



Unprepared for (re)integration

Lessons learned from Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria
on Refugee Returns to Urban Areas

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Durable Solutions Platforms and Secretariat



Steering Committee



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Front cover photo: A man prepares to load his luggage to leave the reception center in Berbera, Somaliland 2015
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Acronyms

3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
ACCI	Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment
ADSP	Asia Displacement Solutions Platform
APRRN	Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network
ARC	American Refugee Committee
AUP	European Union's Aid to Uprooted People programme
BORESHA	Building Opportunities for Resilience in the Horn of Africa
BRA	Benadir Regional Administration
CAP	Community Action Plan
CDC	Community Development Council
CoO	Countries of origin
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DDG	Danish Demining Group
DFID	Department for International Development
DiREC	Displacement and Return Executive Committee
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DSP	Durable Solutions Platform
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GRF	Global Refugee Forum
HDN	Humanitarian–Development Nexus
HLP	Housing, Land and Property
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICLA	Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDA	International Development Association
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interview
LMA	Labour Market Assessment
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MORR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

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OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PD	Presidential Decree
RDPP	Regional Development and Protection Programme
ReDSS	Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat
SSAR	Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WBG	World Bank Group
WFP	World Food Programme

Key concepts and definitions

Displaced persons are persons or groups of persons, including asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons, who are outside their homes or places of residence for reasons related to fear of persecution, conflict, generalised violence or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order.

Durable solution is achieved when displaced persons no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement. It can be achieved through sustainable (re)integration at the place of origin (voluntary return), local integration in areas where displaced persons take refuge or in another part of their country based on their choice. For refugees, it can also be achieved through resettlement in a third country. (ReDSS)

Host community refers to the community within which displaced persons reside. (GCER)¹

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular, as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border.²

Non-refoulement is the cornerstone of refugee protection. Set out in Article 33(1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, it requires that *“no contracting state shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his (or her) life or freedom would be threatened”*.³

Preparedness refers to a proactive and planned response to emergency, disasters or, in the context of this study, to situations of return. The IASC speaks of preparedness as an inter-agency, common and planned approach. Preparedness is multidimensional and multilevelled, at individual/household, community, organisational or state levels. (IASC)⁴

Refugee is a person who, *“...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his (or her) nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself (or herself) of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his (or her) former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”*. (Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention) **1951 Convention** refers to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention).

Sustainable (re)integration – There is no universal definition of the term “(re)integration”. The IASC Framework highlights eight criteria to be used when considering whether durable solutions have been achieved, namely: safety and security; adequate standard of living; access to livelihoods; restoration of housing, land and property; access to documentation; family reunification; participation in public affairs, and access to effective remedies and justice.⁵ Meanwhile, UNHCR sees (re)integration as *“equated with the achievement of a sustainable return – in other words the ability of returning refugees to secure the political, economic, (legal) and social conditions needed to maintain*

1 Global Cluster for Early Recovery (2017). Durable Solutions in Practice.

2 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. UN Doc. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2.

3 1951 Convention, Article 33(1). A similar formulation is also found in Article 3(i) of the UN Declaration on Territorial Asylum adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1967.

4 See IASC (2015) Early Response Preparedness. See also Cassarino (2014) A Case for Return Preparedness.

5 Brookings Institution – University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement (2010). IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons.

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life, livelihood and dignity, (and) a process that should result in the disappearance of differences in legal rights and duties and the equal access of returnees to services, assets and opportunities".⁶

Voluntary repatriation is the return to country of origin "on refugees' free and informed decision".⁷ The essential requirement for repatriation to be voluntary is the counterpart of the principle of non-refoulement. The facilitation of voluntary repatriation is one of the basic functions of UNHCR.⁸

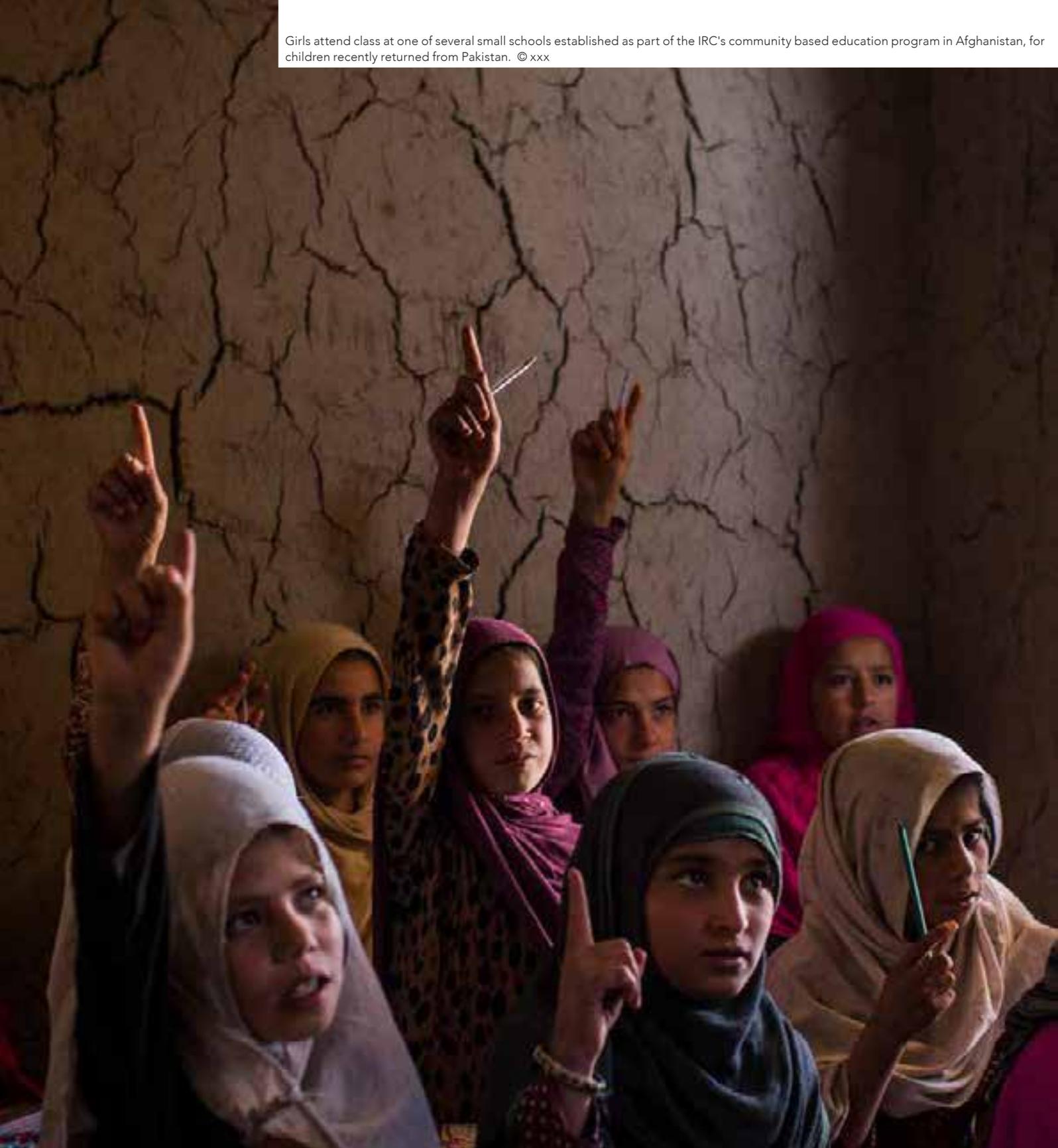
Youth is defined by the UN as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24.

⁶ UNHCR (2004). Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities.

⁷ Adapted from IOM (2019) Glossary on Migration.

⁸ UNHCR (1980). Note on Voluntary Repatriation. EC/SCP/13.

Girls attend class at one of several small schools established as part of the IRC's community based education program in Afghanistan, for children recently returned from Pakistan. © xxx



Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This study informs programming and policies in relation to refugee returns and, specifically, with regards to their (re)integration within urban areas, with a focus on Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. While millions of refugees return to poverty, conflict and insecurity in all three settings, a tunnel focus on returns rather than on (re)integration has limited value for long-term planning. Stakeholders, including communities and returnees themselves, have been unprepared for what happens post-return.

In this context, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) have drawn lessons from recent responses to refugee movements in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. Return trends have shifted in each of these contexts in recent years, driven by changing governmental priorities and conditions in host and origin countries. Although return contexts are diverse, some patterns are common, and refugees' own priorities and actions need to be considered in order to build the way for effective programming.

Objectives and methodology

The main report supports the thinking and planning around (re)integration by examining patterns of return and identifying obstacles, including operational, policy and knowledge gaps, to support better preparedness for (re)integration. It asks: *"How can returnees, receiving communities, governments and organisations be more effectively prepared so as to lay the ground and work towards sustainable (re)integration? What has worked and what could work?"*

The research team interviewed over 100 key informants in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Jordan, Kenya, Somalia and globally; it led 21 focus group discussions, produced 14 household case studies and 4 operational case studies, integrating all levels of policy, programme and community stakeholders. The research builds on a literature review of 150-plus sources to investigate (re)integration dynamics and inform future responses.

Report overview

The report examines findings, paradigms and blind spots that can inform designers, implementers and funders of return and (re)integration programmes, policies and frameworks on how to support returnees, countries of origin and countries of asylum. It examines how preparedness and response can be conceived differently, in order to support the achievement of benchmarks for durable solutions through sustainable (re)integration. The report outlines the following:

- **Trends and factors** – which stakeholders do not sufficiently understand or consider in current return and (re)integration programming – about the profiles, aspirations and decision-making strategies of returnee populations in urban areas, implications for returnees who are not in their places of origin, female returnees and youth returnees.
- **Literature and data gaps** in monitoring, methodology, trend analysis and geographic coverage, which undermine knowledge about how returnees fare and what type of support may be most beneficial for their (re)integration. These knowledge gaps must be closed in order to inform changes in the way policies and programmes have been conceived to date.
- **Ten lessons**, which take into account the outlined trends, factors and information gaps, to provide a roadmap for how (re)integration programming can be conceived and prepared earlier and differently across three phases:
 - return processes
 - immediate support
 - long-term support for (re)integration
- **Conclusions and recommendations** for global discussions, including the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR or compact) as a framework through which multi-stakeholder refugee response can be approached in holistic and more structured ways, including on early preparedness for (re)integration.

10 Lessons for prepared and sustainable (re)integration



Preparedness for returns

1. Defining who is a returnee and when a situation is conducive to returns
2. Improving information-sharing with refugees and returnees
3. Better hosting for better (re)integration



Support to immediate return movements

4. Building on regional agreements to bolster responsibility-sharing
5. Designing cross-border approaches
6. Planning local responses with a focus on HLP



Longer-term support to sustainable (re)integration

7. Prioritising urban and community plans
8. Investing in locally led approaches to economic (re)integration
9. Closing monitoring and data gaps after return
10. Defining the nexus between humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding in return settings



Preparedness for returns

A consensus among key informants is that (re)integration programming starts after return, with insufficient consultation taking place before refugees return. The report presents three lessons learnt to reinforce preparedness for returnees.

1. Defining who is a returnee and when a situation is conducive to returns

Who qualifies for assistance as a refugee returnee? Political and legal factors often determine the timing of returns, who qualifies as a returnee and who qualifies for assistance. In countries where refugee registration has been stopped, or where the refugee status determination system is weak, many who need support may be ineligible to receive it. Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan and Kenya are examples of settings where a gap in registration has resulted in populations of undocumented refugees. Return movements to Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria show the need for an expanded returnee definition, going beyond refugees with formal status. NRC⁹ highlights three categories of returnees who should be supported before, during and after return:

- individuals and groups who do not have refugee status due to national legislation in the hosting country, but who may meet criteria for refugee status under international law
- individuals and groups who have received protection in a host country through temporary schemes, but whose right to stay under those schemes has expired
- individuals who do not qualify as refugees but who may require protection under the human rights principle of non-refoulement.

This expanded definition is critical in the development of global return operations. The lack of equity in return operations is currently evident in the unequal level of assistance provided to documented refugees, while others, who may have lost their refugee status or documentation, receive less support.

In recent return movements, Afghan refugees have received different aid packages, depending on their asylum and documentation status, determining whether their support would come from UNHCR or IOM, based on whether they were registered, card-carrying refugees. This distinction created confusing administrative rifts and exacerbated vulnerability. What should have been a single group – that of

9 NRC (2017a). Operationalising Returns in the Global Compact on Refugees: Supporting State Action to Ensure Refugee Returns Are Safe, Dignified, Voluntary and Sustainable.

refugees – became two groups: the documented and the undocumented.

When is a situation conducive to returns?

Principled return processes entail supporting refugees' informed choice to return to their home countries in and to conditions of dignity and safety. Operational agencies face a recurrent dilemma to determine when conditions of voluntariness, safety and dignity have been met for them to assist refugees in countries of asylum to return, and how to support both spontaneous and assisted returns.¹⁰ The importance of avoiding premature and/or forced returns, and of UNHCR's role in influencing these processes, cannot be underestimated. Evidence shows that prematurely induced returns result in increased needs and exposure to risks among returnees, such as cycles of displacement and exile.¹¹ Decisions require a balance of humanitarian principles – ensuring a rights-based, people-centred and principled approach that takes into consideration humanitarian agencies not being instrumentalised by political interest.

UNHCR's publication of 22 protection thresholds to be met before repatriation is seen as a principled step in relation to Syria, and a model to be replicated across other return settings. They are a product of strong inter-agency advocacy against premature, forced or unsafe returns and serve as a common basis for collectively safeguarding these benchmarks.

2. Informing returns: improving information-sharing with returnees

One key informant in Afghanistan comments that, *"people... think everything is ready for them, that they will easily receive support and financial help. There is not enough information."* In order to make a voluntary decision to return, refugees need accessible, tailored and unbiased information on conditions in the country of origin to compare this with the information they get from their own sources. There is a discrepancy between what refugees are told, by governments and international agencies, and the reality on the ground. Returnees also need better awareness of and assistance with documentation and bureaucratic processes.



Boy leans over balcony Lebanon, 2015. © Eduardo Soteras Jalil

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch (2016). Kenya: Involuntary Refugee Returns to Somalia; see: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/14/kenya-involuntary-refugee-returns-somalia>

¹¹ World Bank (2017d). Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts.

Return packages can address these needs, if reviewed, to act as a link between assistance and information – and not only as a source of cash assistance. Accessible, tailored and unbiased information is crucial in order to:

- Increase opportunities for refugees to see first-hand the situation in their country of nationality, to learn whether these conditions would suit them and their families, to allow them to ask questions at the source, and avoid potential inaccurate relays of information.
- Prepare returnees for the possible significant risk of internal displacement upon return and to the realities of fragile urban contexts.
- Inform returnees of their right to have rights; many returnees are not aware of the importance of documentation or how to obtain it. A political, legal and humanitarian imperative in refugee contexts is the recognition and documentation of refugees' status, and greater information on the legal processes to secure their access to services upon return.

In 2018, the Jordanian interior ministry and UNHCR launched a regularisation campaign to legalise the stay of Syrian refugees in urban areas. The initiative, funded by ECHO and led by six NGOs, provided legal assistance and information for almost 20,000 families.¹² The same steps are needed in all refugee settings to avoid unregistered populations. These can then be completed, prior to and after return, with information for refugees on how and where to access services.

3. Better hosting in countries of asylum for better (re)integration

The relationship between the quality of asylum and the quality of (re)integration remains insufficiently integrated in planning. Focus group participants in Afghanistan and Somalia comment that those with greater financial, human and social capital – that is, those who fared better in their host country – often fare better on return. The types of skills and experience gained in asylum influence their access to opportunities at home. This relationship is often overlooked in both policy and practice.¹³ Feedback from refugees in countries of asylum indicates that they want to learn about and acquire skills that may be relevant upon return. Strategic, policy and programmatic engagement tends to separate these into distinct and disconnected processes, supported by different stakeholders in

different countries. More work is required to make the link between better hosting and better (re)integration, and to make it a priority for development actors.



Support to immediate return movements

Refugees speak of push factors in the hosting context, the fears and difficulties of crossing the border safely, as well as concerns that their assets, mainly land and housing, would be gone. As a result, what happens during the return process also requires attention. The report focuses on the role of regional, national and local actors in ensuring a safe and dignified return process.

4. Building on regional agreements to bolster responsibility-sharing

Regional approaches are crucial in order to facilitate plans that ensure refugee protection before and during return.¹⁴ Tripartite agreements between hosting countries, origin countries and UNHCR provide the legal framework to facilitate return; however, they only cover those with formal refugee status. Tripartite agreements also have other shortcomings, such as the lack of refugee representation. The UNHCR handbook on voluntary repatriation published in 1993 explains it would be “possible and even desirable to include the refugees and establish a quadripartite commission”.¹⁵ However, more often than not, commissions are tripartite, are bound to governments and to UNHCR, and are the only legitimate forum for discussing major repatriation issues. In 1996, the revised handbook merely mentions that “the refugee community should be kept informed of the progress of repatriation negotiations. Formal representation of the refugee community can be considered.”¹⁶ This is especially relevant in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which emphasise the importance of representation. This change needs to be reflected in supporting return movements.

The Nairobi Declaration and Plan of Action and Ethiopia's implementation of the Nine Pledges and the Kampala declaration provide an opportunity to

12 DRC (2018). Helping Syrian refugees in Jordan in legal documentation; see: <https://drc.ngo/what-we-do/stories-from-the-field/helping-syrian-refugees-in-jordan-in-legal-documentation>

13 Harild, Christensen and Zetter (2015). Sustainable refugee return: triggers, constraints, and lessons on addressing the development challenges of forced displacement.

14 Harild, Christensen and Zetter (2015); NRC (2017a).

15 UNHCR (1993). Protection Guidelines on Voluntary Repatriation.

16 UNHCR (1996). Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection. UNHCR Handbook, 34.

integrate and align standards on durable solutions as part of legal changes required within each member state. More needs to be done to integrate refugee representation, voices and influence in the decisions made that impact them.

5. Designing cross-border approaches

While refugees and returnees cross borders, (re)integration assistance has not kept up with mobility dynamics. Cross-border approaches can ensure that interventions are flexible and aligned with people's mobility, instead of being bound by state demarcation lines. Lessons learnt point to the need to set standards for what cross-border programming can achieve. Building on such experiences, in 2011, ACTED and CARE released a set of principles for effective cross-border programming. With regard to return movements, these may necessitate:¹⁷

- Joint cross-border programming in which a programme is designed to support a specific cohort of refugees or returnees and is undertaken on both sides of the border. For example, livelihoods programming focused on skills relevant in countries of origin, livelihoods-matching schemes, and support for individuals with specific needs (often related to health).
- Coordinated or consistent cross-border interventions in which a programme is designed to support people on the return journey and to (re)integrate them on their return.

Recognising that support is more effective when it is consistent and coherent along the return journey, WFP Somalia deployed staff to its Kenyan team in Dadaab to facilitate a joined-up approach. WFP staff indicated they were better able to plan and respond to return patterns of refugees, as well as to trace specific refugee needs along the journey. This included both their ability to address specific vulnerabilities as well as to monitor the nutritional status of refugees before and after return.

6. Planning local responses with a focus on housing, land and property

Housing, land and property (HLP) assistance needs to be implemented in order to prevent land-related conflict and to support inclusion for returnees. Studies find that access to HLP is central, both to refugees' decision-making about whether and when to return, and to prospects for (re)integration. Many returnees have spent years, even decades, in relatively cosmopolitan and urbanised

environments in exile and have adapted their livelihoods accordingly. Expectations have also changed: the lack of opportunities and services in villages of origin prompt many returnees to go to cities.¹⁸ The importance of HLP for (re)integration has prompted increased attention at the policy and programme levels, but it nevertheless remains a critical issue for returnees.¹⁹

A pilot programme on rental subsidies in Mogadishu is underway to tackle challenges of access to housing and forced evictions by improving rental security. The aim of the project is to ensure that enhanced livelihoods generate enough income for returnees to pay their rent on their own.



Longer-term support to sustainable (re)integration

While recognising that returns happen increasingly to urban areas that are not returnees' areas of origin, and that women and youth face specific problems in these locations, the final section of the report sets out lessons for longer-term (re)integration programming.

7. Prioritising urban and community plans

With pressure mounting on available land and returnees often facing the prospect of displacement on return, shortcomings in integrated settlement planning have, in turn, become constraints to (re) integration. While the provision of land or shelter is part of the solution, this, on its own, cannot ensure durable solutions or sustainable (re)integration. International humanitarian organisations – rather than civil society organisations or the private sector – continue to provide services. This runs counter to the objective of (re)integration: that returnees should be integrated not only into their societies but also into the systems that support them. This will require regulating engagement with private sector actors that can, in the meantime, provide access to services such as electricity and water. From a sustainability and affordability perspective, exploring the public–private partnership option should be a systematic endeavour of area-based, durable solutions planning. Other steps

¹⁷ These practices are echoed in the literature on vulnerable dryland communities. See ACTED and CARE (2011) Draft good practice principles for cross border programming in the drylands of the Horn of Africa.

¹⁸ World Bank/UNHCR (2019). Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees: Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data.

¹⁹ Harild, Christensen and Zetter (2015).



Local market in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia, 2014. © Axel Fassio / DRC 2014

will need to be prioritised based on how communities prioritise their needs.

The establishment of a common social accountability process in Somalia is one of the initiatives underway to strengthen the voices and inclusion of displacement-affected communities, and to make those voices heard by the decision-makers.

8. Investing in locally led approaches to economic (re)integration

Economic (re)integration programming has focused disproportionately on technical and vocational education and training (TVET). While a link to the education system is clear, links to market systems have often been overlooked. In Afghanistan and in Somalia, TVET programmes are delinked from other variables, which can, together, result in greater well-being. For instance, the link between TVET and socioeconomic inclusion requires greater attention. In both contexts, there is a strong correlation between available social capital and access to opportunities upon return. Returnees – particularly youth – point to the need for connections to get placements. An overview of previous and existing interventions finds that programming focuses neither on the potential of social networks to sustain livelihoods nor on ways of enhancing TVET in exile.

In 2019, the World Bank, together with the Afghan government, launched the EZ-KAR project with five components to support 13 cities over five years. The project aims to develop market-enabling activities and interventions that are both community-driven and supporting city-level involvement. While the project is still in its inception phase, it provides a development-focused economic (re)integration agenda that other agencies, including NGOs, will be able to contribute to.

9. Closing monitoring and data gaps after return

Monitoring and accountability have to be reinforced in order to ensure that refugees are not returning to situations of danger, and that communities are supported to absorb return flows responsibly and sustainably. There is still a lack of evidence and learning, or clear understanding among aid actors, of the quality and impact of their (re)integration programming.

Durable solutions analysis is a multi-stakeholder exercise that seeks to monitor progress towards durable solutions based on the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions. Operationalised in regional framework indicators²⁰ and globally in an inter-agency indicators library,²¹ this collaborative process integrates learning as an essential component of (re) integration programming. In

20 See: <https://regionaldss.org/index.php/research-and-knowledge-management/solutions-framework/>

21 See: <http://inform-durablesolutions-idp.org/>

*Somalia, the integration of a learning partner within durable solutions consortia has been identified as a key achievement for collective outcomes and coordination between donors, practitioners and government.*²²

10. Defining the nexus between humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding in return settings

Urban services are lacking for everyone – not just for the displaced. This brings national governance and planning to the fore. The issue here is not simply one of limited capacity or services that are not integrated; areas of return require investment in services and infrastructure. Governments need support to take the lead in facilitating broad access to services. Understanding the interrelationships between humanitarian action, development and both peacebuilding and state-building efforts can be key to durable solutions. As humanitarian needs are often a result of the absence of peace, and as protracted conflict hinders development, integrating discussions with peace actors has to be part of the durable solutions conversation in any conflict context.

Conclusions with global implications and recommendations

Our research, focused on (re)integration, points to the importance of engaging early on and enhancing preparedness, whilst ensuring that preparations do not overtake the need for sustained protection in refugee-hosting countries. We conclude, here, on the links with

global discussions. The GCR is framed as the vehicle through which refugee response can be approached in a more holistic, structured way when looking at processes – such as (re)integration – from the very beginning. This report is relevant to all six themes of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum. (Re)integration is not only a discussion on solutions, it is also a discussion on jobs and livelihoods, education, energy and infrastructure, protection capacity and responsibility-sharing. The report addresses all these themes, highlights a range of long-term thinking and planning required, and recommends steps to follow in order to shift the thinking on (re)integration.

