systems to work together to provide streamlined care, protection and services.

ECOWAS Care Protocols and Standards for the Protection and Reintegration of Vulnerable Young Migrant Children on the Move

The ECOWAS Care Protocols and Standards were put forth in November 2011 by the West Africa Network for Child Protection (WAN) steering committee with the support of the International Social Service, Switzerland (SSI Switzerland). WAN is a network of governments, civil society organizations, individuals and other actors working in countries across West Africa. WAN under the supervision of ECOWAS serves as a protection group for children in West Africa, and a viable mechanism for the protection and transnational care of children on the move.

The aim of the Standards is to ensure that the child is at the centre of all care concerns as well as the child's family and community, which is paramount for the development and well-being of the child. In addition, the Standards promote a holistic consideration of the child's individual needs, resources, opinions and relationships.

The Standards propose a conceptual framework of vulnerability which offers a common framework for ECOWAS countries to assess and address the risks and vulnerabilities of children on the move. The conceptual framework demonstrates the impact of vulnerabilities in the child's environment, identifies the root causes and intervention steps which can be implemented to reduce risks, manage cases and promote children's rights. The ECOWAS Care Protocols and Standards identify eight steps for transnational case management which are integrated into the ECOWAS Child Protection Monitoring and Assessment Framework and its implementation guidelines. The eight steps include identification and emergency treatment of the child, study of the child's personal situation and assessment of the family and the child's environmental situation, alternative care, social, educational and professional reintegration, monitoring follow-up after return and family and community support.

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- Ensure that the child is placed at the centre of any intervention.
- Include a chain of actors made up of State actors, NGOs, family and community to provide protective support to the child.

For more information see ECOWAS Support Procedures and Standards for the Protection and Reintegration of Vulnerable Children on the Move and Young

Migrants: <https://www.ssi->

[suisse.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/04001_ssi_content_EN_RZ_web_72dpi.pdf](https://www.ssi-suisse.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/04001_ssi_content_EN_RZ_web_72dpi.pdf)

6.4.5 Strengthening national and local policy frameworks

At the structural level, reintegration policies and strategies, including reintegration assistance, should

be embedded in national and local policy frameworks that ensure that children's rights and needs are at the forefront.

Embedding reintegration assistance and support in national policies can facilitate cross-border coordination. This can include labour needs, vocational training and certification of skills, qualifications and education to enable returning youth and caregivers to utilize the education and skills acquired abroad in their communities of origin.

Strengthening reintegration for children and families at the structural level requires engaging with and supporting key stakeholders in mainstreaming reintegration considerations into national and local policies and strategies that affect all children and families. Structural reintegration assistance interventions should use a multisectoral approach as well as long-term capacity-building of these sectors, in alignment with national and local development priorities. For children and families, the best interests and ecology of the child can help policymakers identify priority sectors and opportunities for mainstreaming. The identified sectors for mainstreaming can include labour, education and training, child protection, social welfare, health and well-being, gender, justice, environment, private sector, business and finance. Also important for children and families is social connection, which would include reducing any stigma or marginalization which may be caused by membership of a particular socioeconomic class, ethnic group or even any stigma which might be associated with being a returnee. Children and families' abilities to feel connected, valued and supported by their communities and peers will often determine whether reintegration will be sustainable. Thus, social inclusion policies which focus on promoting socially cohesive communities and ensuring that minority or marginalized groups are fully integrated into society offer another opportunity to mainstream return and sustainable reintegration.

Finally, minimizing protection risks associated with irregular movement requires the expansion of regular migration channels and pathways. The lack of education and income-earning opportunities are also key drivers for migration among caregivers and young people who migrated alone. The development of national, regional and international policies on regular migration routes and frameworks should always consider the impacts on children and include robust processes to enable swift family reunification.

⁷⁸ [IOM Reintegration Handbook](#), p. 146 (Geneva, 2019).

⁷⁹ UNICEF, [Strengthening Child Protection Systems: Evaluation of UNICEF Strategies and Programme Performance](#), (Geneva, 2018).

⁸⁰ Linsk et al., 2010, p. 996.

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