



# Reintegration of returnees

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*Anna Louise Strachan*

*Consultant*

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## Question

*What are the information gaps in the existing literature around reintegration of returnees, and where could the UK add value in further research?*

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## 1. Summary

The literature on reintegration for returnees covers the economic, social, and psycho-social aspects of reintegration of return migrants. There is a relatively large body of literature on the reintegration of returnees. However, this consists largely of grey literature. There is an absence of rigorous, evidence-based studies on the different aspects of the reintegration of returnees. In terms of geographical focus, most of the country studies available are for countries that have return programmes, such as Afghanistan (Carr, 2014). Moreover, few studies mainstream gender or disability, although there are some studies that look explicitly at the gender dimensions of the reintegration of return migrants in specific country contexts.

The key findings from the literature are:

- The lack of effective tracking/monitoring mechanisms of returnees in some countries means that many aspects of reintegration are not yet fully understood.
- The literature identifies a number of research gaps, but does not identify research areas, which are a particular priority.
- The literature identified does not address the issue of political reintegration of returnees.

## 2. Information gaps on reintegration for returnees

The literature on reintegration of refugees provides an overview of the ideal conditions for the reintegration of refugees, highlighting those factors that are most likely to result in successful reintegration as well as potential obstacles. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), for example, emphasises the importance of an integrated approach to return, consisting of a combination of individual assistance, community-based approaches and structural interventions (IOM, 2017b:1). However, in several countries of origin the tracking of returnees is not systematic, meaning that important questions regarding reintegration and sustainable return remain unanswered (Koser and Kuschminder, 2017: 272).

There is an ongoing debate about a number of aspects of reintegration, including what constitutes 'sustainable' return. This debate centres on whether preventing re-migration is in fact an indicator of sustainable return. Despite numerous papers addressing this issue, clarity on a lot of the terminology in use on the subject of reintegration of return migrants is lacking (Kuschminder, 2017:15).

There is consensus in the literature that:

- The reasons behind return migration, and in particular whether it was forced or voluntary, have an impact on reintegration outcomes for return migrants. Moreover, even in the case of voluntary return, returnees may have chosen that option only because they have run out of options in the country they migrated to, rather than because they want to be in their country of origin. They are therefore considering future options for migration, which makes any form of reintegration difficult (Oeppen and Majidi, 2015:4, Carr, 2014). There is a need for further research in this area (Kuschminder, 2017: 13). In particular, there is a lack of studies on return migrants voluntarily returning to their country of origin from EU member states (Carr, 2014).
- Individual factors and structural factors in the country of origin both have an impact on reintegration. The country of origin affects the reintegration process, as different types of

support are needed, and different types of support are available upon return (Lietaert, 2018:5). For example, research is required on the differences in the reintegration experiences of returnees to conflict, post-conflict, and non-conflict countries. In particular there is a need to establish whether sustainable return is achievable in conflict and post-conflict countries (Kuschminder, 2017: 13).

## **Economic reintegration**

### **Efficacy of skills training**

Vocational training is often provided to returnees in order to facilitate their economic reintegration after returning to their country of origin. However, further research is required on the efficacy of such initiatives, in particular on the long-term outcomes of providing vocational training courses to returnees. This requires follow-up with vocational training participants as well as research on the factors that influence livelihood opportunities (Omata and Takahashi, 2018, pp.10-11).

A number of studies emphasise the importance of labour market/ skills assessments for returnees. However, there is little evidence-based research to demonstrate the extent to which such assessments have a positive impact on the economic reintegration of returnees, and on how these assessments should be conducted to ensure that they are effective in facilitating the economic reintegration of return migrants.

### **Role of the private sector**

A report published by the World Bank highlights the need for recognition of the role of the private sector and how this must be engaged in delivering sustainable return, noting that international efforts have thus far largely neglected this sector. According to the report, 'critical new thinking and policy is needed to remedy this significant gap in supporting sustainable return' (Harild et al, 2015: p. 32). The literature search conducted for this report, has not uncovered any evidence-based literature on the role of the private sector in the reintegration of returnees, although there is some mention of private sector involvement in the provision of vocational training and livelihood opportunities for return migrants.