The compact implicitly suggests that solutions are static and does not give due deference to the fact that effective (re)integration must take account of the evolving goals that refugees have for their lives. The compact aims to measure the impact of hosting refugees. This exercise, however, is delinked from the issue of (re)integration, while the compact does not define what kind of outcomes should be collectively pursued in support of refugees' return. Our research calls for greater commitment from host states towards (re)integration and sets out five recommendations that mark a difference from how reintegration is managed today.

1. Allow for phased, circular and staged returns and cross-border programming.
2. Ensure affected communities participate meaningfully in the return and (re)integration process.
3. Factor in reintegration in development planning – most notably, urban planning.
4. Empower refugees and returnees socially and economically pre- and post-return.
5. Monitor and learn from (re)integration outcomes.

²² ReDSS/Samuel Hall/SDRI (2019). Somalia Solutions Analysis Update 2019: <https://regionaldss.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FINAL-SA.pdf>



PART A

Setting the scene

Global compacts, return and (re)integration

Introduction

In 2016, the Government of Kenya announced that the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps – home to approximately 600,000 refugees – should be closed for reasons of national security.²³ A renewed statement on the closure of Dadaab in 2019 targeted the remaining 210,556²⁴ (mainly Somali) refugees, despite NGOs and UNHCR indicating that many areas of Somalia were not conducive to large-scale returns.²⁵ In 2018, over 800,000 Afghans²⁶ returned to Afghanistan, following mass forced returns of Afghan refugees in 2016,²⁷ and despite the country facing the highest level of civilian violence on record.²⁸ Meanwhile, the UN predicts that 250,000 Syrians may return in 2019 despite continued violence.²⁹ As these three contexts illustrate, there is a pressing need to ensure respect for the core principles of voluntariness, safety and dignity in returns, especially as these are increasingly occurring against a backdrop of protracted conflict.

Recognising the need to address refugee situations that are protracted and large-scale in nature, the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)³⁰ is a global framework for responsibility-sharing between states that sets out to:

- ease pressures on host countries
- enhance refugee self-reliance
- expand access to third-country solutions
- support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity

Given that host countries are reluctant to agree to integrate refugees on their territory in the long-term, and that resettlement options are available to only a few of the world's most vulnerable refugees, return to one's country of origin remains the most commonly envisaged pathway to durable solutions. The GCR focuses little attention, however, on what happens after return.³¹ Evidence from Afghanistan³² and Somalia³³ shows that returnees are likely to have displacement-related vulnerabilities long after their return. Returnees who become internally displaced, who eke out a living in squatter camps or who are forced to move again cannot be considered to have found a durable solution to their displacement.³⁴ While return is starting to be better understood, it is too rarely seen as part of a process. (Re)integration is often not prepared for in advance, nor is it regarded as a responsibility that goes beyond that of the country of origin. There remains a critical gap in support to the processes linking return and long-term (re)integration.³⁵ This study addresses this gap by highlighting operational lessons learnt on refugee returns and (re)integration.

The report underlines findings of relevance to global commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees, informing the pledges, contributions and exchange of good practices that are expected to be made at the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF), to be held in December 2019. More specifically, this study informs discussions and decisions around:

23 Republic of Kenya (2016). Government statement on refugees and closure of refugee camps, signed by Dr Karanja Kibicho, CBS, Principal Secretary of the Interior, on 6 May 2016.

24 UNHCR (2019a). Kenya: Registered refugees and asylum-seekers as of 31 March 2019.

25 NGOs in Kenya (2016). Joint Statement: NGOs urge Government of Kenya to Reconsider Intended Closure of Refugee Camps; VOA (2019). Somalia Not Ready for Massive Refugee Return, UN Warns.

26 IOM (2019). Afghanistan weekly situation report, Jan–Dec 2018. This figure includes the return of registered refugees (15,699, according to UNHCR (2019d) Afghanistan – Operational Fact Sheet, 29 February 2019), as well as 805,850 returnees from Iran and Pakistan not registered as refugees.

27 Human Rights Watch (2017). Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity: The Mass Forced Return of Afghan Refugees.

28 UN (2019). Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Annual Report 2018.

29 Reuters (2018). 250,000 Syrian refugees could return home next year: UNHCR.

30 UN (2018b). Global Compact on Refugees

31 See for instance the GCR, where reintegration is only mentioned six times and briefly: United Nations (2018). Global Compact on Refugees.

32 DRC/Mixed Migration Centre (2019). Distant Dreams: Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees

33 Sturridge, Bakewell and Hammond (2018). Return and (Re)Integration after Displacement: Belonging, Labelling and Livelihoods in Three Somali Cities

34 Crisp and Long (2016). Safe and Voluntary Refugee Repatriation: From Principle to Practice.

35 Harild, Christensen and Zetter (2015).



Vocational training in Gardo, Puntland, Somalia, 2014. © Axel Fassio / DRC

- **Responsibility-sharing** – The GCR contributes to thinking beyond proximity to a crisis as the primary criterion to define state responsibility. Instead, it calls for “*predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing*” across world governments.³⁶ This study contributes to this shift in thinking, by identifying areas where responsibility-sharing and action on supporting countries of origin on return and (re)integration could be improved, as well as highlighting gaps and areas where action on responsibility-sharing is still missing.
- **Triggering the linkage between humanitarian response and longer-term planning** – This report centres on follow-throughs required to make (re)integration a reality, syncing the content of operational lessons learnt to the content of global discussions. While (re)integration is inherently a developmental concern, it has traditionally been led by humanitarians. Governments and development actors are only just beginning to show interest in the process.

Unpacking key concepts: return and (re)integration

This report uses the concept of ‘return’ rather than ‘repatriation’, although these terms are often used interchangeably to refer to refugees returning to their country of origin. Return (unlike repatriation) is often paired with (re)integration to indicate that, together, they may be part of a progressive process towards the achievement of a lasting solution to displacement. This choice recognises that return is not a durable solution in itself: sustainable (re)integration is. The process starts before the return journey begins and continues until well after arrival.

The study uses the concept of ‘sustainable (re)integration’ (hereafter referred to as (re)integration) to reflect the durable solutions process as defined by IASC (Box 1). There is, however, no commonly agreed definition of (re)integration. The concept encompasses (re)integration to places of origin, integration to new areas of settlement in countries of origin and/or the integration of people who may have been born or spent

36 Marwah, (2018). The Global Compacts: A Primer.

Box 1. The IASC Framework on Durable Solutions

The IASC Framework highlights eight criteria that are to be used in considering whether durable solutions have been achieved.

- safety and security
- adequate standard of living
- access to livelihoods
- restoration of housing, land and property
- access to documentation
- family reunification
- participation in public affairs
- access to effective remedies and justice

their entire lives in exile and who are encountering their country of origin for the first time.

Study objectives, methodology and scope

Undertaken as a global partnership between the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), with support from ECHO's Enhanced Response Capacity, the report reflects the three agencies' commitment to promoting durable solutions for displacement-affected populations.

The research has been anchored in the specialised guidance of three platforms at the regional and country level: the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP) in Central Asia, the regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, and the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) in the Middle East in relation to the Syrian displacement crisis. These platforms work to promote collaborative and collective research, learning and policy development within their respective regions of influence.

The study addresses gaps in knowledge on (re)integration by focusing on lessons from operational practices in Afghanistan and Somalia. While the lessons from this study are also relevant to Syrian returns, it must also be recognised that, in the Syrian context, spontaneous refugee returns are occurring on a very small scale and under conditions widely regarded as not being conducive to safe, voluntary or dignified return.³⁷ The study aims to inform programming and policy beyond these three contexts, as a global report that advocates for (re)integration to be mainstreamed in global policy discussions, regional commitments, and national and local planning to support returnees and communities of return.

The study included empirical research in host countries (Kenya, Jordan and Lebanon), as well as return settings in Afghanistan (Kabul and Jalalabad) and

This report answers the following questions:

How can preparedness be effectively addressed and what lessons can be drawn from the operational response on return and (re)integration to urban areas in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria?

1. **Factors:** What factors influence return patterns and sustainable (re)integration? Which factors are common and which are divergent across the three contexts?
2. **Lessons on sustainable (re)integration:** How can returnees, receiving communities, governments and organisations be more effectively prepared so as to lay the ground and work towards sustainable (re)integration? What has worked and what could work?

The research uses two primary lenses:

- **Returns to urban areas that are not people's places of origin:** The idea of refugees returning home is often misconceived. For the many who do not return to their areas of origin, return can mark the beginning of a long process of establishing new social and economic networks in new urban communities. The research analyses the significance of return to urban centres that are not their areas of origin on returnees' prospects for (re) integration.
- **Gender and age:** Women and youth are among the groups that are most impacted by return, yet (re)integration programmes are often neither gender- nor youth-sensitive. This research explores the implications of return and (re)integration on young and on female returnees with a view to informing (re)integration programming.

37 UNHCR (2018c). Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy: Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria.

Table 1. Research Tools Used for Empirical Data Collection

Data collection	Workshops	Key informant interviews	Focus group discussions	Household case studies	Operational case studies
Afghanistan (Kabul and Jalalabad)	1	36	10	5	2
Somalia (Mogadishu, Kismayo, Nairobi)	-	36	11	1	2
Syria (Amman and Beirut)	1	20	-	8	-
Global (Geneva, Nairobi)	1	10	-	-	-
TOTAL	3	102	21	14	4

Somalia (Mogadishu and Kismayo), with a specific focus on urban areas with high levels of return. A qualitative methodology was adopted, as summarised in Table 1.

The empirical work was grounded in a thorough literature review, examining over 150 pieces of secondary literature from academia, the grey literature, project documents and media sources across the three contexts and globally. These were ranked according to their relevance to the study theme and were used to determine both the state of knowledge on (re)integration and the existing knowledge gaps. For a detailed methodology, refer to Annex 1.

Context of return and (re)integration

Global context

The literature and discussions around return have grown since the 1960s,³⁸ culminating, in recent years, in a global call for standards and agreement on suitable conditions for return and (re)integration.³⁹ These trends have informed the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Global Compact for Migration or GCM) and, to a certain extent, the Global Compact on Refugees (or GCR).⁴⁰ The GCR addresses the gaps between asylum and responsibility-sharing, expanding the commitments by states to support not

only asylum seekers within their own borders, but also to support states that, by default of “*geography and proximity to crisis*”, have found themselves bearing a disproportionate responsibility for refugees.⁴¹

When it comes to return, the GCR calls for stakeholders to support policies, investments and programmes that can “*facilitate the socioeconomic (re)integration*” of refugees and their “*integration in national development planning*”.⁴² The GCR suggests ways of supporting countries of origin to enable returns in safety and dignity (objective 4), and reminds stakeholders that it should be “*an overriding priority to promote enabling conditions for voluntary repatriation*”.⁴³ In this way, the GCR seeks to support and incentivise the implementation of existing principles through responsibility-sharing agreements. These commitments are in the early stages of implementation.

Globally, returns are subject to fluctuating political contexts, are often involuntary, and may sometimes be in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.⁴⁴ Surveys capturing refugee intentions highlight this concern: in 2014, fewer than 3% of Dadaab residents wanted to return to Somalia,⁴⁵ 84% of Afghans surveyed in Pakistan in 2011 wanted to stay,⁴⁶ and 85% of Syrians surveyed in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon in 2018 did not intend to return within 12 months.⁴⁷ However, returns still occurred in each of these contexts.

The politicisation of returns has operational implications. Not least is whether and how operational

38 Cassarino (2004). Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited.

39 UNGA/Sutherland (2017). Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Migration.

40 UN (2018a). Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration; UN (2018b). Global Compact on Refugees.

41 Betts (2018). The Global Compact on Refugees: Towards a Theory of Change? 623–626; see: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eey056>

42 UN (2018b). Global Compact on Refugees; see: <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4>

43 UNHCR (2019c). Global Compact on Refugees: Indicator Framework; see: <https://www.unhcr.org/5cf907854.pdf>

44 Human Rights Watch (2017); Human Rights Watch (2011). Malaysia/China: Prevent Forced Return of Uighurs; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Hathaway (2014). Non-Refoulement in A World of Cooperative Deterrence

45 UNHCR/IOM (2014). Joint Return Intention Survey Report 2014

46 UNHCR (2012). Population Profiling, Verification and Response Survey of Afghans in Pakistan 2011, 15

47 UNHCR (2018a). Fourth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees’ Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria (RPIS).



The local market in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia, 2014. © Axel Fassio / DRC

agencies should engage. The humanitarian imperative requires humanitarian organisations to respond where there is need – including to support returnees. This includes establishing whether conditions in countries of potential repatriation are conducive to safe and dignified return.⁴⁸ Research further highlights the need to support sustainable (re)integration for returnees in these difficult circumstances.⁴⁹

Country contexts

Returns to Afghanistan have occurred against a backdrop of increasing conflict and civilian deaths⁵⁰ and growing internal displacement due to conflict and drought. In Afghanistan, 2016 saw a surge in returns, with over 1 million documented and undocumented returns

from Iran and Pakistan; in 2017, this number dropped to just over 610,000, only to go up again in 2018, with over 800,000 undocumented returnees alone, according to IOM.⁵¹ Refugee returns are adding to existing numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Governments' diminishing appetite for hosting refugees, especially at a regional level, have exacerbated pressures to return, often leaving Afghan refugees with no other choice. The Afghan government has expanded its efforts to include (re)integration as a national policy priority and to mainstream refugee (re)integration in its national development plans.

In Somalia, protracted internal and cross-border displacement, rather than return, dominated mobility narratives in the 1990s and 2000s, although hundreds of thousands of spontaneous and organised refugee

48 ICRC (n.d.). The ICRC's position regarding the issue of returns to Syria.

49 See Koser and Kuschminder (2015) *Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants*; Carr (2014). *Returning 'Home': Experiences of Reintegration for Asylum Seekers and Refugees*; Stigter (2006). *Livelihoods Upon Return: Afghan Migratory Strategies – An Assessment of Repatriation and Sustainable Return in Response to the Convention Plus*, 109–122; Black and Gent (2006). *Sustainable return in post-conflict settings*, 15–38

50 UNAMA (2019). *Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019*.

51 IOM (2018). *Return of Undocumented Afghans. Weekly Situation Report, Jan–Dec 2018*; IOM/UNHCR (2018). *Returns to Afghanistan in 2017: Joint IOM–UNHCR Summary Report*, 4.

returns to Somaliland and South-Central Somalia occurred over this period. A voluntary repatriation programme signed in 2013⁵² was ramped up in 2016 as part of efforts to close Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. This was in spite of a food security crisis – coupled with insecurity and conflict – verging on famine, and widespread concerns that Somali refugees were being returned involuntarily to places not conducive to return and with very limited absorption capacities. Since 2016, returns from Kenya have dropped significantly. In 2018, only 7,559 refugees returned from Kenya to Somalia, according to UNHCR – a huge drop in 2017, when 35,403 returned.⁵³ In 2019, the Kenyan government renewed its intention to close the camp. Refugees in Dadaab remain in a situation of protracted displacement, with no right to work or move, while local populations depend on the refugees' presence for their well-being and livelihoods.

Different factors are at play in Syria. Although humanitarian organisations still do not consider the situation suitable for safe returns, there have been some limited increases in refugee returns since 2016.⁵⁴ In 2017–2018, UNHCR recorded almost 107,000 Syrians returning spontaneously from Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan. Although defined as self-organised returns, in some contexts, these were in fact facilitated by host governments, non-state entities and private individuals – humanitarian actors have not been involved. While Syrians may want to return eventually, in part due to the lack of prospects as well as experiences of discrimination in exile, humanitarian organisations and UNHCR do not consider that conditions for a safe, voluntary and dignified return currently exist.⁵⁵ A 2018 report acknowledges that, *“talking too early about or funding assistance programmes that intentionally or incidentally encourage returns to Syria – where fighting still rages, income generating opportunities are rare, access to services is scarce, and durable solutions are lacking – may result in unintended harmful outcomes.”*⁵⁶

Structure of the report

This report speaks to two audiences:

- an audience of governmental, civil society, inter-governmental, non-governmental and other international practitioners working to improve humanitarian and development operational and policy approaches to (re)integration based on principled action
- an audience of policy-makers working on the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees

It is structured around three core parts:

- **Part A** sets the scene by introducing the global context, the concepts and the case studies on which the rest of the report is based. It makes a case for linking operational lessons learnt to the global calls for responsibility-sharing, to accompany the implementation of the GCR. It continues by providing an overview and synthesis of existing trends and factors influencing return and (re)integration (Chapter I).
- **Part B** presents ten lessons learnt across three phases that link return with sustainable (re)integration. These phases are preparedness for return (Chapter II), immediate support to return (Chapter III) and long-term support for sustainable (re)integration (Chapter IV). These lessons are broken down across three chapters, with examples of emerging or good practices that can be scaled and replicated across contexts. This part represents the bulk of the research and of the insights gathered from practitioners and communities on their experiences of (re)integration programming.
- **Part C** concludes on global implications and recommendations to improve practice on returns and (re)integration (Chapter V).

52 A tripartite agreement, Governing the Voluntary Repatriation of Somali Refugees Living in Kenya, was signed between the governments of Kenya and Somalia, with UNHCR, in 2013; see: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5285e0294.pdf>

53 UNHCR (2019b). Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Kenya – Statistical Summary as of 31 January 2019, 10; see: <https://www.unhcr.org/ke/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/02/Kenya-Statistics-Package-January-2019.pdf>

54 DSP (2017a). Unsafe but Home: Returns to Jarablus and Tell Abiad

55 DSP (2017a). Unsafe but Home: Returns to Jarablus and Tell Abiad; DSP (2017b). Returns: Voluntary, Safe and Sustainable? Case study of returns to Jarablus and Tell Abiad, Syria; El Gantri and El Mufti (2017). Not Without Dignity: Views of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon on Displacement, Conditions of Return, and Coexistence.

56 Samuel Hall (2018). Syria's Spontaneous Returns, 6.

Key factors influencing return and (re)integration and implications for programming

Factors that influence return patterns and sustainable (re)integration

Why are refugees returning?

Politics is a significant factor driving refugee returns. Host governments often have a political interest in reducing the number of refugees on their territory and asylum space, an interest that may be linked to economic and security considerations. The European response to the refugee crisis triggered a shift in state response to refugees' needs globally. This response, which intensified the negative rhetoric surrounding refugees and migrants and increased the number of returns and deportations, has been mimicked in other regions. In Afghanistan, involuntary returns from Pakistan and Iran continue and, in some cases, are increasing.⁵⁷ Somali returns from Dadaab in 2016–2018 occurred in a context of diminished rations and allegations of harassment by officials,⁵⁸ and there are signs of increasing pressures in some of the countries hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees.

The political and conflict situation in countries of origin also continues to play a role in influencing decisions to return; this is particularly true when it comes to decision-making on who will return first and how. Split and circular returns provide a popular option for families to balance political pressures to return from host countries against concerns about security in the country of origin. As frequently expressed in focus group discussions (FGDs), one family member will usually return home first, before deciding if it is safe for the rest of the family to join them. Although conflict is not the sole source of insecurity at home, ongoing and existing conflict patterns in countries of origin still have a significant impact on refugees' considerations about

whether to return. In all three countries in the study – Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia – conflict patterns are recurrent and have not ceased. Whether conditions are suitable for returns in these three locations remains questionable, even as returns are ongoing.

However, while safety and suitability for return play a role in decision-making, a more significant factor in these considerations is the condition of life in the host country. Syrian families interviewed for this study in Lebanon highlighted the negative hosting situation as a driver for return, many of them articulating a feeling that, at this point, things cannot be worse in Syria than they are already in Lebanon. As one Syrian mother in Lebanon describes it: *"I hear that things are OK in Aleppo but I am most concerned about the safety of my children, as I have heard about [the] kidnapping of kids on the streets [there]. Mostly, because of the lack of [the] proper rule of law and the chaos that has taken over Syria since the conflict. But I am also worried about their safety here, in Shatila, given how the streets are rough and they are exposed to constant risks... My kids do not get any sun in the camps; they are stranded in the one room when I am working. I have no support system. I see their health is suffering. And they are not as well as they could be."*

Afghan FGD participants who have returned from Pakistan, as well as Somali returnees from Dadaab, also highlight challenging living conditions in hosting countries. The data reveals that specific reasons for leaving a host country include a combination of the following: forced evictions, overcrowded housing or camps, abuse from police and harassment from local authorities, a lack of educational opportunities for refugee children (in Pakistan) and a lack of work opportunities, all combined with, and in some cases a consequence of, political pressure for refugees to return.

Returnees, therefore, *"place more importance on push-factors in the place of displacement, such as a deterioration in the economic or security situation or a lack of assistance/basic services"*, rather than on an

57 Human Rights Watch (2017).

58 WFP (2017). WFP Cuts Food Rations For Refugees In Kenya Amidst Funding Shortfalls; Nyamori (2018). Kenya: Global Compact on Refugees must be quickly anchored in national policy.

actual improvement of the situation at home.⁵⁹ Similar concerns at play in Somalia and Afghanistan have, in the past, resulted in a number of actors questioning the degree to which these returns were entirely voluntary.⁶⁰ Negative drivers of return may leave refugees with only bad options, leading to a reluctant return, which, while perhaps not physically coerced, may not be actively desired or entirely voluntary either.

Refugees find themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place: on the one hand, staying in a host country that has limited resources (and, sometimes, limited political will) to implement dignified and long-term living conditions, in a context where resettlement is hoped for but extremely unlikely; on the other hand, return to a country of origin where conflict remains unresolved and return conditions are uncertain.

What is the current state of (re)integration support?

For refugees who do make the decision to return, the journey does not end on arrival in the country of origin, but continues long into the (re)integration process. Achieving sustainable (re)integration depends on a variety of factors, including the specific destinations of return, the availability and strength of networks in these locations, and the gender and age of the returnees. Yet, these factors are rarely prioritised in return and (re)integration programming, which often centres on immediate challenges rather than longer-term efforts. There remains a significant gap in accountability for people who often return involuntarily with expectations and promises that are unfulfilled.

Approaches to support for return and (re)integration have varied significantly, and these different experiences highlight important implications for whether and how returnees can be supported:

- In **Afghanistan**, status rather than need has framed (re)integration support, with key informants adding that support remains reactive to emergency needs rather than reflective of long-term programming.⁶¹ The approach is also characterised by a short-term humanitarian engagement that is disconnected from wider development efforts to include returnees in national development agendas.

- In **Somalia**, the focus has been on durable solutions,⁶² with area- rather than status-based approaches. Working towards collective outcomes for displacement-affected communities has been identified by government and other stakeholders as central to achieving durable solutions. Consortia programming approaches are gaining in importance as they allow partners with different strengths and areas of expertise to work together to address gaps. Despite such efforts to address humanitarian–development divides, however, humanitarian agencies continue to provide much of the support to returnees, while gaps remain in transitioning from return towards sustainable (re)integration. Another gap has been in measuring sustainable (re)integration among durable solutions actors.
- In **Syria**, returns have yet to occur on a significant scale. The humanitarian and development communities have used the period between the current situation of displacement and possible large-scale future returns to create coordination mechanisms and standards for ensuring that preparations do not overtake the need for sustained protection in refugee-hosting countries.⁶³ These have not yet been tested; essentially, organisations are working with several unknowns as the timing, scale, locations and key actors who may be involved remain to be determined.

Across these contexts, the support offered for (re)integration is consistently insufficient, especially in the context of Syria, where few NGOs have access and where information is often unverifiable. ADSP’s recent review of the evidence around displacement in Afghanistan also notes that existing research on the topic focuses thematically on “*access to economic opportunities for displaced Afghans, followed by access to land and housing and access to legal and civil rights*”.⁶⁴ Little attention has been given to the social dimension and needs for sustainable (re)integration. Significant informational gaps exist pre- and post-return. Returnees gather information prior to return primarily from personal networks, and informational support available in the country of origin mostly relates to migration, rather than (re)integration.

59 H NAP (2019). Returnee Return Series. Part 2: Demographic and Socio-economic Conditions, 17.

60 Human Rights Watch (2016). Though returns from Kenya have decreased, as previously noted, the threat of Dadaab’s closure continues to impact choices. A 2019 NRC article notes: “The threat of the Kenyan government closing Dadaab refugee complex after almost 30 years is also a determining factor on why young refugees decide to leave [Kenya].” NRC (2019). Leaving safety, returning home to fear.

61 OCHA (2017). Afghanistan: Returnee Crisis Situation Report No. 6, 2.

62 ReDSS (2019). Annual Report 2018.

63 See UNHCR (2018c) Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy: Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria, which has been expanded upon by NGOs to identify which activities are currently permissible without incentivising returns.

64 ADSP (2018). Solutions to Afghan Displacement: A Rapid Review of the Evidence, 22.

Finally, the politics of return has a significant impact on whether (re)integration support can be funded or implemented, and whether these gaps can be filled. Because states tend to be more focused on getting refugees to leave their territory, the attention of host or potential resettlement countries tends to fade beyond their own borders, while less attention and support is given to what happens after. Evidence from Afghanistan⁶⁵ and Somalia⁶⁶ shows that returnees are likely to have unsupported displacement-related vulnerabilities long after their return. **Returnees who become internally displaced, who eke out a living in squatter camps or who are forced to move again cannot be considered as having found a durable solution to their displacement.**⁶⁷

Factors that affect refugees' return choices and (re)integration across contexts

Return aspirations and expectations

Return trends are driven, in great part, by changing governmental priorities, conditions in host countries and those in countries of origin. Despite variations in contexts, aspirations and expectations are common.

When possible, refugees want to keep options open. Potential support, in return, can be weighed against keeping their legal status in exile. Return – like all mobility – is a strategy deployed across family



Handover of the new court in Gedweyne Community, Dollow Somalia, 2014. © Axel Fassio / DRC

65 DRC/Mixed Migration Centre (2019). Distant Dreams: Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees.

66 Sturridge, Bakewell and Hammond (2018).

67 Crisp and Long (2016).

networks to manage risks and opportunities associated with displacement. FGD participants in Somalia highlight a common dynamic of returning to “see if they can succeed” without giving up the safety net of camps (where their wider family is still based) if they cannot achieve this success. Similarly, Syrian families interviewed for this study emphasise the importance of flexibility in their return journey, of being able to move back and forth between host and origin countries in order to make better return decisions and to keep options open if conditions in a return area worsen or do not meet expectations.

Returns are often staggered or split to maximise employment, access to services and other opportunities available to the household across contexts, and to take into account safety concerns specific to individual family members; for instance, in the case of Syrian men who may be conscripted if they return, but whose female family members may return home to reunite with family.⁶⁸ While this is a common situation, the decision is not an easy one, and many families interviewed express anxiety around this separation and the stress it causes their families. As one Syrian father explains about his wife and children returning before him: *“The biggest challenge will be constantly worrying about them. I will be spending every moment of the day worried about them. That is why I would rather not send them at all... But I can’t do much as my wife wants to leave and their education has suffered here. It is a difficult choice.”* In some cases, the success of this strategy itself may be mixed: family separation has been shown to lead to greater vulnerability in cases where families have not had the time to adequately prepare for this separation.⁶⁹

Some returns are circular, with returnees migrating back to their host country, once or many times over a period of time,⁷⁰ either as a planned strategy, or as a coping mechanism in the face of unexpected difficulties. The re-return to Iran or Pakistan for Afghan returnees, or for Somali returnees back to Kenya, show that return is not a one-directional process. However, re-migration to the host country to be with family may conflict with sustainable economic and social factors, such as access to safe housing and stable employment opportunities.⁷¹ FGD participants in all three contexts describe shelter needs and employment opportunities as key reasons for

the continued back-and-forth movement between host and origin settings.

Voluntary returns are often based on limited, outdated or even inaccurate information, with many relying on anecdotal information from family and friends. FGD participants in Afghanistan and Somalia frequently highlight the loss of trust, disillusionment and regret that occurs when this information is incomplete or inaccurate. One Somali FGD participant expressed a common sentiment, stating, *“I would go back [to Dadaab] if I had the money... My life has been difficult in Mogadishu. If someone would pay for my life somewhere else, I would take that opportunity and go and not come back because I feel that I was tricked to come back and not given everything I was promised.”* There is a clear need for accurate and neutral information to assist potential returnees in making truly voluntary decisions.

Programming and political return agreements, as they currently stand, often do not take into account the human and family dilemmas that refugees consider carefully prior to their return; this programming and these agreements, when they do exist, are often linear and do not provide the flexibility required for dignified decision-making.

In addition to these common return hopes and decision-making processes, subgroups have specific needs that must be taken into account when designing programming. The following sections explore the existing information around population subgroups that have been identified in the literature and our research as being particularly vulnerable: returnees **not in their areas of origin**, female returnees and youth returnees.

Returns to urban areas that are not areas of origin

Access to strong social networks in locations of return is key to (re)integration. Returnees often move to urban areas when they cannot find opportunities or security elsewhere.⁷² When they move, their hopes may be high and not aligned with the reality on the ground.⁷³ The literature shows that returnees who move to urban areas that are not their place of origin face increased (re)integration challenges.⁷⁴

68 Majidi (2017). From Forced Migration to Forced Returns in Afghanistan: Policy and Program Implications.

69 REACH (2018). Fragmented Families Assessment, 2–3.

70 O’Neil (2003). Discussion on Migration and Development: Using Remittances and Circular Migration as Drivers for Development.

71 Key informant interview, UN-Habitat, Housing, Land and Property Task Force, Eastern Region Coordinator, Jalalabad (April 2019).

72 APRRN (2018). Afghanistan Remains Unsuitable and Unsafe for Returning Refugees. Statement, 1; see: http://aprrn.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/APRRN_Statement_Afghanistan_14May2018_FINAL.pdf

73 Sturridge, Bakewell and Hammond (2018).

74 Depending on the context and conditions abroad. One key informant (UNICEF Afghanistan) noted, “For children who grew up in Pakistan, and they come back to the village of their parents, with no facilities, no electricity, it’s a desert. It’s very difficult to adapt to this... maybe in the city it is better with more facilities, easier for them to adapt. In big cities, the youth can adapt better.”

Returnees to urban areas not of origin have more limited social networks. This, in turn, makes it more difficult to find adequate employment or to start a business, as access to labour markets and decent work opportunities is often mediated through family and community networks who have built foundations of trust in their area.⁷⁵ One Somali participant described his struggle: *“It is the most difficult for people like us, who know no one here; the people we knew are either all dead or have moved elsewhere. Trust is a major concern in Mogadishu, and if you are new and have nobody who knows you, people would not trust you as much.”* Subsequent focus group discussions in Somalia echo this sentiment, finding that those who return to urban centres without networks often struggle to find adequate shelter and may end up in IDP camps, which leads to diminished access to opportunities for long-term reintegration.⁷⁶

Returnees who wish to return to areas where they do have a strong social network – particularly those who are originally from more rural parts of the country – may also face difficulties accessing livelihoods opportunities, as there are simply fewer of these in more rural areas. Returnees may find themselves in a catch-22 situation, having to choose between returning to non-urban areas of origin, where social networks may be strong but economic opportunities limited, and settling in urban areas where economic opportunities may be greater in number but social networks will be weak.⁷⁷ Fostering social capital in contexts where returnees are returning to a new area is crucial to facilitating access to livelihoods and improving social cohesion, mental health and overall well-being.⁷⁸

Skills are key to addressing livelihood challenges and building sustainable (re)integration: if they do not have skills adapted to the local context, returnees will have difficulty reintegrating in urban areas. Originally rural FGD participants in Afghanistan, for instance, describe difficulties learning the skills needed for adapting to urban life, and the disadvantage this puts them at when compared to their urban-raised counterparts.⁷⁹ However, limited data exists about the actual skills and capacities

that returnees bring with them, and whether they do in fact meet the needs of their context, making it difficult to design evidence-based programming around this.

Limited land and housing, in what are rapidly urbanising environments, are major impediments to (re)integration. Land titles (where they exist) have, in some cases, dated to previous generations, making it unclear where and if returnees will be able to return to their former homes.⁸⁰ **Improving infrastructure and security, therefore, represents a critical means of support for hosts and returnees, thereby promoting integration.** Host community members who took part in focus group discussions in urban areas of Afghanistan generally speak positively of renting to returnees or supporting family members by sharing a house.

In these circumstances, **the importance of fostering social capital in contexts where returnees are returning to a new area, as well as building opportunities outside of urban areas, is crucial.**⁸¹

Youth returnees

Youth are rarely considered a separate category in assistance, even though they represent one of the largest population categories in our three contexts. Smaller-scale research highlights the fact that the situations and experiences of youth on return often differ from those of older family members.⁸²

The literature suggests that the involvement of youth in decision-making and their enthusiasm for return is “mixed”.⁸³ Although some youth are among the most eager to return – for example, young Somali refugees in Kenya *“express motivation and hopes for a drastic change in their lives upon return, through access to jobs”*⁸⁴ – youth who were reluctant to return, and especially those who have been deported, experience severe disillusionment and loss of hope.⁸⁵ How decisions to return were made, therefore, has a significant impact on the ability of the returnee to (re)integrate and adjust, particularly from a psychological and social perspective.

For youth as well as children, in many cases, a return home is not actually a return to any recognised home; in

75 Samuel Hall (2016). Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul.

76 Note that, on return, even those with networks may struggle due to the relatively weak absorption capacity of many of these networks.

77 World Bank/UNHCR (2019), 18.

78 DDG underlines the importance of “building trust between groups of people” in fostering social cohesion. DDG (2018a). Presentation of Social Cohesion – Programme Mainstreaming.

79 Nicolle (2018). Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in the National Education Systems of Iran and Pakistan. UNESCO.

80 Key informant interview, NRC (2019).

81 DDG underlines the importance of “building trust between groups of people” in fostering social cohesion. DDG (2018a). Presentation of Social Cohesion – Programme Mainstreaming.

82 Save the Children/Samuel Hall (2018). From Europe to Afghanistan: Experiences of Child Returnees.

83 UNHCR/Samuel Hall (2015). Towards Durable Solutions: Expectations vs. Reality – Perceptions of unassisted returns to Somalia.

84 UNHCR/Samuel Hall (2015).

85 Save the Children Samuel/Hall (2018), 39.

both the Afghan and Somali contexts, many may have never been to their country of origin. (Re)integration can, therefore, be additionally challenging on several levels.

- From a **security perspective**, youth face specific risks and challenges. In Syria, fear of conscription or imprisonment on return prevents young men from returning.⁸⁶ In Somalia, young men face forced recruitment by Al-Shabaab,⁸⁷ while a recent study found that youth – whether displaced or not – express fears of Al-Shabaab-related violence, inter-clan or gender-based violence, and theft.⁸⁸
- **Linguistically**, many young returnees experience communication issues, as youth who have grown up in their countries of asylum may find themselves struggling to gain fluency in their native language on return.
- **Culturally**, youth who have grown up abroad may be perceived negatively, as posing a cultural threat to the status quo. Cultural differences can have implications on social and economic inclusion but may also give rise to new risks for returnees, which should be carefully considered in advance of return. UNHCR lists, in the risk profiles in its Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, “individuals perceived as ‘westernised’”.⁸⁹ In Somalia, one returnee explains, “Another major challenge facing youth is the inability to integrate due to cultural barriers; the acceptable dress code in Somalia is different to... Kenya.”⁹⁰ This causes some youth to withdraw socially, or to engage mostly with other returnees. In some cases, youth may have more positive inclusion opportunities; radio dialogues in Somalia, for instance, have found that youth are more likely to call for socially cohesive approaches to support.⁹¹
- In terms of **mental health**, youth returnees to Afghanistan and Somalia have described needs that

have been worsened by limited support and difficult (re)integration experiences.⁹² Research on returnees to Somalia found that contrasts between their actual and imagined life abroad and return to Somalia led many to exhibit signs of stress, anger and other symptoms.⁹³ It is likely that young people returning to Syria will face similar challenges; IRC has found that over half of Syria’s population needs mental health support.⁹⁴

- **Educationally**, young people face challenges in over-extended education systems, or may experience financial constraints to enrolment,⁹⁵ even as many see education as a key pathway for youth (re)integration. Just 61% of returnee households in Afghanistan were found to send all boys in the household to school, while 37% sent all their girls to school.⁹⁶ Some students face difficulties adapting to new curricula, a lower standard of schooling, the language of instruction, or a lack of access to higher education facilities in their place of origin or return. These challenges have impeded returns to Somalia, with families separating so their young ones can continue to benefit from the widely perceived higher quality of education in Kenya.⁹⁷ One Afghan returnee interviewed for this study also stresses the necessity of education: “Youth should be provided with a great education environment and employment opportunities, as they are the main difficulties... Without educational documents, they cannot get employed.”

Despite the additional challenges that returning youth face, they bring opportunities to their countries of origin – if well integrated and given the possibility to develop and build relevant skills. In Afghanistan, for example, youth returnees stress their desire to contribute locally to their country, but are frustrated by the lack of skills or means to do so.⁹⁸ **Youth are underserved by both humanitarian and national assistance on return:** support remains concentrated

86 World Bank (2019). The Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis (p.74) notes that “Concerns about the mandatory military conscription for men aged 18-42 remained in place by mid-2018. This policy not only drove the departure of many young men and their families from Syria in the first place, it actively discouraged their return. Recent legislation has further complicated this issue. As of 2017, fines of up to \$8,000 could be levied on male youth that do not register for military service within three months of turning 18.”

87 DDG (2017), 22.

88 DDG (2018b). Baseline Assessment: “The Time is Now”, Strengthening Police Accountability and Access to Justice in Somalia, 24.

89 UNHCR (2018e). UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 46.

90 UNHCR/Samuel Hall (2015), 28.

91 ReDSS/Africa’s Voices (2019). Common Social Accountability Platform, 32, 55.

92 Refugee Support Network (2016). After Return: Documenting the Experiences of Young People Forcibly Removed to Afghanistan, 36.

93 Samuel Hall (2015a). Summary report – Returns to Somalia: Setting Protection and Livelihood Standards, 16.

94 IRC (2018). A look into the mental health crisis in Syria; see: <https://www.rescue.org/article/look-mental-health-crisis-syria>

95 One FGD participant in Afghanistan stressed, “I came here because I knew I would be free here and I was expecting to study here. It is better here now because it is my country and I am free, and it has a lot of good sides to it. I cannot study because of economic problems.”

96 World Bank/UNHCR (2019), 22.

97 UNHCR/Samuel Hall (2015).

98 Majidi (2016). Managing migration remotely: return, (re)integration and re-bordering in Afghanistan, 168.

at household level, meaning that heads of household are more likely to be directly receiving it. As a result, youth are not integrated into institutionalised responses to return and (re)integration or to youth engagement. These returning youth require not just support, but ways of engaging within their communities of return.

Women in return and (re)integration

Women FGD participants highlighted specific challenges that most male respondents seemed to be unaware of or were less affected by. Research that focuses on the (re)integration of women returnees remains limited. An NGO worker interviewed for this study described the situations of returnee women and the gendered challenges they face: *"The sense... from women was the sense of helplessness, which the men didn't talk about. Men were focused on accommodation. Basically, the women, when they described their first few days in the new location [of return], felt they knew nobody. They felt they could relate to no one. You know, 'in this new place, we feel that there is no one to save us from our husbands' – in terms of family violence. So... this is a different perspective."*

Qualitative findings on gender challenges faced by returnee women can, however, be contradictory, and disaggregated data on women's return aspirations and decision-making influence remains scarce. FGDs and previous research highlight the fact that, while male heads of households may have the final say for the entire family, the agreement of all household members, including women, is typically sought, particularly in Syria.⁹⁹ Similarly, in Somalia, women have been found to be key actors in decisions to return, especially in cases of split returns.¹⁰⁰ Interviews with potential female returnees in Lebanon, Afghanistan and Syria indicate that, **in some contexts, women are at least as likely (if not more so) to press for return than men.** As one Afghan woman explains: *"Afghanistan is our homeland and we feel relaxed a thousand times more compared to Pakistan."*

Women often referenced social connections and social norms when discussing return in FGDs. Women living in contexts with significantly greater freedoms than they have or may have had in their area of origin may be reluctant to return. Among the differing opinions of boys and girls regarding return, for example, asylum seekers in Sweden have noted the increased burden for girls being forcibly returned or deported to Afghanistan

after having spent years in countries where their rights were more respected.¹⁰¹ Evidence collected as early as 2001 shows that women and girls have an ambivalent attitude to return to Afghanistan, being vulnerable to harassment for the way they dress or finding that their mobility is more restricted than when they lived in Iran or Pakistan.¹⁰² Women, like youth, may face additional cultural pressures, as some of the behaviours of female returnees are perceived as untraditional and not conforming to social norms.¹⁰³

The context of the host country matters when it comes to these feelings of return. Women refugees in Lebanon, for instance, as well as Afghan and Somali returnees, expressed enthusiasm for return and expressed belief in the value of being with their people, including returning to be closer to family and known community norms. As one Afghan woman we interviewed for this study explained: *"When I was making the decision to return to Afghanistan, I discussed it with my husband... I thought, if my husband dies, I will be on my own, and [the] people of the community were Pakistanis. It would be better to return to our country before my husband dies; at least my compatriots would help me a little bit."*

Entering a gendered situation on return

The limited data shows that, on return, women generally face additional barriers to accessing support and livelihoods opportunities, in great part due to a lack of documentation and restricted spheres of mobility. These barriers present specific (re)integration challenges for female returnees:

- **Barriers to accessing support are often higher for women, even when programming is targeted towards them.** Particularly, in the most traditional segments of society, the traditional division of labour in the private sphere is replicated in the public sphere, often restricting both the mobility and ability of women to access assistance.¹⁰⁴ Female focus group participants frequently commented on the mobility restrictions they faced due to social pressures. One female FGD participant describes this as follows: *"Women face challenges because they cannot go out alone to buy stuff and they are harassed on the street. They are also harassed by their neighbours [who talk behind their backs]."*
- **In addition, women and girls, as well as people with disabilities, may face barriers to accessing**

99 IMPACT Initiatives (2018). Picking up the pieces: Realities of return and (re)integration in North-East Syria, 25.

100 UNHCR/Samuel Hall (2015).

101 Save the Children/Samuel Hall (2018), 42.

102 Azerbaijani-Moghadam (2001). Report on Interviews with Returnee Women and Girls in Herat Province, Afghanistan.

103 APPRO (2018). Return Migration and Fundamental Rights in Afghanistan: Perceptions and Practices, 15–16.

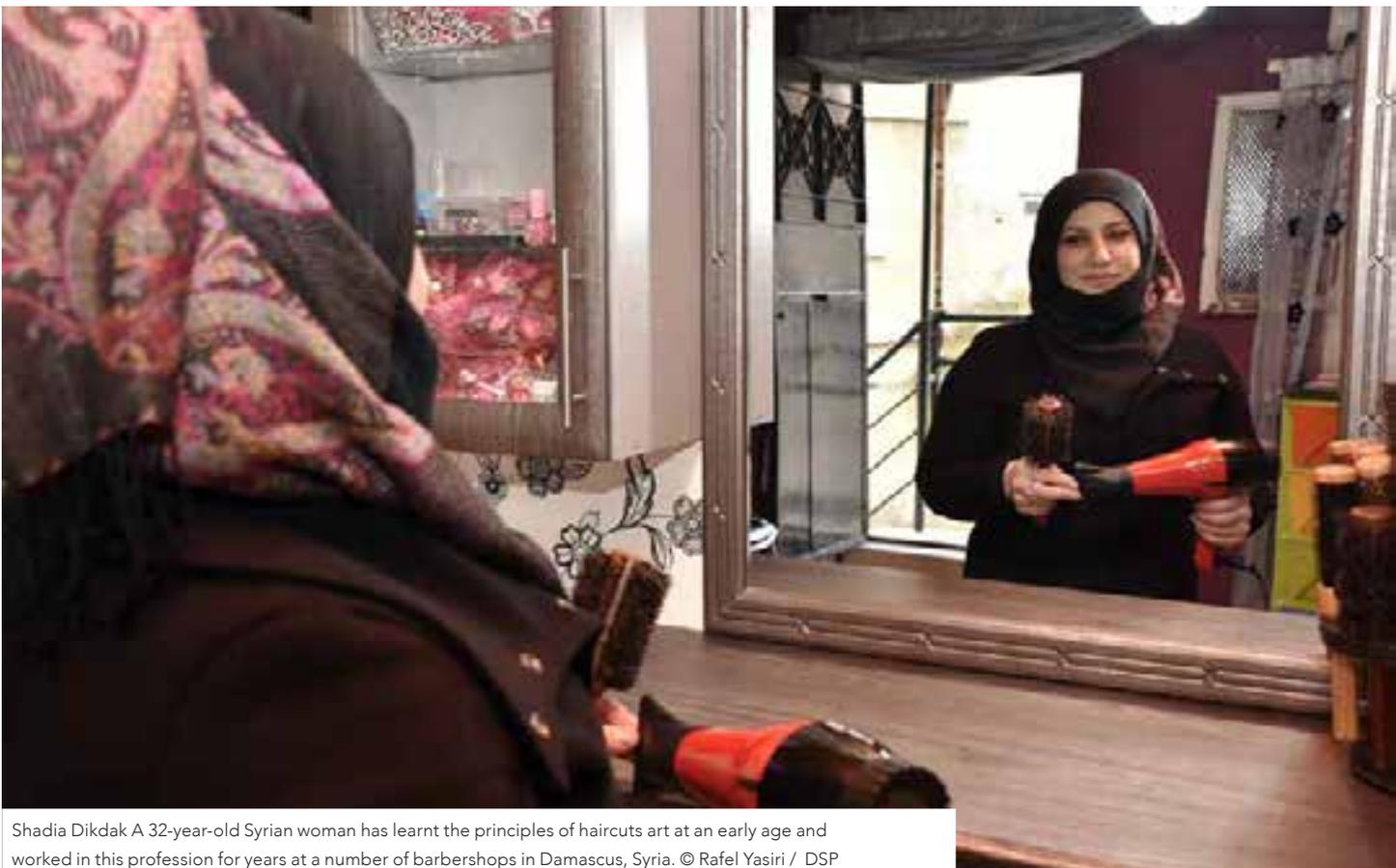
104 OCHA (2019). 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic

information, education, community participation and decision-making at all levels.¹⁰⁵ Social norms negatively impact female returnees even where economic opportunities are positive. In Somalia, although returnee women may actually be perceived as being more employable than men, this does not result in stronger (re)integration: male community members and returnees complained, in FGDs, that female employment has undermined traditional roles and upset family dynamics. Greater exposure to the workplace has, therefore, not necessarily improved women's bargaining power or position in society.¹⁰⁶

- **Challenges in accessing civil documentation has a multiplier effect on access to other services (education and, in some cases, health services)¹⁰⁷ and fulfilling basic needs (for example, shelter).** In the Syrian context, for example, marriages abroad may not have been properly registered.¹⁰⁸ Without the required certificate, couples may be unable to

get birth certificates for their children. This can also prevent widows or women who have been separated from their husbands from claiming marital property.¹⁰⁹ In Afghanistan, only half of refugee returnee women and less than half of IDP returnee women possess a tazkera (official identification document).¹¹⁰

- **Understanding gendered challenges is made difficult by a lack of data disaggregation, which can obscure women's experiences of (re)integration.** For example, research on return migrants and perceptions of rights on return in Afghanistan indicate that perceptions and practices of family rights differ significantly between return migrants from Iran and those from Pakistan, as well as non-migrants, but makes no mention of the challenges faced by women.¹¹¹ However, while it may be anecdotally clear that challenges are gendered, when case data is only available at a broader level, it remains unclear how this links to displacement.



Shadia Dikdak A 32-year-old Syrian woman has learnt the principles of haircuts art at an early age and worked in this profession for years at a number of barbershops in Damascus, Syria. © Rafel Yasiri / DSP

105 OCHA (2019), 33.

106 Sturridge, Bakewell and Hammond (2018), 28.

107 NRC/Samuel Hall (2014). Strengthening Displaced Women's Housing, Land and Property Rights in Afghanistan.

108 NRC (2017c). Syrian refugees' right to legal identity: implications for return, 3.

109 NRC (2017c).

110 NRC/Samuel Hall (2014).

111 APPRO (2018). Return Migration and Fundamental Rights in Afghanistan: Perceptions and Practices, 25.

Implications for programming: what stakeholders do not know

Gaps in the literature can be explained by difficult political or social contexts, the limited appetite for local integration as a durable solution and the lack of donor interest to fund longitudinal research in return settings. The previous sections explored the existing information around populations of returnees that are underserved in the assistance system, namely returnees not in their areas of origin, female returnees, and youth returnees. They show that the literature and data are still insufficient to understand their situations and needs in ways that could change the way policies and programmes have been conceived to date. These gaps undermine knowledge about how returnees fare and what type of support may be most beneficial for their (re)integration. Table 2 reviews key gaps in the literature.