### **Debt**

There is a lack of research on the effect of the original debts incurred to cover the cost of migration on economic reintegration. One study, looking at the assisted voluntary return and reintegration of migrants, finds that 43 per cent of the returnees interviewed were currently in debt, of which 45 per cent had incurred the debt to cover the costs of their original migration. The costs of migration were generally much higher than the allowances offered by assisted voluntary return programmes (Koser and Kuschminder, 2017: 265). The literature review found little evidence on the impact of this debt on economic reintegration.

### **Corruption**

One study, published by PRIO, identifies corruption as an emerging area for research on the reintegration of returnees. It highlights the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, noting that corruption has an

impact on both those contemplating return and those who have already returned. It finds that corruption not only hinders economic reintegration, but also has a negative impact on returnees' sense of belonging and fosters insecurity. The study finds that this does not only apply to the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, but also to other country contexts. It therefore advocates further research on corruption and its impact on the reintegration of return migrants (Carling et al, 2015: 33).

## **Social reintegration**

While there is consensus in the literature on the importance of social reintegration, there is a lack of rigorous evidence on successful approaches to this.

### **Community based approaches**

A study on community based approaches published by the IOM in 2017 highlights the need for further research in this area, given that this is a relatively new area of focus for programming on the reintegration of return migrants. It emphasises the need to conduct country-specific studies to determine the viability of such approaches in different contexts.

### **Return to different communities**

Numerous reports refer to the different reintegration experiences of those returning to rural versus urban areas. Moreover, there are a number of reports that note that the experiences of those who return to their own communities differ from those of the migrants who return to different communities in their country of origin. These studies argue that the latter is not a question of reintegration, but rather a question of integration. For example, Afghans, who are unable to return to their province of origin because it is unsafe, are often returned to Kabul because that is considered safe for them, despite having little experience of life in the city (Oeppen and Majidi, 2015:4). However, these issues are not explored in-depth in the studies identified during the literature search.

## **Political reintegration**

There is very little literature on the political reintegration of returnees, with existing reports making only a cursory mention of this issue.

## **Reintegration of women and marginalised groups**

Much of the literature on the reintegration of returnees does not mainstream gender. A report produced by PRIO (Peace Research Institute Oslo), highlights some of the gendered differences in migrant's decisions to return home, but provides little information on gendered differences in reintegration (Carling et al, 2015). Other studies focus on isolated case studies without taking a comparative approach to the issue, or identifying general trends and key issues. For example there are studies on the experiences of female trafficking victims on their return to Moldova, or on

female return migrants to Ethiopia, but few multiple country studies on the impact of gender on reintegration.<sup>1</sup>

The literature search conducted for this study did not identify any studies focusing specifically on the reintegration of returnees with disabilities or other special needs. Further research is also required on the return migrants with different sexual orientations and on the return of unaccompanied minors (Kuschminder, 2017: 13). In addition, there is a need to conduct research on the different experiences of families and single return migrants (Kuschminder, 2017:13). Moreover, the literature search undertaken for this report did not uncover any recent studies focusing specifically on the reintegration experiences of youth and the elderly.

There is little rigorous engagement with issues pertaining to returnees who have minority status in their country of origin, and how this status has an impact on reintegration. This is a significant gap in the existing literature.

## Government policies on reintegration in countries of origin

There is some discussion of government policies on reintegration in countries of origin in the existing literature. This largely focuses on the absence of such policies. One peer-reviewed journal article questions whether Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes should incorporate a focus on policies in the countries of origin, addressing structural barriers to the reintegration of returnees, such as corruption, clientelism and healthcare access (Litaert: pp. 14-15). The research undertaken for this report has not uncovered any evidence-based studies on this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Brunovskis, A. & Surtees, R. (2012). Coming home; Challenges in family integration for trafficked women. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*, 12(4), pp. 454-472 and Kuschminder, K. (2014). *Female return migration and reintegration strategies in Ethiopia* (Doctoral Thesis). Maastricht: University of Maastricht.

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## About this report

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