Research and knowledge gaps (in particular, around how and where data is collected) exist and are an impediment to designing effective evidence-based programming. Improved data and evidence is explicitly recognised in the GCR as being critical to the development of effective solutions planning.¹¹² In addition, the GCR highlights the role of responsibility-sharing in improving data collection, quality and management, and the importance of building broad consensus on approaches to be taken when it comes to data and evidence. If these plans of action are implemented, the added support that is needed for (re)integration-specific, comparative and longitudinal research can change return policies and programmes and result in a new generation of (re)integration policies and programmes.

Table 2. Data gaps

Category of data gap	Type of data gap
Monitoring and methodological gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public monitoring and evaluation of (re)integration programmes is largely unavailable, limiting learning, accountability and information-sharing. Centralised mapping for returnee (re)integration is not available; information is more commonly aggregated at sectoral level. Breakdown by demographics (including age and gender) is limited. Samples remain limited at household level. Research on returnees with disabilities is limited. Data is short-term and is, at best, limited to the six months post-return. Understanding of progress towards sustainable (re)integration, the factors influencing it, and for whom, is a major gap.
Gaps in trend analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data is unevenly spread between refugee populations: little is known about the plight of returnees who were not recognised as refugees in their countries of exile, spontaneous returnees and returnees from countries where voluntary repatriation agreements are not in place. This makes it more difficult to address their needs through programming. There is limited exploration of specific coping mechanisms linked to return and (re)integration. For instance, data gaps on split family returns and reunification have been highlighted in Somalia.ⁱ There is limited literature on defining when situations are conducive to returns from a human rights perspective, as well as on the appropriateness of returns based on human rights frameworks.
Gaps in geographic coverage	<p>Existing data on returns concentrates on specific contexts within each refugee crisis, to the detriment of other geographic areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Afghanistan, existing research focuses on the situation post-return.ⁱⁱ In Somalia, research on hosting contexts is concentrated on Kenya, despite significant returns from other contexts. There are large numbers of Somali refugees in Ethiopia (181,686 in 2019), and nearly as many Somali refugees in Yemen (250,500 in 2019) as in Kenya (255,754 in 2019).ⁱⁱⁱ In Syria, the literature focused almost exclusively on Lebanon and, to a certain extent, Jordan.

ⁱ ReDSS/Samuel Hall/SDRI (2019).

ⁱⁱ ADSP (2018), 4.

ⁱⁱⁱ UNHCR (2019e). *Horn of Africa: Somalia Situation*; see: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/horn>

112 UN (2018b). *Global Compact on Refugees*.



PART B

Ten lessons learnt
to improve
(re)integration



Preparedness for returns

Having reviewed the factors influencing (re)integration, we turn to the main question of this study: *“How can returnees, receiving communities, governments and organisations be more effectively prepared so as to lay the ground and work towards sustainable (re)integration?”* To answer this question, this chapter presents three lessons learnt based on existing gaps and the steps needed before return takes place.

The GCR is framed as the vehicle through which refugee response can become more holistic and structured, such as by looking at (re)integration from the very beginning. Analysts have long argued that, *“all stakeholders in the process need to prepare effectively for reintegration to succeed... at an individual and institutional level”*.¹¹³ A consensus among key informants is the fact that (re)integration programming starts after return, with insufficient consultation with returnees themselves before they return. Three lessons learnt are set out below to correct these gaps in future (re)integration programming:

1. Redefine who qualifies for assistance as a returnee and benchmarks for identifying conditions for dignified return.
2. Improve information-sharing to allow refugees to make informed and dignified return decisions.
3. Support host countries to provide better hosting conditions in order to more equally share the responsibility for principled return and (re)integration planning.

Across these three areas, we present what works and what can work for a stronger focus on preparedness.

1. Defining who is a returnee and when a situation is conducive to returns

1.1 Who is a returnee?

Political decisions often determine the timing of returns, who qualifies as a returnee and who qualifies for assistance. In countries where refugee registration has been stopped, or where the refugee

status determination system is weak, many who need support may be ineligible to receive it, as they may not be considered to be documented refugees or returnees. Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan and Kenya are examples of settings where a gap in registration has led to populations of undocumented refugees. Partly because of hosting governments’ interest in reducing numbers, formal processes to register refugees are lacking. Additionally, changes in the way refugee registration processes are conducted are not adequately communicated to refugees, resulting in refugees not having documentation that would prove their entitlement to assistance.

Redefining who is a returnee. As well as recognised refugees returning under the umbrella of UNHCR, NRC¹¹⁴ highlights three categories of returnees who may not have formal refugee status but who should be supported before, during and after return:

- individuals and groups who do not have refugee status due to national legislation in the hosting country, but who may meet criteria for refugee status under international law
- individuals and groups who have received protection in a host country through temporary schemes, but whose right to stay under those schemes has expired
- individuals who do not qualify as refugees but who may require protection under the human rights principle of non-refoulement to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment

This expanded definition is critical to developing coherent return operations globally. The lack of equity in return operations is currently illustrated in the unequal assistance given to documented refugees, while others, who may have lost their refugee status or documentation, receive less support.

In recent return movements, Afghan refugees have received different aid packages, depending on their asylum and documentation status, determining whether their support would come from UNHCR or IOM, based on whether they were registered, card-carrying refugees. This distinction created confusing administrative rifts and exacerbated vulnerability. What should have been a single group – that of refugees – became two groups: the documented and the undocumented. This caused tensions within the community as well as impeding the fulfilment of the rights of those who were

¹¹³ Battistella (2018). Return migration: A conceptual and policy framework.

¹¹⁴ NRC (2017a).



Haji Mukhtar (approx. 75, center), originally from eastern Afghanistan, waits for a cash grant to be distributed by IRC. © A Quilty / IRC

undocumented. This confusion obstructed access to clear and unbiased information for many refugees. While the UN humanitarian coordinator (HC) in Afghanistan has requested a commitment to better harmonise the assistance between UNHCR and IOM, fully equalising the two forms of assistance remains challenging and unlikely.

In Somalia, geographic rather than asylum status determines the level of attention or aid provided. Those returning from Dadaab under the repatriation programme are the primary focus of attention, eclipsing spontaneous and other returns from Djibouti, Ethiopia and Yemen. This is despite the fact that the number of spontaneous returns is much higher than that reflected in official statistics and that there is a real need to address these populations. Between 2015 and 2018, UNHCR assisted 82,840 Somalis in returning from Kenya; over 110,000 spontaneous returns from Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti were also recorded, but most did not receive return packages.¹¹⁵

1.2 When is a situation conducive to returns?

The second and crucial dilemma for operational agencies remains engaging with the issues of voluntariness and safety and defining a threshold for conduciveness to return when it comes to supporting both spontaneous and assisted returns.¹¹⁶ UNHCR's joint role as custodian of refugee protection and official counterpart to governments on refugee issues requires a careful balancing act. The importance of avoiding premature and/or forced returns, and of UNHCR's role in influencing these processes, cannot be underestimated. Evidence shows that prematurely induced returns result in increased needs and exposure to risks among returnees, such as cycles of displacement and exile.¹¹⁷ The dilemma is not unique to UNHCR: NGOs must also make difficult judgement calls. Engagement around returns may be viewed as endorsing or incentivising the process, but disengagement can be contrary to the humanitarian imperative to respond. Decisions require

¹¹⁵ Figures provided by NRC, February 2019.

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch (2016).

¹¹⁷ World Bank (2017d).

humanitarian principles to be upheld, ensuring a rights-based, people-centred and principled approach that avoids humanitarian agencies being instrumentalised by political interest.

In some countries, steps have been taken to address this delicate balance. In Somalia, concerns about UNHCR's position over the start of a repatriation process, in 2016, culminated in high-level NGO–UNHCR meetings designed to strengthen mechanisms to support the voluntariness of return. One of the outcomes of these meetings was to acknowledge that NGOs would need to intervene more firmly on protection and assistance to returnees. The landscape on returns has since changed, with multiple durable solutions initiatives and consortia led by NGOs in Somalia.¹¹⁸ However, the process lacked the pre-planning seen in the Syrian context, where minimum thresholds for returns were established. This had not happened in either Afghanistan or Somalia, and will need to be applied across future return operations.

1.3 Lessons from Syria: thresholds and parameters for returns

In what is seen as a principled step in relation to Syria, UNHCR has published 22 protection thresholds to be met before repatriation can be facilitated (see Box 2). This approach may face significant tests in the coming months and years, amid questions from operational

agencies working on Syria asking how to maintain collective adherence and the triggers for engagement. However, it is a result of and can be supported by strong inter-agency advocacy on returns to Syria to ensure these thresholds can be met.

How to engage when refugees return voluntarily to a situation that is not safe

Refugees may decide to return to situations that are not considered safe, as seen in the case of Syria. The decision as to whether or not an organisation engages in returns to potentially unsafe settings needs to be made in consultation with refugees and communicated back to them. Being transparent in the decision-making process will ensure that refugees have an understanding of the support they can or cannot expect. Such clarity has often been limited, leading to a gap between expectations and reality.¹¹⁹ FGD participants in Afghanistan frequently expressed frustration at the disconnect between the support they were expecting to receive and the realities of this support once they returned. Increasing transparency must be linked to two aspects: access and inter-agency planning.

When international organisations cannot guarantee access, local relays have to be strengthened inside countries of origin. The imperative is to better plan on mechanisms to **engage more strategically inside countries of origin**. In Syria, for instance, NGOs as well as UN agencies experience significant access challenges (and in some cases, lack of access), particularly to some

Box 2. UNHCR's Protection Thresholds in Relation to Returns to Syria*

UNHCR's Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy describes two phases of planning and sets out 22 protection thresholds to guide the decision to consider a formal shift to facilitating organised large-scale repatriation (Phase 2).

In Phase 1, the necessary conditions are not in place for safe and dignified return, but some self-organised returns occur. At this point, return should not be encouraged. Engagement is limited to planning, monitoring, counselling, advocacy and ongoing analysis of obstacles to and conditions necessary for return, and to identifying the actions needed to address them. Self-organised returnees are assisted via ongoing humanitarian programmes.

Under Phase 1, preparing for return includes technical assessment of information required for planning, and of legal frameworks to ensure structured processes. It also highlights the importance of engaging with refugee communities, strengthening communication with them in host countries to tailor information products for refugee audiences. The primacy of counselling and information in ensuring the voluntary character of return is explicitly mentioned.

In Phase 2, a shift to large-scale voluntary repatriation would be governed by four criteria:

1. Legal framework(s) guaranteeing the rights of returnees and unhindered access to them are in place.
2. Clear evidence of protection thresholds being met in the place(s) of return. One of the 22 thresholds states that "every individual's decision to return is informed and genuinely voluntary, without any coercion".
3. Conditions in return areas show improvement.
4. Refugees actively request support from UNHCR to return in large numbers.

Phase 2 activities include the legal frameworks for return, such as tripartite agreements, and supporting a robust return operation through return packages, referral systems and other forms of assistance.

* UNHCR (2018c).

118 ReDSS/Samuel Hall/SDRI (2019).

119 DRC/Mixed Migration Centre (2019). Distant Dreams: Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees.



A child rests at the reception center in Bossaso, Puntland, Somalia 2015. © Axel Fassio / DRC

parts of the country. In all three contexts, working with local partners to enhance access for monitoring and scenario planning for returns is an essential element of pre-return planning. Working with local partners to enhance access for monitoring and scenario planning for returns are essential elements of the pre-return planning. In such cases, a vetting system for organisations will be needed – whether civil society organisations or diaspora-led organisations – to ensure that they are able to respond, and that their positioning within a conflict will not pose any risks.

As collective responses to returns need to be formulated and shared with refugees, **the IASC framework on preparedness and contingency planning provides guiding steps.**¹²⁰ In Afghanistan, inter-agency advocacy and planning on returns proved to be ad hoc in the face of mass returns from Pakistan and absent in the context of returns from Iran and Europe. In early 2018, the Afghan government chaired a contingency planning meeting with officials and donors, UN agencies (OCHA,

UNHCR) and NRC. The meeting called for a diplomatic negotiation and contingency planning for the possibility of forced returns. It committed to delinking the political from the humanitarian, as well as to encourage dialogue and the distribution of responsibilities. It also provided a platform for OCHA to advocate that active conflict in many parts of the country rendered returns unsafe. However, beyond such platforms, inter-agency planning and the ‘how to’ engage with returns and returnees in contexts that are unsafe were limited. The IASC Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance need to be adapted to such situations to reinforce reintegration assistance.

In Somalia, in 2015–2016, the humanitarian country team (HCT) developed an inter-agency contingency plan (IACP) to facilitate response interventions, including supporting displaced populations seeking to return to their homes. Such efforts on disaster risk reduction measures can be adapted and applied to the planning on (re)integration.



Key Takeaways

1. The refugee returnee definition should be widened to include those who do not have official refugee status, those whose temporary protection status may have expired and those who may require protection under the principle of non-refoulement.
2. Protection thresholds for facilitating organised returns are required to enhance pre-planning and for determining when situations are conducive to returns and to the engagement of humanitarian actors.
3. Common standards for return and (re)integration preparedness and planning can be achieved by using existing frameworks more systematically. The IASC Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance, Common Framework for Preparedness, and Emergency Response Preparedness Guidelines represent examples of what this can look like.

¹²⁰ IASC (2007). Inter-agency contingency planning guidelines for humanitarian assistance; IASC (2013). Common Framework for Preparedness; IASC (2015). Emergency Response Preparedness Guidelines.

2. Improving information-sharing with refugees and returnees

There is a need for greater coherence in the type and channels of information accessible to refugees and returnees. When returnees were asked, in FGDs, what information they received and from where, answers varied widely: *“The community elders visited Mansehra camps [in Pakistan] and organised a meeting, and told us if we return to our country [Afghanistan], they would provide us with land [and cash] per family member. Their promise [of cash] was true, but their other promises, including the allocation of land, were lies,”* said one participant in Nangarhar. In Kabul, another FGD participant had a different experience: *“We heard from our relatives that Afghanistan was peaceful. Also, Pakistan forcefully evicted migrants, saying Afghanistan was peaceful and that we should go back. We did not get enough information from anyone.”* Access to information – including country of origin information – is key in preparing for voluntary, safe and dignified returns.¹²¹ Preparedness and information are prerequisites for sustainable (re)integration.¹²² In order to make a voluntary decision to return, refugees need to make informed choices. Accessible, tailored and unbiased information is crucial.

Refugees cannot just rely on their social networks for information; time, distance, the cost of a phone call and difficulties in communicating across borders are all impediments to the flow of information through these networks. Refugees and returnees may have their own information sources; however, they need to be able to triangulate and verify this information. In some cases, temporary return allows them to do this: go-and-see visits are one way in which this occurs (see Box 3). In Kenya,

Somali women left behind in Dadaab would actively seek information from the returns help desk but would not always obtain up-to-date or enough information¹²³ to inform their return decisions. Humanitarian and development actors must understand the information pathways that refugees use and trust in order to tap into them, to complement them and ensure that information matches the needs of refugees and is being disseminated using trusted channels. This requires consultation and the mapping of information flows.

Raising awareness – not hopes

Whether about the safety of the return journey, existing levels of return assistance or opportunities for jobs that match skills, information gaps are many and varied and need to be appropriately filled to ensure that potential returnees are fully able to make informed choices.

Return operations must prepare for the significant risk of renewed displacement upon return. Returnees may live in internal displacement as returnee IDPs:¹²⁴ unable to return to their place of origin or being displaced after returning to their place of origin due to conflict, violence, persecution or disaster. Returnees in contexts such as Afghanistan and Somalia end up joining the ranks of millions of displaced persons. Returnees may settle in urban areas to avoid being displaced several more times. However, it is challenging for agencies to share information with returnees after they cross the border. This should not be the case. In many instances, UN agencies and NGOs are present in both the country of displacement (for example, Kenya) and the country of return (for example, Somalia). Information-sharing should be feasible across these contexts but is often determined by the asylum space (in Kenya) and access (in Somalia). Practice shows that maintaining the appearance of impartiality is a particularly complex task.¹²⁵

Box 3. A Shortage of Reliable Information: The Importance of Go-and-See Visits

Accessing accurate information on conduciveness to return can be a challenge for both refugees and humanitarian actors. Refugees can triangulate sources, but investing in accurate, reliable and impartial information makes the (re)integration process more sustainable.

One way to address the information shortage is to increase opportunities for refugees to see at first-hand the situation in their country of origin, to learn whether those conditions would suit them and their families, to allow them to ask questions at the source and avoid potential inaccurate relays of information. Such initiatives have been successful in Somalia but are rare in Afghanistan. Reaching a common agreement that these go-and-see visits can be helpful in protracted refugee situations would be a step forward. When not organised in a responsible manner, informal visits can divide families and hamper return arrangements and, in turn, can compromise the safety of those left behind.

121 OHCHR (2001). Monitoring and Protecting the Human Rights of Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons. Chapter XI in Training Manual on Human Rights Monitoring, 234; see: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/training7part1112en.pdf>

122 Cassarino (2004).

123 UNHCR/Samuel Hall (2015).

124 IDMC/Samuel Hall/NRC (2017). Going “Home” to Displacement: Afghanistan’s returnee-IDPs.

125 Key informant interview with NRC (March 2019).

One of the ways in which organisations have attempted to address this complexity is by linking information-sharing with social cohesion activities after return. In Afghanistan, UNESCO has piloted a programme to support social activities and information-sharing through cultural and sports events, along with job opportunities. One way of including specific groups, such as youth, in outreach and awareness-raising efforts is by reinforcing information flows through social interactions among different groups including host communities and returnees.

Return packages: addressing the gaps in support and the reality on the ground

Another opportunity to focus on information-sharing is to revise the current approach to return packages. Return packages can provide a stronger link between assistance and information and should not simply be regarded as a mechanism for providing cash assistance. The scale and purpose of cash grants offered in return packages is a tricky issue, given concerns that the greater the support, the greater the risk of incentivising return that is not entirely voluntary or well informed. Focus group participants said that cash assistance had been useful and necessary to them on their return, even though the support was short term. However, NGO informants interviewed for this study highlighted the risk that, with cash incentives, some refugees will choose to reluctantly return to unsafe areas in order to access money that would otherwise be unavailable to them. This concern has been raised in Afghanistan, in Somalia and for Syrian refugees. In UNHCR's research, in 2014, over 30% of Afghan returnees had cited the return package as a pull factor for their return.¹²⁶

In Somalia, the size of the package was enhanced to include a monthly education grant of up to US\$25 per school-going child for one year, along with two unconditional cash grants per person,¹²⁷ meaning that Somali households of ten or more people could receive grants of US\$4,000 or more. Amidst concerns that the package could both incentivise returns and cause tensions with other vulnerable groups in the country, some donors, such as ECHO, have refused to finance such return packages. Other challenges pertaining to cash grants include the following:

- **The risk is greater when grants are provided in hosting environments where refugees face reductions in assistance and inhospitable environments.** There is a need to assess return packages carefully to ensure they are not

disproportionate and do not act as a pull to locations that are deemed unsafe.

- **The sustainability of return packages needs to be addressed by linking short-term needs (for example, cash) with information that can strengthen protection and (re)integration.** The fact that return packages mainly take the form of cash grant packages limits their support to the (re)integration process, as referral mechanisms or linkages with assistance are not included. Key informants indicate the need to tailor packages to make them part of sustainable planning from the start and as a more reliable source of information for returnees.
- **Communications on return packages need to be streamlined and expectations managed if these packages are to be seen as a reliable source of support.** *"We need to be very clear about what people will get, what support will come, when it will come, and when it will stop. There needs to be strong engagement of agencies on the ground through an established mechanism."*¹²⁸ There are gaps in the provision of information, particularly in terms of how to access available services, the cost, and the need to explain that support mechanisms in the country of origin will not be a continuation of what was provided in the host country setting.

Documentation: informing returnees of their right to have rights

*"The right to be recognised as a person before the law is one of the most basic human rights."*¹²⁹

Helping refugees to obtain documentation is critical for their dignity and identity, as well as for access to services. It opens the door to all other rights. Information and awareness-raising about the importance of documentation are critical steps in preparing for returns. Many returnees are not aware of the importance of documentation or how to obtain it. The mayor of Jalalabad summarised the confusing bureaucratic processes upon return as follows: *"Returnees do not know where to go, where to seek support. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation sends them to the municipal office, we send them to the Land Authority. The Land Authority says we need the presidential decree, or orders from the minister. It takes a long time [to access the information they need]."*

Documentation challenges apply to all refugees and impact them, and their children, after return. A major political, legal and humanitarian imperative in refugee contexts is the recognition and documentation of

126 UNHCR (2015). Enhanced Voluntary Return and Reintegration Package for Afghan Refugees (EVRPP).

127 UNHCR (2018d). Somalia – Repatriation Update, 1–30 June 2018.

128 Key informant interview, Mercy Corps, Kabul (March 2019).

129 NRC/Samuel Hall (2016). Access to Tazkera and other civil documentation in Afghanistan.



IDP grocery shop in IDP settlement in Gardo, Puntland, Somalia, 2014. © Axel Fassio/DRC

refugees' status, and greater information on the legal processes they need to undertake to secure their access to services, housing and livelihoods upon return. The point here is that refugees need support to access documentation in their hosting country and, equally, in their country of origin.

In March 2018, the Jordanian Ministry of Interior and UNHCR launched a regularisation campaign to legalise the stay of Syrian refugees in urban areas. The initiative, funded by ECHO and led by six NGOs, provided legal assistance and information for almost 20,000 families.¹³⁰ The same steps are needed in all refugee settings to avoid large unregistered populations, whether of the millions living in Iran and Pakistan or the tens of

thousands living in Kenya, who are today considered as undocumented refugees. Prior to and after return, refugees need to know how and where to access services. Key services include documentation, education and legal services. Cross-border programming is essential to provide this assistance to refugees and returnees. The Afghan government and the World Bank are engaging on Component 1 of their EZ-KAR project to reinforce documentation and information in Pakistan, planning for biometric identification documents, providing a helpline for refugees as well as reinforcing consular capacities in-country through a temporary surge of capacity.



Key Takeaways

1. Systematically provide opportunities for go-and-see visits for refugee representatives. Refugees do not all have social networks to rely on for information and should be offered the opportunity to carry out a first-hand assessment of return settings.
2. Ensure that information is provided in respect of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality. One step would be to revise return packages by including a stronger information component. Return packages need to be more than just instruments for cash grant provision and should avoid incentivising unsafe and uninformed returns.
3. Access to documentation and awareness about the importance of documentation needs to be developed before return. Stakeholders need to plan for refugees to have official documentation and information on the services and rights they can access with this documentation.

¹³⁰ DRC (2018). Helping Syrian refugees in Jordan in legal documentation.

3. Better hosting for better reintegration

Preparedness for return and (re)integration also needs to focus on advocacy around better hosting of refugees and other migrants in countries of asylum. Focus group participants in Afghanistan and Somalia comment that those with greater financial, human and social capital – that is, those who fared better in their host country – often fare better on return. This relationship is often overlooked in both policy and practice.

The types of skills and experience gained in asylum countries influence access to opportunities at home. For instance, Somali returnees from Kenya, where many were educated or conducted business in English, are often better placed to secure coveted roles with international aid organisations, government or in education. Some of those returning from Yemen, where refugees had relatively better work opportunities, have opened successful restaurants or do well in construction. *“Since they come from modernised countries, they have helped build our social life... they have showed us ways to improve our business since they understand business. When our kids interact with their kids, they help our kids by educating them,”* noted a host community member in Mogadishu.

In contrast, when displaced populations are unable or are not permitted to work, they do not develop skills

and may even lose existing skills over time, making it difficult to re-enter the workforce. The same is true for those who have gaps in their education or who have been schooled under a different system over an extended period. Adapting and (re)integrating for these groups is more problematic.¹³¹ Situations of mass vulnerability make competition for scarce resources, including humanitarian assistance, extreme. When returnees are perceived as being relatively well off – as is the case with Somali returnees from Kenya – resentment can build when they appear to be favoured for jobs, housing or other support.

3.1 Advances in refugee hosting: how to leverage for returnees

The link between better hosting and better (re)integration requires more coordination and leadership by development actors. Despite calls that refugees want to learn and acquire skills relevant to them on their return, engagement to date has split local integration and (re)integration into disconnected processes. Lessons can be learnt from development actors’ investments in better hosting and expanded to include a link to (re)integration. This offers an opportunity for greater responsibility-sharing and for the upcoming GRF in December 2019.



DRC is distributing firewood in the settlements in Kabul, Afghanistan, 2013. © Axel Fassio/DRC

131 World Bank (2017d).

Box 4. Jordan Compact: Jobs for Syrian Refugees in Exchange for Incentives

February 2016 saw the establishment of the Jordan Compact to enable Syrian refugees to access low-skilled work and education in the country. The World Bank rewarded Jordan with concessional loans subsidised by international donors. The terms included US\$1.7 billion in grants over three years to support infrastructure projects, a ten-year exemption from the EU rules of origin (a tariff barrier) for producers in Jordan who met an employment quota for Syrian refugees and a commitment from the Jordanian government to create 200,000 jobs for Syrians.

Because the compact focuses on work permits for (often) low-skilled workers, rather than actual jobs, there have been challenges in translating policy opportunities into sustainable livelihoods for Syrians. Protection concerns were also not adequately addressed by the Jordan Compact mechanisms, according to key informants for our study. Many refugees work in the informal sector, experience documentation issues and mistrust official institutions, all of which remain obstacles to increased formality. Similarly, education enrolment rates were lower than expected, as issues such as proximity to schools and child protection were not addressed. Nevertheless, the model represents a recognition that investing in refugees' self-reliance can bring economic benefits to refugee-hosting countries and that using economic and political incentives, such as trade deals and loans, can open up a restrictive policy environment and quickly mobilise large amounts of development funding.* Such models need to be expanded to identify opportunities to build skills adapted to return settings.

* Barbelet, Hagen-Zanker and Mansour-Ille (2018). *The Jordan Compact: Lessons learnt and implications for future refugee compacts*.

The past five years have seen a paradigm shift in refugee hosting, precipitated by the Syrian refugee crisis and its implications for Europe, and informed by inter-agency experience and policy responses to decades of protracted internal displacement. In some contexts, short-term humanitarian assistance and social protection programmes for refugees have given way to the economic inclusion of refugees in development processes. This approach is encompassed in the GCR and the CRRF, including new models of refugee hosting, new funding mechanisms and new modalities of engagement with development and private sector actors (see Box 4), as well as innovations in aid architecture and delivery.

Approaches focused on improving the quality of asylum for refugees could be tested in (re)integration

settings. When return is deemed to be safe, voluntary and in dignity, political attention tends to focus on repatriation rather than (re)integration. As protracted crises constitute a development agenda with humanitarian consequences,¹³² the same logic can be applied to returnees in fragile contexts. Including a more explicit development agenda and development actors in planning can help to address this fragility and provide a path towards thinking in the longer term.

This requires a fundamental shift, not only in the way services are coordinated, but on how aid is conceptualised, funding is accessed and people are targeted. This recommends a step towards the better integration of global policy agendas – the nexus and Grand Bargain agendas¹³³ – and a better integration of (re)integration in that agenda.



Key Takeaways

1. The types of skills and experience gained in asylum countries influence access to opportunities upon return.
2. The link between better hosting and better (re)integration requires more coordination, acceptance, and leadership by development actors, learning from the advances in refugee hosting. This requires a fundamental shift, not only in the way services are coordinated, but in the way aid is conceptualised, funding is accessed and people are targeted.
3. Approaches focused on improving the quality of asylum for refugees could be tested in (re)integration settings through new funding windows. The International Development Association (IDA) sub-windows for refugees and host communities could be replicated as a model for returnees and host communities in return settings.*

* The IDA Regional Sub-Windows are International Development Association dedicated funds for low-income countries. The IDA18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities and the replenishment fund in 2019, (IDA19), were focused on funds for low-income countries hosting large numbers of refugees; IDA (2018). *IDA18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities*; see: <http://ida.worldbank.org/replenishments/ida-18replenishments/ida18-regional-sub-window-for-refugees-host-communities>

¹³² Kälina and Chapuisat (2017). *Breaking the Impasse: Reducing Protracted Internal Displacement as a Collective Outcome*.

¹³³ Grand Bargain Initiative – Summary. *Agenda for Humanity*; see: <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3861>; see also, as an example: IASC Task Team on Strengthening the Humanitarian/Development Nexus with a focus on protracted contexts; see: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-strengthening-humanitarian-development-nexus-focus-protracted-contexts>



Supporting immediate return movements

When recounting their return, returnees speak of the logistical arrangements made to either return spontaneously or through a repatriation programme or, in some cases, a complete lack of arrangement when their return was forced upon them. Refugees speak of push factors in the hosting context, the fears and difficulties of crossing the border safely, as well as concerns that their assets, mainly land and housing, would be gone. As a result, what happens during the return process also requires attention. When this research asks, *“How can returnees, receiving communities, governments and organisations be more effectively prepared so as to lay the ground and work towards sustainable (re)integration?”*, the actual return process must be included. While previous sources¹³⁴ have focused on human rights aspects (specifically, the voluntariness of return and the types of return), this section will focus on the role of regional, national and local actors in ensuring a safe and dignified return process.

Refugee movements and return have a regional dimension, as nationals have to cross state borders to seek protection and return to localities in their country of origin. Regional and cross-border commitments are often lacking; yet, they could become the basis for the responsibility-sharing required. This section puts forward lessons learnt to address the gap in support to return movements by zooming in on three important and necessary steps:

- building on regional agreements to bolster responsibility-sharing for returns
- designing cross-border approaches that can adapt to refugees’ return decisions
- planning local responses with a focus on housing, land and property rights

This part examines what works and what can work based on lessons learnt in supporting immediate return movements.



Returnee children waiting for their parents in a packed vehicle at transit center near Torkham crossing. © NRC/Enayatullah Azad

134 OHCHR (2001).

4. Building on regional agreements to bolster responsibility-sharing

Regional approaches are crucial in order to facilitate plans that ensure refugee protection before and during return. These include tripartite agreements between hosting countries, origin countries and UNHCR. These agreements provide the overall legal framework to facilitate return; however, they cover only those with formal status. There are various shortcomings with tripartite agreements as they have been conceived to date.

First, tripartite agreements are often agreed upon hastily and under intense political pressure. Lessons from the Kenya–Somalia Tripartite Agreement highlight, as emphasised by key informants, a political process under pressure from the Kenyan government. This resulted in confusion in the way return should happen, compromising on refugee safety as returns occurred to places without sufficient support. The agreements reached between Kenya and Somalia, and Afghanistan and Pakistan, highlight the shortcomings of agreements that focus heavily on return, with limited accountability measures. Stronger discussions are needed on the establishment of humanitarian aid channels, commitments to security en route, voluntary returns and family reunification processes, among others. Although important advances over the past decade have fostered a movement towards regional approaches, in each country under review, these have fallen short of ensuring the commitment of political and operational actors and have struggled to establish a functional and achievable framework for solving, or at least easing, regional displacement crises.

Second, tripartite agreements have been criticised for limiting engagement to a few stakeholders – and often not including refugees in the decision-making process. Historically, *“UNHCR decides the if, when and how of return movements without including the refugees in any of the formal decision-making processes pertaining to the planned voluntary repatriation exercise.”*¹³⁵ The UNHCR handbook on voluntary repatriation, published in 1993, clarified that it would be, *“possible and even desirable to include the refugees and establish a quadripartite commission”*.¹³⁶ However,

more often than not, commissions are tripartite, bound to governments and UNHCR, and are the only legitimate forum to discuss major repatriation issues. The 1996 revised handbook merely mentions that, *“the refugee community should be kept informed of the progress of repatriation negotiations. Formal representation of the refugee community can be considered.”*¹³⁷ The GCR and CRRF provide an opportunity to strengthen the voice of refugees and returnees, as they emphasise the centrality of representation. This is highly important for durable solutions processes, including to support return and sustainable (re)integration in countries of origin.

Nevertheless, momentum to engage in more extensive regional plans, including a larger number of stakeholders, has been noted. In 2014, the six countries hosting the greatest number of Somali refugees – Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and Yemen – adopted a number of commitments.¹³⁸ In 2017, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) governments¹³⁹ signed the Nairobi Declaration and Plan of Action on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia. These agreements provide a regional platform and framework that seek to create conditions for safe, sustainable and voluntary return and the (re)integration of Somali refugees while, at the same time, maintaining protection and asylum space in hosting countries. Going forward, national action plans will be developed in all six countries to specify actions required to deliver on the commitments made.

These action plans are still being discussed, two years after the Nairobi Declaration was endorsed, and highlight the lengthy process required to bring governments on board and to align implementation. Despite providing a basis for both political and strategic progress on thematic areas (education and livelihoods, for example),¹⁴⁰ these commitments have not translated into an overall regional framework for addressing the return of Somali refugees. As a result, responsibility for return has been detached from (re)integration planning. Any action plan has to now include the centrality of a harmonised support to the return process in order to enhance (re)integration prospects.

The approach in Afghanistan is starkly different and is still limited to just a few stakeholders. The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) is the result of a

135 Zieck (1997). UNHCR and Voluntary Repatriation of Refugees: A Legal Analysis.

136 UNHCR (1993), 4.

137 UNHCR (1996), 34.

138 UNHCR (2014). Addis Ababa Commitment towards Somali Refugees.

139 The member states of IGAD are Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. IGAD’s mission is to assist and complement the efforts of the member states to achieve, through increased cooperation, food security and environmental protection, peace and security, and economic cooperation and integration in the region.

140 Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education (2017); IGAD (2019), Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-Reliance for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in the IGAD Region.



A focus group discussion with community members discussing return, Jalalabad, 2019. © Abdul Basir Mohmand /Samuel Hall

process between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, as well as UNHCR. The SSAR was initiated in 2011 to identify and implement solutions for Afghan refugees in the region. While the SSAR was seen as a step towards regional approaches, its operationalisation has been limited for a number of reasons.¹⁴¹ First, the gap in implementation is linked to concerns that the SSAR is more of a humanitarian funding vehicle than a state-backed mechanism. A second concern relates to the lack of coverage of the return process and measures to safeguard the dignified, safe and voluntary nature of returns. A third concern is the over-reliance on return as the preferred solution, without due consideration being given to other durable solutions or to the voices of the refugees themselves. A fourth is the lack of consultation and inclusion of civil society organisations. To ensure that the regional commitment is a collective one, all of these concerns need to be included in the way that governments, UNHCR and the international community collaborate on durable solutions to the Afghan refugee situation.

Syria's Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) is seen by key informants as a response to these gaps. A strategic response for countries neighbouring Syria that have been impacted by the influx of Syrian refugees, the 3RP spans five Syrian refugee-hosting countries – Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey – and incorporates humanitarian relief, resilience and stabilisation. It comprises country-level chapters that have activity and resource plans developed under the leadership of national authorities. The activity and resource plans are then harmonised into an overall regional strategy, overseen by an inter-agency 3RP steering committee. Theoretically, all durable solutions within the 3RP are part of a comprehensive response, and country operations are framed according to legal, material and physical safety components. In practice, regional governments still position return as a first and preferred solution and have shown little support for local integration. Further political efforts are needed to ensure that all durable solutions are prepared, especially when returns may be neither feasible nor in line with international commitments.



Key Takeaways

1. Political reluctance to consider solutions other than return is an impediment to effective regional initiatives and the development of strong durable solutions that support a dignified life. However, some steps have been taken to address this, such as the Nairobi Declaration and Plan of Action, which provides an opportunity to integrate and align standards on durable solutions as part of legal changes required within each member state.
2. Returns processes require a broader geographic coverage and the inclusion of a more consultative approach to designing solutions alongside civil society actors and refugees.
3. Existing repatriation handbooks lack the involvement of refugee and returnee voices, including in quadripartite commissions, which decide the if, when and how of voluntary repatriation schemes.

141 NRC (2017a).

5. Designing cross-border approaches

Patterns of displacement and return are often cyclical, characterised by secondary movement and recurrent exile, short-term returns, and split or phased returns. Any engagement to support returns, therefore, needs to take into account cross-border movements. **While refugees and returnees cross borders, (re)integration assistance has not followed mobility dynamics. Cross-border approaches can ensure that interventions are flexible and aligned with people's mobility, instead of being bound by state demarcation lines.**

Cross-border trends and dynamics can inform early solutions and country-level planning. In many borderlands, whether in the Horn of Africa or in Central Asia, movement is the result of seasonality, cultural and social practices, trade and commodity prices. Communities on both sides of the border trade and may use each other's services. In recent years, progress has been made in integrating such factors into programming in the Mandera Triangle in the Horn of Africa, across Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia. The EU-funded Building Opportunities for Resilience in the Horn of Africa (BORESHA) project, which is led by DRC, aims to promote economic development and the capacities of cross-border communities to identify their own priorities, and to plan and advocate for measures to support them. As this project in the Horn of Africa is new, it can be studied to inform programming in relation to returns in the Afghan and Somali contexts.

Consultations with stakeholders reveal that:

- **Approaches to cross-border programming on returns and (re)integration in Somalia and Kenya have been limited and have not attracted donor investment.** First, cross-border meetings planned by UNHCR under the tripartite agreement were held only irregularly due to institutional tussles over the location of the meetings (in Somalia or Kenya), setting the tone for wider dysfunction. Cross-border alignment and joint work was not helped by a widely reported misalignment of perspectives between UNHCR's country offices in Kenya and Somalia, not least regarding conditions in areas of return in Somalia.¹⁴² Finally, returns to Somalia were ramped up in 2016 against the backdrop of a severe drought, with most operational actors focused on addressing the acute food insecurity of over 2.9 million Somalis. Facilitating longer-term (re)integration in this context

was not an operational priority, as (re)integration was only later set on the agenda of policy-makers and practitioners.

- **Cross-border programming to support (re)integration has been a shortcoming in Afghanistan and has also received insufficient donor support.** When, in 2014, the European Union's Aid to Uprooted People (AUP) programme was launched in Afghanistan, it included a specific focus on cross-border interventions that had the potential to increase the sustainability of return and (re)integration outcomes, covering Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.¹⁴³ This focus was expected to improve livelihood and (re)integration outcomes in Afghanistan, while also leading to new and independent thinking to support the sector. When the call was renewed after three years, the focus on cross-border programming had been lost due to implementation difficulties. In a 2015 meeting of regional NGOs in Tehran, representatives acknowledged that, although governments and donors were asking for cross-border programming, they had unrealistic expectations of what that would mean in practice. NGOs asked: *"In a region where access is limited, where governments do not authorise implementation or monitoring, when offices are not present in all three countries equally, can we effectively speak of cross-border programming?"*¹⁴⁴ In response, NGOs presented minimum standards for cross-border programming. These standards were not pursued as the AUP's cross-border funding had ended, but they should still be adopted to test the outcomes of cross-border approaches, namely by measuring operational efforts towards:
 - working with the same cohort of beneficiaries across borders
 - adapting infrastructure to ensure cross-border capacity
 - improving referral systems, coordination and communication among NGOs
 - ensuring the presence of legal services, certificates and family tracing mechanisms
 - conducting cross-border monitoring as a basis for programming
 - doing away with conditionality clauses
 - supporting cross-border initiatives through multi-year funding

Lessons learnt point to the need to set standards for what cross-border programming can achieve. Building

¹⁴² Key informant interviews, Nairobi, March 2019.

¹⁴³ EU (2014). Aid to uprooted people. Call for proposals 150514

¹⁴⁴ Samuel Hall (2015b). "Afghan Displaced Youth": A Regional NGO Meeting on Afghan Refugees, Returnees and Durable Solutions.

on such experiences, in 2011, ACTED and CARE released a set of principles for effective cross-border programming. With regard to return movements, these can entail the need for:¹⁴⁵

- Joint cross-border programming in which a programme is designed to support a specific cohort of refugees or returnees and is undertaken on both sides of the border. For example, livelihoods programming focused on skills relevant in countries of origin, livelihoods-matching schemes, and support for individuals with specific needs (often related to health).
- Coordinated or consistent cross-border interventions in which a programme is designed to support people on the return journey and to (re)integrate them on their return.

Box 5. Planning Cross-Border Activities from the Viewpoint of Returnees

WFP Somalia's operational support is an interesting model of what can be achieved when the process develops from the point of view of Somali returnees, rather than through an organisational lens. Recognising that support is more effective when it is consistent and coherent along the return journey, WFP Somalia deployed staff to its Kenya team in Dadaab to facilitate a joined-up approach. Although numerous challenges ensued, the more efficient and effective results offset the initial challenges. WFP staff demonstrated an ability to better plan and respond to return patterns of refugees, as well as to trace specific refugee needs along the journey. This included both the ability to address specific vulnerabilities, as well as to monitor the nutritional status of refugees before and after return. Strong leadership and a willingness within the Kenya and Somalia country teams to work collaboratively were key to the establishment of this arrangement.

In 2014, eight companies from Afghanistan went to Tehran to speak to refugee youth about the possibility of matching their skills to jobs in Afghanistan. The private sector and refugees were interested, but a conditionality clause blocked progress as youth were required to give up their amayesh (refugee) cards. Families were against the clause. NGOs also highlighted obstacles to cross-border programming, including conditionality clauses and the lack of political will to provide multi-year funding for the necessary infrastructure. Conditionality, in this case, is the requirement to forego one's refugee status as a prerequisite to job placement or educational opportunities. A practice for Afghan refugees in Iran and Somali refugees in Kenya, conditionality has led to the failure of cross-border schemes that do not provide the flexibility that refugees require. The issue of conditionality has been noted as particularly problematic from both a human rights and a (re)integration perspective.

In 2016, the Iranian government proposed a conditional programme for Afghan refugees to access university education in Iran should they be prepared to forego their refugee status, to return to Afghanistan to apply for a student visa and then travel back to Iran. Whilst informal interviews with Iran-born Afghan refugees at the Islam Qala border in Afghanistan in 2016 revealed that such plans were aligned with their aspirations, no formal monitoring of this scheme has been carried out to date.



Key Takeaways

1. Cross-border programming, aligned with mobility patterns, are a key component of (re)integration programming and for improvement in referral processes.
2. The lack of funding for cross-border initiatives has meant that programmes are limited to operating on two sides of a border, rather than planning across borders.
3. Cross-border programming can allow stakeholders to work with the same cohort, to provide consistent, coordinated programming that follows and monitors a group of people through their return journey to their (re)integration. This approach can enhance learning to benefit all (re)integration programmes through a longitudinal and multi-sited approach.

¹⁴⁵ These practices are echoed in the literature on vulnerable dryland communities. See ACTED and CARE (2011) Draft good practice principles for cross border programming in the drylands of the Horn of Africa

6. Planning local responses with a focus on housing, land and property rights

There are gaps in urban planning in contexts to which refugees return. Greater planning and support to local return responses are needed to avoid returnees living in informal settlements. Across all contexts, few urban plans have integrated the displaced or the informal settlements in which they live. Instead, much of the response has focused on forced evictions rather than on planning to mainstream urban spaces or upgrading informal settlements. In return settings, national-level actors and urban planners may have reservations about IDPs or returnees living in informal settlements because they can add complexity to both urban planning and the ethnic make-up of a certain area. This may lead to

inclusion–exclusion dynamics, which state and municipal actors must resolve. Yet, planning can only take place when urban systems are considered alongside possibilities for local integration.

Afghanistan’s last urban plan for Kabul was drawn up in 1979. In the 1990s, Taliban rule led to the destruction of large parts of the city. By the time refugees began to return, in 2002, after the US-led invasion, the capital and most other cities had seen no investment in basic infrastructure in at least a decade.¹⁴⁶ The main city was ill-prepared for the returns and could not manage the growth in its population. Kabul expanded from 500,000 to 5 million inhabitants, largely due to returns. A master city plan for Kabul is currently being developed and has frequently been cited as a constraint for the local integration of displaced populations. Somalia has among the world’s highest urbanisation rates,¹⁴⁷ while Afghanistan has the highest rate in its region, at 5% per year – double the regional average.¹⁴⁸ A large part of this urbanisation is due to newcomers: IDPs and returning



An ITS in Zahle, Lebanon, 2017. © Dara Al-Masri /DRC

¹⁴⁶ ODI (2012). *Kabul’s Hidden Crisis*.

¹⁴⁷ World Bank (2017b). *Somali Authorities Make Urban Resilience a Priority*.

¹⁴⁸ World Bank (2017a). *Leveraging the urbanization dividend in Afghanistan*.

refugees, but also rural–urban migrants. Similar challenges are anticipated in Syria in the near future, particularly as peri-urban areas, where heavy fighting occurred, have been extensively damaged.

Some efforts to address this issue do exist. Public conversations around local integration enabled actors such as UN-Habitat in Afghanistan to move beyond a project-based approach, focusing on efforts to upgrade informal settlements in cities receiving returnees, to holding policy-level discussions on national-level changes required to facilitate local integration. This has led the Afghan government to repeal Presidential Decree 104 on land allocation and to institute Presidential Decree (PD) 305 in its place. The Afghan government's Displacement and Returnee Executive Committee (DiREC) worked with a technical working group to develop the legal framework for PD 305, so that land allocation would include improved access to livelihoods and essential services, streamlined beneficiary selection, improved transparency and accountability throughout the land allocation process, and the prioritisation of vulnerable groups.

In Kismayo, Somalia, on the other hand, the government has agreed to the creation of the Jubaland Land Authority, which is tasked with developing a city master plan covering old and new districts of Kismayo, adding a new district for returning refugees. The New Kismayo location, which plans to include schools and markets, may become an example of integrated services for returnees and hosts.

The centrality of housing, land and property in limiting further displacement

HLP assistance needs to be implemented to prevent land-related conflict and to support inclusion for returnees. Studies find that access to HLP is central both to refugees' decision-making about whether and when to return and to prospects for (re)integration.¹⁴⁹ This is evident in relation to spontaneous returns to Syria; despite conditions not being conducive to returns, housing, land and property issues have already taken centre stage. On the one hand, one-third of returnees (both refugees and IDPs) explained, in a recent report, that they had returned to check on their properties or to seek livelihoods.¹⁵⁰ On the other, 27% of housing stock is thought to have been fully or partially destroyed,¹⁵¹ and

there are signs that Syrian government reconstruction may focus on areas populated by those loyal to the government.¹⁵² Furthermore, there is a strong likelihood of competing claims over land and property rights in the context of the widespread loss and destruction of title deeds, displacement and the secondary occupation of properties.¹⁵³ The implication of this for the (re)integration of Syrian refugees is daunting.

Many returnees have spent years – even decades – in relatively cosmopolitan and urbanised environments in exile and have adapted their lifestyles accordingly. Expectations have also changed, with the lack of opportunities and services in villages of origin prompting many returnees to go to cities.¹⁵⁴ Insecurity in Somalia and Afghanistan renders large tracts of land inaccessible to returnees, which means they often arrive to relatively small urban enclaves of stability. This restrictive environment, combined with ongoing processes of urbanisation, results in high demand, limited availability and rapidly escalating land and property prices.¹⁵⁵ With limited resources and lacking the social (and often ethnic) connections to access limited housing stock, returnees face difficulties and discrimination. In Kismayo, a female returnee explains her struggles with precarious housing and access to shelter: *“One of the most challenging issues when I came back to Kismayo was the rent, because if you are in a rented house, the owner may ask you to leave at any point. And this can happen when you don't know the area very well. When you have children, it's an even bigger challenge, because owners don't like large families with many children; they might say that we will damage their house.”*

A significant number of those who return to new areas join the ranks of IDPs: in one estimate, seven out of ten Afghan returnees return to displacement.¹⁵⁶ In IDP camps, shelter is both temporary and inadequate; many returnees in Somalia are also at risk of forced evictions. **Replacing camp life in the country of asylum with camp life back home is a failure of (re)integration and durable solutions.**

The importance of HLP for (re)integration has prompted increased attention at policy and programme levels. In Somalia, this has resulted in government capacity in policy development being strengthened, support for the establishment of eviction monitoring units, increased training for key stakeholders in HLP

149 Harild, Christensen and Zetter (2015); NRC (2017b). Reflections on future challenges to Housing, Land and Property restitution for Syrian refugees.

150 Samuel Hall (2018).

151 World Bank (2017c). The Toll of War: The Economic and Social Consequences of the Conflict in Syria

152 Batrawi (2018). Drivers of urban reconstruction in Syria: power, privilege and profit extraction.

153 NRC (2017b).

154 World Bank/UNHCR (2019)

155 For instance, according to NGOs in Kismayo, the price of a building plot in areas where returnees are being located has risen from US\$200 to US\$600 in the past two years.

156 NRC/Samuel Hall (2018). Returning to what? The challenges displaced Afghans face in securing durable solutions.

issues, legal and information support to displaced persons and the integration of shelter support into wider durable solutions programming. However, despite the centrality of HLP to sustainable (re)integration, chronic and critical shortcomings remain in terms of support to returnees.¹⁵⁷

6.1 Rental subsidies: learning from Somalia

The case study below describes an example of a pilot housing response used in Mogadishu, where land allocation is notoriously problematic. Costs are high and supply is limited, illustrating the complexity of moving from humanitarian shelter approaches towards a housing approach adapted to urban contexts.

Box 6. Rental Subsidies in Mogadishu

A pilot project by NRC and UN-Habitat tackles the challenges of access to housing and forced evictions by improving rental security. A rental approach was viewed as more relevant to Mogadishu, based on feedback from project participants that the proposed public land for allocation was too far from the city centre. The project aims to ensure that enhanced livelihoods generate enough income for beneficiaries to pay their rent on their own. The livelihoods support includes a cash stipend to cover basic needs for seven months, and either vocational skills training for four months or a grant to start a small or medium-sized business.

Beneficiaries must find suitable rental accommodation; NRC then raises landlords' awareness of HLP rights. This has been mostly positively received by landlords, albeit with concerns about what might happen once the support provided has ended. As one landlord in Mogadishu explained: "A year is a short time in which to transform your life."

While the project remains a pilot, early results suggest it has successfully helped participants meet their rental requirements to date, but more efficient processes are required to address the housing needs of 80 households.

Lessons learnt here include the following:

- A pilot is critical for complex HLP projects so that they benefit from lessons learnt.
- A strong participatory component ensured that adaptations to programming were reflective of participant feedback.
- A strong project team is required, with the skills to engage persuasively with multiple stakeholders.
- The project must consider participants' need to settle debts before they relocate. In the pilot, cash grants had to be issued early on so that participants could settle debts without involving gatekeepers who might then have some hold over them.
- In future, the project should plan for utility bills, which were not incorporated into the pilot project.
- Participants indicated a strong preference for properties close to their previous residences so they could continue to tap into social networks.
- No beneficiaries took up the offer of long-term vocational skills training, as families needed the cash injection and could ill afford to commit four months to training. Allocating the grant in two tranches was effective in identifying households able to sustain livelihoods.
- In future, targeting may be based on capacity to sustain livelihoods rather than vulnerability.



Key Takeaways

1. There are gaps in urban planning in contexts of return. Greater planning and support to local return responses are needed. Few urban plans integrate the displaced or the informal settlements in which they live.
2. Public conversations around (re)integration have allowed stakeholders to move beyond the project-based upgrading of settlements to policy-level changes on land allocation.
3. HLP assistance is central to preventing conflict and supporting returnee inclusion. Rental subsidies can be better adapted to urban areas, in certain cases, than land allocation, as piloted in Mogadishu.

¹⁵⁷ Harild, Christensen and Zetter (2015).



Longer-term support for sustainable (re)integration

This final lessons learnt chapter concludes the response to the question “*How can returnees, receiving communities, governments and organisations be more effectively prepared so as to lay the ground and work towards sustainable (re)integration?*” by reflecting on the long-term support required. As national governments are in the lead, it is essential to the promotion of durable solutions that national planning across all sectors be inclusive of returnees and displacement-affected communities.

While recognising that returns happen increasingly to urban areas that are not areas of origin, that women and youth face specific problems in these locations, our focus in this final chapter turns to:

- Locally led urban and community plans for (re)integration. We highlight the role of urban planning and communities in determining priorities for sustainable (re)integration.
- Locally led approaches to economic (re)integration. While sustainable (re)integration is multidimensional, programming has zoomed in on specific strands of economic support. In a recent review of durable

solutions in Somalia, we found that all ongoing durable solutions initiatives target the economic needs of returnees, with an over-reliance by humanitarian actors on technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

- As the focus has predominantly been on economic (re)integration, social and psychosocial dimensions, as well as key legal dimensions, have been sidelined. Closing monitoring and data gaps after return will not only ensure that refugees are not returned to situations of harm, but will also ensure that such gaps in programming are addressed.
- Zoom in on the nexus between humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding to ensure the interrelationships between the three areas inform (re)integration programming.

Throughout this section, we present what works and what can work, based on selected lessons learnt, to inform the longer-term need for supporting sustainable (re)integration.



Local market in Gardo, Puntland, Somalia, 2014. © Axel Fassio/DRC

7. Prioritising urban and community plans

Community-based programming has long been a focus of resilience and development planning, but rarely of (re)integration programming, and even more rarely in urban areas. This gap is now being addressed through community development councils (CDCs) in Afghanistan and community action plans (CAPs) in Somalia that now integrate durable solutions planning. The CDCs and CAPs have a long-term developmental focus, which includes but is not limited to ensuring durable solutions. Community action plans usually do not exclusively deal with durable solutions for returnees, but with development planning (and addressing root causes) for the whole community.

Part of the difficulty, as noted by stakeholders interviewed for this study, was to convince urban planners to come on board the durable solutions debate, and to identify community relays to speak on behalf of displacement-affected communities. Recent initiatives, in Somalia and Afghanistan, address these aspects of community engagement – inclusive of refugees, returnees, IDPs and host communities – as being critical to (re)integration analysis and programming.

The principles were first formulated in 2016/2017 by ReDSS with its partners. They were revised with NGOs and UN agencies in 2018, coordinated by ReDSS and the Somalia UN Resident Coordinator Office, and eventually endorsed by the Federal Government of Somalia early 2019 (see Box 7).

In the decade from 2003 to 2013, the World Bank allocated more than US\$85 billion for local participatory development work globally.¹⁵⁸ The National Solidarity Program (NSP) adopted this approach in Afghanistan

under a US\$2.5 billion programme, which was not only Afghanistan's largest development project, but was also considered its most successful.¹⁵⁹ A central feature was the establishment of community development councils through which the NSP was implemented. The Citizens' Charter, part of Afghanistan's 2016–2026 Peace and Development Framework, builds on these participatory approaches by serving as the entry point to communities for the delivery of education, health, infrastructure and livelihood activities. The approach has been extended to urban areas – the first time that urban and rural development have come together under one pillar, in part to support sustainable (re)integration.¹⁶⁰

In 2016, the Wajadir Framework for Somalia was launched – the country's first national framework for local governance, reconciliation and civic dialogue. A range of actors support its implementation, including through a US\$145 million UN project led by UNDP.¹⁶¹ In Somalia's fractured and fragile security and governance environment, this is a long-term endeavour. In the meantime, durable solutions actors are instigating community engagement approaches called community action plans (see Box 8). A second approach has been to use quota-based systems to ensure that returnees, IDPs and host communities benefit from assistance. This approach is applied particularly when allotting shelter under land allocation schemes in Somalia. Through a community approach, returnees, IDPs and vulnerable hosts are allocated plots of land and shelter, giving rise to new communities composed of diverse groups who share new spaces.

How to ensure that political decision-making listens and responds to the perspectives of diverse groups

An element of greater community engagement and consultation is ensuring that political decision-making listens and responds to the perspectives of diverse groups. An inclusive process is needed to encourage dialogue, mutual understanding and solidarity within diverse (and possibly divided) communities, but also with decision-makers. In the context of widespread need, such as in Somalia, experts admit the emphasis has been on responding to people's needs, with less engagement with social and political dimensions that can foster sustainable (re)integration.¹⁶²

Initiatives are underway to strengthen the voices and inclusion of displacement-affected communities, and to make those voices heard by decision-makers. These

Box 7. Durable Solutions Core Programming Principles*

- government-led
- area-based
- collective and comprehensive
- participatory and community-based
- rights- and needs-based
- sensitive to gender, age, disabilities and marginalisation
- sustainable

* United Nations Somalia and ReDSS Core Programming Principles.

158 Mansuri and Rao (2013). Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?

159 Katz (2017). Community-Based Development in Rural Afghanistan: First, Assume a Community.

160 World Bank (2016). Afghanistan Government Inaugurates Citizens' Charter to Target Reform and Accountability.

161 UN Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralized Service Delivery in Somalia 2008–2016.

162 Key informant interview with UN official, Mogadishu, March 2019.

Box 8. Community Action Plans as a Means of Strengthening Accountability in Somaliaⁱ

Somali returnees return to fragile cities fractured by protracted crises and displacement, prolonged insecurity and weak governance. Many returnees are from low-status clans or live as guests in their new cities of residence,ⁱⁱ where they must overcome endemic discrimination and exclusion to make a living.

An approach that has been adopted in durable solutions programming in Somalia is the use of community action plans (CAPs). A cross-section of residents – including returnees, IDPs and members of the host community – conduct inclusive, participatory, area-based community planning to jointly identify barriers to durable solutions within their communities. The outcome is a set of inter-community priorities articulated in a CAP that directs government and aid agency support.

In Kismayo, IOM and UN-Habitat have conducted CAPs for their Midnimo (unity) project. With the overall objective of strengthening social cohesion, the project aims to boost community participation and accountability between municipal authorities and residents. The project has achieved this by forming core facilitation teams of representatives from the community and government, which lead consultations. The priorities identified as a result of the consultations are captured in a book. First cross-referenced with the communities involved, the CAP is then launched publicly to promote its use as a framework for engagement and assistance by a wider set of actors.

Another benefit of CAPs is the fact that these are not strictly humanitarian projects. The result is priorities different to those that might usually be requested of humanitarian organisations. For example, a number of communities prioritised the building of police stations and rubbish collection through CAPs. Finally, the engagement of government officials represents a step change. Officials note that this approach has resulted in greater leadership and advocacy for the resulting priorities.

One test for CAPs will be the ability of local government to fully participate in the process and align government reconstruction and development planning to those plans. Government funding will also need to be allocated to community priorities. Monitoring when and where this happens can improve the learning process around CAPs.

Without strong efforts to link with local governance, district budgeting processes and sustainable financing, all of which require institutionalisation, these project-specific CAPs may occur in parallel – and may ultimately undermine – emerging governance efforts. These weaknesses are well recognised and are being addressed in a successor project, which aims to strengthen coherence across the different CAPs and create a linkage with local governance efforts.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ This box draws on findings from the ReDSS/Samuel Hall/SDRI (2019) Somalia Solutions Analysis Update 2019.

ⁱⁱ DDG (2017). Dadaab Returnee Conflict Assessment.

ⁱⁱⁱ Danwadaag project, Somalia.

include, for example, the establishment of a common social accountability process in Somalia to engage at scale with communities through a digital and qualitative platform that captures citizens' perspectives on a range of issues that are not defined by a single project, mandate or sector.¹⁶³ Evidence highlights Somali citizens' sense of disconnect from decision-making processes. In Mogadishu, 40% of Somalis living in settlements say they lack access to decision-making, while a third raise concerns that an alarming 96% of those receiving aid believe they are under-consulted.¹⁶⁴ These are sobering statistics for national and international actors striving for sustainable (re)integration. These issues are likely to be exacerbated for returnees, many of whom have spent decades – if not their entire lives – abroad.

What is social accountability?

Social accountability is understood as the holding to account of decision-makers outside of political accountability (i.e. elections and political parties).

It involves amplifying the voice of citizens to the level of decision-making in order to improve the performance of institutions constituted to serve them and, more broadly, to enhance trust in institutions.

Fox, J (2014). Social Accountability: What does the evidence really say? GPSA Working Paper No. 1. Washington: World Bank.

How to ensure adequate representation of different groups

Whilst the essence of (re)integration and durable solutions approaches is to redress vulnerabilities and inequities associated with displacement, a key

¹⁶³ See: <https://www.africasvoices.org/>

¹⁶⁴ ReDSS/Africa's Voices (2019).

principle is to go beyond status-based approaches to a displacement-affected community approach. In some ways, these two aspects of durable solutions are contrary to one another, and there are clear risks of applying a status-based approach. An example is the way that agencies target services to returnees via quota systems (often, 50% returnees, 30% IDPs and 20% host communities). Returnees may be targeted on the basis of prior displacement, such as preventing renewed or secondary displacement. They have specific needs for shelter, livelihoods and education related to displacement, along with potentially longer-term social, cultural and communication needs due to weak or absent networks. However, research shows the risks of categorising people based on their migration status, including marking them out for discrimination as outsiders who do not qualify for a range of rights, and thereby limiting social inclusion and cohesion prospects.¹⁶⁵ Focus group participants in Somalia spoke of children facing discrimination in school and being identified as Yemeni or Kenyan, depending on where they had returned from, pushing returnees to

want to blend in rather than stand out based on their migration status. A woman in Mogadishu also spoke about being identified or labelled a returnee: *"I feel the word returnee has become part of my name now. It is identified in where we live; we are referred to as returnees by the government, organisations and places that have been built for us. We left a country that did not belong to us, where everyone referred to us as refugees, and now we are back in our country and we still have a label."* Supporting this transition should be a focus of programming.

7.1 Land allocation and integrated settlement planning

With pressure mounting on available land and returnees often facing displacement on return, shortcomings in integrated settlement planning have become constraints to (re)integration. A Kismayo returnee, interviewed in Medina village, explains the concerns that he and his neighbours share: *"We were like tractors*



Reception Centre in Berbera, Somaliland, Somalia, 2015. © Axel Fassio/DRC

165 DDG (2017). Dadaab returnee conflict assessment; Sturridge, Bakewell and Hammond (2018).

unloading sand; we were brought here but not given care. No one has looked [at] us again. We don't have water, good education and health." An older man said, jokingly, "Would you call a one bedroom a house? Would you accept to live in one bedroom if you are six people in your household, when you are young and need your privacy?"

While access to land and housing is one of the priority needs of returnees, governments have often assumed that any land would do. Land for the displaced is commonly located on the margins of urban life and service delivery, and in areas not previously conceived as suitable and habitable places. Medina was described to our teams as an area between a graveyard and a rubbish dump.

The risk of encampment upon return occurred in Afghanistan following large-scale repatriation after the fall of the Taliban. In 2005, the Land Allocation Scheme, under Presidential Decree 104, provided landless returnees with land from 300,000 plots at over 30 sites in Afghanistan. However, despite the engagement of key stakeholders – the government, UN, donors and NGOs – many of the sites remained ghost towns, which were either under-inhabited or uninhabited as the intended residents migrated abroad or moved to urban centres due to inadequate access to basic services and livelihoods.¹⁶⁶ One of the community leaders interviewed in Alice Ghan, just 60 kilometres north of Kabul, explained that the government had been unable to negotiate water access with the neighbouring community, resulting in an unaffordable and unsustainable water trucking outcome for returnees. Nor had the government been able to agree on including these townships in national development and rural development plans early on, compromising on any possibility of turning these schemes into areas with growth prospects. Disagreements between stakeholders meant that Alice Ghan, a land allocation site funded by the Government of Australia, with support from the UN, soon became home to those who could not afford to leave. The same community leader explained that, as there was no clinic nearby, his wife had passed away before she could reach a hospital. The most destitute were left to live there.

New legal frameworks for state land allocation for returnees

Afghanistan's new Presidential Decree on Land Allocation (PD-305) was issued in 2018 and is set to be implemented in 2019, in recognition of historical shortcomings in the treatment of returnees and of the

fact that land is a critical component of durable solutions for the displaced. The main aim of the decree is to make best use of land for economic and social purposes, envisioning land allocation, services and shelter as a collective, prioritising vulnerable groups and, thereby, addressing shortcomings of the past. Discussions with Citizens' Charter stakeholders have revealed gaps in knowledge about the new allocation system, with a need for more awareness-raising to accompany the change.

As the case study below illustrates (Box 9), **whilst the provision of land or shelter is part of the solution, this, in itself, does not ensure durable solutions or sustainable (re)integration.** Strong, economically active and well-serviced communities require a longer-term, integrated approach to livelihoods, basic services and housing – not simply land or shelter.

Greater success requires strong coordination across sectors and actors in order to deliver services and support to a community. **Even with a multisectoral response, many services are being provided by international humanitarian organisations rather than being delivered in partnership with civil society organisations or the private sector.** This runs counter to the aim of (re)integration: that returnees should be integrated not only into their societies, but also into the systems that support them, rather than receiving parallel services that are outside of a city's existing services and market systems. The fundamental issue remains that, in some return locations, services are non-existent. The lack of government-led services is being addressed as part of the state-building agenda in Somalia. **The durable solutions and state-building agendas are interlinked:** to ensure that settlements are not set up as villages in parallel but are, instead, integrated into national systems – even if these are nascent. This will also require regulating engagement with private sector actors that can, in the meantime, provide access to services such as electricity and water. From a sustainability and affordability perspective, exploring the public–private partnership option should be a systematic endeavour of area-based planning.

Agreement on an integrated approach under one settlement plan is required to turn land-based solutions into stepping stones for durable solutions. Kismayo illustrates the need to go beyond single settlement plans to larger-scale, citywide urban plans under which new and existing settlements are configured, planned and connected as city extensions, rather than as separate, disconnected villages.

166 Majidi (2013). Home sweet home! Repatriation, reintegration and land allocation in Afghanistan.

Box 9. Land Allocation and Integrated Settlement Planning in Kismayo, Somalia

Kismayo is Somalia's third-largest city and the capital of the Lower Juba region and Jubaland state. Its already large population has increased due to the presence of IDPs and returnees. Many residents live in one-room shelters, where they endure inadequate, unsanitary and cramped living conditions, fire hazards and limited security of tenure.ⁱ A raft of measures – including emergency and transitional shelter initiatives – were implemented in response to this housing crisis.ⁱⁱ However, with IDPs continuing to arrive following a severe drought in 2016, as well as large numbers of returnees, a more sustainable response was needed.

In 2016, in response to advocacy by international agencies and other actors, the Jubaland government allocated land for IDPs and returnees in underdeveloped areas on the outskirts of Kismayo. About 700 permanent one-bedroom brick and concrete houses were built in Afmadow and Medina. Although the housing offered greater security of tenure, the lack of a comprehensive settlement plan quickly became evident. Built on sand, the area is vulnerable to flooding, and the properties soon developed structural faults. People were relocated with insufficient consideration being given to services and livelihoods. Although the site is just 3 kilometres from Kismayo, residents complain that poor access to the city and its main markets undermine livelihoods opportunities.

A second site, Midnimo village, adopted a more integrated and comprehensive approach. NRC developed a settlement plan against which a range of agencies, including the German Development Agency (GIZ), ARC, CARE and UNHCR, established a market, health services, water points and schools. One- and two-bedroom permanent houses came later. The schools and the clinic opened a year into the programme. Many homes have an energy supply, although access to electricity and water needs to be made more affordable and cost-effective for the displaced.

Essential to the approach has been an integrated multisector and multi-actor response, so people moved into a settlement with functional services rather than an empty site. This requires time and cannot be achieved under short-term humanitarian deadlines and funding. Humanitarian agencies point to the need to incorporate support for HLP rights into the plan, while, at the same time, ensuring a government capacity-strengthening component so that government counterparts provide strategic and operational leadership for complex issues.

In 2017, concerned in part that returnees were swapping life in a camp in Kenya for life in a camp in Kismayo, the Jubaland government announced a new shelter policy, stipulating a two-room structure as the minimum. There are signs that this policy, which increases the appropriateness and sustainability of housing, may be adopted across Somalia. However, aid actors are resisting. They insist on striking a balance between providing two-room houses for just a few and addressing the pressing need for shelter for the tens of thousands of IDPs in Kismayo. They argue that the two-room houses, which cost approximately US\$4,500 each, are unaffordable. As an estimated 20,000 households in Kismayo need shelter and based on current housing requirements alone (not including infrastructure, services and the potential increase in returnees from Kenya), the total cost would be an unaffordable US\$90 million. Whether interim solutions – such as building foundations for larger houses and owner-driven responses – could form part of the answer is still being debated. However, experience shows that providing shelter addresses only part of the issue; housing must be part of a comprehensive, integrated plan that addresses livelihoods, basic services, infrastructure and social cohesion.

i UN-Habitat (2017). Kismayo Urban Profile: Working Paper and Spatial Analyses for Urban Planning Consultations and Durable Solutions for Displacement Crises

ii Shelter Cluster Somalia (2016). Shelter and Refugee Returnees.



Key Takeaways

1. The adoption of common programming principles – a key feature of resilience and development planning – can ensure commitment to processes, such as community-based programming, that support durable solutions.
2. Initiatives are underway to strengthen the voices and inclusion of displacement-affected communities, and to make those voices heard by decision-makers. These include, for example, the establishment of a common social accountability platform in Somalia.
3. Integrated approaches under a 'one settlement plan' are required to turn land-based solutions into stepping stones for durable solutions, focusing on housing, rather than shelter, and on configured, planned and connected city extensions.

8. Investing in locally led approaches to economic (re)integration

Economic (re)integration programming has focused disproportionately on technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In return settings, TVET is often considered a cornerstone in rebuilding livelihoods and a necessary step towards socioeconomic (re)integration. While a link to the educational system is clear, links to market systems have, more often than not, been overlooked. To ensure that TVET is more than a skills-building activity and that it generates social and economic impacts for returnee households, the approach needs to be rethought in (re)integration programming. Some analysts interviewed for this research pushed this rationale further, stating that TVET by humanitarian actors should be stopped, leaving specialists – in this case, development actors – in charge of the portfolio around skills and jobs.

Clarifying TVET programming's objective: a re-focus on integration

Technical and vocational education and training programmes in return settings have maintained a dual objective, one of which is to support economic (re)integration and improve access to income, while the other is to reduce irregular migration. Evidence from Afghanistan and Somalia challenge these perspectives and clarify, as a way forward, the need to delink the TVET agenda from a migration-management agenda. While TVET projects within (re)integration programmes in Afghanistan and Somalia often focus on reducing migration, evidence finds no direct link between TVET and migration decision-making. A policy brief based on six datasets of 12,000 survey responses¹⁶⁷ reveals that employee and education programmes have mixed impacts on migration decision-making. Therefore, TVET alone does not anchor returnees in their country of origin; decisions are based on structural factors of peace and hopes for a secure future, as well as actual access to labour markets.



Returnees wait to cross the border at Torkham crossing. © NRC/Enayatullah Azad

167 Mercy Corps/Samuel Hall (2018). Driven to Leave: Aid & Migration – Assessing Evidence from Somalia & Afghanistan.



Newly arrived women from Yemen resting at the reception center in Berbera, Somaliland, 2015. © Axel Fassio/DRC

If the ultimate goal is to improve access to income and, through income, to improve people's lives and capacity to access health, education and other services, then TVET activities need to be part of a holistic approach. In Afghanistan and in Somalia, TVET programmes are delinked from the other variables that can, when combined, result in greater well-being. For instance, the link between TVET and socioeconomic inclusion requires greater attention. In both contexts, there is a strong correlation between available social capital¹⁶⁸ and access to opportunities upon return. Returnees – particularly youth – point to the need for connections to get placements. However, finding work also depends on what you know. Knowledge does not simply develop upon return; building knowledge must be part of education systems in exile. The examples from our primary data are telling: in Somalia, returnees from Kenya found it easier than those from Yemen to secure jobs if they are more educated, but returnees from Yemen were perceived as having marketable skills. This supports arguments laid out earlier for investing in refugees while they are in their country of asylum in order to enhance (re)integration. **An overview of previous and existing interventions finds that programming focuses neither on the potential of social networks to sustain livelihoods nor on ways of enhancing TVET in exile.**

Bringing coherence and building structures for TVET

Key to sustainability is the need to invest in locally led approaches to economic (re)integration rather than exogenous training provided by humanitarian aid organisations. The mayor of Baidoa, in Somalia, has said his city has enough tailors, beauty practitioners and mechanics, and that he would not agree to any more training programmes in these occupations.¹⁶⁹ Similar frustrations have been voiced in Afghanistan, where the absence of strategic coordination on education and skills programming for returnees among line ministries has hindered stakeholders' ability to manage expectations and outcomes.

Donors fund a range of non-specialised organisations to provide TVET without a working group, coordination structure, alignment or commonly accepted standard. A stakeholder in Kabul says, *"Each NGO is doing things separately, going their own way. This does not contribute to sustainability."*¹⁷⁰ The same lack of coordination is seen in the public sector. A key informant mentioned the lack of government-led TVET opportunities outside of the main urban areas, where the technical universities are usually based, as a key shortcoming that needs to be addressed. The concentration of education resources – both public and private – in urban areas requires greater

168 The networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively.

169 Mayor Watiin of Baidoa (2018) DFID Somalia Urban Conference, Jacaranda Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya.

170 Key informant interview, NRC, education specialist, Kabul (March 2019).

public attention, yet this may not be feasible due to funding and security issues.

A first step for ensuring coherence and avoiding duplication or market mismatches is to build structures for TVET policies and coordination. In Afghanistan, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) does not have a regulatory body for TVET. An ongoing objective of GIZ is to work with MoLSA to establish a body that can regulate such programmes under the umbrella of non-formal training. Steps are also being taken to build government-approved technical universities rather than adopting centre-based approaches. The example of Kismayo, in Somalia, sheds

light on recent processes endorsed by local authorities: a university structure is being developed to train trainers, who will gain government-approved and certified skills for further training.

A second step is to give meaning to private sector engagement. A question being raised across Somalia and Afghanistan, as well as in Jordan and Lebanon, is “*who is the private sector?*” Accurate data on the composition and practices of the private sector, including the informal sector, would provide clarity. In order to integrate refugees in larger numbers, evidence is needed to indicate how, when and where the private

Box 10. What Have We Learnt from TVET Programming in Afghanistan?

TVET programmes in Kabul and across Afghanistan have aimed to increase livelihoods opportunities and improve access to sustainable income for vulnerable populations. Yet, global experience shows that TVET programmes alone do not increase sustainable livelihoods. A World Bank economist's global evidence review concluded that “On the labour supply side, the most promising interventions appear to be ones that help workers access different labour markets, overcoming sectoral and, especially, spatial mismatches.” On the demand side, the most successful alternative policies and programs help firms overcome regulatory obstacles (innovation, doing business, hiring). By contrast, the least successful interventions have focused on job-training, skills development, and large-scale employment schemes.”ⁱ Key informants say TVET programmes struggle to place beneficiaries – often returnees, IDPs and vulnerable host community members – in stable employment or sustainable start-up businesses where they can earn an income.

ⁱ McKenzie (2017). *How Effective Are Active Labor Market Policies in Developing Countries? A Critical Review of Recent Evidence*.

ⁱⁱ Mercy Corps/Samuel Hall (2018); McKenzie (2017); Ghiasy, Zhou and Hallgren (2015). *Afghanistan's private sector: Status and ways forward*; World Bank (2008). *Skills Development in Afghanistan*.

TVET programmes alone: skills without jobs?

Traditional, stand-alone TVET programmes struggle to achieve their stated aim of finding stable employment and income streams for beneficiaries. The informal sector constitutes 80 to 90% of the Afghan economy, while formal employment accounts for just 9%.ⁱ In interviews, organisations that implement TVET described the ongoing struggle for their trainees to transition into jobs. Returnees, IDPs and vulnerable host community members have often experienced interrupted or incomplete schooling, and practitioners say target populations often lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, which are essential for technical training.ⁱⁱ

LMAs are integral in identifying skills for TVET and livelihoods programmes – and, therefore, employment after the course. A rigorous LMA identifies knowledge and skills that are a good match for the local labour market and, therefore, for TVET. Organisations implementing TVET say that, even if they are members of consortia, their resources are too limited to afford a comprehensive LMA.ⁱⁱⁱ Each implementer may hire consultants, but without a standardised, larger-scale LMA methodology at the provincial and national level, a smaller, programme-linked LMA is not as comprehensive as that required by TVET organisations. A larger-scale LMA, with economist inputs, may necessitate a wider sharing of resources across TVET providers, or the involvement of international governance actors such as the World Bank, UNDP, IOM and UNHCR.^{iv}

LMAs may use participatory methodologies that draw on the perspectives of beneficiaries, community leaders and community members, but those perspectives may not reflect market realities. A recurring issue with LMAs relates to skills identification; for example, a majority of participatory responses may identify a particular skill that may not correspond to actual opportunities. An NGO informant comments that, “The quality of research has been poor. There has been an issue with participatory research; consultants are talking to beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries, which is fine, but they are not necessarily clued into what the demand for skills is. What we need is actual economists to look at the labour market assessments. Otherwise, [the reply] you will always get back [is] ‘tailoring’” (in reference to common responses from research participants on well-known occupations).

ⁱ Ghiasy, Zhou and Hallgren (2015); World Bank (2008).

ⁱⁱ Key informant interviews with NRC and DRC (March 2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ Key informant interview with DRC (March 2019).

^{iv} ADSP (2018).

Coordination and synergies with government

The Afghan government and MoLSA detail their skills priorities in yearly plans, but these can be unclear or mismatched to project design. It is important to balance locally contextualised skills identification with comprehensive, rigorous market assessments that link to national priority programmes. Without such information, TVET programming cannot achieve its aims. Yet, regulatory and planning frameworks are missing in many return settings. Stronger synergies and enhanced coordination with government are essential to link TVET with livelihoods. Afghanistan's National TVET Strategy was intended to provide a road map for coordination across the TVET sector.ⁱ Still, the TVET landscape remains fragmented: at least four line ministries conduct work in TVET, livelihoods or skills education and training, including MoLSA, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy, the TVET Authority and the Deputy Ministry of Youth within the Ministry of Information and Culture.

In 2019, the World Bank and the Afghan government together launched the EZ-KAR project with five components to support 13 cities across five years. The project aims to develop market-enabling activities and interventions that are both community-driven and supporting city-level involvement. It builds on existing structures and national programmes, such as the Citizens' Charter's focus on community development councils, and the Cities Investment Program, which aims to improve the sustainability of cities in Afghanistan. EZ-KAR's focus on jobs and markets adds to these programmes. Grants will be provided for public works in 13 cities, focusing on provincial capital cities with the highest number of returnees and IDPs. Municipalities will identify a list of market projects and market-enabling activities, with approval being conditional on meeting regulatory reform actions, such as simplifying business regulations. The project will focus on national-level regulatory reform. While the project is only in its inception phase, it provides a development-focused economic (re) integration agenda that other agencies, including NGOs, will be able to contribute to.

i UNESCO (2013). Afghanistan National TVET Strategy.

sector can support returnees. Research finds that, in both Afghanistan and Somalia, small and medium-sized enterprises are often set up by returnees or members of the diaspora, who understand the potential of returnees to contribute. Linking the two through public–private partnerships at the national and local levels is a lesson learnt across contexts.

Investing in social and community-level livelihoods and market systems

Any livelihoods approach in return settings involves working around constraints for children, youth and women – rather than focusing primarily on men's livelihoods.

Save the Children in Afghanistan, as co-lead of the Education in Emergencies Working Group, provides support to families for sustainable employment, notably through small businesses. The goal is to help derail some child labour practices in return settings. However, research shows that such practices are generational and rooted in social customs. Undoing them will require both specific interventions on income and broader support to returnee households through education and raising awareness about harmful child labour practices, such as working at brick kilns or weaving carpets.

Each context also presents both opportunities and social constraints concerning women's business activity and employment, including travel. Perceptions of women-run businesses is an issue in Afghanistan but not in Somalia, for instance. In all settings, the

displaced are eager to ensure more favourable dependency ratios: if a woman has paid work, she adds to her household's income. Home-based activities and self-help groups¹⁷¹ are avenues for planning gender-sensitive livelihoods; another is to develop the market for women by upgrading the marketplace, improving safety to and in workplaces or schools, and linking women to value chains. Achieving these aims requires close collaboration with local governance structures, including municipalities, to help women feel empowered to work. Yet, rarely do women's economic empowerment programmes, established by humanitarian organisations, address the social and political aspects of women's marginalisation and lack of ability – as well as opportunity – to fully participate. One step would be to work with men, and other gatekeepers, to ensure that harmful norms and constraining practices are not entrenched through segregation in markets and workplaces.

Each context requires coordinated labour market assessments (LMAs) and partnerships with local stakeholders. Humanitarian organisations on the ground often do not have a partnership strategy for engaging with partners, whether civil society, the private sector or government. Understanding how to engage better and more strategically around livelihoods practices, including social and community-level norms, is a prerequisite. Building in conflict-sensitive analyses, analysis of social inclusion and economic inclusion, together can enable a broader understanding of labour markets as systems. The approach taken by ILO and UNHCR at a global

171 Schmeding (2018). The Self-Help Group Approach in Afghanistan: Report Prepared for People in Need.



The children of Shakrullah (26, not pictured) settled in Nangarhar, after continuing harassment and uncertain legal status forced them to leave their homes in a camp for Afghan refugees near Peshawar in Pakistan. © A Quilty / IRC

level in refugee-hosting and forced-displacement settings can be extended to the (re)integration context. The Approach to Inclusive Market Systems (AIMS)¹⁷² takes into account the functioning of the markets: from the business relationships and financial networks, to the supporting functions, rules and norms that govern markets and value chains. Any approach to integration requires a three-way social, economic and conflict-sensitive analysis, paired with market system analysis, to understand which sectors have the most potential for growth and for impact on the returnee and displacement-affected populations. Essential to such assessments are a strong understanding of returnee–host relationships, of governance structures and of private sector make-up.

A complementary option is to conduct joint and coordinated LMAs; however, agencies implement their own assessments based on differing methodologies and use the data to inform individual programmes.

Agencies need to avoid making the mistake of seeking singular solutions to livelihood interventions. NGOs complain that LMAs are often of poor quality and not conducted by researchers with a strong grounding in both macroeconomics and microeconomics, including business expertise. Working with market and context experts, development actors and the government is essential. Involving practitioners can ensure that programmes are then adapted. LMAs are critically important in identifying the skills required and in increasing the chances of employment and income following training.

Finally, **linking TVET and livelihoods to market systems is necessary, including to market systems outside of urban areas.** Opportunities may exist for returnees to use networks and their knowledge of rural and border areas to enhance the availability of food and jobs upon return. An analysis of durable solutions programming in Somalia reached similar conclusions.¹⁷³



Key Takeaways

1. Coordination and regulation of TVET activities have been weak across return contexts. TVET training must be delinked from a migration-management agenda and built into a national agenda.
2. Better linkages of TVET activities with employers, private sector actors, the wider market as well as social networks are needed for (re)integration to be possible.
3. Actors with expertise in economics, such as ILO and the World Bank, have a role to play in producing LMAs that are of sufficient technical rigour and scale to guide market-based interventions that do not just focus on areas, but on connections between rural and urban areas.

172 ILO (n.d.). Approach to Inclusive Market Systems (AIMS); see: <https://www.ilo.org/empent/Projects/refugee-livelihoods/lang--en/index.htm#AIMS>

173 ReDSS/Samuel Hall/SDRI (2019).

9. Closing monitoring and data gaps after return

9.1 Improving accountability for (re)integration through learning

In the view of a UN official, greater engagement on accountability does not happen in Somalia due to a lack of clear understanding among aid actors of the quality and impact of their programmes. This is particularly relevant in relation to returnees, whose specific needs and vulnerabilities post-return, in the context of a predominant focus on repatriation, usually remain unknown. Stakeholder monitoring and evaluations that do occur – with UNHCR and WFP, for instance – are rarely shared publicly. Beyond these evaluations on the part of these two actors, no agency or actor has performed a systematic analysis of returnees' progress towards (re)integration, including determinants and barriers they face over the short and longer term.¹⁷⁴ The common perception that returnees who receive a return package are privileged is not grounded in any assessment. There is no understanding of the relative well-being of those who have received return packages through voluntary repatriation schemes and those who return independently. Nor is there a comprehensive understanding of the scale of secondary movement, or how returnees returning to their places of origin are faring. There are perfunctory efforts to understand the vulnerabilities of different groups within a community and the implications for durable solutions. Amplifying community voices can be an important way of better understanding their needs and vulnerabilities. Without such understanding, returnees' needs and vulnerabilities cannot be said to define assistance frameworks for sustainable (re)integration, thereby limiting prospects for accountability.

Another approach – which is ongoing in Somalia – is to integrate learning as an essential component of adaptive programming on durable solutions. In Somalia, the integration of ReDSS as a learning partner within five durable solutions consortia has been identified as a key achievement for collective outcomes and coordination between donors, practitioners and government.¹⁷⁵ This has allowed the consortia to build joint monitoring frameworks, improving not only coordination but also information-sharing and peer learning within and between consortia, which can be fed into programming and policy. It has also helped improve donor

coordination across five durable solutions consortia funded by the EU, DFID, Danida and the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, and across three regions in Somalia (South West State, Jubaland and Benadir).

Closing data gaps to bridge the divide

The last two decades of (re)integration programming demonstrate that no nexus programming is possible until and unless governments agree to place (re)integration on the agenda. When durable solutions are accepted, including local integration or (re)integration in urban settings, development actors can support them. In this regard, the position of humanitarian and development actors on (re)integration has evolved, notably through data-focused initiatives.

Development actors and researchers that are invested in (re)integration across contexts have long argued that effective solutions require critical data gaps to be addressed. Data and analysis on (re)integration are insufficient across multiple dimensions.

A first gap is around the existence of comparable datasets, joint data collection and analysis on returns and (re)integration trends. A second important data gap concerns the desired outcome. There is, to date, no commonly agreed definition of the term '(re)integration'. Yet, (re)integration is the stated goal of most stakeholders working with the displaced and is considered a prerequisite for sustainable return. UNHCR's Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities defines this concept as *"a process that should result in the disappearance of differences in legal rights and duties and the equal access of returnees to services, assets and opportunities"*.¹⁷⁶ (Re)integration is, therefore, understood relative to the local host population. Beyond this intuitive truth lies a host of technical challenges when it comes to measuring the degree of integration in the context of staggering numbers of displaced people and complex patterns of mobility, overall low levels of development, recurrent conflict and a general lack of services and protection. But no common, harmonised source of information is available today to allow for a comparative assessment of the needs of refugees, returnees, IDPs and migrants to target support in the most appropriate manner. This includes the lack of a set of joint monitoring and joint information-sharing mechanisms based on standard objective/subjective indicators, qualitative and quantitative tools, and a displacement and longitudinal lens in data collection.

To address this gap, in Afghanistan in 2015 and 2016, members of the Reintegration Working Group, led by Samuel Hall and UNHCR, launched the Multi-

¹⁷⁴ Two pieces of research have analysed the security implications of refugee return and issues related to belonging and livelihoods of both refugee and IDP returns respectively: DDG (2017) Dadaab returnee conflict assessment, and Sturridge, Bakewell and Hammond (2018) Return and (Re)Integration after Displacement: Belonging, Labelling and Livelihoods in Three Somali Cities.

¹⁷⁵ ReDSS/Samuel Hall/SDRI (2019).

¹⁷⁶ UNHCR (2004), 4.

Dimensional Integration Index (MDI).¹⁷⁷ This initiative was designed to obtain a community-level view of (re)integration dynamics. This joint attempt was intended to establish a standardised framework to enable government agencies and key partners to understand and map integration processes and to assess the impact of programmes on (re)integration levels. Based on IASC global frameworks, academic standards and practitioner assessment tools, the MDI's core purpose is to measure specific displacement-related deprivations.

Pilots of this tool revealed that a contextualised approach to integration programming is crucial: the needs are not the same between different urban return areas, between rural and urban contexts, and between IDPs and returnees. In some areas, social integration was found to be high, while economic and security integration remained lacking. In others (often urban contexts), the opposite was true. Where integration scores were high (pointing to a relative similarity between hosts and the displaced), blanket targeting of the displaced may result in a relative disadvantage to host populations, with potentially negative consequences for social cohesion. Results suggested that the impact of assisted returns packages was significant in Kandahar and Herat, but negligible in a context of massive recent returns to Jalalabad in the east.¹⁷⁸ In the latter case, the fact that the differences between recent documented and undocumented returnees in terms of integration are marginal meant that the cash grants given to returnee families did not appear to contribute to integration in the short term.

In the Horn of Africa, ReDSS has developed a tool widely used for coordination, joint planning and monitoring.¹⁷⁹ The ReDSS Solutions Framework¹⁸⁰ uses 28 outcome indicators structured around physical, material and legal safety to measure durable solutions achievements in a particular context. A traffic light system has been developed to assess the status of each indicator and provide a comparative assessment between the displaced and the host community. The rating of each indicator highlights where information exists, and where more information or data are needed, to help avoid a duplication of data efforts and encourage assessments that can adequately fill information gaps. It provides a road map for agencies to design interventions that address identified gaps. ReDSS conducts periodical solutions analyses by subregions in Somalia, or on specific themes. Using the framework indicators, it provides a basis around which to engage in stronger planning, coordination and learning across time.

Such efforts can inform area-based programming, early recovery planning and types of assistance most needed in communities of return. These tools can be used as a monitoring tool for increased accountability and improved reporting standards to donors and the government. They can be locally calibrated to each location and be used by agencies to obtain better access to communities. They can serve as evidence to support advocacy, drawing critical attention to the diverse needs of urban, peri-urban and rural planning, and present the basis for harmonised monitoring and evaluation efforts.



Key Takeaways

1. Long-term monitoring and evaluation efforts, including tracking over time and in hard-to-reach areas, and joint efforts on analysis, would ensure that (re)integration programming is approached holistically by a range of actors, around a common agenda. A way forward is for joint programming to be a requirement of durable solutions programming, in order to translate monitoring and evaluation into a common strategic framework.
2. Placing (re)integration programming explicitly within research agendas, both in countries of asylum and origin, can provide the necessary link to state-building and development work.
3. There is need to set standards to monitor and measure sustainable (re)integration. There is lack of evidence and consensus among durable solutions actors on what works or does not work in the process of measuring and monitoring progress towards (re)integration. However, initiatives are underway, communities of practice have been established and require linkages to global framework processes under the CRRF and the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, and for inclusion in approaches globally.

177 Samuel Hall/UNHCR (2017a). The Multi-Dimensional Integration Index: Methodological Note.

178 Samuel Hall/UNHCR (2017b). The Multi-Dimensional Integration Index: Pilot Results.

179 ReDSS (n.d.). ReDSS Solutions Framework; see: <https://regionaldss.org/index.php/research-and-knowledge-management/solutions-framework/>

180 The ReDSS Solutions Framework builds on and operationalises the IASC framework.

10. Defining the nexus between humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding in return settings

Urban services are lacking for everyone – not just for the displaced. This brings national governance and planning to the fore. The issue here is not simply one of limited capacity or services that are not integrated; areas of return require investment in services and infrastructure. Governments need support to take the lead in facilitating broad access to services. Understanding the interrelationships between humanitarian action, development and both peacebuilding and state-building efforts can be key to durable solutions. As humanitarian needs are often a result of the absence of peace, and as protracted conflict hinders development, integrating discussions

with peace actors has to be part of the durable solutions conversation in any conflict context.

This is especially important in situations where the state-building agenda is carried out by a different set of actors than humanitarian organisations who may consider the state-building agenda too political to engage with. Agreeing on parameters of engagement across actors with different sets of principles is essential. One such parameter has to be the adherence to government-led planning. Another has to be adherence to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus (or triple nexus)¹⁸¹ that can address, sustainably, (re)integration prospects. As identified in a 2016 IASC paper, the triple nexus can be understood, “as an operational imperative where the development, humanitarian and peace-related actors need to take account of each other’s actions – and possibly collaborate – to be efficient and effective because their activities have impact on each other and each actor is affected by the broader context where peace, development and humanitarian action interacts as well”.¹⁸²



The registration desk from Bossaso, Puntland, 2015. © Axel Fassio/DRC

181 ICVA (2016). Nexus Briefing Paper. Topic 1: The “nexus” explained.

182 IASC and UN Working Group on Transitions (2016). Background paper on Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus.

Steps towards this triple nexus are underway: in Afghanistan, in 2016, the Citizens' Charter was launched, alongside the Urban National Priority Programme, to address service delivery for all. In Somalia, efforts at the state and municipal levels address durable solutions in urban settings, with a growing voice and leadership by local authorities. Between 2017 and 2019 alone, 24 pieces of legislation or policy were announced in Somalia to account for durable solutions.¹⁸³ More needs to be done to support national and sub-national actors in turning policies into reality to ensure national policies and programmes can concretely support first responders – that is, local authorities and municipal actors.

Somalia's experience demonstrates that repeated and protracted crises – albeit in a context of insecurity and state-building – can prompt longer-term developmental approaches. Many agree that the 2011 famine led to greater engagement in building resilience in the country in response to broad recognition of the need to shift from repeated, short-term, emergency-based responses to longer-term investments at the community level. As a result, numerous donors, working through consortia, have invested in significant multi-year resilience funding. The approach to durable solutions has been modelled on these principles and approaches.

A cautious approach to peacebuilding and the triple nexus

Political uncertainties prevail in Afghanistan and in Syria. In the former, peace talks and elections together create a climate of uncertainty and a tendency to wait for new developments. Important questions relate to whether the Taliban could return to power if the peace talks fail, and the implications for out-migration and the readiness of foreign governments to recognise Afghans as refugees. In Syria, the security of those in spontaneous or self-organised returns could be threatened due to the perceived role of the individuals and their families during the conflict, in particular for young men, regardless of their political leanings.

Peacebuilding conversations in Afghanistan have remained separate from discussions about durable solutions or the humanitarian–development nexus (HDN). The triple nexus – of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts – has not materialised in the country. Apart from a conversation about growth post-2020 that could be included in a peace scenario and planning, efforts remain separate. There is no direct link between the HDN and the peace process in Afghanistan.

In Somalia, the possibility exists to merge plans to target the triple nexus in 2019 through greater collaboration with stabilisation actors involved in

the peacebuilding agenda. Stakeholders across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding arenas are engaging in discussions on durable solutions. These discussions build on the strengths and know-how of stabilisation actors, such as their experience in community-based planning, infrastructure work, social cohesion efforts and urban initiatives involving civil society. Stabilisation actors' experience is seen as beneficial to the thinking and planning on durable solutions in Somalia.

10.1 Aligning humanitarian and development financing

“We have funds for humanitarian return and emergency response, not for development or sustainable (re)integration. There is a huge gap in the communities as well. We target a few villages in a district, but nearby villages with returnees will receive no support.”

(UN representative, Afghanistan)

The humanitarian–development gap is increasingly being bridged by development actors stepping in to address short- and longer-term needs. Development actors are increasingly seeking to reach backwards to bridge the gap between development and short-term emergency needs, while humanitarian actors are increasingly reaching forwards to bridge the divide between humanitarian and development needs. Both sets of actors, in turn, seek increasingly (though with more or less success in practice) to engage governments, strengthening their ability and will to drive development policy and durable solutions planning. The lesson learnt is that (re)integration requires the commitment of government, development planners and donors. The humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus depends on opportunities offered by governments and funding released by donors.

There are structural and financial reasons for gaps between humanitarian and development aid.¹⁸⁴ Integrated planning – and using aid and services to integrate returnees, IDPs and hosts – will remain a theory as long as funding is not aligned. The fact that more funds are invested in returns than in (re)integration has prevented actors from supporting a global discussion on (re)integration. No global policy commitments or funding facility are currently on the World Bank horizon. However, successful initiatives and ad hoc practices on (re)integration are taking place in Somalia and Afghanistan. Key informants argue that, until there

183 ReDSS/Samuel Hall/SDRI (2019).

184 NRC/FAO/UNDP (2019). Financing the nexus: Gaps and opportunities from a field perspective.

are identifiable sources of funding for (re)integration (whether this comes as a dedicated funding source or is anchored in existing development funding mechanisms), these steps will constitute nothing more than innovative projects achieving results – and will remain disparate.

There is growing evidence of what development funding can achieve through support for (re)integration. In Somalia, European Union funding has launched multi-year consortia working on (re)integration in urban and rural areas. The EU has set an example for other donors, such as DFID and Danida, to support the durable solutions agenda in Somalia. In Afghanistan, the same level of strategic funding has not materialised. A lack of coherence in donor funding means that, whilst all pieces of the (re)integration puzzle are being funded, the approach is not coordinated.

The approach in Somalia has been to fund multiple durable solutions consortia, combining UN and NGO efforts to directly support the government at the federal and state levels, with multi-year funding and a programme-based – as opposed to a project-based – approach. In Afghanistan, the work has been less cohesive and subject to contestation. The Joint Way Forward came under criticism for facilitating returns at a time of increasing conflict in the country, with

NGOs claiming that conditions were not conducive to returns. In line with the new European Consensus on Development¹⁸⁵ and the Joint Way Forward,¹⁸⁶ the European Union, through its Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, funds various migration projects in Afghanistan. EU-funded actions on return and (re)integration, internal displacement, intra-regional migration and migration management for 2016–2020 amount to over 200 million euros. These are not tied to a common vision or a coherent pursuit of collective outcomes in the country of return. The EU in Afghanistan could learn from the EU in Somalia to take on more flexible, long-term and consortium-focused funding to address multidimensional needs and locally led approaches, and to include a learning partner to support. Lessons from Somalia and other emerging initiatives constitute a basis for the humanitarian–development–peace nexus (see Box 11). This supports the finding that it is easier to establish coherence among donor agendas when their other geopolitical interests converge, and if donor governments do not have conflicting interests. It is about politics and donor coordination – not just the lack of skills or capacity.

Box 11. Emerging Initiatives by Development Actors

In Afghanistan and Somalia, World Bank initiatives have the potential to support (re)integration and to bridge gaps. Work in both countries focuses on reinforcing responses in urban settings through infrastructure, service provision and jobs.

In Afghanistan, the EZ-KAR project plans to address the overall environment – including the regulatory framework – for development and job creation in return areas. It will aim for the economic integration of returnees in urban and peri-urban areas through the Citizens’ Charter and the Cities Investment Program and through support to municipalities. The initiatives will total US\$200 million.

In Somalia, infrastructure and technical support provided by the World Bank in support of the Federal Government of Somalia has reinforced capacity to address two urban solutions: the Somali Urban Investment Planning Project and the Somalia Urban Resilience Project now integrate displacement-affected communities in their planning. The World Bank is launching a preparatory process to consult with community and government stakeholders and to set up a project implementation unit at the municipal level within the Benadir Regional Administration (BRA). The work has two goals:

- to establish measures to ensure evictions are avoided during and after the end of the project
- to work with solutions consortia to provide alternative security of tenure for IDPs in project areas

In discussions with IOM and DFID, the World Bank intends to map all IDP settlements in the project target areas, identify any available public land for resettlement and study rental subsidy options. This is the start of an area-based plan and discussion with partners.

These solutions will take time to put into practice. They have the benefit of working with and through the government to create sustainability. In the meantime, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the German Development Agency (GIZ) are developing a road map on services, livelihoods and capacity-building. In Afghanistan, UNDP is leading an assessment of service provision for returnees once they cross the border, while GIZ is supporting the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry to support returnees through training and placement in trades, thereby complementing the education sector.ⁱ

i ACCI (2018). ACCI provides internship program for Afghan Private business.

185 European Union. International Cooperation and Development – Building partnerships for change in developing countries.

186 European Union/Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Joint Way Forward on migration issues.

10.2 (Re)integration programming in a context of emergencies, drought and instability: learning from Afghanistan

The difficulty in bridging the humanitarian–development–peace nexus is affected by the context of conflict, insecurity and disasters, which heightens the need for life-saving measures and the imperative for humanitarians to focus on an emergency response. In 2019, the Afghan government and the World Bank took steps to bridge the divide by ensuring that development partners are more invested in life-saving measures. A first discussion, in 2018, between multilateral and multisectoral stakeholders, addressed the drought response. The partners agreed to: discuss ways to hand over humanitarian response; engage in mid-term responses over a one-to-three-year timeframe; and consider the longer-term response, with actions by development and government actors needed to tackle systemic issues such as water scarcity, adjustments in

agricultural practices and providing the right information to people to boost their resilience. The emphasis is on providing social support and other assistance in drought-prone areas to help households become resilient. While the conversation is a useful starting point, it must be accompanied by concrete activities in order to have an impact. In addition, the same conversation could be widened to determine how to support and help those resuming or launching livelihoods in urban areas.

Since 2002, humanitarian funding to Afghanistan has dropped by an estimated 70%. Furthermore, the 2018 drought has pushed actors towards emergency response, with a limited number of agencies still working on (re)integration. Programming continues to focus on life-saving measures, basic services, food and non-food distribution and shelter. The trend is more towards humanitarian response and less so towards durable solutions.¹⁸⁷ Since early 2018, attention has also turned towards internal displacement, protracted conflict and IDPs rather than returnee response. While returns peaked in 2016, the subsequent slowdown has focused



DRC distributing firewood in the settlements in Kabul, Afghanistan, 2013. © Erick Gerstner/DRC

187 Key informant interview with Welthungerhilfe Afghanistan (March 2019).

attention on humanitarian crises, internal displacement, peace and elections.

To better understand what actors are doing along the humanitarian and development spectrum, the Afghan government, under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, is conducting a protocol review of all UN work in the country. The idea is to seek clarity on actions and results in three areas:

- understanding the government's plans for a long-term assistance and response framework
- ensuring that humanitarian action is coordinated based on core competencies and coverage

- establishing a link between drought and (re)integration through national priority programmes

The government's response is clear: some contexts require a flexible definition of the humanitarian–development nexus. Beyond that, in the long run, the government should focus on including both development and humanitarian partners within humanitarian response. As a result, hopes for a humanitarian–development nexus can only materialise if development actors support the transition to early recovery.



Key Takeaways

1. The adoption of common programming principles – a key feature of resilience and development planning – can ensure commitment to processes, such as community-based programming, that support durable solutions.
2. Initiatives are underway to strengthen the voices and inclusion of displacement-affected communities, and to make those voices heard by decision-makers. These include, for example, the establishment of a common social accountability platform in Somalia.
3. Integrated approaches under a 'one settlement plan' are required to turn land-based solutions into stepping stones for durable solutions, focusing on housing, rather than shelter, and on configured, planned and connected city extensions.



PART C

Conclusions and commitments for sustainable (re)integration

Conclusions and commitments for sustainable (re)integration

While millions of refugees return to contexts of poverty, conflict and insecurity in Afghanistan, Somalia and, possibly, in Syria, a tunnel focus on returns rather than on (re)integration, and a process led by humanitarian actors, have resulted in a short-term vision of (re)integration. Stakeholders, including communities and returnees themselves, have been unprepared for what happens post-return. As a result, this research asked a key question: *“How can returnees, receiving communities,*

governments and organisations be more effectively prepared so as to lay the ground and work towards sustainable (re)integration? What has worked and what could work?”

The findings are presented as a set of ten lessons learnt, which, together, provide a roadmap for how (re)integration programming can be conceived differently across the three phases below.



Preparedness for returns

1. Defining who is a returnee and when a situation is conducive to returns
2. Improving information-sharing with refugees and returnees
3. Better hosting for better (re)integration



Support to immediate return movements

4. Building on regional agreements to bolster responsibility-sharing
5. Designing cross-border approaches
6. Planning local responses with a focus on HLP



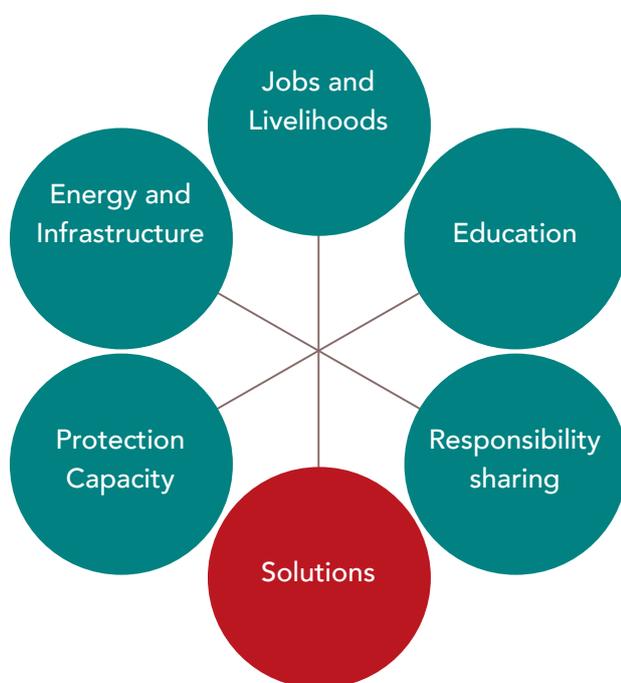
Longer-term support to sustainable (re)integration

7. Prioritising urban and community plans
8. Investing in locally led approaches to economic (re)integration
9. Closing monitoring and data gaps after return
10. Defining the nexus between humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding in return settings

Implications for global discussions

Our research, focused on (re)integration, points to the importance of engaging early on and enhancing preparedness, while ensuring that preparations do not overtake the need for sustained protection in refugee-hosting countries. We conclude on the links with global discussions. The GCR is framed as the vehicle through which refugee response can be approached in a more holistic, structured way in terms of looking at processes, such as (re)integration, from the very beginning.

This report is relevant to all six themes of the Global Refugee Forum. (Re)integration is not only a discussion about solutions, it is also a discussion about jobs and livelihoods, education, energy and infrastructure, protection capacity and responsibility-sharing. This report addresses these themes, highlights a range of long-term thinking and planning required, and recommends steps needed to follow through, prepare and shift the thinking on (re)integration.



Theme 1: Jobs and livelihoods

Our research calls for a focus on strengthening social capital as an integral part of jobs and livelihoods programming for (re)integration, enhancing skills training in exile with skills adapted to return settings,

and building national structures for TVET in countries of return. It calls for joint approaches to labour market assessments by humanitarian and development organisations, to put an end to single-agency approaches to jobs and livelihoods.

Theme 2: Education

Our research calls for financial constraints to enrolment to be addressed, especially given the rise of private-sector-led education services. Working with youth and education service providers (both public and private) will be essential as youth need to adapt to the new curricula and language of instruction. It also calls for ensuring that access to documentation is facilitated in return processes, so that the lack of documentation does not become a barrier to children’s integration in the education system. Special provisions and waivers are needed to allow for enrolment, even without documentation, and to protect the right of all children, regardless of status, to education. A good practice was put forth by the Afghan Ministry of Education in 2016 in response to the mass returns from Pakistan.

Theme 3: Energy and infrastructure

The report highlights the gaps in urban planning in contexts to which refugees return. Greater planning and support to local return responses are needed to avoid unmanaged urban growth, pressures on limited absorption capacities and unplanned informal settlements. Across all contexts, few urban plans have integrated the displaced or the informal settlements in which they live. The affordability of electricity and water continues to be a key constraint for returnees, requiring greater planning on public–private partnership to bring the cost of basic services down. Urban upgrading and integrated settlement planning, under the leadership of the UN and governments, can ensure that the arrival of returnees is seen as a benefit to communities of return.

Theme 4: Protection capacity

The research emphasises the importance of engaging early on and enhancing preparedness for return and (re)integration, while ensuring that preparations do not overtake the need for sustained protection in refugee-hosting countries, and that standards for conditions and modes of engagement are agreed. A good practice

is found in the protection thresholds set in the Syrian context to clarify engagement on returns. The research also calls for an expanded returnee definition in return processes to allow for the inclusion of individuals and groups who do not have formal refugee status for flawed technical or procedural reasons, and for others who may be entitled to international protection under human rights norms, such as the principle of non-refoulement to torture or inhuman and degrading treatments.

Theme 5: Responsibility-sharing

(Re)integration is, fundamentally, a development process. The research calls on development actors to work with the humanitarian sector to reinforce (re)integration prospects. Financial commitments for (re)integration will be needed, mirroring those for refugees and communities in hosting settings (IDA-18 sub-window). The process of restructuring and rebuilding services and infrastructure to ensure returns are sustainable can take years and come at an extremely

high cost, going beyond the timeframe and financing attached to return programmes. Echoing research, this report calls for spaces to be created for dialogue on financing (re)integration and financing refugee participation in return and (re)integration responses. Good practices, such as go-and-see visits and cross-border programming, require donor support.

Theme 6: Solutions

The research calls for improved and enhanced information-sharing with refugees and returnees, and for refugees' voices to be included in quadripartite agreements so that they are part of the decision-making process that will ultimately impact them. It also calls for return packages that currently offer cash assistance to be reviewed, and to be adapted to include more information, counselling, legal assistance (ICLA) and support. Lessons can be learnt from emerging practices on rental subsidies and adapted to refugee return settings.

Recommendations

The recommendations below mark a difference to how reintegration is managed today. Given the range of stakeholders involved in making (re)integration an achievable outcome, this section targets the recommendations to specific audiences.

1. Allow for phased, circular and staged returns and cross-border programming.

Recommendation to UNHCR: Facilitate systematic go-and-see visits and design repatriation schemes suited for those returning to areas that are not their areas of origin, and tailor (re)integration programmes for women and youth as specific target groups.

Recommendation to hosting country: Remove conditionality clauses in return arrangements to allow refugees to test the viability of return, especially in light of protracted displacement situations and in the case of young refugees born in exile.

Recommendation to humanitarian and development actors: Design cross-border initiatives to work with the same cohorts across borders, improving referral systems, coordination and communication across borders.

Recommendation to donors: Continue to fund cross-border initiatives that have the capacity to contribute to hosting and origin countries, and that can be best adapted to regional mobility patterns.

2. Ensure affected communities participate meaningfully in return and (re)integration processes.

Recommendation to UNHCR: Include refugees in return processes planning and opt for quadripartite rather than tripartite agreements. Manage expectations by communicating systematically and transparently with refugees and returnees.

Recommendation to hosting country: Go beyond tripartite agreements that have proved limited in their outcomes, instead thinking of regional response plans like IGAD's Nairobi Declaration and Plan of Action on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia and building on the learning from Syria's Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) as possible models for coordinated and inclusive regional planning and support to return movements.

Recommendation to humanitarian and development actors: Include participation systems and processes in all programming, with specific guidelines for staff to make the voices of returnees and hosts heard by decision-makers and ensure efficient communication loops to manage expectations.

Recommendation to countries of origin (CoOs): Local government should be supported (whether municipal or district authorities), as well as private service providers to engage in a dialogue on durable solutions with returnees and their communities in order to better understand the profiles and needs, alongside the contributions of returnees to their communities.

Recommendation to donors: Provide funding support for community engagement processes and social accountability mechanisms and platforms as part of (re)integration programming.

3. Factor in reintegration in development planning – most notably urban planning.

Recommendation to humanitarian and development actors: Jointly pilot programmes for rental subsidies in urban contexts, design housing rather than shelter programmes that are adapted to the social and cultural expectations of returnees, and plan for access to services and markets in areas that are not returnees' areas of origin.

Recommendation to donors: Design funding windows for returnees and hosts in (re)integration settings, mirroring the IDA-18 sub-window.

Recommendation to countries of origin (CoOs): Local government should be supported (whether municipal or district authorities), as well as private service providers to engage in a dialogue on durable solutions with returnees and their communities in order to better understand the profiles and needs, alongside the contributions of returnees to their communities.

4. Empower refugees and returnees socially and economically pre- and post-return.

Recommendation to UNHCR: Revise the approach to return packages to include a stronger link between assistance and information and to go beyond cash assistance. Pilot initiatives with other UN agencies, NGOs, governments and civil society actors to build upon the lessons learnt in this report. Offer possibilities for information-gathering and family reunification as a way of better informing return and (re)integration prospects and minimise protection risks.

Recommendation to hosting countries: Allow refugees rights, and eliminate related restrictions and barriers, to freedom of movement and access to work. Uphold standards equivalent to those in the 1951 Refugee Convention or more favourable ones afforded by other applicable international or (sub)regional agreements.

Recommendation to humanitarian and development actors: Foster social capital in contexts where returnees are returning to a new area and as a way of complementing jobs or livelihoods programming. Adapt programming to fit in with social norms and develop strategies to address situations where social norms act as a barrier to the economic participation of specific groups – in particular, women and youth.

Recommendation to countries of origin (CoOs): Include returnees in national development planning processes through local community structures and address situations where gatekeepers may be an obstacle to returnee (re)integration.

Recommendation to donors: Provide incentives for countries that pair social and economic rights and specifically allow for men, women and youth to work and exchange knowledge, information and practices to strengthen their protection.

5. Monitor and learn from (re)integration outcomes.

Recommendation to UNHCR: Revise the 2004 definition of (re)integration to account for the changes in theory and practice in the last two decades, including the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions and the requirements for multilevel planning and multidimensional well-being. Update the repatriation handbook to put refugee participation at the centre of quadripartite agreements on repatriation, return and (re)integration.

Recommendation to humanitarian and development actors: adaptive programming, to mitigate unintended negative impacts and to strengthen positive impacts on development and peace. Conflict sensitivity must be mainstreamed throughout all (re)integration programming. Utilise conflict and context analysis to inform joint programming, and to establish (re)integration strategies and coordination platforms. At a global level, build on opportunities such as the UNHCR–World Bank Group Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement to enhance evidence on (re)integration outcomes.

Recommendation to academia and researchers: Build upon standards and indicators for the measurement of (re) integration, based on inter-agency work in progress, to hold governments/authorities to account as the duty-bearers, as well as to have agreed standards and indicators on which coherent and coordination action can take place. These standards need to be a balance between global/international and context-specific indicators.

Recommendation to donors: Include, with any return programme, systematic funding for learning and monitoring efforts to ensure that refugees are not returning to situations of harm and are provided with adequate prospects for (re)integration. Commit to make monitoring and evaluation of (re)integration projects public to enhance accountability and learning for all.



Annexes

Annex 1: Methodology, scope and limitations

Samuel Hall has designed a series of tools to fully answer the main research questions.

Research questions and tools

	Research question	Secondary literature and data	Operational workshops	Key informant interviews (KIIs)	FGDs* and household case studies	Operational case studies
Q1	What factors influence return patterns and sustainable (re)integration?	X	X	X	X	X
Q2	How can preparedness be more effectively addressed? What lessons can be drawn?	X	X	X	X	X

* FGDs – Focus group discussions

These tools were deployed to three separate returns contexts: Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. This selection was largely determined by the work of the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) in Somalia, the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP) in Afghanistan, and the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) in Jordan working on the Syrian refugee response.

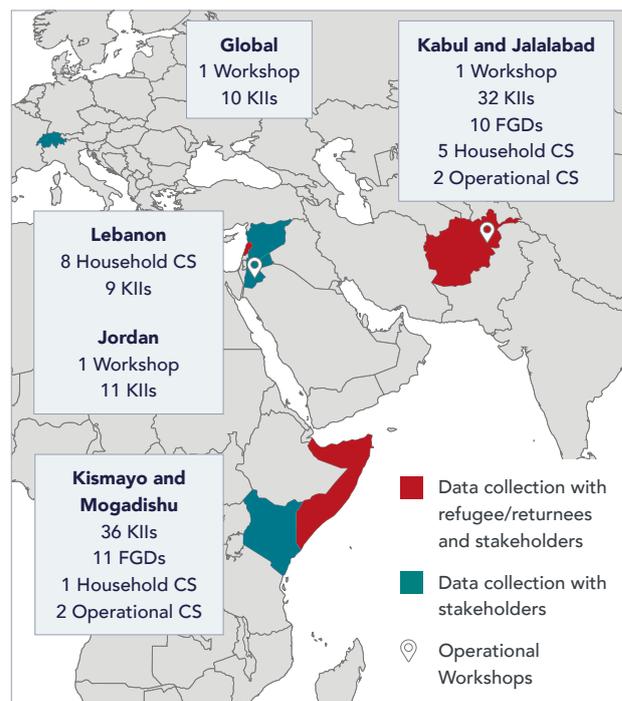
For each context, fieldwork was conducted in two locations: Kabul and Jalalabad in Afghanistan, Mogadishu and Kismayo in Somalia, and Amman and Lebanon for Syria. This sampling enabled the research team to grasp the urban dilemmas of return by choosing the return locations with high numbers of returns and allowed for coverage of one refugee host setting. Locations in Afghanistan and Somalia were specifically chosen to allow for perspectives from both national and municipal, and ‘headquarters’ and programme staff. Through the literature review and the accounts of the returnees interviewed, the research covered the situations of refugee returnees from Iran and Pakistan to Afghanistan, from Kenya and Yemen to Somalia, and from Lebanon and Jordan to Syria.

A phased approach

The research took a three-phased sequential approach to gathering data in order to ensure that each tool added specific value and was targeted towards particular areas of enquiry.

1. The research team drew on **existing secondary literature and data to identify practices and knowledge gaps**, to ensure that the research builds on current knowledge.
2. **Key informant interviews (KIIs)** engaged a wide pool of stakeholders globally and in each context (for example, government officials, community leaders and experts).

Overview of data collected and research locations



3. An operational workshop was conducted in Kabul to launch the research, engaging a wide set of operational actors; and in Amman with regional stakeholders, providing an overview of key findings from Afghanistan and Somalia to generate discussion and feedback.
4. **Focus group discussions and case studies** (household and operational/programme-level case studies) were conducted across the context, with returnees, refugees intending to return and host community members.

Research tool details

Secondary literature review

The findings of this research are framed by and built on current knowledge on preparedness and return. The research team reviewed, assessed and identified over 150 documents during the first phase of the research, and continued to add to these over the course of the project. These sources were assessed based on relevance of results, quality and methodology, and the key points from top-ranked documents were detailed in a literature review template. Based on this, key gaps in existing data were identified. Sources included policy and programme documentation, existing research studies on the topic, data around returns and (re)integration shared by a variety of UN and other stakeholders, and more.

Operational workshops

Two operational workshops were conducted: one in Afghanistan and one in Amman. The purpose of the workshop in Kabul was to provide a Chatham House Rule setting to bring together relevant stakeholders working on refugee return and (re)integration in Afghanistan to discuss the lessons from 15 years of programming, to highlight current debates and trade-offs in Afghanistan and to identify recommendations for the study's methodological framework and focus areas. The second workshop, in Amman, presented preliminary analysis around the findings from the examination of returns in Afghanistan and Somalia in order to discuss lessons learnt from these contexts in relation to current and potential returns to Syria. Both workshops included a plenary session around initial findings as well as an operational session in two working groups, which sought to provide clear recommendations to answer major questions emerging from the research.

Key informant interviews

Although the original target for this research was of 45 key informant interviews (KIIs), 102 key informants were interviewed, both at a global level and in the three contexts of primary research (Afghanistan, Somalia, and Lebanon/Jordan). These included local and national-level government officials, programme and policy staff at NGOs and INGOs, researchers, academics and more. These interviews complemented the operational workshops to triangulate data on lessons learnt and to ensure that humanitarian, development and national actors were engaged with throughout the research process. They provided a broad range of views around current programming centred on preparedness, as well as planned and past programming.

Focus group discussions

The 21 focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted were specifically designed to draw out the views and opinions

of host and community members on preparedness and returns. Conducted in urban contexts of return where returns have been ongoing for some time (to ensure a longer understanding of sustainability), the FGDs sought to examine the realities of returns and differentiators in returns experiences, broader social cohesion and participation, operational support and future aspirations. Analysis focused on key thematic gaps identified during the secondary literature review, as well as subgroups of interest (in particular, age- and gender-(re)integration-related factors). Purposeful sampling was conducted to ensure that within each FGD, a variety of respondent profiles would be included.

Programmatic case studies

Four operational case studies focus on a particular programme, either in Afghanistan or Somalia, to better understand existing programmes in place to support returnees from the perspective of programme implementers, government stakeholders and returnees.

Household case studies

The household case studies (14 in total) were designed to address the fact that, while much existing data on return considers households as units, decision-making, particularly around return, can prompt significant discussion and tension, and may have long-lasting impacts on reintegration. As such, these case studies sought to better understand the lived experiences of members of the same household with regards to preparedness and actual returns, interviewing, in each case, a minimum of two household members. As regards to the Syrian context, these were all conducted with Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Research limitations

Existing data on returns and (re)integration is both limited and fragmented. As such, while it has been considered and integrated where appropriate, the potential for direct comparisons between the situations in each of these contexts is limited.

A purely qualitative approach was used for data collection with refugees and returnees (KIIs, case studies). The main objective of both the case studies and the FGDs is, therefore, not to provide granular comparative analyses, but, rather, to serve as illustrations of some of the different tensions – in particular, around gender, age and return – that can exist in these contexts of return, directly focused on areas identified through the earlier phases of the research.

Key informant interviews collected depend on the willingness of potential interviewees to participate and respond. Samuel Hall reached out to a broad range of stakeholders so as to ensure that a variety of perspectives were included.

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Durable Solutions Platforms and Secretariat



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